

#SurfacingEDI

Surfacing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion within Academic-Policy Engagement

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Discussion
Document

Credits

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About UPEN

The Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) is a community of UK universities, academics, and policy professionals committed to increasing the impact of research on public policy at a local, regional, national, and international level.

The mission of UPEN is to harness the collective research power and leading expertise of UK academic institutions to make a real difference to policymaking. UPEN does this by offering a dedicated contact point for policy professionals (e.g. civil servants, politicians, funders) and supporting them to better engage with universities across the UK to meet their evidence needs. It also works to build a more sophisticated understanding for the policy world of academic life, research processes, and reward and incentive structures.

Since its inception in 2018, UPEN has been driving towards its goals to support better decision-making by increasing equal access, or ‘democratising’, the opportunities for academic-policy engagement and diversifying the evidence presented to inform public policy beyond the ‘usual suspects’ within mainstream organisations and well-worn channels.

UPEN does this in a variety of ways, including acting as a dedicated contact for policy professionals



to seek and receive expert advice, organising knowledge-exchange events with key stakeholders from universities, UK government, parliament, devolved bodies, and local authorities, and working together to identify mechanisms to take forward specific projects and share best practices. Through seven sub-committees, UPEN covers areas of academic-policy engagement related to Areas of Research Interest (ARI), Communications, Devolved and Regional Engagement, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), International, Futures and Professional Development.

UPEN’s Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) sub-committee aims to support its members to address and make progress on EDI in academic-policy engagement. This includes working together on the challenges identified by knowledge brokers in the survey: research versus people, expertise vis-à-vis diversity, saturation and representation, ways of working and workplace communications, training, and funding.

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Preface



Preface

UPEN members and collaborators nominated individuals from across the academic-policy engagement space to provide reflections in response to the following two questions:

- 1 What would ‘good’ academic-policy engagement look like if EDI was front and centre? and**
- 2 What is the biggest change you’d like to see to achieve EDI in academic-policy engagement?**

Alongside the content of the report and its recommendations, the reflections aim to spark conversation.

Question 1

What would ‘good’ academic-policy engagement look like if EDI was front and centre?

Demographic factors, research discipline, career stage, type of institution, where you live and work – none of this would feel like a barrier to academics and policy makers having meaningful engagement. If EDI truly underpinned all academic-policy engagement, whoever was the best researcher to contribute to policy would feel able and supported to do it.

Naomi Saint, Knowledge Exchange Manager, UK Parliament

It should look, sound, and move like the people it is being funded to help, by the people it is being funded to help, for the people it is being funded to help. It should have many faces, many voices and many languages.

Nigel Orrillard, University of South Wales

Better data, resources and networks might enable academics from underrepresented groups to better engage with policy and vice versa.

Open Innovation Team, Cabinet Office

Supporting structures and mechanisms to enable researchers and colleagues to be able to contribute and to have their contributions recognised. [. . . A] proactive approach to skills development in order that this is an appreciated and planned part of an institutionally diverse approach to engagement and impact.

Jenny Hasenfuss, Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement Project Coordinator, Northumbria University

Flexibility and childcare, by building it into events planning and commissioning, to allow women to participate and progress in evidence-based policymaking careers. For all research commissioned: ‘good’ academic-policy engagement is ensuring that all data is gender disaggregated so we can track the impact of gender on research, policymaking, and policy evaluation, and on those involved in it.

Anonymous

Flexibility and childcare . . . to allow women to participate and progress

That we don't just work towards a more inclusive approach to policy engagement because it's the right thing to do or because it should be our default setting – although both of those are true. We do it because it makes for better evidence, better analysis, better engagement and better policy.

Nick Bibby, Director, Scottish Policy & Research Exchange (SPRE)

Proactively working with policymakers to help them see the value of different perspectives, [as] there is still a view that there are certain countries we can learn from and others we teach to – this is inherently racist.

Prof. Wendy Loretto, University of Edinburgh/UKRI EDI External Advisory Group

It needs a 'whole system' approach. [. . .] we all need to work together to create the conditions where diverse voices can thrive, improve the rewards and incentives from funders for policy engagement, and systematically collect EDI data, which is then analysed and acted on.

