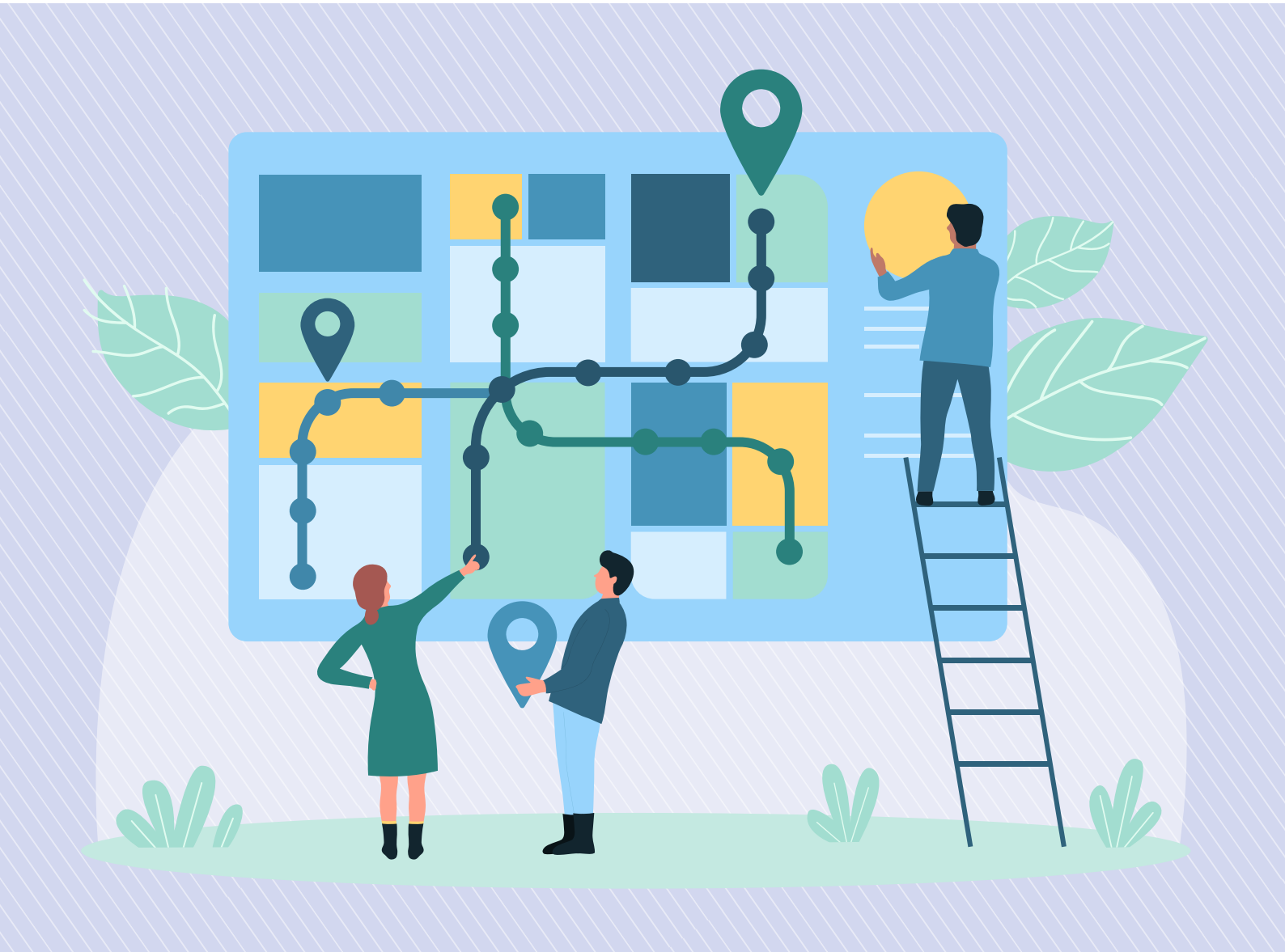
Growing a university policy engagement function: Towards better models, methods, and measures of success



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CAPE

About CAPE

CAPE is a knowledge exchange and research project funded by Research England that explores how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals across the higher education sector. CAPE's resources have been co-developed across the CAPE consortium and using practice-based experience.

Our toolkits, guides and reports are designed so that they can be adaptable and operable for diverse contexts and tailored needs across universities and policy organisational systems. Our CAPE resources are intended as a starting point that we hope will help both to navigate some common challenges in academic policy engagement and to inspire new and deeper ways of engaging. We welcome feedback on all our resources if you've used them to inform your own practice.

Contents

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Executive Summary – key considerations

This report outlines a range of considerations to inform any university seeking to grow a university policy engagement function. There are 17 considerations to consider:

WHAT MODELS OF STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP AND FUNDING?

1. **Make a principled as well as pragmatic case.** The principled case for a university-wide policy function includes not being dominated by the 'usual suspects' and using all expertise for Equalities/Equities, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). The pragmatic case includes helping on UK Research Excellence Framework performance.
2. **Consider the four types of policy function.** Will you be the: policy impact support office; knowledge broker; policy evidence producer; and the demand-led relationship builders (Durrant & MacKillop, 2022) or a combination? Is there value in sitting more semi-detached, sitting outside central university structures (Breckon & Boaz, 2023)?
3. **Recruit and develop staff with competencies in the 'third space' of policy and academia.** Even if you do have resources for a big team that can cover all engagement practices, the challenge for knowledge exchange staff is that they need skills, reputation, and confidence to bridge the 'two communities' (Caplan, 1979) of policy and academia.
4. **Have champions within the senior leadership.** Having leadership buy-in and a close relationship to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor or senior management is a crucial part of success. They may also be able to provide discretionary funds and support for innovation and growth.
5. **Grow a 'mixed economy' of diversified funding.** Consider diverse funding sources – including consultancy, dedicated UKRI policy funds, and funding from foundations - rather than rely on a single source of public money that may stop and not enable enough resource for impact.
6. **Be part of coalitions and consortia.** Inter-university partnerships are not only needed for many funding opportunities, consortia are also needed because policy organisations increasingly want one-stop shops for policy expertise.

WHAT METHODS OF POLICY ENGAGEMENT?

7. **Beware the downsides of prioritising policy themes.** Picking priority areas should be starting points only, and there needs to be some wriggle room for opportunities for impact in fast-moving and unpredictable policy windows. Although having policy priorities gives the advantage of focusing finite resources and avoiding being too thinly spread.
8. **Keep a geographic focus.** Some policy engagement bodies have benefitted from a tight geographical focus on the sub-UK level, particularly universities providing scientific and research advice to new mayoral combined authorities and local government, or those working with devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

9. **Define and map your audiences.** Despite the challenges of picking policy themes, it is still necessary to pick some target audiences and not be too thinly spread. No institution has the time and resources to chase after every audience at any scale. Target audiences should also include arms-length bodies, NGOs and think-tanks, business and trade bodies, and 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) like nurses, psychologists, and social workers.
10. **Do not rely on dissemination methods alone to inform and influence policy.** In isolation, drafting policy briefings and other dissemination is unlikely to be sufficient to improve evidence use within real-world policymaking environments. Although, they can be a useful ingredient within a cocktail of engagement measures.
11. **Build capacity and support relational policy engagement.** Consider academic skills development, training, secondments, and networking. However, training and capacity-building must be closely embedded within real-world policy challenges and favour experiential action-based learning, including policy fellowships inside public bodies.
12. **Recognise and address the wider research-policy system.** A policy function in a university should look at the wider environment and culture of support, and the wider research-policy ecosystem, including supporting system-level approaches like Areas of Research Interest.

WHAT WAYS TO MEASURE ENGAGEMENT?

