



Informing Public Policy

A Guide for UCL Researchers & Staff



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Public Policy: an introduction

What is Public Policy?

There is no single accepted definition of public policy; much depends on disciplinary perspective, who is considered a policy professional, what type of engagement and outcome is desired through a particular policy tool.

For the purposes of this handbook, public policy can be seen as the process by which government identifies priorities and makes decisions on how to implement them in order to deliver change. Informing policy with evidence is part of that process.

It is helpful when approaching academic-policy engagement to recognise that in the UK there are three functions through which public policy is enacted: 1. Parliament 2. Government and 3. the Judiciary. Each performs its own function and has its own processes but are part of a system. Each requires evidence to develop policy, scrutinise and uphold laws. This means that researchers can interact with all or any of these branches for academic-policy engagement through a variety of policy tools and techniques. Find out more [here](#).

The path from research to policy and practice is not straightforward. Successful research uptake takes time, requires mutual understanding, shared motivations among everyone involved, and funding and resources to make it happen.

The policymaking process

The policymaking process is not linear, but the visual representation on page 5 gives some insight into the steps involved.

There are many ways that researchers can engage with each of these steps - for example, informing policy debate, responding to consultations and working with advocacy groups or parliamentarians on bills.

Academic-policy engagement takes a range of forms, from providing research or expertise in person or through written briefings to ensure that policy is underpinned by good evidence.



What is UCL Public Policy?

UCL Public Policy is an initiative of the Office of the Vice-Provost (Research, Innovation & Global Engagement) that aims to maximise the way in which UCL improves public policy, by enabling researchers to inform public policy with evidence.

UCL Public Policy:

- offers mechanisms for public policy engagement
- translates research into public policy-focused outputs
- connects researchers and policy professionals
- delivers specific public policy-focused projects
- draws together public policy-related activity at UCL
- conducts research on the efficacy of academic-policy engagement

What we can offer you

Funding

UCL Public Policy provides funding for researchers via schemes including:

- **Policy Fellowships:** enable researchers to spend time in policy organisations on a flexible basis
- **Small grants scheme:** annual awards to encourage activities that enhance policy engagement or policy impact from research

For information on other funding opportunities, please [visit our website](#).

Advice, guidance and training

UCL Public Policy offers advice and support to researchers and departments through:

- guidance materials and best practice templates
- advice on pathways to impact
- organising ‘Up Close & Policy’ sessions for researchers to hear from policy professionals with experience of engaging with research
- holding ‘advice surgeries’ for researchers

Support for researcher-led policy engagement

UCL Public Policy can offer support for individual researchers or groups wishing to:

- make a submission to a Select Committee inquiry
- contribute to Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) projects
- apply to be on government advisory committees
- apply for public policy-focused funding schemes
- design an event aimed at policy professionals
- communicate research to policy professionals
- build their engagement with policy

How you can get involved

Researchers can contribute to regular UCL Public Policy activities such as:

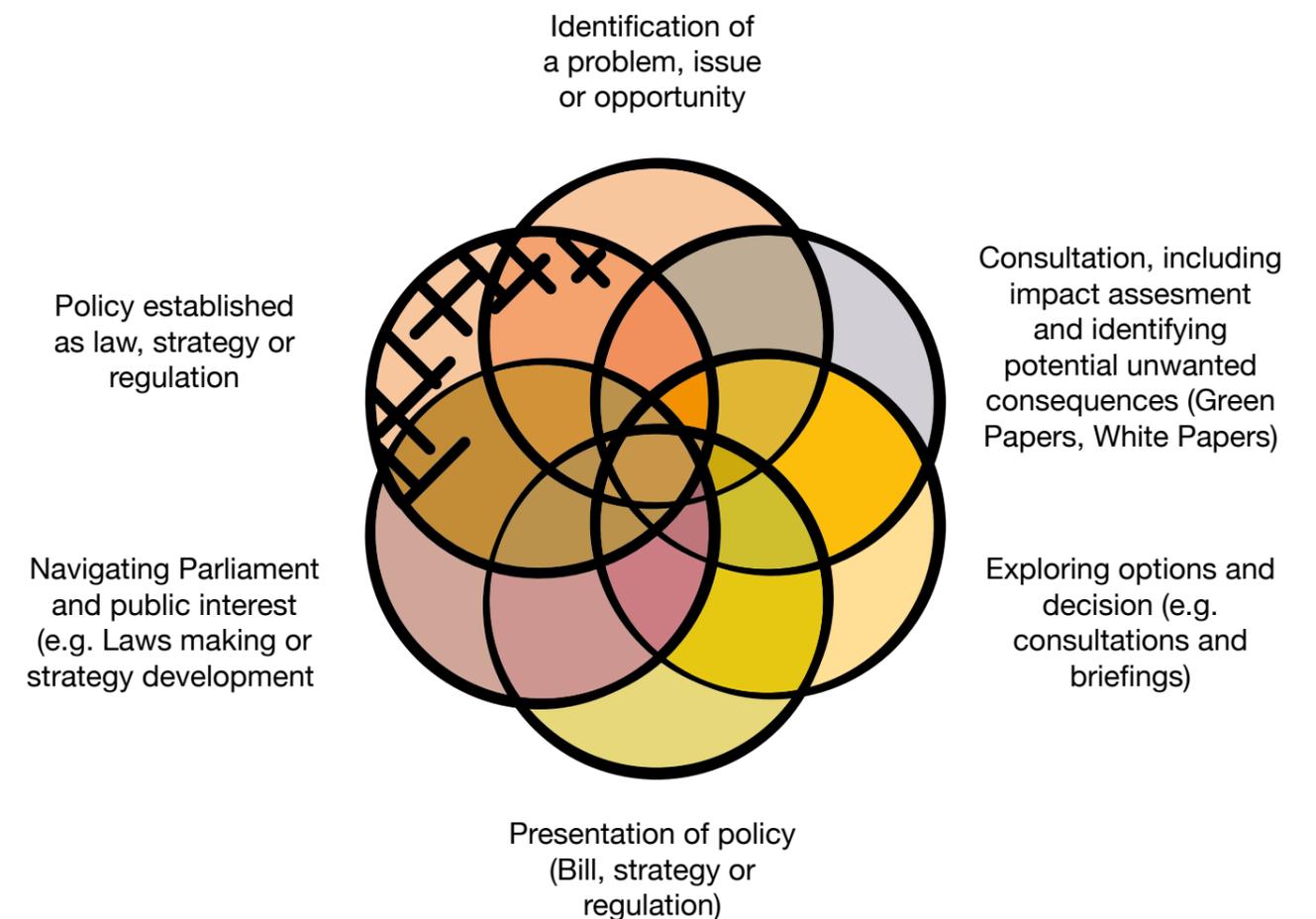
- policy events held with external partners
- policy roundtable meetings, which bring together researchers and policy professionals to discuss topical issues, facilitating dialogue and networking
- research summaries aimed at policy professionals

If you have an idea for a potential partner, event or topic, please get in touch.