Rob Davies, Knowledge Mobiliser, CLOSER/UCL

Universities [. . .] have increasingly embraced and celebrated EDI in the acquisition of talent and skills but there is a long way to go to truly harness the power of an equitable, diverse and inclusive academic community. [. . .] Solving complex national and global challenges requires divergent perspectives and an inclusive approach to drive real progress.

Dr. Cher Li, Associate Professor, University of Nottingham

Including diverse voices and perspectives is a key part of realising the potential of research to inform and shape public policy at all levels, improving outcomes for people, organisations, society and the economy.

Prof. Alison Park, Interim Executive Chair, ESRC

Solving complex challenges requires divergent perspectives and inclusive approaches

Question 2

What is the biggest change you'd like to see to achieve EDI in academic-policy engagement?

Clean up the unconscious bias in the system.

Prof. Obas John Ebohon, Professor of Sustainability and Environmental Law, London South Bank University

To see further research to help [. . .] capture, explain, and provide a more nuanced/contextualised understanding of the complexity of the interacting factors underlying the underachievement of EDI in academic-policy engagement across the UK. Attending to this substantive evidence gap remains an integral first step [. . .] in promoting the prospect of more meaningful and effective action-oriented dialogue among actors across the wider UK HE ecosystem to address such underachievement.

Anonymous, Knowledge Broker, Northern Ireland

Better and more systematic data capture – [this] can yield evidence-based insights to help overcome unconscious bias while creating an enabling and long-lasting inclusive culture.

Dr. Cher Li, Associate Professor, University of Nottingham

Greater diversity amongst the 'power brokers' on each side of the academic/policy divide.

June McCombie, Honorary Fellow, University of Nottingham

Greater diversity amongst the 'power brokers' on each side of the academic/policy divide

Development of a research and innovation system by everyone and for everyone.

Prof. Alison Park, Interim Executive Chair, ESRC

Disrupting the pattern of 'usual suspects' [. . .] (e.g. via requirements of funding opportunities) to be building capacity amongst groups less well represented in academic-policy engagement.

Prof. Wendy Loretto, University of Edinburgh/ UKRI EDI External Advisory Group

For academics [to] draw on the grey literature, as well as the academic literature, so that policy research is embedded in lived experiences rather than being purely theoretical.

Dr. Wendy Booth, University of South Wales

That secondments, placements, and funding opportunities to engage with policymakers are equally available to researchers at any stage of their career, from any discipline and from any group they identify with or belong to as per their protected characteristics.

Dr. Alejandra Recio-Saucedo, Senior Research Fellow, University of Southampton

To see both the research sector and policy sector start from a position of accessibility and inclusion; so an assumption from everyone is that each opportunity will be accessible and inclusive, and whatever is needed to ensure this is built in as a routine process, rather than 'D&I' or 'access needs' being an add on afterwards.

