



## UCL Public Policy Strategy



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## Executive Summary

UCL is committed to using its expertise to address complex policy problems, and as a force for positive social change. The *UCL Public Policy Strategy* sets out our university's **Vision** for public policy engagement, encompassing:

- Embedding public policy engagement and impact across UCL
- Bringing cross-disciplinary expertise to bear on public policy challenges for societal benefit
- Fostering a two-way flow of knowledge between UCL researchers and policymakers.

The **Principles** underpinning UCL's public policy activity are:

- Enabling expert-to-expert contact between academics and policymakers
- Engagement on topics that are of relevance to policymakers, while recognising the different contexts in which research and policymaking operate
- Adopting a collaborative approach to public policy engagement
- Remaining non-partisan and independent.

The **Core Aims** of this strategy are to:

- Build on UCL's capacity for public policy engagement to ensure that UCL researchers are supported to engage with public policy
- Promote a coordinated approach to UCL's wide range of public policy-focused activities
- Integrate expertise and knowledge from across disciplines to inform public policy
- Support the effective communication of research with public policy relevance to external stakeholders
- Establish UCL as a hub for dialogue and debate on public policy and develop UCL's reputation as a source of high-quality research which can inform policymaking.

The main means of implementing this strategy is the UCL Public Policy initiative, whose **Priority Activities** are:

- Maintaining a strategic overview of policy-related activity across UCL
- Supporting strategic public policy activities initiated by departments and faculties
- Holding public events on contemporary policy issues
- Running small grants and policy placement schemes for UCL researchers
- Developing accessible research summaries for policymakers
- Convening roundtable meetings on policy-relevant topics
- Developing our strategic external networks and partnerships
- Supporting researchers' engagement with public policy.

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## Introduction

At UCL, we support a rare breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise drawn from world-leading research. We can be proud of our engagement with public policy: approximately 30% of our impact case studies submitted to the Research Excellence Framework 2014 were related to public policy.

The *UCL Public Policy Strategy* recognises the opportunity that UCL has to inform public policy from cross-disciplinary perspectives and ensure a multifaceted approach to policy challenges. It thus helps UCL to fulfill its mission as a force for positive social change.

The UCL Vice-Provost (Research) is responsible for public policy engagement agenda at an institutional level, supported by the UCL Public Policy initiative. This strategy sets out UCL's vision for the engagement of its research with public policy, the principles that underpin it, and the strategic aims and activities of the UCL Public Policy initiative.

UCL boasts many centres of expertise which are highly engaged in the public policy sphere, including transport, health, energy, environment, planning, political science, law and engineering. An essential part of UCL's ethos is to use our expertise to address the pressing global challenges that humanity faces today and will face in the future. This can be seen in *UCL 2034* (our 20-year strategy) as well as our Enterprise and Public Engagement activities, our strategic Research Domains, the development of UCL East and the UCL Grand Challenges, through which cross-disciplinary application of our collective knowledge delivers greater impact and enhanced benefit for society.

This strategy has a critical role to play in delivering key aspects of our institutional ambitions. It is complemented by the *UCL Global Engagement Strategy*, which will increase UCL's global impact and leads on our internationally focused policy activities, and the development of the *UCL London Strategy*, which will enhance our engagement and partnerships within our capital city.

Through the implementation of this strategy and UCL Public Policy's coordination and initiation of a number of underpinning policy-focused activities, we will enhance our university's reputation and raise our profile with the public policy community. We will also position UCL to make timely and well-informed contributions to policy development.



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## Vision

UCL is rightly proud of the radical tradition – a commitment to innovation, accessibility and relevance – that was established by our founders. Successive generations have sought to impact on society and challenge convention. The *UCL Public Policy Strategy* builds on that proud history to offer a framework for the future and ensure that our university continues to play its part in transforming society.

Our vision for public policy is to maximise the potential of UCL’s research to inform policy by a commitment to **embed public policy engagement and impact across UCL**. We will further cultivate an ethos of policy impact throughout the university to ensure that our research informs public policy wherever possible. It is also important that our public policy-related activity can both work across disciplinary boundaries and integrate with other UCL activities and strategies in order to achieve maximum policy impact.

In line with *UCL 2034*, the *UCL Research Strategy* and the UCL Grand Challenges, we bring **cross-disciplinary expertise to bear on public policy challenges**.

Exploiting the breadth of our expertise through cross-disciplinary and collaborative activities that integrate multiple perspectives on public policy issues enables us to offer a well-rounded and evidence-based response.

Effective policy engagement relies on a **two-way flow of knowledge**. We will continue to expand our engagement with policymakers to discuss current research and key policy priorities. Knowledge exchange operates at multiple levels and in multiple directions and can benefit both policy development and research understanding. We will continue to seek to inform policy development from an early stage and to develop fruitful strategic partnerships and ongoing engagements.