UCL Policy Champions

UCL Public Policy coordinates a grassroots network of policy enthusiasts based throughout the university. To contact your departmental or faculty policy champion, [visit this page](#).

If you are interested in becoming a Policy Champion, please visit our website to find out more.



Source: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/research-and-innovation/the-forum/public/policy-making.pdf>

Enhancing your policy engagement and impact

Understand the policy landscape

Map out the key policy sectors and stakeholders to whom your research is relevant. Understand who you want to engage with, when you want to do so, and how you might do it.

Appreciate the policy process

There is no single route for policy engagement and it is not always possible to predict or define clear outcomes.

Appreciate that policy development is complex, messy, happens on many different levels and occurs at many different timescales – this can help you to spot opportunities and know when, where and how to engage.

Showing policy professionals that you understand the complexity of the process and some of the common barriers to engagement (e.g. different professional cultures, different languages, different timescales, different incentives and priorities) can help to build productive relationships.

Be aware of how evidence and research are used in policy development

Evidence can inform, but not determine, policy. It is one of a number of factors that policy professionals take into consideration when developing their thinking and making decisions, which also include ideological, technical, financial, social, moral and political factors.

Build links and networks

Most effective policy engagement is developed from personal links and happens serendipitously on the basis of being in the right place at the right time. Personal relationships also help to establish trust and credibility which are key factors for effective policy impact.

Make your communication meaningful and accessible

Don't use academic jargon or technical language and be as clear as possible. Put your research into the policy context: be aware of why it might matter for public policy and what stakeholders might be interested in.

Be open to opportunities and interaction

The more you can participate in policy and public activities (e.g. events, meetings, blogs for policy audiences) the more you will be exposed to policy stakeholders and develop your understanding of the policy landscape. The stronger your networks of policy stakeholders, the more likely opportunities for engagement are to arise.

Be proactive

Don't just wait for opportunities and policy professionals to come to you but seek to engage them, particularly at an early stage of research. Be clear and targeted about key stakeholders that you might involve through co-production or ongoing engagement.

Undertaking a policy placement

Dr Ilias Krystallis

Like most scientists, I am driven by curiosity. I wanted to find new ways of adding value to my research – and accelerating its impact – by putting my research into practice. One way of doing this was by embedding myself in a policy team through a secondment.

From March to September 2019, I worked as a policy advisor for the Grand Challenges team, part of the UK's Industrial Strategy flagship policy programme at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

A scientist secondee has two main goals for their secondment: to better understand the policy environment in practice and to identify pathways to achieving impact.

During my secondment, I worked directly with a policymaker, and she monitored my progress for the duration of my time there. Together, we planned how many projects I should be involved in and what they would cover.

Undertaking a secondment can be a useful opportunity for academics to examine their own field from a different angle – and can also act as a chance to explore where their career might take them next.

They can help you to become an active contributor in an area of interest, enable you to gain access to an important network of policymakers, and allow you to develop close connections within the policy world.

Although I'm now back in my academic position at UCL, I'm currently collaborating on another exciting project with the policy team I got to know during my time at BEIS - and am looking forward to exploring the



fascinating field of policymaking in greater depth in future.

Being seconded to BEIS was a great experience for me. Being curious about how policy works, it gave me a good overview of what it's like working for the Government, and I have now a good sense of what policymakers are doing and a greater understanding of how they work.

By understanding their way of working, I can better contribute to policy work through my research, and I would definitely recommend a secondment to other scientists, no matter which stage they are at in their career.

Routes for contributing to public policy in the UK

Overview

There are a number of routes through which researchers and academics can contribute to public policy formation, many of which are digital and can be undertaken remotely. These vary in terms of how direct the input is; whether contributions are invitation-only, specifically sought, or open to all; and whether contributions will be cited or published.

Please subscribe to the [UCL Public Policy](#) newsletter, which gathers together information about current opportunities through these and other routes.

Parliament

Select Committee inquiries: House of Commons and House of Lords Select Committees hold inquiries throughout the parliamentary year into a wide range of policy issues under their respective remits. Calls for evidence are issued at the beginning of an inquiry; [see open calls for evidence](#).

Submissions should be as brief as possible and focus on explaining research findings and conclusions which are relevant to the inquiry. All submissions are published online and in hard copy, and may be cited in Committee reports.

Building relationships with Clerks and Committee specialists can be helpful. For more information, [see individual Select Committees](#).

Public Bill Committee inquiries: Public Bill Committees are formed to scrutinise legislation after the second reading of a Bill in Parliament (the first significant Parliamentary debate on a piece of legislation). They receive written evidence from outside organisations (as well as taking oral evidence) as part of their scrutiny process.

Evidence should be relevant to the particular legislation being considered and as specific as possible. Written evidence is published online and in hard copy. [See open calls for evidence](#).

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST): POST provides scientific advice to MPs, peers and parliamentary staff. It regularly produces briefing notes on particular scientific issues with relevance for policy and seeks academic input into these. Input may be cited in published POSTNotes or other documents.

The best contact is the [relevant scientific adviser](#).

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs): APPGs vary hugely but the most active will hold regular meetings on specific issues, which it may be possible to attend or speak at. The best contacts are the Secretariat or Chair; see the complete list of [APPGs](#).

House of Commons Library: The [Commons Library](#) provides research services for MPs and staff and produces a series of research briefings on particular issues and legislation. It also produces briefings in response to requests from individual MPs.

There may be scope to engage with subject specialists to help them draw on academic knowledge in developing briefing notes.

House of Lords Library: The [Lords Library](#) prepares research briefings for debates and at the request of peers. Getting on its radar as a useful source of expertise can be helpful.

House of Commons Outreach service: Get on their [mailing list](#) for latest news and events about Parliamentary activity.