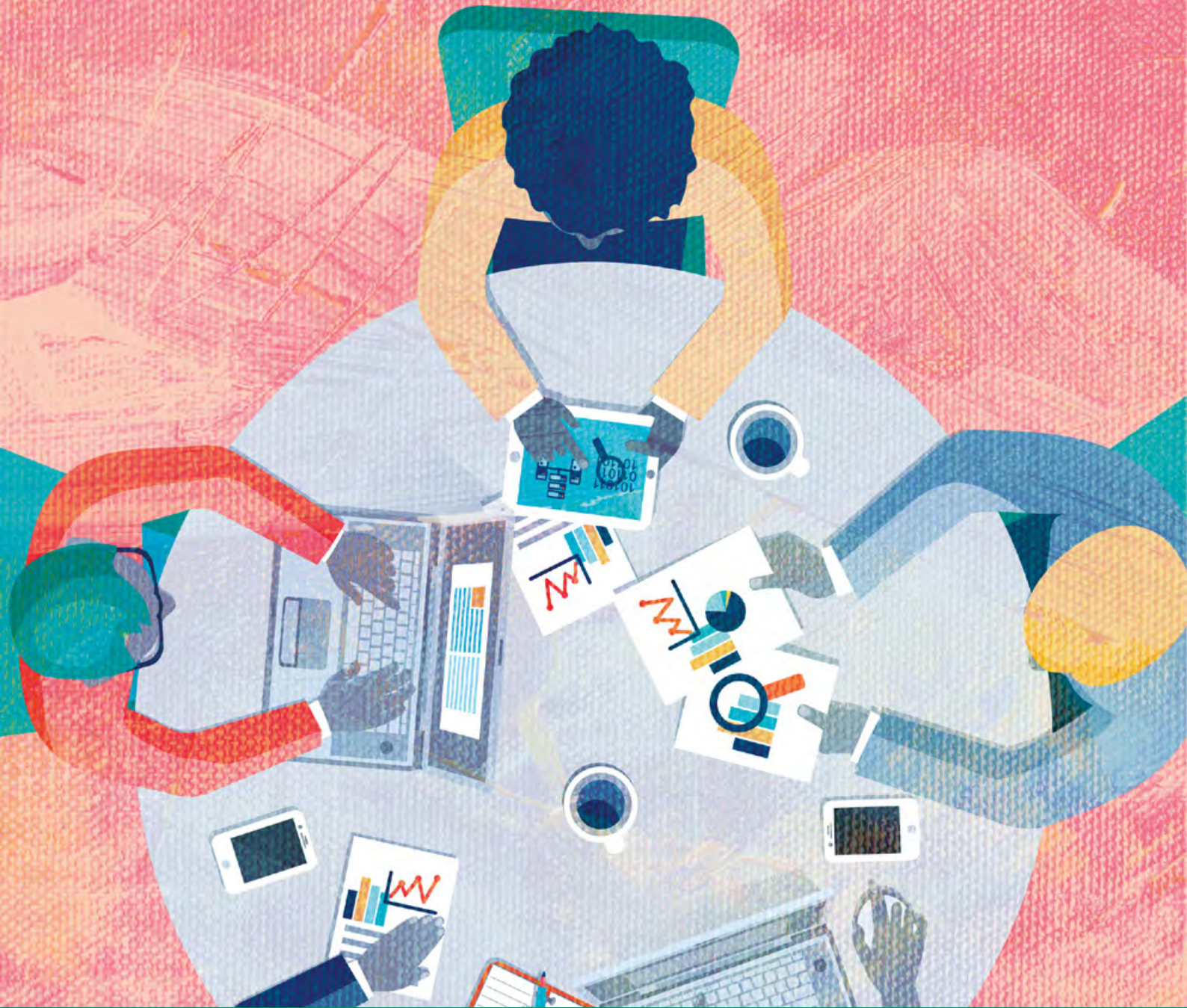
Naomi Saint, Knowledge Exchange Manager, UK Parliament

About this report

This report has been primarily written by and is based on views from university knowledge brokers working to support policy engagement and impact from academic research. University knowledge brokers in this arena are also the primary audience for the report. It also has implications for the wider higher education sector, as well as policy professionals who are looking to engage academic expertise. Whilst the report includes contributions from institutions across the UK, the focus of the content is on a Westminster and Whitehall context.

The report introduces issues faced by knowledge brokers at UPEN member institutions. The report illustrates our commitment to working together, within our own institutions, our policy partners, and others to meet the challenges of creating a more inclusive approach to academic-policy engagement.

- 1 Section one** introduces the issue of EDI in academic-policy engagement.
 - 2 Section two** outlines the survey methodology.
 - 3 Section three** discusses the survey findings and highlights themes including:
 - Research versus People
 - Expertise versus Diversity
 - Saturation and Representation
 - Ways of Working and Workplace Communications
 - Training
 - Funding
 - 4 Section four** offers conclusions.
- C Contexts** [Appendix] frames EDI within the academic-policy engagement context and considers inequalities within university structures, regional variations, the funding landscape, and the policy arena.



Executive summary



Executive summary

This report (the Report) synthesizes the current state of play for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in academic-policy engagement.

Academic-policy engagement is a relative newcomer in comparison to the more established elements of research impact such as public engagement, knowledge exchange, and academic enterprise. However, there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of evidenced-based policy making and the need to build capacity in this area. As such, the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) was created in 2018 to bring together UK higher education institutions (HEIs), research organisations, and policy professionals to increase and realise the impact of research on public policy at a local, regional, national, and international level.

