Vaccinations: decisions at the sharp end
Consultation with 14-19 year olds
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This is a final report, which summarises the findings from seven debate events, involving 503 students.

Introduction
A series of debates titled Vaccinations: decisions at the sharp end were staged in schools and the four science centres involved in the Doing Dialogue project. These involved 503 young people aged 14-19 during April-September 2006. The debate format is designed for students -- led by a facilitator -- to complete a series of tasks and challenges which deepen their understanding of the issues raised. Some of these tasks are specifically designed to address questions in the Working Party consultation paper. The questions were selected by educational advisors as being most relevant and accessible to the target age group.

Age and gender of participating students
We had 3.5% year 7 (11yr old), 4.5% year 9 (13yr old), 69% year 10/11 (15/16yr old), 23% year 12/13 (16-19 yr old).

68% of participating students were female, 32% male.

Some countries have a compulsory rather than voluntary system of vaccination. On what basis can such policies be justified to achieve herd-immunity? Should they be considered in the UK?

Opinion was split on this question:

For compulsory vaccination
There was a majority in favour of compulsory vaccination for a variety of reasons. Overall it was felt that compulsory vaccinations benefited the whole community, those who refused vaccinations were being unfair by making others sick and that by achieving herd immunity the weaker members of society would be protected, some felt that it was essential to achieve this. If herd immunity is reached then those who are against vaccination will be protected anyway and won't be a threat to others. By making vaccination compulsory, deadly diseases could be eradicated, so lowering health care costs. They felt that the costs of administering the programme would be cheaper than treating the subsequent disease. A majority felt that the costs should be scaled those who could pay did and those less able to pay were subsidised by the Government. Certainly, travellers and business people should cover their own costs.

There were several different views as to how compulsory vaccinations should be administered. Some felt they should be given at birth, more felt that under 16s should be compulsory and over 16s should have a choice. The majority felt that the media and government had a strong role in promoting and educating people about the benefits of vaccination. Some felt that people should be fined for not having the vaccination but there could be exceptions in the case of religion and the danger of physical reaction to the vaccine.
**Against compulsory vaccination**

Those who were against compulsory vaccination felt strongly that it contravened individual rights and that there should be a choice, especially for those who held strong religious beliefs. Some groups felt that it would be expensive to administer vaccinations to everyone and one group felt there might be costs involved with any legal cases that might be brought.

Those who favoured voluntary vaccination felt that if a disease were to reach an epidemic/pandemic situation then vaccinations should become compulsory.

**Policy decisions**

At the end of the debate, student groups are asked to write a policy statement about vaccination – a statement which the majority agrees to.

The policy statements were also divided, with the majority in favour of compulsory vaccination for more deadly or disabling diseases. There should be voluntary vaccination for the less harmful diseases. One group suggested that vaccines be labelled A-D according to whether they should be compulsory or not, eg A - compulsory, B - highly recommended, C - optional, D - required for travelling to affected regions. They felt that there should be a system to test for allergic reactions so those people could be exempted, and that more research should be conducted into possible side effects.

Several groups stated that more unbiased information about the benefits of vaccination should be available, and that the media and schools had a role to inform the public more. Fines should be enforced for non-vaccination and one group suggested that children shouldn’t be allowed to start school without proof of vaccination. Another said that if people have refused to have a vaccine they should not be entitled to free medical care.

Several groups suggested that young people should have much more say in the vaccination process with over 16s being able to decide and under 16s following parental guidance. If parents felt unable to make that choice, then doctors would advise them.

Those groups against compulsory vaccination felt that the system should stay as it is with more government funded education to help people decide. They wanted to reach herd immunity through voluntary vaccination with research to find suitable alternatives to using needles, eg oral doses.