



RiDC

Research

Engaging with low-carbon energy options and advice

How accessible, meaningful, and actionable is consumer engagement and advice?

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energy
saving
trust

“It does make you feel guilty. It does get you down because you're thinking, well, I can't help it, but I'm being compared to the average person, to the average person who is fit and healthy” _Isabel

Background

Why research 'engagement'?

The research topic 'Engaging with low-carbon energy options and advice' was chosen by

- being present in our previous research outputs (EV home charging, and renewable energy solutions) during the 'Enabling Inclusive Innovative and sustainable Choice' research programme.
- the result of a participatory research engagement with the RiDC consumer panel.
- Tension exist between wanting to engage, and being able to engage, with low-carbon energy options

“Green heating will probably have the greatest impact on lowering carbon emissions. I am concerned about the people who **have to use electric health equipment, like dialysis machines, oxygen concentrators, or have other health reasons for essential but unusually high energy use, like skin complaints requiring lots of washing”**

_RiDC panel member (Previous research)

Approach

Previous research

Over the two-year span of this research programme disabled people have repeatably informed us of their wish to engage positively with the low carbon/ sustainable future agenda in the home and whilst out and about. This has not always been possible.

Our research showed these barriers to disabled people are:

- Information provided not being accessible or contextually relevant
- Installation of low carbon products not being sympathetic to the home life practicalities
- Financial models not reflecting lived experience

These areas of information, products, and finance are where much of the advice is given to improve people's carbon footprint.

“No accessibility settings just an Accessibility Statement which basically told me nothing, well nothing I could understand easily anyway... I backed away” _Jess, Mobility & VI

“I never spoke to them once, not even on the phone, they asked my carer to take the photos ... but probably think in the future if I was left here without a carer I would go back to a petrol car, because I could put fuel in it easier than charge[ing] at home” _Kate, Mobility, Wheelchair user

“I could find nothing anywhere that a disabled, social housing tenant living on disability benefits could apply for” Jess, Mobility & V.I.,