The literature on EDI in academic-policy making is limited. Available data shows that UK universities are not representative of various groups especially at senior levels. Resource for policy engagement differs between institutions. Academic contracts do not usually fund or include engagement activity and it may not be accounted for in workload allocations. Internal and external funding calls are competitive and often do not cover time. These and other research, teaching, and admin pressures mean that engagement activity can be seen as a luxury or an additional burden for academics. Support for policy engagement is often provided by academic-related staff known informally as ‘knowledge brokers’. These brokers are the conduit between policy professionals and the academic expert; they seek out and funnel opportunities to researchers within their organisation and

encourage active engagement with the key policy players in the researcher’s area of expertise.

In Spring 2020, the EDI sub-committee of UPEN issued a survey to the Network’s membership. The purpose of the survey was to gauge what, if any, measures were in place to capture EDI data, insights, and best practice in academic-policy engagement in university settings. The survey was developed to illuminate the various factors that dictate how opportunities to engage with policy professionals are managed, allocated, and monitored. The University of Glasgow administrated the survey, which was completed by 29 member organisations.

Survey findings highlight several challenges for knowledge brokers at UPEN member institutions. We found that the vast majority of brokers do not collect EDI data relating to policy engagement, but when they do it is limited to data about career stage. This was evident from the absence of any formal collection mechanisms available, and/or due to workload capacity and limited resources to undertake such work well.

When considering who to share policy engagement opportunities with or who to put forward, we found that brokers overwhelmingly took a research-first approach and prioritised researchers on track to be included within Research Excellence Framework (REF) impact case studies. Where efforts to identify researchers from diverse backgrounds were noted, significant structural barriers existed. Brokers explained that it is neither possible nor wise to determine protected characteristics from visible profiles, that asking for such information may not always be appropriate, and that it is

ultimately the third-party policy professional who selects the researcher from the pool provided for the opportunity. Consequently, this caused an over-reliance on the same experts, and brokers reflected on how to engage without placing a double burden on those already facing disadvantage.

Where this differed was in policy-engagement training initiatives, where brokers told us that achieving diverse participation was possible, with some members directly targeting under-represented groups in their promotion of sessions and utilising diverse examples within training programmes.

Reflecting on funding for academic-policy engagement, we found that EDI considerations had not been comprehensively integrated into the allocation of impact funding. This is evident from the range of approaches adopted by brokers, and the lack of systematic actions to improve diversity in the allocation of IAA funds at their institution. This in combination with limited data-driven insights is having significant consequences for advancing EDI work.

Based on these findings, the Report identifies several key recommendations for UPEN

institutional members and identifies how they will be supported by the UPEN Secretariat and EDI sub-committee which is outlined in the next section. It is evident from the survey data and available literature that EDI monitoring in academic-policy engagement is sporadic and inconsistent, often done in isolation and informally. There is much to do to understand how brokers can proactively address the issue and to identify what formal support is required to build an equitable, diverse, and inclusive academic-policy nexus.

The Report is the first publication by the UPEN EDI sub-committee. The content is based on available literature and one survey. It is the first report that we are aware of published on EDI specifically in relation to UK academic-policy engagement. Further research is required to fully understand how institutions can ensure EDI is embedded into their academic-policy engagement strategies and activities. The survey responses are a snapshot in time before the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak and therefore do not reflect the current changes to working cultures at universities and within the policy community.

We found that EDI considerations had not been comprehensively integrated into the allocation of impact funding

Recommendations

Based on the review and survey results, we make the following recommendations to the UPEN Network and UPEN member institutions in order to deliver more diverse and inclusive academic-policy engagement.

UPEN Committees and Sub-Committees are recommended to:

- 1 Create a space for and facilitate sustained dialogue with key stakeholders and the academic community to promote and enhance EDI in academic-policy engagement.
- 2 Take proactive responsibility and create a set of EDI principles in consultation with its members and relevant EDI experts for member institutions to adopt within their local context.
- 3 Provide a suite of workshops to enable UPEN member institutions to proactively explore ways to enhance EDI in academic-policy engagement training provision.
- 4 Raise awareness of the need to embed a culture of systematic data collection and improve engagement with existing EDI data to drive developments in academic-policy engagement.
- 5 Work with funders to deepen understandings of how reward and incentive structures (both national and institutional) drive research culture and progress towards greater EDI in academic-policy engagement.

UPEN institutional members are recommended to:

- 1 Better understand the nature and specificity of the barriers faced in academic-policy engagement by diverse groups in their institutions.
- 2 Put in place processes to ensure that academic-policy engagement opportunities are open to all and reach as many as possible.
- 3 Share examples of EDI academic-policy engagement best practice and case studies with UPEN to champion progress in this area.

