

Building capacity, delivering impact:

The use of the Policy Support Fund in universities

Laura Bea & Sarah Chaytor

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Introduction & Context

There is growing awareness of the importance of investing in institutional capacity for academic-policy engagement, in order to support the use of evidence in public policymaking. The Policy Support Fund enables universities to strengthen the engagement of research with policymaking in a range of ways.

Research England are responsible for providing funding to higher education providers (HEPs) in England, in order to 'create and sustain the conditions for a healthy and dynamic research and knowledge exchange system in the higher education sector' (RE, 2024).

In 2021/22, the Policy Support Fund was introduced to replace the Strategic Priorities Fund. The objectives remained the same, to support universities to engage with policymakers. It is allocated by Research England in proportion to HEPs' research income from UK central government bodies, local authorities and health and hospital authorities. Funding is deployed flexibly by universities to support research engagement with public policy in a range of ways.

This report summarises findings from a survey of UPEN member universities on how they have used PSF allocations to support academic-policy engagement. It discusses the key benefits of the PSF as well as reflecting on some of the challenges experienced.

The report also provides a number of case studies which illustrate the range of uses specific examples of initiatives, projects, or strategic use of the fund.

Methodology

We surveyed our (then) 110+ Membership of Universities to collect information on how they have used their allocation of Policy Support Fund over the past few years (up to 2024). In total, we received responses from 23 members.

Overall, these 23 member institutions were in receipt of £23,297,591.00, or 27% of overall PSF allocation between 2022-2025. This data was pulled from available published data from [Research England](#).



Foreword

Research England provides funding to universities to support research and knowledge exchange across a breadth of activity. In recent years, as the importance of strengthening links between academic research and public policymaking have become more apparent, the Policy Support Fund has provided dedicated, flexible institutional funding to link with policy research priorities and opportunities at local, regional, national and international levels.

Given the increasing complexity of challenges facing policy- and decision-makers, improving access to and use of academic research by policy actors is a vital component of universities' public benefit. The PSF has been a means of encouraging all universities to develop a greater strategic focus on how their research can contribute to public policy decisions and implementation. It recognises that individual universities will have an approach and focus that is relevant to their institutional and wider context and which reflects their particular capabilities.

This report offers an insight into how universities are deploying their PSF allocations, from supporting capacity and infrastructures for policy engagement in institutions, to building skills and capabilities amongst researchers and university staff, to enabling researchers to directly engage with policymakers. It has enabled universities to contribute to policymaking within their own localities as well as more widely, and has helped to expand and diversify the number of academic researchers participating in policy engagement activities.

There is much to be gained from improving shared learning around how universities are deploying PSF and the strategies they are adopting to strengthen academic-policy engagement, and in building greater understanding of good practice in terms of institutional support and activities. I am very pleased to see members of UPEN sharing their experiences in this report to inform future approaches to supporting academic-policy engagement in universities.



Steven Hill, Director of Research – Research England

Steven Hill is Director of Research at Research England. Steven was formerly Head of Research Policy at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and leads on all aspects of research policy and funding.



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Recommendations on future use of the Policy Support Fund

The Policy Support Fund is an important source of support for universities to strengthen the impact of their research on public policy.

It has been particularly useful in supporting university capacity and infrastructure for academic-policy engagement, such as building or expanding knowledge brokerage units. It has also helped to raise awareness of the importance of engaging with policymakers amongst university researchers, professional staff and senior leaders. It has broadened research engagement with public policy, reaching individuals and disciplines which had not previously been active or engaged with in policy-focused work. And crucially, it has improved universities' ability to understand and respond to policy needs for evidence.

PSF is seen by institutions as a key resource for supporting policy-focused activity which would not otherwise take place. This reflects the long-term and often uncertain nature of academic-policy engagement and research impact on policy, and illustrates the importance of a dedicated funding stream to support such work.

It is particularly notable that academic-policy engagement activity is seen as an important, but under-supported, part of wider knowledge exchange and impact agenda.

We highlight here three considerations for supporting the most impactful deployment of PSF going forward.

1) Longer funding periods

The ability to deploy PSF over a longer time period would provide impetus for strategic activity, fostering greater collaboration, relationships, and stronger pan-UK university collaboration. It would also support the retention of talent and expertise alongside policy engagement with a wider range of researchers and research evidence.

We encourage Research England to consider further multi-year SPF allocations to provide some degree of certainty to inform institutional planning.



2) Enhanced guidance for institutions

Alongside longer funding horizons, we suggest it would be beneficial to develop further guidance for institutions on effective strategies for deploying PSF. This could include, for example, the importance of allowing for longer-term planning where possible; the value of building institutional capacity and infrastructure to support academic-policy engagement, and on ways of tracking longer-term impacts arising from activity supported via PSF.

3) Facilitating sharing of best practice

Finally, it would be helpful to build a bank of case studies and exemplars of best practice approaches to deploying QR PSF. This could include institutional programmes and strategies (such as funding or mobility schemes) alongside specific activities and projects (such as knowledge exchange events or challenge-led research).

The longer time frame and our ability to play a strategic coordinating role for QRPSF has allowed us to administer the funding effectively and efficiently, avoiding unspent funding. - Anonymous respondent to survey



How do universities use the Policy Support Fund?