Approach

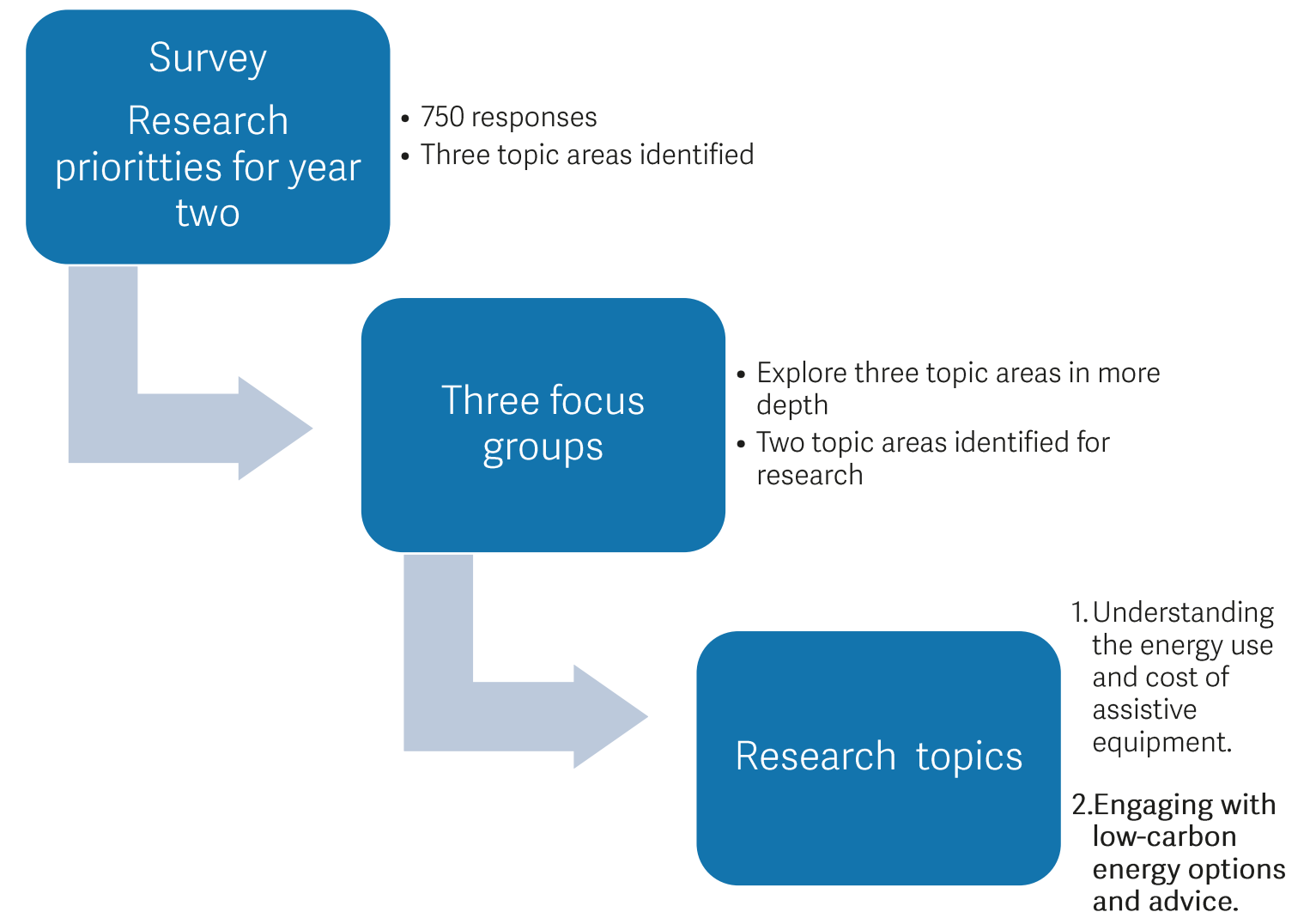
Participatory research

We asked members to complete a short survey about what their decarbonisation priorities and concerns were in the home. After a number of potential topic areas were identified from the **survey of 750 responses**, we identified **three topic areas (listed below)** to further explore across three focus groups with separate impairments in each focus group (Sensory, Physical, Cognitive).

- Understanding the energy use and cost of assistive equipment.
- Low energy choices about the kitchen.
- **Engaging with low-carbon energy options and advice!**

¹. This is a difficult topic to research with many of our panel having a very negative opinion of government and industry led carbon reduction campaigns

Participatory research flow



Method

Focus groups

Focus groups

Homework - carbon footprint calculator

A series of **questions** followed by your **results** and some **advice** on how to lower your carbon footprint.