Government

Areas of Research Interest (ARI): ARI documents are published by nearly all government departments. They are separated out by department and make public the main evidence needs they are facing.

ARI documents are useful for researchers as they indicate strategic research questions that a department would like evidence input into in the short to medium term. The questions published are a good place to start a conversation but are not an end in themselves.

Helpfully, ARI documents also provide guidance on where to start engaging civil servants with your research.

The Government Office for Science (GO-Science): GO-Science works across the whole of Government to provide scientific advice and evidence to policy teams and ministers. It does not develop policy but synthesises research and evidence, and supports the work of the CSAs. The best contacts are the individual area specialists; [see also the organisational chart](#).

Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs) and their networks: CSAs provide scientific advice to their department which can help to inform the development of policy.

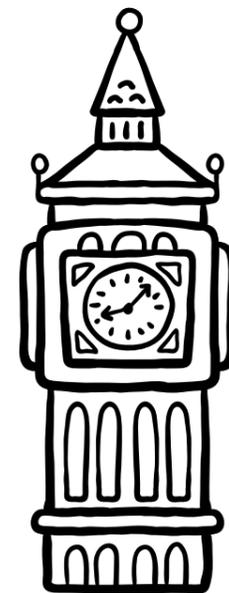
Making contact with CSAs at the right time (i.e. when a particular policy issue is being considered and evidence being sought) can be a useful way of feeding into the process. Establishing a relationship can lead to future opportunities for input. [See the current CSAs](#).

CSAs operate within a network of science and engineering professionals in Government; again it can be useful to establish contacts with those professionals working in relevant areas and on relevant issues. [See current policy professions](#).

Advisory Committees: Many government departments maintain scientific or social science advisory committees, which seek to draw together academic expertise to inform policy development. Details are on individual department websites.

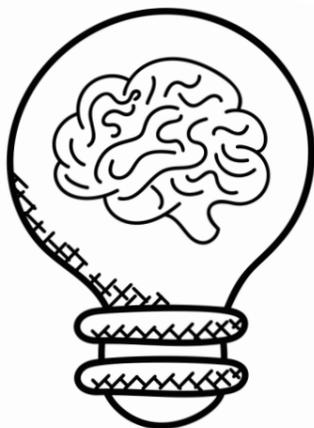
You may wish to consider applying to become a member of such a committee (opportunities are advertised by Government departments as they become available) or whether you may be able to attend seminars organised by the committees.

Government consultations: The Government routinely runs consultations on new policy proposals and on green and white papers. (Green papers are the first iteration of a policy document that will be developed into legislation; white papers are a more final version that will closely inform the development of the relevant Bill.) The consultations are open to anyone; [see open consultations](#).



Foresight: The Foresight team sits within GO-Science and has a remit for examining longer-term policy challenges and horizon-scanning. Its inquiries have small permanent advisory committees, largely made up of academic experts, but also draw ad hoc from relevant academic advice. [See current projects and policy areas.](#)

What Works Centres: The What Works initiative aims to support the use of evidence in policy and decision-making. The network includes a number of centres focused on key policy issues of health and social care, education, crime reduction, economic growth and wellbeing. The centres help to ensure that robust evidence shapes decision-making at every level by collating evidence, conducting systematic reviews and undertaking policy evaluations. There are different ways to get involved with each of them. See individual websites [here.](#)



Third sector / Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Learned societies/professional bodies: Many learned societies and professional bodies (e.g. Royal Academy of Engineering, The Royal Society, Institute of Physics, The British Academy) also conduct policy work (generally within their remit).

Some will have academic expert committees but also be interested in other contributions from academia. Significant contributions or advice should be cited in written reports.

Charities: Charities will often be interested in academic evidence, either to feed into their work or for specific projects. Any significant contributions or advice given should be cited in written reports. The best contact will usually be the policy officers or policy advisers working in your area of interest.

Think tanks: Think tanks will often seek academic input into particular pieces of work or as part of bigger projects. Any significant contributions or advice should be cited in written reports. A think tank may also have an advisory board which includes academics, so joining that can help to build networks and provide a platform for research informed policy engagement. The best contact will usually be research fellows or policy advisers working in relevant areas.

Working with Government

Dr Ine Steenmans

The UK's industrial strategy outlines four grand challenges, which signpost to policy missions. Each mission has a specific delivery team, including a mixture of analysts and policy strategists. Operationalising detailed delivery and implementation plans to meet the challenges is very difficult. Applying systems thinking, which gains an overarching picture of inter-related, complex policy systems, enable you to make sense of how to address a mission and deliver it. This is where my project, Systems Mapping for Missions, comes in.

The UK has hubs of expertise, such as the Cabinet Office's Policy Lab. Policy Lab were asked by the BEIS Industrial Strategy Team to identify how systems thinking could practically be applied in scoping missions. In parallel, so I could increase my researcher visibility, I was attending events and building my policy network. As part of Policy Lab's background research, they approached me with some questions related to my PhD thesis, and, much is the way with this kind of policy engagement, I became involved in a relatively informal way. What resulted from these interpersonal connections was an invitation to attend a brown bag roundtable where I showcased some of the work I was involved in.

After this initial roundtable, I received an invitation to work with the Policy Lab to support the BEIS Industrial Strategy team on working with three of the missions. I worked 'behind the scenes' to coordinate a series of internal and external workshops. Designing the workshop series, I worked with the partners and colleagues to establish a clear set of expected outcomes from the meetings. I also proposed a way for us to collaborate on mapping and to analyse the information captured during the meetings.

We held around 12 workshops over a six-month period, during which three different maps emerged. We turned these into digital



systems maps of the three corresponding industrial strategy missions. Each map has a set of supporting documentation, and the aim is to keep these live and open for anyone to view. This underscores the need for more open science and brings this evidence into a policy space where it might not have been used before.

Throughout this process, I realised that the impact you have depends on the senior stakeholders involved and the different types of questions that they need a response to. I have had to be flexible, responding to phone calls and emails, but also have been open to new types of work and ideas that inevitably emerge. What has really helped me on this project has been taking a step back and not being as personally invested in my research agenda, which may seem counter-intuitive. However, by adopting the perspective that my role as an academic is to impart my research with the wider community and act as a facilitator, I have been able to benefit from some great opportunities.

[Hear more about Dr Steenmans' work.](#)

Writing high-level summaries of your research

What is an evidence note?

An evidence note communicates policy relevant research findings and other evidence-based information and conclusions to policy professionals in clear, non-academic language. They may also provide a series of recommendations, based on research findings, to address a particular policy issue.

