

How does the UK public think about trade policymaking?

Appendix to 'How do we make trade policy in Britain? How should we?'

This Appendix seeks to give a bit more body to the section 'How does the UK public think about trade policymaking?' by offering more quotations from jury members for the various arguments advanced. It is not yet the definitive analysis of the juries' views, because there is further analysis to do, but it is correct in so far as it goes. The descriptions of the juries' views are representative of the transcripts, but the quotations are not selected to be strictly representative but to illustrate the key ideas in participants' own words.

As noted in the text, in the Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy (CITP) we have started to compile information on the apparently simple question of what *are* public views about trade policy? By this we mean, not what individuals think after seeing the latest X (formerly Twitter) feed, but after they have had some reasonably sound information and time for reflection and discussion. We not only sought their views on particular policy issues, but also investigated how they think about trade policy issues and habits or principles they bring to such questions.

'Trade-offs in Trade Policy' is a series of Citizen Juries conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) over January and February 2023 and now under analysis. As the term implies, the juries hear evidence and reflect on it to reach a conclusion. There were five juries of about 20 members each, located in Belfast, Bridgend, Doncaster, Paisley and Reading, each being broadly representative of their local areas. The evidence they considered was presented by CITP faculty members (with considerable effort to ensure the offering was accessible, opinion-free and balanced). Each jury answered a brief survey at the beginning and end of the process, had four online sessions (of 2.5 hours each) and one face-to-face session (6 hours). Each session featured specific questions and votes (with brief explanations)

The juries' deliberations were facilitated by NatCen staff without any CITP presence (although CITP answered questions from early sessions as the groups evolved towards the final session). There were some plenary sessions (of the whole of one jury), but most deliberations took place in groups of about six with a facilitator. The topics covered a wide range of trade policy with online sessions on

- The impact of UK trade policy on the rest of the world
- Balancing trade between territories and sectors of the economy
- Privacy and data transfer
- Food and the environment

The face-to-face session dealt with four issues, one from each of the four topic areas and with a specific question, plus an introduction and a wrap-up session. Each was introduced by material prepared jointly by NatCen and CITP, but in each case, of course, jury members had had some experience from the online sessions. The format was for NatCen to present on an issue, for deliberations to occur and then a vote held on which participants briefly recorded the main reason for their vote and then discussed how they voted. We then modified the scenario a little and the process was repeated. Throughout we asked participants to imagine that they were Members of Parliament charged with pursuing both the national and their constituency interests.

CITP has/is undertaking three levels of analysis: NatCen's analysis of voting and impressions of the discussions (from facilitators' notes) – see Grimes et al (2023) and Winters et al (2023) – plus two

based on the transcripts from the face-to-face discussions analysing the discussion groups' arguments, attitudes, tacit 'knowledge' and trade-offs. One was based on Nvivo and involved the extraction of common themes in the data based on a close reading of transcripts. The other one, based on a Corpus Linguistic approach, analysed the co-occurrence of words and syntax in the data and was conducted for us by the Concept Analytics Laboratory in the University of Sussex. The following discussion is based on preliminary conclusions from the last two. It describes one of the trade-offs and then some general features of the juries' discussions. Given the breadth of the trade policy issues covered and the geographical spread of the juries, these latter results paint an informative picture of UK attitudes, although one cannot claim that they are statistically representative.

