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Our ref: AQW 24390/22-27
Date: 23 April 2025

Kellie Armstrong MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stomont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Kellie

AQW 24390/22-27 – MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CO-DESIGN PROCESSES IN SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGIES

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 24930/22-27, asking that I: (i) provide a copy of the processes and procedures used by my Department with third parties involved in co-designing and co-producing policy; (ii) detail any mechanisms in place to measure (a) the effectiveness of the co-design and co-production process; and (b) feedback from organisations, bodies and individuals who have worked with my Department, for example on any of the social strategies or the Irish Language Strategy.

Further to my answer to this Question, I have arranged for the Business Consultancy Services *Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design Process*, to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities

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Business Consultancy Services

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

DfC Department for Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Department of **Finance** An Roinn **Airgeadais**
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CONTENTS

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DOCUMENT SUMMARY

Revision History

Revision	Date	Author	Designation	Changes
1.0	March 2023	Project Team	BCS	N/A
2.0	March 2023	Project Team	BCS	Minor clarifications based on client comments

Approvals

Name	Designation	Date
Cheryl Robinson	Principal Consultant	March 2023

Distribution List

Designation	Date
Project Steering Group	March 2023

Executive Summary

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Business Consultancy Service (BCS) of the Department of Finance (DoF) was appointed by the Department for Communities (DfC) to undertake a review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process.

Approach and Methodology

The core methods which the project relied on are:

Findings and Analysis

The following table provides high level summary and conclusions in relation to the 3 main areas of overall effectiveness, level of stakeholder engagement and lessons learnt.

Findings and Analysis Summary and Conclusions

Heading	Conclusion
Overall Effectiveness	26% of survey respondents rated the overall effectiveness of the co-design process to date as effective[4]. Barriers and challenges which appear to have impacted stakeholder views on level of effectiveness have been outlined in Section 4.4.2.
Benefits	The survey results show 49% of respondents rated a good[5] level of benefits for the groups/individuals they represent. 24% considered there was a low[6] level of benefits for groups/individuals. 52% of respondents rated a good[5] level of benefits for their organisation. 22% respondents rated a good level[5] of benefits for progression of the Strategies. Articulated benefits of participating in this process included: • a better understanding within Departments of the challenges faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver; • the ability through the process for a range of diverse organisations with a mix of expertise across the sectors to come together and to build consensus around key areas, share best practice and build on evidence-led outputs; • the accessibility and responsiveness of DFC officials to the general requirements of the various stakeholder groups; and • the process supported the prioritisation of issues and identification of any gaps, which will help create a more cohesive suite of draft strategies for consideration.
Barriers/ Challenges	Barriers and challenges stakeholders understand constrained the co-design process are: • **Decision making:** 24% of survey respondents deemed decision making was sufficient[7]. For the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups, there was a perceived lack of collaboration and understanding of the delivery environment to enable shared decision making between these groups in developing outputs. These groups felt they were working in parallel rather than in partnership. • **Timescales:** 16% of respondents considered timescales as sufficient[7]. While there was a general understanding and consensus among stakeholders on the need for expeditious

Heading	Conclusion
	progress, the majority of stakeholders felt timescales were unrealistic and impacted on the quality of outputs and overall process.
	• **Resources:** 7% of respondents considered resources for the delivery of the Strategies to be sufficient[7]. It is a majority opinion that constraints on resources to deliver the Strategies created a barrier to fully exploring issues and solutions.
	4% of respondents deemed resources to undertake co-design as sufficient[7]. A lack of resource to participate in the co-design process created extra pressures for stakeholders to undertake a process that was considered resource intensive. The process required significant time spend in addition to stakeholder work commitments, impacting in some scenarios, on capacity to participate.
	• **Communication and Engagement:** 45% of respondents considered communication during the process as sufficient[7]. Co-design Groups were concerned by a perceived lack of ongoing formal communication to the groups with regards to status updates throughout the process. The Expert Advisory Panels and Cross-Departmental Working Groups were, in the main, content with communication and deemed the process to have been managed well with ongoing formal and informal communication as needed. All groups felt there was limited engagement across groups which created a barrier to collaboration and discussion.
	• **Expertise:** Consultees noted a lack of consistent knowledge and expertise across Co-design Groups in relation to policy development and Executive process, which may have contributed to a number of the stakeholder views on barriers outlined. Stakeholders noted that structure of group engagement limited discussion based on true expertise; there would have been value in separating engagement, for example, by theme or Department and additional engagement in smaller groups would have allowed the expertise from all organisations to be heard.
	• **Governance and Process:** Some stakeholders viewed the process as lacking in overall planning and noted the process appeared reactive. The process and timeframe did change in response to stakeholder feedback and there appears to be an inconsistency in stakeholder understanding of this. It is the view of some stakeholders that the process was insufficient to ensure full understanding of the delivery environment across all groups, which underpinned diverging views throughout the engagement and on occasion caused adversity in and between groups.
	• **Relationships:** Stakeholders across all groups indicated that limited timescales and a necessity to hold all meetings virtually impacted on the ability to allow for early development of relationships in groups and led to a lack of engagement between groups. Stakeholders view this as a constraint to enabling full collaboration to allow for robust discussion. The co-design process required the input of a range of diverse voices with often competing priorities both between and within groups. Stakeholders indicated that development of the informal relationship would have been influential in allowing collaboration and discussion on areas of divergence.
Stakeholder Understanding of Co-design Process	Before the process commenced, 93% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 87% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 65% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of co-design. These results indicate stakeholders had a different interpretation of the process at the outset. There was not a shared understanding of what a co-design process is and involves. It was evident that there was contrasting levels of understanding of how co-design feeds into policy making and constraints that the delivery environment may place on the sharing of information. In developing an Executive Strategy, there will be constraints on sharing information that other Departments hold in relation to the Strategies. The survey results outlined that 31% of respondents indicated the Social Inclusion co-design process had a good level of alignment of process to co-design principles.
	A majority of stakeholders did not feel this process aligned with their interpretation of co-design; stakeholders felt that Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups worked in parallel to each other for majority of the process. This limited the ability to

Heading	Conclusion
	collaboratively explore issues and develop joint solutions. Many stakeholders understand this process felt more like stakeholder engagement than co-design.
	These findings suggest that there was not a shared understanding of the process from the outset. Stakeholder expectations of what this co-design process was and would involve were not met which was, in particular evident, for the Co-design Groups.
Stakeholder Understanding of Executive Process	Before the process commenced, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 62% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of Executive process. These results indicate a small decrease in understanding towards the end of the process, which is perhaps influenced by the fact that strategy progression has been put on hold due to external factors.
	There was not a shared or well-developed understanding across all stakeholders of Executive processes.
Stakeholder Views on TOR	The survey results outlined that 45% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs were appropriate for the process. 36% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs enabled a clear understanding of the process. 36% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs clearly defined roles for the process.
	Perceived disconnect in terms of expectations of stakeholders, in particular, Co-design Groups. While all groups were given an opportunity to comment on a draft TOR and comments were reflected in the final versions, there was limited push back on TORs from the Co-design Groups at the beginning of the process. As the process progressed, it was clear that the TORs did not deliver on expectations for Co-design Groups, demonstrating a missed opportunity from both Co-design Groups and DFC officials to develop the TORs collaboratively to ensure transparency in terms of the structure of the process and subsequent expectations.
Level of Stakeholder Engagement	**Level of engagement**
	Through the survey, 16% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove the appropriate level of engagement from the individual. 14% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove appropriate level of engagement from their group. Survey responses and opinions shared indicate that stakeholders sense that level of engagement was impacted by some of the barriers previously outlined, for example, size and structure of groups, limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups and the necessity to hold all meetings in a virtual environment.
	Level of Communication between groups
	Respondents rated the level of communication between groups. The ratings for a good[5] level of communication were in the range of 26% to 73%.
	Engagement between DFC and all groups was rated more positively, supporting stakeholder views that DFC were committed to engagement across all groups. However, stakeholders understand there was limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups to deliver an effective co-design process. Through the survey, stakeholders were asked, on the basis of your experience in this co-design process, would you take part in a similar process in the future.
	• 48% of respondents stated that they **would take** part in a similar process in the future
	• 12% of respondents stated that they **would not** take part in similar process in the future
	• 38% of respondents stated that they were **unsure** if they would take part in similar process in the future.
	Despite some of the challenges outlined, stakeholders clearly value the opportunity to provide input.
What Worked Well	Stakeholders outlined what had worked well in the co-design process as follows:
	• **Resources** Stakeholders note that DFC officials demonstrated a high level of commitment and willingness to progress the process and ensured they were accessible to stakeholders throughout the process. • **Communication & Engagement**

Heading	Conclusion
	Stakeholders deemed the continued engagement, despite what many describe as a challenging delivery environment, as a positive. Many stakeholders valued the opportunity to engage and understand the engagement was regular, constructive and allowed for open discussion. There were opportunities to share best practice and opportunities for departments to highlight the work that is already being undertaken in specific policy areas.
	• Expertise
	Group membership was broad and diverse and stakeholders valued the expertise and knowledge this brought to the process. A majority of stakeholders welcomed the work produced by the Expert Advisory Panels. They indicate this was evidence-led by those who have the necessary expertise in their sector.
	• Governance & Process
	The approach from DFC in managing the process was valued. Stakeholders are conscious that managing this process required handling and organising a significant amount of information and diverse voices. DFC showed clear willingness to progress and be accessible to stakeholders.
	• Relationships
	The co-design process was valuable in establishing links across departments and other organisations.
Areas for Improvement	Stakeholders noted the following areas for improvement:
	• Principles of Co-Design
	There is a need to develop a framework that is based on a shared understanding of co-design principles. This framework should allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the process against the wider delivery environment and become a measurement tool to assess in each circumstance if co-design is the right or appropriate choice (see Recommendation 1).
	• Decision Making
	Ensuring a shared understanding of government process and the scope of co-design to be undertaken within this together with upfront clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs and ongoing and frequent access to decision makers will demonstrate the influence stakeholders groups have on the overall decision making process (see Recommendations 1, 2 and 3).
	• Timescales
	Moving forward timeframes should be clearly set out based on what is achievable and reasonable. Both clear scheduling and adherence of timeframes with consistent communication on changes to timeframes underpinned by rationale for change should be a feature of any future co-design projects (see Recommendation 4).
	• Resources
	To ensure future capacity and capability, in establishing a co-design approach, identification and allocation of required resources across all stakeholders groups will be of benefit. In addition to this, a number of stakeholders within co-design groups considered remuneration for their resources would have better enabled capacity (see Recommendation 4). There was a large volume of feedback in relation to the resource available to deliver the Strategies. While a noted area for improvement was to ensure additional funding is available, this is outside the remit of this review which focuses on the co-design process and funding for the delivery of the Strategies is not in control of DFC policy officials. It is evident that stakeholders understand a lack of resource impacted on the ability to fully explore the issues and therefore impacted the process. Areas for improvement in reference to this are outlined in Decision Making; clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4).
	• Communication & Engagement
	It is the view of a majority of stakeholders that there should be increased early and ongoing formal engagement between all groups (see Recommendation 3). Formal communication and information updates at regular intervals will ensure all stakeholder groups are fully informed (see Recommendation 4). Some stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing accessibility issues and are keen that future processes ensure reasonable adjustments are adhered to throughout the process (see Recommendation 4).
	• Expertise

Heading	Conclusion
	Ensure a shared understanding of policy development and government process to impact positively on expectations of the process and help with understanding of how co-design can inform decision making and flows through to policy (see Recommendation 2). While there were differing views on how to undertake co-design, a number of stakeholders noted that co-design process should be based on a fully informed problem. For example, expert advice and views should be based on a full understanding of the delivery environment and what levers are available to allow for solutions to be developed (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4). • **Governance & Process** Future processes should consider developing detailed co-design process planning in collaboration with all stakeholders (see Recommendation 4). Terms of Reference should be developed collaboratively through early engagement with stakeholders to allow for a shared understanding of scope and remit with governance in place to ensure activities and outputs are aligned to terms of reference (see Recommendation 5). Consideration of a stepped approach to these strategies to impact on capacity to participate and ensure constraints and challenges which may be faced in one strategy do not impact progression of the remainder. Undertaking project planning (see Recommendation 4) will allow for full oversight of the resource and timescales needed and aid decision making on the most appropriate approach to progressing strategies. • **Relationships** Allow sufficient time for relationships to be established. Well-developed relationships should enable enhanced collaborative discussion (see Recommendation 3). • **Areas of improvement for stakeholders** Stakeholders noted areas of improvement they would individually make to improve future processes. Members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups noted they would undertake more up front promotion of the co-design work across their Department to better understand if the support and resource from the Department will be readily available to them. For members of the Co-design Groups, some suggestions included carrying out more research on the priorities for other organisations within their group and being more direct to ensure your opinion is heard and included in outputs. Members of the Expert Advisory Panels noted they would ensure more formal engagement with the other groups throughout the co-design process. For all groups, views expressed included taking the time and space to ensure more clarity around the process and their role and remit and requesting the appropriate resources to undertake co-design.

Summary and Conclusions

While, it is concluded that the Social Inclusion strategies co-design process has been largely effective for DFC in achieving its overall objective; the development of a suite of Social Inclusion strategies, to include a process based on inclusion of the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement, the process has encountered a number of challenges and barriers and a majority of stakeholders do not rate the process to date as effective overall. The following table sets out the conclusions as per each of the original TOR for this evaluation:

Conclusions against original Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
The overall effectiveness of the process	
Benefits in relation to stakeholders, organisation & strategies	Benefits of participating in this process included: • a better understanding within Departments of the challenges faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver; • the ability through the process for a range of diverse organisations with a mix of expertise across the sectors to come together and to build consensus around key areas, share best practice and build on evidence-led outputs;

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
	• the accessibility and responsiveness of DFC officials to the general requirements of the various stakeholder groups; and • the process supported the prioritisation of issues and identification of any gaps, which will help create a more cohesive suite of draft strategies for consideration.
Barriers/ challenges to the co-design process	Stakeholders understood barriers/challenges to the co-design process included a perceived lack of shared decision making between the Co-design Groups and Cross-Departmental Working Groups in developing outputs. The process was viewed by a majority as insufficient in terms of: • timescales to deliver; • a lack of resource to support the co-design process and deliver the Strategies; • insufficient formal communication and engagement for and between groups; • insufficient informal communication and relationship building between groups; • structure of group engagement; and • expertise of stakeholders to include a shared understanding of policy and Executive process and a shared understanding of the delivery environment for the Strategies.
Stakeholder understanding of the delivery environment as part of the wider NICS co-design process, including constraints (before and after process); Stakeholder understanding of co-design process specific to the DFC Social Inclusion Strategies (before and after process	As the co-design process progressed, the understanding of the co-design principles among stakeholders decreased indicating stakeholders had a different interpretation of the process at the outset. There were contrasting levels of understanding of how co-design feeds into policy making and constraints that the delivery environment may place on the sharing of information. In developing an Executive Strategy, there will be constraints on sharing information that other Departments hold in relation to the Strategies. A majority of stakeholders did not feel this process aligned to their interpretation of co-design; stakeholders felt that Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups worked in parallel to each other rather than partnership for majority of the process. Overall findings suggest there was not a shared understanding of the process from the outset. Stakeholder expectations of what this co-design process was and would involve were not met which was, in particular evident, for the Co-design Groups.
Stakeholder understanding of Executive processes and strategies (before and after process)	There was not a shared or well-developed understanding across all stakeholders of Executive processes. There was a small decrease in understanding of Executive process and strategies among stakeholders towards the end of the process, which is perhaps influenced by the fact that strategy progression has been put on hold due to external factors.
Stakeholders views on the content and appropriateness of the Social Inclusion Strategies co-design TOR / scope	There appears to be a disconnect in terms of expectations of stakeholders, in particular, Co-design Groups. While all groups were given an opportunity to comment on a draft TOR and comments were reflected in the final versions, there was limited push back on TORs from the Co-design Groups at the beginning of the process. As the process progressed, it was clear that the TORs did not deliver on expectations for Co-design Groups, demonstrating a missed opportunity from both Co-design Groups and DFC officials to develop the TORs collaboratively to ensure transparency in terms of the structure of the process and subsequent expectations.
The level of engagement of all stakeholders	
Stakeholder views on if the process drove appropriate stakeholder engagement (individual and group	**Level of Engagement** Survey responses and opinions shared indicate that stakeholders sense that level of engagement was impacted by some of the barriers previously outlined, for example, size and structure of groups, limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups and the necessity to hold all meetings in a virtual environment. **Level of communication between groups**

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
	Engagement between DFC and all groups was rated positively, supporting stakeholder views that DFC were committed to engagement across all groups. However, stakeholders understand there was limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups to deliver an effective co-design process.
An indication of whether stakeholders would re-engage in future processes	• 48% of respondents stated that they **would take** part in a similar process • 12% of respondents stated that they **would not** take part in similar process • 38% of respondents stated that they were **unsure** if they would take part in similar process in the future. Despite some of the challenges outlined, stakeholders clearly value the opportunity to provide input.
Lessons learnt from the process	
Stakeholder views on what worked well in the process	Stakeholders indicate that a number of positives to include DFC's commitment to the process and their ability in managing a range of information and opinion, stakeholder commitment to the process, the opportunity to engage and have collaborative discussion, the broad and diverse range of group members, the level of expertise across groups and the opportunity to establish links with other Departments and organisations.
Areas for improvement to include stakeholder views on where they could input to improve the process	Stakeholders noted the following areas for improvement: • Development of a framework based on a shared understanding of co-design principles • Ensure a shared understanding of Executive process and the scope of co-design to be undertaken to include delivery environment • Realistic timescales • Identification and allocation of required resources for all groups to participate in a co-design process • Increased formal and informal communication for and between groups • Identification of and consistent adherence to adjustments required for participants • Process planning and project management approach to future co-design processes in collaboration with stakeholders (e.g. in development of TORs). **Areas of improvement for stakeholders** • Promotion of the co-design work across their Department to better understand if the support and resource from the Department will be readily available to them • Undertake more research on the priorities for other organisations within own group • Ensure the level of engagement and communication from individual or group is not restricted by the process • Ensure more clarity around the process and role and remit • Request the appropriate resources to undertake co-design.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made. The Review Team acknowledge that the realisation of recommendations is dependent upon the type of process and whether this relates to a Departmental process or a Cross-departmental Executive process.