Figure 1 shows the overarching themes of activities carried out by respondents, categorised into 5 core themes. As shown, activities relating to building, maintaining or strengthening relationships and partnerships make up a significant part of PSF allocation. However, it is worth noting that these activities do not stand alone, but intersect and depend on one another. It is clear, for example, that while capacity building as a concentrated activity is another significant use of the fund, activities related to events, generating evidence outputs, relationship building, and capability building, have been made possible because of the additional capacity PSF allows.

Figure 1: Overarching themes of activities carried out using PSF allocations

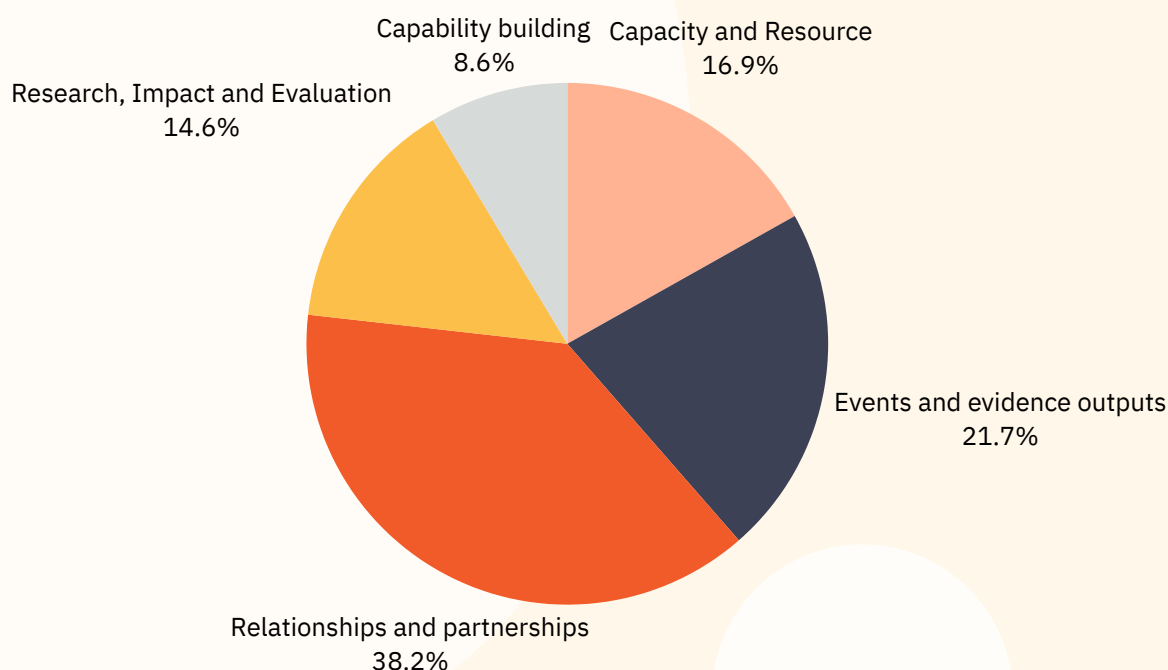




Figure 2 breaks down these themes (and their corresponding colours) into the specific activities. Training and capacity building was the most common use of the fund, alongside the running of roundtables and events. This points toward an operational use of the fund, which can be attributed to its short term spending period. However, strategic moves are still being made possible through the use of PSF, for example, developing local partnerships, engaging with industry, and building relationships and networks.