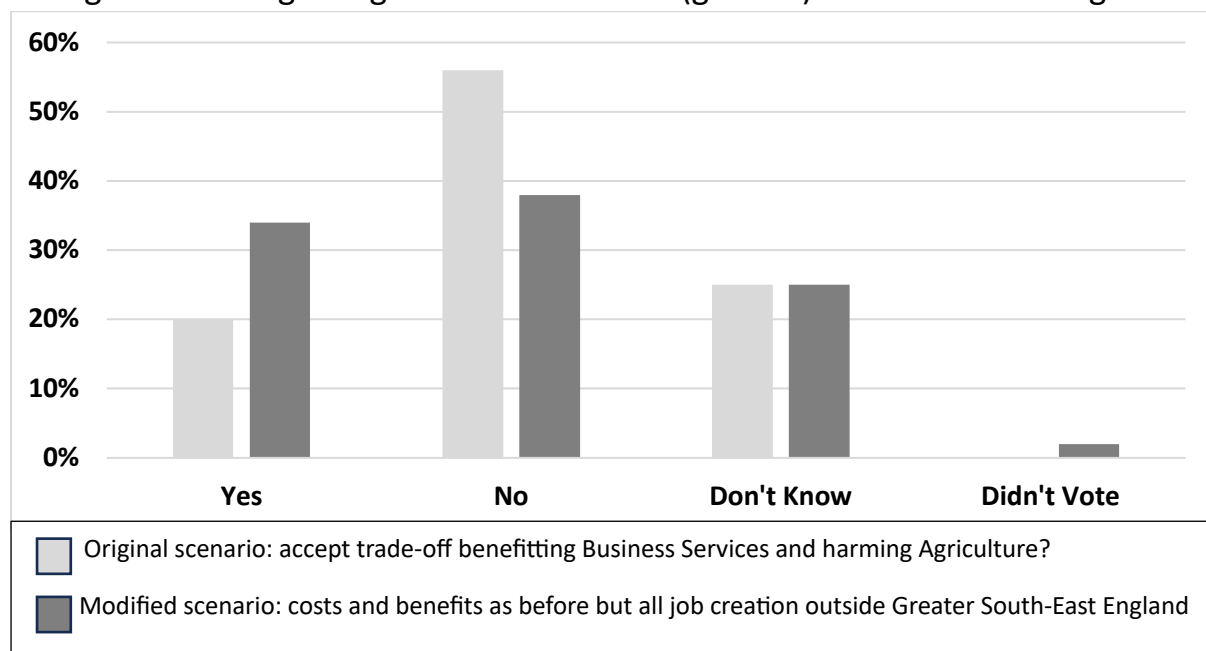
Balancing sectors and regions: agriculture vs business services

This example isolated one trade-off in simplified form using the government impact analysis of the UK-Australia FTA (Department of International Trade, 2021).¹ The report estimated that the FTA would increase gross value added in Business Services by £212 million p.a. but reduce that in agriculture by £94 million p.a. and create 3,700 jobs in the former and eliminate 2,500 jobs in the latter. On the basis of current employment numbers (see Gasiorek et al, 2022), we told participants that about three-quarters of the job creation but only about one quarter of the job losses would occur in the 'Greater South East' – the UK standard regions of London, South East England and East of England – and that there would be a net gain of around 800 in female employment. We also added that food prices might be 0.3% lower as a result of the agreement, but that there was a slight risk of lower food-safety standards.

The voting question was whether the UK should accept such a trade-off (assuming that it could be isolated) and the second vote was held on a modified scenario in which we supposed that all the job creation occurred outside the Greater South East. As Figure 1 shows, the juries rejected both the original and modified scenarios, very strongly in the first instance, and the difference between the two demonstrates some hostility towards the South East. There was little difference between locations in the voting and not much in the discussions (the Reading jury was not inclined to favour the South East region – of which they were part – but their narrative was arguably less overtly hostile).

¹ We were very clear with participants that trade-offs did not actually come in such a simple form and that the numbers we gave were only very rough estimates, introduced to make the question concrete.

Figure 1: Voting on agricultural losses vs. (greater) business services gains



The two most frequently occurring explanations/motivators for the preference for agriculture over business services are distribution/redistribution and what I would term farm exceptionalism. Table 1 provides a summary based on Nvivo coding, where 'Files' refers to the number of transcripts (files) where an idea occurs (out of 15 – three transcripts from each of five juries), and 'Refs' to the number references to such issues across all the transcripts.²

Table 1: Motivations for favouring agriculture over business services

	files	Ref.s	Issues
Distribution/ Redistribution	13	67	Compensation; shifts between sectors; comparing across regions and gender
Farm exceptionalism - culture	11	33	Foundation of UK society; generations,
Farm exceptionalism - security	14	90	Food security (predominantly); food standards; price shocks; climate goals;

To illustrate, on redistribution (to preserve anonymity, we know only the gender and the location of the speaker)

I think every Scotsman's concerned about the London effect or all these other nice little towns. None of it's getting spent in Paisley or ... or Motherwell ... (Male, Paisley)

² I am grateful to Alice Livingston Ortolani for doing the Nvivo coding.