Recommendations	Owner
1. Develop a framework for Co-design with input from all departments and the wider external landscape, which is based on a shared understanding of co-design principles in an NICS context. This framework should allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the process against the wider delivery environment and become a measurement tool to assess in each circumstance if co-design is the right or appropriate choice.	DFC (in collaboration with NICS Departments)
2. At the outset of a co-design process, develop a shared understanding of government policy and Executive process across all participants (internal and external) to clarify roles and remit for groups and create awareness of how co-design flows through to this process.	DFC
3. Establish links for earlier engagement in and between groups to allow relationships to develop. Ensure more frequent engagement between groups to enable a full co-design approach and to include access to decision makers to continually demonstrate to stakeholders where they are having an influence on outputs.	DFC
4. Future processes should consider developing detailed co-design process planning in collaboration with all stakeholders to include the set-up of: • project plan with timescales • communication & engagement plan • stakeholder commitments • clear remit and expected resource requirement of roles and groups (including values and behaviour framework) • clear outputs defined for each phase of the co-design process. There should be upfront discussion on adjustments required and adherence to these together with continuous project management of the co-design process to track and monitor progress against an agreed project plan and formal communication in reference to this.	DFC and stakeholders
5. Terms of Reference should be developed collaboratively through early engagement with stakeholders to allow for a shared understanding of scope and remit with governance in place to ensure activities and outputs are aligned to Terms of Reference.	DFC and stakeholders
6. For any future situations that may include progression of a suite of strategies, consider if a stepped approach would be more appropriate to enable planning, suitable timescales, adequate capacity and resource.	DFC

Section 1: Background & Introduction

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

1. BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Business Consultancy Service (BCS) of the Department of Finance (DoF) was appointed by the Department for Communities (DfC) to undertake a review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process.

1.2   Programme Background and Context

At paragraph 4.6.2 of "New Decade, New Approach" (NDNA) agreement it states that "the PfG (Programme for Government) could be underpinned by key supporting strategies", including:

- an Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- a Disability Strategy;
- a Gender Strategy;
- a Sexual Orientation Strategy.

NDNA states that engagement with civic society and the principles of co-design and co-production must underpin the development of the PfG and its associated budget and strategies.

An approach to co-design of the Strategies was agreed by the Executive and led by DfC. This included consultation and development with a range of partners for each strategy, including an Expert Advisory Panel, a Co-design Group consisting of stakeholders from the relevant sector and a Cross-departmental Working Group consisting of officials from across all NICS departments.

The work on drafting the Social Inclusion Strategies remains ongoing. However, the most intensive period of co-design, including direct contact with the Co-design Groups has been largely completed and initial drafts of the Strategies (with the exception of the Gender Equality Strategy) were presented to the previous Minister for Communities before she left office on 28 October 2022.

While work on drafting the Strategies will continue, further progress will be limited until an incoming Minister and Executive is in place. DFC have therefore decided that this would be an appropriate time to take forward a review of the co-design process to establish how effective stakeholders and officials feel that this process has been to date. DFC commissioned BCS to take forward this review to obtain an impartial oversight of the input from stakeholders across the co-design process for all 4 Social Inclusion strategies.

1.3   Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for BCS's involvement in this assignment are as follows:

To undertake a review of the initial co-design process for all DFC Social Inclusion strategies through multiple stakeholder consultations to outline[1]:

- **the overall effectiveness of the process:**
    - Benefits in relation to stakeholders, organisation & strategies;

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[1] Stakeholders refers to members of the Cross-departmental working groups, expert advisory panels and co-design working groups. The views and experiences of the DFC officials managing the co-design process and associated policy development will also be considered in this review.

- ○ Barriers/ challenges to the co-design process;
- ○ Stakeholder understanding of the delivery environment as part of the wider NICS co-design process, including constraints (before and after process);
- ○ Stakeholder understanding of co-design process specific to the DFC Social Inclusion Strategies (before and after process);
- ○ Stakeholder understanding of Executive processes and strategies (before and after process); and
- ○ Stakeholders views on the content and appropriateness of the Social Inclusion Strategies co-design terms of reference/ scope.

- **the level of engagement of all stakeholders:**
  - ○ Stakeholder views on if the process drove appropriate stakeholder engagement (individual and group); and
  - ○ An indication of whether stakeholders would re-engage in future processes.

- **lessons learnt from the process:**
  - ○ Stakeholder views on what worked well in the process; and
  - ○ Areas for improvement to include stakeholder views on where they could input to improve the process.

1.4 Programme Scope and Timeframe

This review commenced in January 2023 and completed in March 2023. The scope of this review is the process of co-design undertaken by DFC for the Social Inclusion strategies.

1.5 Acknowledgements

BCS (the Review Team), would like to thank the Project Steering Group for its insight, oversight and guidance during this review. BCS would also like to thank the wide range of stakeholders who took part in interviews, focus groups and surveys to inform the evaluation. A full list of stakeholder groups consulted with is included in Appendix II.

Section 2: Approach and Methodology

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

2.   APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

2.1   Introduction

This section includes an overview of the methods and approach used to complete the review.

2.2   Methods

The core methods which the project relied on are:

Figure 1 Core Methods

Desk based review · Survey for stakeholders · Stakeholder consultation interviews/ focus groups · Analysis and reporting

2.3 Approach

The activities of this assignment are summarised in the following table.

Table 1 Summary of Activities

Method	Why	What	Who	How	Report Ref
Desk based review	• Need to understand the process and principles of co-design for the DFC Social Inclusion Strategies	• Review of DFC co-design process information	• DFC Central Policy Unit	• Review of submissions in relation to the co-design process • Review information outlining remit and structure of groups involved in the co-design process	Section 3
Survey for stakeholders	• Need to understand stakeholder views on overall effectiveness of the process, the level of engagement from all stakeholders and lessons learnt from the process	• Online survey for stakeholders	• Members of the Cross-Departmental Working Groups • Members of the Expert Advisory Panels • Members of the 4 Co-design Groups	• Survey questions centred around effectiveness, level of engagement and lessons learnt	Sections 4 and 5
Stakeholder consultation interviews/focus groups	• Need to understand stakeholder views on overall effectiveness of the process, the level of engagement from all stakeholders and lessons learnt from the process	• Semi-structured one to one consultation meetings with stakeholders • Semi-structured facilitated focus groups to enable discussion and gather a range of stakeholder views	• DFC officials involved in managing the co-design process and associated policy development • Members of the Cross-Departmental Working Groups • Members of the Expert Advisory Panels • Members of the 4 Co-design Groups • Independent Facilitators involved in elements of the co-design process	• Interviews and focus groups included: ➢ Benefits of the co-design process ➢ Barriers of the co-design process. ➢ Levels of stakeholder engagement ➢ Lessons learnt	Sections 4 and 5

Method	Why	What	Who	How	Report Ref
Analysis and reporting	• Analysis of information on effectiveness, level of stakeholder engagement and lessons learnt to set out findings for reporting	• Information and data obtained from: ➢ Co-design process ➢ Survey data ➢ Consultation findings	• BCS Project Team	• Examination of all information and data to set out recommendations and report	Sections 4 and 5

Section 3: Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

3. SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGIES CO-DESIGN PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

This section outlines an overview of the co-design process and groups involved.

In April 2020, the Minister for DFC authorised the progression of a co-design process for the development of a suite of Social Inclusion strategies. This committed to inclusion of the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement, co-design and co-production in the development of the new Strategies. Executive approval for development of the 4 Social Inclusion strategies was established in September 2020 with a commitment to deliver draft strategies by December 2021. Development of the Social Inclusion strategies and the processes within have been progressed and managed through the DFC Central Policy Unit.

3.2 Social Inclusion Strategies co-design process

In developing an approach to a co-design process for the Social Inclusion strategies, DFC were committed to early engagement and to allow space for experts to develop themes and identify gaps for inclusion in the Strategies. This commitment would provide a framework for the engagement that would occur during the co-design process. The process was based on incorporating the principles of co-design to allow for full and early discussion by stakeholders to give the opportunity to influence the output, which would flow through the final Strategies.

To facilitate the co-design process the following groups were established:

- Expert Advisory Panels for each Social Inclusion Strategy;

- Co-design Groups for each Social Inclusion Strategy; and

- Cross-departmental Workings Group for each Social Inclusion Strategy.

Draft Terms of Reference (TOR) were presented to each group for comment to ensure stakeholder views were considered in agreeing the groups' collective responsibilities (the TOR for each group is attached at Appendix III).

The Expert Advisory Panels were established with the remit of having an advisory role in setting direction for development of the Strategies and presenting the key issues for consideration. To this end, the Panels made evidence based recommendations on the themes, content and key actions that should be considered for inclusion in the Social Inclusion strategies. Each panel consisted of 4 members who were selected based on their expertise and in-depth subject knowledge. Panel members received remuneration for their participation.
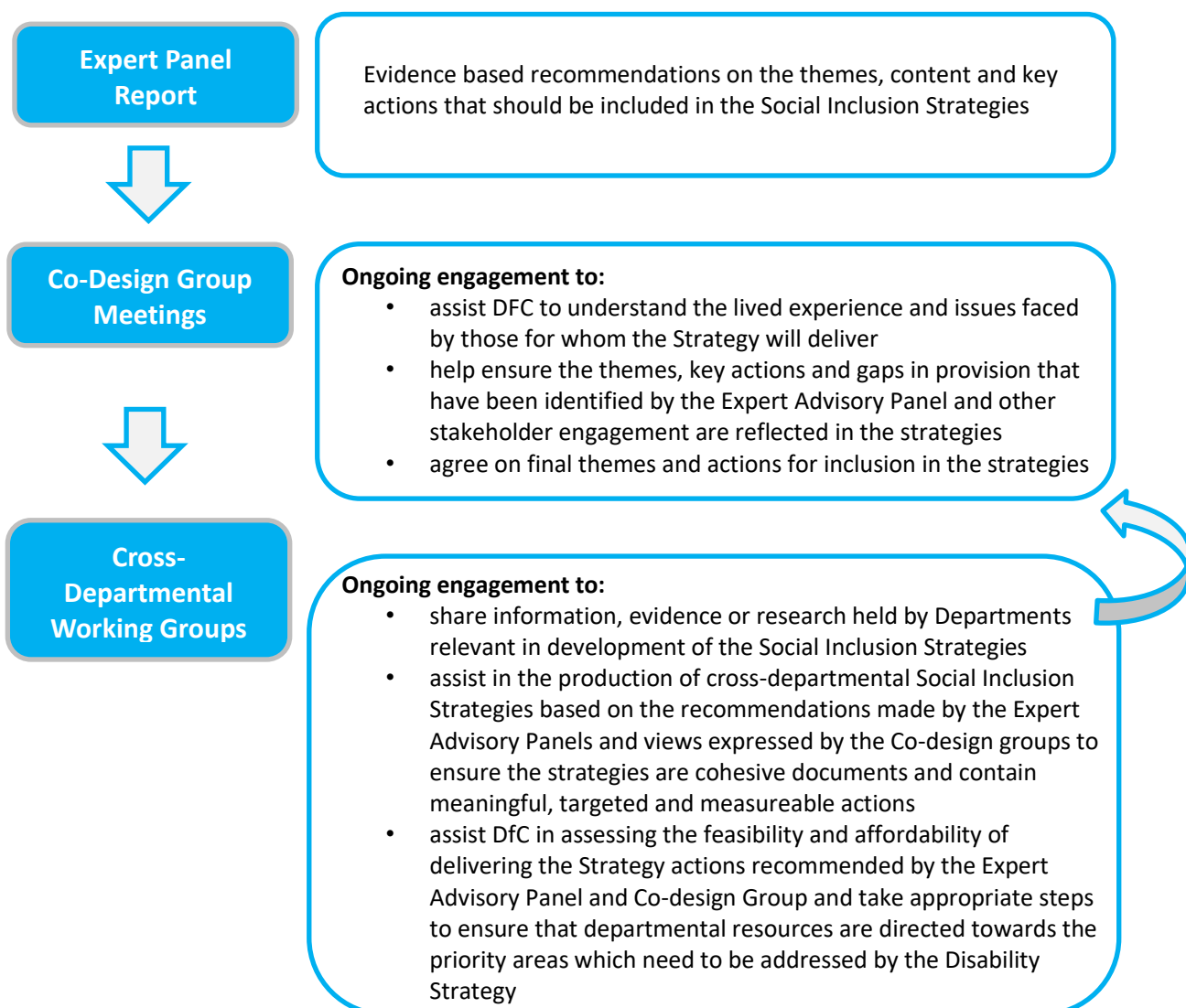
The Co-design Groups consist of members of organisations with a presence in NI that represent the breadth of work in their sector and have strong connections across the range of stakeholders whose views will need to be reflected in the Strategies. These groups were established to have a key role in the co-design and development of the Strategies. Their input and knowledge has been an important element in helping DFC understand the lived experience and issues faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver. The groups have worked alongside DFC to help ensure the themes, key actions and gaps in provision that have been identified by the Expert Advisory Panels and other stakeholder engagement are reflected in the Strategies.

The Cross-departmental Working Groups are made up of senior officials nominated by each of the NICS Departments to share information, evidence or research held by Departments which is relevant in development of the Social Inclusion strategies. Working in partnership with DFC, the role of this group is to assist in the production of cross-departmental Social Inclusion strategies informed by the recommendations made by the Expert Advisory Panels and views expressed by the Co-design Groups.

The remit of all groups is to provide advice, guidance and input on their area of expertise. Final decisions on the content of the Social Inclusion strategies and the actions associated with it will be the responsibility of the Minister for Communities and Executive Committee prior to draft strategies being presented for public consultation and Executive agreement. The Minister for Communities established a Ministerial Steering Group to oversee development of the Strategies throughout the co-design process.

An indicative timescale of 12-18 months for development and publication of the Strategies was agreed by the Minister to allow time to undertake a co-design process. Delay in gaining Executive approval required agreement of a revised timeframe of approximately 15 months. During the course of the co-design process, this timetable was revised in light of feedback on the constraints that timescales placed on the process. The figure below shows the process that was progressed and managed by DFC.

Figure 2 Social Inclusion Co-design

Expert Panel Report → Evidence based recommendations on the themes, content and key actions that should be included in the Social Inclusion Strategies

Co-Design Group Meetings → Ongoing engagement to:
- assist DFC to understand the lived experience and issues faced by those for whom the Strategy will deliver
- help ensure the themes, key actions and gaps in provision that have been identified by the Expert Advisory Panel and other stakeholder engagement are reflected in the strategies
- agree on final themes and actions for inclusion in the strategies

Cross-Departmental Working Groups → Ongoing engagement to:
- share information, evidence or research held by Departments relevant in development of the Social Inclusion Strategies
- assist in the production of cross-departmental Social Inclusion Strategies based on the recommendations made by the Expert Advisory Panels and views expressed by the Co-design groups to ensure the strategies are cohesive documents and contain meaningful, targeted and measureable actions
- assist DfC in assessing the feasibility and affordability of delivering the Strategy actions recommended by the Expert Advisory Panel and Co-design Group and take appropriate steps to ensure that departmental resources are directed towards the priority areas which need to be addressed by the Disability Strategy

Following extensive engagement with groups on the Expert Advisory Panel's recommendations and to progress agreement through co-design on key commitments and actions, independent facilitators worked with the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups to enable discussion on the Expert Advisory Panel's recommendations and the key strategic commitments and actions. These sessions enabled the development of position papers for each strategy, setting out the priority commitments and actions the Co-design Groups proposed be taken forward under the draft outcomes within each strategy. While this work is still being finalised for the Gender Equality Strategy, each Co-design Group from the remaining strategies met with the Ministerial Steering Group to present their position paper and discuss the key actions for inclusion in each strategy.

Work on drafting the Social Inclusion strategies remains ongoing and initial drafts of the Strategies (with the exception of the Gender Equality Strategy) were presented to the previous Minister for Communities before she left office on 28 October 2022.

Section 4: Findings and Analysis

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1   Introduction

This section outlines the key findings from consultation divided in 3 main areas of overall effectiveness, level of stakeholder engagement and lessons learnt.

Table 2 Section 4 Structure

Sub Section	Heading
4.2	Survey Consultation
4.3	Interview and Focus Group Consultation
4.4	Overall Effectiveness of the Co-design process
4.5	Level of Stakeholder Engagement
4.6	Lessons Learnt
4.7	Findings and Analysis Summary and Conclusions

4.2   Survey Consultation

To consult with key stakeholders and gather views on the DFC Social Inclusion Strategies co-design process, a survey was issued to the following groups:

- Members of the Expert Advisory Panels;
- Members of the Co-design Groups; and
- Members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups.

The survey was agreed in advance with the PSG and detailed questions to understand stakeholder views on the following key areas:

- Overall effectiveness of the co-design process;
- Benefits of the co-design process;
- Barriers and challenges of the co-design process;
- Level of stakeholder engagement; and
- What worked well and areas for improvement.

Full survey charts are included in Appendix IV[2].

The sample size and response rates for the survey are detailed in the following table. This represents a good response rate compared to similar reviews.

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[2] Due to rounding survey data presented in Appendix IV may not equal 100%

Table 3 Survey Response Data

Survey	Sample Size	Response Number	Response Rate
All Stakeholders	125	42	34%
Response Rate by Group			
Expert Advisory Panel	20	5	25%
Co-design Group	73	27	40%
Cross-departmental Working Group	32	10	31%

4.3   Interview and Focus Group Consultation

To supplement survey findings and allow for fuller discussion, a series of one to one interviews and focus groups were held with the following groups:

- Members of the Expert Advisory Panels;
- Members of the Co-design Groups;
- Members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups;
- DFC policy officials involved in the co-design process; and
- Independent facilitators involved in elements of the co-design process.

Stakeholder views were sought for the following key areas:

- Overall effectiveness of the co-design process;
- Benefits of the co-design process;
- Barriers and challenges of the co-design process;
- Level of stakeholder engagement; and
- What worked well and areas for improvement.

4.4   Overall Effectiveness

Overall effectiveness of the co-design process has been set out in the following sections under Benefits, Barriers/Challenges, and Stakeholder understanding of the co-design process and Executive process and views on the Terms of Reference.

The main objective of this process was the development of a suite of Social Inclusion strategies, which would include a process based on inclusion of the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement. While the co-design work is still being finalised for the Gender Equality Strategy, each Co-design Group from the remaining strategies has presented their position paper with the key actions for inclusion in each strategy. These position papers represent an agreed opinion from the co-design process, have informed initial drafts and will continue to be used to inform as work continues on the Strategies. The Social Inclusion strategies co-design process has therefore been largely effective for DFC in achieving its overall objective.

