



# UCL GUIDANCE NOTE

Engaging with  
European Union  
policymaking  
as a researcher  
post-Brexit



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This guidance was produced as part of a wider project to facilitate international policy engagement at UCL, led by UCL European Institute, UCL Global Engagement and UCL Public Policy.

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## UCL GUIDANCE NOTE

# Engaging with European Union policymaking as a researcher post-Brexit



### Why engage with European Union policymaking?

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If you want to impact on policy in the broadest way possible, influencing EU policy offers an opportunity to shape priorities and legislation across 27 Member States.

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As a result of the specific competences of the EU, its policies and policymaking processes often focus on issues that benefit particularly from scientific and technical input.

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As a so-called ‘regulatory superpower’, policy at EU level also influences norms and legislation across the world (the “Brussels effect”).



### Is it still possible to engage with EU policymaking as a UK-based researcher post-Brexit?

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Yes. EU policymakers, like policymakers around the world, are working to address complex societal challenges. Drawing on the best available expertise and advice, regardless of where it comes from, is central to this process.

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The UK’s decision to leave the EU may have made the routes to policy impact more complex but the strength of the UK’s leading universities, like UCL, is recognised across the continent.

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There is also general interest across the EU-27 in international benchmarking, comparative perspectives, and the identification of best practice from countries outside the Union.



## How does European Union policymaking process work?

The EU policymaking process is complex. Decision-making processes and the role of the EU institutions differ depending on the subject under consideration, and can be supranational or intergovernmental in character. The EU can only make law in areas where it has been given responsibility under the Treaties.

In areas of 'EU competence', the legislative, or law-making, function of the EU is typically carried out by three institutions, outlined on p.6.

Policymaking in the EU typically takes place by 'ordinary legislative' procedure or 'co-decision'. This procedure involves the Commission, Parliament and Council, who aim to come to agreement on the final legislation.

For a useful overview of this process, see this overview by the **Royal Society**.

**EU policy is enacted through various types of legislation, some binding and others not. For an overview of legal acts in an EU context, see EU official webpages.**

### Further information

An overview of the **EU decision-making process** (EU Official webpages)

**The EU: Institutions explained** by Professor Hussein Kassim (UK in a Changing Europe)

**How is Policy developed in the European Union** (Royal Society)

**The Ordinary Legislative Procedure** (European Parliament)

**The European Union: Questions and Answers** (US Congressional Research Service)



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### **The European Commission**

is the executive of the European Union (roughly equivalent to national ministries or government departments). This means it has responsibility for initiating and enforcing laws and managing EU policies. The European Commission has an exclusive 'right of initiative' as regards most legislation and acts as the main civil service for the EU institutions.



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### **The European Parliament**

is the only directly elected institution in the European Union and has gained considerable powers since the first direct elections were held in 1979. Most proposed laws must be negotiated and approved by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (or Council of Ministers) to become law. The Parliament also decides on the allocation of the EU's budget jointly with the Council.



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### **The Council of the European Union**

(or Council of Ministers) represents the 27 Member States at Ministerial level and shares legislative and budgetary powers with the European Parliament, apart from in areas, such as foreign policy, defence and taxation, where Member States retain full sovereignty and the Council thus plays a much more important role. The Presidency of the Council rotates among the member states, changing every six months; the country holding the Presidency helps set agenda priorities and organises most of the work of the Council.



## How does science inform EU policymaking?

Actors within the EU institutions and associated agencies draw on science advice (from across the disciplines) in diverse formal and informal ways to help inform policy and legislation. What follows provides an overview of the main formal structures for science advice in the EU.




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### Science advice in the European Commission

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The European Commission has an in-house science service, the **Joint Research Centre** (JRC), which runs seven scientific institutes across the EU and responds to requests from other Directorate Generals for scientific analysis.

In addition, the European Commission has a **Scientific Advice Mechanism** (SAM) to provide high-level, multidisciplinary advice on strategic policy issues.

The SAM consists of a group of seven **Chief Scientific Advisers** supported by the **Science Advice for Policy by European Academies** (SAPEA) a consortium of over 100 European academies across all disciplines, which provides evidence reviews and access to a multidisciplinary expertise, and a dedicated secretariat in DG Research & Innovation (RTD).