UPEN welcomes feedback on these recommendations and will look to review and evaluate progress by UPEN and its members on a biennial basis and publish their findings.



Section one



Section one

Introduction

In recent years, the need for greater diversity and inclusion across the research ecosystem has gained traction. Likewise, as part of the knowledge exchange (KE) agenda the impetus for academic-policy engagement to support evidence-informed policymaking has also increased. Much of this activity has been catalysed by, or undertaken in response to, a perceived policy need as policy professionals, funders, universities, learned societies, and other stakeholders work to support the use of diverse research and evidence.

Some progress in articulating how Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) should be embedded within academic-policy engagement has been made. The UK Parliament has worked to increase diversity and inclusion in scrutiny¹, which emphasises the promotion of mixed witness panels to bring about gender parity; the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST²) has invested in training specifically for women/identifying as women and ethnic-minority researchers to increase their engagement with Parliament's programmes; and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) has committed to work in partnership with academics to find solutions to inequalities.

It is important to note that devolution of power exists across the nations of the UK. Separate parliaments or assemblies were established in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (NI) after devolution referendums in the late 1990s. The Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru, and the

Northern Ireland Assembly have varying levels of power to develop policy and make decisions on matters such as education and health outside of Westminster. In addition to the UK-wide academic engagement initiatives managed by POST, each devolved nation's parliament or assembly engage with the academic community at a regional level. For example, the NI Assembly's Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series³ is the first formal partnering of a legislative arm of government with academia.

Likewise, funders, as a powerful part of the academic-policy engagement ecosystem, are placing much more emphasis on embedding EDI within their portfolio. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has stated '[our] vision for EDI is to enable an inclusive research and innovation system, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and has the opportunity to flourish and succeed'⁴. Activities are underway to see this vision realised. These range from more investment in public engagement to ensure that research is done *with* communities rather than *on* or *for* them, to placing responsibility on universities to report on EDI impacts against UKRI funding.

Inequalities have also been a consistent topic of study in the academy. From the work of Edwin Chadwick more than 175 years ago on the 'Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Poor'⁵ to the 2020 Marmot Review⁶, ten years on, swathes of academic research have highlighted the numerous ways that different factors influence societal outcomes and the measures needed to address them.

Alongside this, universities, as generators of knowledge, have begun to turn the lens on

themselves to look at how they perpetuate inequalities – whether through their recruitment practices, their student admission systems, or their approaches to research and teaching. Steps to address such inequalities through publishing gender and ethnicity pay gaps and working with the government to widen participation are a start. Athena Swan data shows promise, with the number of female professors on the rise, increasing by 1,200 in the five years since 2014/15, compared to an increase of just 600 men/identifying as men in the same period.⁷

Likewise, the demand for universities to be more inclusive in the way that academic-policy engagement is undertaken is leading brokerage mechanisms in some institutions to prioritise EDI. There are examples to celebrate, such as Research England’s funded Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE)⁸ programme, the University of Nottingham’s D&I Hub, Durham University’s Public Policy EDI project, and Public Policy Southampton’s EDI strategy. However, there is still much to do if we are to embed EDI principles within structures, research, and policy engagement activities across the demand- and supply-side interface.

For many institutions, EDI in academic-policy engagement remains a confused conversation. This is unsurprising given the embryonic nature of this type of engagement in comparison to more established university–business relations or public engagement, the piecemeal investment in roles supporting it, the impact instruments driving engagement, and the setbacks to progress that Covid-19 has caused. However, that does not mean it can go unchecked.

So, whilst we have a lot to do to address EDI *within* and *through* academic-policy engagement, and there are a lot of unknowns, each of us has an opportunity to contribute to making academic-policy engagement more inclusive through building fairer structures to ensure diversity of participation and thought.

About Academic-Policy Engagement

Universities play an important role in society as leaders in teaching and learning, research, and innovation. Over the last decade, the Knowledge Exchange (KE) agenda has become a central part of university activity and part of the employment landscape. Within this, KE between academia and public policy has emerged as a significant area of activity. This has led to a growth in roles that connect evidence to policy, facilitate engagement, and support the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

There is no single definition of what academic-policy engagement is¹. However, there is broad agreement that the practice of academic-policy engagement grows out of the understanding that policy that is informed by evidence is stronger, more effective, and provides better value for public spending.

