

energise

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

Beyond targets and talking: delivery and doing

Simon Roberts, CSE's Chief Executive, explains how 'talkers' and 'doers' need to see eye-to-eye

I recently raised a few hackles by drawing a distinction between 'talkers' (people who talk about the need to do something) and 'doers' (those who get on and do them). I described CSE as a 'doer'.

Admittedly it is a rather simplistic way to categorise the human race and the organisations that it has spawned, but I was emphasising the need for a debate about how to secure true alignment of effort and purpose in the sprint we need to move towards a genuinely low-carbon society.

My thesis was that, being of different temperaments, 'talkers' and 'doers' tend not to understand each other and so fail to appreciate or make the most of the contribution the other offers.

The doers beaver away at their projects but often fail to engage with the talkers' strategic insights, discussions and policy decisions that shape the environment in which they operate; they are left frustrated that the world is not organised as they would have it.

Meanwhile the talkers convince each other that 'something must be done' and busily develop their ideas about what that might be. But, having failed to engage with the doers or asked openly what actually works in practice, their policies and pro-

grammes are not grounded in real experience. Instead they are shaped by over-confident, doctrinaire analysis and a misplaced belief that the talking – and its typical outcomes of target setting and declaration drafting – is the same as the doing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Government (and political establishment generally) is full of talkers. As a result, it drafts declarations and sets targets without establishing workable, funded plans to meet them.

We can see this at work in the rising levels of fuel poverty in spite of the Government's legally binding target to eliminate it. And also in its stubborn refusal to look to countries like Spain and Germany for effective and replicable policies – like feed-in tariffs – that stimulate vastly superior rates of deployment of renewable energy [see page 2].

That's why CSE is putting more effort into not just 'doing' but also into creating stronger engagement with the talkers, to do more to help shape the policies and programmes which determine what can be achieved.

For example, the study we led for WWF-UK [page 3] is an attempt to bridge the gap between talking and doing by examining the nature and scale of practical improvements which need to be made to the UK's existing housing stock to meet emission reduction targets.

Our 3-year project – Our Big Energy Challenge [pages 4-5] – is helping to ensure that the targets for cutting public-sector energy demand in Bath are delivered in practice through technical know-how and culture-changing interventions. And we're sharing with other organisations, including the Prime Minister's policy unit, the learning from our 100 Ideas House [page 6].

To succeed in engaging the talkers, we will need to express ourselves to them in ways that sound neither cynical ('that won't work') or frustrated ('you just don't know what it takes'). If we can achieve this, there is a chance that, unlike the past, future targets and declarations will be backed up with workable, practical plans that truly support and enable what needs to be done.

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