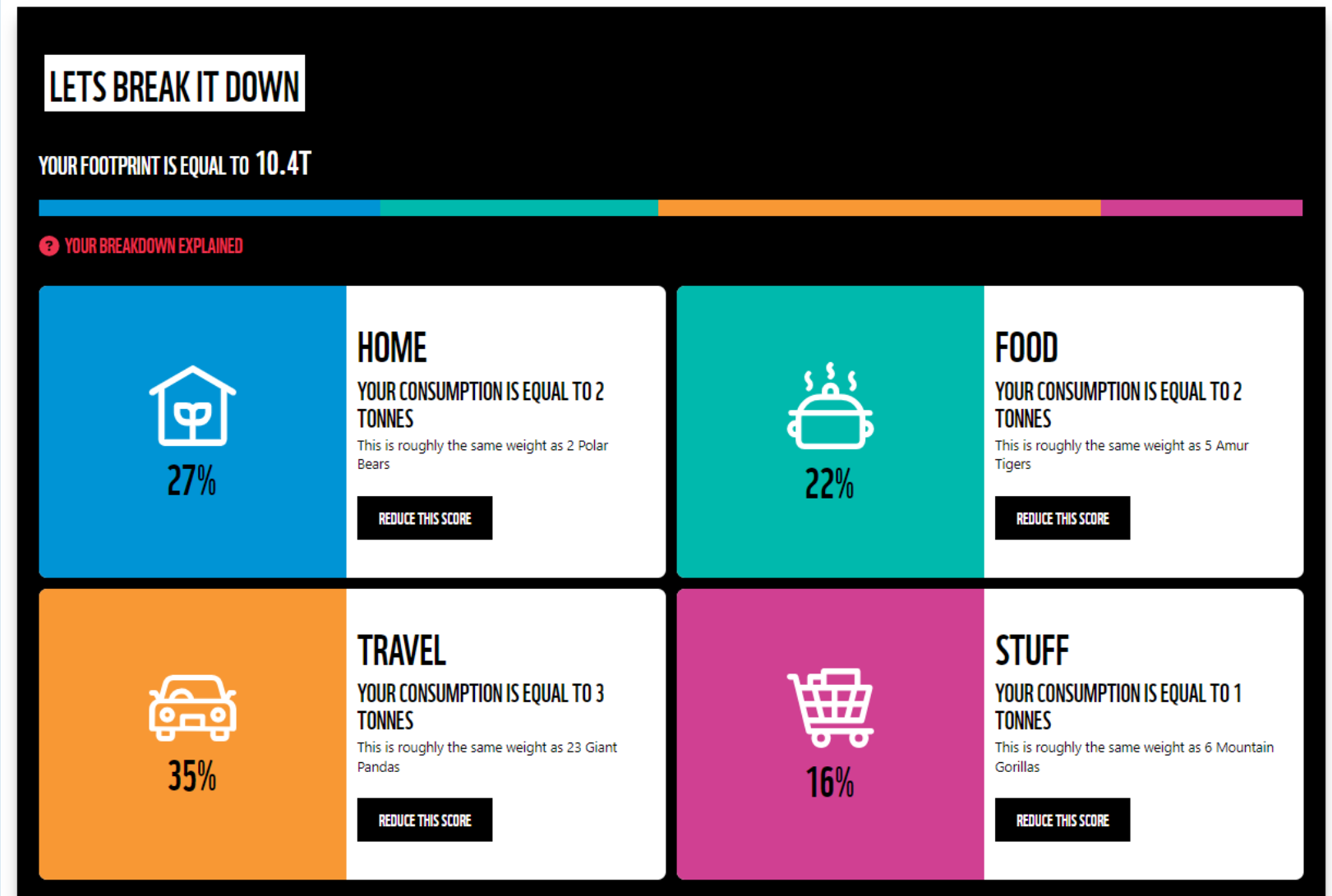
<https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>

Questions about

- Food
- Travel
- Home
- Stuff (consumables)

We were not critiquing the WWF calculator's functionality or design, which was found to be helpful in giving an overview of a person's carbon footprint. **We used the WWF online carbon calculator as a probe** to explore how such tools and advice might be made more relevant and meaningful to disabled people.

WWF Carbon footprint advice categories



WWF are a not-for-profit organisation which we hoped would facilitate a more open and holistic discussion.

Focus groups

Three online workshops – Lasting 90 minutes each with two sessions which included a ten-minute comfort break. These sessions were recorded for analysis and a ‘thank you’ payment given for participation.

Session one – Exploring the **accessibility** and **relevance** of questions asked

- Review of questions and answers provided within the four topic areas:
 - Food, Travel, Home, Stuff (consumables)
- Were the questions easy to understand
- Likes, dislikes and improvements
- Areas of ‘their’ lives which were not included

Participants were – chosen from their previous survey and focus group contributions . They were recruited in groups of five with each group having a mix of disability and home circumstances.

Session two – Are the results and advice given **meaningful** and **actionable**?