13. **Monitor and plan 'rigour' in policy engagement.** In 2029, the research assessment exercise will give greater emphasis to showing 'rigour' in policy engagement, to sit alongside 'reach' and 'significance'. Policy functions can help plan and capture case studies and statements to show 'rigour' in EDI, ethics, and best practice in knowledge exchange.
14. **More learning and sharing about the *process* of policy engagement.** Consider creating formal learning structures, such as peer-to-peer networks, mentors, embedded action-learning, and university-wide communities of practice to share knowledge.
15. **Use frameworks and Theories of Change.** Consider setting up a formal structure to think about engagement and impact. For example, Theory of Change, Logical Framework Analysis, Payback Framework, and other logic models. Indicators may be used prospectively during planning as milestones and targets, and then retrospectively to see if planned impacts were achieved.
16. **Finding more innovative and user-friendly tools.** To ease the administrative burden of measurement, think about using various platforms to help capture impact, like Overton or Researchfish. Consider finding more innovative types of impact (as long as they are not overly bureaucratic to measure).
17. **Learn from others.** To help plan effective engagement strategies, there may be existing lessons and strategies that can be learnt from others, including from other disciplines or countries. The bibliography and research in this report offers a synthesis of research on 'what works'.

Introduction

This report identifies current and recent effective practice in policy engagement from a university setting.

It is intended to provide a suite of options for academic-policy engagement activities and processes that we hope is useful for any university seeking to grow a university policy engagement function. We hope that it can support universities who are exploring potential models for university policy engagement centres.

It is aimed at any university leader, academic, funder, or professional support officer seeking to set up a new centre or expand an existing one. The focus is predominantly UK – but we learned important insights from interviews with experts in Australia, Canada, the EU, and the US.

We recognise that this report sits within a wider discussion currently underway within higher education and its core purposes across research; teaching and learning; and engagement, and the pressing nature of financial considerations in delivery and planning for universities.

Methods and approach

Although there is no magic formula and every centre will differ in scale, location, focus, and strategy, there are some common lessons for all. These lessons were gathered as part of a six-month Policy Fellowship based at Northumbria University for CAPE (Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement). CAPE is a knowledge exchange and research project funded by Research England that explores how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals across the higher education sector.

The report was informed by:

- interviews with 34 individuals from the UK, overseas (Australia, Canada, EU, New Zealand, and the US), including leaders of other university policy units, or government and public policy professionals (in Westminster, Whitehall, and UK local government). For a full list of external interviewees see Appendix A;
- interviews with 37 academics and staff within Northumbria University, including: 18 senior academics (e.g. professor) with impact leadership roles; 8 research-enabling staff (e.g. senior executives or research support staff); 3 mid-career academics (e.g. lecturer); 5 early career researchers (e.g. recent PhD completion); and a
- review of academic and grey literature on university and policy engagement, with a focus on action-orientated research, frameworks, and systematic reviews, e.g. on what works in enabling policy influence (see Bibliography).

Making the case

When thinking about how to grow a policy engagement centre, it is worth going back to why centralised support is needed in the first place. The reasons for university-wide policy support are both pragmatic and principled. The principled case - or as one interviewee called it, 'the moral case' - includes a university-wide responsibility as a civic university and anchor institution. Universities have responsibilities to their communities and host localities (UPP Foundation, 2019). As institutions, they can impact upon their local economies, job creation, skills, research and development. Supporting local policy and public services can be part of that commitment to host localities. Relying on individual academics may not be enough to nurture local and regional policy engagement. University-wide support may be needed.

There is also a 'moral case' for not relying on 'brilliant individuals doing brilliant things' (senior manager, UK university). This group was perceived as often being dominated by senior, established academics who were 'white, middle-class and middle-aged people' (Interviewee, senior academic, UK university). A centralised policy engagement support function in a university can have a crucial Equalities/Equities, Diversity, and Inclusion role (EDI), according to external interviewees, in ensuring that the 'pipeline' is more diverse - through training, mentoring, support, and breaking down (where possible) barriers to engagement from within the system itself (Universities and Policy Engagement Network, 2021).

Another aspect of the 'moral case' is that decision-making can be improved by academic expertise – and we need to make the most of vast and increasing investment in knowledge production (Oliver & Boaz, 2019). Policy centres can help meet the demand for research by policymakers and harness the full impact of the research base (Reid & Chaytor, 2022). In a time of increased political polarisation worldwide, and when the value of evidence/expertise/research is questioned, it has become increasingly crucial that universities can demonstrate that they're helping to improve lives through policymaking.

In addition to these 'moral' arguments, academics themselves value support for policy engagement. According to Vitae's academic researcher survey, 63% of UK researchers say that they would like to get more involved in public policy development – but do not have the skills and support to do so (VITAE, 2023). Influencing policy and public services could be a 'personal driver' for researchers and 'one of the reasons they get up in the morning… to make the world a better place' (Interviewee, advisor on academic/policy engagement support). A 2022 survey of academics by CAPE said they found public policy engagement 'rewarding and intellectually stimulating' (Parker, 2022).

As well as these principled reasons, there are also pragmatic issues of funding or the next research assessment exercise; a significant quantity of engagement income (25% of next UK Research Excellence Framework - REF) is likely to be driven by policy engagement work. Many other public funders or foundations put a high value on seeing policy impact.

A university-wide policy engagement support function - with impact guidance, training, and knowledge brokering - can help nurture REF performance, and, for example, 'nudge an impact case study' (head of UK university policy engagement unit) from a lower to a higher rating. Relying on a small pool of talented individuals runs counter to the REF priority of recognising the breadth of people, culture, and environment (Research England, 2023). It is possible that there will no longer be such a bias towards individual star policy engagement academics.

These are some of pragmatic and principled cases for a policy support function. The rest of the report sets out how to develop a centre.

Structure

The first section sets out practical advice on the organisation of different models of policy engagement centres – including tips on where to find sustainable funding, the types of skills and leadership needed, and target audiences. The second section focuses more on methods: what policy engagement practices such centres should prioritise, such as policy briefings, meetings, and more systemic evidence infrastructure. Finally, the challenges of trying to capture and measure success are covered.

Part One: University Policy Centre Models: Types, Leadership, and Funding

How should a policy engagement centre be organised? According to research by the Wales Centre for Public Policy (Durrant & MacKillop, 2022), there are four models of university-based policy centre.

The:

- policy impact support office;
- knowledge broker;
- the policy evidence producers; and
- the demand-led relationship builder (see Table 1.1 below).

Their names are numerous, including @policy, hub, centre, and lab. Some focus on specific disciplines and themes, while others focus on helping the whole university (Durrant & MacKillop, 2022) - or are more semi-detached, sitting outside central university structures (Breckon & Boaz, 2023). But what unites them all is the desire to improve university policy engagement, and a desire to move beyond a laissez-faire approach with isolated pockets of excellence in policy work, towards something more sustained, strategic, and university wide.

Table 1.1:
Four types of university policy engagement body (adapted from Durrant & MacKillop, 2022)

Type	Core dimensions of activity	Staff background	Strategies and tools
Type 1: The policy impact support office *e.g. University of Edinburgh KE and Impact Team*	Support REF impact case studies Dedicated support for academics to develop and deliver research pathways to impact Academic capacity-building	Professional services staff	Track research impact Desk-based stakeholder mapping Policy engagement toolkits and training, e.g. writing for policymakers
Type 2: The knowledge brokers *e.g. Public Policy| Southampton*	Nurture and build relationships with policymakers to understand demand Identify points of policy intervention for select university research Capacity-building of academic staff beyond training, e.g. mentoring	Former civil servants or policy advisors Professional services staff 'Hybrid staff' with expertise and academic backgrounds/PhDs and policy expertise	Elevate university research through networks Design and deliver policy–research interactions and coach academics in policy engagement Policy engagement toolkits and training, e.g. writing for policymakers

Type	Core dimensions of activity	Staff background	Strategies and tools
Type 3: The policy evidence producers *e.g. Institute for Policy Research, Bath*	Nurture and build relationships with policymakers to shape demand Produce research based on identified and future policy needs (short to mid-term horizon) Raise policy awareness of research and develop feedback loops	Former civil servants or policy advisors Senior academics and postdoctoral researchers	Elevate university research through networks Research programme directly addressing policy relevant questions In-depth interaction mechanisms, such as fellowships, masterclasses, postgraduate programmes, and secondments
Type 4: The demand-led relationship builders *e.g. Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff*	Establish close relationships with policymakers to directly respond to demand Multiple mechanisms for on-going interaction with policy Engagement with wider evidence community	Former civil servants or policy advisors Former think tank/ consultancy staff Senior academics	Demand-led research programme responding to an articulated demand for evidence Open dialogue events, meetings, roundtables, etc. often behind-closed-doors Mobilise evidence and knowledge in context

In practice, many interviewees discussed working across all four types outlined in Table 1.1., rather than fitting neatly into one. But the four are helpful archetypes for seeing the kinds of models universities are using – and for thinking through the considerations for growing a policy evidence centre set out below.