Academic-policy engagement can take many forms. For example, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) suggests it ‘can thus encompass interaction with policy-makers, practitioners and members of the public. It covers a spectrum from new insights generated by collaborative research, conferences and seminars, to briefing and advisory activities, public debate of policy questions, and commissioned research’.²

Two recent developments likely to drive future academic-policy engagement are the implementation of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and the implementation of the Concordat for the Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in Higher Education in England (KE Concordat). We do not discuss these here, but for further details see a briefing note prepared by POST³.

Why now?

Given this explosion in academic-policy engagement and KE activities, UPEN believes it prudent to now take stock and examine who has been undertaking such engagement and how best to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion are taken into consideration. The survey of members, as outlined in the following section, is intended as a snapshot of current practices and attitudes to mobilise further conversations and considerations of EDI within the ever-expanding landscape of academic-policy engagement⁴.

However, it is important to also note the wider landscape of the research workforce, the distribution of research funding, and the instruments of assessment being utilised as critically influencing EDI practices in academic-policy engagement. If the sector itself lacks diversity, then this naturally affects the pool from which diverse voices can be drawn to engage in academic-policy activities. Likewise, the distribution of research funding, including Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs), needs attention to ensure that specific groups are not being excluded.

A deep-dive into the data (and lack of data) in these areas and the REF is included in the Appendix.

Endnotes

- 1 Oliver, K and Cairney, P, (2019). 'The dos and don'ts of influencing policy: a systematic review of advice to academics'. *Palgrave Commun* 5, 21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0232-y>.
- 2 Arts and Humanities Research Council, (2013). 'Guidance on planning and demonstrating effective policy engagement'. Available at: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/guidance-on-planning-and-demonstrating-effective-policy-engagement/>. Accessed, 16.06.2021.
- 3 UK Parliament: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), (2020). 'Knowledge Exchange and Legislatures'. Available at: https://old.parliament.uk/documents/post/Final_KE%20and%20Legislatures_WEB%20-%20updated.pdf. Accessed, 16.06.2021.
- 4 Although both 'equality' and 'equity' promote fairness, for the purposes of this Report we are adopting equity and the EDI subcommittee is developing our approach based on the following definitions: **equity** ensures fairness to correct imbalances in opportunities and resources; **diversity** is recognising and respecting different characteristics; **inclusion** is where everyone feels welcome and valued; **academic-policy engagement** is when academic knowledge, evidence or expertise informs and influences the debate, development, design and/or implementation of government policy.

Endnotes Section one

- 1 House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service, (2018). 'Diversity Monitoring Report'. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-commission/HoC-and-PDS-Diversity-Monitoring-Report-2018.pdf>. Accessed, 16.06.2021.
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- 4 Ogbomo, O, (2020). 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund'. Available at: <https://innovateuk.blog.gov.uk/2020/10/08/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-industrial-strategy-challenge-fund/>. Accessed, 16.06.2021.
- 5 Chadwick, E, (1842). 'Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain'. W. Clowes and Sons, London.
- 6 Marmot, M., Allen, J., Boyce, T., Goldblatt, P and Morrison, J, (2020). 'Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On', Executive Summary. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf. Accessed, 14.06.2021.
- 7 Adams, R, (2020). 'Fewer than 1% of UK university professors are black, figures show. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/27/fewer-than-1-of-uk-university-professors-are-black-figures-show>. Accessed, 14.06.2021.
- 8 Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE). Available at: www.cape.ac.uk. Accessed, 18.06.2021.



Section two



Section two

UPEN EDI survey – methods

This section outlines the survey instrument used to collect data on the state of EDI in academic-policy engagement amongst UPEN members.

Background

In January 2020, UPEN issued a survey to its university members on EDI in academic-policy engagement. At the time the survey was issued, UPEN had 45 university members. The aim was to understand:

- Members' approaches to EDI through training;
- How instruments such as the REF drive academic-policy engagement practices;
- If funding was used to drive better EDI engagement.

The survey was also intended to draw out experiences, learnings, and best practices, as well as stimulate further conversation in this area.