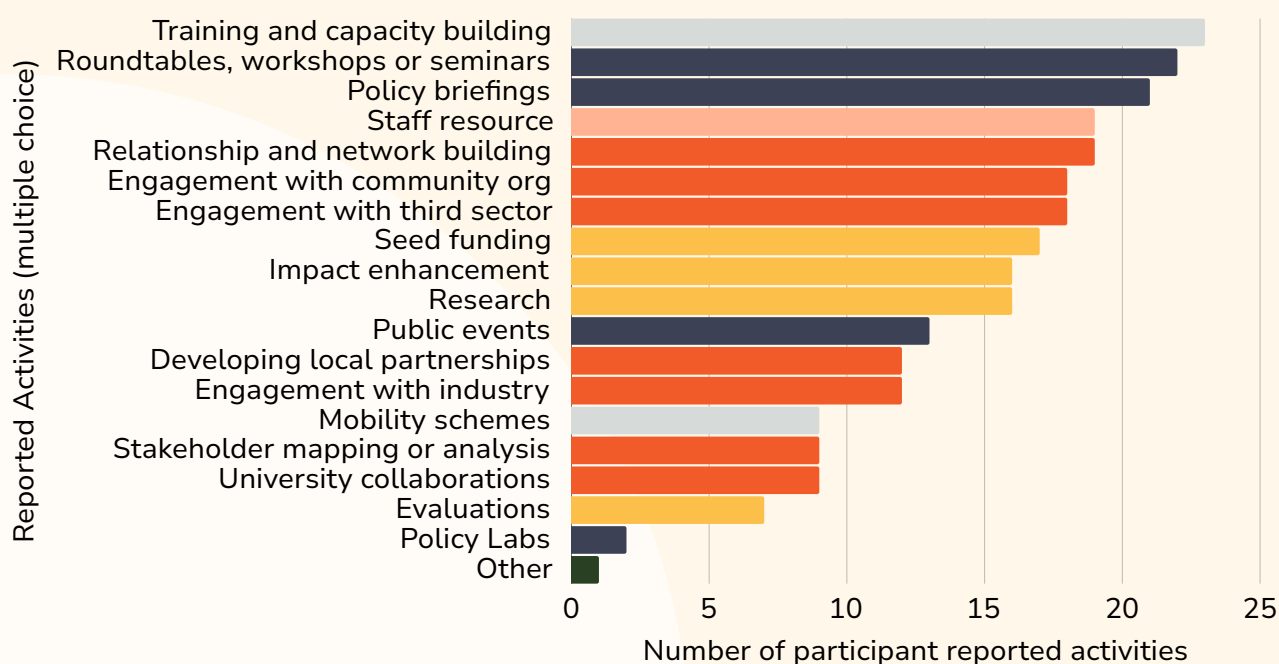


Figure 2: Detailed list of activities carried out using PSF allocations



Developing academic-policy engagement capability

Policy Support Fund supports capacity building for academic-policy engagement within institutions. There is no other resource to support this activity at present.

Respondents noted that institutional PSF allocations have provided resource to build institutional capacity and support a range of activities. The 3-year commitment to PSF funding was highlighted as providing greater stability to support this investment. Three key ways universities used PSF are discussed below.

Enhancing training and development: PSF has enabled institutions to invest in upskilling researchers to support academic-policy engagement. Some UPEN member universities have deployed PSF to focus on specialist training and policy support. This supported institutional knowledge brokerage units to be responsive and to specific needs of their academic community, aligned to their institutional research strengths.

Supporting mobility and collaboration:

PSF has underpinned policy fellowships, placements and secondments for PGRs and ECRs. As well this, seed funding activities enabled opportunity for cross-disciplinary relationships and collaborations

Diversifying engagement:

PSF has also enabled institutions to provide targeted support to early career researchers. It has ensured that knowledge brokerage functions can spend more time finding other researchers to engage with policy opportunities in order to avoid 'usual suspect' syndrome.

PSF has facilitated higher quality and wider engagement of traditionally under-represented groups across both people and discipline

We have found [PSF] to be particularly valuable in supporting the university's aims to be a civic institution, playing a key role in supporting economic growth, wellbeing and prosperity for the region. Anonymous respondent to survey



Benefits of Policy Support Funding

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the impact which Policy Support Fund has enabled. Benefits could be seen both for individual researchers and across the wider institution, as well as for policy stakeholders. Overall, PSF has supported an improved ability to engage with and address policy needs.

Establishing policy engagement and impact within the wider knowledge exchange and impact agenda

Respondents emphasised the importance of a dedicated and ring-fenced funding stream focused on supporting policy-focused activity. This has helped to demonstrate the importance of academic-policy engagement activity within universities - both to researchers and to senior leaders. PSF also supported investment in dedicated institutional capacity for academic-policy engagement which complements other, more established, knowledge exchange and impact support.

Dedicated yet flexible funding

The flexible nature of PSF was welcomed by all respondents. This has enabled institutions to deploy funding in accordance with their own strategic priorities and context and has supported investment in both individual-led activity

and institutional capability. It has also underpinned a responsive approach to engaging with a wide range of policy domains.

Engaging with public policy at multiple levels

Many respondents emphasised that the flexibility of PSF enabled institutional engagement with policymakers at multiple levels of governance, from local to national. This was seen as particularly important in the context of ongoing devolution and changes to governance. PSF has underpinned new relationships with policymakers as well as enabling consolidation of existing partnerships.

Responding to policy priorities

The value of PSF in supporting research focused on policy priorities was highlighted, with many respondents observing that work wouldn't have taken place without PSF. Respondents mentioned a wide range of projects and activities which had been developed in response to policy needs, supported by PSF. They also noted the importance of PSF for maintaining policy relationships which underpin specific activities.



Building institutional capacity in academic-policy engagement

Notably, many institutions have deployed PSF to support institutional capacity and structures for policy engagement, reflecting the importance of underpinning infrastructure and brokerage expertise. A number of respondents discussed how PSF had supported dedicated staff and specialist expertise in academic-policy engagement. A particular benefit of such institutional capacity was expanding policy engagement activity to disciplines which had historically been less engaged with.

Building individual capacity for policy engagement

A majority of respondents noted that PSF enabled the provision of targeted support for individual researchers, both through training and funding schemes. The value of PSF in widening researcher participation in academic-policy engagement activity, at a range of career levels, was strongly emphasised.

Supporting wider civic agenda and regional engagement

Some respondents noted that PSF supported wider institutional civic engagement strategies, by facilitating interactions with local and regional policymakers. PSF was particularly important in sustaining key relationships and enabling improved understanding of, and research responses to, regional needs.

Strengthening dialogues and visibility:

Many respondents drew on PSF funding to support events, policy roundtables, policy labs and evidence outputs. They reported that this allowed them to make more visible policy relevant research generated by their universities. It also provided capacity to build relationships across policy spaces. In particular, some respondents noted the funding enabled them to join and engage in networks and intermediary organisations (such as UPEN, the Conversation, and others) which has allowed them to increase their outreach and build their networks significantly.