However, for all internal and external stakeholders, the process was not without challenges and it is these perceived barriers that have largely informed the overall stakeholder view on effectiveness. Through the survey, we collected opinions in relation to the overall effectiveness of the co-design process to date[3]. The survey outlined 26% rated the overall effectiveness of the

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[3] *17% of respondents declined to answer the question relating to effectiveness, which they understand cannot be measure until they have sight of draft strategies.*

co-design process to date as effective[4]. The Expert Advisory Panels rated overall effectiveness as 60%. As outlined throughout this section, some challenges appear to have impacted to a greater extent on the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups.

4.4.1 Benefits

Through consultation, the Review Team gathered views on benefits of the co-design process. These are set out below.

Benefits to Stakeholders

The survey results outlined 49% of respondents rated a good[5] level of benefits for the groups/individuals they represent. 24% considered there was a low level of benefits[6] for groups/individuals. This was reflective in the consultation feedback as it was outlined by members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups that engagement driven by this process enabled a better understanding within Departments of the challenges faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver. A majority of stakeholders also recognised the positive levels of dedication demonstrated in terms of commitment and time given to the process in addition to daily work commitments.

Furthermore, a majority of stakeholders outlined that DFC officials were accessible and responsive to the general requirements of the various stakeholder groups.

Benefits to Organisation

The survey results outlined 52% of respondents rated a good level[5] of benefits for their organisation. 34% considered there was a low level of benefits[6] for their organisation. The results also indicated that the Expert Advisory Panels and Co-design Groups felt the highest level of benefits in relation to their organisation. This was reflected by multiple stakeholders who stated that the formulation of the Co-design Groups provided a platform for organisations across the sectors to come together, form consensus around key areas and build on evidence-led outputs. Organisations within the Co-design Groups also felt that that their groups provided appropriate diversity and representation of the sector.

There was also feedback that the Expert Advisory Panels, Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups provided a satisfactory mix of external and internal expertise and advice to the process. An additional benefit that was evident in consultation was the discussion between Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups, which enabled an opportunity for Departments to showcase the work that was already taking place, relevant to each of the Strategies. Many members of the Co-design Groups were unaware of several interventions deployed by Departments and are now able to bring this knowledge back to organisation for consideration and future engagement/ development.

Benefits to progression of Strategies

The survey results outlined 22% respondents rated a good level[5] of benefits for progression of the Strategies. 46% considered there was a low level of benefits[6] for progression of Strategies. While this is not a largely positive response rate, the Review Team noted through one to one interviews and focus group consultation that stakeholders did find benefits to the process.

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[4] *Effective where respondent rated 6 or above on a scale of 1-10.*
[5] *Good where respondent rated 6 or above on a scale of 1-10.*
[6] *Low Level where respondent rated 3 or below on a scale of 1-10*

It is important to note that the Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-Design Groups rated the lowest level of benefit in relation to the progression of strategies. Consultation reflected these results as many stakeholders in both groups felt they were working in parallel, therefore the various issues were not given joint consideration to achieve the most appropriate set of outcomes to be included in each of the Strategies. This feeling of limited benefits in relation to progression of the Strategies has also been impacted by the fact that there can be limited progression to the Strategies due to absence of an Executive and there has also been a perceived lack of clarity on how draft strategies are being developed and progressed.

The most common benefit in this area was the majority consensus that the Expert Advisory Panel's report provided good evidence based proposals that enabled appropriately structured meetings to have the appropriate conversations. The Expert Advisory Panel's report supported the planning of sessions across strategies and enabled groups to augment the report rather than starting from scratch. The process enabled a range of views to be incorporated into outcomes for each of the Strategies. The process also supported the prioritisation of issues and identification of any gaps, which will help create a more cohesive suite of draft strategies for consideration.

4.4.2 Barriers/Challenges to the Co-design Process

Respondents were asked to rate various elements of the co-design process. These response rates, together with opinion heard at consultation, note that elements of the co-design process created perceived barriers which are outlined below.

Decision Making

The survey results outlined 24% of respondents deemed decision making as sufficient[7]. The Expert Advisory Panels were the exception, rating sufficiency of decision making at 60%. For the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups, during consultation, it was evident there was a perceived lack of collaboration and understanding of the delivery environment to enable shared decision making between these groups in developing outputs that will contribute to the draft strategies. This was driven by stakeholder views that the Co-design Groups and Cross-Departmental Working Groups were working in parallel to design and produce outputs rather than in partnership. Co-design Groups also noted they had limited access to the decision makers, particularly Ministers and Officials.

Timescales

The survey results outlined 16% of respondents considered timescales as sufficient[7] (60% of the Expert Advisory Panels, 25% of the Cross-Departmental Working Groups and 7% of the Co-design Groups). DFC responded to feedback from the groups on the constraints that the timescales were placing on the process, by extending the timeframe throughout the period of co-design. However, it remains the view of a majority that timescales were too ambitious from the outset and did not allow time for full exploration of the issues. While the Expert Advisory Panels noted in consultation that their timescale had been limited, it is evident from focus groups and survey responses that this issue had a greater impact on the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups. There was a general understanding and consensus on the need for expeditious progress. However, the majority felt these were unrealistic and impacted on the capacity to have more frequent engagement in and between groups and may have impacted quality of outputs and overall process.

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[7] *Sufficient where respondent rated 6 or above on a scale of 1-10.*

Resources for delivery of strategies

The survey results outlined 7% of respondents deemed resources for the delivery of the Strategies as sufficient[7]. This view, held by a majority of consultees, noted that a number of the key areas in the Strategies would require additional cross-departmental funding. It is a majority opinion that constraints on resources to deliver the Strategies created a barrier to fully exploring issues and developing solutions.

Resources implications for your organisation to undertake co-design

The survey results outlined 4% of respondents deemed resources to undertake co-design as sufficient[7]. The survey response rate was marginally higher for the Expert Advisory Panels at 20%. Those members were remunerated for their participation. Stakeholders across the remainder of the internal and external groups indicated a lack of resource to participate in the process created additional pressures to undertake a process that was considered resource intensive. The process required significant time spend in addition to stakeholder work commitments, impacting in some scenarios, on capacity to participate. Many stakeholders also indicated a lack of resource to develop aggregated data and evidence to support issues and priorities.

Communication and Engagement

The survey results outlined 45% of respondents deemed communication during the process as sufficient[7]. There was a clear difference in response rates across the groups with 60% of the Expert Advisory Panels and 63% of the Cross-Departmental Working Groups rating communication as sufficient. This decreases to 37% for Co-design Groups. This echoes views expressed through focus groups and interviews.

Co-design Groups felt there was lack of ongoing formal communication to the groups with regards to status updates throughout the process. The Expert Advisory Panels and Cross-Departmental Working Groups were, in the main, content with communication and deemed the process to have been managed well with ongoing formal and informal communication as needed. All groups remarked on the limited engagement across groups. It was felt that earlier and more frequent engagement and communication between groups would have benefited collaboration and discussion (see Section 4.5 for further findings on engagement).

Expertise

Consultees discussed a lack of consistent knowledge and expertise across Co-design Groups in relation to policy development and Executive process. This may have contributed to a number of the stakeholder views on barriers outlined, for example, understanding the co-design process as one step in the policy process and how this process is used to inform decision making.

Stakeholders noted that the structure of group engagement limited discussion based on true expertise. For the Cross-department Working Group members, there would have been value in separating engagement, for example, by theme or Department ensuring the appropriate expertise from each Department was present. For the Co-design Groups, additional engagement in smaller groups would have allowed the expertise from all organisations to be heard and they indicated that group size could limit full input.

Governance & Process

A perceived lack of governance and process was discussed at focus groups. While in benefits we have outlined positive feedback in relation to DFC's management of the process, for others there was an absence of time and collaboration in planning an appropriate framework to deliver an effective co-design process. This led to lack of clarity in terms of expectations, roles and responsibilities, required input and procedures. Through consultation, the Review Team heard views that the process lacked overall planning and appeared reactive. The process and timeframe did change in response to stakeholder feedback and there appears to be an inconsistency in stakeholder understanding of this. Some stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing accessibility issues and are keen that future processes ensure reasonable adjustments are adhered to throughout the process.

For one specific Social Inclusion strategy, there was a view that appropriate lived experience was not fully present. While for other strategies, those with lived experience were members of the Co-design Groups, ensuring lived experience membership from this sector was more complex than was the case for the other strategies. The TORs stated that the Co-design Groups would consist of members of organisations with strong connections across the range of stakeholders whose views will need to be reflected in the Strategies. This membership was considered an important element in helping DFC understand the lived experience and issues faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver. Therefore, consideration as to how to gather views and input on lived experience from this sector was discussed at the outset with DFC. In collaboration with DFC, the Co-design Group developed plans as part of the process to consult outside of the group with those with lived experience so their view could be included in discussions to inform outputs. It would therefore appear that while measures were in place, there was not an agreed understanding of the best approach to this issue and there is an assumed opinion from some stakeholders that this created a barrier to allowing full understanding of lived experience.

Many consultees noted that the process undertaken from the outset led to a discrepancy in understanding of a fully informed situation, which created unrealistic expectations for the Co-design Groups. This is further evidenced by the survey views from the Cross-departmental Working Groups who rated available evidence below other groups (25%). There was differing opinion of what co-design is and involves. Some stakeholders understand that you cannot undertake a process of co-design with built in parameters. Others understand that co-design should focus on a fully informed problem knowing the levers available to you; delivery environment parameters such as funding, departmental priorities and understanding of work already being undertaken in Departments. It is the view of some stakeholders that the process was insufficient to ensure full understanding of the delivery environment across all groups, which underpinned diverging views throughout the engagement and on occasion caused adversity in and between groups.

While all groups were given an opportunity to comment on a draft TOR and comments were reflected in the final versions, there was limited push back on TORs from the Co-design Groups at the beginning of the process. Many of the stakeholders from the Co-design Groups indicated that their TORs were not fully appropriate for the process that followed which did not meet their expectations. Stakeholders suggested these TORs should have been developed through early engagement and in collaboration with groups (see Section 4.4.5).

Relationships

Due to restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, all meetings were virtual, which stakeholders understand limited relationship development. This was a necessity to allow co-design to progress during the conditions at that time.

Stakeholders across all groups indicated that limited timescales impacted on the ability to allow for early development of relationships in groups and led to a lack of engagement between groups. Stakeholders view this as a constraint to enabling full collaboration to allow for robust discussion.

The co-design process required the input of a range of diverse voices with often competing priorities both between and within groups. Stakeholders indicated that development of the informal relationship would have been influential in allowing collaboration and discussion on areas of divergence.

4.4.3   Stakeholder Understanding of Co-design process

The survey results outlined the understanding of co-design principles throughout the process. Before the process commenced, 93% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 87% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 65% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of co-design. These results indicate stakeholders had a different interpretation of the process at the outset. There was not a shared stakeholder understanding of what a co-design process is and involves.

The survey results indicated that, as expected, the Cross-departmental Working Groups had a higher level of understanding of the delivery environment throughout the process due to enhanced experience of undertaking similar type projects against similar delivery environments. However, it is important to note that feedback from consultations did outline that there is limited access to a consistent NICS wide co-design framework. For example, some stakeholders have participated in alternative NICS co-design processes that differed in its approach.

It was also evident from consultations that there were contrasting levels of understanding of how co-design feeds into policy making and constraints that the delivery environment may place on the sharing of information. In developing an Executive Strategy, there will be constraints on sharing information that other Departments hold in relation to the Strategies. Now that stakeholders have been involved in the process there is a feeling that co-design cannot be fully applied to development of such strategies due to final decision making and executive processes.

The survey results indicated a lower level of understanding for the Expert Advisory Panels and Co-design Groups in relation to the delivery environment. This is expected due to the fact that many of the stakeholders did not have the consistent knowledge or awareness of the various constraints and variables in which the process was operating, indicating an inconsistent understanding of the delivery environment across stakeholder groups.

The survey results outlined that 31% of respondents indicated a good[5] level of alignment of process to co-design principles. Consultation feedback reflected this result as majority of stakeholders did not feel this process aligned to their interpretation of co-design. For example, stakeholders felt that Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups worked in parallel to each other for majority of the process. This limited the ability to collaboratively explore issues and develop joint solutions. This was evident in the externally facilitated sessions between the Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-Design Groups as there appeared to be some misalignment on issues and expectations. Another reason why many stakeholders did not feel the process was reflective of their interpretation of co-design was the fact that the programme

(project plan, governance & terms of reference etc.) for delivery was not set up collaboratively. This led to a missed opportunity to co-design the programme of work underpinning the process.

The survey results also indicated that the Co-design Groups had the lowest level of understanding of the co-design process. This again was reflected in consultation as many of the stakeholders across strategies felt that co-design principles were not adhered due to the process dynamics. For example, stakeholders commented that it felt more like stakeholder engagement than what they interpret as co-design, demonstrated by parallel working and constant push back on priorities and issues. It was felt that DFC should not have used the term co-design as it set expectations of groups too high.

These findings suggest that there was not a shared understanding of the process from the outset. Stakeholder expectations of what this co-design process was and would involve were not met which was, in particular evident, for the Co-design Groups.

4.4.4   Stakeholder Understanding Of Executive Process

The survey results outlined the understanding of NI Executive processes and strategies throughout the process. Before the process commenced, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 62% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of Executive process. These results indicate a small decrease in understanding towards the end of the process, which is perhaps influenced by the fact that there can be limited progression to the Strategies due to absence of an Executive.

It is also evident from the consultations that there was not a shared or well-developed understanding across all stakeholders of Executive processes. This was demonstrated by members of Co-design Groups stating that some group members are not policy experts and found it difficult to understand the process in the context of policy making and Executive decision making. This resulted in some stakeholders spending additional time attempting to interpret NICS documentation etc.

4.4.5   Stakeholder Views on Terms of Reference

Appropriateness of Terms of Reference

The survey results outlined that 45% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs were appropriate for the process. Results also indicated that the Cross-departmental Working Groups and Expert Advisory Panels were more satisfied with the appropriateness of the TOR. This is driven by the fact that the some members of the Expert Advisory Panels engaged in conversation with DFC officials at the beginning of the process to clarify the TORs. Cross-departmental Working Groups, as NICS colleagues of DFC officials, were in a better position to have informal chats on role and remit with regards to the TORs.

The results indicated that members of Co-design Groups were less in agreement with the appropriateness of TORs. As per section 3.2, TORs were developed by DFC officials and issued to Co-Design Groups for comment, sign off and agreement. There was limited push back on TORs at the beginning of the process from these groups. However, Co-design Groups felt that as the process progressed it was clear that the TORs did not deliver on expectations, therefore demonstrating a missed opportunity from both Co-design Groups and DFC officials to develop the TORs collaboratively to mitigate risks of misalignment. This misalignment was partly caused by expectations set within the TOR which conveyed a partnership approach. For example within

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[8] Where respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

the TOR it contained phrases such as 'work alongside DfC', 'support DfC', and 'advise DfC'. Although to an extent this did take place, many stakeholders felt that a true partnership approach did not fully materialise and it felt like a one-way communication exercise, causing frustration amongst stakeholder groups.

Terms of Reference enabled a clear understanding

The survey results outlined 36% of respondents agreed that the TORs enabled a clear understanding of the process. These results also indicate that Cross-departmental Working Groups had the clearest understanding of the process. This is due to the fact that many of the members have been involved in similar processes in the past and understand TORs designed by NICS officials. The Expert Advisory Panels did have a lower understanding of the TORs and this was indicated by the need for members of the panel to clarify to ensure understanding was clear.

Co-design Groups demonstrated a high level of disagreement that the TORs enabled clear understanding of the process. Consultation feedback supports this as many stakeholders felt the process was reactive and did not feel it was a well-planned or thought out process. There also seemed to be a disconnect in terms of expectations, as Co-design Groups were exploring issues and interventions with limited constraints whereas Cross-departmental Working Groups were exploring issues with the constraints of budget, resource, and legislation in mind. The lack of interaction from the DFC officials and Co-Design Groups with regards to the TORs at the beginning and throughout the process led to a lack of clarity and transparency in terms of the structure of the process and subsequent expectations.

Terms of Reference clearly defined roles

The survey results outlined 36% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs clearly defined roles for the process. The results also indicated that Expert Advisory Panels agreed more that the TORs clearly defined roles and this is driven by the action of the Expert Advisory Panel reaching out to DFC officials for clarification at the beginning of the process. Moreover, the Expert Advisory Panel's role and remit was shorter and more easily defined. Cross-departmental Working Groups members had experience in similar processes prior, therefore roles were better understood, especially in the context of Executive process.

Co-design Groups demonstrated disagreement that the TORs clearly defined roles. Consultation feedback support this as many stakeholders were unsure of their roles in terms of time, effort and outputs required. This was evident as many members of the Co-design Groups were unsure of what their expected inputs were to specific cross group meetings. Also, members were unclear of the value they were adding to a co-design process. This lack of clarity in roles still remains at the time of this review and has been exacerbated by the fact that many individuals are not clear on their future roles in the development and issue of draft strategies.

4.5   Level of Stakeholder Engagement

The Review Team sought opinion on if the process drove appropriate engagement. Through the survey, 16% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove the appropriate level of engagement from the individual. 14% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove appropriate level of engagement from their group.
Responses from the Expert Advisory Panels (60%) evidenced that this opinion was more widely held by the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups.

Survey responses and opinions shared, indicate that stakeholders sense that level of engagement was impacted by some of the barriers previously outlined. Size and make up of Co-design Groups

with various competing priorities constrained the environment. Co-design requires an extensive range of opinion. However, for a number of stakeholders, there would have been merit in separating engagement into smaller more focused groups.

Stakeholders indicated that within their respective groups they engaged well and there was a significant level of input from the groups and individuals. As outlined in benefits, a majority of groups valued the Expert Advisory Panel's report, which they understand ensured that engagement was based on evidence-led information and provided appropriate direction for engagement.

As previously noted and outside of control for DFC given the conditions at the time, some stakeholders consider engagement level was restricted by the virtual environment. This view was not held by all stakeholders. For others, virtual meetings are more accessible, can allow for savings in terms of resource and also enable increased participation. A number of stakeholders welcomed the virtual approach and would prefer an option for virtual attendance to remain.