*the reality is, it would go to the business services, the bankers, the financial services and stuff.
They're already rich enough ...* (Female, Doncaster)

Raising the question of whether compensation actually gets delivered,

[No, but] if we knew how much would be going into compensating the farmers, diversifying that, whatever their infrastructure is, then potentially a yes. (Female, Reading)

and with a different emphasis

if there was a farmer earning £10 a week, but if this goes ahead, he would only earn £4 a week, so he would get subsidised that extra £6 to keep doing what he's doing, the farm running, (Female, Paisley)

This last is interesting from a trade policy perspective, because the gains from international trade come very substantially from changing economic activities. Compensation to allow people to remain in their original occupations would undermine most trade reforms.

On farm exceptionalism

Farming goes down generations. How are you going to tell somebody who's basically worked as a kid probably on a farm, to then go, 'Oh yeah mate, you need to go and get into IT or something'? It just doesn't work. (Female, Belfast)

If we're producing everything we need to in a factory rather than open land farm, field, individuals, tractor drivers, etc., is there still an argument or is this about the culture of being a farmer on your open land, the roots of Britain, England, whatever? (Male, Reading)

if us [sic] food and agriculture was suffering a bit, we can get by without financial architects and lawyers. (Male, Doncaster)

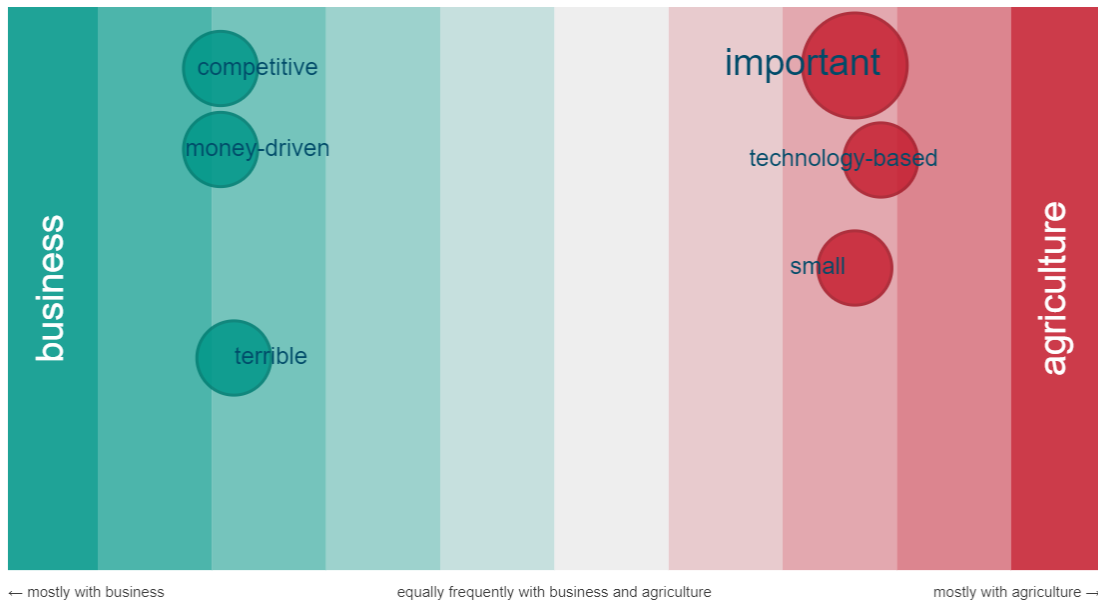
Finally, to re-emphasise the differences in attitudes towards business services and agriculture the linguistic analysis illustrates the way in which participants refer to them. Figure 2 compares the relative frequency with which particular adjectives and possessive pronouns are associated with each term – on the left words used more for business services and on the right for agriculture.³ The size of the bubbles reflects the number of occurrences of the word anywhere in the transcripts. The samples are of people who volunteered to join a citizen jury (with remuneration), which may involve some biases, but the perceptions of the juries of business services and agriculture differ dramatically. Agriculture is 'important', 'technology-based' or 'small', whereas business services are described in far more negatively evaluated terms such as 'money-driven', 'competitive' and 'terrible'. The story with the pronouns is particularly stark – business is typically described as 'their's' whereas agriculture is seen as 'our's'!

