MetroPolis

Manchester Metropolitan University

Transforming **Research & Policy**

A HANDBOOK TO CONNECT RESEARCH WITH POLICY MAKING

By Chris Fox, Sam Gray & Jack O'Sullivan
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Introduction

This handbook is part of an important conversation about how, universities can play a role in policy development that their learning, skills and public funding demand.

It draws on the latest academic literature and on our experience at Manchester Metropolitan University. Sitting in the midst of a great civic experiment – devolution of power from Westminster to England's regions – and uncertainty about Britain's future directions, the University is striving to enhance its relationship with policy and practice in innovative ways.

Our thinking has led us to recognise that universities have to go the extra mile to become relevant and pertinent to policy and practice. We are rethinking how we develop research and teaching, with greater emphasis on action and on understanding policy making. We are pioneering institutional infrastructures that provide a place for research and policy to meet and share their views of the world.

We bring our learning from our approaches to colleagues in the UK and internationally in the hope that they will also share their insights.

> **"In times of change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."**
>
> ***Eric Hoffer***
> ***– American Social Writer***

Section 1:
Opportunities

1

"Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them and then, the opportunity to choose."

C Wright-Mills – American Sociologist

Universities and their research have great opportunities to influence decision-makers. That's because policy and practice face increasingly complex problems and need authoritative evidence, knowledge and expertise to make good decisions.

Universities are well-placed to help out. They, like policy makers, are in the business of problem solving. They are trusted as knowledgeable and impartial, with a capacity for analytical thinking that cuts through the noise. They are respected for their well-founded evidence. Many are well-connected to agencies and practitioners, so they can speak with policy makers about realities on the ground. These and other assets make universities useful in bringing together the fragmented and disconnected worlds of policy, practice and evidence.

Dr Rob Ralphs of Manchester Metropolitan University has been doing just that during a Chancellor's Fellowship, which has embedded him in policy making. During his time as a Fellow, Dr Ralphs has focussed on bringing to policy makers his research into the Spice drugs epidemic among homeless people, prisoners and ex-offenders. The epidemic has been created, to some extent, by poor co-ordination of policy between different government departments.

"Public policy, particularly related to 'wicked problems' is often characterised by siloed, fragmented interventions that need to be drawn together,", explains Dr Ralphs. "So, for my part, I have aimed to help integrate policy makers from the criminal justice, housing and public health to understand how individual policies impact each other and contribute to the Spice drugs problem that has unfolded in vulnerable groups."

Challenges to mutual understanding between universities and policy

But making the most of the relationship between research and policy making poses many challenges. For a start, whereas policy has traditionally focussed on "doing", research has been more about "questioning and inquiry". That difference in modes makes dialogue vital but sometimes difficult.

There are further issues of mutual understanding: policy and research often operate in different time frames, frequently speak different languages and may have values that don't necessarily fit well together.

"Public policy, particularly related to 'wicked problems' is often characterised by siloed, fragmented interventions that need to be drawn together"

They may be asking different questions, albeit in the same areas. Cultural clashes can get in the way of fruitful relationships. In short, lack of mutual understanding, amid other pressures and differences in goals, can lead to missed opportunities for everyone, with citizens losing out and resources poorly utilised.

Responses to the challenges

The good news, however, is that each party to this relationships is shifting towards the other. Academia has become more action-orientated – co-production and research in practice are taking academics out of their ivory towers. Meanwhile, policy making has grown more interested in inquiry: a new focus on evidence-based policy and evaluation is bringing decision-makers down from their imposing battlements.

Researchers are becoming more adept at communicating about their work, thinking about policy contexts, using intermediaries to mediate the relationship, embedding themselves in policy environments and understanding how decision making works and the values that underpin it. They are recognising that influencing policy demands more than generating documents – it involves close, face-to-face relationship and discussion.

In short, the area of overlap between research and policy has grown in size. However, the area remains smaller than it could be, or needs to be, to make both research and policy making as effective as possible. This handbook aims to increase the size of that area further.

Structure of this handbook

We draw on latest findings from academic studies into what works. We combine that knowledge with the learning from two key innovations pioneered by Manchester Metropolitan University. They come, first, from researchers who have been embedded in policy making settings thanks to the University's innovative Chancellor's Fellowship that embeds researchers in the policy world. They also come from the founders of MetroPolis, the University's think tank, which is creating the conditions for research and policy to work closer together.

From these diverse sources, we examine, first, the barriers that can prevent evidence from influencing policy. Then, we set out solutions for overcoming these barriers. Then, we highlight innovative tools that researchers – and also policy makers – can use. Finally, we explore how to measure the impact of research on policy.

Message – shift to action and shared understanding

The message of this handbook is for universities to focus on two overarching issues that can make their work more relevant and compelling to policy makers. First, bring inquiry and action closer together. Second, concentrate more on shared understanding and working.

The result can be better informed, evidence-based action rooted in greater trust and mutual understanding between research and policy. This is developed through clear and continuous communication that incorporates a community of interests surrounding supporting and informing both parties around inquiry and action.

The interaction between research and policy is not a singular dialogue. Rather, researchers and policy makers are part of a wider group of interested parties, who contribute to – and support

– the conversation, the inquiry and the action. This wider group provides insights that sustain the relationship between research and policy. A multi-stakeholder approach provides a setting for continuous dialogue that can develop dynamic, increasingly shared approaches to sound, efficient and effective decision-making and action.

Innovations at Manchester Metropolitan University

This conclusion has led Manchester Metropolitan University to set up MetroPolis, one of Britain's first think tanks inside a university. Its design and role recognises that universities need an additional institutional framework that is more action/change orientated and can focus on building understanding between the people who conduct research and those that make policy.

Enhanced action and people-focussed mutual understanding have inspired Manchester Metropolitan's development of its Chancellor's Fellowships which embed researchers in policy making environments.

The message of this handbook is for universities to focus on bringing inquiry and action closer together, and to concentrate more on shared understanding and working.

"As academics, we are familiar with the latest research and we are well-connected to agencies, healthcare providers and policy makers with responsibilities for care. So we're well placed to host discussions, share learning and work together towards better approaches at all levels. We can make a difference in the often complex, fragmented worlds of policy and practice."

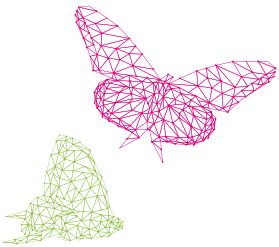
Sarah Galvani, Chancellor's Fellow.

"Policy makers hear about issues from lots of sources, but the analytic approach that academics bring develops a succinct approach which can be helpful."

Shoba Arun, Chancellor's Fellow.

"Universities bring prestige, expertise and a reputation for being open-minded, impartial and focussing on sound evidence. They can host debates – indeed think tanks run by universities can be very good at that."

Michael Taylor, co-founder MetroPolis, Manchester Metropolitan University's think tank.



Section 2:
Barriers

2

"It doesn't work to leap a twenty-foot chasm in two ten-foot jumps."

American Proverb

Researchers and policy makers – both being problem solvers – have a great deal in common. This offers opportunities for mutual gain. Yet, perhaps the biggest mistake that both parties commit is not also appreciating, and then addressing, their key differences.

A superficial similarity – involvement in problem solving – can obscure dissimilarities in institutional function, motivations, values and, therefore inevitably, accumulated skills. A lack of mutual understanding is also partly explained by, and compounded by, difficulties that researcher and policy makers experience in finding each other, communicating clearly and listening to each other.

Given that the problems tackled by researchers and policy makers are also complicated and different – though sometimes closely related – it's hardly surprising that they sometimes pass like ships in the night.

However, the drivers and incentives to make the relationship closer are strong and increasing. The funding of academic research is now partly determined by its impact on policy.

The validity of findings is also increasingly judged on their application to multiple contexts. This pushes researchers to work closely with practice which helps inform sophisticated policy making. Meanwhile, policy makers have become increasingly concerned to demonstrate that their decisions and actions are evidence-based and that, once enacted, they work in practice. That has increased demand for research and implementation evaluation.

Five barriers

Five key barriers to the impact of evidence on policy are identified in this section. The first is the continuing, albeit diminishing, difference in the orientations of policy making and research – action versus inquiry.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham speaking at the Spice Summit in 2017.

The second is that policy is focussed on multiple stakeholders, whereas researchers/universities may be unaware of, or disconnected from, some of these stakeholders. These two barriers partly explain the third: policy makers and researchers have different motivations and values.

Inevitably, these divergences in purpose, role and justifications produce a fourth barrier: different skill sets among researchers and policy makers, some of which do not coincide. All four, taken together, can create a fifth barrier – it can be hard for the two sides to speak and listen to each other, share understanding and routes to change.

None of these considerable barriers are insurmountable – we know that evidence and policy can work very effectively together. Identifying these barriers is, therefore, an important initial step towards the subsequent sections of this handbook, which address the barriers.

Barrier 1: Action versus inquiry

Policy making and research sit in different institutional settings, both of which tackle and solve problems. Policy making typically operates in administrative systems whose job is to do and to act. In contrast, research sits in institutions that teach and question.

This difference helps explain some of the frustrations that one side can feel and express about the other. Researchers complain that policy makers act presumptuously, and erroneously, on inadequate evidence. Meanwhile, policy makers may object that researchers are an obstacle to action – too negative and critical, more interested in knocking down proposals than creating routes to change.

Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan, working to develop female start-up businesses in India, explains: "A lot of policy makers regard academic research as just a bunch of criticisms – saying what is wrong. Yes, academic research is quite rightly about adopting a critical approach and we are good at critiquing. But sometimes we don't operate in the real world and engage well with what policy makers are up against. A lot of research papers are critical – this actually puts the policy makers' backs up. You strike a bitter tone if you go that way. You have to be engaging. You have to be positive. Keep the academic criticisms to yourself."

Heinz Tuselmann, also a Chancellor's Fellow, who was embedded with the United Nations in Geneva, highlights other frustrations: "Policy making and research don't speak together very well. The policy makers find what academics deliver is too complicated and speaks above their heads. The academics are frustrated that policy makers are not including them in their work – that policy making is not sufficiently evidence-based."

