Engaging with policymakers

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Part 1: Introduction to research-policy landscape

Overview of research and policy stakeholders
Introduction to UK Parliament
Overview of parts of Parliament that use research

Part 2: Engaging with Select Committees

Part 3: Engaging with MPs

What is academic-policy engagement?

Interaction between the academic and public policy communities which aims to increase the use of research evidence and expertise in policymaking

…and why does it matter?

"The Spending Review committed record levels of investment in the UK's world-leading research base over the next 3 years, with **R&D spending set to increase by £5 billion to £20 billion per annum by 2024-2025** - a 33% increase in spending over the current parliament by 2024-2025"
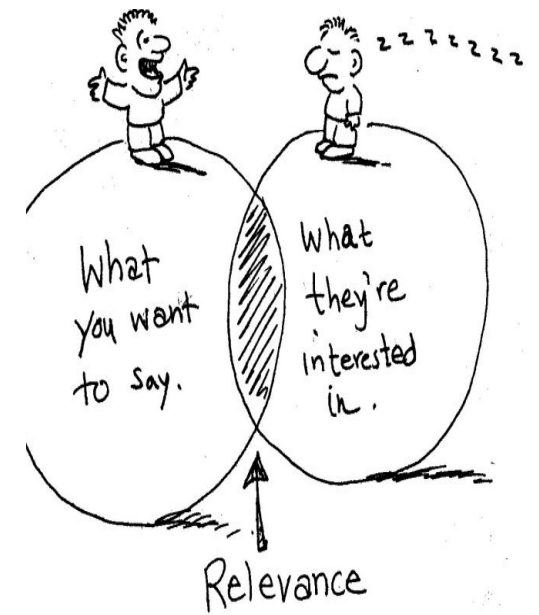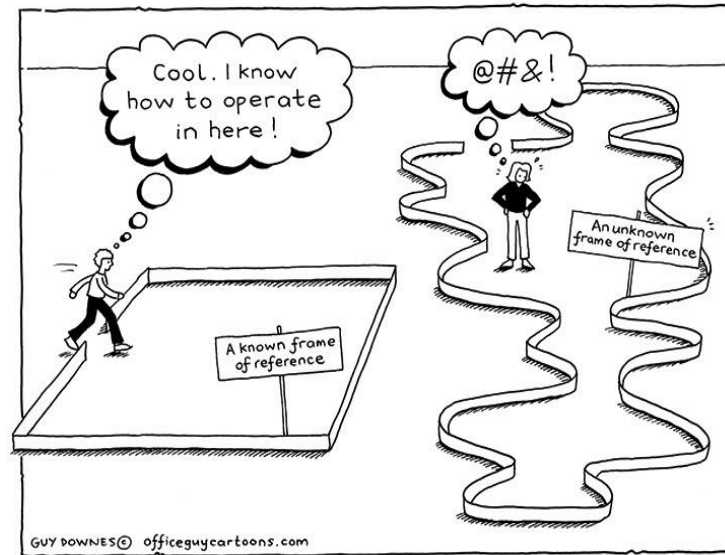BEIS statement, 14 March 2022