- Review the presented results
 - Carbon tonnes and comparisons across countries
- Review the advice given
 - Food, Travel, Home, Stuff (consumables)
- What could be done to tailor advice to individual circumstances?
- What assumptions should be avoided when giving carbon footprint advice?

Results

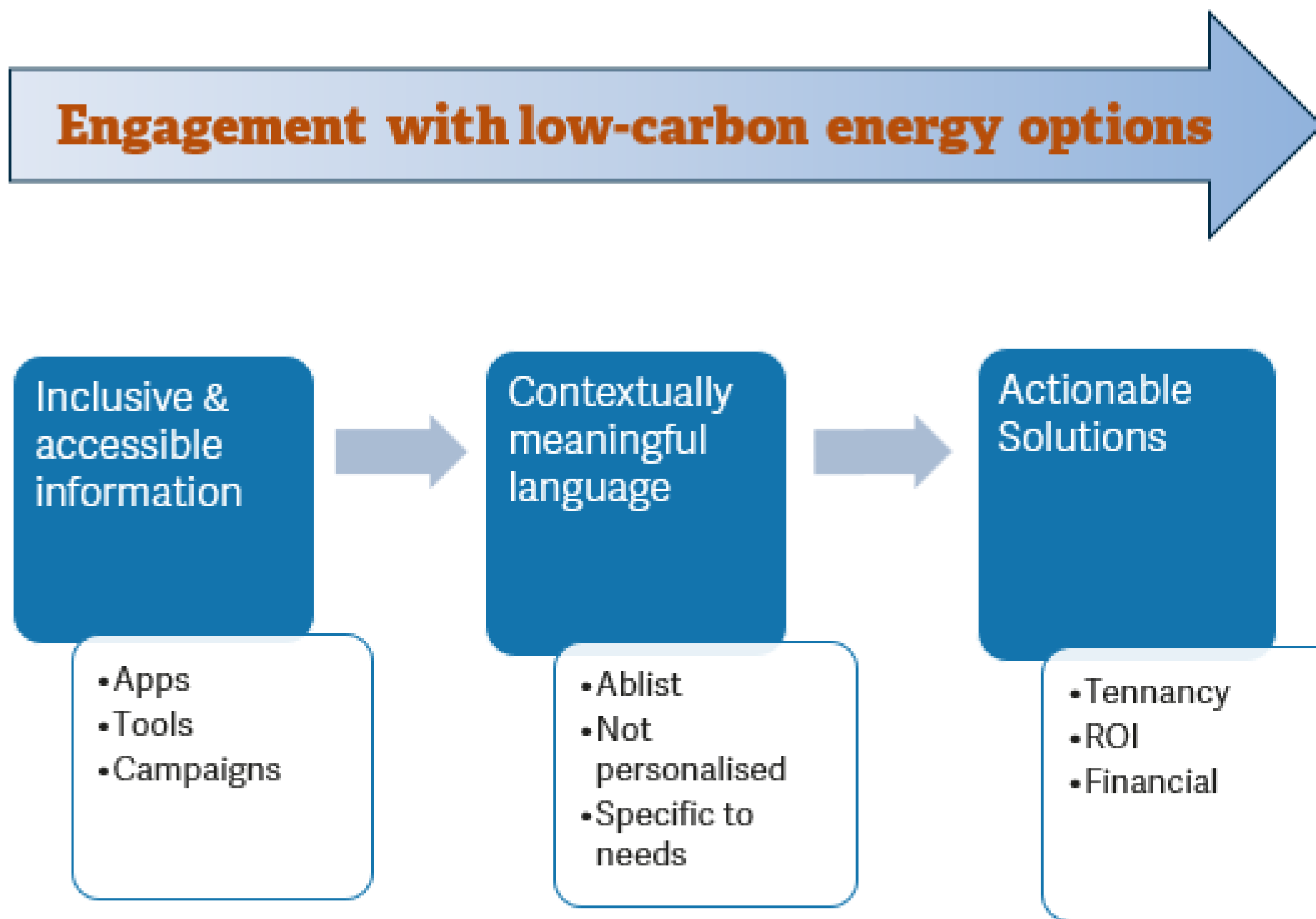
Findings

Thematic analysis

When the process is not inclusive, meaningful, or actionable, this can lead to ...