Researchers have tended towards an over-simplistic approach to achieving change. Traditionally, they've seen their job as doing high-quality research and disseminating their findings. This is

a one-dimensional and linear model where researchers and practitioners are understood as two communities and dissemination strategies help to "bridge the gap" between them (Nutley et al. 2003). However, within the research community and among research funders there is "a growing realization of the failure of simple models of research-into-practice as either descriptions or prescriptions" (Nutley et al. 2003: 126).

Chris Fox, a co-founder of the MetroPolis think tank, highlights the inadequacies of this approach: "Traditionally, academics have seen their task as to do good research that's written up in a clear, concise report. So they produce research and get it out there and the rest is someone else's issue. My personal experience and literature suggests that model doesn't work. It is a push model. It needs to be more of a pull model – to say it is all down to policy makers to make use of the research is not realistic. The model has to be far more collaborative."

Carol Weiss, the influential social scientist, argued that knowledge rarely drives change in a simple linear relationship in the social sciences. She sketched seven ways in which policy makers use knowledge (Weiss, 1979).

Sometimes, but not usually, they come with a problem and seek solutions from a study. More likely, policy makers look for information from lots of sources, including the social sciences in a disorderly process. They may seek research that justifies a political decision they have already made. Alternatively, the fact that research has taken place – rather than the findings themselves – can be tactically useful in a policy decision.

Another possibility is that research broadly enlightens informed publics,

Carol Weiss, the influential social scientist, argued that knowledge rarely drives change in a simple linear relationship in the social sciences. She sketched seven ways in which policy makers use knowledge (Weiss, 1979).

generally shaping public thinking and, so, lays the ground for policy development. Finally, Weiss shows how research can be part of society's intellectual enterprise, in which social sciences and policy interact and influence each other.

Nutley et al. (2003) suggest four ways to frame how research is, in reality, used by policy and practice. These ways largely incorporate Weiss's seven-part approach. Research, finds the Nutley review, can have an instrumental use (feeding directly into policy); a conceptual use (creating new ways of thinking); help to mobilise support (a political tool, where information is used as ammunition to support an action); have wider influence (contributing to large-scale shifts in thinking).

The complexity of research's impact on the policy making process can make it hard for researchers to achieve or measure their success in influencing what happens. So it can be difficult to justify the effort involved in seeking impact. Sam Gray, co-founder of MetroPolis, explains: "Sometimes, there are lots of academics involved in policy, sitting on committees, coming

up with policy changes that may be watered down, altered and then adopted as resolutions by government or through international organisations such as the EU and the UN. In such instances, it's hard to put your finger on where your research has led to policy shifts.

"Not every impact has to be epoch defining and usually isn't. Sometimes building the relationship is the most important impact. It's important to recognise that just being in the room is important and deserves recognition."

Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan, argues that shifting research towards a greater focus on action would have rewards: "It is controversial to say that impact should drive research, but where it does, impact is probably greatest, because research is aligned with an understanding of the possible and systems of delivery."


Stefan White

Barrier 2: Policy and research may not work with the same stakeholders.

Research tends to be just one among many stakeholders that influence policy making. Its evidence is weighed up against many other interests and factors that are also brought to bear on the process. But research may not be involved with, or understand, these other elements. That can weaken both the suitability of its findings for implementation and its relationships with policy. "Links between policy makers and academics are not as strong as they would be if academics took account of the many stakeholders to which policy responds," explains Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow. "You have to work within a chain of communication that includes all the various stakeholders and make sure the research is well translated into language that they can all understand."

The difficulty of issues facing policy makers means that researchers need wide engagement with stakeholders if their evidence is to make an impact, says Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow, adding: "Wicked problems, particularly in cities, are multi-causal and it is rare to be able to identify a reductive approach that will resolve the problem. That's why it is important for policy impact to create relationships that are cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary."

Barrier 3: Different motivations, values, speeds and practices

Timing and opportunity are prominent barriers to the impact of evidence on policy, finds a review by Oliver at al (2014). That's because policy and academia are rarely synchronised and move at different speeds.

"Policy moves happen quickly," explains Chris Fox, co-founder of MetroPolis. "People change jobs. So it can be very difficult to maintain insight and useful links and relationships, especially with central government. It's been ten times harder with Brexit which has produced even more rapid turnover of government special advisors and civil servants."

Academics' primary responsibility for doing research can be at odds with their goal to influence policy. Oliver et al. (2004) found that researchers had different priorities from policy makers and often felt pressures to publish in peer-reviewed journals that were described as a barrier to the use of research.

"The price of our great commitment to ensuring that our work has impact is that sometimes we don't write up enough journal papers," explains Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow, whose research focuses on age-friendly cities.

"Architecture is problem-based learning – we have to be aligned with practical and relevant issues and potential impact. We have to grow this through networks and relationships. But that causes us problems for writing papers in the current measurement and reward system of the Research Excellence Framework (REF)."

Organisational factors within policy making can also inhibit use of research. Studies have identified important barriers such as lack of time and internal resources for engaging with research, as well as poor managerial support and will, a lack of a supportive professional body, material and personnel resources, and staff high turnover. Poor internal communications can also be a factor.

Humphries et al. (2014) particularly highlighted the decision-making culture of some organisations, crisis management cultures and highly politicized environments. An overall resistance to change was also a barrier to evidence-use.

Humphries et al. found that organisational cultures which support evidence use typically demonstrate through action that evidence-use is valued and they provide necessary human resources, training and rewards. That review found that evidence-use within health care organisations was facilitated through inter-organisational collaboration and the sharing of information, expertise and experiences between organisations.

Humphries et al. (2014) found that decision-makers in health care organisations also experienced barriers to evidence use at the individual level. Commonly cited factors included inadequate research literacy, inexperience of using research, and a lack of formal management training.

However, both research and policy have in recent years shifted towards the others' value system. So academia has shifted towards action thanks to the funding requirements demanding that research shows its impact on policy and practice – action, in other words. Meanwhile, policy makers have become increasingly concerned to demonstrate that their decisions and actions are evidence-based.

Barrier 4: Inadequate skills

Specialist skills are particularly valued in academia. This specialisation is important in research's quest for causality and certainty. But it can undermine capacities for more general engagement with policy makers, who typically have more wide-ranging problems to address and may need authoritative generalists rather than specialists.

> **"That's why the onus must be on researchers reaching out and speaking the language that policy can understand."**

"Academics are rewarded for being ever more specialised – we are rewarded for being one of the leading experts in a specific area," explains Chris Fox from MetroPolis.

"Sometimes, the more specialised you become, the less confident you are about talking in general terms about a sector – the very skill that a policy maker may require. So very senior academics with strong research profiles may feel inhibited about speaking beyond a narrow specialism, even though, policy wise, it is important to be able to speak across a broad policy area.
"For example, when talking about policy and criminal justice, you must be able to comment on a broad range of issues. However, you might chiefly be an expert in restorative justice. If that's all you can speak on, then you'll be too narrowly focussed for policy makers. That makes having a foot in both the research and policy camps is difficult."

Policy makers' characteristics also play a role in evidence uptake, with their research skills and awareness (or lack of) reported as a barrier in Oliver et al's (2014) review. In general, personal experiences, judgments, and values were reported as important factors in whether evidence was used. Poor mutual understanding between academics and policy makers often reflects a lack of skills at both ends that could facilitate understanding. A systematic review of 145 studies from over 59 countries by Oliver at al (2014) identified the most frequently reported barriers as poor availability of research, lack of relevant research, insufficient time or opportunity to use research evidence and policy makers' and other users not being skilled in research methods.

Tackling this gap in the skills and capacities of policy makers to understand research may be difficult. Policy is accustomed to assessing evidence from multiple stakeholders, rather than focussing in a singular manner on research evidence. So it's difficult for policy making to privilege research evidence. That's why the onus must probably be on researchers reaching out and speaking the language that policy can understand.

Barrier 5: Poor communications, speaking and listening

Academics, for lots of the reasons set out above, may not understand the world in which policy making works. That can diminish the impact of their work.
"Some academics live in a bubble," explains Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow. "They think, they have done this and found this, so you have to listen to them. They don't realise that they have to make their research meaningful and translate it into policy-friendly language."

Heinz Tuselmann, a Chancellor's Fellow, who was embedded with the United Nations in Geneva, says: "I would not put some of my colleagues in front of the policy makers I meet, because some of them don't have the ability to connect. They forget that they are not engaged in an academic exchange, where conversation can be very robust and

critical and they might say to policy makers that there is no evidence for their policy, that it is not underpinned academically. We say things like this at conferences when we are among our own. But it doesn't work in exchanges between researchers and policy makers.

"A good dose of diplomacy and proper communication and understanding of the challenges and issues to which the policy community is seeking answers from academia is essential for our research to effectively feed into evidence based policies."

Sometimes, there is also an over-reliance by researchers on written communication, rather than on personal engagement with policy makers. "Researchers spend a lot of time developing websites and briefing papers and on writing reports," explains Chris Fox, co-founder of MetroPolis.

"But, probably, these approaches are not particularly effective ways to engage with the policy community. They are probably not reading that stuff, not on spec. If there is a relationship – that material will be collateral to support the relationship – but if relationship is not there, then it's unlikely that policy makers are reading the material."

Academics and policy makers may also lack the capacity to find each other. "For example," explains Michael Taylor, co-founder of MetroPolis, "an opposition MP is, arguably, not a policy maker because their party is not in power. But such MPs are important. They progress policy. They raise issues. They might be in power at some point. So it is important to engage with them."

Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow, adds: "It's much harder if you are starting work in a new area, where you are not


Sarah Galvani

known in the field and you have to go out and find the right people from scratch. Where do you start?" It also easy to focus one's energies on the wrong people or organisations. "There is the risk of operating with like-minded people in a bubble where everyone is in agreement," says Chris Fox, co-founder of MetroPolis. "But what is happening in Whitehall may be quite different – you may not be close to ministerial thinking. So your impact, despite all the noise and effort, might not be significant. That's to be avoided."