"In order to thrive in an increasingly competitive world, countries must apply science and technology strategically and embed it in their policy- and decision-making."
Patrick Vallance, Civil Service Blog, 22 February 2022
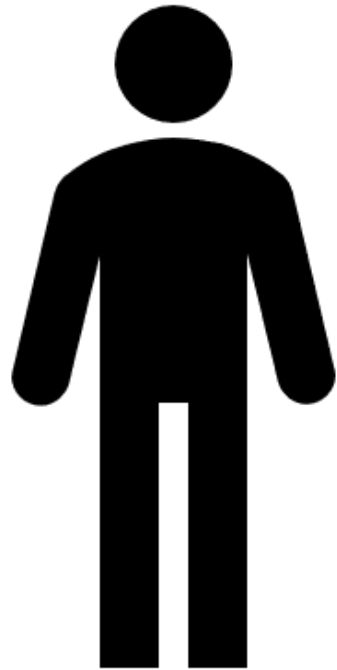
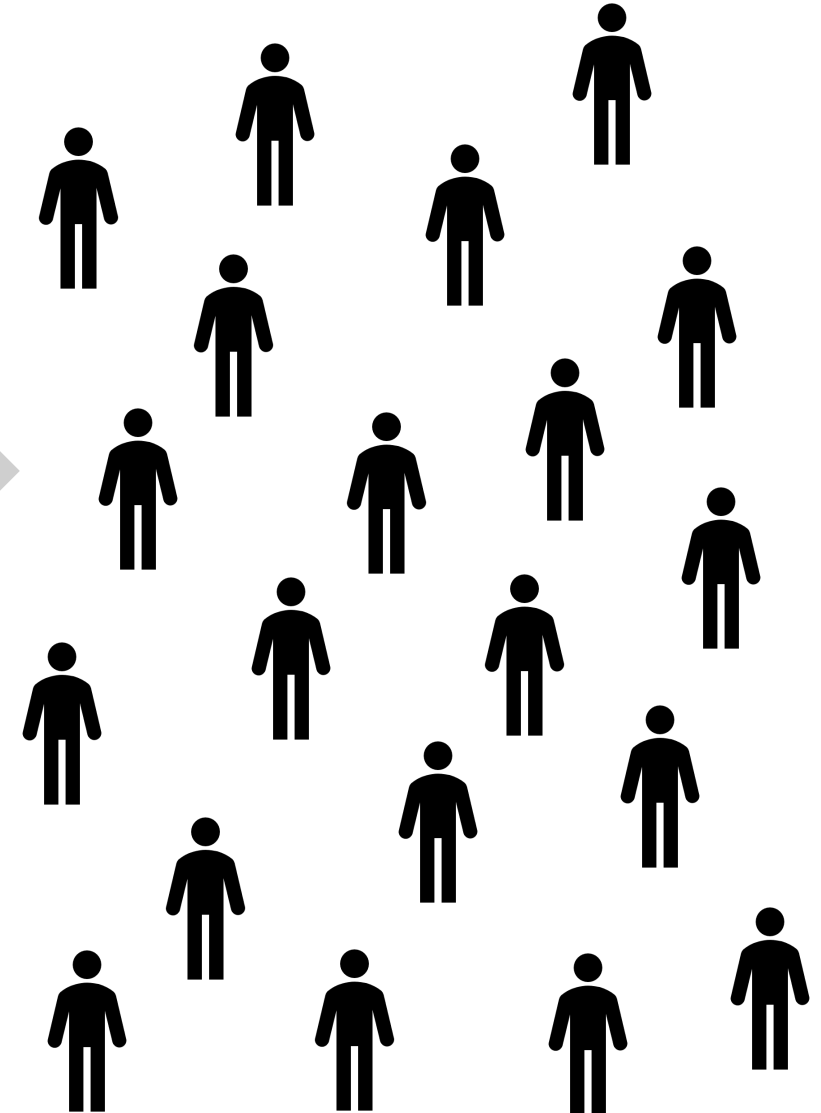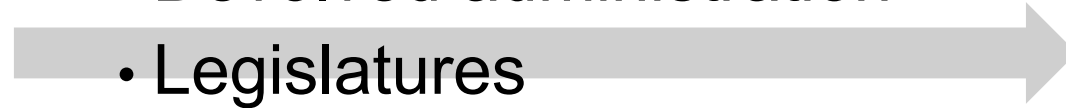# UK context: From the niche to the mainstream
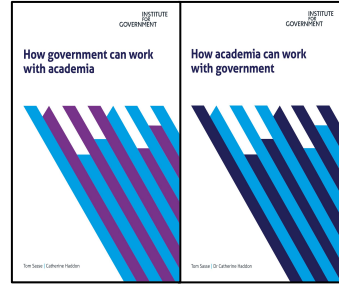
Common obstacles to academic-policy engagement

Who are 'policymakers'?