Cultivate staff in a 'third space' of policy and academic skills

A university policy engagement centre will need people with skills, knowledge, and backgrounds that cut across a vast array of potential activities, from technical procedural knowledge regarding legislation, to more public relations and translation skills to hone a punchy policy briefing.

The potential range of knowledge brokering activities required can be very broad (see Appendix B for list of policy engagement practices). To help staff reflect on the diverse mix of competencies needed, the European Commission Joint Research Centre has created a 'Smart4policy' tool.

Even if you do have resources for a big team that can cover all these practices, the challenge for knowledge exchange staff is that they need to be comfortable and credible bridging the 'two communities' (Caplan, 1979) of policy and academia. The traditional distinction between academic and administrative staff in universities (two professional spaces, in other words) no longer captures the growing number of staff who operate at the intersection of both research and management – a 'third space' (Flinders & Chaytor, 2021).

The communities of policy and academia don't just have different skills and knowledge. They can have fundamentally opposing 'opinions, values, interests, goals, or agendas' (Neal et al., 2023, p. 102). The university policy centre needs to navigate through this tension, and nurture 'trust building, sense making, and conflict resolution' (Berdej & Armitage, 2016, p. 2) and be able to deploy a wide range of 'everyday practices and crafts' to ensure that research evidence can applied to 'real-world' challenges (Durrant et al., 2023).

One staffing model is to recruit advisors or leaders who have a background in policy. Previous experience in (local, devolved or national) government may bring the tacit knowledge of how to 'navigate the labyrinth' and the 'unwritten rules' (Friedman, 2021) of the policy field.

In the interviews for this report, examples were shared of universities that had recruited former senior civil servants (e.g. Director-level) or elected officials (e.g. former MPs), or special policy advisers (e.g. Special Advisors to Ministers) to leadership positions, including as deans, heads of university policy hubs, senior advisers, or as professors of practice (see Table 1.2 below).

Table 1.2: Policy engagement leads in other universities with policy backgrounds

Name	Current university role in policy engagement	Former/current policy post
Mike Baker	Senior Advisor External Engagement, York Policy Engine, York University	Former senior civil servant, including executive leadership roles in HMRC and DWP
Dr Mark Bennister	Associate Professor of Politics/ Director of The Lincoln Policy Hub, Lincoln University	Former Executive Officer at the Australian High Commission and a parliamentary researcher
Dan Bristow	Director (Policy and Practice), Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University	Former Senior Policy Adviser, Cabinet Office
Professor John Denham	Director Southern Policy Centre, Professorial Research Fellow, Southampton University	Former Labour MP for East Hitchin and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Professor Stephen Gethins	Professor of Practice in International Relations, St Andrews University	Former SNP MP for North East Fife
Professor Graham Roy	Dean of External Engagement and Deputy Head of College (Social Sciences College Senior Management), Glasgow University	Former Senior Civil Servant in the Scottish Government, where he was Head of the First Minister's Policy Unit and a Senior Economic Adviser
Stephen Meek	Director, Institute for Policy and Engagement, Nottingham University	Former Director at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Chris Millward	Professor of Practice in Educational Policy, Birmingham University	Formerly Director of Office for Students
Jane Robinson	Pro-Vice Chancellor, Engagement, Newcastle University	Former Chief Executive of Gateshead Council
Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP	Professor of Practice, Bath University	Former MP and Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research, and Innovation
Professor Nick Pearce	Director, Institute for Policy Research, Bath University	Former Director of IPPR, and Head of the No10 Downing Street Policy Unit

As well as policy experience, academic credibility is also needed - something that ex-civil servants may not have; somebody with deep knowledge of the field, and credibility amongst academics as well as policymakers. A senior academic lead (perhaps as a dean or other senior role) could add value as the head of the policy function by providing academic kudos and respect amongst colleagues, and the ability to be a named principal investigator in external funding bids for policy work.

> *'I think [having an academic background] gives you a little bit more … credibility when I'm talking to the academics. When I have those initial engagements with academics …. you can tell in their faces, they kind of soften, she knows where I'm coming from. She knows this game. She kind of understands the pressures.'*
>
> Head of university policy centre

Having a champion within the senior leadership

Having university senior leadership buy-in was regarded as important in interviews. An 'initial leap of faith (from senior university staff) that was so important' (Head of policy engagement at non-UK university) in setting up and growing a centre and 'having the vision to try something a bit different' (Head of policy engagement at non-UK university). Some interviewees shared how they had benefited from direct vice-chancellor sponsorship and discretionary funds. Durrant and Mackillop (2022) also found that almost all university policy centres referred to the role of the Vice-Chancellor or senior management in the creation of the centre.

But interviewees shared how challenging it could be to find the right location for the policy function amongst senior leadership. There was a wide range of governance and line management arrangements in universities. Some position policy engagement under the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Research, others under PVCs with external facing responsibilities (e.g. knowledge exchange, impact, enterprise, partnership, business, public engagement), and others under deputy PVCs, associate deans, deans, and others.

Another challenge was that PVCs and associated posts in other universities have 'more and more stuff lumped on their plate' that can mean 'policy engagement gets lost' (Policy engagement lead, UK university). Getting their attention for policy engagement could be hard. But wherever you sat in the formal university management structures, the important thing was having a close relationship with a senior champion, a leader with the capacity and capability to champion your policy engagement cause.

Grow a 'mixed economy' of diversified funding

Policy engagement centres shared a range of different funding models. Some had secured single sources of public or philanthropic money. Others had UKRI or other public sector grants for specific projects. One recommended funding model was to have a more diversified 'mixed economy'. This would create additional funding streams and avoid the danger of relying on one source of funding (such as the UKRI Policy Support Fund).

Box 1.1 The City-Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI)

City-REDI was established in 2015 with over £4m of University of Birmingham direct investment to address the gap in interacting and supporting local partners. It has gone on to be the largest university-based institute dedicated to studying regional economic growth and adopting a civic purpose.

With over 30 staff, and over £2m turnover a year, they have a broad portfolio of policy focussed research projects driving academic impact. Because city-regions are complex, integrated, and unique economic, political, and social systems, they work on policy interventions customised to this scale. This requires a much deeper understanding of how regions evolve along specific pathways than we currently have.

Funding for City-REDI came initially from leadership at the University of Birmingham in the form of discretionary investment funds in 2015. Then, alongside a range of other funders including ESRC, AHRC, foundations, regional and national stakeholders, there was a large Research England Development Fund award in 2019 to establish the consortium underpinning the West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute (WMREDI) within City-REDI.

The idea for City-REDI came from local partners working with the university senior management, including the chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership (then Andy Street) and local Authority Chief Executives, at a time when concern about regional inequalities across the UK (and beyond) began to grow. This concern had grown because (broadly since 2008) differences in productivity, prosperity and levels of opportunity and deprivation had also grown. These inequalities moved up the political hierarchy, recently becoming part of the 'levelling up' agenda in the UK.

City-REDI has grown to take on other roles, including running the UK's Local Policy Innovation Strategic Co-ordination Hub - funded by ESRC Innovate UK and AHRC - and the Midlands Engine Observatory in 2018 - with funding from the Midlands Engine and in partnership with the Black Country Economic Intelligence Unit and Nottingham Trent University.

'So, we don't chase one big project. We have multiple projects that, you know, keep us alive and the income coming in. We were originally set up with investment from the university for £0.6 million of nice clean money that I could match, but it was on a payback model.'

Head of UK university policy centre

One funding source discussed by interviewees was policy-research consultancy, analysis, and evaluation for government and public bodies. However, interviewees stressed that consultancy income is not without risks. There are downsides of consultancy funding in that it cannot cover full economic costing, can lead to a 'short-termism', and can be 'quite small scale' (head of university policy unit).