A review by Oliver at al (2014) found that lack of relationships, trust, and mutual respect between researchers and decision-makers got in the way of evidence use, a finding echoed in a review by Humphries et al.

It is often hard for policy makers to find what they need, when they reach out to the world of research and evidence. When 'googling' an academic in the field that concerns policy, it can be difficult to isolate their key messages. These might be buried in journal papers with unclear abstracts and a pay wall guarding the full paper: all too much for the busy policy maker.

"Clarity, format, relevance and reliability of research are all factors which effect uptake."

"Universities often don't speak clearly to policy makers – or indeed anyone other than fellow academics – about what they have found or think," concedes Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow.

Heinz Tuselmann adds: "It is difficult to establish relationships with policy makers: it is easier to lose them than make them if you involve an academic who does not have the right communication skills for interaction and dialogue."

Written communications are often poorly pitched for policy makers. Oliver et al's (2014) review identifies important facilitators of the relationship as: access to and improved dissemination of research plus the existence of, and access to, relevant research. Humphries et al identify access to information and well targeted dissemination of research findings to decision-makers as important facilitators of evidence use. The Oliver et al review highlights clarity, format, relevance and reliability of research as effecting research's uptake.

Rob Ralphs, one of Manchester Metropolitan's Chancellor's Fellows, explains: "People don't want to read a 30 page journal article or a 100 page report – they want two or four sides that get to the key facts and recommendations.

"So it's vital to provide short concise policy briefings and arrange briefing meetings. They want material packaged so they can use it easily."

Dr Rob Ralphs: impact of Spice on the prison population has been devastating.

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"People don't want to read a 30 page journal article or a 100 page report – they want two or four sides that get to the key facts and recommendations. So it's vital to provide short concise policy briefings and arrange briefing meetings. They want material packaged so they can use it easily."

Section 3:
Solutions

3

"Blame no-one, expect nothing, do something"

NY Giants locker room

Five principles underpin making evidence influential on policy.

1. Bring action and inquiry closer together
2. Work with multiple stakeholders
3. Work with policy maker motivations and values
4. Build skills – researchers and also policy makers – that support the policy-research relationships
5. Create better understanding by speaking and listening well with policy makers.

Solution 1: Bring action and inquiry closer together

Research can become – and is becoming – more action-focussed. That helps it to sit more easily in the realm of policy making. But the gulf is still great and much of the work has to be done by research to bridge it. First, you need a theory of change, to look outwards to the world, plus a plan and smart understanding of the policy process and of existing policy.

– Develop a theory of change

Researchers need to be clear on the theory or framework that they are working within. Developing a theory of change is an important, early stage to clarifying thinking on how to mobilise knowledge effectively. If researchers plan to go on and evaluate their knowledge mobilisation work (see below) this will also be an important early step in the evaluation.

Fox et al. (2016) detail how a theory of change will state the desired (long-term) change based on a number of assumptions that hypothesise, project or calculate how change can be enabled. This means thinking through who will benefit from the change, the context – including the social, political and environmental conditions – the current state of the problem, and other actors able to influence change. The theory of change should sketch out the process or mechanisms of change anticipated to lead to the desired long-term outcome.

– Become more externally focussed

"A key issue is how academics prioritise their time and organise their environments," explains Chris Fox, co-founder of MetroPolis. "Academics should worry if they are obsessing about offices, desks and spending a lot of time decorating them. If they are more likely to be found in a cafe near City Hall or on a train to a meeting with a policy-maker in Westminster or Brussels, then that's a useful sign that they are looking outwards. We also need to ensure the right balance between writing and researching on the one hand and – on the other – relationship building with the outside world."

– Understand the policy process and policy makers.

Policy making is a complex process involving different institutions. It's important to understand all of them and how to engage with them. Oliver et al. (2014) found that research uptake benefited where researchers had a good understanding of the policy process and the context surrounding policy priorities.

Policy processes can be opaque, arcane and frustrating, requiring tenacity and persistence, explains Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow: "Bureaucracies can be slow to respond – meetings get cancelled – but quick to change when staff are transferred. You have to start from scratch again – you need to know how to do that."

For example, Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow, sets out how to engage with UK parliamentary processes. "See if there is an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) that is relevant to your particular topic area," she recommends. "Contact the secretariat – ask if you can attend. Go to one of the meetings and build relationships in the limited time available and then suggest that you would like to present or talk to the APPG about your own areas of interest and expertise.

"We have to understand their level of knowledge, what help they might need, and the scope and political risks for building hydrogen fuel cells into that strategy," Michael Taylor, MetroPolis

"Build a relationship with clerks to these committees. They are the gatekeepers. I have contacted a few in relation to older people, end of life and alcohol and I got knocked back by some. Some APPGs are very short-term – it also depends on who leads the APPG and how influential they are and whether that takes us beyond 'we are talking about an important issue' to having someone who can influence in the House."

At a more regional level, Michael Taylor, a co-founder of MetroPolis, shows how a detailed knowledge of the policy process is shaping the think tank's approach to promoting a regional focus on Manchester Metropolitan's research.

"Improving the impact of the hydrogen fuel cell work that we are doing at Manchester Met demands that we identify who is responsible for the Greater Manchester Low Carbon and Alternative Energy Strategy.

"We have to understand their level of knowledge, what help they might need, and the scope and political risks for building hydrogen fuel cells into that strategy," Michael Taylor, MetroPolis

"As well as strategy, we need tactics. So, for example, we hosted a launch event for the Fuel Cell Innovation Centre to which we invited senior representatives of Greater Manchester's Combined Authority and businesses. We promoted this event through the media and the University's network, leading up to a roundtable bringing together stakeholders where we agreed action points. These included securing that the Fuel Cell issue was an agenda item in the Mayor's Green Summit.

"Meanwhile, we have engaged with a think tank that is strong on industrial strategy – the Northern Powerhouse Partnership. We are working with them on a forthcoming report they are producing about the Northern Powerhouse Energy Strategy. We will contribute a section on hydrogen. All of this will feed into Greater Manchester's deliberations."

– Understand existing policy

It's vital to be up to speed on existing policy. "Be aware of what policy is out there already in relation to your topic of interest or area of practice," advises Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow.

"It sounds obvious but it is important to know that what you are proposing fits with existing policy documents to make sure that you can cross reference your work with them. This means that, when you talk, policy makers don't think you are just another earnest academic with a good idea. They should know you have done your homework and that you have looked at key policy documents so you can say: 'This is all very well but you need to add these elements.' This allows you to propose easy incremental change.

"It's also helpful to know which policy documents are likely to be reviewed in the near future. If a review has just been completed, you might want to focus your energy on something else. If a review is just about to happen, there is always the possibility of co-badging the work with a key policy maker, which places you as an insider."

"When you talk, policy makers mustn't think that you are just another earnest academic with a good idea. Do your homework on them," Sarah Galvani

– Make a plan

It's clear that mobilising knowledge demands ". . . an appreciation, willingness and capacity to negotiate the compositional and contextual qualities of the policy process" (Bannister and Hardhill 2015: 2). This includes operating at different levels ranging from the relationships between individual researchers and policy makers through to organisational and sector wide processes and structures. So, as Powell et al. (2017) demonstrate, research must go beyond applying standard approaches such as dissemination, education or developing briefing notes and guidelines. On their own, they are unlikely to have sufficient impact.

They emphasise that the increasing complexity of models of the knowledge mobilisation process require practitioner engagement, an understanding of external context, organisational factors and political dynamics. All of this demands a plan.

Daley and Shinton (2014) suggest the plan should detail specific audiences that will be engaged, detail about engagement activities (publications, meetings, websites, etc.) and a rationale for these as well as the expected benefits of engagement and the timescale for these benefits to be achieved.

Solution 1: Checklist

Actions	Tasks
Develop a theory of change	Develop a theory of change that explains how your research could lead to policy change.
Be more externally focussed	Re-think how you prioritise your time. Spend more time outside the institution in and close to policy makers.
Understand policy and policy makers	Find out if there is an APPG relevant to your research and if there is get to know the clerk. Identify the House of Commons Select Committee relevant to your research and monitor their calls for evidence. Watch or attend a relevant Westminster Hall debate. Start to build a relationship with an MP with a shared interest. Identify and make links with local and regional policy makers.
Understand existing policy	Read recent Green and White papers and any commentary around recent legislation relevant to your research. Read regional/local strategies relevant to your research. Identify a journalist who writes on an area of policy you are interested in and follow them on social media.
Make a plan	Develop a plan that goes beyond 'traditional' dissemination activities. At a minimum, identify specific audiences you will engage, a rationale for engagement, a timescale for doing so and the mode of engagement. Include local, regional and national dimensions.

Solution 2: Work with multiple stakeholders

Working with multiple stakeholders is key to understanding and developing the landscape for change. Working collaboratively helps to create compelling advocacy from many quarters. It also embeds change in practice and it helps to ensure the sustainability of impact beyond the survival of individual relationships between researchers and policy makers.

– Broaden your stakeholders

"A lone voice is probably an ignored voice," advises Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow. This can be avoided by harmonising with the many voices that policy makers listen to you, he says.

Chris Fox, co-founder of Metropolis, advises: "Alongside building relationships with politicians and civil servants, engage with big NGOs, regulatory bodies, other big players in the policy environment who have a more constant view of priorities and are less at the whim of events – so that provides more long term engagement and insures against change at the top."

Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow, explains how working with a broad set of stakeholders strengthens impact particularly on issues that requires policy makers to alter a fixed mind set.

"If you are trying to change culture and mindsets, you need policy makers to hear the message from multiple voices," she explains. "So, for example, I am trying to show policy makers that women-led, start-up businesses in India are disadvantaged because women face hurdles that male officials may not understand and because, having more family responsibilities, women may be more risk averse and struggle to devote as much time as male counterparts to their businesses. These messages are heard best from many quarters."

This broadening of stakeholders can act as an insurance policy against change at the top. "By the time you reach the end of a project, the civil servant you began dealing with might have moved on," explains Shoba Arun. "That's why your engagement strategy must involve multiple stakeholders: you can't allow your influence to disappear because a policy maker has been promoted or left. Other stakeholders will be accustomed to such change and will know how to work with it."

