



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



Policy Impact

A 'how to'
guide for
Researchers

WHAT

WHY

HOW

HELP

Policy Impact

Making your research agenda and research findings relevant to policy-making in a way that has an impact on how policy is formed, implemented or understood. Whether and how this happens is something that researchers (or groups of researchers) can influence and manage.

Policy

A set of rules or norms governing behaviour in a particular area of activity - established by an organisation (the “policy-maker”) accepted as having authority to set such rules or norms. The basis of this authority is usually, but not universally, statutory in nature. It may also include authority to enforce the rules.

Who Forms Policy?

Law-makers at a **supra-national** level, such as the European Parliament

Law-makers at a **national** level, such as the UK Parliament

The **bureaucracies** that support law-makers, such as UK Government Departments and DGs of the European Commission

Statutory bodies with **sectoral** responsibilities, such as utility regulators

Statutory bodies with **regional** responsibilities, such as local councils

Statutory bodies with **subject-matter** responsibilities, such as the HSE

What Shapes Policy?

**Scrutiny of
policy-makers by
legislative bodies
such as Select
Committees**

**Consultation
exercises by
Government
Departments**

**Debate and
scrutiny during
the passage of
legislation**

**Consultation
exercises by
Statutory Bodies**

**Government-
supported
enquiries and
reviews**

**Manifestos of
political parties**

**Reports from
think-tanks, lobby
groups or interest
groups**

Legal judgements

**Crises or high-
profile events**

Why do it?

- To promote the value and usefulness of your research
- To strengthen the case for research funding
- To shape further research needs and priorities
- To showcase yourself, and your institution
- To strengthen links with other researchers
- To understand how to make your research more impactful
- To make your role more interesting and challenging

How can researchers access policy makers?

Submit research evidence to scrutiny bodies such as parliamentary Select Committees

Contribute to public consultation exercises by Government Departments

Correspond directly with MPs and Peers about your research

Contribute to public consultation exercises by Statutory Bodies

Contribute to government-supported enquiries and reviews

Contribute to briefing and debating packs for parliament

Contribute to reports from think-tanks or interest groups

Engage with government research staff such as parliamentary library staff and departmental analysts

Be opportunistic – when necessary, engage in debates and campaigns using your research

Academic journal publications

- Civil servants report in surveys that they do read original journal articles
- Open access journals are more likely than subscription-only journals
- Academics may submit a journal publication to government
- Research reports, evidence summaries and Policy Briefs provide synthesis of research

'Knowledge-brokers'

- On university side they make links between researchers and civil servants (e.g. Cambridge Uni CSaP)
- NGOs, think-tanks and other third-party organisations provide coalition of support around research
- On civil service side, role of departmental analytical service staff and government researchers who are knowledgeable and commission research

Dissemination by online resources and social media

- Using digital communications such as popular blogs (topic-based) and Twitter
- University websites growing in importance
- Social media outlets also link to conventional media such as practitioner publications and print journalism

Collaborations

- Networks outside academia (industry, NGOs, think-tanks) whose interests support research and policy recommendations
- Networks can be used to test out analysis and policy recommendations and also lobby policy makers

How research is used by policy officials**Parliamentary Select Committee**

- Academics provide written and oral evidence to committee inquiries
- Government is obliged to respond to select committee reports
- There are select committees for each department plus House of Lords
- Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) seeks research for briefings and speakers for events

Expert Advisory Role

- Research expertise becomes known through role on departmental advisory committee and other public bodies
- Advice and follow-up information and analysis is sought as trusted source
- Research circulated through role on prominent expert committees such as international policy committees, award and funding bodies, esteemed societies

Commissioned research and briefings

- Open calls to research professionals for original or secondary research around specific topics or policy issues
- Scoping and background research for committees and inquiries
- Independent policy evaluations
- Individual civil servants (and government researchers) seek expert opinion and written advice

Presentations

- Civil servants may attend subject-based academic conferences
- Target professional and policy-orientated conferences
- Seminars and events organised by NGOs, think-tanks at which civil servants attend
- Direct presentation to government (or face to face meeting)

How to Engage with Policy Makers

- **Target** Identify the policy-makers where your research might be relevant, and learn the basics about what their agendas are and how they use research. And keep this knowledge up-to-date. Agendas can change quickly.
- **Timing** Understand the policy-makers' process, and align the timing of your contribution to it.
- **Tailor** Make your input relevant and digestible. Do not "dumb down" – but assume that you are dealing with a non-technical audience. Help them "join the dots" to see how and why your research is relevant to them.