In response to this challenge of short-termism and consultancy insularity, one regional policymaker interviewed stressed that they had moved away from 'transactional consultancy' to a more collaborative relationship of knowledge exchange:

> *'We've definitely moved into a space of wanting to be a partner, an active partner. We want to be shaping consultancy briefs in collaboration…you're gonna get better quality outputs if you are part of that process, and you are involved.'*
>
> Senior manager regional policy organisation

Another source for the 'mixed economy' model was funds from charities and philanthropy. See Table 1.3. The funding may be relatively small compared to Quality-Related funding (the UK annual block grant provided to each university based on a review of research excellence), or the Higher Education Innovation Funding (which supports knowledge exchange), or Impact Accelerator Accounts (strategic awards for research organisations for a wide range of impact activities). But it is still a useful alternative source of funding in enabling growth in policy impact work.

Table 1.3: Policy-focused funding for universities by NGOs & foundations. NB some is funding not directly to policy centres but to other university centres

UK Foundations & NGOs	Examples of beneficiaries' policy-focused funding
Barrow Cadbury Trust	Co-funder of the Migration Observatory, Oxford University
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Co-funder of the Centre for Cultural Value, Queen Margaret University
Nuffield Foundation	Strategic Fund for LSE/Resolution Foundation
Nesta	Collective Intelligence Grants for City University
Omidyar Network	Grant for UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose
Gatsby Foundation	Cambridge Centre for Science, Technology & Innovation Policy
Health Foundation	Centre for Evidence Implementation in Adult Social Care
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Policy research projects by Manchester Metropolitan University
Motability	Inclusive Transport Evidence Centre, University of Coventry
King's Fund	Partnership with York University on rapid policy analysis
Wellcome Trust	Policy engagement pilot awards for Monash University
Wolfson Foundation	Grant for forthcoming British Academy's Gladstone Institute

Be part of coalitions and consortia

Research funders and policy audiences increasingly expect collaborative models for policy work. Inter-university partnerships are not only needed for funding - consortia are also needed because policy organisations increasingly want one-stop shops; when policymakers seek out academic expertise, they want to be directed to the leading experts in the country, not the leading experts in just one university.

> *'There's been a kind of push from the government … they don't want universities to always be competing. They want there to be places that they can go to where they can kind of get a sense of who's the best person working on this, which isn't filtered through institutional competition of like University X is the place for this, or University Y is the best place for that.'*
>
> UK academic working on policy engagement

Interviewees in the UK Parliament and in Whitehall stressed the need for coordination and active brokering between groups of universities when approaching them. Policy bodies do not have the capacity to deal with many competing university requests or submissions, such as in a response to a government inquiry. CAPE has assisted with coordination of some pilot opportunities and linkages with the University Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) are a pivotal part of sustaining joining up of opportunities.

In addition to this demand from policymakers, those engaged in policy knowledge exchange are calling for more joined-upness and cross-institutional learning, to move away from the current space of a 'vast and increasingly rudderless mass of activity' (Oliver et al., 2022), towards more coordination and central intelligence (Breckon et al., 2022).

There are of course downsides to consortia and networks. They can be time-intensive to manage and fail to have equality across all partners. Ideally, a university may gain the most benefits if they lead a consortium - having more funding and control to direct the partnership - and greater brand recognition amongst funders and universities (as long, of course, as the project is a success).

'Picking winners'? beware the downsides of prioritising policy themes

Some universities, in the UK and internationally, discussed having a thematic model with a small selection of policy priority areas. But there was no resounding endorsement of its benefits for accelerating impact. There were mixed and uncertain views on the benefits of 'picking winners' (head of UK university policy body) from interviewees (see Table 1.4 outlining the pros and cons below).

The problem is that prioritising research areas can miss opportunities for impact in fast-moving and unpredictable 'policy windows' (Kingdon, 1984). Interviewees said that university-led priority policy areas can be a hindrance and fail to adapt to rapid new urgent priority areas (e.g. Covid pandemic crisis). Agility is needed to 'strike while the irons are hot' and 'identify, create, and seize upon policy windows' (Rose et al., 2020, p. 6).

Table 1.4: Pros and cons of focusing on research areas for university/ policy engagement

PROS	CONS
STRATEGIC Aligns with institutional strategy and supports organisation-wide priorities	**NOT DEMAND-FOCUSED** Focus on certain areas misses major policy priority areas. Policymakers seek trusted individual academics, not anonymous themes
EFFICIENCY Avoids 'scattergun' approach. Allocates finite policy engagement resources (e.g. training, advice) on areas likely to have most impact	**DIFFUSION & DUPLICATION** Themes end up being too broad in order to be inclusive and multi-disciplinary. Broad topics risk duplication with other universities (e.g. many others cover Net Zero, Levelling-up, AI etc.)
EQUITY Priority themes assist EDI in having a range of people across academic careers and backgrounds. Not dominated by just individual 'usual suspects'	**EXCLUSIVITY** Demotivates other staff not prioritised. Can appear top down and contrary to academic autonomy

Policy officials interviewed were also less interested in themes. Policymakers said they wanted trusted individual academics (see Part Two on best-practice methods), not anonymous groups or university-based themes. Prioritising internal research strengths could be less responsive to external needs of policymakers. University priorities may be out of step:

> *'You want to target your resources. You want to be able to align it to what the government wants. But what the government wants changes, changes at quite a pace. As soon as you nail your colours to the mast, then you're making a fool's errand of the process.'*
>
> Head of UK university policy centre

Another disadvantage of focusing on a small group of priority areas is that it means operating in a crowded space; it is very hard to find a topic-based policy engagement USP for any university. Giving priority to grand global challenges - such as AI or Net Zero - will mean competing with many other universities, think-tanks, trade and private sector bodies. Thus prompting need for greater collaboration.

> *'The downside is if you put all your eggs in a few baskets [in priority policy areas] and then it turns out that the basket's already full of everybody else's better eggs.'*
>
> Head of university policy centre

This is not to say that there are no benefits in prioritising some research areas: it has the advantage of focusing finite resources and to avoid being too thinly spread. But themes of research excellence-should be 'starting points' only (Interviewee, senior academic) and there needs to be some wriggle room for topics that fall outside of priority topics.

Keep a geographic focus

Some policy engagement bodies have benefitted from a tight geographical focus on the sub-UK level, particularly universities providing scientific and research advice to new mayoral combined authorities and local government (Gillingham et al., 2023), or those working with devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and with a strategic priority to be a civic university (UPP Foundation, 2019).

The geographic focus did not, however, extend to international audiences. Interviewees did not think it was realistic for a centralised university

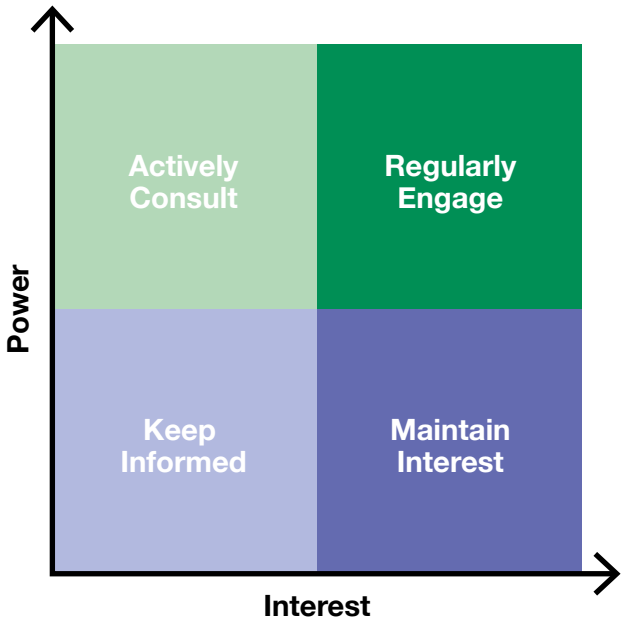
policy engagement centre to systematically target overseas governments or trans-national bodies (such as the EU, UN, or a boundary-spanning international NGOs like Amnesty International).

Whilst individual university units might be international, it was not feasible for a university-wide policy centre to support global work. Resources could not stretch that far. Realistically, geographic, and jurisdictional focus, needs to be orientated towards the UK – at either national or sub-national level.