Challenges of using PSF

Respondents pointed to some persistent challenges in deploying funding, particularly in terms of long-term planning and sustainability.

Uncertainties over annual allocations and continuation of funding

The majority of respondents reported that their institutions were unwilling to underwrite spending beyond confirmed institutional allocations within a given year. This reflects uncertainty about the longevity of PSF funding and impedes the ability to invest sustainably in building institutional capacity, for example through supporting additional staff posts (other than through short fixed-term contracts).

Respondents welcomed the 3-year investment in PSF for the period 2022/23-2024/25 but noted that with confirmation of institutional allocations remaining on an annual basis, there was limited scope for long-term planning and investment.

Annual allocation cycles impeding longer-term sustained activity

More than 80% of respondents reported the timeframe of PSF spending as a key challenge. Annual allocations means that there are limited opportunities to develop sustainable programmes of activity or funding mechanisms beyond a 6-12 month timeframe.

The effect is that activity is focused on short term seed funding and events at the expense of long term strategic planning. This is particularly acute when allocations are confirmed some way into the financial year.

The long-term nature of academic-policy engagement

A majority of respondents emphasised that the nature of academic-policy engagement and impact on policy is that it occurs over a long timeframe. Short spending cycles could make it difficult to support the necessary long-term activity to maximise research impact on policy.

Loss of talent

Respondents noted that the annual nature of the funding meant that, where dedicated staff were recruited, this was via short-term contracts. This risks a cycle of continually recruiting, inducting and training new staff, whilst losing talent and expertise that has previously been developed. This short-term approach also risks being at odds with EDI priorities and best practice across the sector.



Contextual challenges

Many respondents highlighted longer-term institutional challenges around supporting academic-policy engagement activity, including lack of internal reward structures and administrative systems which are not geared up to support policy engagement work. This can act as a further impediment to delivering activity within 12-month spending cycles.

Lack of clarity or criteria over what constitutes 'policy'

Respondents welcomed the flexible nature of PSF, but noted that there was a lack of clarity on what policy means in this context. Defining this area of work would allow for knowledge brokerage units to further justify in internal discussions resource allocation, and allow for more rigorous evaluation to take place on the impact of using the fund for this area.



Case Studies

The following case studies showcase activities across the last three years of Policy Support Fund allocation within 9 institutions. They are indicative of activity but do not represent the entire academic-policy engagement landscape. Whilst they show the breadth of work being done to strengthen academic-policy engagement, this report highlights how further work needs to be done to capture and qualify academic-policy impact systematically across Higher Education and the importance of funding policy engagement work.

Case Studies: Growing Academic- Policy Engagement Functions



Building dedicated infrastructure at De Montfort University



PSF funding has been instrumental in transforming the DMU Policy Unit from concept to reality, and enabled us to create a dedicated infrastructure that bridges DMU's research innovations with the policy arena at local, national and international levels.

Through PSF, we have the ability to respond to rapidly developing projects through seed funds and are able to support the development of long term projects through our infrastructure building programmes.

Through PSF, we established the groundwork for the DMU Policy Unit as a demand-driven responsive network of academics united by their passion for supporting community resilience. The funding enabled us to host the inaugural Policy Engagement Symposium in February 2024, which welcomed Leicester's Deputy Mayor Adam Clarke to explore collaborative opportunities between DMU's researchers and the city council. This event ultimately fostered momentum across the university, where academics were energized to pursue policy engagement to catalyse change in their fields.

PSF was critical for operationalising the Unit by assisting in:

- Establishing a steering committee of senior researchers from across faculties who guide the Unit's strategic direction.
- Creating comprehensive data infrastructure through a university-wide policy impact survey to map DMU's policy-relevant expertise.
- Hosting senior members of the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) to introduce academics to the opportunities for change the lie within the field of policy engagement.

By extension, the PSF investment allowed the Unit to respond to major international policy challenges, most notably through our Ukraine Recovery Project in response to the Royal Society's 2023 Ukraine Recovery conference.



In so doing, we mobilised a coalition of 50 senior researchers across all faculties and produced a comprehensive report outlining DMU's potential contributions to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

This was the first collective university response to this initiative in the UK.

The value and impact of PSF extends beyond its financial support where it also served as a catalyst for institutional change in how our university now approaches policy engagement. At DMU, PSF has enabled us to demonstrate that policy impact is not merely an ancillary benefit of research but a core mission that deserves a dedicated funding infrastructure.

The Policy Unit now stands as tangible evidence that with targeted support like PSF, universities can bridge the traditional gap between research excellence and policy impact. For us at the DMU Policy Unit, PSF represents not just funding, but validation that policy engagement deserves institutional prioritisation. As we progress in developing our policy infrastructure, I maintain that policy engagement is a key impetus for universities to fulfil their civic responsibilities and drive societal progress through research.

Key Activities Funded

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Training and capacity building | ✓ Seed funding |
| ✓ Policy briefings or evidence products | ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars |
| ✓ Impact enhancement | ✓ Relationship and network building |



Establishing strategic approaches at the University of York

The Policy Support Fund (PSF) has been instrumental in establishing a strategic approach to academic-policy engagement at the University of York. It enabled the introduction of The York Policy Engine (TYPE) - a dedicated, strategic unit that connects researchers with policymakers to ensure that academic evidence generated at York informs real-world decisions. PSF has significantly strengthened the University of York's ability to ensure that research evidence drives real-world impact and delivers tangible benefits for public good.