³ This is based not on crude frequency but frequency corrected for how often the noun business or agriculture and the chosen pronominal possessor object appeared in any context in the transcripts – using a metric of co-occurrence measure called LogDice, see Lexical Computing Ltd (2015).
https://www.sketchengine.eu/my_keywords/logdice/

Figure 2 Relative use of adjectival predicates and pronominal possessors associated with business services and agriculture

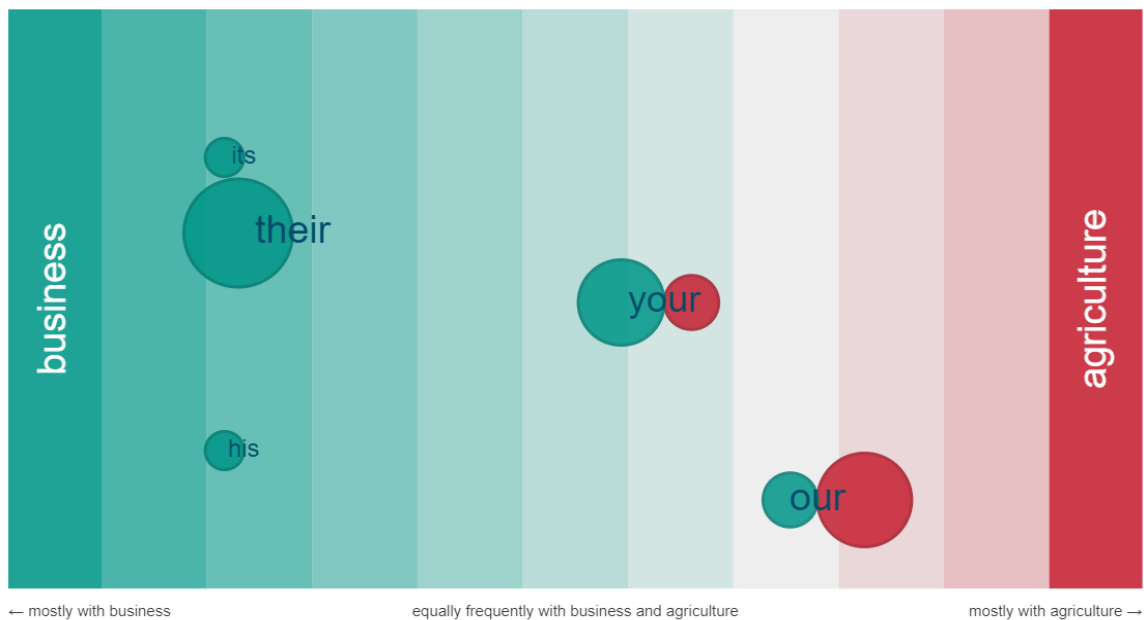
Show relation

adjective predicates of "business/agriculture" ▾



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pronominal possessors of "business/agriculture" ▾



Doubt, fear and mistrust

Taking the transcripts as a whole, the discussions of trade policy displayed a number of common features across scenarios. First, participants' language demonstrated a good deal of doubt about the positions they were adopting than one observes in 'ordinary' conversation. There was a great deal of hedging of arguments, frequent rephrasing – for example, 'I mean', 'or...or...or' – and a lot of negation – statements followed immediately by 'but'. An examination of so-called 6-grams – sets of six consecutive words – showed that phrases such as 'I don't know whether (that) (they)', 'I don't know what the' and 'But I don't know how' occurred much more frequently in the CITP transcripts than is normal.⁴

A second interesting feature was periodic caution about other countries. Most references to 'other country/ies were as objects of UK action, because the juries were asked to discuss UK policies. Some argued that worrying about them was a luxury and some felt discomfort at imposing UK standards/practices on them. Where 'other countries' were agents (i.e. supposed to be taking actions), there was periodically concern. For example:

Other countries haven't got the same welfare standards. (Female, Bridgend)

Other countries may seem to gain competitive advantage if we are too prissy, cautious
(Male, Paisley)

Yes, but other countries won't care about our information (Male, Paisley)

This may seem an awkward place to be starting a trade conversation, but it was real enough and needs to be recognised as a source of concern about efforts to stimulate or to rely on international trade.