Why you should write evidence notes

Writing an evidence note aimed at policy stakeholders is a useful way to communicate research findings and raise awareness of yours - and others' - research. They will have most impact when they synthesise the field and address a specific and current policy need.

Evidence notes are not a guarantee of policy impact, but are a useful resource to have available for when policy engagement opportunities arise.

Questions to ask yourself before you start

Why does the research matter for public policy?

Think about whether there are particular areas or public policy issues for which your research findings are significant. Is there a current policy debate to which they are relevant? What are the implications of your findings? What solution(s) are you offering to policy challenges? Does your analysis acknowledge policy constraints? Does your analysis show ways to improve current policymaking?

What audience am I trying to reach?

You should have a particular audience in mind and try to target it as much as possible.

Audiences may include:

- local government officials and representatives
- central government officials
- Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff
- All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)
- think tanks, charities and civil society groups
- funders/donors
- trade unions
- business or industry representatives

What information do I want to get across?

Accessible evidence notes should focus on research findings, conclusions and offer ways forward for policy, not try to describe how the research was undertaken (except briefly and at the end of the document).

Things to remember

Tailor an evidence briefs to specific policy needs as much as possible.

Policy professionals receive a high-volume of things to read so in the first paragraph of your cover email state clearly that you are writing to them because you know of their interest in the subject and how your research and/or expertise impacts on this policy area.

Further include a clear ask on what you would like them to do as a result of reading your evidence note. For example, ask for a meeting to discuss the topic further or adapt their policy messaging to take account of the research or evidence.

Evidence notes should be considered as providing a starting point for further engagement, not an end point. The 'impact' of an accessible evidence note will ultimately depend on it being used by the right people in the right place at the right time.

How to write an accessible evidence note

Guide structure

- Key points box
- Introduction: statement of the problem or question your research addresses
- Key research findings and conclusions
- Short analysis, including description of relevant research insights (use subheadings as appropriate)
- Brief summary of research methods

Keep it simple

You are not writing for academic peers but for an audience with variable expertise. Use plain language and avoid complicated and lengthy sentences.

Keep it short

Policy professionals have limited time. It should be kept as short as possible – a single page is ideal, but in all cases the most relevant information should be on the first page.

Title

This should communicate the key message of your research findings, as well as capture a policy professional's imagination.

Focus on key research findings

Outline the policy issue and summarise your conclusions and how your research findings address it. Explain the significance of the findings. You should provide a short analysis of your evidence and include a very brief description of your research at the end. If you are including any conclusions for policy or policy recommendations, ensure these are prominent.

Summary

- Keep it short
- Use accessible language
- Focus on key research findings and their implications
- Target the summary to the intended audience
- Deliver clear conclusions
- Recommendations should be actionable, rather than vague aspirations

Further information

Providing links for interested readers to access more information (such as the full research paper, or project website) is useful.

References

These should be kept to a minimum and included in endnotes (not footnotes).

Dissemination

Evidence notes can be disseminated in numerous ways: via social media, websites, meetings and mailings to a targeted audience. Reaching a smaller number of people who are more likely to read at least some of the briefing is more valuable than a larger number of people who may never read it.

More information

UCL Public Policy can provide support and help with developing evidence notes, include using our standard template. We also host these on our website and disseminate through our communication channels – [please get in touch](#).

[See examples of UCL Public Policy's evidence notes.](#)

Writing evidence notes

Professor Lindsey Macmillan

Policy Context: In 2016 Theresa May consulted on expanding the provisions of selection by ability at age 11 in secondary schools in England. This led to a number of debates before the policy was eventually dropped after the 2017 election.

Example: Evidence summary of access to and the impact of grammar schools sent to all speakers in a House of Lords debate on the topic.

The debate about expanding selection by ability in education at age 11 is often known as the ‘zombie policy’, due to the fact that it keeps coming back. Those in favour of expanding selection by ability see them as engines of social mobility. They have often either experienced grammar schools themselves, or close friends or relatives have, and (wrongly) attribute any successes thereafter to their experiences at school.

The empirical evidence on grammar schools is overwhelmingly conclusive: grammar schools take very few students from deprived backgrounds, and they exacerbate inequalities, meaning that they are very bad for social mobility.

Given the regular use of anecdotal evidence in the debate on selective schools that was happening at the time, led by the Prime Minister, I sent a high-level review of the empirical evidence on grammar schools when they were being debated by the House of Lords.

The idea was to ensure that people speaking on the topic were armed with the facts, and could rely on the hard evidence to challenge the emotional arguments.



Using a list of all scheduled speakers for the debate, I sent out a three page note, summarising the main findings from each strand of literature on the topic. This included a top level summary at the start to catch their attention, with the details from each study, in simple language, and the associated references, below.

The key is to ensure that very busy people can understand the main point in the first few sentences. Limiting the use of any academic jargon and keeping to simple accessible terms makes it more likely that the notes will be of use.

The note was very well received. For example Lord Jim Knight responded stating “That was really useful. There will be plenty more to be done to stop this - we should keep in touch.”

Presenting research to policy professionals

Think about your audience

Who are they? Why might they be interested in your research? What might they be most interested in? What policy problem are they trying to find the solution to?

Consider the policy context

Think about how your research might fit into the broader policy context and why it matters; show that you have some understanding of this. Also consider why your research might offer solutions.

Be concise

Policy professionals have limited time and attention span, and deal with a vast range of information and inputs on a daily basis.

Focus on your findings

Don't go into detail on research methodology; policy professionals are more interested in the state of the evidence base, and what your research shows than how you did it. Be as clear and definitive as possible.

Don't overstate the case, but don't hedge your conclusions. Be honest about what you think.

Don't use academic jargon

Use clear accessible language; make your research simple to understand (but not simpler).

Be engaging

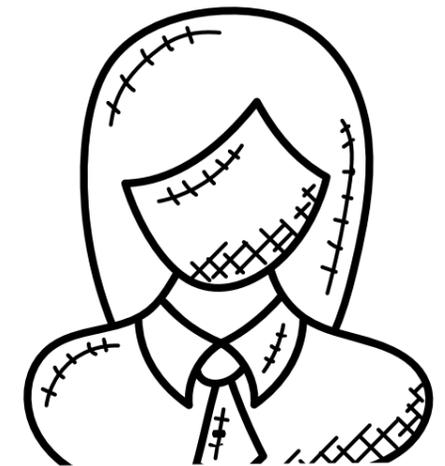
Offering examples of lived experience can help to illustrate a point or make things more immediate or personal. Tell a personal story and interact with your audience. Ask them questions.