It also makes sense not be singularly focussed on the senior decision-makers. "I target the second layer of influence," says Shoba Arun. "Not just policy makers, but other stakeholders – they will stay longer and also, as beneficiaries of policy change, they are valuable advocates.

This approach, she says, also insures against the researcher moving onto other work, particularly in international contexts: "I cannot always be in India. I have other work and research to do. But I need to make sure that the influence of the research will last. You must work from the bottom up because it is too risky to rely on one policy maker or researcher to engineer change."

However, when I worked with a think tank, I realised the benefits of making one and thinking strategically, targeting information at key people, holding events, focussing on All Party Parliamentary Groups seeking evidence, keeping an eye

on government websites, watching out for European reviews. The University's Research and Knowledge Exchange team can be helpful with all of this."

Sarah Galvani adds: "I operate to a loose plan. We want to influence at national, regional and organisational levels. So we need to know who we should talk to at each of those levels. National level is sometimes easier to know because there may be so many organisations to engage with. It can involve a lot of knocking on doors."

– Co-produce evidence with people, practitioners and policy makers

A key theme running through numerous reviews of the literature is the importance of co-creation/co-production of research knowledge. This approach focusses on the practitioner-as-learner and reconceptualises knowledge use as a learning process, in which new knowledge is shaped by the learner's pre-existing knowledge and experience.

This shift encourages a multi-dimensional view of the process of research implementation. It is a more complex understanding in which research is understood as socially constructed and it is assumed that research evidence cannot be separated from its social context (Nutley et al. 2003).

This approach can involve potential end-users in the research design phase. It might mean encouraging potential end-users to take some ownership of research and, conversely, researchers ceding some ownership. It can help policy makers to develop the skills needed to use evidence and to 'pull' in more research, as explored further in Solution 4. Graham et al. (2014, 2018) explain how "knowledge users work with researchers throughout the research process, starting with identification of the research question. Knowledge users represent those who would be able to use research results to inform their decisions (e.g. clinicians, managers, policy makers, patients/families and others)."


Shoba Arun

It's an effective approach, according to Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow, who works in India with female-led start-up businesses. She explains: "Bringing policy makers together with practitioners and users encourages policy makers to engage with women's real lived experiences starting up small businesses in India. Policy makers like to know what impact they are really having."

In a review of how to achieve research impact through co-creation in community-based health services, Greenhalgh et al. (2016) identified some principles of successful co-creation.

They include adopting a systems perspective and framing research as a creative enterprise focussed on improving human experience. There is an emphasis on process – the framing of the programme, the nature of relationships, and governance and facilitation arrangements, especially the style of leadership and how conflict

is managed. Their review suggested that co-creation 'failures' could often be tracked back to abandoning or never adopting these principles.

Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow, shows how these principles are reflected in his work in Greater Manchester. "We are trying to develop age-friendly cities. But we can't do that alone or even advocate what to do on our own. We need to work in partnership with the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub, with officials who understand all the other pressures on the bureaucracy.

"They must write policy that the delivery agents can actually deliver. We need to keep our ears open to understand the real problems and what research is needed to deliver on the principles we want to achieve – age-friendly cities."

– Work with stakeholders on shared communication

Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow, explains how she has delicately found good ways to communicate with policy makers. She says: "Sometimes, it's good to go directly to policy makers. But, in many cases, working through other institutions and with practitioners is more effective than going directly.

"Policy makers don't come to you and ask: 'How can we do something better?' So one needs to identify communication and mediating channels with which policy makers are comfortable. In my case, trying to use my research to support women-led small businesses in India, I worked with a local management institute, which included a start-up cell for such women so I had the leverage to contact the policy makers."

– Focus on organisational – not just policy – change

Impact on organisational reform can be as important – and more achievable – than policy reform. In social care, for example, says Sarah Galvani, "you can achieve more immediate impact at an organisational level because national policy takes so long".

Walter et al. (2003) argue that impact is enhanced where there is strong evidence, endorsement from opinion leaders and a demonstrably high level of commitment from organisational stakeholders.

– Use local change as a stepping stone to national change

"It's important to strive for change at a national level, but success can be difficult, especially if you are not based in London," explains Rob Ralphs, a Chancellor's Fellow. "A Cabinet reshuffle can send you back to the drawing board. Local policy makers are more accessible and their turnover is slower. Nationally, prison reform is difficult because it is so charged politically.

At a local level, we have focussed on developing a model of good practice that can then be shared with other localities and then brought to national attention."

"Influencing policy can involve knocking on a lot of doors," Sarah Galvani.

Solution 2: Checklist

Actions	Tasks
Broaden your stakeholders	In addition to meeting policy makers, engage with big NGOs, regulatory bodies, other big players in the policy environment
Co-produce evidence	Work with people, practitioners and policy makers so they feel greater ownership of the research and it becomes easier to implement
Work with stakeholders on shared communication	Use communication channels employed by practitioners that policy makers are accustomed to hearing from.
Focus on organisational – not just policy – change	Work with practitioners at the ground level where they can often develop new ways of working long before policy and instructions are created at the top.
Use local change as a stepping stone to national change	Developing local good practice that can then be shared with other localities and brought to national attention.

Solution 3: Recognise policy maker motivations and values

– Align with the drivers of policy development

Research evidence is likely to go unheard unless it fits the key policy drivers of the moment. Rob Ralphs explains how he had to rethink the pitching of his findings around drug policy when Theresa May took over as Prime Minister from David Cameron.

"David Cameron, as PM, had more liberal views around drug policy – he admitted using drugs when he was a student," explains Dr Ralphs. "However, when Theresa May became Prime Minister, the think tank I was working with recognised that she was a strong prohibitionist and so they had to develop a different approach.

"Mrs May had a long history, as Home Secretary, of opposing modern day slavery and of tackling youth gangs and violence. So the think tank's campaign around cannabis is focussed not on libertarian arguments that cannabis should be legalised. Rather, it appeals to Theresa May's interests and talks about how cannabis farms are run by people using Filipinos in modern day slavery.

"The think tank has shown how lots of knife crime and youth violence can be attributed to street drug dealing. So, it's making the case that if cannabis used was regulated, we could see a reduction in modern day slavery and serious youth violence. Similarly, when ministers are reshuffled, the think tank will identify people to work with and change some of their narratives accordingly. Michael Taylor, a co-founder of MetroPolis, is trying to make sure that key research programmes at Manchester Metropolitan gain traction with regional policy makers.

Michael Taylor, a co-founder of MetroPolis, is trying to make sure that key research programmes at Manchester Metropolitan gain traction with regional policy makers.

So his thinking is all about aligning the programme with their motivations and values.

He explains: "At Manchester Met, we have a Hydrogen Fuel Cell Innovation Centre, a facility receiving over £4m funding. It's looking for lower cost production methods to create fuel cells that can fuel cars and decarbonise the heat network by converting the existing gas-powered network to hydrogen in the long term.

Meanwhile, Greater Manchester Combined Authority is drafting the Greater Manchester Low Carbon and Alternative Energy Strategy, which currently does not mention hydrogen as an option. So we need to understand the goals of the Combined Authority's strategy in order to align our work with it.

"So, first of all, we need to understand the drivers of its strategy which are to meet the Government's requirements to develop cleaner air, cut carbon emissions (decarbonising the energy grid and industry) and support job development in emerging, greener industries. Locally, Greater Manchester is committed to zero net carbon emissions by 2038.

"Our work fits into these goals: if our research can cut the cost of hydrogen fuelled vehicles, then we can help Greater Manchester to address national requirements around air quality and carbon emissions and we can support its regional ambitions by making it economical to commission bus and car fleets as well as trains and trams that rely on this technology."

Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow, talks about being ready to adapt research and spot what you are doing that is relevant to prevailing narratives. "Our School of Architecture needs to find and help coordinate the many institutional levers that might improve the lives of older people by making their city age-friendly. This requires better planning by city-wide partnerships, informed by research.

We realised that now is an opportune moment both in the School's well-advanced research programme and for Greater Manchester's changing landscape, to explore how to scale up the community-led visions of an age-friendly city that we have developed.

"That's why I have chosen now to become embedded in the policy environment – I have been seconded to the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub, which brings the needs of ageing citizens to the attention of Greater Manchester's Combined Authority."

"Be ready to adapt research and spot what you are doing that is relevant to prevailing narratives," Stefan White.

– Focus on champions of existing change rather than 'blue skies' thinking

Change that is already happening – thanks to local champions – can be more compelling than change recommended by analytical academic research. Sarah Galvani, Chancellor's Fellow, explains: "Around changing end of life care for substance users, we began work with key professionals at a local level on Merseyside who were already engineering improvements. They can really help to propel change – when practitioners and policy makers see colleagues making a difference, they are more willing to roll out change elsewhere. Likewise, organisationally, we focus in those areas where we are pushing on open doors, rather than doing 'blue skies' thinking."

– Target particular policy makers with tailored messages

Getting the right message to the right policy maker at the right time is essential for effectiveness. Rob Ralphs, a Chancellor's Fellow, who researches synthetic cannabinoids such as Spice, explains an instance where his work was targeted at policy makers discussing whether Spice should be reclassified as a Class A drug.

"The think tank I worked with interviewed me on this issue, creating a clear piece of information for policy makers. They then sent it directly to key individuals such as MPs, Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables who have been supportive of liberalising drug policy and who were, therefore, likely to oppose such reclassification. In a subsequent debate at the All Party Parliamentary Working Group, an MP quoted the article.

He read it almost verbatim. "Doing your homework is this way is not that difficult. With Twitter it is much easier now than in the past to drop someone a message and make them aware. Universities, which have think tanks or communications departments focussed on impact, can advise researchers on who is good to target and help them with doing that."

– Ensure that evidence is reliable and authoritative

The quality and authoritativeness of research is clearly a factor in uptake, particularly where other evidence in the area is poor quality, according to a review by Oliver et al. (2014). It noted that researchers were valued more when it was clear they were non-partisan and they produced unbiased results.

"Try to understand the direction that policy is developing so you can relate your research to it," Chris Fox, MetroPolis.