Target

- **Identify** policy makers in your field
- **Learn** about what their policy agendas are and how they use research evidence (government department, regulator, local or national body etc.)
- **Keep up-to-date** knowledge about relevant policy makers (follow on social media, read reports, attend meetings and conferences)
- **Strategies to engage** policy makers (present at meetings, publicise your research findings, invite them to speak to your group, send written material to them)

Timing

Understand the ways in which your research could impact policy process:

- **before:** get involved in agenda setting before new policy decisions are taken (look up departmental consultations; select committee enquiries)
- **during:** feed your research into policy decisions (contribute material to departmental reviews, evidence sessions, public meetings)
- **after:** participate in policy review processes (by department, committee) and your focus research findings around addressing current policy agendas

Tailor

- Make your input **relevant** and digestible
- Think about who you are talking to and what is the **scope** of your output (defining a problem, offering an approach, making specific recommendations)
- Assume you are dealing with a **non-technical** audience
- Write specifically for the **purpose** (e.g. submission to committee, consultation) and explain how and why your research is relevant to them (do not simply forward a copy of an academic paper, although you can provide this as further information)

Key Tips:

Early Career Researchers

- Try to **understand the motives and objectives of policy makers**
- Think about contributing to a government body (committee, department) as a **specialist adviser**
- Do some background reading in order to **understand the policy process** better (see further reading and sources)
- **Case studies show how varied impact can be**; remain open-minded as to different approaches and processes
- **Develop your networking skills and contacts, as the policy-making system is complex**
- **Talk to other researchers, NGOs and practitioners about your policy issue – be visible** and persevere

Engaging with International Policy Makers

- **European Parliament** Researchers can access the European Parliament through its standing committees for specific subject areas. Meeting dates, papers, delegates and support staff are all listed here: www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/parliamentary-committees.html
- **International NGOs and Think Tanks** Organisations such as the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) (www.ceps.eu) can help researchers build networks and disseminate their findings. Researchers can also engage with consultancy companies (such as Deloitte, BCG) that undertake government commissions.
- **The Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (CRIE)** conducts policy evaluations. They also have a remit to make connections between EU policy-makers and the scientific community <https://crie.jrc.ec.europa.eu>
- **The European Science Foundation** publishes reports to influence policy makers which are accessible online by disciplinary area: www.esf.org and it has officers looking after these domains that could be contacted by individual researchers or research groups.
- **Professional Bodies** These are important to researchers in terms of building networks with the international policy community. They are interested in research findings related to their portfolio and are likely to be members of overarching international organisations that serve to conduct policy work, engage with policy makers and lobby governments. These bodies may already work with advisory boards and committees that could be of interest to researchers.

Key Tips:

Writing for Policy Makers

- **Who am I?**

My expertise, position, organization/institution. What sort of thing will people expect me to say?

- **Who am I talking to?**

Government ministers, other parliamentarians, civil servants, NGO workers, practitioners. In which field?

- **Who else is listening?**

- **What is the scope of the output?**

Defining a problem, offering a general approach, making specific recommendations, a combination. If working to a brief what have you been asked to produce? Have you tested the idea? Has it been applied elsewhere?

- **What else is going on in your world beyond this issue?** (provide context)

- **What else is going on in your audience's world?** (competing priorities)

- **Remember the 'art of the possible'** - what resources, attention, political will is there likely to be for your recommendations (can you adapt? Can you engage other policy groups, NGOs to support your case)

- **What do you want your audience to do?**

This is crucial. You are not simply presenting evidence, you are telling someone what you think they should do (or not do!). Be concise.

- **Consider policy writing to be a conversation.** Policy work is dynamic and integrative, arising from teamwork. It pulls together perspectives from people across disciplines and areas of knowledge and experience. In particular, for your work to be relevant, interesting and useful for policy makers, you need to engage in discussion with them from the very beginning.

