



World-class
Research

Governance and
Public Policy



The University of
Nottingham

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Routes to policy impact

A practical guide for academics and researchers



Contents

- 2 **Policy Impact:** what and why?
- 3 The policy landscape
- 5 Informing evidence-based policymaking
- 7 Responding to current policy priorities
- 9 Governance and Public Policy Research Priority Area
- 10 Useful resources

Policy impact: what and why?

This booklet is designed to complement the green book guide *From Research to Impact: A practical guide* which outlines how planning for and demonstrating impact can support both your grant applications and your research outcomes. This guide will focus in more detail on public policy impact.

So what is policy impact?

In a nutshell, achieving policy impact means using your knowledge and research to influence the development and implementation of public policy by politicians and civil servants.

Why is it important?

By considering policy impact as you develop and share your research, you can help ensure decisions which affect people's lives are taken with the strongest available evidence. Across all case studies submitted nationally to the last REF, 'influencing Government policy' was the single most commonly cited form of impact, with 'Parliamentary scrutiny' in second place.

For more information and links to the resources available to support policy impact, visit www.nottingham.ac.uk/about/government-relations/policy-impact-resources.aspx

Benefits

Paying attention to policy impact helps researchers with:

- enriching research bids with new pathways to impact
- ensuring the research is meaningful, timely and useful to the wider public
- shaping policy priorities to support and enable innovative research
- developing skills and raising their profile
- developing future case studies

Challenges

Polymakers work in different ways to academics. This creates several challenges for academics, including:

- non-linear path of policymaking - it can be difficult for 'outsiders' to see when and how decisions will be made
- establishing new relationships – for quick decisions policymakers often rely on familiar sources
- communication – your policymaker audience are unlikely to be experts
- timing – decisions are made and priorities move on quickly

The Policy landscape

National policymaking

Westminster

Concerned with making laws and legislation and parliamentary scrutiny:

- Members of Parliament
- Bills going through Parliament
- Select committees
- All-Party Parliamentary Groups

Whitehall

Concerned with the 'behind the scenes' activity and implementation of legislation:

- The work of government departments and civil servants
- Quangos eg NICE, Ofcom, Highways Agency

Wider policy community

These other groups feed into the decision making:

- Lobbyists and campaign groups eg think tanks; unions; charities

International policymaking

Global/transnational

- United Nations and its agencies
- World Bank
- World Health Organisation
- IMF / OECD

European

- European Parliament
- European Commission

Single country

- Other National governments and their agencies in developed and developing nations



Local or regional policymaking

Local government

- City councils, county councils
- Devolved administrations

Regional bodies

- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Midlands Engine

Other

- NHS
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Water authorities
- Local charities

Informing evidence-based policymaking

Your engagement with evidence-based policymaking may be the result of a specific piece of research aimed at improving policy or practice, or which concludes by identifying potential changes to public policy. Alternatively, you may be looking to share your broader knowledge and evidence base as an expert in your field, called on to bring your academic rigour to the analysis of, for example, social or economic problems or policy options. Either way, the tools of proactive engagement are similar.

Tools of engagement

Talking to policymakers directly	A great way of making your case and showing your expertise and passion for a subject. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone, attend an event they are at or ask them for a meeting.
Policy briefings	Short (two-page) documents highlighting key policy messages arising from a piece of academic research. They should be tightly targeted and include a call to action. Relevant audiences may include local, national or international policymakers, NGOs, charities and advocacy groups, funders, and members of the public.
Policy reports	Slightly longer than a briefing, going into more detail on an issue. They can be used to inform debate on a current 'hot topic' or can seek to set the groundwork for a policy change.
Blogs, podcasts and social media	Can be an effective and engaging way to reach a broad, global audience, ranging from policymakers, to the general public, journalists and fellow academics. They can give a sense of immediacy and 'freshness' to the issue and, if they are successful, may be shared by interested individuals – especially important for the more niche areas of research.
Traditional media	Is helpful for building profile, bringing an issue to the attention of the public and policymakers and driving forward your recommendations. You can use press releases and media interviews to establish your status as an expert on the topic, or send a summary of your research to a journalist who is likely to be interested in your findings. You could also draft an article for a 'quality' newspaper.

Sharing your conclusions

Across all disciplines, whether planned into your initial objectives or not, research can come to a conclusion which suggests a change to public policy is required. You can use the tools below to identify and reach out to relevant policymakers, effectively communicate your research and clearly set out your recommendations. Impact would be demonstrated by ensuring the issues you have identified are discussed at policymaker level, and by any developments which move policy towards the outcome you recommended.

Becoming a go-to person

Most policymakers rely on known and trusted academics and, due to the fast paced timescales they work in, will refer back to those they already have contact with, or have sufficient public profile to be regarded as an expert. You might choose to use the tools below to develop and strengthen long-term relationships with policymakers and policy-engaged organisations or groups. If you know from the outset of your research that you hope to influence particular policy areas, investing in relationships and reputation from an early stage can produce benefits which extend long beyond those of a specific project or recommendation.

Think tanks and charities	Collaborate with academics to add credible research and expertise on the issues they focus on. They may have a specific policy agenda with pre-determined outcomes, or may focus more on stimulating and informing debate on topical issues. They can be an effective intermediary to help get your research considered.
Civil servants	Can embed research-led advice on a specific issue in departmental policy advice, and can fundamentally shape policy. They can also directly implement recommendations or other research outputs in the management of the department and its business.
Opposition politicians	(From parties other than the current Government) don't have the same institutional support as the Government. This means they are often more receptive to external research and recommendations as they hold the Government to account.
All-Party Parliamentary Groups	Are self-selecting groups of Members of Parliament interested in a particular topic. The more informal structure means they have flexibility and will often invite expert speakers to their meetings.