Define and map your audiences

Despite the challenge of scale, or picking policy themes, it is still necessary to pick some target audiences and not be too thinly spread. No institution has the time and resources to chase after every audience at any scale. Interviewees shared how they had used a range of stakeholder mapping methods to prioritise audiences, such as the 2X2 power-interest grid set out below (Mendelow, 1981).

Figure 1.1: Example of power-interest grid



The matrix is a technique used to categorise stakeholders based on their power or influence and interest in a project: One dimension is power (the ability to influence an organisation's strategy or project resources); the other is interest (how interested they are in the organisation or project succeeding).

Target audiences should also include people who are not just 'making' policy, but also people delivering, scrutinising, challenging, regulating, commissioning, or training public services. These audiences are often not situated in government bodies - such as in Westminster, Whitehall, local and regional government – but in arms-length bodies (Boswell, 2018) or NGOs, think-tanks and 'evidence intermediaries' (Breckon & Boaz, 2023). Power and governance can be diffuse and 'poly-centric' (Ostrom et al., 1961) and universities may benefit from targeting professional and arms-length bodies, or local public and charitable organisations, NGOs and think-tanks, business and trade bodies, and 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) like nurses, psychologists, and social workers.

UK universities already have links with many of those groups – including training them on campus – so it would be a question of building on these relationships. A more inclusive definition of 'policy' is in line with UKRI definitions of impact as policy and public services (Research England, n.d.).

Part Two: Best Practice Methods of Academic Policy Engagement

What are the most promising methods and approaches for policy engagement? The previous section discussed how to organise a university policy centre. This section looks at the best working methods for the centre to prioritise.

Our recommendation is to use a model of three broad 'generations' of knowledge mobilisation: linear, relational, and system approaches (Best & Holmes, 2010). Policy engagement practices have been mapped on to these three generations to see if research supports these approaches (Hopkins et al., 2021), informed by a previous 2016 large systematic review and scoping study (Langer et al., 2016).

Annex B gives an overview of examples of policy-engagement practices.

First generation: Dissemination to policymakers is not enough

For the first generation, research evidence is either: pushed out from academia and turned into products such as through policy reports or digital products synthesising research findings; or pulled into policy through commissioned consultancy work or calls for evidence in consultations by Westminster or Whitehall (Hopkins et al., 2021).

In isolation, these approaches that focus only on evidence dissemination and availability - such as drafting policy briefings - are unlikely to be sufficient to improve evidence use within real-world policymaking environments (Cairney et al., 2023).

However, although dissemination may not be enough to deliver impact, it should not be ruled out: policy audiences do benefit from products such as written policy briefings. They can play a useful ingredient within a cocktail of engagement measures.

Policy briefings need to be based in rigorous and transparent synthesis methods (Royal Society & Academy of Medical Sciences, 2017), presented in a clear and accessible format, and have an obvious link to a current and pressing policy problem (Donnelly et al., 2018; Whitty, 2015).

In addition to clarity and rigour, policy briefings should consider including effective data visualisations (Harold et al., 2020), appropriately-framed evidence 'storytelling' (Davidson, 2017), and exploit 'policy windows' (Kingdon, 1984), such as publishing at the right time in the Parliamentary diary to have a chance of influencing legislation (Rose et al., 2020) regulation, implementation or practice. Universities can help prepare for policy windows by nurturing relationships with policymaker so the audience becomes 'primed' in advance of a window of opportunity (Cairney & Oliver, 2020).

Box 2.1: Policy briefings by the International Public Policy Observatory

Established at the start of the global pandemic in late 2020, the International Public Policy Observatory's (IPPO) initial focus was measures to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19. Over two years, they synthesised large bodies of evidence to explain what we knew about the impact of the pandemic on education, mental health, social capital, NHS staff wellbeing, and health misinformation, and what we could learn from these findings to inform policymaking.

IPPO produces policy-relevant briefings, ranging from short policy reports, to studies informed by systematic-review methods (Breckon et al., 2023) and these can be a vital tool when engaging policy audiences in meetings and seminars. The briefings can be produced in close partnership with policy bodies. For example, the UK Department for Education commissioned IPPO to do evidence reviews on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in education. The work was used in Spending Review bids on family policies and fed into discussions at the Education Recovery Board.

IPPO is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and is a collaboration between UCL, Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) at Cardiff University, University of Glasgow, Queen's University Belfast, the Evidence for Policy & Practice Information Centre (EPPI), International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA), and academic news publisher, The Conversation.

Sharing policy briefings in advance of the event could, according to some interviewees, be a useful means to focus attention and facilitate buy-in from policymakers. For example, one head of a university policy centre shared how useful a draft 'straw person' policy briefing was in engaging with policy audiences.

Interviewees discussed how they had organised successful policy events by collaborating closely with participants who were 'not the usual suspects', such as experts with lived experience from marginalised communities, and others from diverse backgrounds. Academics from other universities should be invited:

> *'[Inviting academics from other universities] shows you are sophisticated enough to understand the broader policy landscape and the broader stakeholders, and you can play that role in a way.'*
>
> Head of UK university policy body

The meetings need to nurture trust and a mutual understanding of language and terminology, values, beliefs, motivations, and challenges (European Commission Joint Research Centre et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2019). The event format needs to avoid being 'talked at… with death by PowerPoint' (Head of university policy body). Instead, the co-designed meeting requires a frank dialogue about what policymakers really need - to understand demand - and what the researchers can realistically offer.

Second generation: Build capacity and support relational policy engagement

For the second-generation relational category, university initiatives focus on 'building bridges to share knowledge and promote mutual understanding' (Hopkins et al., 2021, p. 344). University policy engagement centres often focus on skills development, training, secondments, and networking for this second-generational relationship-building work.

For example, the Newcastle University Policy Academy provides skills development for all staff and post-graduates via one-day Foundation Workshops. Such training can cover practical topics, like an introduction to Westminster, or how to consider a global reach, and help academics how to 'navigate around the labyrinth' of government (Friedman, 2021).

Training and skills development does not have to be done internally within the university. Several universities commission others to delivery training, such as the Open Innovation Team based in HM Government or The Knowledge Exchange Unit in Parliament.

However, training and capacity-building must be closely embedded within real-world policy challenges. According to Professor Matt Flinders, a former ESRC National Impact Champion who is working with UKRI on talent management and research culture investments, the current provision of leadership training is not what academics want:

> *'What researchers say they need but are struggling to access – especially those at the beginning of their careers – is researcher development and leadership support that is focused around specific challenges, underpinned by case studies and delivered by people that have actually gone through it themselves. The preference is for experiential learning and the opportunity to develop skills in new contexts, for the chance to join professional networks that bring them into contact with people from beyond their own institution and discipline and to foster skills in relation to co-production and co-design. High-quality and committed mentorship was by far the most common demand.'*
>
> (Flinders, 2022, p. 53)

Training needs to be less academic and more 'experiential' with close mentorship by experts – otherwise any insights may be quickly lost when trainees return to their desks. Like any effective professional training, it needs to be action-based and not standalone (Breckon, 2016).

Another means to build these skills is to work directly inside a policy body, such as through secondments or people exchange schemes. There are now a wide range of formal schemes to assist with this (see Box 2.2).

Box 2.2 : List of UK policy fellowships and secondments. NB this does not include policy fellowship activities run by individual universities.

- Scottish Parliament Fellowship Scheme
- Senedd Academic Fellowships
- British Academy Innovation Fellowships
- British Ecological Society Policy Fellowships
- CAPE Policy Fellowships
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology Expert Exchange
- Parliamentary Thematic Research Leads
- Open Innovation Team Policy Fellowships
- POST Fellowships Parliament
- Royal Society Policy Associates
- Royal Society Parliamentary Pairing Scheme
- UKRI Policy Fellowships

Some schemes can also be in the other direction – for policymakers to come into academia (see box 2.3 on the University of Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy).

Box 2.3: Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy Fellowship Programme

Established in 2009, The University of Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP) has focused on being demand-led and for valuing networks and personal relationships.

