

# It's time for reform of the UK Public Inquiries System, says CEDR

Submitted by: Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR)

Monday, 28 May 2012

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New study reveals 73% of Britons do not have confidence in the Public Inquiry process

An independent study commissioned by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR), revealed a fundamental lack of faith in the UK's Public Inquiries process. Of more than 2,000 Britons polled, less than a third (27%) said they had confidence in the system. A contributing factor appears to be a broad lack of understanding: 77% of respondents expressed little or no understanding of Public Inquiries, with 7% saying that they do not know what a Public Inquiry is.

Despite this, the survey uncovered strong sentiment around specific aspects of the system as well as its outcome:

- More than half of those surveyed (58%) believe that Public Inquiries are too costly;
- 56% said that politicians have too much influence over the process;
- Fewer than half (44%) of Britons believe Public Inquiries result in the recommended changes being made.

The intense media focus on events like the Leveson inquiry would appear to have influenced the public's awareness: the CEDR study found that 49% of respondents were aware of Public Inquiries through media exposure. However, of this group, only 25% had confidence in the current system – two percentage points lower than the general average.

An opportunity for change through collaboration

The survey of 2,011 UK adults, conducted by Opinium, was launched as part of CEDR's Inquiry into Public Inquiries, undertaken in partnership with former Chief Justice of England and Wales, Lord Woolf of Barnes. One of the initiative's key objectives is to assess what role alternative dispute resolution (ADR) could play in reforming Public Inquiries.

"For anyone with access to the news, Public Inquiries would appear to be a mainstay of daily life. But the impact of Public Inquiries, good and bad, is far-reaching and deserves further consideration beyond what is said in the headlines," said Dr. Karl Mackie, CEO of CEDR. "By launching 'Inquiry into Inquiries', we hope to encourage necessary changes in the commissioning, management and integration of Inquiry findings with public policy."

"Key to these recommendations will be the implementation of facilitated negotiation and collaborative problem-solving, which we believe will enable a more effective and efficient Inquiry process with probity at its core," continued Mackie.

Former Chief Justice of England and Wales, Lord Woolf of Barnes will co-chair the initiative – the first of its kind in the UK. The project a foundation activity of CEDR, which is a not-for-profit organisation, which seeks to discover, implement and share alternative dispute resolution best practices to advance effective dialogue in society and business.

“Public Inquiries have been normalised in UK society by their sheer frequency and the level of attention provided by media outlets,” said Lord Woolf. “What’s needed is a serious review of the design and execution of Public Inquiries, to answer the fundamental question of whether, in its current form, the Public Inquiry is still fit-for-purpose.”

Lord Woolf continued: “I am delighted to be working in with CEDR on such an important undertaking.”

Further findings from the Opinion poll revealed:

- Fifty-six per cent of respondents felt Public Inquiries are too long
- Over two thirds (68%) agreed that Public Inquiry panels should include members of the general public
- When asked, “if you could set up a Public Inquiry into a specific issue”, respondents chose NHS failures in patient care (30%) and Directors’ bonuses (28%) as the top two areas that deserve closer examination.

As part of the Inquiry into Inquiries initiative, CEDR invites experts, past inquiry participants and other potential project partners to share their insights and experiences by visiting [www.cedr.com/inquiry](http://www.cedr.com/inquiry).

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#### About CEDR

CEDR is a leader in the development of neutral-assisted dispute resolution. It is a non-profit organisation and its mission is to encourage and develop cost effective dispute prevention and dispute resolution in commercial and public sector disputes and in civil litigation. CEDR operates in the UK and internationally and has been instrumental in helping to bring mediation into the heart of business practice and into judicial systems. CEDR Mediator Accreditation is recognised as an international standard. [www.cedr.com](http://www.cedr.com)

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