The survey was designed by members of the EDI subgroup and comprised 14 questions, including closed, open, and multiple choice. Questions 1–4 looked at the nature of members' roles in supporting policy impact, and questions 5–14 investigated the practices of EDI in their work. Responses were anonymous, although applicants could voluntarily include an email address if they were happy for UPEN to follow up with them.

Brokers' demographics

In February 2020, UPEN launched the survey to its members, with six weeks to respond. In total we received 29 responses. Three responses were from different parts of the same university and eight responses were anonymous.

Survey respondents' job roles fell into four areas; those who worked directly on research impact, those who held policy advisor/manager roles, those who worked on public affairs, and those who worked in communications at their university. All respondents worked at the interface between policy and engagement and were not the 'end users', i.e. the researchers or the policy professionals themselves. A majority (n=19) of the respondents indicated that they worked within central units within their university, rather than in research institutes or departments. Some (n=9) worked within a school or within a faculty and one respondent was in a university leadership team.

Time spent working on policy engagement varied quite significantly: 31% spent up to 20% of their time on policy engagement and 45% spent between 80–100% of their time in this arena. The other 24% respondents spent between 20–80% of their time on policy engagement.



Section three



Section three

Key findings and observations

Key themes from the survey responses are outlined below. Knowledge brokers at UPEN member institutions were asked:

- whether/what EDI data has been collected;
- the inclusion of diversity in academic-policy engagements;
- training for policy engagement in academia;
- the inclusion of EDI in the allocation of IAA funding for academic-policy engagement initiatives that UPEN members oversee.

Findings are grouped into the following themes:

- **Data Collection**
- **Research versus People**
- **Expertise versus Diversity**
- **Saturation and Representation**
- **Ways of Working and Workplace Communications**
- **Training**
- **Funding**

The next sections focus on each of these in turn.



Data collection

What the survey said: Very few brokers collect any data to help them deliver inclusive policy engagement activities (72% responded ‘No’). Reasons for this included the informality of relationships and being one step removed from the engagement, as this quote illustrates:

‘It would be difficult to gather this information [. . .], particularly where we are simply a conduit for sharing opportunities and therefore not directly brokering a relationship between academic and policymaker. [. . .] One of the challenges is that we often work with academic colleagues in an informal, flexible way over a long period of time, so it would be difficult to have a formal point at which we ask for EDI information.’

Those (n=5) who reported that they do collect data and monitor EDI progress tended to do so around career stage. Data was collected on training and event attendance and participation in fellowships programmes. One broker elaborated:

‘We deliberately monitor and ask if someone is new to KE and/or ECR. But we don’t collect data on, say, gender, BAME categories etc.’

Those who reported that they do collect data and monitor EDI tended to do so around career stage

The challenge: Brokers highlighted that to track EDI data and carry out EDI monitoring correctly is a considerable undertaking. Most felt that there wasn’t resource available for this and even if there was, they felt unsure what to monitor and at what point to do so. This is indicated here, when a respondent provided additional comment on the data they collect:

‘One issue is understanding what the baseline levels of engagement are – we can’t track everyone doing policy engagement, and it wouldn’t be feasible to gather EDI data on all activities we deliver (e.g. working informally with people, offering ad-hoc advice etc. It would not be feasible to attach an EDI monitoring process to that).’

While members did not tend to collect comprehensive EDI data, they did draw on their universities’ EDI strategies to support thinking and were interested in developing ways to collect data:

‘Although we do not formally collect data, we are always mindful of the diversity of staff who we involve in policy engagement in line with our university’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy. We would be interested to learn more about how other institutions are monitoring this and where they are sourcing any data on diversity from.’

Given the uncertainty around how to undertake appropriate EDI monitoring, more support for the use of formal data collection should be provided. This could help build a picture of potential barriers to engagement within specific contexts and support the development of broker activities that directly reduce these. Any understanding (derived from data) of their research communities should be intersectional to avoid an overly simplistic understanding of progress.

Research versus People

What the survey said: When putting forward staff members for policy engagement opportunities, many brokers considered REF impact case studies as the number one consideration (59%). Fewer considered policy engagement opportunities as suitable for building new relationships or for proactively putting forward those with protected characteristics.

This in part relates to a difference in approach, **prioritising Research versus prioritising People**. Some brokers thought that the **relevance of research** is the primary consideration for putting forward staff members for policy engagement:

‘Ultimately, we have to be focussed on getting the best impact from our best research – because of the REF.’

