



How to...

Connect with policymakers

This guide will help you to identify steps that you can take to increase your engagement with policymakers. It provides practical advice on how to make your work known, how to keep up to date with what is going on in the Scottish and UK Parliaments, where to find details of consultations at local, national and European level and how to give effective evidence to committees and consultations.

What are policymakers looking for?

- Information. Concise, relevant, packaged and timely
- Experts! However, they haven't got time to find you so make yourself known.

How can I engage with policymakers?

- Participate in government consultations
- Give evidence to a parliamentary committee or cross party group
- Link up with an MP, MSP or MEP who is championing an issue
- Present at an all-party parliamentary group
- Be an expert adviser to a committee.

How do I find a 'way in'?

- Contribute your research to a piece of policy work that is already underway; frame your contribution in a way that will be useful for your audience.
- If you are working with a partner organisation, work together on how to influence policy. They will have contacts and influencing expertise beyond what we have access to in academia.
- If you haven't been working with a partner organisation, approach a relevant charity or public body for a conversation about how your research could be useful to them.
- Look out for new politicians, especially backbenchers, who are interested in your area and who are looking for an issue to champion. You will find a list of their interests online.
- To find civil servants working on areas you want to influence, look at organograms and at papers that go through committees. Remember that civil servants change jobs every two to three years.
- Find relevant cross party groups to work with. These groups can push for consultations so working with them from an early stage allows you to shape a consultation.
- Look for expert groups and opportunities to become an expert adviser.

Box 1: Connecting with the Scottish Government

When planning your engagement with individuals in the Scottish Government, consider:

- Who else is engaging on the same issue? How do they relate to one other?
- How is the issue framed by Government? By others?
- At what point in the policy cycle are you engaging? Is your input appropriate?
- Are you speaking to the right person, in the right government, in the right way?
- Be an expert adviser to a committee.
- Relationships, not information, are the key
- Are you proposing a solution? Good policy ideas need to be possible, affordable, legal, politically acceptable, appropriately timed and aimed at the right audience.

Current devolved and reserved matters: <http://edin.ac/2aPHx5g>

Current consultations: <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/>

Taken from a presentation by Graeme Beale, Office of the Chief Researcher, at our 'Connecting with Policymaking' Learning Lunch series, 2015.

How can I keep up to date with what is going on?

- Speak to your Knowledge Exchange or Impact support staff in School or College. They can help you identify where to look for information and opportunities
- Look out for relevant government consultations, or, better, subscribe to emails or alerts (see box 1)
- Look out for opportunities to give evidence to parliamentary committees. Both the UK and Scottish Parliaments publish current and forthcoming committee business online (see boxes 2 and 3). Introduce yourself to the clerks of relevant committees so that they are aware of your expertise. Keep an eye on committees which are less immediately relevant to your work too, as issues may come up in unexpected ways.
- Introduce yourself to research staff based at political party headquarters. Be aware of what parties have promised in their manifestos in areas relevant to your work. Keep an eye on their progress during party conferences, the Queen's speech, and Prime Minister's or First Minister's questions.

How can I make my work known?

- Contact the clerks of committees relevant to your work, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), The House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries and the UK Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) (see boxes 2 and 3).
- Make your papers Open Access.
- Keep your online profile up to date.
- Use social media to share your work and engage with others. As well as blogging, follow relevant blogs and participate in discussions by posting comments. Share your work on Twitter, and build your online network by retweeting and replying to tweets. Tweet directly to relevant people and organisations who have a lot of followers. Remember to thank them if they retweet your work. These tools are most effective when used in an interactive way, rather than as broadcasting tools.
- Network at events.

Box 2: Connecting with the Scottish Parliament

When engaging with people at the Scottish Parliament, ask yourself:

- What's my story?
- Why is it important?
- Where is it important?
- Why now?
- To whom?

Committees play a central part in the work of the Parliament - taking evidence from witnesses, scrutinising legislation and conducting inquiries. Most committees meet weekly or fortnightly, usually on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday mornings. Each committee has a clerk whose role it is to manage the committee, call witnesses, appoint special advisers for inquiries and receive written submissions.

Current committees and committee business <http://edin.ac/1QWRXQm>

Researchers in the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) support MSPs, committees and staff with factual information about parliamentary business <http://edin.ac/1QEKHex>

Taken from a presentation by Graeme Cook, The Scottish Parliament Information Centre, at our 'Connecting with Policymaking' Learning Lunch series, 2015.

Box 3: Connecting with the UK Parliament

When submitting written evidence to a committee, remember:

- Tailor your research to the specific inquiry
- Write for an intelligent non-specialist
- Begin with a short summary, use bullets and numbered paragraphs, keep your submission to a maximum of 3000 words
- Include factual information from which the committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions
- Include recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the committee to consider.

There are two types of Commons select committees. Departmental select committees examine spending, policies and administration in each Government department. Cross-departmental committees scrutinise broader issues, e.g., public accounts or environmental audit.

House of Lords select committees examine issues rather than the work of specific departments. They investigate specialist subjects which take advantage of the experience of members of the Lords.

All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal cross-party groups on an issue and can be very influential. They are a useful way to identify MPs/Lords' interests.

Current calls for evidence <http://edin.ac/1QEm64F>

Researchers in the UK Parliament

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is Parliament's in-house source of independent, balanced and accessible analysis of public policy issues related to science and technology <http://edin.ac/1QWVnm6>

The House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries provide specialist, impartial information to MPs, Peers, their staff, committees and staff of the Houses <http://edin.ac/1QWViyQ> and <http://edin.ac/1QEmaS0>

Taken from a presentation by Gary Hart, Parliamentary Outreach Service, at our 'Connecting with Policymaking' Learning Lunch series, 2015.

Top tips: Giving evidence to Government consultations or Parliamentary committees

- Make sure you have a point to make. This may be a solution, or a challenge to the way the issue is framed. Avoid giving a long outline of your research without clearly linking it to the issue under consultation. Avoid simply reiterating the problem.
- The question may or may not be asked in a way that matches how you would frame the issue. Use the question as a jumping off point to say what you want the people running the consultation to hear.
- If something obvious is missing, bring it up. Don't assume it has already been considered.
- Create a short summary of your findings, and include full and clear references to your research.
- Make use of the 'any other comments' section at the end to raise points that don't fit neatly into other sections.
- Be aware of, and use, the language of the consultation or inquiry.
- Go to committees to see what happens and how they work.
- There can be a risk that an issue will become politicised and that you could be drawn into that. To mitigate the risk, try to engage early; always be neutral. State the issue, summarise what your research shows and always link on to your full findings. If you are not comfortable contributing to a consultation or inquiry, you don't have to.

Consultations: useful links

Scottish Government consultations <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/>

UK Government consultations <http://edin.ac/1QEhHPg>

European Commission consultations http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm

Local Government consultations: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) run consultations on local issues in Scotland and the Local Government Association (LGA) in England. These can be an opportunity to contribute your expertise at the sharp end of service delivery. The Committee of Regions is the European body which represents local authorities across Europe.

- **COSLA** <http://www.cosla.gov.uk/>

- **LGA** <http://edin.ac/1QWOPnk>

- **European Committee of the Regions** <http://edin.ac/2aPI8nx>

This guide was produced by the CAHSS Knowledge Exchange Office. We help colleagues to engage with industry, policy and practice to maximise the impact of their research. Find out more at www.ed.ac.uk/cahss/rke

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