Level of Communication between groups

Respondents were further asked to rate the level of communication between the groups. Responses were as follows[5]:

- **Co-Design Groups to Co-Design Groups:** 26% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **Cross-departmental Working Groups & Co-Design Groups:** 26% of respondents indicated a good level of communication
- **Expert Advisory Panels & Co-Design Groups:** 55% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **DFC & Co-Design Groups:** 54% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **DFC & Cross-departmental Working Groups:** 59% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **DFC & Expert Advisory Panels:** 73% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **Cross-departmental Working Groups & Expert Advisory Panels:** 35% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.
- **Co-Design Groups & Ministerial Steering Group:** 37% of respondents indicated a good level of communication.

The responses evidence further, opinion shared through interviews and focus groups, that DFC officials were committed to engagement across all stakeholder groups. However, stakeholders understand there was limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups to deliver an effective co-design process.

Through the survey, stakeholders were asked, on the basis of your experience in this co-design process, would you take part in a similar process in the future.

- 48% of respondents stated that they **would take** part in a similar process in the future
- 12% of respondents stated that they **would not** take part in similar process in the future
- 38% of respondents stated that they were **unsure** if they would take part in similar process in the future.

This is a positive response in light of some of the challenges outlined. Stakeholders clearly value the opportunity to provide input. For those unsure if they would take part, barriers to future participation included if the parameters were set up in the same way, if it was the same process and it was termed co-design instead of consultation and if there was no additional resource assigned to deliver the scope.

4.6   Lessons Learnt

The Review Team consulted with stakeholders on what had worked well within the co-design process and areas for improvement to inform lesson learnt and recommendations for future co-design process.

4.6.1   Stakeholder Views on What Worked Well

Resources

In terms of resources to deliver the co-design process, stakeholders note that DFC officials demonstrated a high level of commitment and willingness to progress the process and ensured they were accessible to stakeholders throughout the process.

Communication & Engagement

Stakeholders deemed the continued engagement, despite what many describe as a challenging delivery environment, as a positive with many stakeholders remaining fully committed to continued engagement through the process. Some commentary provided shows that stakeholders valued the opportunity to engage and understand the engagement was regular, constructive and allowed for open discussion. There were opportunities to share best practice and opportunities for departments to highlight the work that is already being undertaken in specific policy areas.

Expertise

A majority of stakeholders understand the appropriate members were included in the groups. Membership was broad and diverse and stakeholders valued the expertise and knowledge this brought to the process. The process also gave the opportunity for Departments to showcase the work that was already taking place, relevant to each of the Strategies.

A majority of stakeholders welcomed the work produced by the Expert Advisory Panels. They indicate this was evidence-led by those who have the necessary expertise in their sector.

Governance & Process

The approach from DFC in managing the process was valued. Stakeholders are conscious that managing this process required handling and organising a significant amount of information and diverse voices. DFC showed clear willingness to progress and be accessible to stakeholders. This is further noted through stakeholder views that DFC officials were responsive to feedback from all stakeholders as is evidenced in changes made throughout the cycle of co-design.

Relationships

The co-design process was valuable in establishing links across departments and other organisations.

4.6.2   Stakeholder Views on Areas for Improvement

Principles of Co-Design

The most common theme throughout consultation was a divergence on views on what co-design is and should include. Stakeholders have participated in other co-design processes, which differ in approach, to include within NICS. This has led to differing expectations about the process and frustration for some stakeholders. There is a need to develop a framework that is based on a shared understanding of co-design principles. This framework should allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the process against the wider delivery environment and become a measurement tool to assess in each circumstance if co-design is the right or appropriate choice (see Recommendation 1).

Decision Making

Stakeholders indicate that they did not sense a commitment to the co-design principle of shared decision making. One challenge for some stakeholders was a lack of shared understanding of government process to include co-design as one step in this process and their role and remit in terms of decision making. Ensuring a shared understanding of government process and the scope of co-design to be undertaken within this, together with upfront clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs and ongoing and frequent access to decision makers will demonstrate the influence stakeholders groups have on the overall decision making process (see Recommendations 1, 2 and 3).

Timescales

Timescales for a majority of stakeholders were ambitious and unrealistic. Moving forward timeframes should be clearly set out based on what is achievable and reasonable.

Timeframes were adjusted throughout the process in response to stakeholder feedback. There is not a shared understanding of the process changes and if or why this took place. Both clear scheduling and adherence of timeframes with consistent communication on changes to timeframes underpinned by rationale for change should be a feature of any future co-design projects (see Recommendation 4).

Resources

Stakeholders discussed the barriers created by a lack of resource in place to deliver the co-design process. With the exception of the Expert Advisory Panels who received remuneration for their participation, all internal and external groups were required to participate as an addition to their business as usual role. This may have impacted capacity to participate and caused pressures for stakeholders.

To ensure future capacity and capability, in establishing a co-design approach, identification and allocation of required resources across all stakeholders groups will be of benefit. In addition to this, a number of stakeholders within co-design groups considered remuneration for their resources would have better enabled capacity (see Recommendation 4).

There was a large volume of feedback in relation to the resource available to deliver the Strategies. While a noted area for improvement was to ensure additional funding is available, this is outside the remit of this review which focuses on the co-design process and funding for the delivery of the Strategies is not in control of DFC policy officials. It is evident that stakeholders understand a lack of resource impacted on the ability to fully explore the issues and therefore

impacted the process. Areas for improvement in reference to this are outlined in Decision Making; clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4).

Communication & Engagement

It is the view of a majority of stakeholders that there should be increased early and ongoing formal engagement between all groups (see Recommendation 3).

Stakeholders noted a lack of shared understanding of the process, steps along the way, agreed actions and changes in timescales. Communication and information updates at regular intervals will ensure all stakeholder groups are fully informed (see Recommendation 4).

Some stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing accessibility issues and are keen that future processes ensure reasonable adjustments are adhered to throughout the process (see Recommendation 4).

Expertise

As previously noted, there was not a shared understanding of policy development and government process. Setting the scene for participants to ensure a consistent level of understanding of members of the co-design groups will impact positively on expectations of the process and help with understanding of how co-design can inform decision making and flows through to policy (see Recommendation 2).

While there were differing views on how to undertake co-design, a number of stakeholders noted that co-design process should be based on a fully informed problem. For example, expert advice and views should be based on a full understanding of the delivery environment and what levers are available to allow for solutions to be developed (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4).

Governance & Process

There were varying views on this process as a reflection of stakeholder interpretation of co-design and this is evident in the number of views where we heard that the process did not meet their expectations. This was further complicated by a lack of shared understanding of the process and roles and remits. Future processes should consider developing detailed co-design process planning in collaboration with all stakeholders (see Recommendation 4).

Terms of Reference should be developed collaboratively through early engagement with stakeholders to allow for a shared understanding of scope and remit with governance in place to ensure activities and outputs are aligned to terms of reference (see Recommendation 5).

Given feedback from all stakeholders on timescales and resource required to participate in the process, many view a stepped approach to these strategies would be more appropriate rather than delivering them as a suite of strategies. This will ensure more capacity to participate in the smaller workload of one strategy and ensure constraints and challenges which may be faced in one strategy do not impact progression of the remainder. Undertaking project planning (see Recommendation 4) will allow for full oversight of the resource and timescales needed and aid decision making on the most appropriate approach to progressing strategies.

Relationships

Allow sufficient time for relationships to be established. Well-developed relationships will enable enhanced collaborative discussion (see Recommendation 3).

Stakeholder views on where they could input to improve the process

Stakeholders noted areas of improvement they would individually make to improve future processes. Members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups noted they would undertake more up front promotion of the co-design work across their Department to better understand if the support and resource from the Department will be readily available to them. For members of the Co-design Groups, some suggestions included to undertake more research on the priorities for other organisations within their group and being more direct to ensure your opinion is heard and included in outputs. Members of the Expert Advisory Panels noted they would ensure more formal engagement with the other groups throughout the co-design process. For all groups, views expressed included taking the time and space to ensure more clarity around the process and their role and remit and requesting the appropriate resources to undertake co-design.

4.7 Findings and Analysis Summary and Conclusions

Table 4 Findings and Analysis Summary and Conclusions

Heading	Conclusion
Overall Effectiveness	26% of survey respondents rated the overall effectiveness of the co-design process to date as effective[4]. Barriers and challenges which appear to have impacted stakeholder views on level of effectiveness have been outlined in Section 4.4.2.
Benefits	The survey results outlined 49% of respondents rated a good[5] level of benefits for the groups/individuals they represent. 24% considered there was a low[6] level of benefits for groups/individuals. 52% of respondents rated a good[5] level of benefits for their organisation. 22% respondents rated a good level[5] of benefits for progression of the Strategies.
	Benefits of participating in this process included:
	• a better understanding within Departments of the challenges faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver;
	• the ability through the process for a range of diverse organisations with a mix of expertise across the sectors to come together and to build consensus around key areas, share best practice and build on evidence-led outputs;
	• the accessibility and responsiveness of DFC officials to the general requirements of the various stakeholder groups; and
	• the process supported the prioritisation of issues and identification of any gaps, which will help create a more cohesive suite of draft strategies for consideration.
Barriers/ Challenges	Barriers and challenges stakeholders felt constrained the co-design process are:
	• **Decision making:** 24% of survey respondents deemed decision making was sufficient[7]. For the Co-design Groups and Cross-departmental Working Groups, there was a perceived lack of collaboration and understanding of the delivery environment to enable shared decision making between these groups in developing outputs. These groups felt they were working in parallel rather than in partnership.
	• **Timescales:** 16% of respondents considered timescales as sufficient[7]. While there was a general understanding and consensus among stakeholders on the need for expeditious progress, the majority of stakeholders felt timescales were unrealistic and impacted on the quality of outputs and overall process
	• **Resources:** 7% of respondents considered resources for the delivery of the Strategies to be sufficient[7]. It is a majority opinion that constraints on resources to deliver the Strategies created a barrier to fully exploring issues and solutions.
	4% of respondents deemed resources to undertake co-design as sufficient[7]. A lack of resource to participate in the co-design process created extra pressures for

Heading	Conclusion
	stakeholders to undertake a process that was considered resource intensive. The process required significant time spend in addition to stakeholder work commitments, impacting in some scenarios, on capacity to participate.
	• **Communication and Engagement:** 45% of respondents considered communication during the process as sufficient[7]. Co-design Groups were concerned by a perceived lack of ongoing formal communication to the groups with regards to status updates throughout the process. The Expert Advisory Panels and Cross-Departmental Working Groups were, in the main, content with communication and deemed the process to have been managed well with ongoing formal and informal communication as needed. All groups understood there was limited engagement across groups which created a barrier to collaboration and discussion.
	• **Expertise:** Consultees noted a lack of consistent knowledge and expertise across Co-design Groups in relation to policy development and Executive process, which may have contributed to a number of the stakeholder views on barriers outlined. Stakeholders noted that structure of group engagement limited discussion based on true expertise; there would have been value in separating engagement, for example, by theme or Department and additional engagement in smaller groups would have allowed the expertise from all organisations to be heard.
	• **Governance and Process:** Some stakeholders viewed the process as lacking in overall planning and noted the process appeared reactive. The process and timeframe did change in response to stakeholder feedback and there appears to be an inconsistency in stakeholder understanding of this. It is the view of some stakeholders that the process was insufficient to ensure full understanding of the delivery environment across all groups, which underpinned diverging views throughout the engagement and on occasion caused adversity in and between groups.
	• **Relationships:** Stakeholders across all groups indicated that limited timescales and a necessity to hold all meetings virtually impacted on the ability to allow for early development of relationships in groups and led to a lack of engagement between groups. Stakeholders view this as a constraint to enabling full collaboration to allow for robust discussion. The co-design process required the input of a range of diverse voices with often competing priorities both between and within groups. Stakeholders indicated that development of the informal relationship would have been influential in allowing collaboration and discussion on areas of divergence.
Stakeholder Understanding of Co-design Process	Before the process commenced, 93% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 87% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 65% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of co-design. These results indicate stakeholders had a different interpretation of the process at the outset. There was not a shared understanding of what a co-design process is and involves. It was evident that there was contrasting levels of understanding of how co-design feeds into policy making and constraints that the delivery environment may place on the sharing of information. In developing an Executive Strategy, there will be constraints on sharing information that other Departments hold in relation to the Strategies. The survey results outlined that 31% of respondents indicated the Social Inclusion co-design process had a good level of alignment of process to co-design principles. A majority of stakeholders did not feel this process aligned with their interpretation of co-design; stakeholders felt that Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups worked in parallel to each other for majority of the process. This limited the ability to collaboratively explore issues and develop joint solutions. Many stakeholders understand this process felt more like stakeholder engagement than co-design.

Heading	Conclusion
	These findings suggest that there was not a shared understanding of the process from the outset. Stakeholder expectations of what this co-design process was and would involve were not met which was, in particular evident, for the Co-design Groups.
Stakeholder Understanding of Executive Process	Before the process commenced, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding. During the process, 74% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding and after the process completed, 62% respondents had a good[5] level of understanding of Executive process. These results indicate a small decrease in understanding towards the end of the process, which is perhaps influenced by the fact that strategy progression has been put on hold due to external factors. There was not a shared or well-developed understanding across all stakeholders of Executive processes.
Stakeholder Views on TOR	The survey results outlined that 45% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs were appropriate for the process. 36% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs enabled a clear understanding of the process. 36% of respondents agreed[8] that the TORs clearly defined roles for the process. Perceived disconnect in terms of expectations of stakeholders, in particular, Co-design Groups. While all groups were given an opportunity to comment on a draft TOR and comments were reflected in the final versions, there was limited push back on TORs from the Co-design Groups at the beginning of the process. As the process progressed it was clear that the TORs did not deliver on expectations for Co-design Groups, demonstrating a missed opportunity from both Co-design Groups and DFC officials to develop the TORs collaboratively to ensure transparency in terms of the structure of the process and subsequent expectations.
Level of Stakeholder Engagement	**Level of engagement** Through the survey, 16% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove the appropriate level of engagement from the individual. 14% of respondents agreed[8] that the process drove appropriate level of engagement from their group. Survey responses and opinions shared indicate that stakeholders sense that level of engagement was impacted by some of the barriers previously outlined, for example, size and structure of groups, limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups and the necessity to hold all meetings in a virtual environment. **Level of Communication between groups** Respondents rated the level of communication between groups. The ratings for a good[5] level of communication were in the range of 26% to 73%. Engagement between DFC and all groups was rated more positively, supporting stakeholder views that DFC were committed to engagement across all groups. However, stakeholders understand there was limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups to deliver an effective co-design process. Through the survey, stakeholders were asked, on the basis of your experience in this co-design process, would you take part in a similar process in the future. • 48% of respondents stated that they **would take** part in a similar process in the future • 12% of respondents stated that they **would not** take part in similar process in the future • 38% of respondents stated that they were **unsure** if they would take part in similar process in the future. Despite some of the challenges outlined, stakeholders clearly value the opportunity to provide input.
What Worked Well	Stakeholders outlined what had worked well in the co-design process as follows: • **Resources**

Heading	Conclusion
	Stakeholders note that DFC officials demonstrated a high level of commitment and willingness to progress the process and ensured they were accessible to stakeholders throughout the process. • **Communication & Engagement** Stakeholders deemed the continued engagement, despite what many describe as a challenging delivery environment, as a positive. Many stakeholders valued the opportunity to engage and understand the engagement was regular, constructive and allowed for open discussion. There were opportunities to share best practice and opportunities for departments to highlight the work that is already being undertaken in specific policy areas. • **Expertise** Group membership was broad and diverse and stakeholders valued the expertise and knowledge this brought to the process. A majority of stakeholders welcomed the work produced by the Expert Advisory Panels. They indicate this was evidence-led by those who have the necessary expertise in their sector. • **Governance & Process** The approach from DFC in managing the process was valued. Stakeholders are conscious that managing this process required handling and organising a significant amount of information and diverse voices. DFC showed clear willingness to progress and be accessible to stakeholders. • **Relationships** The co-design process was valuable in establishing links across departments and other organisations.
Areas for Improvement	Stakeholders noted the following areas for improvement: • **Principles of Co-Design** There is a need to develop a framework that is based on a shared understanding of co-design principles. This framework should allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the process against the wider delivery environment and become a measurement tool to assess in each circumstance if co-design is the right or appropriate choice (see Recommendation 1). • **Decision Making** Ensuring a shared understanding of government process and the scope of co-design to be undertaken within this together with upfront clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs and ongoing and frequent access to decision makers will demonstrate the influence stakeholders groups have on the overall decision making process (see Recommendations 1, 2 and 3). • **Timescales** Timeframes should be clearly set out based on what is achievable and reasonable. Both clear scheduling and adherence of timeframes with consistent communication on changes to timeframes underpinned by rationale for change should be a feature of any future co-design projects (see Recommendation 4). • **Resources** To ensure future capacity and capability, in establishing a co-design approach, identification and allocation of required resources across all stakeholders groups will be of benefit. In addition to this, a number of stakeholders within co-design groups considered remuneration for their resources would have better enabled capacity (see Recommendation 4). There was a large volume of feedback in relation to the resource available to deliver the Strategies. While a noted area for improvement was to ensure additional funding is available, this is outside the remit of this review which focuses on the co-design process and funding for the delivery of the Strategies is not in control of DFC policy officials. It is evident that stakeholders understand a lack of resource impacted on the ability to fully explore the issues and therefore impacted the process. Areas for improvement in reference to this are outlined in Decision Making; clarity and transparency around the parameters impacting on outputs (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4). • **Communication & Engagement**

Heading	Conclusion
	It is the view of a majority of stakeholders that there should be increased early and ongoing formal engagement between all groups (see Recommendation 3). Formal communication and information updates at regular intervals will ensure all stakeholder groups are fully informed (see Recommendation 4). Some stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing accessibility issues and are keen that future processes ensure reasonable adjustments are adhered to throughout the process (see Recommendation 4). • **Expertise** Ensure a shared understanding of policy development and government process to impact positively on expectations of the process and help with understanding of how co-design can inform decision making and flows through to policy (see Recommendation 2). While there were differing views on how to undertake co-design, a number of stakeholders noted that co-design process should be based on a fully informed problem. For example, expert advice and views should be based on a full understanding of the delivery environment and what levers are available to allow for solutions to be developed (see Recommendations 1, 3 and 4). • **Governance & Process** Future processes should consider developing detailed co-design process planning in collaboration with all stakeholders (see Recommendation 4). Terms of Reference should be developed collaboratively through early engagement with stakeholders to allow for a shared understanding of scope and remit with governance in place to ensure activities and outputs are aligned to terms of reference (see Recommendation 5). Consideration of a stepped approach to these strategies to impact on capacity to participate and ensure constraints and challenges which may be faced in one strategy do not impact progression of the remainder. Undertaking project planning (see Recommendation 4) will allow for full oversight of the resource and timescales needed and aid decision making on the most appropriate approach to progressing strategies. • **Relationships** Allow sufficient time for relationships to be established. Well-developed relationships will enable enhanced collaborative discussion (see Recommendation 3). • **Areas of improvement for stakeholders** Stakeholders noted areas of improvement they would individually make to improve future processes. Members of the Cross-departmental Working Groups noted they would undertake more up front promotion of the co-design work across their Department to better understand if the support and resource from the Department will be readily available to them. For members of the Co-design Groups, some suggestions included carrying out more research on the priorities for other organisations within their group and being more direct to ensure your opinion is heard and included in outputs. Members of the Expert Advisory Panels noted they would ensure more formal engagement with the other groups throughout the co-design process. For all groups, views expressed included taking the time and space to ensure more clarity around the process and their role and remit and requesting the appropriate resources to undertake co-design.