Using Policy Support Fund to support delivery of policy engagement and impact activities

Building Capacity

TYPE has developed a capacity building portfolio catering for all career stages. Since April 2023, 364 colleagues from 38 departments/school/centres and 11 directorates have taken part in training, totalling 2,350 hours of training. We have developed our own Policy Academy that runs annually over 9 months involving 25 staff from across the university. We have also provided capacity building opportunities for students, including paid roles for PGR students to work as Policy Associates, and a Policy School for postgraduate and undergraduate students. TYPE also supports individuals and teams to amplify their evidence through tailored support in their policy activities.

Supporting the generation of evidence and engagement

TYPE has provided funding and support for 30+ policy engagement projects in the last 2 years across the three faculties at York (Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences). This use of PSF has enabled TYPE to support the development of high-quality evidence to influence policy, grow capacity and confidence to engage with policymakers, and support staff to build networks and partnerships beyond the institution. Through PSF, we have also established four Policy Research Groups - Cost of Living; Law and Process; Child Mental Health and the Creative Industries.





These groups bring together cross-disciplinary expertise to address current policy issues, particularly at regional and national levels. TYPE helps convene these groups, catalyse activity, and elevate the visibility and impact of their evidence.


Networks and Partnerships


TYPE is building York's reputation as a trusted voice in the policy landscape, regionally and nationally in particular. Central to this effort is the development of strong networks and partnerships. A core part of our portfolio is to foster systematic, long-term engagement with the civil service at local, regional, and national levels - in particular we have developed a successful collaboration with the Darlington Economic Campus. TYPE plays a coordinating role in the University's contribution to many key regional initiatives, such as the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement Research Network, the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership, the Bradford Health Determinants Research Collaboration, and the Born in Bradford Centre for Social Change at York. TYPE also works with the Mayor of York & North Yorkshire and the Combined Authority to align priorities with the University's research strengths.

Key Activities Funded

 Training and capacity building

 Impact enhancement

 Seed funding

 Relationship and network building



Establishing a policy engagement network at the University of Oxford

“The Policy Support Fund (PSF) has been key to the development of the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN), as a growing community of more than 1,200 research professionals in more than 50 departments at the University of Oxford.

It has kick-started and enabled longer-term collaboration with policy professionals across and outside the UK, including via a dedicated OPEN Seed Fund and Public Policy Challenge Fund, and production of videos showcasing engagement involving researchers in different disciplines, at different career stages, and in different policy areas. The PSF has also allowed the University's Policy Engagement Team to pilot and scale up an innovative approach to learning and development: the OPEN Peer Mentoring Scheme.

In 2021, in partnership with the UK Civil Service Policy Profession Unit, the team began to explore the potential benefits to be derived from matching research and policy professionals at similar career stages, and supporting them for up to six months as peer mentors.

As a pilot, four researchers from medical and social sciences, as well as the humanities, were matched with four policy professionals from two government departments.

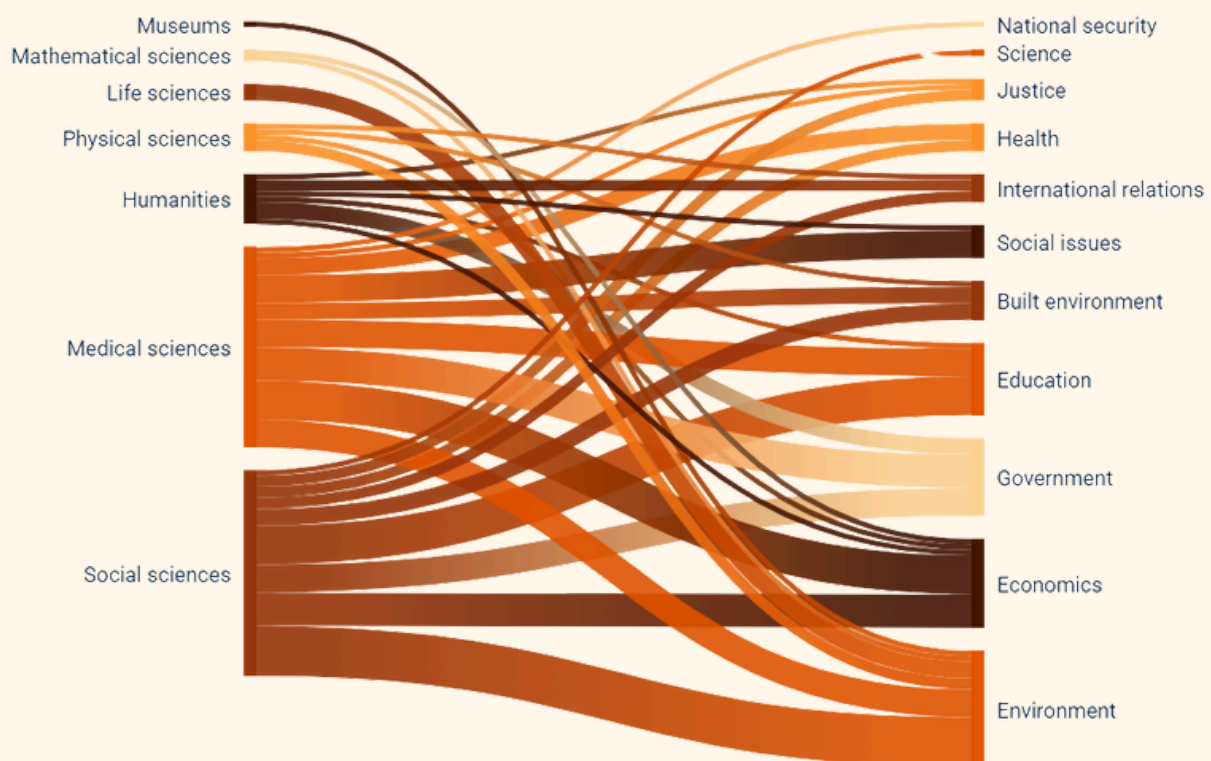
Following an initial cohort-gathering, the pairs agreed objectives; pursued these in monthly 1:1 meetings; explored shared challenges with other participants via online drop-in meetings; and reconvened to share their experiences. They reported a range of benefits, including deeper understanding of the interplay between research and policy; increased confidence for subsequent engagement; expansion of networks; and improved mentoring skills.

