

POLICY ENGAGEMENT: GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS

The world today is facing enormous challenges and we look to our policy-makers – and those around them – to find and implement ways to address these challenges. However, solutions only work if those making the decisions are informed by evidence. Your research – both your individual projects and your broader expertise – can play a key role in providing this evidence, but it's not always easy to get your findings and recommendations to those making the decisions.

This guide has been created to help you navigate the system and get your message heard. We've identified a set of steps to guide you through engaging with policy actors, from identifying where to start to creating memorable, accessible and useable communications. Use these to build policy engagement into planning at the start of each research project.

Why is policy engagement important?

Evidence-based research should be at the heart of public policy decisions. [Research carried out in 2017](#) found that research was used by UK policy makers in a range of different ways: to provide background knowledge; to inform opinions; to test hypotheses; to provide credibility; and to provide balance. However, the same study found that academic research did not always 'cut through' to policy actors, either because it was submitted (or found) too late to be influential in the decision-making process, or because it was poorly presented, too technical or took too long to digest. By engaging effectively with policy actors, you'll be sharing your work more widely, contributing to decision-making processes that can lead to demonstrable change within society, and ensuring that your research has impact and makes a difference.

Who should I engage with?

The policy environment in the UK is complex, made up of a number of different levels, including UK ministerial departments, the UK Parliament, executive agencies, public bodies, devolved governments and parliaments, local governments, and the civil service. Policy making can happen through different bodies, including stakeholder consultations, Select Committees and cross-party groups. There are also a wide range of groups influencing policy, including think tanks, lobbyists, charities and NGOs, and industry bodies. With 100 ministers, 650 members of the UK parliament and 18,000 civil servants who describe their role as 'policy making', it can be near impossible to know who to approach.

Luckily, there's lots of great advice available, guiding you through the policy landscape. The links below provide information on the UK policy environment, as well as links to specific ways to engage with the different elements of it. Use this to start thinking about which thinking about individuals, organisations and/ or committees might benefit from your research. It's often useful to map out the potential stakeholders to help you decide where to focus your efforts.

Useful links:

- ⇒ UK Government: How government works <https://www.gov.uk/government/how-government-works>
- ⇒ UK Government: Local government structure <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-structure-and-elections>

- ⇒ UK Parliament: Research impact at the UK Parliament <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/research-impact-at-the-uk-parliament/>
- ⇒ Scottish Parliament: Academic engagement in the Scottish Parliament <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/100471.aspx>
- ⇒ Scottish Government <https://www.gov.scot/about/>
- ⇒ Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament: How can academics get involved with the Senedd's work? <https://research.senedd.wales/knowledge-exchange/how-can-academics-get-involved-with-the-senedd-s-work/>
- ⇒ Welsh Government: <https://gov.wales/>
- ⇒ Northern Ireland Assembly <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/>
- ⇒ Northern Ireland Government <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/>
- ⇒ Arts and Humanities Research Council: How to engage with policy makers <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ahrc-how-engage-policy-makers.pdf>
- ⇒ Economic and Social Research Council: Working with Westminster <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/influencing-policymakers/guide-to-influencing-public-affairs/parliament/>

When should I engage?

Your research needs to reach policy makers at a time when they can take action, so you'll need to be prepared. The UK government and devolved administrations publish areas of current concern and interest, so spend some time finding out what they are. Local authorities will have budget cycles and committee meetings where decisions are made and relevant dates are likely to be published online. However, you'll be most effective if you've already established relationships with decision makers and other policy actors (and influencers), so focus on building your networks early and add policy engagement to your impact planning from the start of each research project.