- UK Government
- Devolved administration
- Legislatures
- Regional authorities
- Local councils
- Public agencies

Policy functions / stakeholders

	Evidence Analysis	Policy development	Scrutiny	Implementation	Evaluation	Campaigning
MPs			■		■	■
Parliamentary Staff	■				■	
Ministers		■		■	■	■
Civil servants	■	■		■	■	
Local councillors / authority members		■	■	■	■	■
Local / regional authority staff	■	■		■	■	
NDPBs	■			■	■	
NGOs / intermediaries	■		■		■	■

Policy engagement and impact routes

What is the UK Parliament?

House of Commons

House of Lords

Monarch

What does the UK Parliament do?

- Represents the people
- Checks and challenges the work of the Government (scrutiny)
- Makes and changes laws (legislation)

- Debates the important issues of the day (debating)
- Checks and approves Government spending (taxes and budgets)

Image by Dan Johnston from Pixabay

Parliament ≠ Government

UK Parliament

UK Government

UK Parliament

- Commons, Lords and Monarch
- Holds Government to account
- Makes laws
- Enables the Government to raise and spend money

- Some MPs and some Peers, chosen by the Prime Minister
- Runs Government departments and public services
- Is accountable to Parliament

istock by Getty images

Who uses research in the UK Parliament?