(Credit: David Neal, Polygeia, University of Cambridge)

University Support

University offices and research support:

**Research Impact
Teams and
Coordinators**

REF Impact Team

**Public Engagement
Office**

**Centre for Science
and Policy (CSaP)**

Public Policy SRI

**Training
Opportunities**

University Support

Research Impact Teams and Coordinators:

There is a growing body of university-based professionals who work as **'knowledge-brokers'** between academic researchers and external policy makers and practitioners (industrial and commercial partners, NGOs, funders)

At Cambridge, research impact resources are organised around the Research Councils and school-based structure. Key resources are:

- School of the Biological Sciences – **Bioscience Impact Team** Further info: www.bio.cam.ac.uk/impact
- Clinical School – **Office for Translational Research** (OTR) Further info: <http://otr.medschl.cam.ac.uk>
- **EPSRC Impact Acceleration Account** (IAA) Further info: www.research-strategy.admin.cam.ac.uk/contact-us
- **ESRC Impact Acceleration Account** (IAA) Further info: www.research-strategy.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-funding/internal-funding-opportunities/institutional-sponsorship-grants/esrc-impact
- School of Humanities and Social Science and Arts and Humanities – Research Facilitators, Further info: www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk/Research-support-contacts/SRT
- Department-based research grant administrators, Further info: www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk/Research-support-contacts/research-grant-admin

University Support

Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP):

- CSaP works in a number of ways to promote engagement between public policy professionals and academics at Cambridge
- CSaP has established an extensive network of **Policy Fellows**, civil servants and policy makers who have attended a programme of meetings and events at Cambridge, as well as established contacts within Westminster and Whitehall who are interested in engaging with researchers
- The experience and diversity of this unique network provides fresh perspectives and critical challenges to conventional thinking, and helps research from all disciplines
- CSaP also advises academics on completing Pathways to Impact statements on research grant applications
- Researchers interested in engaging with policy makers, and including research impact on research grant applications can contact CSaP at: www.csap.cam.ac.uk

University Support

REF Impact Team:

- Based in the university's Research Strategy Office, the team **support** researchers in relation to impact, and compile information for research funders and higher education funding bodies on impact
- The team manage the university's submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which includes research impact
- **Contact** the REF Impact Team at: impact@admin.cam.ac.uk
- You can record and store information relating to your research impact at the university's **Impact Repository**. Access is via Raven login. Contact the REF Impact Team for access details
- Placing copies of impact documents (letters of support, media references, report citations, event details) can help with recording impact for funding and assessment bodies

University Support

Public Policy Strategic Research Initiative (SRI):

- One of the university's strategic research initiatives, the Public Policy SRI aims to **support public policy research across Cambridge**, working with colleagues in science, social science, the arts and humanities, to apply new thinking to public policy problems and promote research and analysis into the public policy process
- The SRI undertakes projects in different subject areas, organising policy events and workshops to bring academics together around **important policy issues** and drawing academics attention to policy around their research
- The SRI can also provide advice and support for new grant applications in public policy research
- Contact the SRI Coordinator at cs738@cam.ac.uk or visit the website at: www.publicpolicy.cam.ac.uk if you are interesting in joining the initiative or would like to know more

University Support

Public Engagement Office

- The Public Engagement office organizes annual events such as the Cambridge Science Festival, Cambridge Festival of Ideas, Open Cambridge and Cambridge Community Knowledge Exchange, which promote public engagement with Cambridge research. It has also organized events for researchers to come together with parliamentarians to discuss the insights from academic research
- As well as organising the University's large-scale public engagement events, at which researchers can connect with communities, citizens, policy makers and NGOs, the office also **offers practical support and training** to University staff and students
- The office also maintains a **network of community contacts** to nurture charitable, educational and voluntary partnerships between the University and its communities. Further information: www.cam.ac.uk/public-engagement

University Support

Training Opportunities

- Doctoral Training Centres (subject-based, for example: <http://esrc-dtc.cshss.cam.ac.uk>)
- AHRC Engaging with Government Programme www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Pages/Engaging-with-Government.aspx
- CSaP professional development workshops www.csap.cam.ac.uk
- OPdA (Office for Postdoctoral Affairs) www.opda.cam.ac.uk
- Impact workshops and events organised by Coordinators (school or subject-based)
- Internships (POST, CSaP, Research Council, Government)
Further info: www.rcuk.ac.uk/skills/policy-internships-scheme

Further Information

- Hill, M. (2012) The Public Policy Process (Sixth Edition) (Routledge)
- Kingdon, J. (1995) Agendas, alternatives and public policy (Boston: Little Brown)
- Sanderson, I. (2002) Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making, Public Administration 80 (1) 1-22
- Stoker and Evans (2016) Evidence-based policy making in the social sciences: methods that matter (Policy Press)
- LSE Impact Blog
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences>
- What Works Centres
www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network
- Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) publications including POST notes and other briefings

Cambridge
Public Policy

SRI

Contact

For more information find us at:

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