Be open to questions and future engagement

State your willingness to discuss further or be contacted in the future.

Use an appropriate format

PowerPoint presentations (with clear, simple slides and diagrams) are good for larger audiences but less so for smaller groups.



Parliamentary Select Committees: giving evidence

What is a Select Committee?

Select Committees work in both Houses. They check and report on areas ranging from the work of government departments to economic affairs. The results of these inquiries are public and they require a response from the government. House of Commons Select Committees are largely concerned with examining the work of specific government departments which they shadow. Committees in the House of Lords concentrate on six main areas: Europe, science, economics, communications, the UK constitution and international relations.

Committees have power to appoint specialist advisers; these are not permanent members of staff, but outside specialists paid on a daily rate. They are often, but not always, academics, and are appointed either generally or to assist with particular inquiries. They support the clerk as the head of the committee's staff.

Making a written submission to a Select Committee inquiry

Be succinct: Committees can receive many written submissions to each inquiry, so there is little appetite for lengthy submissions. Think about the crucial points to get across and focus on these. Keep your submission as short as possible. Note that you don't need to respond to every question posed, but do be clear which ones you are answering.

Be focused: Your submission should largely respond to the specific questions posed by the Committee. If you would like to make additional points to the inquiry questions, be

explicit that you are doing this.

Be clear: Remember that Committee Members are not experts; write your submission avoiding acronyms where possible and use clear language pitched at the level of a very intelligent sixth former.

Be as definitive as possible: Submissions that make clear arguments and draw clear conclusions are more likely to be effective than those that are largely discursive and do not adopt conclusions. Committees are looking for evidence and advice to inform their inquiry and value submissions that provide clear evidence, arguments and conclusions.

Use evidence wherever possible: Committees can be persuaded by powerful arguments alone, but they are more likely to be so if it is supported by convincing evidence. Providing them with relevant evidence will also be seen as helpful to their work and give your submission more chance of being referred to and used in their final report.

Submissions are an opportunity to both inform and influence: Determine if you are trying to inform, influence or do both when preparing your submission. Be clear if you are making recommendations to the Committee or seeking to advise them on their final conclusions and recommendations.

Include a summary: This should focus on your key points and conclusions. Write it on the basis that this might be the only part of your submission that is read – it will certainly be the part that is referred to most. The 'Executive Summary' should be placed before the Introduction, in bullet points, and surrounded by a text box in order to highlight it.

See a template with links to examples [here](#).

Preparation: Ensure that you understand the Committee's agenda and wider public opinion. The latter will usually drive the Committee's questions. Follow the press, look at previous evidence sessions on the same inquiry, look at individual Members' interests, and speak to the Committee Clerk or Adviser – all of these can help you identify the Committee's concerns and the interests of individual Members.

Giving Oral Evidence

Watch some oral evidence sessions: Watching others give oral evidence will increase your understanding of the process and develop your appreciation of the interests and approach of different Committee members. Evidence sessions are usually open to the public (unless there is an unavoidable need for privacy), and you can view them online.

Structure your responses: Prepare a few key messages in advance and have these to hand so that you can refer back to them throughout the hearing (these can be the same as your opening statement). Rehearse what you are going to say in advance to ensure you are confident in articulating it – it helps to do this with a 'critical friend'.

Open with a succinct statement: Committees like to get into the questioning promptly, but if granted the opportunity open with a succinct statement that addresses no more than three key points.

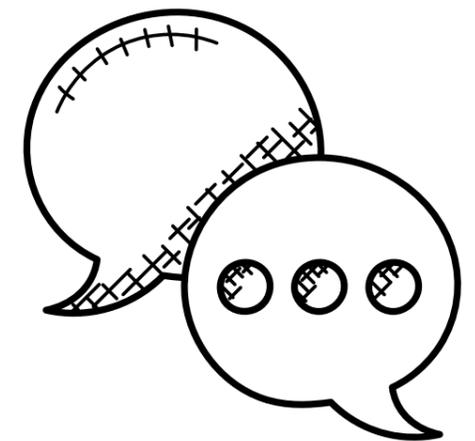
Answering questions: Respond directly to the question asked, and be succinct with your answers throughout. Stay on message and do not provide too much background information or get bogged down in unnecessary contextual detail.

Be accurate and consistent on factual questions: If you cannot answer a question or you think it is not appropriately aimed, say so. Do not try to bluff or turn the question into another question that you can answer. You can also offer to come back to the Committee in writing at a later date if they have asked about something which you can investigate further.

Manners: At times a Committee, or individual Members, can be hostile (although most are not). However, as a witness, your role, is to assist them to do their work and build their evidence. Respond calmly and courteously as this will help your evidence to be heard.

Follow-up: If you do not feel you quite got your point across properly during the session, follow up with further written evidence to clarify or expand on what you said.

You should also consult the official *Parliamentary guidance on giving oral or written evidence*, available [here](#).



Engaging with Select Committees

Audrey Tan

Engaging with the world of public policy at first can seem daunting, as it's often difficult to know *where* to start.

In my Engagement Facilitator role within UCL Public Policy, I'm often involved in putting together responses for UCL for parliamentary Select Committees. Whilst responses can be made by a university, they can also be made by individuals. They are a great first step for researchers looking to engage with parliament as they set out the evidence needs and provide a defined route for engagement.

In order to identify applicable inquiries, I joined the mailing lists and followed the Twitter accounts of relevant Select Committees, such as the Commons Science and Technology (S&T) Committee. I also consulted the [list of current inquiries](#) and discovered that the S&T Committee had launched one into 'Coronavirus: lessons learnt'. From the title it seemed very relevant, but there wasn't much information within the call itself. So, I arranged a telephone call with a Committee Clerk; this conversation provided me with key details around evidence gaps as well as an opportunity to bring UCL researchers to the attention of the Clerks.

After this call, it was clear that the submission needed to include a body of evidence, rather than a single study, so I contacted UCL researchers about relevant sections of the inquiry and asked how they thought their research could contribute. I then consolidated the responses into a single written submission. To ensure this was effective, I followed the [Parliament guidance](#) and drew on [insights from my colleagues](#).