Contandriopoulos et al. (2010) emphasise the importance of credibility or 'legitimacy' of the information. However, 'legitimacy', they say, does not necessarily equate to methodological rigour. Their review suggests that ". . . internal validity per se does not influence information use . . ." (Contandriopoulos et al. 2010: 457).

Various reasons are suggested for this. It might be that users' lack of research training means they cannot assess whether research has a high level of internal validity. Alternatively, users could be more interested in external validity (the extent to which research can be generalised to other settings).

A third explanation, and the one favoured by Contandriopoulos et al. (2010), is that users are required to balance different kinds of information, only some of which is research-based, and, therefore, they cannot sort through and prioritise all of this information using internal validity as a criterion. The implication is not that internal validity doesn't matter, but that designing effective knowledge mobilisation processes is a different process to developing sound scientific research (Contandriopoulos et al. 2010).

– Research should be relevant

The most frequently cited barrier to evidence-use is a perceived lack of relevant research, particularly for local decisions, according to a review by Humphries et al. (2014). Walter et al. (2003) suggest that successful initiatives are those which analyse the research impact context and target specific barriers to, and enablers of, change. Contandriopoulos et al. (2010) identify the importance of context-dependent characteristics such as timeliness, salience, and actionability, collectively referred to as 'relevance'.

"Try to understand the direction that policy is developing so you can relate your research to it," advises Chris Fox, a co-founder of MetroPolis. "You have to think about work you have done and how you fit that to the changing policy agenda.

"It's easier to be policy relevant if you are close to high level policy – working

upstream – so you can tailor research to the direction of policy. Whereas if you are operating downstream – and you hear only when there is a White Paper or a 'Ten Minute Bill' that signals emerging policy – then your ability to move your research to prioritise that issue is very limited. This implies trying to engage with ministers and Special Advisors (SPADs) or, at the very least, operating with fairly senior level of civil service to understand how they are thinking about policy."

– Spot passing bandwagons – and jump on

There is, as Michael Taylor, a co-founder of MetroPolis explains, a "window of discourse" – a range of discussion that can be tolerated and heard. It is important for research to find its place within this field. There are also moments when discussions suddenly open up and it's important to take opportunities to attach your research to those conversations.

"Jump on bandwagons when you see them," advises Sarah Galvani. She gives an example: "A team member for our end of life care project for people with substance use problems came across a YouTube clip of Sir Ed Davey MP who was speaking in Parliament on homelessness and end of life care. I realised how passionate he was, so I contacted my MP and Sir Ed. They were interested in my work with substance users for different reasons. We met at the House of Commons and talked about how our different interests were related. Sir Ed has put us in touch with other people and academics. He is looking at legislation in this field – but now our names are out there around this topic."

"Jump on the bandwagons when you see them," advises Sarah Galvani

– Use intermediaries who can mediate the relationships

Building and facilitating all of these relationships can be difficult and time-consuming. Sometimes, academics don't have the right skills. They may supplement missing skills either by developing certain academics or bringing in experts to help.

Mike Kane MP

"Academics need mediators who can translate research into policy-friendly language and also into different formats, blogs and short policy briefs with crisp findings," explains Shoba Arun.

There are various kinds of intermediaries including "conveyors", "brokers" and "lobbyists", explains a review of the literature by Contandriopoulos et al. (2010). Knowledge brokers work as 'boundary spanners', identifying, selecting, and obtaining information from the environment and transmitting it.

Bednarek et al. (2018: 3) define the practice of boundary spanning as "work to enable exchange between the production and use of knowledge to support evidence-informed decision-making in a specific context". Boundary spanners are "individuals or organisations that specifically and actively facilitate this process. Essentially, boundary spanners dedicate their time to creating and enabling effective knowledge exchange".

Reviews suggest that, although in some cases, an individual researcher can act as a boundary spanner, the role is typically too intense and wide-ranging to be played by someone engaged directly in research. Boundary spanners are more likely to act in a full-time capacity as expert intermediaries.

But success rates for boundary spanners are not well-documented. Contandriopoulos et al. highlight "the practical difficulties of such a role in communication networks in which numerous sources of information are competing, polarization and politics matter, and information is unlikely to be neutral". (Contandriopoulos et al. 2010: 464).

A typical case of boundary spanning was undertaken by a team at Manchester Metropolitan's Policy and Evaluation Research Unit (PERU).The team led a Horizon2020 project in which ten universities from across Europe researched innovative approaches to welfare reform in their countries.

An 'impact partner', usually a policy expert from a not-for-profit organisation – was recruited in each country as a "knowledge intermediary" or "research broker". Early in the project, they worked with research partners to ensure that their planned research was policy-relevant. Later in the project, they took research results and turned them into a number of outputs including policy briefings and social media content that they used to inform and influence policy-debates happening in their countries.

"Academics need mediators who can translate research into policy-friendly language and also into different formats, blogs and short policy briefs with crisp findings," Shoba Arun.

By the end of the project, impact partners had engaged in over 2000 face-to-face meetings with policy makers, distributed large numbers of policy briefings and emails and had over 12,000 web pages downloaded. In addition, extensive qualitative evidence was collected exploring how specific interactions had led to policy and practice influence.

Solution 3: Checklist

Actions	Tasks
Align with the drivers of policy development	Find out what matters to the policy makers you are working with. Tailor your messaging to those concerns and highlight elements of your research that are relevant.
Focus on champions of existing change	Find those who are already supporting and implementing the changes you advocate.
Target particular policy makers with tailored messages	Identify MPs, civil servants and public officials who support the policies suggested by your research. Write easy-to-digest briefings. Work with your communications experts.
Ensure that evidence is reliable and authoritative	Make sure that your work is non-partisan and unbiased. This reputation is vital for policy makers seeking your advice more widely.
Is your research relevant to policy?	Understand the direction that policy is developing so you can relate your research to it
Spot passing bandwagons – and jump on	Find out what MPs are interested in and attach your research to their campaigns.
Use intermediaries who can mediate the relationships	Recruit 'boundary spanners' or ensure that some of your research team have skills to mediate between evidence and policy, through meetings, briefings and web development.

Solution 4: Build skills – among researchers and also policy makers – that support policy-research relationship

– Researchers require the right social skills.

"You want to be working with team of people who have the same passion for influence as you do," explains Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow. "That helps you to keep good communication within the team. You can share out the visits and the influence. Working at the policy level is very much about having researchers who are able to build relationships, really good communicators and analysts who have reflective and strategic qualities."

– Be positive, offering solutions not just strong criticism

"It's not enough just to criticise," explains Rob Ralphs, a Chancellor's Fellow. "Policy makers need you to offer workable solutions to the problems you are identifying – not just blue sky thinking. For example, it's easy to recommend more local investment but that's not realistic where council budgets have been cut by 25 or 50 per cent. You need to make smart recommendations for service development and investment that are in line with the resources and staffing.

"So develop positive ideas for action. In the past, my research has tended to criticise policy and local authorities. Now, I am more interested in offering them solutions and, as a consequence, policy makers are more receptive."

Introducing questions, rather than criticisms, can be a good approach. Sarah Galvani explains: "We're trying to rethink end of life care for people with substance use issues. There are a lot of problems, but we need to avoid strong criticisms. So instead we ask questions. We ask practitioners, for example, whether it is helpful to be thinking of recovery from substance abuse as people are reaching the end of their lives. A lot say it's ridiculous. Our question helps to put the issue out there without voicing criticism."

– Support policy makers capacities to use evidence

Policy makers' characteristics also play a role in evidence uptake, with their research skills and awareness (or lack of) reported as a barrier, according to a review by Oliver et al. (2014). It found that personal experiences, judgments, and values were reported important factors in whether evidence was used.

Langer et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of decision-makers having the necessary skills to locate, appraise, synthesise evidence, and integrate it with other information and their political needs.

But it's not enough just to build decision-makers' skills to access and make sense of evidence. The review found that this was effective at increasing use of evidence only if that increase in access went hand in hand with enhancing the capability and motivation of decision-makers to use research evidence. An example would be capacity-building that fosters decision-makers' skills in using of evidence as well as increasing their openness to the evidence. Organisational structures within

Chris Fox shares a platform with Liz Truss MP, First Secretary to the Treasury at an event at Conservative Party conference

policy and practice can be vital to the adoption of research. Important factors include administrative support, intra-organisational linkages that promote knowledge sharing across the organisation, developing internal expertise on research utilisation and formalising the integration of evidence into decision-making. Work on organisational reform can make policy making more receptive to evidence from research.

Such work is vital if we are to move on from simply the traditional, supply-side, 'push' model of disseminating research to one that focusses more on the demand side and tries to encourage policy makers to 'pull' in research. Co-production of research (see Solution 3) can be an important factor in developing policy makers' skills to interpret and draw on research.

– Think ahead of the curve, identify grand challenges and provide foresight

Policy makers sometimes find it hard to be open in discussions with researchers around immediate, polarised or politicised issues. It can be easier to talk about issues that are, maybe, five years in the future, – but policy makers can be too absorbed in the moment to think that far ahead.

This is where researchers can help out. They can think ahead beyond elections to less polarised, less political spaces where policy makers feel more comfortable about discussing evidence. This type of foresight and thinking ahead of the curve can greatly improve trust and authority in the research-policy relationship.

It's also important that researchers are alert to what policy makers, themselves, see on the horizon, as Heinz Tuselmann,

a Chancellor's Fellow, explains: "Thinking about what is coming in terms of policy emphasis means that you can deliver research a bit ahead of the curve. You can't just do airy fairy research and expect the policy making communities to pick it up."

Dr Tuselmann adds: "You don't want to be a one trick pony. It is good to identify big issues and grand challenges for policy makers. So, for example, I have highlighted to the UN how we need to ensure that the next generation of academics from the global south are well-equipped to research and speak about development issues, so the research-policy dialogue is not simply with researchers from the industrialised north.

"You can't just do airy fairy research and expect the policy making communities to pick it up," Heinz Tuselman

"As a result, together we are running research workshops in the global south for early career researchers. Also, I have been helping the UN to develop and host workshops for multinationals looking at how their investments can tackle modern slavery. So we are helping policy makers to think outside the box."