CSaP has built a particular reputation for its Policy Fellowships programme, through which senior policy officials – from Whitehall, the devolved administrations, local government, the European Commission, as well as NGOs, industry and the third sector – meet a wide range of researchers and work collaboratively to address policy problems over a two-year tenure.

The flexible and tailored programme provides policymakers with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the latest research in their field, while academics gain a better understanding of the challenges facing policymakers.

The Fellowship programme begins with five days at University, having one-to-one meetings with around 25 researchers discussing policy questions. They then follow up with suggested activities, such as organising workshops, hosting secondments, advisory roles, giving talks, collaborating on projects or new research.

Policy Fellows follow the programme with CSaP for two years, and there are follow-up monthly meetings in London, an annual conference, and other ways to stay connected, including with the network of 490 Policy Fellows – and over 1700 researchers and other experts.

The Fellowship has been rolled out to involve other affiliate universities including Bath, Southampton, Durham, Bristol, and the CAPE universities UCL, Manchester, Nottingham, and Northumbria.

Aside from the Fellowships programme, CSaP's other main method of engagement is through its workshops (around 12-15 each year) which again bring together interdisciplinary researchers and policymakers to address policy questions, and Professional Development workshops (for early career researchers and policy professionals).

However, a word of caution. While this relational work is an important bedrock of policy engagement., like dissemination, it may not be enough to have sustained impact.

> *'If it's all about relationship building, that takes resources and often if you don't have that in place, what it ends up being is a dinner here, a letter there, a kind of submission to the comprehensive spending review at the last minute, which anyone who works in policy will tell you doesn't work, it just bounces off.'*
>
> Head of UK university policy regional body

If the relationship-building work is scatter-gun and superficial, such as through countless conversations with policymakers or training schemes, it is unlikely to have lasting impact. A third generation of system-level work may be the answer to more embedded cultural and institutional change. This is described below.

Third generation: Recognise and address the system

A systems-informed approach looks at the wider environment and culture of support, including a healthy and dynamic research production ecosystem (Hopkins et al., 2021).

The types of methods used by university policy engagement centres include strategic leadership and advocacy for evidence use, for example: the Chief Scientific Adviser-type roles to coordinate and support universities and others across the UK (Gillingham et al., 2023), as part of the DLHUC Local and Regional Authority Academic Advisers Network. Or institutionalising the routine use of research in decision-making through leadership, governance, and cultures so that it is 'taken-for-granted' in policy-making (Kuchenmüller et al., 2022).

However, there are few examples of organisations providing pragmatic and well-evidenced lessons on how to support systemic work. Most universities and organisations focus on single elements within the research-policy system – and not the system as a whole – and there is little rigorous evaluation or research on what works (Hopkins et al, 2021). This makes it hard to recommend specific models, only promising directions gleaned from our interviews and literature review.

One system-level approach that was shared by several interviewees was Areas of Research Interest (ARIs). The UK Government requires all departments and arms-length bodies to publish regularly updated statements of their evidence needs, called 'Areas of Research Interest' (See Box 2.4 on ARIs). ARIs can act as a system intervention by, for example, influencing strategic funding programmes by organisations like Research Councils, Innovate UK, or the British Academy (Oliver, Boaz, et al., 2022).

Box 2.4: UK Areas of Research Interest

Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) set out the most important research questions facing each Government department. They were first introduced by the national UK Government after the Nurse Review of UK Research Councils as a 'more systematic expression of Government's own research needs' (Nurse, 2015, p. 25). These ARIs allow researchers to see where they can best contribute to urgent policy questions, and for more strategic use of limited funding. Since then, ARIs have been developed by the UK and Senedd, and other public bodies such as the Food Standards Agency and Metropolitan Police.

According to Oliver and Boaz, ARIs have in practice had a much broader set of uses beyond purely identifying strategic research priorities (Oliver, Boaz, et al., 2022). Universities and academics find them useful to plan engagement activities such as workshops and fellowships, but often tend to view them as poorly written research questions.

ARIs can help the research community to understand what government departments want from them. This happens most effectively when there are opportunities for dialogue or a clear narrative about the policy history behind each ARI. Government departments, on the other hand, use them for a range of purposes, including as means to improve internal working and relationships, to implement the agenda of the Chief Scientist, or to support other governmental processes such as spending reviews. The true value of ARIs may be in illuminating the ways in which the research-policy system is connected, and how we can intervene most effectively to support this system. (Oliver, Boaz, et al., 2022).

ARIs can be a valuable part of the university-policy system by providing a positive signal of research needs. They can work well where Government departments match ARIs with clear engagement strategies with academia – such as the Department for Work and Pensions (Heckels, 2020).

Although ARIs are usually led by government agencies or legislatures (such as UK Parliament and Senedd), universities can play their role. Universities have helped develop ARIs locally, including Leeds City Council, Yorkshire, Greater London Authority, Leeds City Council, and North of Tyne Combined Authority. More could be done by universities working in partnership – perhaps running ARI focused workshops from a range of institutions – possibly in geographical clusters and working with the Universities and Policy Engagement Network (Heckels, 2020).

For any university considering systems work, it may also help to map out the policy systems such as all the relevant organisations and the structures that underlie complex situations, a technique recommended by Government Office for Science and many others (Government Office for Science, 2023). We heard from some university-based interviewees that provide this service, running workshops and creating systems maps for seeing the interconnections in a system.

Part Three: Measuring Engagement

Whilst all interviewees recognised the importance of capturing impact, no clear definitive answers emerged on the optimum way to do this. There were many concerns about the practicality of measuring policy impact, reflecting long-standing concerns about the difficulty of the bureaucratic burden of the 'impact agenda' (Smith, 2020) and the threat to academic autonomy from the 'tyranny of relevance' (Flinders, 2013). Staff interviewed in universities were fearful of the lack of meaningful data and extra burden:

> *'Just what bureaucratic burden are you creating? And realistically, they're just not going to do it. I worked a 20-hour day last week and then the next day I was teaching for eight hours. I'm not going to be logging on to some form and recording every conversation that I've had.'*
>
> Policy impact manager, UK university

Interviewees shared their sense of the profound difficulties in attributing causality of policy impact from individual research or finding the 'golden thread between academic research … and a decision being made' (Head of university policy centre).

Despite these concerns, there was interest in learning and capturing impact, and some practical models of and ways ahead are set out below. We should avoid 'throwing up our hands in air' and thinking meaningful measurement is impossible but instead 'keep having the conversation' (Leadership team member, non-UK umbrella body for impact) and attempt to find realistic pragmatic ways to capture impact that are good-enough and avoid the 'excellent being the enemy of the good' (Vice President impact, non-UK university).

Monitor and plan 'rigour' in policy engagement

REF in 2029 may address some of the concerns by placing a greater focus on the holistic strength of the research culture and community. No longer will there be a bias towards individual star policy engagement academics. REF is likely to recognise the breadth of people, culture, and environment (Research England, 2023).

For the first time, the research assessment exercise will recognise wider processes of engagement, via impact case studies and accompanying statements, as part of the 25% weighting for engagement and impact (Research England, 2023). The next REF will give greater emphasis to showing 'rigour' in policy engagement, to sit alongside 'reach' and 'significance'. Exactly what 'rigour' means has not yet been clarified.

But one core motivation is to reward 'professional care taken to realise impact' (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, 2022, p. 12). For example, case studies and statements may have to show how EDI, ethics, and best practice in knowledge exchange have been considered. University policy engagement centres can help plan and capture this 'rigour' from the start of policy engagement and help to frame impact subsequently.

More learning and sharing

Interviewees said that they valued learning – and sharing – about the process of policy engagement. Rather than waiting for an impact evaluation, there was an appetite to shorten 'feedback loops' of learning to improve current practice – and not wait years down the line for an impact evaluation to be published.

One recommended way of doing this was to create formal learning structures, such as peer-to-peer networks, mentors, and university-wide communities of practice to help foster learning. One university policy body had embedded an action learning researcher to develop insights and write a reflective diary:

> *'It's not straightforward, but it's interesting …. writing reflective diaries …we understand what are the key themes, the reoccurring issues, and then kind of try and mitigate them and learn what's worked, it is a very iterative experience … that goes beyond kind of typical kind of KPI [key performance indicator] type measure.'*
>
> Programme director, regional university policy network

University policy organisations like Insights North East and Yorkshire & Humber Policy Engagement & Research Network (Y-PERN) have recruited collaborative learning partners and 'critical friends' to help guide their work and speed up the 'feedback loops' of learning.