The most striking general feature was the lack of trust that participants had in government and the ways in which they reacted to this. We asked explicitly whom they would trust to provide information on trade policy and whom they would trust to take decisions on it. By far, the most frequent collocation of 'trust' was 'not', and the most frequent object of 'not + trust' was 'government'.⁵ The top ten objects included 'them', 'politician' and 'MP'.⁶ For example: 'I personally don't trust the government, ...' (Male, Belfast); 'I don't trust politicians full stop' (Female, Paisley); 'I don't believe in the government or MPs.' (Female, Bridgend).

However, this lack of trust was often qualified by a grudging resignation that one had to trust someone with decisions and, sometimes, that those decisions are highly complex:

I have no choice but to trust the government. (Male, Belfast)

Would I trust local government? They're the only place you can go to. (Female, Bridgend;
from context, we believe that 'local government' here refers to the Welsh Government)

I cringed and I was like, 'Oh!' I'm putting faith in them?' It was, yes, because it's part of their job, isn't it to make the decisions. (Female, Reading)

⁴ The reference set was the British National Corpus (2014, spoken part), which contains over 1,250 conversations from British English across a range of topic areas – around 11.8 million tokens (words plus punctuation) - compared with the nearly 400,000 words of the Citizen Juries transcripts.

⁵ The count of objects of the verb *to trust* included a small number of (near) synonyms of the verb 'to trust' and related terms such as 'to believe' and 'to have faith in'.

⁶ In this comparison is based on LogDice scores.

I think I've come out of this trusting the government a lot more [laughs] than when I came into this because yes, there is a lot of complex decisions! (Female, Doncaster)

These statements are mirrored in the results of a search for 'trust' and 'but' within five words of each other:

I know we don't trust them but I think at the end of the day you're going to need to have them! (Female, Paisley)

*The thing is ... so it's not because I trust government more, but because there is no...
...There's no one else to...* (Male, Reading)

We are struggling to make the decisions reading the simple scenarios; imagine what they are doing. We're saying that we trust them but we're really saying we don't. (Female, Reading)

Reflecting the lack of trust, there is evidence of some participants believing in the need for oversight to ensure accountability in trade deals. The term 'oversight' - concentrated in the Belfast transcripts, so not really generalisable - shows support for mechanisms to check up on government, although varying from citizens' assemblies to international organisations:

I don't think I'd run everything past every single person but have things like groups and things like that where actually they can run by something different - like this, for example. Like citizens' groups? Things like that, yes. Yes.

(Interaction, Reading)

Maybe like an oversight thing that we mentioned before. That would be the international one, exactly. Maybe someone who can have a bigger view, a more international view.

(Interaction, Belfast)

The one group that participants seemed willing to trust quite strongly (for information, sometimes for decisions) was 'experts'. It is apparently fairly common for people in deliberative research to seek the advice of experts when confronted with technically complex issues, but the contrast here in terms of trust is striking.

General public maybe will trust the experts, that they know what they're talking about, rather than the government ... (Female, Belfast)

If we can't trust experts in their field, who have put in research and time, then who can you trust? (Male, Paisley)

Trust the experts of the trades, so example agriculture would be farmers and so on. ... So, is that the businesses or is that the experts? ... > Yes, well, it'd be a bit of both, wouldn't it?

(Interchange, Bridgend)

A key characteristic of experts was seen as their independence (unbiasedness, neutrality), arguably further indication of the extent to which government and business have lost the battle for credibility.

Where did we get to with that conversation, who do we trust? You were saying about unbiased; that was the keyword, wasn't it? Yes, independent bodies. Unbiased. Independent. Let's have a separate one for independent. No financial interest. No financial vested interests. (Interaction, Reading)

There was also support (notably in Belfast) for trades unions as sources of expertise, but it was far from universal. A number of participants also saw International Organisations as sources of unbiased expertise, although, in truth, they had little idea of how these fitted into the policymaking ecosystem. At least one person, on the other hand, was hostile, fearing the influence of other countries' preferences/agenda and preferring UK institutions.

The role of, and need for, information was repeatedly stressed in these conversations. It was seen as essential for decision-making: for example, a search for the combination 'make...decision' (which yielded 233 hits) revealed the importance of being informed, with the salient collocations being 'informed' (12 occurrences), 'base' (9), 'inform' (10), 'right' (7) and 'proper' (4). But the quality (and unbiasedness) of information was also stressed.