– Bring resource to policy makers

There are many ways in which research can bring resource to policy makers who are often hard-pressed to deal with the evidence that is available.

They can help with drafting policy documents, as Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow, explains: "Out of all our activity, the goal of my research team is to draft a suite of policy documents that develop policy on the ground for those providing end of life care for people who use substances, that creates regional policy in the field and that sets out guidelines and principles to inform national policies."

Go the extra mile

It's also important to be flexible and go the extra mile. "Making yourself available and accessible is vital," explains Rob Ralphs, a Chancellor's Fellow. "Of course, this requirement is not reflected in research contracts – they might specify a day or day and a half for dissemination, but I am often asked to do a policy briefing or presentation. I have done dozens about Spice. It can take a day or more to pull everything together for a single event.

"I would be within my contractual rights to say no – all I am obliged to do is provide interim findings and final report. In lots of cases, I have gone above and beyond the remit of the research but there are mutual benefits in terms of knowledge exchange. I enjoy that public engagement. I like discussing everything with beneficiaries and practitioners – I really enjoy it."

– Think internationally, not just nationally/locally

Given that students and funding come from all over the world, and policy innovation is applicable globally, researchers should think about impact beyond borders. Heinz Tuselmann explains: "Universities today are

operating in a global marketplace. If they want to move up the international rankings they should be able to demonstrate impact internationally."

However, Shoba Arun highlights that taking this bigger perspective has resource implications: "International change requires more time because the cultural contexts are different. So you need to create a network of lobbyists at the local /national level."

– Build the policy relationship with your institution not just an individual academic

"When working with policy makers, it is important to build a legacy relationship between your institution and the policy makers and ensure a continuing relevance of what can be offered in the future." So explains Heinz Tuselmann, who aims to embed Manchester Metropolitan University within the structure of UNCTAD – the UN body responsible for trade and development.

"We need to be adaptable in response to practices that help to determine what stories we tell and what methods we adopt," Stefan White.

"When I was seconded to the UN, it was doing a lot of work on new industrial policy and shaping investment by multinational companies. So I helped by showing how multinationals can be anchored more securely and be rendered less footloose, offering more long-term economic benefits.

"However, that was last year. Next year, the emphasis at the UN is on Special Economic Zones. So now I have to ensure that my research is relevant to that topic and I am able to show what research helps policy to ensure that benefits from Special Economic Zones are long-lasting and spread beyond those particular areas."

– Be pragmatic

It's vital the research brings skills of flexibility that make the relationship with policy and practice easier. "Our principles are clear," explains Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow. "We're seeking age-friendly cities – but we need to be adaptable in response to practices that help to determine what stories we tell and what methods we adopt.

"People might say that adapting to policy making is compromising research. It's isn't. It's actually being very rigorous and testing research findings and whether they work in a real, actual context. This involves taking a holistic view of context, a systems' view of it."

"Build a legacy relationship between your institution and policy makers," Heinz Tuselman.

Solution 4: Checklist

Actions	Tasks
Ensure researchers have the right social skills	Make sure at least some researchers are good at building relationships, communicating and strategy.
Be positive	Offer solutions not just strong criticism
Support policy makers capacities to use evidence	Encourage administrative support for policy makers to access evidence better. Encourage knowledge sharing across the organisation and development of internal expertise in research utilsation. Co-produce evidence, making it more accessible.
Think ahead of the curve, and provide foresight	Find out what's coming in policy terms and link your research to it. Look ahead and highlight future challenges to policy makers
Bring resource to policy makers	Help to write policy and practice guidance
Go the extra mile	Offer help even if it is beyond your paid contract
Think internationally	Look at how your research might impact beyond the UK and build relationships with international bodies such as the UN.
Build the policy relationship with your institution not just an individual academic	Ensure sustainability by drawing academic colleagues into the policy relationship.
Be pragmatic	Stick to principles but be ready to adapt the application of research to fit circumstances.

Solution 5: Better understanding: speak and listen to policy makers

Good contact, collaboration and relationships help evidence use. Oliver et al. (2014) found that these factors were a major facilitator of evidence use. Humphries et al. identified sustained dialogue and developing partnerships between researchers and decision-makers as facilitators of evidence use.

Policy makers want to speak directly to people. They want headlines and then to talk about the findings. They want the human element and case studies. They like to hear stories of applied and good practice. So, try to convey recommendations with human stories that affect policy makers on a human level.

– Find and welcome policy makers.

Personal contact with policy makers is vital, emphasises Walter et al. (2003). Their review suggests that individual enthusiasts can help carry the process of research impact. They are vital to "sell" new ideas and practices.

Contandriopoulos et al. (2010) also note the importance of interpersonal trust and that repeated communications strengthen such trust. "In the long run,", they say, "this feedback process helps open natural and enduring communication channels and is at the core of the numerous recommendations in favour of developing a close collaboration between producers and users" (Contandriopoulos et al. 2010: 463).

To do this, policy makers may need outward looking researchers: "They may not know how to find you – so you have to find them," says Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow. "Researchers should think of approaching ministers directly and the civil servants associated with them, if there is a particular shared interest."

Langer et al. (2016) highlight the importance of researchers being available to policy makers. They found that a combination of evidence-on-demand hotlines and help applying evidence in decision-making led to evidence use.

– Create a trustworthy relationship.

Both theory and evidence reviewed by Contandriopoulos et al. show the influence of social structures in knowledge exchange. Their review finds that interpersonal trust facilitates and encourages communication and that repeated communications create trust.

"Face to face contact creates a different quality of relationship than email and telephone," explains Sarah Galvani. "People make judgements based on appearance. It's a combination of how you come across plus your presentation in terms of listening and participating. That can create a positive or negative impression. And it can create trust."

"That's vital," says Rob Ralphs. "The more you engage with an organisation or politicians, the more the relationship and trust grows. So, they will trust your judgement based on previous experience to provide advice. That longevity matters. Increasingly, they respect your expertise on a host of issues, not just about a particular piece of research."

Trust, however is easier to develop at a local level than nationally, says Rob Ralphs: "Policy makers and ministers change frequently at a national level so it's harder to build trust and

Angela Rayner MP, Shadow Education Secretary speaking at Manchester Metropolitan's Education conference.

relationships with them. But at a local level, MPs may represent constituencies for decades, commissioners and councillors stay in post for long periods so that makes it easier to build trust."

– Be sensitive and discreet.

That can be hard for some. Sarah Galvani explains: "One academic went to an All Party Parliamentary Working Group (APPWG) where a civil servant asked them to do something. Next day, they were tweeting about doing policy work for the APPWG. That was insensitive and could have put people off working with them again."

– Don't be too protective about research be open

"Don't be defensive about what you're doing. Share it and your ideas as much as you can within the confidentiality contracts," says Sarah Galvani. "Tell people what you are doing, how far you've got, and where you are struggling.

"That's very helpful when setting up project advisory groups or practice and community partner groups. Feed back to them regularly to them and ask them for support and ideas if coming up with difficulties – it keeps them involved and they'll see you are open to their experience.

– Speak a common language. Make research accessible.

Multiple reviews of the literature identify accessibility as a vital element in successful knowledge exchange including dimensions such as appropriate targeting and use of language.

Evaluation results must be timely, particularly if they are to be of instrumental use and this means balancing thoroughness and completeness of analysis with timing and accessibility of findings (Rossi et al. 2004, Oliver et al. 2014).

Walter et al. (2003) suggest that to have an impact, research findings need to be adapted to or reconstructed within practice and policy contexts. They suggest this can involve tailoring findings to a target group, enabling debate about their implications. Rossi et al. (2004) emphasise the importance of understanding the cognitive styles of decision-makers and ensuring that evaluation outputs are tailored to these. For example, politicians will respond to different types of knowledge, compared with practitioners.

– Make sure messaging is clear

"Policy makers don't necessarily see academic research as very compelling," explains Sarah Galvani. "So we need to speak language that can be translated into policy. That means taking out theorisation and putting findings into lay person terms that are accessible to the public and for policy makers."

Rob Ralphs adds: 'It's important to create good briefings. Policy makers need policy briefings that are short and reliable with clear, take-home messages and actions. Our background briefing work with, for example, the Mayor's office in Greater Manchester, has been as important as our high profile public events in securing action and change.'

– Beware – good communications are not enough on their own

Langer et al. (2016) found that interventions facilitating access to research evidence (e.g. through communication strategies and evidence repositories) were only found to be effective at increasing use of evidence if the intervention design simultaneously tried to enhance decision-makers' opportunity and motivation to use evidence.

– Use social media, but don't expect too much from it

Social media is a useful way both to target evidence at particular policy makers/practitioners. 'Altmetrics', or alternative metrics, capture the wider social media impact generated by research publications as a result of such targeting. However, when Ravenscroft et al linked this data to REF impact case studies, they found little in the way of correlation between Altmetric scores and REF impact. Despite this, there is growing evidence that social media tools such as Twitter can be very useful in extending the reach of research including to policy makers.

So, beyond citations, include social media posts, blogs and press releases as well as academic articles in your drive to increase impact and monitor this activity using a platform such as Altmetric. But don't fool yourself that such activity is sufficient in itself to drive the use of research evidence.

Solution 5: Checklist

Actions	Tasks
Find and welcome policy makers	Seek out policy makers, make appointments to meet them. Invite them to your institution. Engage directly with government ministers in your policy area.
Create a trustworthy relationship	Don't brag about your relationships with policy makers
Don't be too protective about research – be open	Set project advisory groups or practice and community partner groups that are well-briefed in your work.
Speak a common language. Make research accessible	Avoid jargon. Keep documents short, readable and accessible.
Make sure messaging is clear	Take out theorisation and put findings into lay person terms that are accessible to the public and for policy makers
Use social media, but don't expect too much from it	Capture activity through altmetrics. Use Twitter to extend reach of research. Remember it's no substitute for face to face relationships.

Section 4:
Innovative Tools

4

"Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire."