Useful links:

- ⇒ UK Government: Areas of research interest <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>
- ⇒ UK Government Office for Science <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-office-for-science>
- ⇒ UK Parliament <https://www.parliament.uk/>
- ⇒ Scottish Parliament: Parliamentary Business <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentary-business.aspx>
- ⇒ Scottish Government: Consultations <https://consult.gov.scot/>
- ⇒ Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament: Senedd Business <https://senedd.wales/senedd-business/>
- ⇒ Welsh Government: Consultations <https://gov.wales/consultations>
- ⇒ Northern Ireland Assembly: Assembly Business <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/>
- ⇒ Northern Ireland Executive: Consultations <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/consultations>

How should I engage?

There are different ways to engage with policy actors, so part of your preparation should be considering which are most appropriate. Options are likely to include blog posts and social media, policy briefings and meetings or workshops. You can also submit responses to public consultations, or you might be invited to provide expert evidence or advice. The table below shows what you might use when.

Blog posts & social media	Policy briefing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Short, informal presentation of your research, focusing on key messages ▪ Encourages visual presentation – easy to interpret diagrams & charts ▪ Reach large audience quickly – and can be targeted by tagging individuals and groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A document/ report that provides concise & accessible summary of research ▪ Highlights benefits & solutions in digestible way ▪ Summarises complex information in a way that helps the reader get to the heart of the issues, quickly
Meeting or workshop	Expert evidence/ advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enables presentation of research in a more direct way ▪ Creates opportunity for discussion and debate about research findings and relevance to policy ▪ Can be supported by supplementary materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Links your research directly to a policy issue under consideration ▪ Evidence can include specific suggestions for amendments to current and existing legislation ▪ Draws on specific projects and broader expertise

What should I share?

When you share your research to policy actors, your focus should be on solutions and recommendations, rather than problems. Of course, you'll describe your project, hypothesis and methodology, but what's most useful and interesting to policy makers is the research outcomes – what you've discovered as a result of your research. Be prepared to focus on those outcomes that are most relevant for the policy issue, theme or challenge that your research can influence. And use what you've discovered from your engagement planning to identify what those key findings might be. If you're giving evidence to a committee, you should also be prepared to share your broader knowledge, as well as specific research outcomes.

How should I communicate?

Any research communication should take the audience into account and engaging with policy actors is no different. Policy actors – whether they're civil servants, ministers or local government officials – all suffer from the same thing; a lack of time. They need to be able to identify and understand your key messages quickly. Your audience is also likely to include non-specialists, who are looking for practical ideas and recommendations that they can put into practice. This means your communications – whether you're writing a policy brief or hosting a meeting – need to be clear, concise and accessible, and focus on what's most relevant, interesting and useful to those accessing the information.

Below, you'll find some top tips for communicating with policy actors, as well as set of useful links providing further advice and guidance.



Further resources

- ⇒ NCCPE: Policymakers <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/understanding-audiences/policy-makers>
- ⇒ ODI: 10 things to know about how to influence policy with research <https://www.odi.org/publications/10671-10-things-know-about-how-influence-policy-research>
- ⇒ PolicyBristol Hub: How can researchers engage with policy? <https://policybristol.blogs.bris.ac.uk/2019/07/22/how-can-researchers-engage-with-policy/>
- ⇒ POST: How to write a policy briefing <https://post.parliament.uk/how-to-write-a-policy-briefing/>
- ⇒ Imperial College London: Understanding policy making <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/research-and-innovation/the-forum/public/policy-making.pdf>
- ⇒ UCL: Public Policy <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-policy/how-guides>
- ⇒ UPEN: Universities Policy Engagement Network <https://www.upen.ac.uk/>

- ⇒ University of Cambridge: Policy Engagement <https://www.research-strategy.admin.cam.ac.uk/impact/routes-impact/policy-engagement>
- ⇒ University of Nottingham: Institute for Policy and Engagement <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/policy-and-engagement/home.aspx>
- ⇒ University of Oxford Policy Engagement: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/policy-engagement>
- ⇒ University of Southampton: Ways to engage <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/publicpolicy/support-for-researchers/ways-to-engage/ways-to-engage.page>
- ⇒ University of Sussex: Policy@Sussex <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/policy-engagement/resources-for-researchers/>