

Research Project Proposal: ‘How, and where, is policy engagement recognised and rewarded in Higher Education?’

Aim & Objectives of the Research

The research question and title of the project is ‘How, and where, is policy engagement recognised and rewarded in Higher Education?’

My objective of this research is to investigate the current infrastructure of academic promotion and progression criteria for policy engagement and knowledge exchange within UK Higher Education institutions. This includes an assessment of the landscape of this relationship nationally across institution types, such as post-92s compared with Russell Group universities, geographically, and across disciplines. Other variables that may impact differences include funding, size, and specific regional authorities (Breckon et al., 2024). This will contribute to the future development of theoretical structural change within HE that will create better avenues for policy engagement careers for university academics.

Project Summary

In brief, the question will be investigated through a survey of HE academic promotion and progression criteria. There will be an initial focus on English universities, with the potential for expanding across the UK dependent on time and resources accessible.

The survey-specific research methods will be primarily online and desk-based. There may also be opportunity for specific case studies, however, wherein follow-ups with specific institutions, academics, or policy makers may be attempted via email or call. Last year, Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson and Luke Sewell compiled 21 case studies of Arts and Humanities who had successfully influenced policy in their report titled ‘How does Arts and Humanities research influence public policymaking?’ This would be an accessible place to start looking deeper into the response of universities to successful knowledge exchange.

It would be useful to locate these responses within the guidelines officially set out by separate institutions; the universities of Oxford (2020), Manchester (no date), and Open University (2022) are all examples of institutions who have explicitly outlined their knowledge exchange stance and progression policies. This process may also reveal potential avenues for the future of HE policy engagement solutions. Oxford University’s guidance notes for *Monitoring, evaluation and learning for policy engagement* (Roche, et al., 2020) suggests producing an alternative version of National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement’s EDGE tool (no date), which can inform questions asked to participants.

As with all research, before proceeding with the project, it is important that the appropriate ethical approval is acquired, as compliant with Durham University’s data protection policy and ethical guidelines, alongside other relevant policies, such as the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019). This may involve, for example, ensuring

that full informed consent is ensured through the signing of consent forms in the case of interviews.

Outputs

The chief outcome will be a detailed written report of the specific procedure and findings of the project, intended to effectively communicate our findings to a wide audience.

To present the project effectively and accessibly, an online publication will be released in collaboration with the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN). In producing this, reference will be taken to similar past publications, such as the Holmes-Henderson and Sewell's previously referred to 2024 publication, and Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE)'s online brochure titled 'Growing a university policy engagement function: Towards better models, methods, and measures of success' (Brocken, 2024). While having different purposes, both utilise effective visual and textual communication tools for audiences, such as consistent relevant use of images, statistics, and graphs.

Impacts Beyond Academia

What makes this project so exciting is that the results are likely to have a vast impact beyond the immediate academic community.

The potential interdisciplinary range is massive as it informs a national strategic infrastructure that affects every discipline studied under HE institutions. For example, the current management and motivation structure is likely to be similar, whether it is a shared workload or 'tariff' model, or similar achievements are rewarded in similar ways. This research is necessary to contribute to our understanding, and thus eventual changing, of these processes, an impact that will cumulate over time as research scholarship continues to be synthesised.

Furthermore, those policy professionals and institutions will also be impacted. As the other half of this vital knowledge exchange process, it is the desired effect of this research to improve this relationship and engagement process. Thus, the political impact could be significant, which in turn could contribute to economic, social, educational, and environmental change and more. For example, we have seen how Holmes-Henderson's previous research has created further impact in spurring other bodies into action, such as the National Literacy Trust and All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Literacy's Parliamentary Commission Report titled 'Critical Media Literacy and Fake News' (2018). Eventually, contributions such as these culminated in the formation of the APPG Classics in 2024 (UK Parliament, 2025). A proactive relationship between researchers and policymakers can have impacts beyond the setting of the university; there is now a committed group dedicated to discussing the national importance of classics education.

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