Learning from this pilot, the team has since expanded the scheme, and now supports two cohorts of 30 peer mentors each year, extending eligibility to policy professionals outside the Civil Service, and offering additional networking opportunities.



Many pairs still have different research and policy interests, but the team is also running a cohort in partnership with the Oxford Climate Research Network, matching participants with closely aligned interests. Most participants are still early-to-mid-career, but several senior participants have also benefited. The team is also exploring options for widening participation to research and policy professionals in other organisations.

To date, more than 170 research and policy professionals have taken part. The figure below illustrates the diversity of research disciplines and policy areas in which they work.



Key Activities Funded

- ✓ Training and capacity building
- ✓ Seed funding

- ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars
- ✓ Relationship and network building



Providing dedicated expertise at the University of Southampton

Policy Support Fund allowed the unit to move from a generalist approach to policy engagement support to a specialist approach, and facilitated the growth of 4 new posts in the team.

PSF has enabled the university to invest in institutional capacity to support policy engagement and impact, via the Public Policy | Southampton initiative. Four new specialist policy officers, each associated with a faculty or interdisciplinary research centre, were appointed. This enabled the university to enhance the visibility of policy relevant research being conducted and provided greater insight between government departments, agencies and researchers. It also provided a named point of contact for researchers within the university to come to with applications for funding and existing projects for additional support.

Additionally, PSF enabled the commissioning of an independent evaluation of a key policy engagement programme policy roundtables. This allowed the university to further hone its offer to civil servants and policy actors.

Policy Support Funding was also used over the past 3 years to provide seed-funding opportunities, through the 'New Things Fund', to researchers designed to stimulate policy engagement and facilitate the building of networks, relationships, skills and knowledges of researchers in policy engagement. This funding has supported on work related to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Cost of Living, Place, and Areas of Research Interest.

Impact

There were significant increases in funding in comparison to the NTF original funding amount demonstrating the potential impact of initial funding by PPS influencing future funding bids. For example, a project led by Ian Williams saw funding increase from the NTF amount of £7500 to his project on Sustainable heterogeneous e-textiles for imperceptible human interfaces (SUSTAIN) receiving funding of over £7m.



Another example of a large increase in funding after the initial funding bid contributed by the NTF was Preeti Dhuria whose original NTF project received just under £7500 led to her ECON project expanding and being built upon, eventually receiving over £1m; a percentage increase of 18532%. The NTF project also led to the PI being invited to deliver evidence at the House of Lords Select Committees in November 2019 and March 2024.

Further impact from our most recent New Things Fund included researchers Such as Ingi Iusmen, whose project “Impacts of Age Assessment for Child Refugees’ Asylum Pathways and Mental Health,” was able to building a trust-based working relation with key stakeholders, that supported the Nuffield bid and the creation of new contacts amongst relevant politicians (Lord Dubs, Baroness Lister, MP Tony Vaughan) and key immigration officials (David Bolt and David Neale, current and former independent chief inspector of borders and immigration).

Key Activities Funded

- ✓ Training and capacity building
- ✓ Policy briefings or evidence products
- ✓ Impact enhancement
- ✓ Seed funding
- ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars
- ✓ Relationship and network building



Case Studies: Strengthening place- based evidence- policy processes



Building regional collaborations and capacity at the University of Leeds

“Policy Support Funding (PSF) has allowed the University of Leeds to deepen and broaden its collaborations with regional partners. A key part of this has been work with Leeds City Council (LCC) to develop local Areas of Research Interest.”

Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) were first implemented in Government in 2017 after the 2015 Nurse Review of Research Councils. Supported by the University of Leeds, Leeds City Council developed their first ARI in 2022.

The University has since awarded 18 LCC ARI projects directing just over £1m of PSF funding at addressing LCC policy knowledge needs and so improve the lives of people in Leeds. The funding further supported the placement of a University of Leeds knowledge mobiliser in LCC to embed ARI as a way of working.

‘Our approach [with Leeds City Council] has allowed us to foster cohorts of projects that learn and support each other whilst creating a strong network that works together collaboratively’

University of Leeds

The funding has also underpinned work with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), contributed to the delivery of the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement Research Network, and their recent childcare provision system review to inform WYCA’s new Local Growth Plan.