Through my experience in responding to a range of inquiries, I found that it's best to keep the submission short, putting the important points in a summary on the front page and highlighting key recommendations through bolding text. It's also vital to ensure that the evidence presented answers the questions set by the inquiry.



As evidence submitted to parliament becomes a public document published on their website, this is a really beneficial way of demonstrating your impact. You can also monitor impact by checking whether your evidence has been cited in the Committee's final report, or if a member of your team has been called to give oral evidence.

It's been brilliant working on the public policy team at UCL, and seeing first-hand how evidence can help to shape policies, and how research can have an impact in the real world. Most recently, I provided editorial support to the European Institute's response to the House of Lords European Union Committee's inquiry into future UK-EU relationships; this submission was heavily cited in the Committee's [report](#), which was fantastic to see. If you need help or advice with a submission, the UCL Public Policy team and I are happy to help – so please do get in touch.

More examples of submissions led or supported by UCL Public Policy and colleagues from across UCL can be found on the [UCL Public Policy website](#).

Engaging with All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

What they are

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are cross-party groups that have no official status within Parliament, but they are an excellent mechanism to work through to build your networks and connect with relevant people interested in your research and expertise. They are run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords, though many choose to involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration and activities.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) consist of Members of both Houses and all parties who join together to examine a particular topic or interest. With over 600 established, they cover a diverse range of subjects, for example the built environment, health, and women and work or focus on a country of common interest.

They are not however official parliamentary bodies and they should not be confused with select committees.

Why engage?

They are established for a rich variety of purposes. They provide a valuable opportunity for parliamentarians to engage with individuals and organisations outside Parliament who share an interest in the subject matter of their Group. Therefore they can be very receptive to approaches from researchers, research teams and organisations and can provide a forum for well-informed discussion and analysis.

How to engage

By looking at the APPG register online you can identify a group most closely related to your research and/or expertise.

Each APPG has its own [webpage](#) containing details of its members, the secretariat, upcoming meetings, topics and past publications.

Get in touch with the secretariat to find out more about what the group is interested in, how your research and/or expertise can contribute and how you can get involved.

Meetings are public so anybody can attend. By attending one or two you will be able to get a good understanding of how the group works and meet some members. Following them on social media (eg Twitter) can also help to build an understanding and offers the means for virtual engagement to support relationship building.

Ways to engage

APPGs receive information from a variety of experts and sources. They also receive a lot of it and all of the time. It is therefore helpful to translate your research in to an accessible and tailored format for readers, who may not be experts in your subject area. These can consist of written research summaries, attending or speaking at events or communicating via social media. Whether in person or online, its always useful to have a short elevator pitch ready to go.

Inquiry submissions: APPGs can invite written submissions for inquiries, which provides an opportunity to present your evidence to policy professionals. You can find details of these online.

Engaging with policy

Dr Ben Noble

I enjoy public policy engagement partly because of the element of the unknown. Chance encounters, side comments, and unexpected puzzles have the chance of resulting in something meaningful and impactful.

My policy engagement work began at the end of 2017. I gave a talk at King's College London on my research into the State Duma – the lower chamber of Russia's national-level parliament. At the end of the talk, somebody from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) approached me to say they were keen to get me in to talk about my research findings further with their colleagues.

The following exchange of emails between the FCDO contact and me allowed us to develop trust and a rapport – and to learn more about what insight I could bring to analysts and officials in Whitehall.

A few months after my talk at King's, I delivered a presentation at the FCDO on my research to a mixture of research analysts and officials working on UK policy relating to Russia. This wasn't just a one-way process of me imparting information: I learned about how these non-academic stakeholders viewed questions in their own way – something which made me see some of my own material in an entirely new light.

The visit also gave me a better sense of the policy landscape of Whitehall, and to which other units it might be worth reaching out.



Indeed, my post-talk networking led to further engagements, such as ad hoc policy briefings and joining a panel discussion on threats in the lead up to the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Though you can plan a strategy for the people you want to meet, you have to be ready to take advantage of moments when opportunities present themselves, such as bumping into someone in the hall on your way to a meeting with somebody else. Have a plan, by all means, but be ready and willing to change the plan as new opportunities arise. The serendipity of policy engagement can be exhilarating.

[Hear more about Dr Noble's work here.](#)

Designing an event to attract a policy audience

Why hold an event?

Hosting an event aimed at a policy audience can be a very effective way of communicating your research expertise. It can also provide a valuable opportunity for engagement and for developing useful contacts.

The purpose of an event can vary but can include:

- to promote a piece of research or a research centre or launch a particular activity
- to map stakeholder interests or engage them with your research
- to establish longer-term relationships with policy stakeholders
- to better understand the policy landscape you wish to engage with
- to provide an opportunity for dialogue and debate on a particular issue

Questions to ask yourself

- Why are you hosting the event?
- What do you want the event to achieve?
- What will you do to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is front and centre to planning and delivery of your event?
- How do you plan to engage a diverse policy audience?
- How do you plan to make the event accessible?
- Is the event primarily intended to showcase research, provide an opportunity for dialogue, build a relationship, or something else?
- What outcomes would you like to see from the event? How can you evaluate these?

What format?

Consider a number of different formats, including:

- **public event** – a larger event, open to all, focused on a policy issue. Usually includes both academic and policy speakers, and audience questions
- **seminar** – a smaller event, usually with an invited audience, with short presentations and a discussion
- **roundtable** – a small, invitation-only event with chaired discussion on a particular issue
- **workshop** – a small, invitation-only event with a particular focus on participants identifying and working through problems to generate solutions
- **online** – events can be online or in person. If online, think about which platforms to use, given your audience size and event type; UCL recommends MS Teams

You can [learn more about this here](#).

Topic

To attract a diverse policy audience, your event should be focused on a policy-relevant issue. Generally speaking, the more topical an issue is or the more your event addresses a policy 'need', the more likely you are to engage policy professionals.

Try to use an engaging but clear title for your event.

Partnering with a policy organisation to co-produce the event, or otherwise involving policy stakeholders (e.g. through an invited speaker), is likely to increase its appeal and impact.

Audience

Try to tailor your event to those audiences you wish to reach (e.g. Government officials, Parliamentary staff, local government, practitioners, non-governmental organisations, particular interest groups). This includes consideration of content, but also practicalities such as accessibility, timing, and location.

It's vitally important within these audiences to ensure participants represent a diverse range of backgrounds, ages, disabilities, ethnicities and opinions.