Disengagement

“That could literally mean that people say, oh, do you know what? I'm not even going to bother buying another light bulb that's energy efficient or LED because it doesn't seem to make a difference... but you know, people have got to feel like the time they have spent engaging has been worthwhile [and] has meaning to them.” _Harriot



Contextually meaningful language

Finding relevant answers to their situation.

Questions requiring an answer to a **closed list** of options MUST include answers that are relevant to disabled people e.g.,

Question: 'What kind of vehicle do you travel in most often as driver or passenger? (if any)'

Options: Car; Motorbike; Neither – I walk cycle or use public transport for all my journeys.

Perhaps include Electric wheelchair, Mobility scooters or even Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle

Understanding disability.

Questions that ask about a '**typical week or month**' can be difficult to answer since many impairments affect people in a non-linear way i.e., good days and bad days.

Ableism - Where multiple-choice questions did not offer meaningful or relevant response options for disabled people, or other questions only offering options which were not achievable for some disabled people.

“It doesn't cover people [like me], I need to use a mobility scooter and to go locally [and] if I'm traveling any distance, I'm fortunate enough to have a wheelchair accessible vehicle WAV and put my scooter in the back.” _Henry

“What is a typical month, one month I'm in hospital and another month I'm not... I don't know from day to day what I am doing, I can't because my health doesn't let me . So how am I supposed to put a number to a question?” _Isabel

Contextually meaningful language

Generalisations and inclusivity.

Need to recognise the increase in possible answers to questions that would be needed, for these sorts of tools to be inclusive to disabled people. Disability covers many different impairments that can impact people's lives in very different ways.

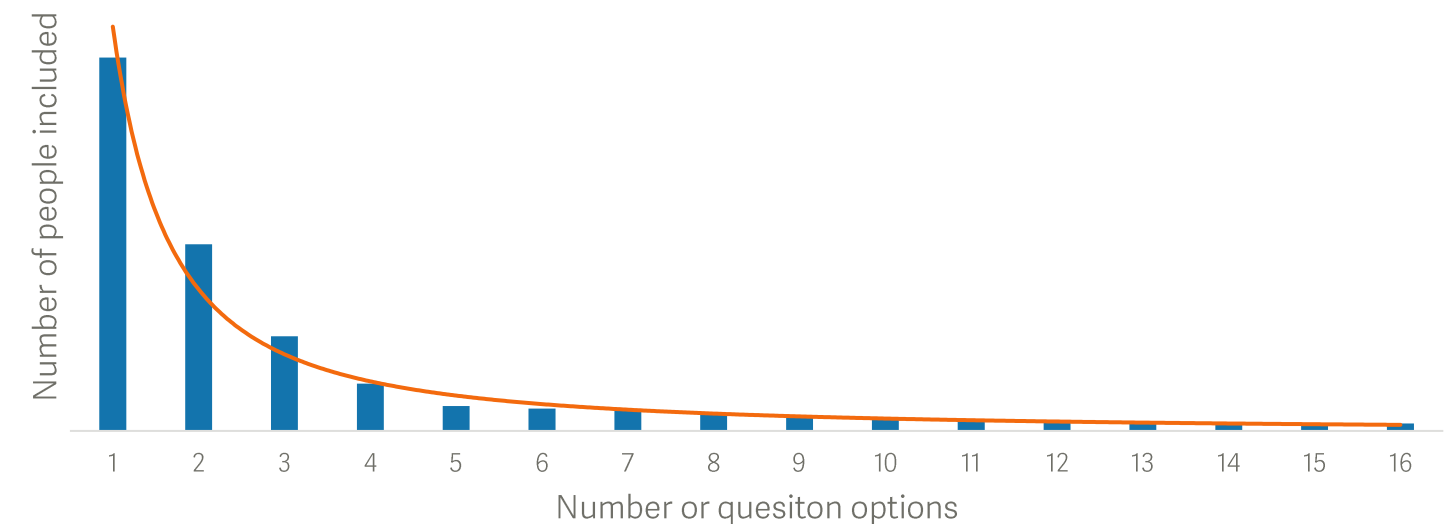
It is a **design challenge** to capture these long tail options.