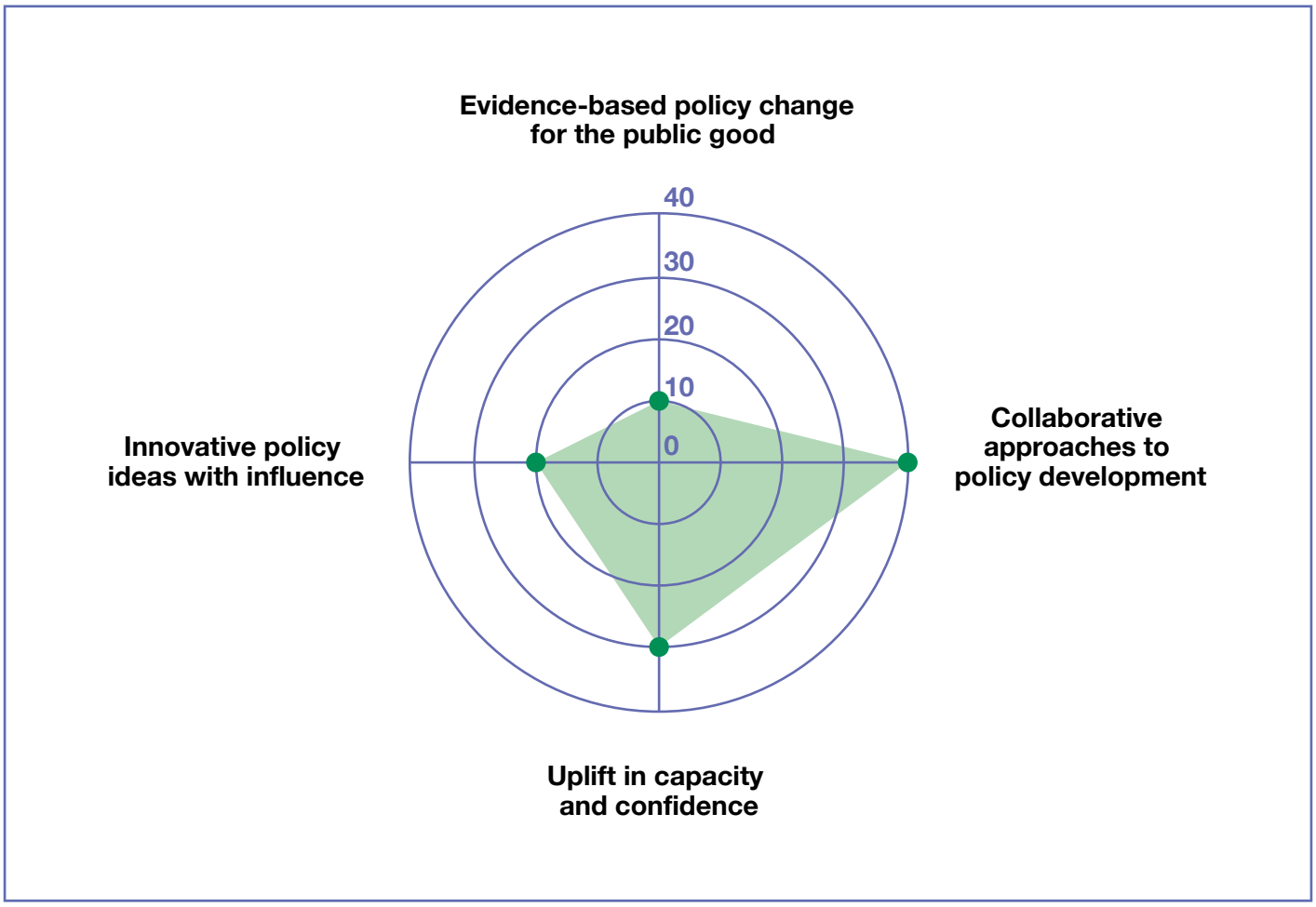
Another important aspect of learning is to gather data and insights on how inclusive the engagement process is. A report for UPEN (University Policy Engagement Network, 2021) points to the need to capture institutional and sector level information on who is involved in policy engagement to address and enrich Higher Education Statistics Agency profiles of underrepresented groups in academia. The CAPE collaboration project is analysing its work on how to identify and connect academic expertise to policy demand, and has inclusion embedded into its Theory of Change.

Use frameworks and Theories of Change

There are benefits of having some structure to think about engagement and impact. For example, Theory of Change, Logical Framework Analysis, Payback Framework and other logic models. Indicators may be used prospectively during planning as milestones and targets, and then retrospectively to see if planned impacts were achieved (for a discussion of impact methods see Reed, 2018).

Some organisations have created their own bespoke framework for capturing impact. The James Martin Institute for Public Policy (JMI) in Australia found its framework highly useful for structuring the data that the organisation captures – and to create credible information for its partners. Its 'Impact Stories' present this to external audiences and continue to be updated as the project's impact is felt. The framework and related stories are also visually impactful and a useful tool to communicate to funders and wider stakeholders.

Figure 3.1: The James Martin Institute for Public Policy impact framework



Finding more innovative and user-friendly tools

To ease the administrative burden of measurement, there are various platforms to help capture impact. Some policy engagement centres pay for subscriptions for services like Overton that can track references to academic work through the world's largest searchable index of policy documents, guidelines, think tank publications and working papers. Others have used Researchfish technology to capture impact-related data to advocate research and inform funding strategies.

Beyond existing platforms, university policy engagement centres can also be creative in tracking non-obvious benefits, such as the roles of academics in organisational memory (Oliver, Hopkins, et al., 2022). There may be other non-instrumental benefits, sometimes called the 'enlightenment' insights of research, or how capacity building impacts on policymakers (ESRC, n.d.). It is very rare for research bodies to measure their impact beyond obvious outputs, like counting the numbers of people involved, or web hits (Bornbaum et al., 2015; Gough, 2021; Oliver, Hopkins, et al., 2022; Torres & Steponavičius, 2022). Universities should consider finding more innovative approaches to measuring impact (as long as they are not overly bureaucratic).

Learn from others

Measuring impact can be a burden on limited university resources. To help plan effective engagement strategies, there may be existing lessons and strategies that can be learnt from others (Oliver & Boaz, 2019). There is also much to learn across geographical boundaries. Our interviewees in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the EU, and the US were all looking at what could be learnt across geographic boundaries.

The bibliography and research in this report offers some synthesis of research on 'what works' in advancing evidence usage for policy (see for example Borst et al., 2022; Cairney et al., 2023; Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017; Cairney & Oliver, 2020; Durrant et al., 2023; Haynes et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2021; Langer et al., 2016; Oliver, Hopkins, et al., 2022).

There are also lessons from other 'evidence intermediary organisations' that broker between policy and research, (Breckon & Boaz, 2023), such as think-tanks (e.g. Abelson & Rastrick, 2021), innovation intermediaries (e.g. Howells, 2006), and 'policy labs' (e.g. Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020).

As well as capturing insights from published research or other organisations, there are also lessons to be shared about individuals, capturing the experience of staff and leaders working at the interface between the boundaries of research and policy (Bednarek et al., 2018). There have been attempts to be more explicit about the skills and lessons regarding the practices of knowledge brokers.

Conclusion

During the writing of this report in 2024, we saw a squeeze on funding for UK universities. Finding new resources for policy centres may be harder to realise. A general election in the UK has also created uncertainty for universities.

Within this context, we recognise that this report's recommendations are not a comprehensive remedy for all ills but provide a suite of options that may - or may not - be applicable to different institutions in different circumstances.

University policy centres can vary considerably in size and resource allocation. Often in smaller universities, remit is linked to specific regional engagement and civic university aims. Universities without natural regional coalitions may also be out of the loop as such networks develop further (largely around urban areas with groups of universities). Financial pressures may also impact on policy engagement being seen as a priority for some universities. However, you can find smaller regional universities developing strengths in co-produced policy/research and innovative working arrangements with local voluntary sector and cash-starved local authorities.