Speakers

Academic speakers should be good communicators and able to present research succinctly. You should consider inviting policy speakers (to share their perspective or respond to academic ideas). Speakers should be willing to participate in open debate and be challenged. Identify a strong chair who can facilitate productive discussion.

Brief all speakers and the chair in advance with information on the audience, purpose of the event, their role and your approach to ensuring inclusivity.

Ensure speakers, lineups and panels are balanced for diversity e.g. a range of backgrounds, ages, disabilities, ethnicities and opinions.

Presentations

Ensure that you have engaging speakers (especially if academics). Keep presentations short (ideally five minutes, no more than 10). Focus on findings and key messages.

Think about the policy context/policy implications. Be as clear and definite as possible in presenting conclusions. Content should be accessible: no academic jargon, and don't get bogged down in intellectual frameworks or methodologies.

Discussion

Ensure there is generous time for discussion. Promote interaction and try to involve all your invited policy stakeholders. Be attuned to your participants and ensure that you bring in diverse voices.

In smaller events, try to ensure the discussion moves towards some sort of conclusion, next steps or recommendations.

If your event is online, be sure to adhere to digital etiquette; if using platforms like Zoom or MS Teams, use the 'raised-hand function' to facilitate questions, and make sure your microphone is on mute when you're not talking. Also use accessibility functions such as captioning and provide a transcript post event.

Events can also be used as a networking opportunity for you and your attendees, so do ensure there's time for this.

Advertising

Target invitations to people with relevant interest, but as you compile your list be sure to stay alert to your unconscious biases. Use personal invitations to increase attendance. You may need to research and target a particular audience.

Offering access to academic expertise is valuable but it should be timely, relevant and appropriately communicated.

Take advantage of UCL dissemination channels (e.g. the UCL Public Events website, UCL Grand Challenges, UCL Public Policy, the Week@UCL (internal staff newsletter), UCL Minds (shares the knowledge, insights and ideas of our UCL community and are accessible through a wide range of events and activities, open to all, in and outside of UCL) and Twitter.

If your event is public, consider using a hashtag so that people can tweet about it and those who are not present can follow the debate on the day.

Follow-up

You may want to produce outputs associated with or after the event, e.g. an evidence note on the issue or a high-level summary of the research. Producing a note or blog of the event can aid its longevity and reach a wider audience.

You should consider evaluating your event (e.g. attendance, participation, a feedback form or questionnaire) to see how useful or successful it was and how it might have been improved. Be sure to measure the impact of your EDI actions. This will help you establish best practice for future engagements. Make sure to also engage with UCL's GDPR office for advice on data capture and storage.

UCL services

UCL Corporate Events provides a range of support for events planning and management, as well as a [UCL Events Toolkit](#), including room bookings, audiovisual services, digital and creative media services, as well as catering.

UCL Room Bookings: The UCL Room & Conference Booking Office is responsible for all centrally bookable space in UCL and will be able to provide you with a full list of venues and their capacities. You can check availability and book space online or contact the team to discuss your requirements further directly by email or telephone (x41819).

UCL Audiovisual Centre: The UCL Audiovisual Centre supports audiovisual and IT facilities in UCL's centrally bookable spaces. It can be contacted by email. The UCL Room Bookings team will be able to advise you about what equipment is available in centrally bookable spaces.

UCL Creative Media Services: UCL Creative Media Services provides digital and creative media services, including photography, video, design and print. The team should be your point of contact with regards to queries about filming and event live streaming. See key contacts and costs of services.

Catering: Sodexo is UCL's preferred supplier for hospitality and events. See more information and the hospitality brochure; place orders [here](#). For all catering enquiries email Sodexo or by telephone (x32153).



Organising online events

Dr Kris de Meyer

In March 2020, UCL Public Policy and the Local Government Association had planned to run a one-day workshop called 'Pathways to Net Zero'. But when COVID-19 struck, we decided to move it online.

We learned a lot through running this event about what works well (or even better) in an online format - and what doesn't.

Firstly, it's important to pick your platform carefully. Technology-wise, we knew we needed a video conferencing platform that would allow pair work or small group discussions, and a 'gallery view' in which all of the participants could see each other side-by-side. These facilitation constraints meant we needed to use Zoom.

We also found that breakout group discussions need clear tasks and questions. We frequently switched between pairwise and small group discussions, relied on random as well as pre-assigned groups, and discovered that limiting discussions to eight minutes enables them to be more focused than in face-to-face meetings.

With 15 people who can only strictly speak in turn in a video call, a plenary is not the place to get an exchange of opinions going. Make sure you know exactly what questions need answering or what experiences from the breakout rooms you'd like participants to share.

Digital whiteboards (e.g. Jamboard or Mural) are great to capture the salient points of the group conversations. In our workshop, these worked best for participants who had access to a second screen. Also, making sure everyone was able to spend some time either during or before the session getting used to the technology is important.



One of the perks of breaking up a one-day workshop into four weekly sessions is allowing time for 'homework'. As the aim of our workshop was to foster partnership working, we wanted discussions to continue between sessions. If a task was too complicated to do during the session, or if more time was needed for applying a learning of the workshop to their own practice, we assigned it as a 'homework' task. We would always come back to the homework at the start of the next session, such that it had a real purpose in the overall design of the programme.

Timing: design your workshop so that you know what you will do to the minute. However, give yourself five minutes of 'landing' time at the beginning, and end with never less than 10 minutes of plenary time, so that you have a bit of flexibility of running over time in other parts.

Evaluating public policy engagement and impact

Overview

Evaluating public policy engagement and impact is notoriously complex: policy impact can be diffuse and hard to track and it may be that the full impact of an activity or piece of research will never be fully captured. Whilst evaluation is likely to remain an imperfect process, there are some relatively simple ways to capture some of the value of engagement and impact activity. These suggest some of the things you may wish to consider when evaluating your own activity or when inviting views from stakeholders.

Opening questions

In order to evaluate your activity, you'll need a clear and realistic sense of what you are hoping to get out of public policy engagement. The more specific you can be, the easier it will be to evaluate.

It may help to start by answering the following questions:

- What are you aiming to achieve?
- How are you planning to achieve it?
- How will you know if you have succeeded?

Possible evaluation methods

The [UCL Public Engagement Unit](#) has provided extensive guidance on possible evaluation methods (much of which is highly relevant to policy engagement). It is likely that much evaluation of public policy engagement and impact will be qualitative and done largely through accounts of activity, relying on testimonials and feedback.