Section 5: Summary and Conclusions

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section sets out the key conclusions against each of the original TOR and summarises the recommendations for consideration in future co-design process.

5.2 Conclusions

While, it is concluded that the Social Inclusion strategies co-design process has been largely effective for DFC in achieving its overall objective; the development of a suite of Social Inclusion strategies, to include a process based on inclusion of the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement, the process has encountered a number of challenges and barriers and a majority of stakeholders do not rate the process to date as effective. There are a number of recommendations outlined below for any future process which would impact on stakeholder views on level of effectiveness.

To address each section of the TOR, the Review Team conducted a blended consultation approach of survey, interviews and focus groups across each stakeholder group.
The following table sets out the conclusions.

Table 5 Conclusions against original Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
The overall effectiveness of the process	
Benefits in relation to stakeholders, organisation & strategies	Benefits of participating in this process included: • a better understanding within Departments of the challenges faced by those for whom the Strategies will deliver; • the ability through the process for a range of diverse organisations with a mix of expertise across the sectors to come together and to build consensus around key areas, share best practice and build on evidence-led outputs; • the accessibility and responsiveness of DFC officials to the general requirements of the various stakeholder groups; and • the process supported the prioritisation of issues and identification of any gaps, which will help create a more cohesive suite of draft strategies for consideration.
Barriers/ challenges to the co-design process	Stakeholders understood barriers/challenges to the co-design process included a perceived lack of shared decision making between the Co-design Groups and Cross-Departmental Working Groups in developing outputs. The process was viewed by a majority as insufficient in terms of: • timescales to deliver; • a lack of resource to support the co-design process and deliver the Strategies; • insufficient formal communication and engagement for and between groups; • insufficient informal communication and relationship building between groups; • structure of group engagement; and • expertise of stakeholders to include a shared understanding of policy and Executive process and a shared understanding of the delivery environment for the Strategies.

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
Stakeholder understanding of the delivery environment as part of the wider NICS co-design process, including constraints (before and after process); Stakeholder understanding of co-design process specific to the DFC Social Inclusion Strategies (before and after process	As the co-design process progressed, the understanding of the co-design principles among stakeholders decreased indicating stakeholders had a different interpretation of the process at the outset. There were contrasting levels of understanding of how co-design feeds into policy making and constraints that the delivery environment may place on the sharing of information. In developing an Executive Strategy, there will be constraints on sharing information that other Departments hold in relation to the Strategies. A majority of stakeholders did not feel this process aligned to their interpretation of co-design; stakeholders felt that Cross-departmental Working Groups and Co-design Groups worked in parallel to each other rather than partnership for majority of the process. Overall findings suggest there was not a shared understanding of the process from the outset. Stakeholder expectations of what this co-design process was and would involve were not met which was, in particular evident, for the Co-design Groups.
Stakeholder understanding of Executive processes and strategies (before and after process)	There was not a shared or well-developed understanding across all stakeholders of Executive processes. There was a small decrease in understanding of Executive process and strategies among stakeholders towards the end of the process, which is perhaps influenced by the fact that strategy progression has been put on hold due to external factors.
Stakeholders views on the content and appropriateness of the Social Inclusion Strategies co-design terms of reference/ scope	There appears to be a disconnect in terms of expectations of stakeholders, in particular, Co-design Groups. While all groups were given an opportunity to comment on a draft TOR and comments were reflected in the final versions, there was limited push back on TORs from the Co-design Groups at the beginning of the process. As the process progressed, it was clear that the TORs did not deliver on expectations for Co-design Groups, demonstrating a missed opportunity from both Co-design Groups and DFC officials to develop the TORs collaboratively to ensure transparency in terms of the structure of the process and subsequent expectations.
The level of engagement of all stakeholders	
Stakeholder views on if the process drove appropriate stakeholder engagement (individual and group	**Level of Engagement** Survey responses and opinions shared indicate that stakeholders sense that level of engagement was impacted by some of the barriers previously outlined, for example, size and structure of groups, limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups and the necessity to hold all meetings in a virtual environment. **Level of communication between groups** Engagement between DFC and all groups was rated positively, supporting stakeholder views that DFC were committed to engagement across all groups. However, stakeholders understand there was limited early, ongoing and frequent engagement across groups to deliver an effective co-design process.
An indication of whether stakeholders would re-engage in future processes	• 48% of respondents stated that they **would take** part in a similar process in the future • 12% of respondents stated that they **would not** take part in similar process in the future • 38% of respondents stated that they were **unsure** if they would take part in similar process in the future. Despite some of the challenges outlined, stakeholders clearly value the opportunity to provide input.

Terms of Reference	Conclusions
Lessons learnt from the process	
Stakeholder views on what worked well in the process	Stakeholders indicate that a number of positives to include DFC's commitment to the process and their ability in managing a range of information and opinion, stakeholder commitment to the process, the opportunity to engage and have collaborative discussion, the board and diverse range of group members, the level of expertise across groups and the opportunity to establish links with other Departments and organisations.
Areas for improvement to include stakeholder views on where they could input to improve the process	Stakeholders noted the following areas for improvement: • Development of a framework based on a shared understanding of co-design principles; • Ensure a shared understanding of Executive process and the scope of co-design to be undertaken to include delivery environment; • Realistic timescales; • Identification and allocation of required resources for all groups to participate in a co-design process; • Increased formal and informal communication for and between groups; • Identification of and consistent adherence to adjustments required for participants; and • Process planning and project management approach to future co-design processes in collaboration with stakeholders (e.g. in development of TORs). **Areas of improvement for stakeholders** • Promotion of the co-design work across their Department to better understand if the support and resource from the Department will be readily available to them; • Undertake more research on the priorities for other organisations within own group; • Ensure the level of engagement and communication from individual or group is not restricted by the process; • Ensure more clarity around the process and role and remit; and • Request the appropriate resources to undertake co-design.

5.3   Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made. The Review Team acknowledge that the realisation of recommendations is dependent upon the type of process and whether this relates to a Departmental process or a Cross-departmental Executive process.

Table 6 Recommendations

Recommendations	Owner
1. Develop a framework for Co-design with input from all departments and the wider external landscape, which is based on a shared understanding of co-design principles in an NICS context. This framework should allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the process against the wider delivery environment and become a measurement tool to assess in each circumstance if co-design is the right or appropriate choice.	DFC (in collaboration with NICS Departments)
2. At the outset of a co-design process, develop a shared understanding of government policy and Executive process across all participants (internal and external) to clarify roles and remit for groups and create awareness of how co-design flows through to this process.	DFC
3. Establish links for earlier engagement in and between groups to allow relationships to develop. Ensure more frequent engagement between groups to enable a full co-design approach and to include access to decision makers to	DFC

Recommendations	Owner
continually demonstrate to stakeholders where they are having an influence on outputs.	
4. Future processes should consider developing detailed co-design process planning in collaboration with all stakeholders to include the set-up of: • project plan with timescales • communication & engagement plan • stakeholder commitments • clear remit and expected resource requirement of roles and groups (including values and behaviour framework) • clear outputs defined for each phase of the co-design process. There should be upfront discussion on adjustments required and adherence to these together with continuous project management of the co-design process to track and monitor progress against an agreed project plan and formal communication in reference to this.	DFC and stakeholders
5. Terms of Reference should be developed collaboratively through early engagement with stakeholders to allow for a shared understanding of scope and remit with governance in place to ensure activities and outputs are aligned to Terms of Reference.	DFC and stakeholders
6. For any future situations that may include progression of a suite of strategies, consider if a stepped approach would be more appropriate to enable planning, suitable timescales, adequate capacity and resource.	DFC

Section 6: Appendices

Review of the Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design process

APPENDIX I: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, TABLES AND FIGURES

Abbreviation	In Full
BCS	Business Consultancy Service
DFC	Department for Communities
DOF	Department of Finance
NDNA	New Decade, New Approach
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
PfG	Programme for Government
TOR	Terms of Reference

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APPENDIX II: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS

- DFC Central Policy Unit

- Members of Social Inclusion Strategies Expert Advisory Panels

- Members of Social Inclusion Strategies Cross-Departmental Working Groups

- Members of Social Inclusion Strategies Co-design Groups

- Independent Facilitators involved in elements of the co-design process

APPENDIX III: TOR

[Anti-Poverty Strategy expert advisory panel - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Anti-Poverty Strategy co-design group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Disability Strategy expert advisory panel - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Disability Strategy co-design group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Disability Strategy cross-departmental working group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Gender Strategy expert advisory panel - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Gender Equality Strategy co-design group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Gender Equality Strategy cross-departmental working group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Sexual Orientation Strategy expert advisory panel - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Sexual Orientation Strategy co-design group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

[Sexual Orientation Strategy cross-departmental working group - terms of reference | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)](communities-ni.gov.uk)

APPENDIX IV: PARTICPANT SURVEY RESPONSES

Effectiveness and level of benefits of the process to date

Figure 3 Overall effectiveness of the process to date[3]
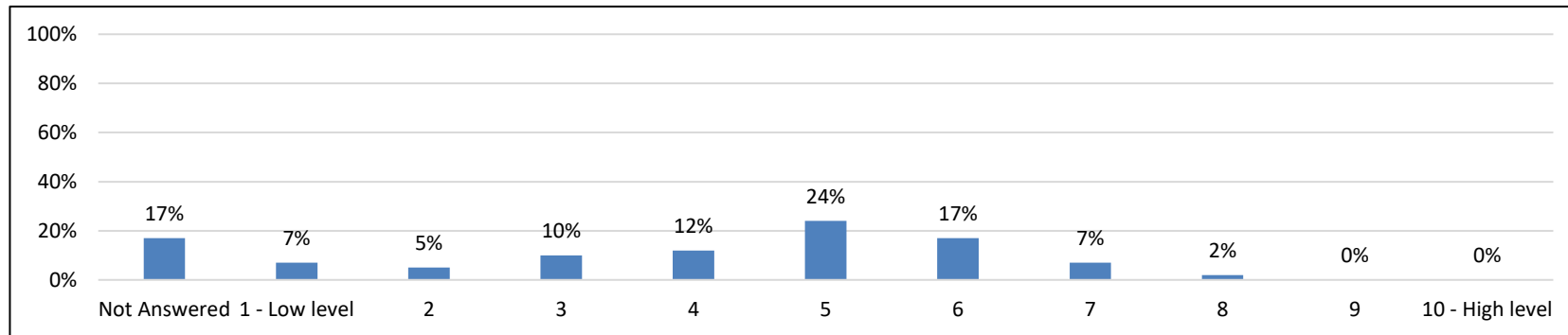
Figure 4 Benefits for groups/individuals you represent
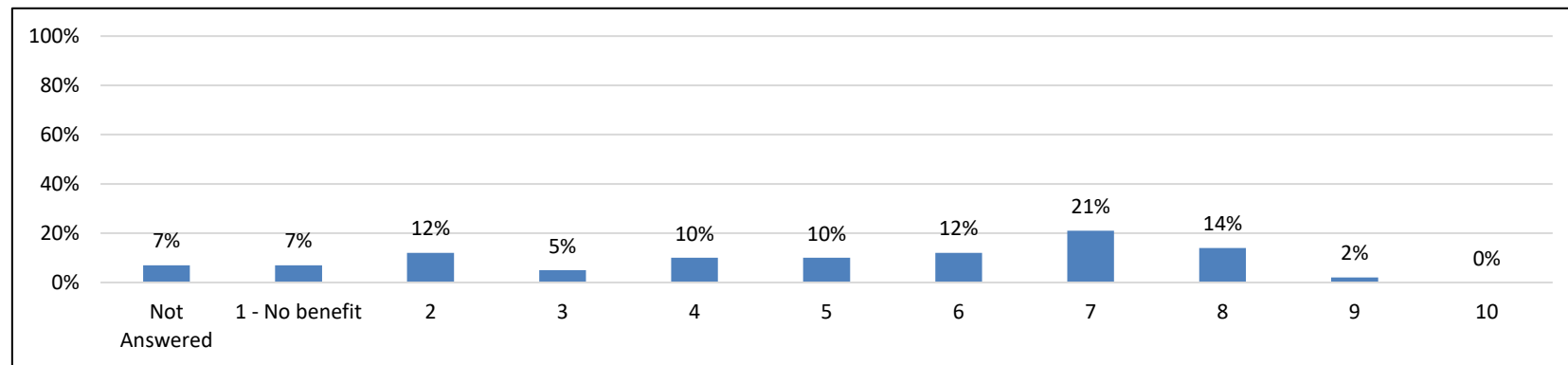
Figure 5 Benefits for your organisation

	Not Answered	1 - No benefit	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	7%	5%	12%	17%	2%	5%	7%	26%	5%	14%	0%
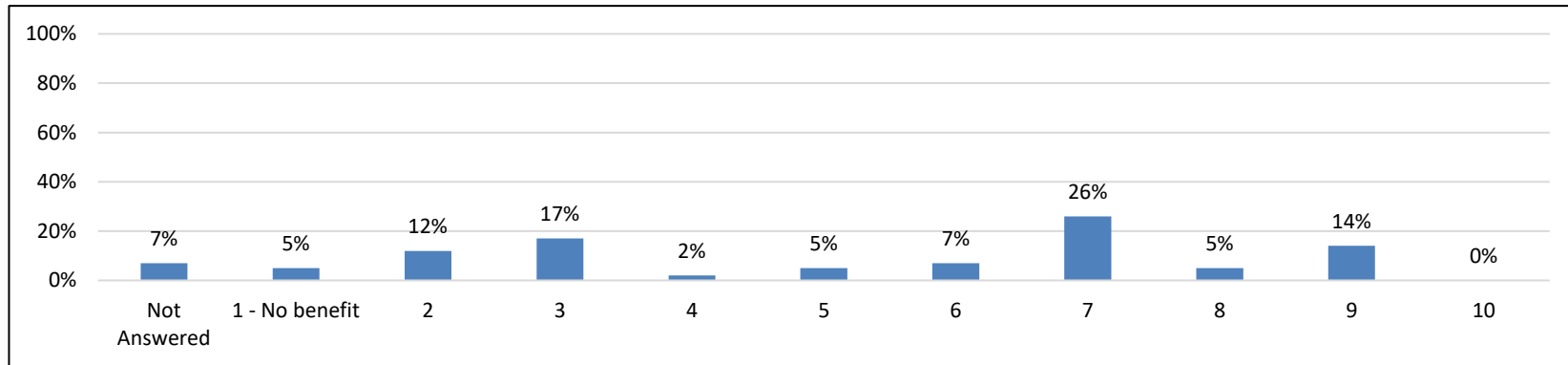
Figure 6 Benefits for progression of the Strategies

	Not Answered	1 - No benefit	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	5%	17%	12%	17%	7%	21%	2%	10%	5%	5%	0%
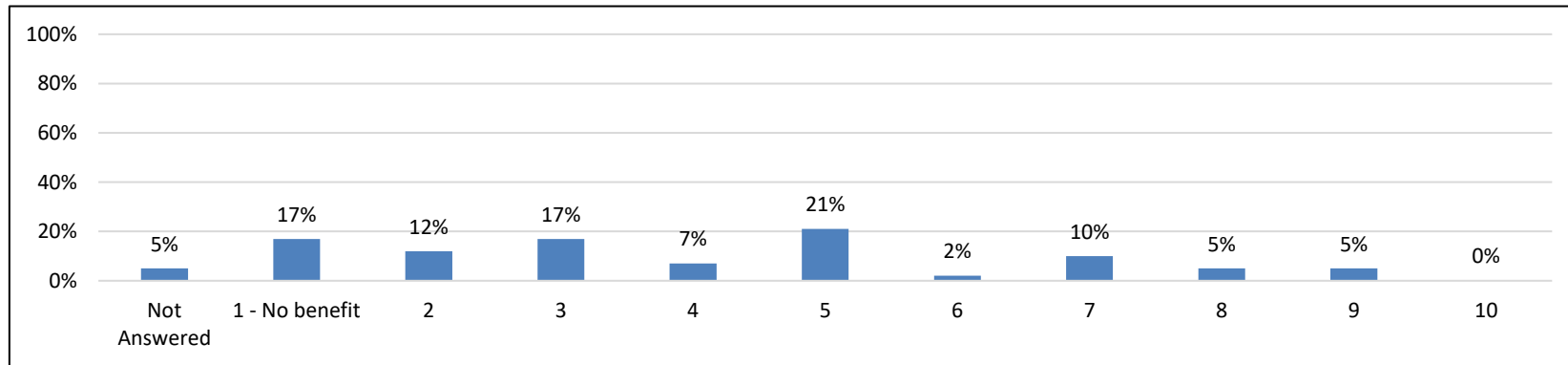
Ratings on Co-design process

