

Working with the Policy Impact Unit

August 2019

The Policy Impact Unit brings together UCL Engineering researchers with policy makers and the wider policy community to achieve real impact on issues of public interest.

About the Policy Impact Unit (PIU)

We believe policy should be informed by rigorous evidence. Our team of policy professionals collaborate with Engineering researchers to ensure the policy community has easy access to the high-quality evidence it needs. We are policy entrepreneurs who aim to stimulate and inform policy debate, decisions, delivery and scrutiny.

Policy Entrepreneurs

“To be a policy entrepreneur is to: find out where the action is, learn the rules of the game, form alliances, frame your evidence in relation to the language of policy debate, and respond to socioeconomic context and events which help create windows of opportunity.”

Cairney, P. (2018) ‘Three habits of successful policy entrepreneurs’, *Policy and politics*, 46(2), pp. 199–215. doi: 10.1332/030557318X15230056771696

Effective policy engagement requires time and energy as well as specialised skills and knowledge. The PIU was established to provide a dedicated resource for UCL Engineering to help deliver effective policy engagement activities.

Our staff members have experience of working in both academia and public policy, and bring an understanding of the policy process, key players and institutional landscape. We also understand the political context in which policy debates and decisions play out. We know how to write for policy audiences, how to run events and how to facilitate workshops and roundtables. Most importantly, we take a strategic approach to all of our engagement activities in order to help create windows of opportunity and maximise the potential for impact.

By doing the heavy lifting of policy engagement – from researching the state of relevant policy debates and identifying opportunities for influencing them to managing contacts and dissemination of outputs – we free up researcher time to focus on core activities.

We also assist with the important task of tracking and measuring and recording impact.

Why work with us?

We are motivated by getting high-quality research off the shelf and into the hands of policymakers. We want policy decisions that shape society to be informed by the best available evidence.

Our programmes of work aim to deliver real impact. Although the policy-making process is complex, and impact can never be guaranteed, we will always work with the objective of achieving change. We will consider our activities successful if we achieve one or more of the following types of change:

- Policy debate is stimulated or informed by research evidence.
- Policy decisions or changes to legislation are informed by research evidence.
- Decisions by regulatory authorities have been influenced by research.
- Research is used by parliamentarians to develop proposals for new legislation through Private Members' Bills, or to assist scrutiny of legislation and inform amendments to other bills such as those introduced by government.
- Research helps to highlight issues of concern to parliamentarians and contributes to new analysis of existing issues.
- Research helps parliamentarians and staff to identify inquiry topics, shape the focus of inquiries, inform questioning of witnesses, and underpin recommendations.
- In delivering a public service, a new technology or process has been adopted or an existing technology or process improved.
- The quality, accessibility, acceptability or cost-effectiveness of a public service has been improved.
- The work of an NGO, charitable or other organisation has been influenced by the research.

If you want your research to contribute towards policy change, understand that sustained engagement over a period of time is necessary, and are ready to collaborate, then we would love to hear from you and explore how we can work together.

What we offer

We collaborate with researchers in five main areas:

1. **Co-development of research projects:** Facilitating engagement between the research and policy communities to develop research questions that have value for both sectors.
2. **Scoping and planning:** Understanding the policy landscape, identifying opportunities for engagement and developing a strategic approach to deliver impact-related goals.
3. **Engagement activities:** Designing and delivering engagement activities, including briefings, events and communications activities.

4. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Developing an indicator set and tracking progress towards impact goals as well as providing input for REF case studies and ResearchFish submissions where appropriate.
5. **Training:** In partnership with Dr Ine Steenmans (Lecturer in Futures, Analysis and Policy), we have developed a two-hour 'introduction to policy engagement' training course.

What we don't do

We can't help with the following activities:

Public Affairs activities (such as making requests for research funding)

The primary objective of the PIU is to supply research evidence to stimulate and inform policy debate, decisions, delivery and scrutiny.