But the public also seems to value information, first, *per se*

They [the CIP presenters] used real statistics, as well, didn't they? Yes. They didn't go, gloss over it and say, 'Well, it may impact this or it may...' They actually used real figures and graphs and things like that, and that's what we need. We need that. (Female, Doncaster)

We need to know more, I think, about that. Educating ourselves as well. Yes, and I'm more aware now, since I arrived. (Female, Paisley)

And, second, as a key contribution towards earning public trust in trade-policy decisions. The latter arises partly because it helps the public understand policy trade-offs and constraints and partly because, if the public were persuaded that the government received and listened to informed advice, it would more readily accept and have faith in their decisions:

What do you think it takes for people to trust the people who make those decisions? They have to show it, don't they. Evidence (Interaction, Bridgend)

Why can't they have a specialist with them to... Explain it, rather than just...? It'd create more trust in the government, wouldn't it (Female, Doncaster)

Should we include the public in trade policymaking? And how?

A natural extension of questions about whom to trust with trade policy information and decisions is 'why not trust ourselves?' – i.e. why not give the public a more prominent role in decisions? The responses suggested a strong desire for the public to be informed and to be heard but less for a role in decision-making, the public's lack of information/experience pushing one way and its closeness to the issues the other. For example,

So, yes, trust the public but make sure that they are informed and the manipulation is stopped, is weeded out? Yes (Interaction, Bridgend)

At least as a public we can offer that angle to the expert people. We never know enough, do we? You never get enough information.... (Interaction, Reading).

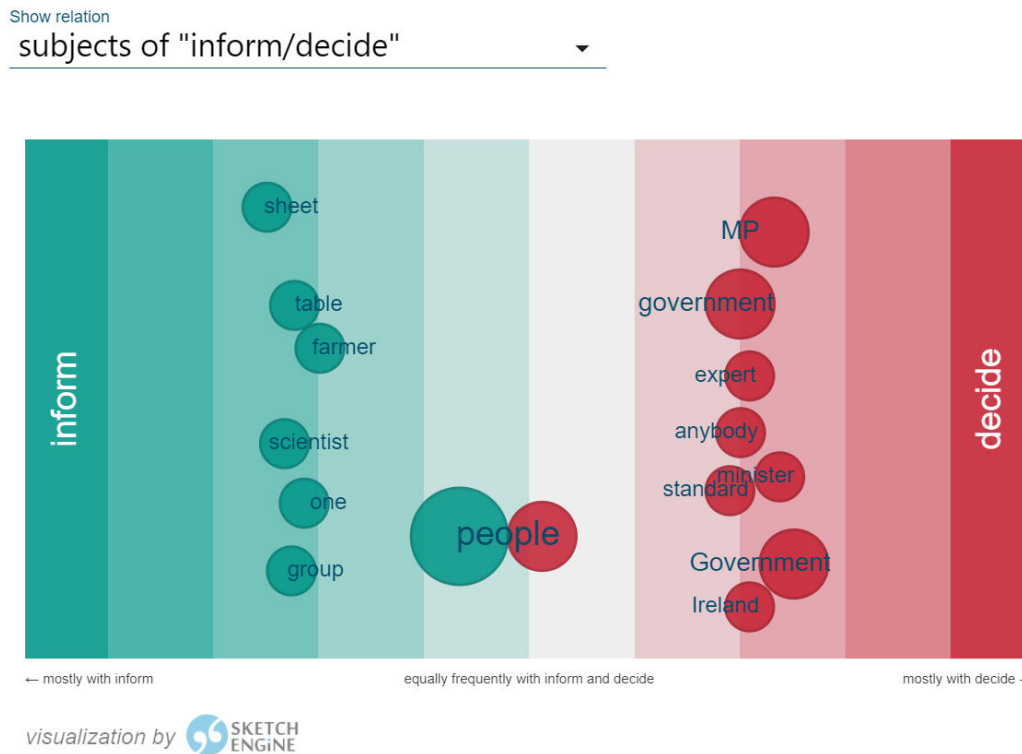
You don't want to trust the general public to make the decision because we're not informed enough, or we don't know enough about it to be able to make an informed decision.