Figure 7 Communication
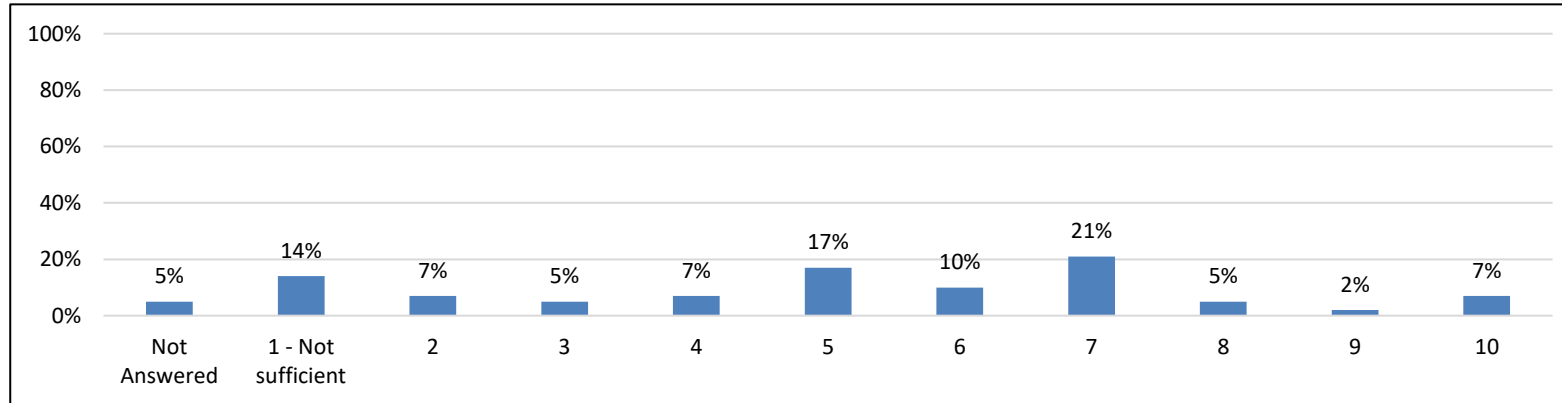
Figure 8 Decision Making
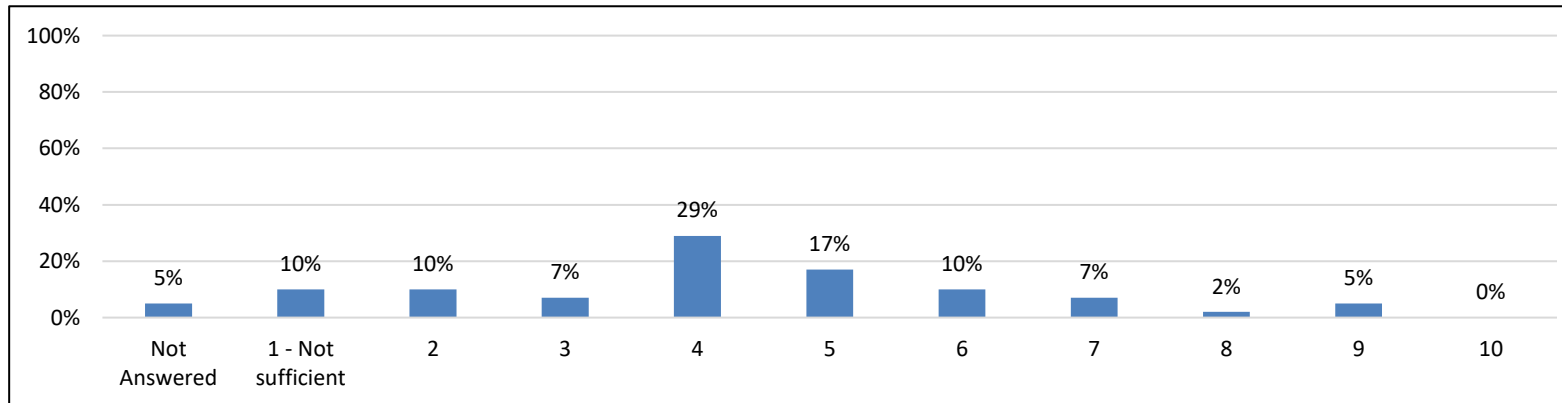
Figure 9 Timescales
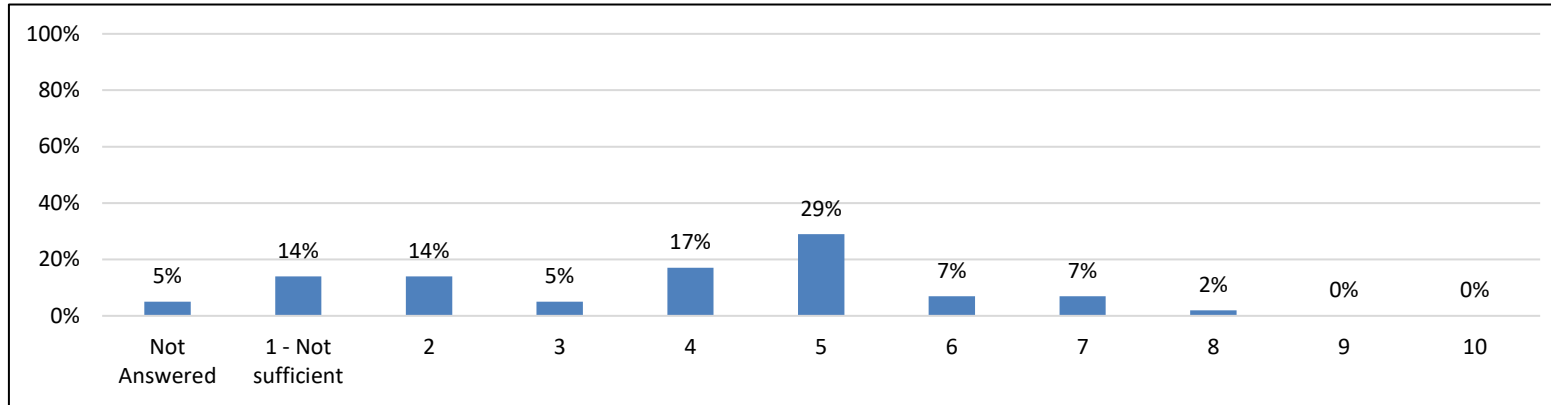
Figure 10 Resources (for delivery of the Strategies)
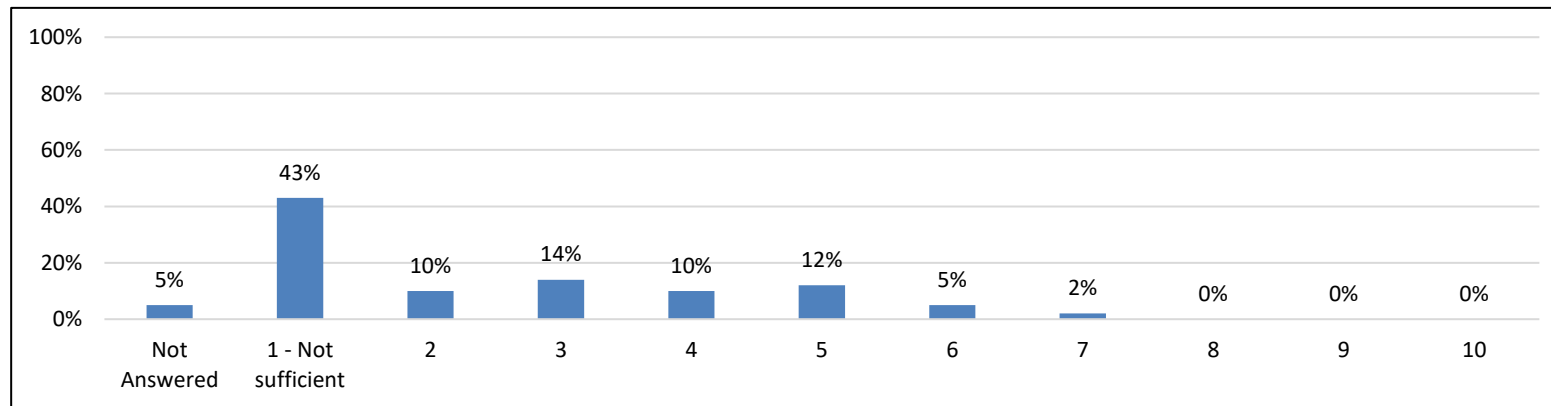
Figure 11 Resources (implications for your organisation)

Bar chart showing responses:
- Not Answered: 7%
- 1 - Not sufficient: 40%
- 2: 7%
- 3: 12%
- 4: 19%
- 5: 10%
- 6: 0%
- 7: 2%
- 8: 0%
- 9: 0%
- 10: 2%
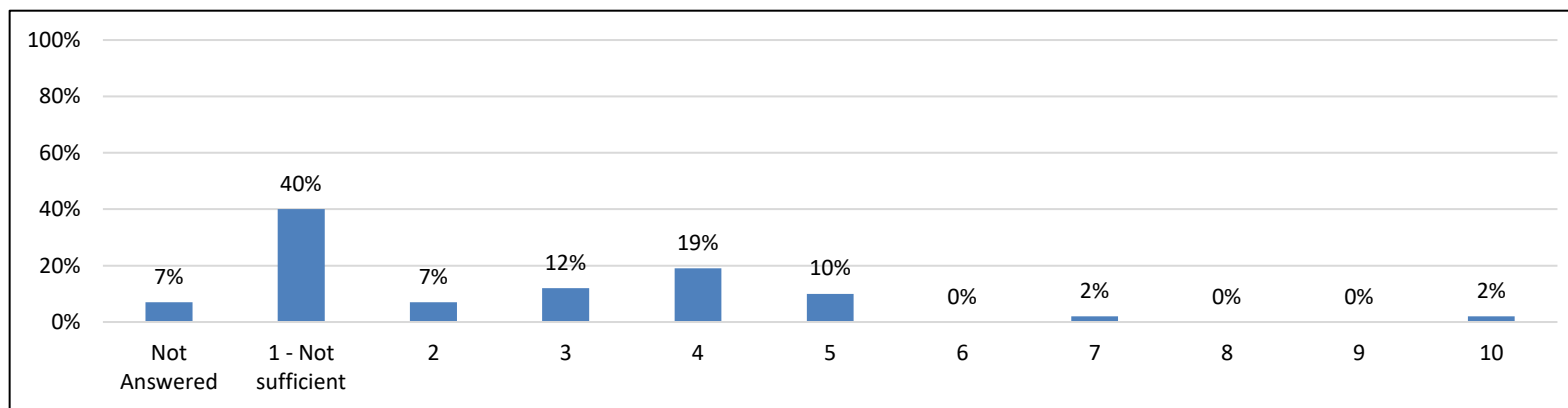
Figure 12 Available evidence

Bar chart showing responses:
- Not Answered: 5%
- 1 - Not sufficient: 7%
- 2: 17%
- 3: 5%
- 4: 2%
- 5: 12%
- 6: 2%
- 7: 19%
- 8: 14%
- 9: 12%
- 10: 5%
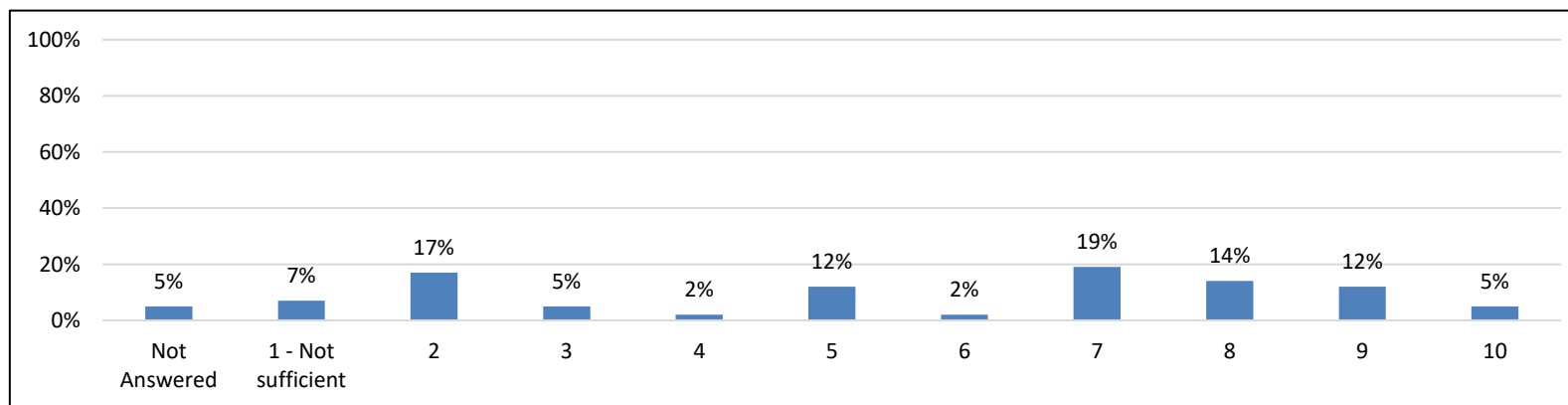
Stakeholder understanding of principles of co-design

Figure 13 Before the process
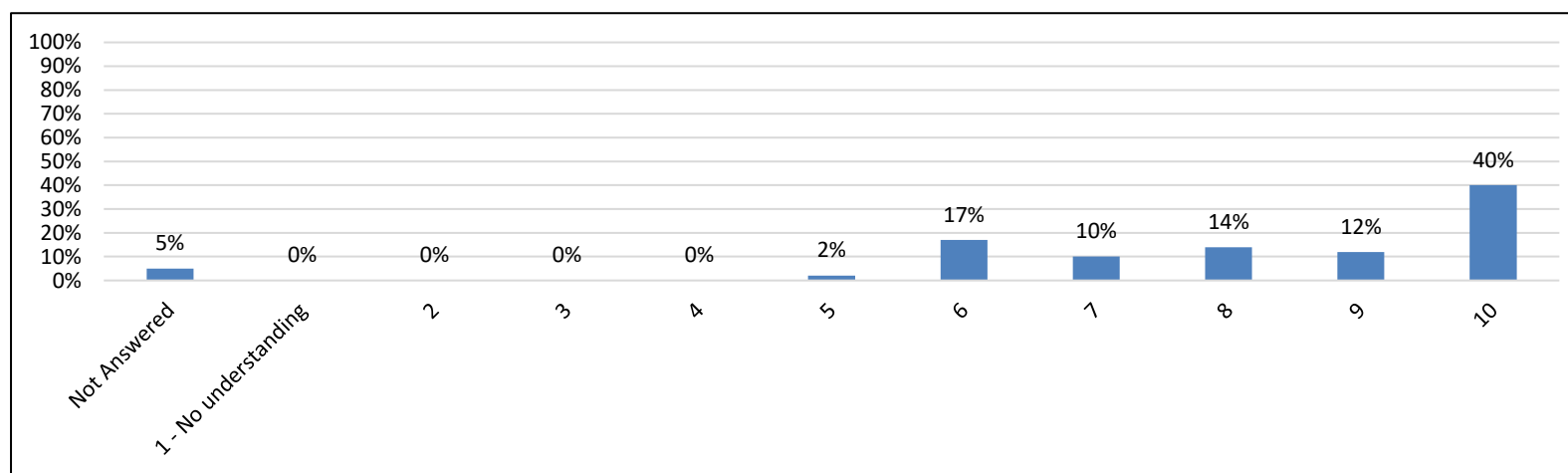
Figure 14 During the process
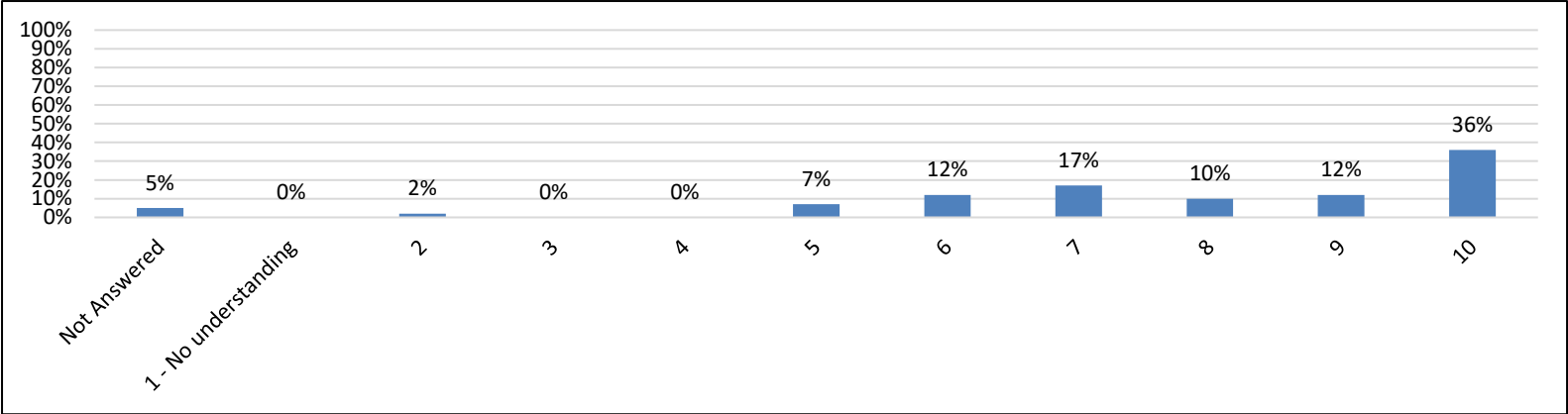
Figure 15 After the process
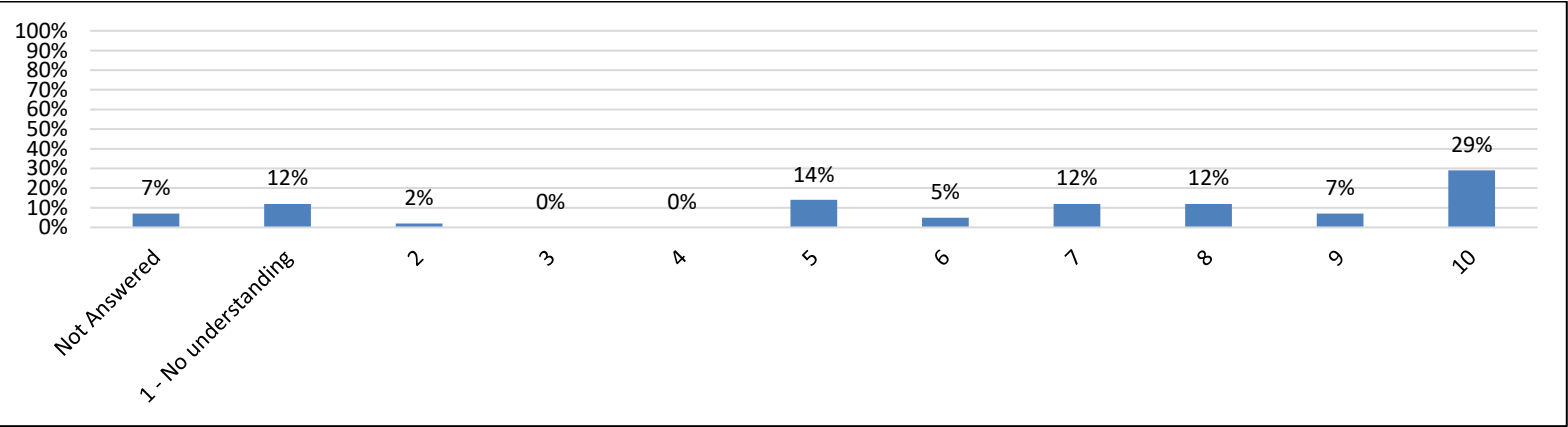
Process alignment with principles of co-design