The European Commission convenes over 1000 **expert advisory groups** across the Directorates-General. These can be permanent or temporary.

European Commission bodies may also directly commission research or reviews to inform policy through consultancy. These will tend to be oriented towards specific policy initiatives that are in development.



### Did you know?

Sir Geoff Mulgan, Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation at UCL STEaPP is a member of the **International Advisory Board** of the European Parliament's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA).

### Science advice in the European Parliament

The European Parliament can draw on its own sources of scientific advice.

#### **The European Parliament's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology**

helps EU lawmakers with independent assessments of new technologies and commissions foresight studies on cutting edge topics designed to empower Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to anticipate and respond to future techno-scientific developments.

The **European Parliamentary Research Service** (EPRS) is the European Parliament's in-house research service. It provides analysis and evidence on particular issues for both individual MEPs and Parliamentary Committees and publishes studies alongside shorter research briefings and notes. All these publications are freely available online.



### Further information

**Scientific Advice for Policy-makers in the European Union** (EPRS Briefing, September 2016)

**Do EU institutions have access to the latest scientific advice and evidence?** (The Royal Society)

### Science advice in the Council of the European Union

The Council has a small in-house **research service** which produces papers and other research publications on a wide range of EU-related issues. It encourages strategic reflection and foresight in support of the European Council and Council of the European Union.

The representatives of the Member States who participate in working parties and committees can also rely on their national institutions and structures for science advice.



### Further information

To find out more about Horizon Europe funding, the guarantee scheme, and associated support, please see the website of the [UCL European Research and Innovation Office \(ERIO\)](#)

You can register as an external expert via the [European Commission's expert database](#), to assist in the evaluation of grant applications, projects and tenders

### EU funding

The EU is also a major research funder, primarily but not exclusively through the EU's flagship research and innovation programme **Horizon Europe**. The outcomes of EU funded projects help to shape and deliver on EU policy priorities.

You can explore these in details via the [Community Research and Development Information Service](#) (CORDIS) database, which brings together results from the projects funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation, from FP1 to Horizon Europe.

### UK participation in Horizon Europe

In the 2021 'Trade and Cooperation Agreement' the UK and the EU agreed that the UK would continue to take full part in Horizon Europe as an 'associated country'. However, the association process continues to be delayed, pending the resolution of wider political discussions.

In the interim, to support UK researchers and innovators and to provide certainty to their institutions, the UK Government is providing a **Horizon Europe 'Guarantee' scheme**. This ensures that eligible UK applicants with proposals that have been successfully evaluated by Horizon Europe have access to funding, regardless of whether the UK associates to the programme.



### How does expertise inform European regulators and agencies?

At European level there are agencies with enforcement power, entities which provide a coordination function between national bodies and agencies, and a range of organisations which fall somewhere in between.

These include bodies of the Union which often have advisory roles, such as the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) and European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) for data protection or the European External Action Service (EEAS) for foreign relations, and decentralised agencies and regulators such as the European Medicines Agency, the Body of the European Regulators of Electronic Communications (BEREC), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) or the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). A guide to these organisations can be found [here](#).



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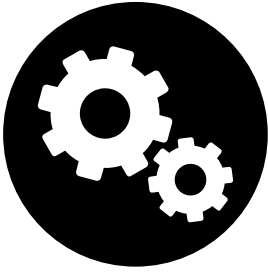
Many of these entities do not engage with the formal science advice machinery outlined above, yet still make use of scientific and technical knowledge on a regular basis through formal and informal processes. These entities are often key in the early stages of scoping new policy proposals and guidance documents.

**TOP TIP:**

Advising national regulators and agencies in particular Member States can be an effective way to influence EU policy, in certain situations - particularly where bodies are European groupings of national, high-capacity bodies. For example, in bodies such as the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) or the Body of the European Regulators of Electronic Communications (BEREC), national regulators are often given the task of acting as rapporteurs on important pieces of regulatory guidance. They will draw upon their own networks as the European-level secretariats, which have co-ordination rather than enforcement roles, often lack the staff and/or specialist expertise.



Where should I start?



## I'm interested in engaging with EU policymaking as a researcher. Where should I start?

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If you're interested in engaging with the EU as a researcher, the first thing to consider is what you want to achieve and the relevant mode of engagement.