UK Parliament

House of Commons select committees	House of Lords select committees

Joint select committees

Legislation

House of Commons Library	House of Lords Library

POST

Individual MPs and their researchers	Individual Peers and their researchers

All Party Parliamentary Groups
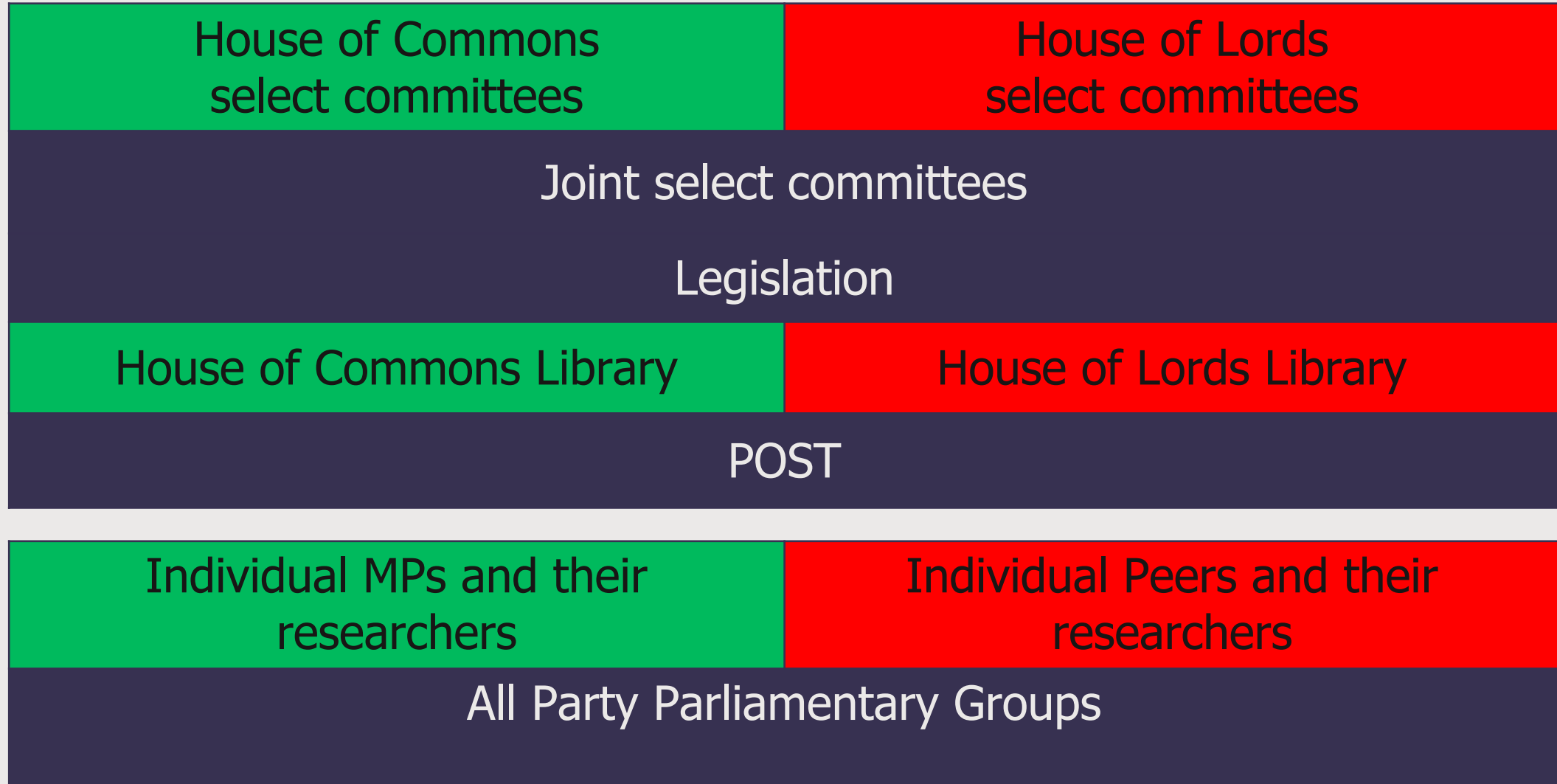
POST

- Bridges research and policy to ensure that the best available research evidence feeds into the legislative process and scrutiny of Government, through:
  - Horizon scanning briefings (POSTnotes)
  - Reactive advice for Committees and Libraries (POSTbriefs)
  - Events
  - Knowledge Exchange (internal and external)
  - Academic fellowships
  - International work

Upskilling and retraining the adult workforce

Overview
- The UK faces a range of challenges that will require workers to upskill or retrain.
- There are mismatches between supply and demand of skills in the UK workforce.
- The Government and the devolved administrations are pursuing a range of policies to strengthen the UK's skills base.
- Participation in adult education (AE) in England has fallen from 4.4m in 2003/04 to 1.5m in 2019/20. In the same period, funding for AE fell by nearly two thirds.
- Participation in AE is less likely for adults who are older, lower skilled or experience educational disadvantages.
- Adult learning is associated with a range of positive economic and wellbeing outcomes.

This POSTnote provides an overview of adult upskilling and retraining in the UK. It outlines the national context of adult education, including issues around supply and demand of skills as well as funding and participation rates. It also discusses the key impacts of adult learning. This briefing focuses on 19+ adult learning and excludes university education.

While there are a range of competing frameworks that define 'skills',[1–4] the UK Government's Employer Skills Survey (ESS), which in 2019 was undertaken by 81,000 employers in the UK (excluding Scotland),[5] grouped skills into 'technical and practical skills' and 'people and personal skills'.[6,7] Technical and practical skills include specific knowledge needed to perform a role, while people and personal skills include time management, task prioritisation and teamworking.[6,7] Upskilling refers to the improvement of an individual's skillset while retraining refers to developing skills to enable a change in an individual's role.[8]

Imbalance between the skills available in the labour market and those sought by employers creates 'skills mismatches'.[9–13] When the skills or qualifications of workers exceed employer demand it can lead to 'skills surpluses'. However, when the type or level of skills that employers need is lacking amongst individuals, it [create] 'skills gaps' and 'skills shortages'.[9] Skills gaps occur [wor]kers within an organisation lack the necessary level of [their] roles. Skills shortages occur when vacancies [due] to a lack of skilled individuals in the [unfil]led vacancies can also reflect a failure [de]sirable working conditions.[9] [ho]wever, there

are currently significant skills challenges within the UK. The 2019 ESS reported that 24% of job vacancies were caused by skills shortages and that 13% of employers thought that some employees were under-skilled for their role.[6,14] Productivity levels in the UK have remained weak since 2008,[15,16] and the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the labour market.[17] Trends such as automation, migration and an extended work life are also likely to influence the type of jobs available in the future. There are 32.5m workers aged 16+ in the workforce,[18] and, according to the Confederation of British Industry, 25.5m will require upskilling and 5m will require retraining by 2030.[8]