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## Principles

Public policy activity at UCL should:

- focus on **expert-to-expert contact**, providing brokerage where necessary
- seek to engage on **topics that are of relevance to policymakers** where research can illuminate policy problems, whilst also recognising the different contexts in which research and policymaking are undertaken and the different imperatives for each
- adopt a **collaborative approach** to policy engagement which draws from the full breadth of UCL research, fosters dialogue, incorporates multiple perspectives, and engages other partners
- remain **non-partisan and independent**, and seek to inform policy development rather than necessarily advocate specific policies.



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## Core Aims

The following are the Core Aims of the *UCL Public Policy Strategy*.

### **Build on UCL's capacity for public policy engagement**

UCL Public Policy raises awareness of opportunities for research to inform policy (and the value of doing so) and encourages a willingness to engage with public policy and policymakers. We work with UCL faculties and departments to build on our capacity for public policy engagement, and with other units to capture the impacts arising from that engagement. Through the provision of advice and support to UCL researchers with an interest of policy engagement, we will expand UCL's capacity and appetite.

We continue to develop our external networks and partners to enhance our activities and to better understand where we can most add value in the public policy sphere.

### **Promote a coordinated approach to our wide range of public policy-focused activities**

UCL Public Policy develops synergies between other UCL initiatives to maximise learning between departmental, faculty and school activities. To enable this we stimulate and add value to specific projects and initiatives by sharing best practice and providing additional support where appropriate. UCL Public Policy has an important role in coordinating and communicating opportunities for UCL researchers to engage with policy (for example, through secondments and calls for evidence) and in facilitating additional routes for researchers to interact with policymakers.

We aim to minimise the risk of conflicting approaches from UCL agents to external bodies through consultative stakeholder relationship management.

### **Integrate expertise and knowledge from across disciplines to inform policy**

The institution-wide perspective of the Office of the Vice-Provost (Research) enables UCL Public Policy to bring together senior UCL academics to anticipate and respond to government, parliamentary and civil service needs for policy evidence. UCL Public Policy identifies key policy issues to which UCL can make a contribution and coordinates such contributions, including exploiting insights emerging from UCL Grand Challenges activity. We emphasise the value of our breadth and depth of expertise to policymakers by offering access to a range of knowledge relevant to complex issues and deploying our considerable convening power.

### **Support the effective communication of research with policy relevance to external stakeholders, highlighting the policy implications of UCL research**

UCL Public Policy works with researchers to identify and access public policy-relevant research, highlighting the range of UCL policy initiatives and outcomes. We ensure that these are effectively communicated to policymakers and promote these externally through a range of mechanisms, including meetings, written briefings and submissions to inquiries. UCL also seeks opportunities for engagement with policymakers around key areas of research and specific public policy-focused research activity. We respond to policymakers' needs where our research has relevance and to translate research insights into the public policy sphere wherever possible.



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## UCL Public Policy Priority Activities

**Establish UCL as a hub for dialogue and debate on public policy and develop UCL's reputation as a source of high-quality policy-relevant research**

UCL Public Policy provides an interface between academics and policymakers and offers a forum for discussion and interaction. Through expanding our networks of researchers and our contacts in the public policy community, we promote and facilitate new routes for engagement and interaction between researchers and policymakers. We also facilitate new strategic partnerships with external organisations, and build on existing relationships, to expand our public policy activity.

We are responsive to both the external policy landscape and internal developments. To support this we prioritise a number of Priority Activities that we consider will best deliver our strategic aims:

- Maintaining a **strategic overview** of policy-related activity across the university, and acting as a **point of contact** for external policymakers who wish to consult UCL expertise
- Convening **roundtable meetings** which bring together researchers and policymakers to discuss topical issues, facilitating dialogue and networking
- Providing accessible high-level **research summaries** for policymakers, based on key UCL research activities
- Offering a **small grants** scheme to stimulate public policy engagement activities among UCL researchers
- Managing a **policy placement scheme** to enable UCL researchers to spend time in policy organisations
- Providing support for **strategic public policy-focused activities** initiated by departments and faculties
- Expand our **external policy networks** and delivering activities with external partners
- Providing **support for researchers** who wish to engage with public policy via channels such as Government consultations, Select Committee inquiries, Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology projects, advisory committees and learned societies, and through other means.



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## Conclusion

Academic expertise is highly valuable to policymakers and policy professionals. The greater emphasis in Government and Parliament on the use of evidence in policy development and move to ‘open policymaking’, coupled with a reduction in in-house analytic capability in the civil service, offer significant opportunities to increase academic engagement with policy. UCL will need to have the skills, capacity and willingness to take advantage of this.

There remain significant barriers to academic engagement with the policy sphere, not least cultural differences and a lack of understanding of the best routes for engagement. Through this strategy, and its implementation through the UCL Public Policy initiative, we will continue to work to overcome these barriers and enhance UCL’s already significant capacity in this area, in order to increase our policy engagement and social impact further.

In the next five years, we intend to: increase our academics’ interactions with policy professionals; expand our policy focused outputs; and improve our ability to respond to policy demand for academic expertise.

UCL will continue to provide the knowledge and expertise that can challenge conventional wisdom, and inform and improve policy development. We should be at the forefront of academia’s efforts to provide policymakers with the knowledge and expertise they need to tackle policy challenges and develop the policies that will drive social progress.

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