W. B. Yeats, poet

There are many approaches, set out in the previous section, for shifting research towards action and better understanding of policy. These include co-production of research, meetings, one-to-one relationships, publications, use of intermediaries, events, websites and various forms of social media that can draw evidence and policy closer together.

In this section, we explore three particular innovative tools, developed at Manchester Metropolitan University, which can be added to the armoury for promoting the impact of evidence on policy.

They are, first, embedding researchers inside policy contexts. A second innovation is creating or working with a think tank that provides a safe space for joint working. Thirdly, we identify ways to use teaching to impact on policy. All three innovations shift research towards action and towards greater understanding of, and engagement with, policy makers.

Innovation 1: Policy-orientated Fellowships

Embedding researchers in policy environments can make them policy insiders. This develops trust, mutual understanding and sustainable impact. It provides insights into the policy process that allow researchers to offer tailored evidence for policy makers and to increase the nuance of their findings by building in policy contexts.

"Fellowships or secondment provide immersion in the policy environment. The researcher has to be agile, to say to themselves that I am now one of them, but without going native," says Heinz Tuselmann, one of the Chancellor's Fellows. "Fellowships must not simply fund someone's favourite hobby horse. They must offer long-term sustainable, tangible benefits for the University beyond the fellowship."

Chris Fox, who helped to set up the Chancellor's Fellowship at Manchester Metropolitan, adds: "They can support engagement over a sustained period which otherwise can be difficult. So policy makers feel that there is a commitment and it's worth engaging.

"There is some, albeit limited, evidence and theory that these intermediaries are quite critical in this process. That's where the Chancellors Fellows come in: we are trying to support academics who are comfortable and credible in both the policy and academic environments. But this knowledge broker role is difficult – it is difficult to be credible in each environment.

"Fellows may operate in different ways. Some people look for the policy opening that lets them focus on their specialism. Others work in teams and become network partners who can speak across a broad subject area."

– A fellowship turns the researcher into an insider

"We seek visceral, direct, physical relationships with policy," explains Sam Gray, co-founder of the MetroPolis, which set up the Chancellor's Fellowship. "If you want to change something, you need to know who can change it and sit with them to do it. A policy–orientated fellowship, placing an academic inside an organisation that shapes policy, is like a Trojan horse – it gets the researcher into the room, with academic status that gives them influence. A fellowship can ensure that you are present, around the table, when important decisions are taken."

Heinz Tuselmann, one of the Chancellor's Fellows, describes how this has worked in practice for him, embedded in UNCTAD, the UN body that manages trade and development.

"You become part of the team, treated as insider while you are there. Policy making is not a 9 to 5 job, so it means that you work the way they do," he explains. "When we were working on the UN's World Investment Report, we sometimes worked till 3am and at weekends in the run-up to completion. Decisions are made quickly and sometimes at the last minute so you need to be there.

"You see how outside academics serve as feeders – they are flown in from Oxford or Harvard for expert meetings or speak on Skype. But that's it. The insiders make the real decisions. If you are there, inside the room, on the ground, you are not just a feeder. You go through all their pain with them. What later comes out in print – quite a bit of it was finally decided at the end of the process – springs from when you were there, sitting with them."

> **"You became part of the team, treated as an insider while you were there. Policy making is not a 9 to 5 job"**

– Fellowships remove academics from day to day pressures

Literature reviews make clear that competing pressures to teach and publish in journals make it extremely difficult for academics to engage enough with change makers. "Usually fellowships are very academic and the relevance to policy is an afterthought, so policy-orientated fellowships are a smart development," says Heinz Tuselmann. "They remove the academic for a while from the university and its every day pressures such as applying for funding and from publishing."

– They give status to impacting on policy and make a difference

"Embedding academics in policy environments signifies to colleagues that the university is serious about impacting policy," observes Heinz Tuselmann. "It also gives status to the academic's research, recognising that it is of a high enough level to be of interest to policy makers.

"We can also make a real difference. I work on how to anchor multinational investment in countries – a vital need especially for developing countries. My fellowship at the UN means I have contributed to the UN's flagship 'World Investment Report', which is widely consulted by heads of state, government ministries and the international investment community. Working at the UN means that, as researchers, we're not whistling in the wind. We have the ear of the UN. The world is listening."

– Fellowships help sustain policy impact

"A policy-orientated fellowship identifies an academic who is able to engage with policy makers over a sustained period," explains Chris Fox. "So it gives policy makers a sense of commitment that this person will stick around, for months, maybe longer. That encourages policy makers to invest in the relationship. Money from the fellowship can oil the wheels – for example, sometimes, a civil servant may want you to come to working group that involves an overnight stay but has no budget to pay for it. The fellowship can provide flexibility and funding needed to maintain the relationship."

Shoba Arun, one of the Chancellor's Fellows, reflects on how that has worked well in India, where she has spent her fellowship. "The partnerships established by the Fellowship are now strong. We hope they will continue to bear fruit," she says. "The fellowship must embed the university, not just a single academic, into policy change."

– Embedding the university in policy

Heinz Tuselmann takes up his colleague's emphasis on embedding the university. "It's important that fellows develop networks beyond the scope of their particular fellowship or topic interest," he explains. "So, for example, during my work at the UN, I have applied for my university to join the UN's prestigious global university network – UNCTAD's 'Virtual Network'. The only other UK university accredited is London's School of Oriental and African Studies. It is vital that a less well-known university such as mine is accredited because it would not normally be the UN's first port of call. Otherwise organisations like the UN only reach out to famous universities such as Harvard and Oxford.

"A policy-orientated fellowship identifies an academic who is able to engage with policy makers over a sustained period," explains Chris Fox.

"I am trying to embed my university at the UN so this is not just a one man or one woman show. So I have already got an early career researcher working with UN as business analyst for three months. They've said they are also happy to take on any good Masters student as interns if we have one. I might leave at any time, so it's important to embed the university in this way."

Innovation 2: Universities and think tanks

Think tanks offer the skills and space for evidence and policy to engage in a mutual relationship.

Manchester Metropolitan University has experimented in working with external think tanks and also setting up its own think tank – MetroPolis.

Rob Ralphs explains the benefits he has experienced from working with an external think tank: "I spent my Chancellor's Fellowship with Volteface, a think tank which explores alternatives to current public policies relating to drugs. Together, we developed the "High Stakes: Prison Drugs Symposium" in May 2017 that drew together a broad range of interested groups including ex-prisoners, academics, policy makers, campaigners, prison staff and drug treatment workers. This led to a second Volteface event in Manchester, opened by Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester's Mayor, in July 2017, entitled "Responding to Spice: Developing an integrated response".

– Think tanks can raise the profile of researchers

"Here's just one metric to demonstrate how working with a think tank has helped raise my profile," says Rob Ralphs. "Before working with Volteface, my research had a respectable reach of 15 million people in 2016. Today, that figure has more than quadrupled, to over 70 million in the past year. That's partly thanks to extensive media coverage in print, online and on air. It's also been because of policy lobbying – that "reach" includes people who make a difference. For example, we have briefed the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, who opened our 'Responding to Spice' conference."

– A London-based think tank can help regionally-based research

Rob Ralphs explains: "It is easier for a London-based organisation to attract leading ministers and MPs to events: the first symposium held by Volteface was at London's Barbican centre, close to Westminster.

"The think tank is media savvy: one director has been a speech writer for David Cameron and has worked for Channel 4 News while another is an IT whizz. Through this experience and working closely with my institute's press office, I've learned how to work better with the media and find the reporters and programmes that will cover my research accurately and sensitively and how to engage with social media platforms."

– Develop a think tank within your university

Sam Gray is co-founder of MetroPolis, Manchester Metropolitan University's research-led think tank. He explains its philosophy.

"A think tank provides a community of experts with whom to examine ideas share knowledge and provides the researcher-policy relationship with a much needed focal point. It can provide a sharp clear voice that provides research with much more influence.

"Think tanks institutionalise impact and relationships, making both more sustainable. They retain institutional memory which is valuable when dealing with policy makers, who might be in post for a relatively short time. Think tanks – sitting in the space between research and policy – can be knowledgeable and literate in each and

can anticipate and see a forthcoming agenda on the horizon."

A relatively new development is the Universities Policy Exchange Network (UPEN), which includes a number of universities that are exploring this approach.

Innovation 3: Use teaching to increase impact on policy

There are two ways in which teaching can support the impact of research on policy. First, students can be taught some of the skills of engagement with policy detailed earlier in this handbook.

Secondly and more innovatively, teaching and research can walk hand in hand. Provided that each is linked into practice and policy, they can impact on the policy environment and show students ways to operate in the future.

Stefan White, who lectures at the Manchester School of Architecture, explains how teaching and research sit together in his department. "Teaching is part of our impact," he explains. "So our architecture students provide some *pro-bono* services to people, designing for voluntary groups, helping campaign groups fight developments they don't agree with. We win some commissions our design that Masters students deliver under senior academic guidance.

"Students also augment professional research capacity in the area of engagement, finding out what people need. Our teaching space – the studio – is also an area in which we research by using discussions to scope with students what we should do next.

"This massive involvement of our students has provided many opportunities for experimentation and engagement with deprived older people – neglected citizens who might otherwise be beyond the reach of Greater Manchester's agencies. It shows the mutual benefits gained by creating new relationships between research, policy and practice in the city, especially at a time when overall public expenditure is so highly constrained."

This model is applicable in many teaching contexts where learning is applied, particularly in the social sciences. It is an area that Manchester Metropolitan is exploring, although there is uncertainty about the long-term possibilities. Sam Gray, one of the founders of MetroPolis, explains: "Sometimes it is hard to know whether doubling up research and impact is shareable methodologically or just a desperate response to difficult circumstances. It needs researchers who are interested and partnerships that will release the opportunities."

"Teaching is part of our impact," Stefan White explains. "So our architecture students provide some *pro-bono* services to people, designing for voluntary groups, helping campaign groups fight developments they don't agree with... "

This thinking also highlights the need to make the most of alumni for impact. This can be particularly true at universities that draw many of their students from the region and where graduates remain in the area once they have completed their degrees.

Sam Gray explains: "University graduates bring their learning out into the world and often into the particular locality of the university. Some 68 per cent of Manchester Metropolitan's students are from the North-West and similar proportion will stay in the region after graduation.