Figure 16 Process alignment with the principles of co-design
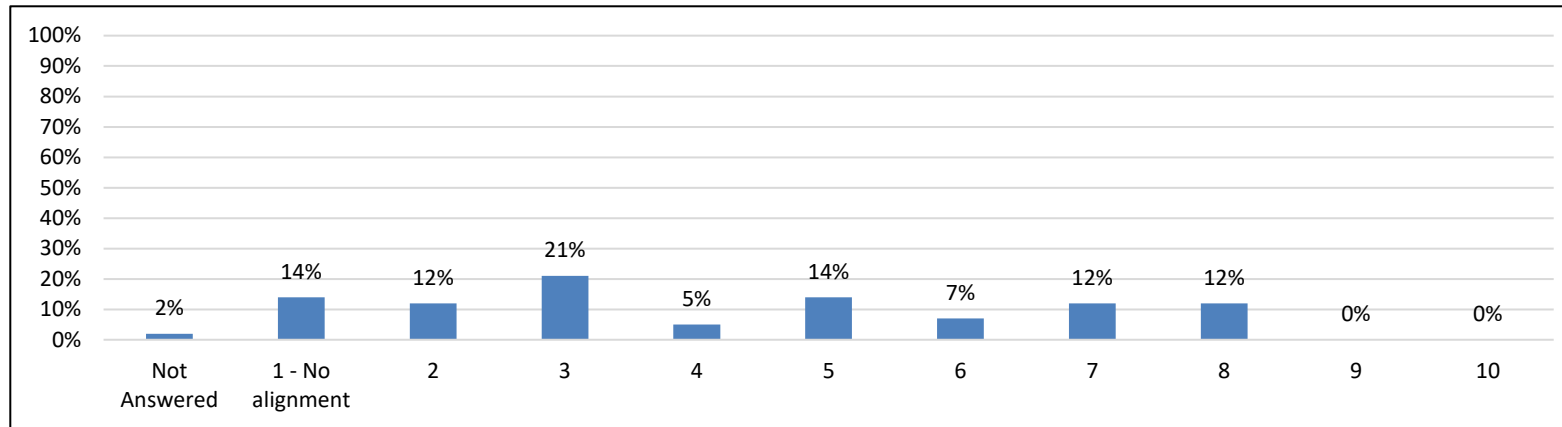
Stakeholder understanding of NI Executive processes and strategies

Figure 17 Before the process
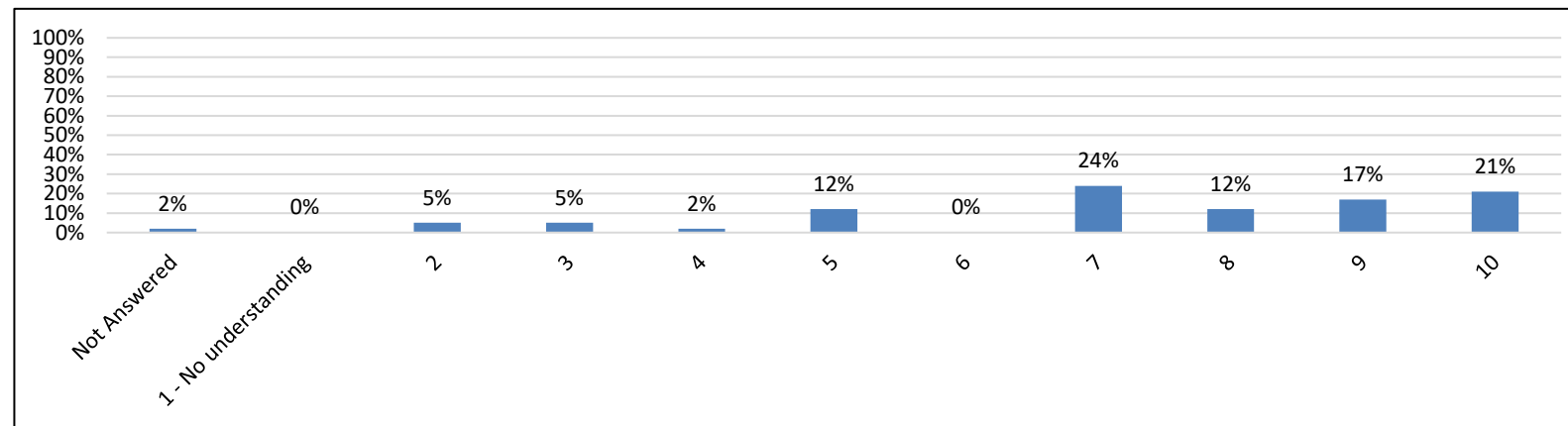
Figure 18 During the process
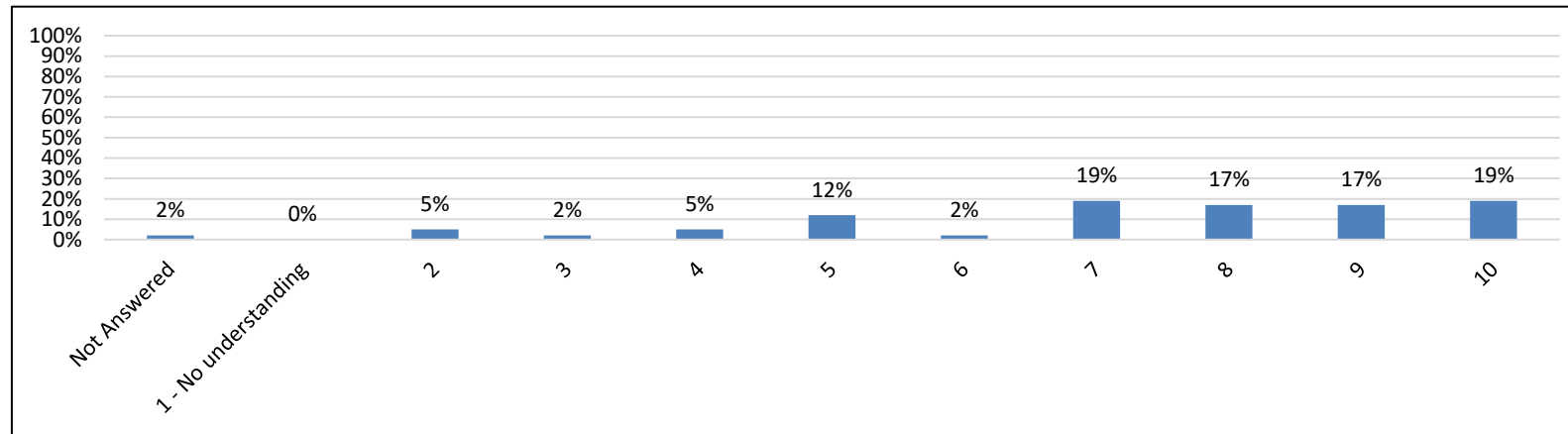
Figure 19 After the process
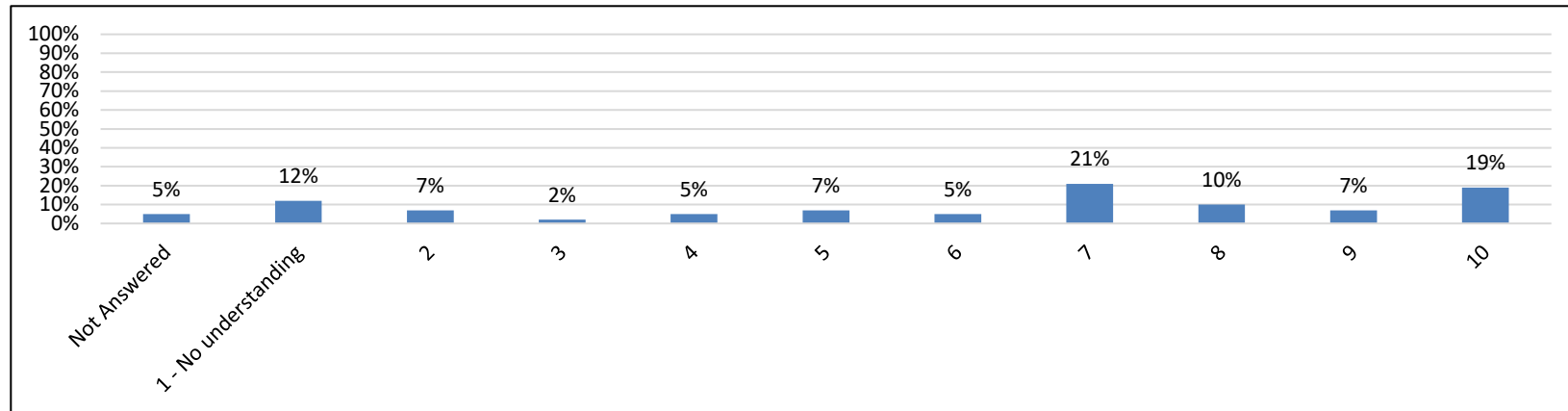
Terms of Reference

Figure 20 Appropriate for the process
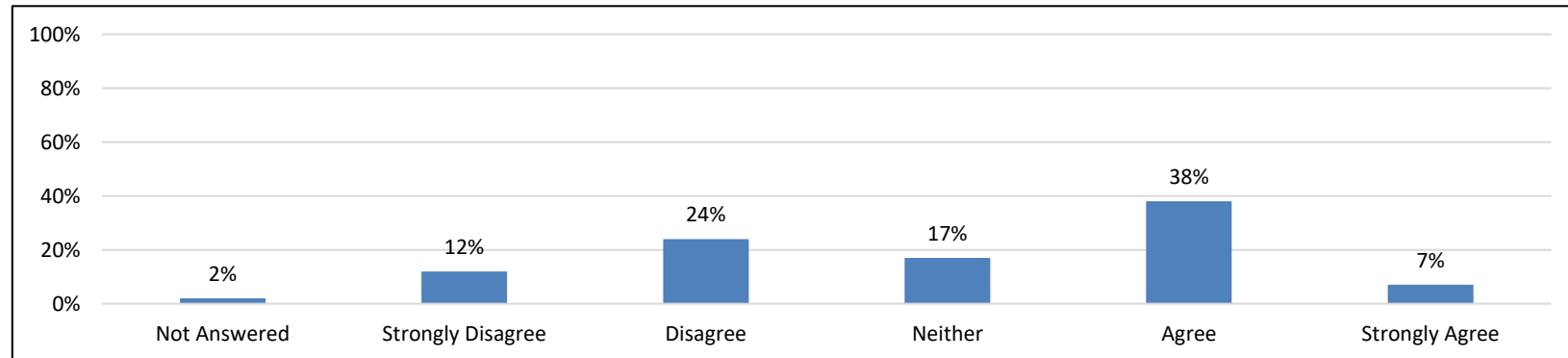
Figure 21 Enabled a clear understanding of the process
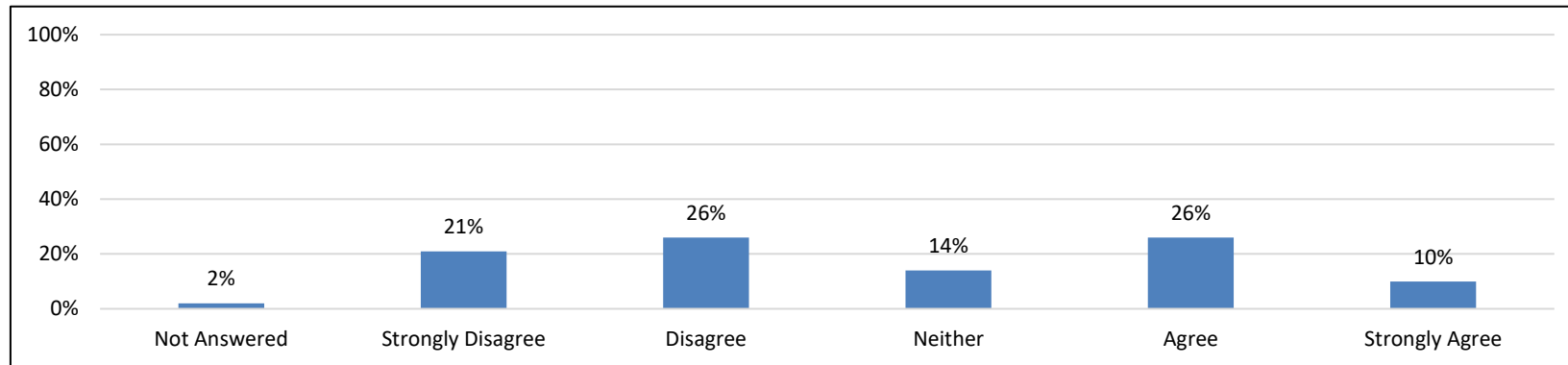
Figure 22 Clearly defined my role as part of my group in the process
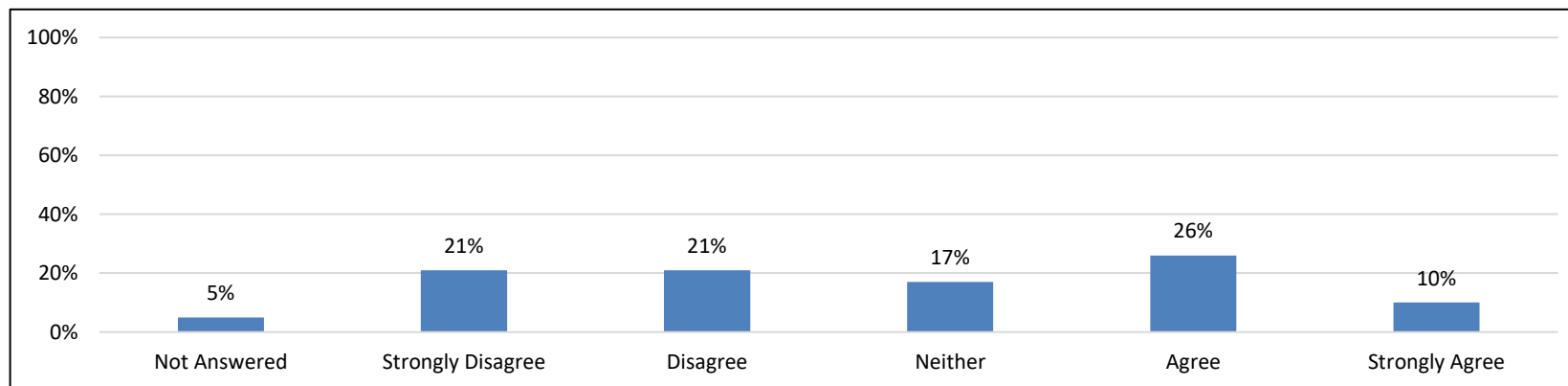
Level of engagement