The most useful methods could include:

- questionnaires
- interviews
- focus groups
- personal logs and reports of activity

You may also want to think about what indicators can help you to evaluate the success of your public policy engagement or impact, such as:

- citations in policy documents or reports
- website visit and usage statistics
- download statistics of policy-focused documents or other resources
- readership of blogs or newsletters
- number of attendees or participants at events or meetings
- invitations to speak at policy events

Useful impact evaluation questions

It may be useful to ask yourself questions such as:

- How far do you feel you met your original aims?
- Did you form any new contacts or relationships with policy stakeholders?
- Have any existing stakeholder relationships been strengthened?
- Have you created additional capacity for public policy engagement?
- Have you created additional policy knowledge?
- Was research successfully communicated to policy stakeholders?

More information

- [UKRI's guidelines on evaluation](#)
- [REF impact case studies database](#) – 'political' impact case studies
- Digital Science report on [economic and social impact of research](#)
- [UK Collaborative on Development](#)
- [Research paper](#) on evaluating research impact
- [UCL's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Training](#)

UCL's public policy impact - from local to global

UCL research and expertise impacts on public policy in a variety of ways, from providing advice to Government or policy organisations, undertaking commissioned research, or arriving at new insights that can inform policymaking.

Professor Frank Smith UCL Mathematics

Improving air safety

The Department of Mathematics has a strong tradition in applied mathematics, in particular fluid dynamics. Research led by Professor Frank Smith has resulted in improved aircraft safety. The formation of ice on aircraft is highly complex, and engineering solutions are neither robust nor complete. Over several years, Professor Smith's team studied the nature of droplets of water, and how they impact, splash, skim, freeze and thaw on aircraft. This work at UCL has fed directly into commercial applications in aircraft ice protection systems, particularly through a partnership with engineering consultancy firm AeroTex UK.

Professor Andrew Hayward Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care

Informing national and international influenza vaccination policy

Research led by Professor Andrew Hayward has informed national influenza vaccination and control policy. Since 2006, Professor Hayward has led the MRC/Wellcome Flu Watch study, the world's largest community study of influenza transmission and immunity. This study provides the most robust measures to date of influenza burden across different age groups and highlights the particularly high rates in children. This work has contributed to the recommendation by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation of routine vaccination of all children against influenza every year and the decision not to recommend extension of vaccination to all adults aged over 50 years.

Professor Henrietta Moore Institute for Global Prosperity

Universal Basic Services

The universal basic services (UBS) policy proposal was developed by the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) as a pathway to deliver on secure livelihoods and prosperity. Their research showed that a UBS system would be economically feasible, sustainable and transformative, reinforcing the capacities of individuals and communities to respond and adapt to sudden shocks. In 2019, the UK Labour Party published a report on UBS, *Universal Basic Services: The Right to a Good Life*, with the concept shaping parts of the party's manifesto released ahead of the 2019 December Election. Currently, the IGP is working in collaboration with local authorities, community organisations and stakeholders in Liverpool, Wales and London to develop pilot studies to test the idea in practice and help inform policy.

Dr Willy Burgess and Professor John McArthur UCL Earth Sciences

Arsenic in Aquifers

Toxic arsenic pollution in groundwater is a severe threat in certain parts of the world, particularly the Ganges Delta region, where over 70 million people are exposed to potentially contaminated aquifers. Research by UCL's Earth Sciences department, led by Burgess and McArthur, has had considerable impact on government policy in Bangladesh and international aid programmes in the region. UCL's research showed that the arsenic pollution was natural, and not caused by pumping for irrigation as was previously thought. This reversed government plans to curb irrigation, which would have had serious negative impacts on food production in the area. Further research by the group has informed new strategies for and monitoring of groundwater pumping in Bangladesh.

Resources: UCL Public Policy and beyond

UCL

UCL Public Policy

- [UCL Public Policy website](#)
- [UCL Public Policy blog: Policy Postings](#)
- [UCL Public Policy YouTube](#)
- [Subscribe to the UCL Public Policy mailing list](#)

Other UCL websites

- [Policy Impact Unit \(STePP\)](#)
- [The Bartlett - Informing Policy](#)

Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN)

UPEN is a network of UK universities who are working together to increase the public policy impact of their research. UCL is a founding member of the network. [Visit their website to find out more.](#)

Respond to a consultations or Inquiry

- [Gov.uk list of open consultations](#) - find and respond to a consultation.
- [Select Committee Inquiries](#) - find an inquiry and submit your evidence.
- [Research Impact at the UK Parliament](#) - everything you need to know to engage with Parliament as an academic researcher.

Parliamentary Resources

- Consult the [calendar of scheduled business](#) in Parliament.
- Consult [Hansard](#): a searchable, verbatim report of what is said in Parliament (for example: debates, speeches, questions and answers).

Follow the work of Parliament by choosing to receive updates and alerts from the areas of the institution relevant to your research:

Select Committees

- Sign up for email alerts direct from the relevant [Select Committee](#)
- Many Committees are on Twitter. Find details of Twitter accounts on individual [Committee pages](#)

House of Commons Library

- Subscribe to [email alerts](#) about the Library's work
- Read [insights](#) on current affairs from the Library
- Follow the Library on Twitter: [@commonslibrary](#)
- Follow the House of Commons on Twitter: [@HouseofCommons](#)

House of Lords Library

- Subscribe to [email alerts](#) about the Library's work
- Read [blog posts](#) on topical issues and current affairs from the Library
- Follow the Library on Twitter: [@HLLibResearch](#)
- Follow the House of Lords on Twitter: [@UKHouseofLords](#)

POST

- To receive notifications about POST's publications, events and work programme, [join the POST mailing list](#)
- Follow POST on Twitter: [@POST_UK](#)
- Follow POST on [LinkedIn](#)

Find out more

UCL Public Policy publishes a regular newsletter providing news of ongoing policy inquiries and Select Committees, UCL Public Policy activities, topical policy blogs and funding opportunities.

Sign up at ucl.ac.uk/public-policy/newsletters and follow our blog at medium.com/policypostings

We are happy to support other policy focused activities - please get in touch.

Get in touch

public-policy@ucl.ac.uk
[@UCLPublicPolicy](https://twitter.com/UCLPublicPolicy)

ucl.ac.uk/publicpolicy
medium.com/policypostings