Responding to current policy priorities

At any time, a number of issues will be in the spotlight as topical policy priorities. These issues change regularly, for example, with legislation passing through Parliament, when an interested party (such as a campaigner, charity or non-government MP) successfully raises the profile of an issue or due to external events in the news.

Academic research and expertise can increase public and policymaker understanding of these issues and help provide answers to the questions they raise. You can take advantage of a window of public interest to increase your profile as an expert, to advance recommendations your research may point to, or to gain support for further research.

Reacting to current priorities could involve responding to formal evidence requests from public bodies, shaping a research bid to reflect topical priorities or fill identified gaps in the current evidence base, and sharing your expertise through informal routes in response to public interest.

Opportunities to add your expertise to topical debates

Your existing research or expertise can become more policy relevant due to current events. Your audience may be policymakers themselves, other influencers or the general public.

As well as using the tools of engagement on the previous pages, this opportunity might lend itself to providing a more detailed analysis of your research or expertise through the following channels.

Engaging with media

- Submitting written contributions to The Conversation, newspapers and magazines
- Doing radio or TV interviews

Updating your blog or submitting contributions to the University's blogging platform to demonstrate how your research enables you to contextualise and explain current events

Reacting on social media channels to:

- Express your views

Demonstrate the link between your research and the event making news headlines



Requests for expert evidence and advice

At all levels there are formal opportunities to engage with the policymaking process.

The UK Parliament has formal committees which seek evidence from members of the public, including academics. Public bill committees are set up to oversee a single piece of legislation, while Select Committees are permanent bodies which scrutinise the policy and practice of Government.

In addition, departments like the House of Commons Library and the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology offer opportunities to peer-review evidence, or contribute to briefing notes for policymakers. A list of public consultations from across Government can be found on the gov.uk website. The database is searchable by Department and policy area.

Local authorities are responsible for a significant proportion of public services expenditure and face huge challenges. Therefore access to high quality research can be a major asset, particularly through jointly-funded research collaboration.

The European Commission and EU policy can have substantial effects on specific regions, particularly on issues to do with human rights, culture and heritage, and research and higher education. Like the UK Parliament, the EC has formal committees and regularly consults experts on topical issues and new regulations.

Further Research

Keeping an eye on current and future public policy priorities through the networks you've built can support a funding proposal to carry out further research in relation to current events/ trends. In addition, building strong relationships can lead to opportunities for collaborative research to directly inform new policy and practice.

Governance and Public Policy Research Priority Area

The University of Nottingham's Governance and Public Policy (GaPP) Research Priority Area is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in theoretically-informed and applied disciplinary and interdisciplinary research in governance and public policy. It promotes methodologically innovative, cutting-edge research.

Our research

- Governance and policymaking: we study how organisations, partnerships and networks produce policies and influence events. By looking at issues such as power, accountability and effective administration, together with factors such as politicians, pressure groups, frontline staff and external shocks, we will improve understanding of policy agendas, the policymaking process and delivery.
- We also examine why some policies change over time; and the role of public participation, user empowerment, and co-production in policy formulation and delivery
- We analyse how public services are organised and managed to deliver policy: the roles of service commissioners, providers, regulators, users and other stakeholders, and the challenges of implementing policy innovations and interventions

Contact

Professor Bruce Stafford

t: +44(0)115 8467439

e: bruce.stafford@nottingham.ac.uk

Public Policy mailing list

To stay informed of funding opportunities, events and other activities relating to governance and public policy research and impact, subscribe at lists.nottingham.ac.uk/mailman/listinfo/publicpolicy

Useful resources

The **Political and Public Affairs Unit** aims to highlight and enhance the transformative potential of our world class research by offering public affairs and public policy outreach support to colleagues across the University.

Alex Miles

Deputy Director, External Relations
(Public Affairs)

e: alex.miles@nottingham.ac.uk

Léonie Mathers

Political and Public Affairs Officer

e: leonie.mathers@nottingham.ac.uk

t: 07973 975 055

The **University of Nottingham Government Relations** webpage is a resource both for academics and staff, and for policymakers and external organisations to find out more about what the University is doing related to government and policymaking: www.nottingham.ac.uk/about/government-relations/index.aspx

The **Policy Impact Resources** page includes details about funding schemes available and further opportunities, how-to guides, online tools, and links to all the external resources referred to in this document - including Parliamentary resources and policy impact advice from research councils and funding bodies: www.nottingham.ac.uk/about/government-relations/policy-impact-resources.aspx

Media relations team offers training to academic colleagues on dealing with the media; assistance with press releases; photography, video and social media support. You can find contacts for **Faculty Media Relations Managers** at www.nottingham.ac.uk/communicationsmarketing/services/service-details/press-releases.aspx

Communication guides (blogs, social media, press releases) can be accessed on Workspace at <http://tinyurl.com/zepbnjf>

The ESRC Impact Acceleration is available to support work to build knowledge exchange activities and impact through social science. You can find more about the strands of impact activity on Workspace at www.tinyurl.com/j6r9t7s

For further guidance on how to think about the wider impact of your research, see the green book guide From research to impact: A practical guide for academics and researchers available on Workspace at www.tinyurl.com/z8uyxaq



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Nottingham

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Political and Public Affairs Unit

The University of Nottingham
Executive Office, Trent Building
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

t: +44 (0) 115 951 5151

w: www.nottingham.ac.uk