Figure 23 Process drove appropriate level of engagement from me
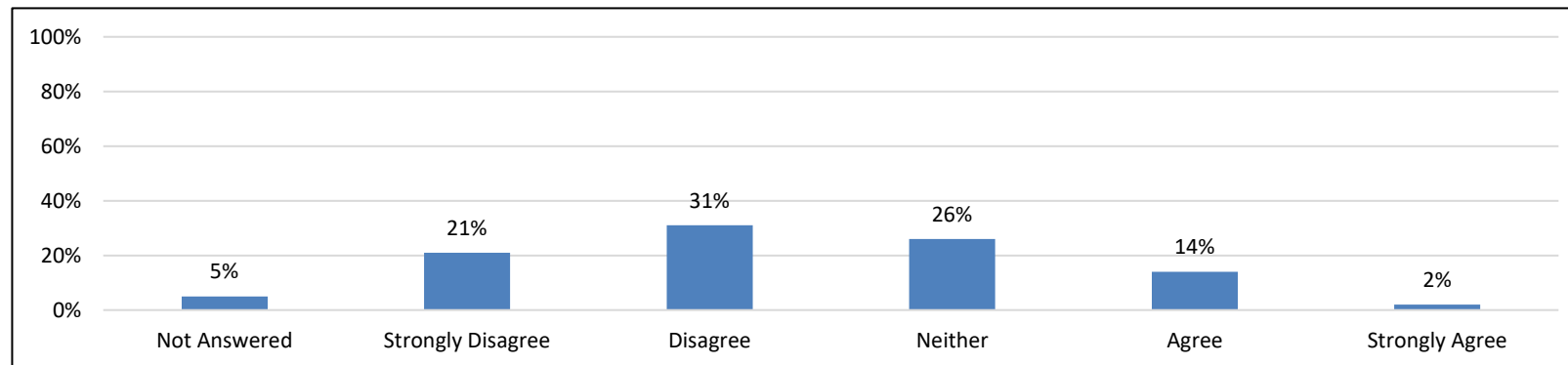
Figure 24 Process drove appropriate level of engagement from my group
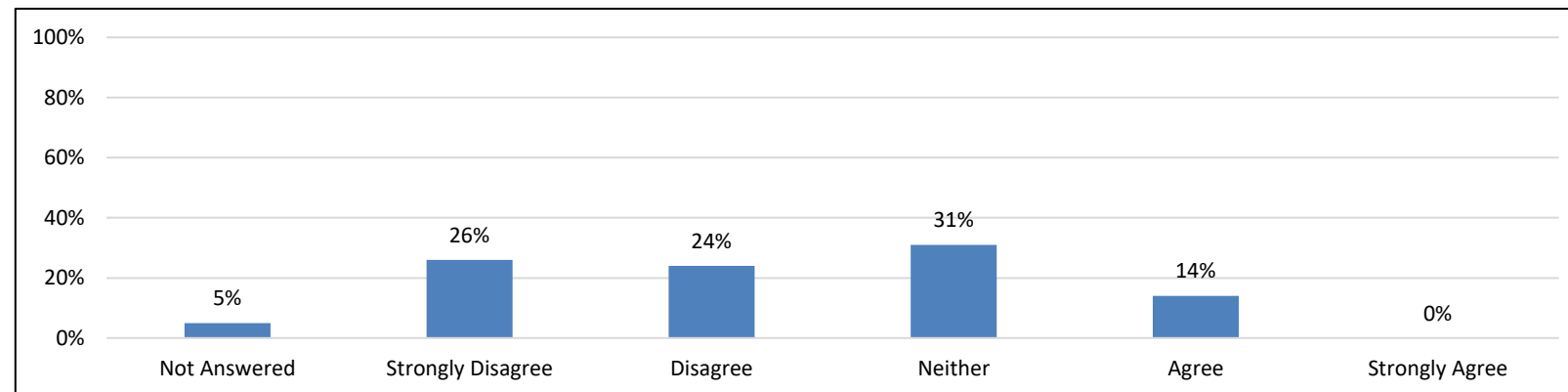
Figure 25 Engagement between Co-design groups
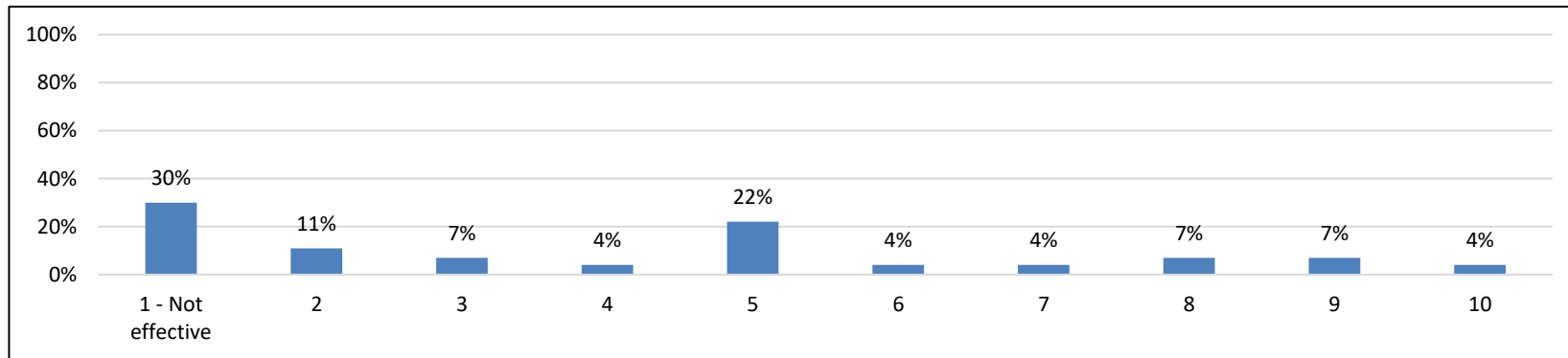
Figure 26 Engagement between Co-design groups and Cross-departmental working groups
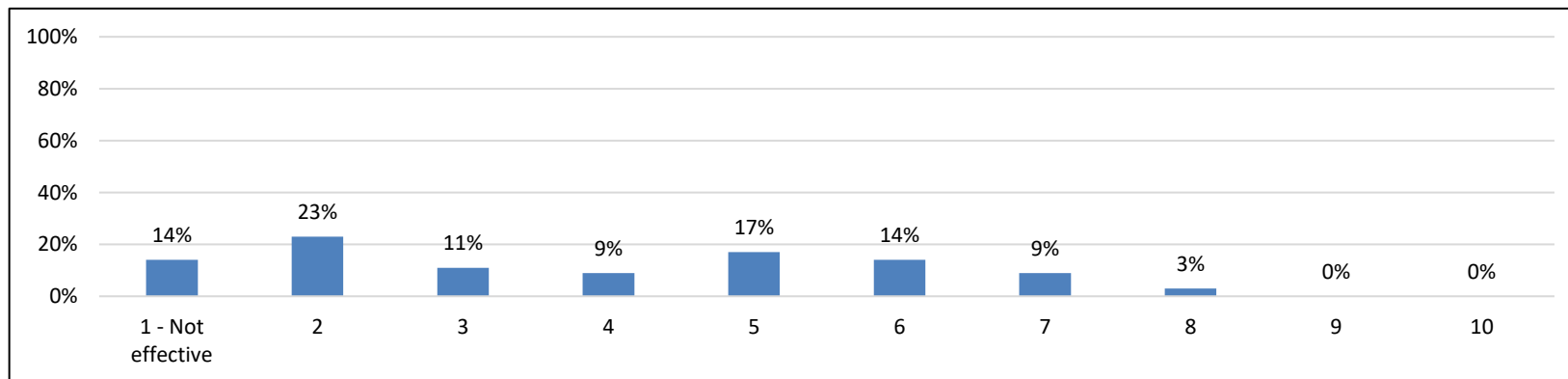
Figure 27 Engagement between Expert advisory panels and Co-design groups
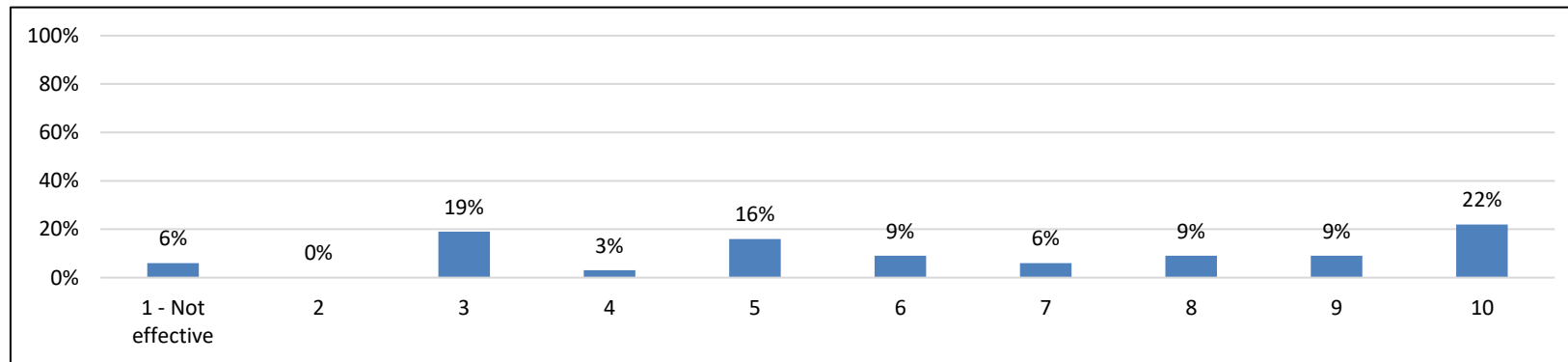
Figure 28 Engagement between DFC and Co-design groups
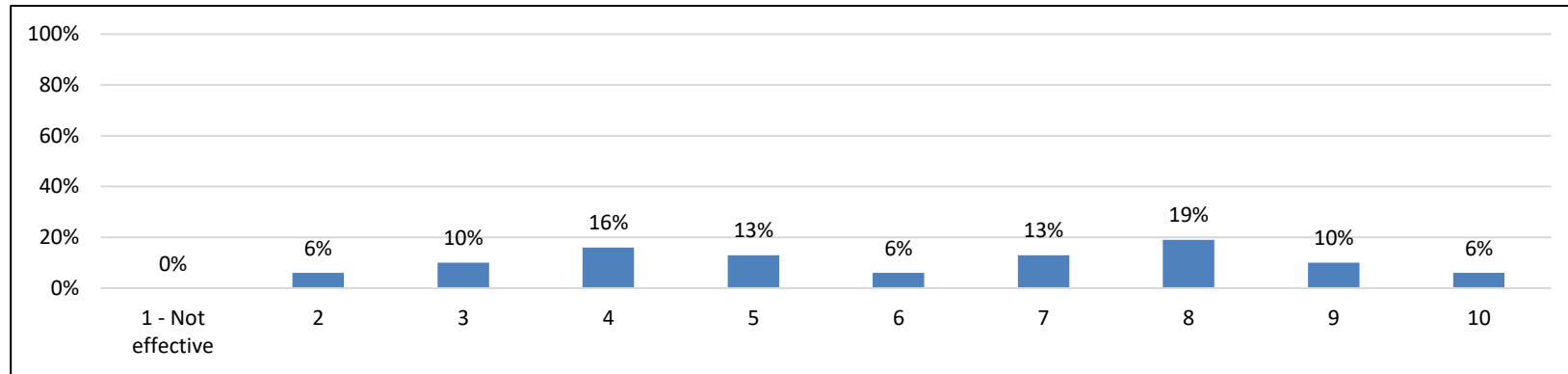
Figure 29 Engagement between DFC and Cross-departmental working groups
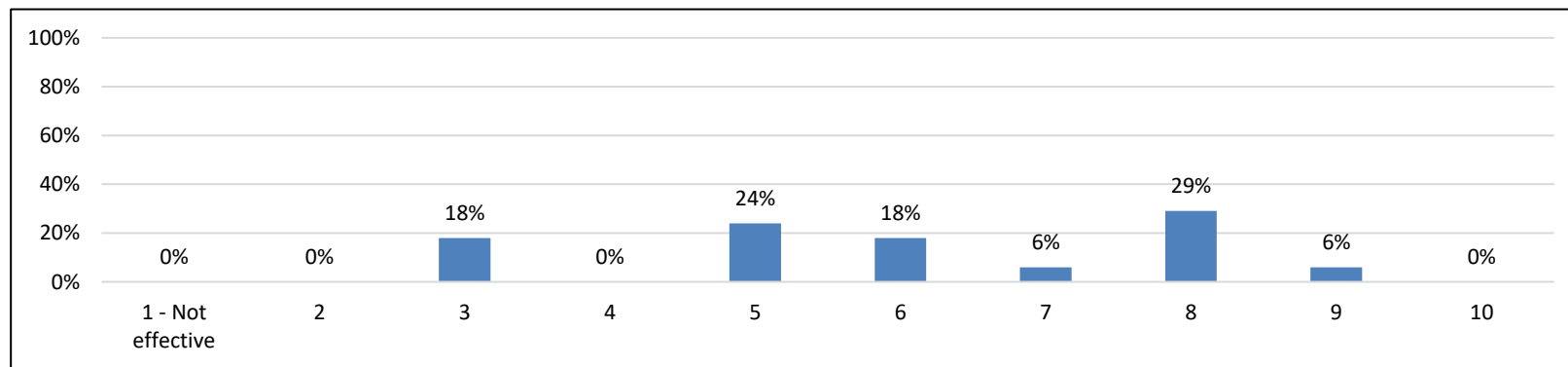
Figure 30 Engagement between DFC and Expert advisory panels
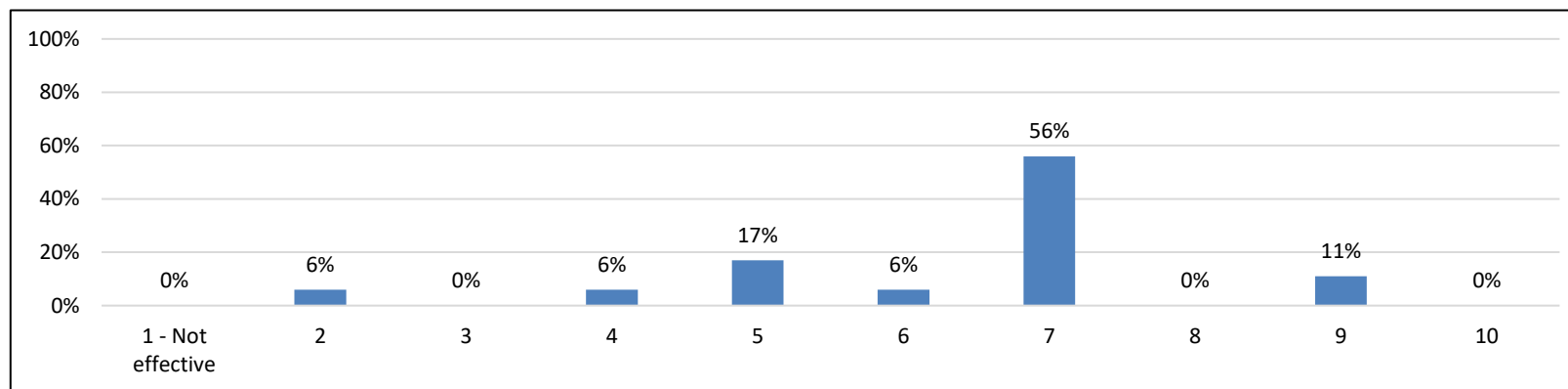
Figure 31 Engagement between Cross-departmental working groups and Expert advisory panels
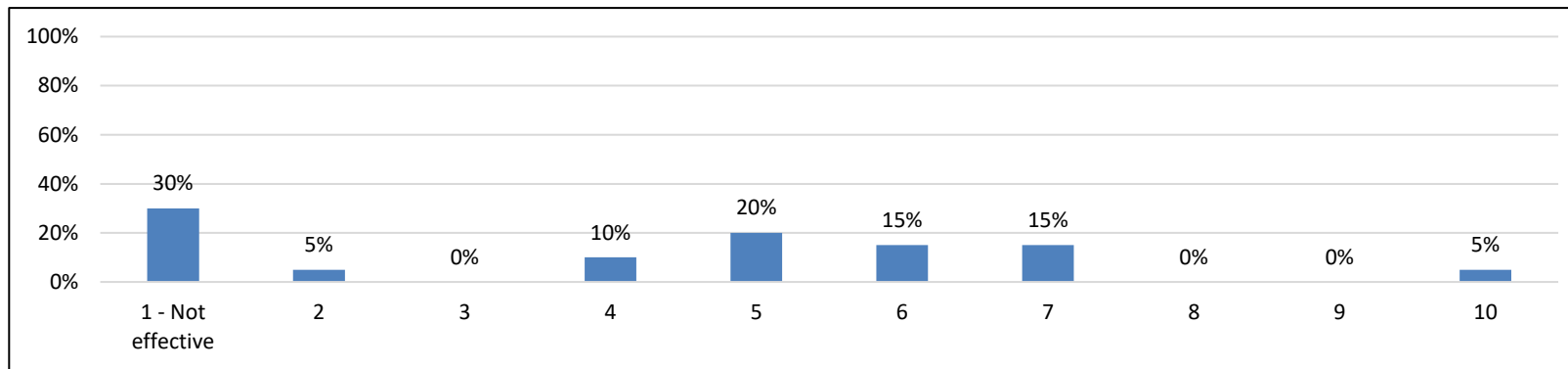

Figure 32 Engagement between co-design groups and Ministerial steering group
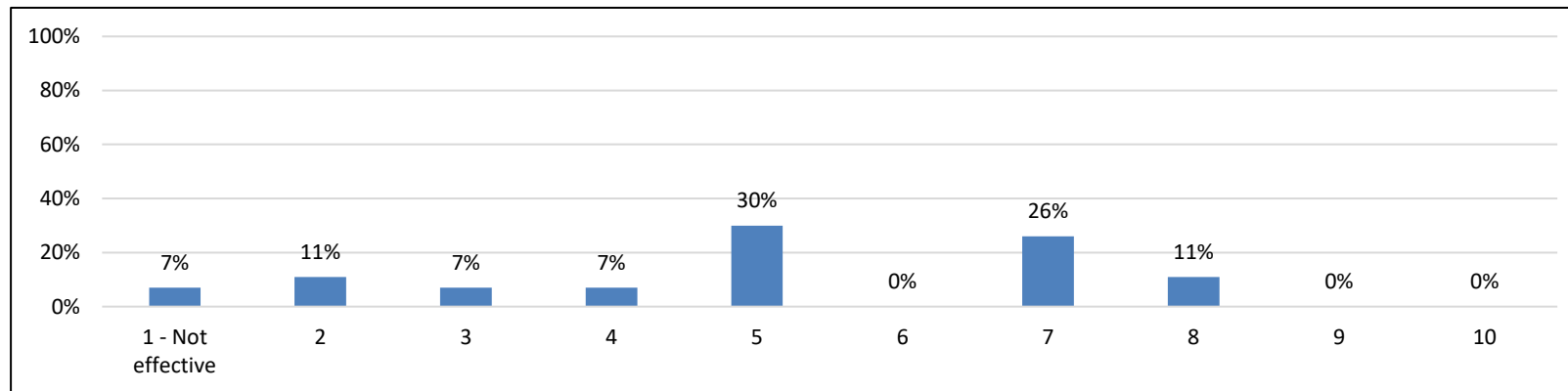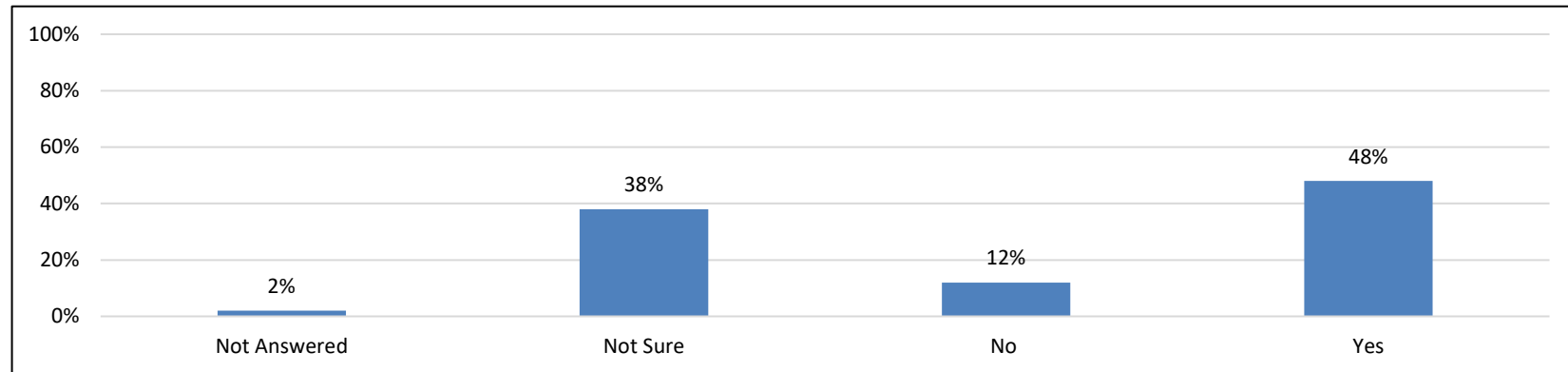
Figure 33 Willingness to take part in a similar process

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