ACADEMIA AND POLICY IMPACT

Academics and policymakers are both seeking closer working relationships in order to ensure policymaking is informed by evidence. However, meaningful impact does not happen by chance. It requires effort and expertise on both sides to align research evidence with policy needs. The STEaPP Policy Impact Unit (PIU) seeks to address the academic side of the partnership, to ensure that policy engagement is as effective as possible.

UCL AND STEAPP

UCL has a longstanding interest in public policy, reflecting the breadth of its research portfolio, its proximity to Whitehall and Westminster, and through the work of UCL Public Policy.

The Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STEaPP) is focused on public policy. STEaPP’s research and education programmes seek to explore, experiment and improve the ways science, technology and engineering expertise can be used in public decision-making and policymaking to tackle the most pressing global challenges.

STEaPP’s people bring first-hand experience of working in policy institutions, including advising governments and legislatures. Our expertise includes leading-edge thinking on how to facilitate effective engagement between research and public policy.

A NEW POLICY IMPACT UNIT

STEaPP’s new Policy Impact Unit puts our academic expertise into practice by delivering strategic interventions for meaningful and measurable policy impact across the Faculty of Engineering Sciences (in the first instance). The PIU provides training and support in three main areas:

- Facilitating co-design and user participation activities to align research and engagement activities with policy need.
- Developing strategic plans for policy impact, and delivering engagement activities.
- Monitoring, evaluating and tracking policy impact, to maximise effectiveness and meet reporting requirements.

The PIU will be staffed by professional academia-policy intermediaries (‘Policy Advisers’) with both specific subject knowledge (e.g. civil engineering) and policy expertise (e.g. how to write a policy brief). Each Policy Adviser will manage a policy domain and draw on research from multiple sources. We are in the process of recruiting the first Policy Adviser, who will cover engineering, science and technology.

The unit is run by Dr Chris Tyler, STEaPP’s Director of Public Policy (and former Director of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology), and Jenny Bird, STEaPP’s Public Policy Manager (and former senior adviser to a parliamentary select committee). STEaPP is initially providing additional services such as events management and communications. The first Policy Adviser is being funded by the Faculty of Engineering Sciences and will develop a programme of policy engagement activities in areas that have been identified as being pertinent to FES research. Subsequent roles will be funded by writing 0.2-1.0 FTE (Grade 7) into multiple research grants across UCL.

WHAT THE PIU OFFERS

The PIU offers a tailored package of activities, including:

- Co-design of research grants with policy makers
- Contributing to pathways to impact statements
- Stakeholder mapping
- Engagement strategy
- Research impact papers (2-pagers)
- Policy briefs (4-pagers)
- Training on policy engagement techniques
- Breakfast/lunchtime policy briefings
- Public seminars
- Workshops
- Exhibitions
- Access to PIU’s policy network
- Monitoring and evaluation of policy impact

The precise package will depend on the nature of the topic and the scale of resource available.

Since policy officers will be funded by several projects, their activities will span a range of FES research. They will also seek to identify other, complementary, research that could be combined into outputs in order to boost appeal for policymakers.
The Policy Impact Unit (PIU) boosts public policy activity at UCL, dovetailing with the activity already being undertaken and co-ordinated by UCL PP.

The PIU develops programmes of engagement activities around a particular policy need. We draw on expertise and support from the UCL PP team where appropriate to deliver specific outputs within each programme. We also collaborate with UCL PP on activities that increase researchers’ own capacity to deliver policy impact. For example, we are currently working together to develop a policy engagement training programme for UCL researchers.

Where appropriate, we will also seek opportunities to work collaboratively with other UCL-wide initiatives, such as the Grand Challenges, Public Engagement Innovation and Enterprise and Global Engagement Office teams.

**WHAT IS PIU’S RELATIONSHIP WITH UCL PUBLIC POLICY?**

PIU’s Policy Adviser will cut across multiple academic and public policy areas. This means that they can identify non-obvious opportunities for policy impact; avoid uncoordinated engagements with policymakers; and bring together multiple evidence-streams, which is what policy makers find most useful.

PIU Policy Advisers will work with other policy impact officers during the lifetime of a grant, but because our staff will remain beyond the end of a grant, we can help you have policy impact even after the funding for your project has ended. This is essential to maximise opportunities for policy impact, which often occur after the lifetime of a research grant.

**WHAT IS AN ACADEMIA-POLICY INTERMEDIARY?**

PIU staff are career intermediaries who have typically worked in both academia and public policy. They speak both ‘languages’, have active networks in both, and know how to build links between the two.

Policy Officers offer key knowledge and skills that are crucial for delivering quality impact. These include: an understanding of the policy process, key players and institutional landscape; writing for a policy audience; and routes for engagement. They can develop strategic engagement plans to maximise the potential for impact.

**WHY NOT TRAIN UP RESEARCHERS INSTEAD?**

We fully support the idea of training researchers and the PIU actively works to develop the skills of academics who want to work with policy makers, e.g., via training programmes developed with UCL PP.

While researchers may be able to engage on behalf of their own projects, the PIU can add value by working across projects and bringing together multiple voices to address a single policy issue – creating outputs that are greater than the sum of their parts.

We also recognise that effective policy engagement requires a significant volume of work. The PIU can help alleviate some of this burden by taking on many of the necessary but time-consuming tasks that are associated with policy impact; from monitoring government announcements, to identifying key stakeholders, to drafting and distributing policy briefs.

**MY PROJECT ALREADY HAS A DEDICATED IMPACT OFFICER, WHY IS A PIU NECESSARY?**

The PIU offers three types of benefit:

1. **Freeing up researcher time:** By funding a dedicated Policy Officer to deliver outputs such as pathways to impact, policy briefings, events and consultation responses, researchers will have more time to focus on core research activities.

2. **Added value:** The PIU’s ability to draw on research from multiple projects will increase the salience of our outputs for policymakers and therefore the potential for you to achieve real impact. Policy professionals who are able to develop strategic interventions will help to increase the likelihood of achieving real impact and enhance the reputation of the individual and team responsible for the research. Policy Officers will also work with other relevant teams across UCL (such as UCL PP, Grand Challenges, RICS, CAM, I&E etc) to coordinate and access other sources of expertise.

3. **Pain relief:** PIU Policy Officers will carry out the more ‘painful’ aspects of policy engagement – from trawling for stakeholder contact details to tracking impact evidence for potential REF case studies – so that you don’t have to.

**WHY SHOULD I FUNNEL POTENTIAL RESEARCH BUDGET TO THE PIU?**

STEaPP was established to help build bridges between academia and policy, with a focus on the intersection between STEM and public policy. Our expertise in this area means we are well placed to offer support to FES researchers.

To find out more or to work with the Policy Impact Unit, please email:

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