Work targeted at national policy has led to the establishment of a Climate Evidence Unit, an influential year-long campaign with N8 Child of the North for a ‘child first government’, and work that has supported getting cuckooing included as a criminal offence in the upcoming Crime and Policing Bill.

The PSF has also underpinned building policy engagement capacity at the University. The University worked with the Institute for Government to develop a course to be delivered in-house that has offered training to 150 participants so far.



Mark Reed was commissioned to write an accompanying handbook that formed the basis for his new book 'The Researcher's Guide to Influencing Policy', sharing the learning more widely.

Furthermore, a 2022/23 evaluation of the University of Leeds's policy engagement funding found that PSF facilitated researchers to 'learn by doing'. Even projects that did not fully achieve their original objectives upskilled researchers and led to more targeted future engagements and research.

Key Activities Funded

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Training and capacity building | ✓ Seed funding |
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| ✓ Impact enhancement | ✓ Relationship and network building |



Supporting policy-responsive activity at Nottingham Trent University

The funding provides a clear pathway for undertaking this work and maximising the value of research undertaken by colleagues. It also works well with Nottingham Civic Exchange to add additional capacity to their work and partnerships helping to leverage additional resource to engage partners and staff to work together.

NTU has developed a culture of policy focused research and engagement which can be seen through our partnerships and programmes of work and through our internal funded Policy Engagement Group (one of our KE professional networks) which helps connect policy curious staff together to make a wider and deeper impact.

At Nottingham Trent University, PSF is administered through the Institute for Knowledge Exchange Practice. Primarily, the institute uses the funding in three ways:

- Rapid Response Fund: colleagues can apply for a small amount of funding to facilitate policy-related activities and opportunities that arise throughout the year.
- Follow-on Funding: Previously approved projects can apply for up to £4k to further develop or implement policy related activities.

Large scale, multi-actor policy events: Working through the Universities for Nottingham Civic partnership, Nottingham Expert Advisory Panel and targeted strategic activity with civic, policy and research partners.


Below are a set of examples of activities supported through PSF include:


- a highly successful event that brought together key national, regional and local partners to support suicide prevention with and surrounding the secure estate. This programme brought together research and expertise to help translate lessons from prisons and secure environments into probation settings. It has helped to galvanise approaches and develop strategy building on a long-term secondment partnership between NTU and HMPPS.




- Helping to develop policy solutions to labour exploitation through the feasibility testing of local licensing on non-compliant and unlawful had car washes which is currently informing the Employment Rights Bill and development of the Fair Work Agency.
- Helping to understand and tackle river health in chalk streams by supporting staff to bring the evidence to key partners so that together they could shape national policy guidance on river health
- Working with a national charity to develop evidence-based resources to understand the difference between banter and bullying and using these resources to inform Anti-Bullying Week and schools' guidance.

Key Activities Funded

 Training and capacity building

 Policy briefings or evidence products

 Seed funding



Case Studies: Widening researcher engagement with public policy



Expanding institutional policy engagement at the University of Cambridge



Through PSF, we have the ability to respond to rapidly developing projects through seed funds and are able to support the development of long term projects through our infrastructure building programmes.

QR PSF has enabled the Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP) to evolve its 'policy demand-led' approach. Through funding additional knowledge exchange staff, the Centre has been able to develop relationships and intelligence over several years and harness these to help researchers gain skills and knowledge for policy engagement.

PSF funding has supported dedicated policy engagement staff for Biological Sciences & the Clinical School; Physical Sciences & Technology and Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. It has also supported improved coordination with the university's central Impact and Knowledge Exchange, Public Engagement and Cambridge Enterprise teams as well as central teams in research facilitation in the Schools.

CSaP has created a Policy Engagement Network as a sub-group of the University Knowledge Exchange Network, with bulletins, events and training being devised for the researchers and professional staff signing up across all Schools.

This work has enabled the university to focus more strategically on policy engagement activities and the potential for policy impact. It has also supported a scoping exercise which has helped the university to frame our future activities and support a shift in institutional strategy in the area.



Impact

CSaP has worked with the Cambridge Reproduction Strategic Research Initiative to organise two Policy Workshops in 2022 and 2023 on stem cell-based embryo models, which are useful for researchers studying some of the processes that happen in early embryo development, as well as exploring drug development and toxicology studies.

The workshops included key individuals from all the major regulators with an interest in this research area.

This fed into the recommendation of a science policy briefing on human stem cell-based embryo models, through a longlist consultation and discussion with science advisers at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. This resulted in the publication of a [POSTnote](#) by POST (February 2024), highlighting the emerging technology, research opportunities, legislative and regulatory gaps and ethical challenges where new legislation/regulation may be needed. Drawing on outputs from the two workshops and interactions with scientists, legal experts, bioethicists, funders, regulators and policy makers. The POSTnote cites the Cambridge research groups' work and lists some of the researchers as key contributors, who reviewed the science policy briefing.

In addition to this impact and legislative scrutiny engagement, Cambridge Reproduction published the 'SCBEM Code of Practice' in July 2024.