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Informing strategic priorities will require an understanding of who the relevant decision-makers, civil servants and opinion-shapers are in your area, what their priorities are, and the windows of opportunity for agenda-setting or policy influence.

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Influencing the implementation or contributing to the evaluation of policy may instead require preparing for work on a commissioned services basis.

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You will also need to consider how relevant your research is at EU level. Does it address an area of EU competence? Does it have pan-regional relevance?

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Finally, if you are interested in pursuing formal opportunities, for example the provision of consultancy services or joining a European Commission expert group, do note that some but not all opportunities will be limited to individuals from EU Member States.



### TOP TIP:

**Start early.** As a general rule, the earlier you engage the greater your scope for impact.

### TOP TIP:

#### **Understand the context and identify key stakeholders.**

Browse the webpages of the EU institutions, use the **EU staff directory** and consult the **EU Legislative Train** to understand the policy environment, identify the key players and track the progress of legislative files. Stay up to date through news sources such as Politico, EUObserver and Euractiv. You may also find it helpful to explore the **EU Transparency register**, where individual organisations' record of engagement and responses to public consultations are recorded.

## TOP TIPS



### TOP TIP:

**Invest time in building relationships.** Take time to attend relevant conferences and events, visit Brussels if you have an opportunity, and persevere. There are many demands on policymakers' time.

### TOP TIP:

**Cultivate a diverse network.** While it can be important to engage directly with civil servants and decision-makers, you should also consider cultivating wider influencers, from the media to business representatives, influential think-tanks to membership organisations and charities. Working through academies, representative bodies or professional bodies, and their umbrella organisations, can be an effective way to reach the right people.

### TOP TIP:

**Spend time planning how best to communicate your research effectively.** Remember to put yourself in the shoes of the policymaker you are addressing. How can your research findings help them? Remember that overarching syntheses and broad expertise are often more useful to policymakers than individual scientists communicating their results or publications. Don't always assume detailed prior knowledge, and distil key messages and clear recommendations where possible.

### TOP TIP:

**Remember the practicalities.** If you are considering a study or engagement visit to Brussels, avoid public holidays, the month of August and official **closure periods for the EU institutions**.

### TOP TIP:

**There are multiple 'ways in' to engaging with the EU.**

The European Union is not a monolithic block but a complex eco-system of institutions, where diverse interests inform and influence the policy process.

You can find a full list of official EU institutions and bodies [here](#). Depending on your discipline area and existing networks, there may also be opportunities to engage the EU through fora and mechanisms provided by other international organisations, such as the OECD or the United Nations.



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## Engaging with the European Commission

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As the European Commission is responsible for planning, preparing and proposing new legislation, it is responsible for gathering most of the evidence required and has the largest ‘civil service’ with the most in-depth policy expertise of all the EU institutions.

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European Commission legislative proposals are normally accompanied by an impact assessment, often based on dedicated studies and various forms of expert, stakeholder and public consultation, including input from specialist agencies and **EU Delegations** around the world.

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You can learn more about the EU’s policy priorities by exploring the **European Commission website**, the webpages of the Directorates-General relevant to your policy area and the **CORDIS database** of past funded research projects.

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### TOP TIP:

The European Commission often sends their civil servants on the conference circuit just after large pieces of legislation are proposed to explain the proposal to stakeholders. This can be a good opportunity to get to know the relevant *fonctionnaires*, though such connections will typically come after the proposal stage, where the Commission has less influence. However, these networks can be useful in future, as the Commission does engage informally with academics during the drafting process of new legislation.



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## EU Public consultations

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European Commission public consultations allow citizens, civil society and businesses to have their say on EU policies and planned or existing laws and are a key way of contributing to the policy process.

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You can stay up to date with EU public consultations [here](#)

If you are a UCL researcher, please note your affiliation with UCL, which is a registered institution on the EU Transparency Register, as part of the submission process.



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## European Commission expert groups

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The European Commission convenes over 1000 **expert advisory groups** across the Directorates-General.

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You can explore the **latest calls for applications** [here](#).

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## Contracting with the European Commission

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The European Commission frequently relies on public competitive tenders to source external inputs, reviews, or evaluations, in order to ensure that work is fairly and transparently commissioned.