Following the tips in this report is no guarantee of success. But the recommendations may provide useful prompts and some 'common ingredients' seen in other successful research-policy centres (Bazalgette, 2020).

In a time of financial constraint, it may be more valuable to focus resources on approaches that are likely to work. For instance, interviewees and the research literature cast doubts about the efficacy of dissemination and 'first generation' work (Best and Holmes, 2010). Short policy briefings, for instance, continue to grow in number across many countries (Arnautu & Dagenais, 2021) even while there is a large body of research saying that such linear models are unlikely to work, without accompanying engagement with policymakers (Oliver, Hopkins, et al., 2022).

Policy engagement is increasingly a multifaceted, non-linear, and complex process that involves multiple partners (Durrant & MacKillop, 2022). University policy engagement bodies need to embrace this complexity. As Ruth Stewart and her colleagues in South Africa have stressed, we need to move beyond individual findings and single organisations, and influence change across the complete evidence ecosystem (Stewart et al., 2019).

We need to continue to grow a university-policy ecosystem that avoids a 'rudderless mass of activity' (Oliver, Hopkins, et al., 2022) and learn from each other, build knowledge brokering skills, and think beyond the day-to-day difficulties of delivery (Breckon et al., 2022). This includes planning, learning, and reflecting on what is working – and what is not. It also includes valuing meaningful networks (such as the Universities Policy Engagement Network) and collaborations referred to throughout this report, such as Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement, Insights North East, Y-PERN, London Research and Policy Partnership, and the Local Policy Innovation Hub.

These important aspects set the conditions in which policy engagement centres can survive or thrive in the future.

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Appendix A: Interviewees (external to Northumbria University)

Name	Job Title	Organisation
Kristiann Allen	Executive Secretary	International Network for Government Scientific Advisers, New Zealand
Rokia Ballo	Project Coordinator	International Network for Government Scientific Advisers, UK
Dan Barlow	Knowledge Exchange Manager – Climate Change Scrutiny	Scottish Parliament Information Centre, Scotland
Laura Bea	Network Manager	Universities Policy Engagement Network, UK
Mark Bennister	Director	Lincoln Policy Hub, University of Lincoln, UK
Nicola Buckley	Director Fellowships and Networks	Centre for Science and Policy, University of Cambridge, UK
James Canton	Deputy Director Public Policy & Engagement	Economic and Social Research Council, UK
Sarah Chaytor	Principal Investigator	International Public Policy Observatory, UK
Hannah Durrant	Senior Research Fellow	Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University, Wales
Justin Fisher	Director of the Policy Unit	Brunel University London, UK
Matt Flinders	Lead	ESRC Review of Research Leadership, UK
Sarah Foxen	Knowledge Exchange Lead	Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, UK
Gareth Giles	Head of Public Policy	Public Policy|University of Southampton, UK
Libby Hackett	Chief Executive	James Martin Institute for Public Policy, Australia
Catherine Haddon	Senior Fellow	Institute for Government, UK
Abbi Hobbs	Senior Analyst Climate Change Scrutiny	Scottish Parliament Information Centre, Scotland
Robert Hamilton	Head of Investment & Economic Growth	North of Tyne Combined Authority, UK
Frances Kitt	Senior Manager	James Martin Institute for Public Policy, Australia
Kristian Krieger	Policy Officer	European Commission - Joint Research Centre, EU
Paul Manners	Co-Director	National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, UK
Stephen Meek	Director	Institute for Policy and Engagement, University of Nottingham, UK
Peter O'Brien	Executive Director	Yorkshire Universities, UK
Olivia O'Sullivan	Director UK in the World Programme	Chatham House, UK
David Phipps	Director	Research Impact Canada
William Pryor	Head of Policy Engagement	Oxford University, UK
Susan Renoe	Executive Director	ARIS Center for Advancing Research Impact in Society, USA
Rebecca Riley	Co-Director	City-REDI, University of Birmingham, UK
Bridget Sealey	Director	Sealey Associates, UK
Liz Shutt	Programme Director	Insights North East, UK
Katherine Smith	Board Member	Scottish Policy and Research Exchange, Scotland
Martin Smith	Head of Policy Lab	Wellcome Trust, UK
Audrey Tan	Policy Partnerships Manager	Mile End Institute, Queen Mary University of London, UK
Ben Taylor	Deputy Head	Open Innovation Team, HM Government, UK
Sarah Weakley	Research & Knowledge Exchange Lead	Glasgow University College of Social Sciences, Scotland, Scotland

Appendix B: Examples of policy-engagement practices

Generation		Activity	Description	Example
Generation	Linear	Policy briefings	Drafting and editing concise documents summarising key findings from research and recommendations for non-specialist audiences	e.g. Policy briefings by Heseltine Institute at Liverpool University
		Digital and media dissemination	Producing media content, blogs, social media, podcasts and other digital products	e.g. International Public Policy Observatory partners, The Conversation UK for comments and articles
		Thought-leadership	Sharing new ideas and writing commentary, and provocations in think-tank role using digital reports and original research	e.g. Policy@manchester produces 'expert articles' with ideas, commentary, and evidence on topical issues
		Consultancy	Bidding and delivering commissioned research, expertise, and consultancy-type projects through competitive tenders or as a preferred provider	e.g. Manchester Met Policy Evaluation and Research Unit provides rapid evidence assessments as government contracts
		Knowledge brokerage	Brokering by trusted university-based person or team to help policy audiences navigate around universities and locate experts	e.g. Public Policy|Southampton locate best academic to respond to external request for expertise
		Horizon-scanning	Monitoring opportunities to respond to consultations and inquiries (e.g. by central government or legislatures)	e.g. University of Lincoln internal newsletter on upcoming consultations
	Relational	People exchange	Managing, brokering and/or hosting policy secondments, fellowships, internships and other positions	e.g. Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy Fellowships for policy professionals to work with academics
		Training	Delivering online or in-person training on policy impact e.g. understanding how government works, using media, writing policy briefs	e.g. HM Government Open Innovation Team Policy Masterclass: Introduction to Whitehall
		Advice and coaching	Offering bespoke, intensive and interpersonal advice and support from professional support staff or academic colleagues	e.g. Mock panel of Sheffield University to prepare academics for policy fellowships
		Co-produced policy seminars	Organising or supporting convenings as part of ongoing policy/academic collaboration, including co-created roundtables and networking events	e.g. Roundtables organised by Northumbria University with HM Government Darlington Economic Campus
		Mapping stakeholders	Mapping target stakeholders such as policy organisations and individuals to see who has influence and most interest in the areas of research	e.g. CITI-REDI Birmingham University mapped out target organisations and individuals – who could be stakeholders in their work and also potential funders
		Peer-to-peer learning	Curating informal learning between colleagues to share knowledge and build confidence regarding policy engagement	e.g. Northumbria University Public Policy Community of Practice for academics
		Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)	Training and developing a wider group of academics including from groups which are typically under represented and other colleagues and actors, in university policy engagement, so not dominated by 'the usual suspects'	e.g. University of London providing training for early career academics from diverse backgrounds

		Activity	Description	Example
Generation	Systems	Developing Areas of Research Interest	Partnering with public bodies to develop Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) - regularly-updated statements of their evidence needs. UK Government now requires all departments and arms-length bodies to publish ARIs	e.g. CAPE Fellows developing ARIs for the North East Combined Authority
		Incentives and recognition	Celebrating and incentivising impact such as through recognition in career promotion criteria, or awards or showcasing impact success	e.g. Nottingham University runs annual prize to celebrate academic impact, policy and public engagement
		Strategic leadership	Championing evidence and leading on developing the university-research ecosystem	e.g. Wales Centre for Public Policy researching and growing sector-wide learning on evidence intermediary organisations
		Evidence infrastructure	Creating and managing formal and sustained roles and structures in local or national government bodies, such as chief scientists or academic advisory committees	e.g. Chief Scientific Adviser at Essex County Council as part of formal collaboration with University of Essex
		Place-based partnerships.	Leading and embedding infrastructure collaborations between stakeholders to address specific issues of a geographic area	e.g. Insights North East partnership with Newcastle and Northumbria Universities