Key Activities Funded

- ✓ Training and capacity building
- ✓ Impact enhancement

- ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars
- ✓ Relationship and network building



Widening engagement at the University of Bath



Without Policy Support Funds we would not have been able to set up the Policy Engagement Academy. The Policy Support Fund has enabled the university to pilot a Bath Policy Engagement Academy to strengthen institutional policy engagement and impact.

The Bath Policy Engagement Academy (BPEA) at the University of Bath has four key aims:

- Unify and enhance policy engagement training, and activities across the UoB
- Expand UoB policy engagement impact regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- Support successful external policy fellowship applications and research bids.
- Provide a clear entry point for senior policymakers to access UoB expertise.

The PSF has also supported institutional capacity for policy engagement by enabling additional staff resources and an open funding call for academic policy research projects. The funding enables research that can have a meaningful impact on policy at all levels. The money has been allocated to cover a range of costs, including research staff time and travel, in order to be able to inform policy development and implementation.

The funding has also provided a basis for academics at the university to work with new organisations, leading to further collaborations.

Overall, the Policy Support Fund continues to be of significant value to the University of Bath and has provided focused and accelerated opportunities for researchers to enhance the impact of their research. The funding of the BPEA has enabled the development of new initiatives at the UoB, such as working strategically with colleagues in the Research Impact Services to support REF Impact Case Studies, as well as to increase academic-policy engagement activities and impact, boost policy engagement training provision and participation, drive continued high-level policy engagement with senior policymakers, and support greater and more impactful evidence-informed policy at the regional and central government levels.



Impact

A research project evaluating the success of a policy to provide free period products in Nepali schools worked with provincial-level government and other stakeholders to improve menstrual policies. One outcome from the project has been national radio appearances for the Nepali partner, including a weekly radio show about menstruation, organised by the Secretary of the Social Development Secretary from the Ministry of Health and Social Development in Gandaki Province.

Key Activities Funded

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Training and capacity building | ✓ Seed funding |
| ✓ Policy briefings or evidence products | ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars |
| ✓ Impact enhancement | ✓ Relationship and network building |



Supporting institutional strategy at UCL

The Policy Support Fund has enabled UCL to build institutional capacity, strengthen infrastructures for policy engagement, and go beyond individual projects, allowing for coordinated, strategic, and scalable programmes aligned with UCL’s institutional policy priorities and Research England’s academic-policy engagement goals.

Expanding UCL’s Policy Mobility Programme

QR-PSF supported the appointment of a dedicated coordinator, enabling the growth of our fellowship scheme. This has enhanced strategic partnerships with local and national policy bodies (including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Greater London Authority and the UK Parliament) and increased opportunities for academics and policymakers to participate in fellowships. [Read more about the impacts of our Parliamentary Fellowship Scheme](#)

Strengthening Public Policy Engagement Infrastructure

Dedicated staff resources and a structured programme of knowledge exchange activities have significantly improved UCL’s capacity to provide and scale opportunities for academic-policy engagement.

These include the [UCL Policy Commission on Cost of Living Crisis](#), the [British Academy collaboration on AI and the Future of Work and Engagement with DSIT on AI and Young People](#), as well as our three-year Programme with [Local Government Association Net Zero Innovation Programme](#)



Investing in Research Capabilities and Policy Impact

Creating a Policy Impact Accelerator fund to drive policy-focused REF activities has catalysed a range of academic-policy engagement outcomes, from introducing new ways to engage in policy debate on contested monuments to establishing international networks on regional income inequality policies to building capacities and informing policy around pregnancy loss for health care professionals.

[Read how this work is being received](#)

UCL's survey of recipients found that 84% stated: "the policy engagement would not have happened without the funding". In comparison, 16% "would have proceeded on a smaller scale". Read more on [supporting UK government international work on strengthening the rule of law](#)

Supporting Strategic, Place-Based Initiatives

Through UCL's 'Regional and Local Communities' programme, PSF funding has facilitated partnerships with five local and regional authorities.

These collaborations focus on enhancing local data capabilities for policymaking, aiming to inform regional and national policy around data provision and use. Likewise, UCL worked with UCL's London boroughs and the London university sector, strengthening local engagement and relationships. [Learn more about Centre for Health and Care Equity](#)

Key Activities Funded

- ✓ Training and capacity building
- ✓ Policy briefings or evidence products
- ✓ Impact enhancement
- ✓ Seed funding
- ✓ Roundtables, workshops or seminars
- ✓ Relationship and network building



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About UPEN

UPEN (the Universities Policy Engagement Network) champions **academic-policy engagement** to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking in the UK.

UPEN provides a national interface between universities and public policy actors. It offers a '**one stop shop**' for UK governments and legislatures to communicate their evidence needs and engagement opportunities with academic researchers and universities.

UPEN helps to **mobilise academic research to inform public policymaking**. UPEN also provides a forum for knowledge exchange and **shared learning** between academics, policy actors and professional services staff.

UPEN was set up in 2018 by a small group of UK universities and now has more than 120 members.

UPEN's activities include:

- a weekly UPEN newsletter
- a regular events programme and blog
- curating resources on academic-policy engagement
- an annual conference
- sub-committees and communities of practice on particular aspects of academic-policy engagement

UPEN also works to generate collaborative academic-policy engagement opportunities and to build collective awareness of key policy priorities amongst our network.

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