(Female, Belfast)

In a search for a negated verb followed by the noun *public*, e.g. "don't ask the public", seven out of twenty hits relate to lack of trust in the public making decisions. Figure 3 offers a graphic description

of the juries' distinctions between who should inform and who should decide trade policy: it plots the relative frequency of references to different groups collocating with 'inform' or 'decide'.⁷

Figure 3 Relative association of groups with inform and decide



'Scientists' and 'farmers' figured prominently in informing, and 'people' was also collocated somewhat more strongly there. Elements of government, on the other hand, were much more strongly associated with 'decide'. The appearance of 'expert' in the latter context is strongly influenced by a discussion of experts deciding that certain pesticides are bad for one's health rather than more broadly. Thus, while participants support the involvement of the public and experts in the process of policymaking, they seem largely to agree that decisions should be left to the machinery of government.

The general sense is that it should be the government ultimately making decisions:

Also we've come out with the UK Government making the decision about any trade agreement.
(Facilitator summarising discussion, Reading)

Yes, I think that was the point you were making earlier on; that that's their job and that's what they should be getting on with. Yes. ... I would hope it's - nobody else should be making decisions. Governments, they are elected and they can be dealing with it. I would just hope - my hope would be that their decisions are informed by consulting experts....

(Interaction, Belfast)

⁷ The 'decide' side of the figure refers to both 'government' and 'Government': the former is generic while the latter refers to a specific government.

The classic solution to bringing the public into official decision-making is democracy. Edmund Burke's description of Representative Democracy seems to catch the discussion above rather well in his address to his Bristol constituents (Burke, 1774): the electorate chooses a Member of Parliament whom they trust, he/she remains in 'the most unreserved communication' with them, giving 'their opinion, high respect; their business, unremitted attention' and then exercises 'his [sic] unbiassed opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience'. Burke goes on to tell his voters that 'If government were a matter of will upon any side, yours, without question, ought to be superior. But government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, and not of inclination, ...'

The problem is that the UK system does not really work like this. As Dunt (2023) explains, the selection process for MPs tends to stress their campaigning ability over other skills and attitudes, MPs spend large proportions of their time on local issues (to nurture their constituencies) and the whips (party managers) select the Committees which scrutinise legislation and determine nearly all votes that MPs make. The result is that the scrutiny of national legislation is not valued by MPs and is heavily biased towards accepting the government view of any issue. Moreover, MPs who also hold government posts (possibly the more able and experienced ones) are not part of the legislative scrutiny process at all.

Possible mitigations for these weaknesses include, as above, extending Parliament's and the Devolved Administrations' role and ensuring that information delivered to the government, Parliament, stakeholders and the public is reasonably reliable. At least in the cases of parliament and the public, however, one should not over-estimate their patience, energy, focus and, arguably, ability to wrestle with the detail. Ensuring that the simplifications on which they base their views are fair is a major task in itself and a critical one.

A third mitigation is to have a more thorough process of public consultation, although, in my view, only of an advisory nature. A fuller and more serious set of regional and sectoral meetings should ensure both better information *ex ante* and better accountability *ex post*. In the former case, it is not just statistics that need to be promulgated but conceptual information about how 'trade works', what trade-offs are involved and that perfect certainty about outcomes is not possible. While it was not our objective in the Citizen Juries to educate, it is detectable that over the course of the programme a number of people commented on how much they learned, how complicated trade was and how they came to appreciate the complexities of the balances that needed to be struck. This demonstrates that consultation is not quick and easy (i.e. a cheap and low-level activity), but involves serious discussion.

In the consultations, one neither can nor should try to prevent interested parties from airing their own views (lobbying), not least because, as the Citizens' Juries noted, interested parties are often the best informed. However, one needs to be aware of the near inevitability of bias and counter it both in assessing the opinions and information offered and in ensuring that the set of consultees is broad and representative. Whether, as one or two in the Citizen Juries suggested, one should convene a Citizens' Assembly to hear the unmediated views of the public would, I think, depend on the issue. For example, where a major issue of principle is involved or where a government feels a referendum is necessary, one could make a very good case for an Assembly which then fed back into public information and debate.