Wanting to give context to selected answers.

People want to add context to why they do not choose certain options to the questions asked. This often was to do with not having any choice.

“[We have] no choice about how warm we keep the house, how much energy we use, how much heating we use. For us, it's also an awful lot of washing and tumble drying as well because we've got no choice.” _Natalie

Long tail for question options



I feel like there weren't enough options to cover what I wanted to see because some of the answers I gave to these questions were through circumstances that made me look as if I was, you know, not caring about my carbon footprint. But when in actual fact, the answer I wanted wasn't there. _Zoe

Actionable solutions

Carbon footprint of disability

In many cases there is **no choice** of taking low-carbon options either at home or out & about.

Disabled people can spend a lot of their time at home:

- Low house temperatures can exasperate many health conditions, so keeping warm at home becomes a necessity in keeping healthy.
- In addition to this, energy will be used in the home for stairlifts, adjustable beds and chairs, air purifiers, medical equipment, entertainment, and cooking devices.

“I have a urostomy stoma. So, a lot of my clothes get urine on them because of the urostomy stoma. I'm not going to wash something that's got urine stain stuff on in at 35-degree wash.” _Isabel

Home ownership and cost

- Having **no authority** to install low carbon products such as heat-pumps or solar panels
- Living circumstances of many disabled people

“If you're a disabled person, you're more likely to be on a low income like myself. I feel like, you know, you're, you're more likely to have to purchase fast fashion because that's what you can afford. You're less likely to be able to compost because you might not have a garden because you live in a flat, you know, you're less likely to have energy efficiency stuff in your home because that's up to the landlord to put in if you can only do that if you own your own home.” _Nathan

Actionable solutions

Technology solutions

- **Opportunity** to better utilise smart speaker technology that many disabled people have
- Worry about cost
- Understanding benefits

Wanting to engage

Clear message from our participants is that they want to engage with reducing their carbon footprint.

Because of the many barriers disabled people encounter with information and advice not being relevant to them, engagement becomes more difficult than it should be and can lead to feelings of being **stigmatised** and of **disengagement**.

Perhaps ask people if they are disabled?

“I feel really agitated. There are enough exclusions as it is without adding to it and adding to the pressure that you now feel to comply and be part of, be part of the community, but only if you do these things.” _Nicole

**“It’s not asking you if you are disabled”
_Alice**

Current situation & impact

Campaigns and online advice seeking public engagement with low-carbon energy options and advice, often ...

Do not use **inclusive** and **meaningful** language or provide **actionable** solutions

The language used and advice given does not always consider the realities of the disabled peoples' lives.

Do not help disabled people make **suitable** low-carbon energy choices

Without tailored solutions there is the risk of inappropriate choices being made that could have impact on disabled peoples' health and finance.

Discourages engagement

Where the relevance of information and advice is not applicable to disabled people, it can lead to feelings of **stigmatism, exclusion, and disengagement.**

Recommendations

A greater awareness of the barriers that disabled people encounter when engaging with media campaigns about low-carbon energy use will help provide with more relevant information and actionable solutions.



Include disabled people in the design process of engagement campaigns from the very beginning.



Recognise that disabled people will often have a larger carbon footprint than the national average.



Consider the living situation of many disabled people and how that might impact any advice given.



Consider the potential difficulties some disabled people have with making medium term investments.



Be mindful of the impact of disability on the suitability of choice(s).



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