"So research that speaks to what they see and experience around them – and helping them to understand it – makes a difference. Students already care about what they see in their city and they can be energised by an academic community that is engaged with the world."

"University graduates bring their learning out into the world and often into the particular locality of the university. Some 68 per cent of Manchester Metropolitan's students are from the North-West..." Sam Gray

At the launch of Alex Fox's book on care policy (centre), hosted by MetroPolis. Chaired by Michael Taylor, speakers were Liz Kendall MP, author Alex Fox, Professor Sue Baines of Manchester Metropolitan University and Greater Manchester Health and Care Partnership's Chief Officer, Jon Rouse (one of the 20 most influential people in the NHS, according to HSJ).

Section 5:
Measuring Impact

5

"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted."

Albert Einstein – Nobel prize winning physicist

– It's not easy

Measuring the impact of knowledge mobilisation activities on policy can be challenging because so many, diverse factors determine policy. Reflecting upon our own experience and some ideas from the literature we suggest a number of approaches. They range from fairly rudimentary monitoring, through to more in-depth evaluation. We start, though, with a word on attitude.

– Don't be a shrinking violet

Our practical experience with MetroPolis and the Chancellor's Fellowship is that proving research's impact on a policy is, indeed difficult, so it is important to make sure that the input and contribution of researchers is properly recorded.

Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow, explains what is needed: "In their journal papers, academics make sure that they acknowledge the influence of peers – if they worked with fellow academics and their contribution is not included, they will point that out. As far as wider impact is concerned, academics also need to ensure that their research and any other contributions are referenced by policy makers. It's important to have it in black and white.

"Most academics are quite humble about what they achieve but, working with policy makers in external environments, they should be aware of the value of what they offer. Academics often bring free resources into policy and practice – and this needs to be acknowledged."

– Gather testimonials

Sam Gray, a co-founder of Metropolis, adds: "Official letters from the right people can speak volumes about the value that research brings to policy. But be careful not to overwhelm your policy friends with too many such requests."

– Influence is about many voices

But the process of logging influence is not simply about direct relationships with policy makers. It can be just as important in influencing others, who then go on to be heard by policy makers. To use a football analogy, the goal scorer is important, but the player who provides the final pass to the scorer – making the "assist" – is also vital and should be recorded. Stefan White, a Chancellor's Fellow, explains: "As we build the case for place-based working, there are many other voices that we also influence at different levels such as the chief executives of local authorities who are very enthusiastic about our approach."

– Focus on the beneficiaries of policy or practice impact.

"It's important to remember that change in policy and practice is just a stepping stone to improving people's lives," says Sam Gray. "So always keep that in your mind's eye. It's one reason why research in practice helps impact – because researchers are there at the sharp end engaged with the would be beneficiaries.

"That means, yes, work with policy makers but also make connections with end users and beneficiaries – the people who will gain from impact. If you are doing your job properly, you are probably starting your research with them.

"I'm unapologetically an applied researcher and I don't do anything that won't make a difference in practice or policy," Sarah Galvani.

The need for 'impact' is a compelling argument for co-producing research with individuals and communities."

Sarah Galvani, a Chancellor's Fellow, is emphatic about the value of this approach. "I'm unapologetically an applied researcher and I don't do anything that won't make a difference in practice or policy," she says.

"It is usually easier to change practice than policy. I don't think they are mutually exclusive. By doing research in partnership with practitioners, you are in position from the outset to start change happening. Also the evidence you draw from working with practice can be fed up the line. A multi-pronged approach is more likely to change policy."

Shoba Arun, a Chancellor's Fellow, finds that focusing on the beneficiaries

"It's great to work directly with the people who use the policy and implement it, working with all them directly," Shoba Arun.

enhances not only knowledge of impact but the research itself and the quality of policy development. "It's great to work directly with the people who use the policy and implement it, working with all them directly," she explains. "That shapes your research and creates practice-based research. Research followed by dissemination is a one way conversation, but research in practice is a dialogue. It changes the way in which you view the theorisation of your research. It overcomes the problem of context and increases the application and supports upscaling of your work."

– Get involved in implementation

As well as research in practice being useful for impact evaluation, involvement in implementation of findings is important. Sam Gray has worked closely on developing Manchester Metropolitan University's presentation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

"In the last REF, Manchester Metropolitan had 42 impact case studies," he explains. "The impactful stories concerned not just producing research – the academics were also intimately involved in the pathway for their research being adopted and used.

"For example, Dr Annapurna Waughray, Senior Lecturer in Human Rights Law at Manchester Metropolitan, has conducted research on discrimination in the UK based on 'caste' and the need to amend equalities legislation. However, Dr Waughray did not just develop the research, she also made herself available to help with drafting the subsequent legislation. She is typical of our most effective researchers who are passionate about their work and don't let go when the research is complete. They work on pathways and relationships that can lead to their research producing change."

Jim McMahon MP met with young people from Greater Manchester in a round table convened by MetroPolis.

Evaluating impact

Moving beyond collecting data to monitor impact, some researchers will want to build in evaluation of their impact into the work that they do. However, 'traditional' approaches to impact evaluation that often use a counterfactual will rarely be practical. Faced with such challenges, evaluators of academic research impact have started to draw on other, emerging traditions in evaluation. Some have switched from discussing "attribution" to what is termed "contribution". So they focus on the importance of supporting factors in understanding impact in more complex settings where multiple causes or causal packages can lead to impact. (Mayne, 2012; Stern et al., 2012)

– Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and Process tracing

Academic literature suggests that two forms of analysis can help in this approach to assessing impact – qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and process tracing.

Where there are a number of cases for which information is available, but no counterfactual Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) might be useful. It looks at a number of in-depth case studies and tries to identify causal patterns within the cases (White and Phillips, 2012). It compares different combinations of conditions and outcomes to work out which configurations of conditions lead to what outcomes, and which conditions are key in producing certain outcomes.

Underlying this approach is the concept that different configurations of conditions can produce the same outcome and that a given condition can produce different outcomes, depending on the context (White and Phillips 2012).

Where there are only a very small number of cases, a second form of analysis, Process Tracing, tries to "unwrap" the links between putative causes and outcomes by studying how the causal mechanisms might work (White and Phillips, 2012).

So you start with some hypothetical causal mechanisms and identify what should be observed if a hypothesis is true or false.

The next step is to identify pieces of evidence which, in practice, you would expect to find at each step of the causal chain, if a hypothetical explanation were true.

Practical evidence is then gathered to overturn or support rival hypothetical explanations ("process verification"). This helps to establish whether the actual mechanisms at work fit with those predicted. Assessing each of the hypotheses and their evidence together should aid understanding of what causes a given set of outcomes in any given case.

Evaluating the impact of research on policy is not straightforward and we can only scratch the surface here. For more information contact Chris Fox at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit where a range of approaches to evaluating research impact are being developed or attend one of the regular MetroPolis training events which are open to all Manchester Metropolitan staff.

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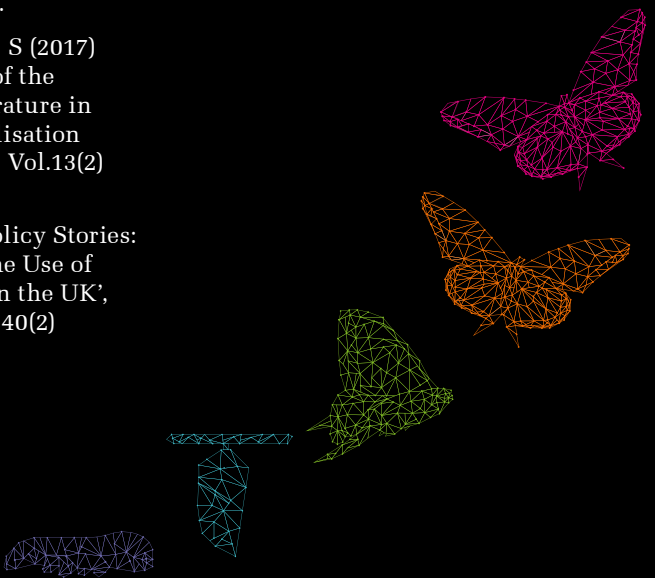
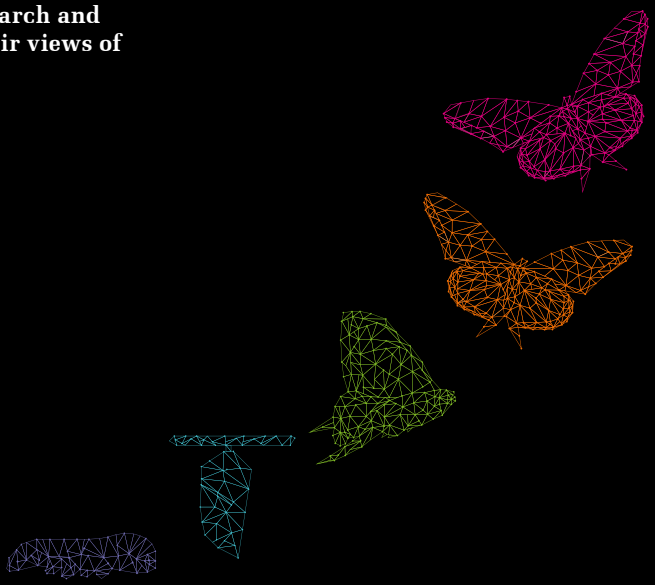


Manchester Metropolitan University

This handbook is part of an important conversation about how, universities can play a role in policy development that their learning, skills and public funding demand.

It draws on the latest academic literature and on our experience at Manchester Metropolitan University. Sitting in the midst of a great civic experiment – devolution of power from Westminster to England's regions – and uncertainty about Britain's future directions, the University is striving to enhance its relationship with policy and practice in innovative ways.

Our thinking has led us to recognise that universities have to go the extra mile to become relevant and pertinent to policy and practice. We are rethinking how we develop research and teaching, with greater emphasis on action and on understanding policy making. We are pioneering institutional infrastructures that provide a place for research and policy to meet and share their views of the world.



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