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You can explore EU funding opportunities and calls for tender [here](#)



### TOP TIP:

Procurement legislation is a key factor to consider. If there is an ongoing procurement related to the policy or technical area, staff will be unable to speak with any parties until the procurement has completed. Conversely, parties who have heavily influenced the design and specification of a procurement can be barred from bidding for the work.



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## Engaging with the European Parliament

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The European Parliament's administrative services, political groups, committees and MEPs often rely on external evidence to ensure they are responsive to citizens' and civil society's concerns and to reduce their reliance on European Commission ideas. This can take place through formal and informal means, ranging from briefings and meetings with individual MEPs to commissioned consultancy services.

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## Engaging directly with MEPs

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While the UK may no longer have its own MEPs, you may still be able to engage MEPs if their policy interests and/or current legislative priorities align with your research, especially if the issue is politically salient.

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**All individual MEPs** have a profile page including their main parliamentary activities, links to their social media, and contact details for themselves and their assistants. Many will be professionally available via social media.

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When engaging on a particular piece of legislation, you can use the **EU Legislative Train** on the European Parliament's website to track its progress.



### TOP TIP:

Engaging with MEPs' assistants is a useful first step and will help you understand individual Parliamentarians' priorities. When contacting MEPs' offices it is a good idea to copy all listed assistants, and to persevere. Most offices are dealing with a high volume of correspondence. Do also bear in mind the **Parliamentary calendar**, including Strasbourg sessions.



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## European Parliamentary Committees

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European Parliamentary Committees play a crucial legislative role: preparing the European Parliament response to legislation proposed by the European Commission, developing a common position, and negotiating with the European Commission and the Council.

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The European Parliament's political and legislative work is carried out **by 20 standing committees and three subcommittees** each of which elects a chair and up to four vice-chairs, and each of which has its own Secretariat.

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For each legislative file, the responsible committee nominates a 'rapporteur', tasked with consulting with political groups and outside experts, organising hearings, and preparing a report including amendments which is subject to a vote, first in committee then in plenary. Political groups also have the option to nominate 'shadow rapporteurs' which play an important role in facilitating the search for compromise on a legislative proposal.



### TOP TIP:

When engaging with the European Parliament it is important to understand who has influence on a particular piece of legislation. The nominated rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs are particularly important and, during intense negotiations, are often amenable to taking part in external discussions and to receiving expert input, including proposed amendments.



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## Contracting with the European Parliament

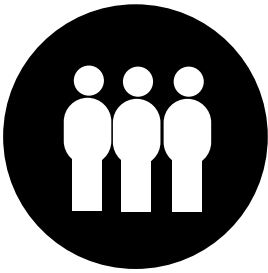
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Like the European Commission, the European Parliament commissions consultancy services. For an overview of open invitations to tender, [see here](#)

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If it aligns with your research interests, you may also wish to subscribe to updates from **Research4Committees**, which provides updates on in-house and commissioned reports and contract opportunities for the CULT, AGRI, PECH, REGI and TRAN committees.





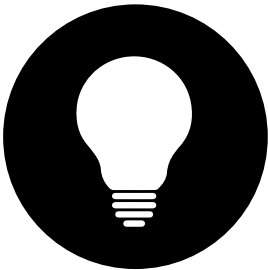
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## Engaging with the Council of Ministers

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Engaging with the Council of Ministers typically requires engaging directly with Member State governments. This can be trickier, as the Council of Ministers is significantly more opaque in its functioning than the European Parliament.

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### TOP TIP:

Strategies for engaging with the Council of Ministers include identifying a Member State with which you have an affinity (such as linguistic ability, or close collaborators), and reaching out to the responsible ministry there who will be leading negotiations, directly or via partners.

## Sources of support at UCL

To learn more about the elements of effective policy engagement, see [UCL Public Policy resources, including a dedicated UCL Extend module](#).

To access support in presenting your research to EU policy audiences, contact the [UCL European Institute](#)

To discuss options and models for engaging in policy-related services provision to EU bodies, contact [UCL Consultants](#)

For EU funding related queries, contact [UCL European Research and Innovation Office](#)

To connect with other colleagues with an interest in the region, sign up to [Global Engagement's Europe Regional Network mailing list and meetings](#)

## Explore UCL case studies of impactful European policy engagement



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