

A Guide to Engaging with Government for Academics

Overview

Scientific advice and evidence is crucial for making good policy. We want to get the best evidence, analysis and advice in front of the right people at all levels of government but the communications links are not always in place. We're seeking to improve this but to make a real difference there needs to be a push in both directions both in government and academia. Better policy benefits everyone and influencing policy counts towards your department's research impact.

Government Office for Science and GCSA

The [Government Office for Science](#) is a focal point for science and engineering across government and exists to support the [Government Chief Scientific Adviser](#), Sir John Beddington. The key role of the GCSA and GO-Science is to ensure that all levels of government, including the [Prime Minister](#) and [Cabinet](#), receive the best scientific advice possible, and to enable the many science-using [departments](#) across government to create policies that are supported by strong evidence and robust arguments. It is also important to look over the longer term. The [Foresight](#) unit in GO-Science can provide evidence-based, peer reviewed strategic insights into future trends in science and technology to influence and inform policy and strategy in government. The [Department for Business, Innovation & Skills](#) administers the budget for the UK's world class research base.

How government engages with academia

There are many interactions between government and academia. Some of these are:

- [Departmental Chief Scientific Adviser](#) (CSA) Network. There are approximately 20 CSAs, many with links to their sitting university and through their personal networks.
- [Science Advisory Committees/Councils](#) There are approximately 75 science advisory committees providing independent scrutiny of the science used by departments.
- Civil Servant officials. There are approximately 3500 members of [Government Science & Engineering](#), the cross-government community of scientists and engineers, and many policy leads make direct contact with academics and specialists.
- Placements/internships. Each year there are around 100 researchers in universities or the [Research Councils](#) who undertake placements in the policy making community. Some examples are the [RCUK placement schemes](#), or the [Royal Society Pairing Scheme](#).
- Direct commissioning of research by Government. Government departments will post research opportunities on their websites, such as here at the [Department for International Development](#) or at [Department of Education](#). [Foresight projects](#) also commission a significant number of academic papers.

The science policy landscape

- As well as government itself there are lots of organisations who work in science in the UK, and many have a policy interest. Some examples are:
 - The academies ([The Royal Society](#), the [Royal Academy of Engineering](#), the [British Academy](#));
 - Parliament ([The Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology](#));

- Policy units in universities themselves (Some examples are [The Centre for Science and Policy](#), [UCL Public Policy](#), [The Oxford Martin School](#)).
- This [jargon buster](#) and [who's who](#) list from the [British Science Association](#) lists some of the key organisations.

What next?

Ask yourself some questions:

- What are current government priorities and could my research be relevant to this? If so, to whom and how?
- What might the policy implications of my research be?
- How might my research be relevant in different ways to different government departments?
- Can I explain my research in layman's language?
- What is my university doing in terms of interacting with government? Does my university have a policy unit?
- Are Science Advisory Committees (SAC) or Councils recruiting for members? Do you know anyone on a current SAC?
- Would I find a placement or internship of interest?
- Could I bid for government research work?
- Would I enjoy peer reviewing government-commissioned science? Could I offer my services to a CSA?

For the answers, you can use this document and the internet as a starting point. Always feel free to pick up the phone, to us or to departments. Keep the dialogue going.

GSE@bis.gsi.gov.uk