The UK Government and devolved administrations are pursuing policies to help boost the UK's skills base (Box 1). In May 2021 the UK Government introduced the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill to Parliament, which provides legislation for reforms to post-16 education and training in England outlined in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.[19] This includes a Lifelong Loan Entitlement equivalent to four years of post-18 full-time or modular study at higher technical and degree levels, the detail and scope of which will be consulted upon.[20] Research shows that [co-]production of training between providers and em[ployers] help create effective training programme[s,] envisages more employer input th[rough] Local Skills Improvement [Plans]

UK Parliament

Questions?

Understanding a select committee's terms of reference

Select committees

UK Parliament

- Conduct inquiries and produce reports on a range of matters, from the conduct of Government to specialist subject areas
- Committees can be departmental (House of Commons) or more cross-cutting
- Invite evidence from witnesses
- Can employ subject specialists as specialist advisers, usually academics/expert practitioners

Lords Communications and Digital Committee: Digital exclusion and the cost-of-living inquiry

UK Parliament

Terms of Reference:

1. What are the main causes of digital exclusion in the UK? What is the economic and social impact?

2. How has the rising cost of living affected digital exclusion?

    a) To what extent does digital exclusion exacerbate cost of living pressures?

    b) What are the long-term implications of this relationship?

Lords Communications and Digital Committee: Digital exclusion and the cost-of-living inquiry

Possible relevant research (and underpinning expertise)

Lords Communications and Digital Committee: Digital exclusion and the cost of living inquiry
Possible relevant research (and underpinning expertise)

- Adult education and lifelong learning
- Adult loneliness
- Climate change
- Communities of practice
- Devolution
- Digital Skills
- Disabilities
- Economic disparities
- Education
- Employment
- Financial inclusion
- Health and Wellbeing
- Levelling up
- National Security

Find select committee inquiries relevant to research at your institution

- Follow the link in the Q&A feed to a list of all currently open calls for evidence

UK Parliament

Questions?

How to engage with an MP to present ideas for change

5 ways that Members can represent your research at Parliament

1. Written/oral questions to Government
2. Backbench Business Committee
3. Select Committee work
4. Private Members Bill
5. Early Day Motions

Guidance for engaging with Members

UK Parliament

1. Sell yourself - highlight that you are a researcher on this topic
2. Be clear on what action you want them to take/what change you want to see introduced
3. Tell them how your research supports the action/change that you are asking for
4. Highlight why your work is relevant
5. Be accessible- avoid using jargon and acronyms.

Remember you are engaging with a non-specialist audience!

Activity: Writing to an MP

UK Parliament

"You're writing to your local MP to ask them to table a question to the Government. When writing to your MP include…"

- **What** question you want them to ask the Government or what change you like them to press the Government to change.

e.g. I would like you to ask for teddy bears to be banned from the UK

- **How** your research supports the question/proposed change

e.g. my research has demonstrated that teddy bears slow down child socialisation

Find your local MP: https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP

Questions and reflections

Resources for engaging with UK Parliament

Online resources and 'how to' guides: www.parliament.uk/research-impact

Follow the Knowledge Exchange Unit: @UKParl_Research

Follow POST: @POST_UK

Get in touch: keu@parliament.uk

Sign-up for our weekly round-ups to find out about opportunities to engage

Some useful resources

Universities Policy Engagement Network

What we do

Through UPEN, policymakers can easily access evidence and expertise from several different UK universities. Services offered include:

- **Calls for evidence**

  Policymakers can ask for evidence and/or the answers to specific questions. UPEN will circulate to experts within its members' institutions and collate responses.