We are sometimes asked if we can help to make the case to policymakers that research funding for specific areas should be increased. While our work might include helping to raise awareness about emerging areas of research interest, we do not carry out lobbying or campaigning activities where UCL or UCL researchers would be (or might be perceived to be) primary beneficiaries. This is because such lobbying activity is likely to undermine our credibility with the policy community as 'honest brokers' of research evidence.

However, some academics have themselves gone on to make the case for more research funding after having worked with us.

Producing outputs without a clear impact objective in mind

Our approach to policy impact is to start with an impact objective (that is, to identify the policy change we wish to affect) and to then develop a strategic engagement plan that we think is most likely to lead to this change. We believe that producing policy-facing outputs (reports, briefings, events etc) without a clear objective and strategy is unlikely to deliver quality impact and is therefore likely to result in wasted time and effort.

We are very happy to work with researchers to develop an impact objective and strategic plan before agreeing on which outputs should be produced.

Working with the PIU

Researchers can collaborate with us on projects with a significant policy engagement component by costing our services into grant submissions or paying a day rate.

Co-development and pathways to impact

We offer to work with researchers on co-development activities and preparation of 'pathways to impact' statements free of charge, so long as Policy Adviser time is included in subsequent grant applications.

Directly Allocated/Pre-award

We can be included on grants as a directly allocated cost and will prepare a section in Worktribe for this as part of the grant submission process. We can provide fractional or full-time effort as needed, throughout the project or at critical intervals, and manage resourcing and recruiting issues to ensure the team is capable of servicing such obligations.

Post-award

For research groups who already hold appropriate grant funds, where the total budget is £5,000 or more, we will require a separate project sub-account to be set up against which we will charge our costs, and will cost on the basis of a retrospective costing using UCL's standard grant costing tools. For projects with a budget of less than £5,000 we will request transfers via IDT. For smaller projects we can on occasion use a day rate. Please contact us for the current rate.

Training

We aim to help all researchers at UCL to improve their knowledge and skills of policy engagement. We offer a two-hour 'introduction to policy engagement' training course, which we will provide free of charge, subject to staff availability.

Prioritisation criteria

The PIU will always aim to take on paid-for projects that lie within our remit and may become involved either pre- or -post award as described above. However, due to high demand, we are at times unable to work with all groups that contact us. In such circumstances, we will prioritise projects where we can provide the most benefit, relative to other potential solutions.

Personnel and communication

The Policy Advisers working on the project will be chosen by the PIU, based on skillset and time availability. We reserve the right to change Advisers throughout the project (although will endeavour to do so in a way that is mutually beneficial).

There will be regular (e.g. fortnightly) meetings organised for status updates, at times convenient for the researchers and Policy Advisers, but more meetings and other means of communication (e.g. via Teams project site) are encouraged for efficient exchange of information.

Scheduling work

The PIU supports many research projects across UCL simultaneously and needs to manage the time commitments individual developers give to each project in order to ensure each one is successful, as far as it is within our power to do so. We are often under very high demand and hence need to schedule work several months in advance. While we strive to adapt to changes in research priorities and unexpected deadlines, we cannot guarantee being able to do so. In particular, if there is a lack of responsiveness from research groups during the scheduled work period, the project may need to be rescheduled resulting in delays. The collaboration will be most effective if we are informed of known deadlines well in advance, and schedule tasks together with you in order to meet these. We will update you on the forecast schedule at the regular meetings as desired and will let you know of any material changes on our side as early as we can.

Time tracking

We use a tool for time tracking and time spent in projects and can give updates on this when requested.

Recognition for the PIU

One of the aims of the PIU is to raise the profile of policy engagement within the wider research community. We do not require that we are named as authors on research papers, but we would be keen to co-author journal articles relating to policy engagement activities with you. Such activities also help to enhance the group's track record for subsequent grant proposals in which we collaborate.

Contact us

If you are interested in collaborating with the PIU or would like to find out more about what we do, please contact Jenny Bird on jenny.bird@ucl.ac.uk or 0203 108 9201.