- **Identification of experts**

  UPEN will respond to requests to identify experts with specific knowledge or skills. It will provide list of relevant experts and details of their expertise from across its members.

- **Knowledge exchange meetings**

  UPEN will work with policymaking bodies to set up meetings around themes or technical areas identified by policymakers, bringing relevant experts.

- **Placements and secondments**

  UPEN can work with policymakers to identify staff and PhD secondments and mechanisms to organise them with minimum, best-practice bureaucracy. They will also promote existing secondment schemes.

- **Evidence synthesis**

  UPEN can help policymakers commission evidence synthesis and identify individuals or groups able to carry it out.

- **Training**

  UPEN can, through its members, organise training for civil servants and others on specific technical subjects, on research methods and techniques, and also on the role and organisation of UK universities and the best way to engage with colleagues from academia.

In all cases, UPEN aims to be flexible and responsive, and would happily consider requests which fall outside this list.

Sign up to our weekly UPEN update here, which collates opportunities, events and projects in this space.

UK Research and Innovation — Policy Fellowships 2023

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), UK Research and Innovation
Co-funders:	Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK)
Funding type:	Fellowship
Publication date:	21 February 2023
Opening date:	21 February 2023
Closing date:	20 April 2023 4:00pm UK time

Last updated: 21 February 2023

Start application ▶

Apply for funding to collaborate with a UK or devolved government host or What Works Network centre on research activity to address pressing national and global challenges.

You will:

- co-design research with the host organisation to inform policy on a priority area
- help improve the exchange of knowledge between policy and academic institutions

You must:

- be based at an organisation eligible for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding
- have a PhD or equivalent experience

For fellowships with a Whitehall or devolved administration host the full economic cost (FEC) is £170,000. For fellowships with a What Works Network host the FEC is £210,000.

Timeline

21 February 2023 — Opening date

Mid-March 2023 — Webinar

20 April 2023 4:00pm — Closing date

June 2023 — Panel assessment

July 2023 — Interview

September 2023 — Expected decisions

🖨 Print this guidance or save as PDF

Guidance on good research
⇨ Good research resource hub

Subscribe to UKRI emails

Some useful resources

IPPO

Directory of organisations, networks and projects spanning IPPO's policy topic areas

One of the International Public Policy Observatory's key roles is to encourage useful new connections among all those working on responses to the social impacts of COVID-19 and the pandemic recovery. This directory presents an overview of many such organisations, networks and projects throughout the UK (and even beyond), arranged according to IPPO's seven broad policy topic areas (in terms of their main area of focus) plus an eighth on 'data collection'.

There are, of course, also a number of organisations, like IPPO, which work across all of these areas – we list these under 'multiple social impacts'. All entries marked with an asterisk receive funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

If you would like to add your organisation or project to this list, or adjust an existing entry, please let us know at ippo@ucl.ac.uk.

Multiple social impacts

IPPO and partners

Organisations	+
Networks	+
Registers of COVID-related reviews	+

Other cross-cutting organisations

CAPE

Reports and toolkits

Engaging with Evidence toolkit

This is a toolkit on how to utilise, synthesise, scrutinise, and engage with evidence and expertise for policy development. It was created by Nesta in partnership with the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) programme and the Chief Scientific Adviser's (CSA) Office at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

It's been designed to help translate the ambition of evidence-informed decision-making into actionable learning content that can be adapted to different contexts, time frames and work plans.

It offers a range of interactive activities that you can use to determine what evidence and expertise is needed for what purposes – and the principles, processes, methodologies, and tools that can support this work.

Download the toolkit

Hosting Policy Fellows: a guide for Higher Education Institutions

Policy Fellowships, where academics and policy professionals spend time in each other's organisations to exchange knowledge, are becoming a far more visible and common method of supporting academic-policy engagement. From 2020-22 CAPE adapted the model pioneered by the Cambridge Centre for