Other members took a **people-first** approach, weighing whether the researcher was policy-ready, e.g. could communicate effectively with policy stakeholders and/or had novel perspectives to contribute:

‘If they have a good idea and it/they seem credible.’

‘Whether they will bring a fresh perspective/diversify the debate.’

Aspects of timeliness and the speed at which a person could respond were also identified as important factors, as this statement indicates:

‘The expertise of staff members and the appropriateness of the opportunity (how well it fits their interests and how well the research fits the policy opportunity). Time available to the staff member. Protected characteristics are often considered earlier in the planning but sometimes other requirements such as panel deadlines, availability, etc. may result in being unable to follow the ideal practice.’

The challenge: The Research versus People approach, where one factor supersedes the other, runs the risk of universities creating hierarchies of engagement and drawing from small pools of ‘usual suspects’. The Research approach could limit brokers from considering ‘under-’ experienced researchers for academic-policy engagement opportunities. Whereas a People-only focus requires that knowledge brokers have a thorough understanding of the expertise required for the policy opportunity. However, as reflected by a UPEN member institution:

‘If I can find any previous information about the person on impact work with the same type of policy actor, I can get a sense whether this is something they are likely to engage in. However, this relies on up-to-date information on websites and social media!’

When this information isn’t readily available, or is out of date, researchers risk being excluded from policy engagement opportunities.

Expertise versus Diversity

What the survey said: Where an expertise approach was employed, many brokers reported that a key factor for putting someone forward for an academic-policy engagement opportunity is the **relevant expertise to the call**.

When considering policy expertise, efforts to include colleagues from diverse backgrounds were noted, but significant barriers exist:

‘When responding to requests for expertise, I deliberately try and include a diverse range of people in the response. However, this is not always possible because (a) not all of the characteristics of diversity are visible from people’s profiles and (b) there is not always someone who has the necessary expertise that has an aspect of diversity.’

Because of a lack of readily available means to establish an individual’s diversity characteristics, brokers tended to focus more on perceived visible characteristics (such as gender and ethnicity). They also reported unease about asking for what they perceived to be sensitive information upfront.

Brokers don’t work in isolation and where they did put forward a diverse range of researchers, they noted the challenge to persuade the policy community to think differently about engagement, as this quote illustrates:

‘Whilst we try to put forward a diverse group of staff, we rely on third parties to choose our experts, so we cannot always be sure who is taken up.’

The challenge: Whilst it can be for valid reasons, the approaches used to identify expertise means that HEI brokers tend to play it ‘safe’. When combined with the drivers for engagement being related to REF and the uncertainty expressed by the policy community around how to work beyond ‘usual suspects’, the need to challenge the status quo across the policy-engagement ecosystem is all the more urgent. One approach could be more inclusive reward and incentive instruments another could be inclusive instruments of assessment. Instruments that dismantle, on both the supply and demand sides, the idea that a particular kind of expertise (such as a strong research track record combined with an ability to communicate effectively with policy professions), that is generally concentrated within senior researchers is necessary for effective academic-policy engagement should be encouraged.

Challenging this perception would open up the ability to take a broader appreciation of *who* has the expertise, *where* expertise lies, and *what* kinds of expertise the policy world needs to make effective decisions, whilst at the same time creating the possibility for a more inclusive reward and recognition system.

Saturation and Representation

What the survey said: Brokers reported that some researchers from underrepresented groups have expressed that they often feel they get a seat at the policy table solely to improve diversity statistics and this can result in disengagement and fatigue:

‘We have had women academics say they are unable to commit to events because they have been invited to too many events in order to “improve diversity”.’

Brokers recognised that inviting academics as a token gesture to fulfil diversity statistics is wholly inappropriate, as this member illustrates:

‘Always referring back to the same people/speakers rather than being able to grow network of diverse groups. Feels like this is placing double burden on those facing disadvantage.’

However, given the expertise versus diversity conundrum, the reward and incentive drivers, and the limited diversity within universities, some members felt that they have limited options but to approach the same researchers repeatedly.

The challenge: Members expressed a lack of clarity on what they could do to bring about positive change for the staff that they engage with. This is because many of the issues felt structural and multifaceted: ‘Challenges [to participate] come both in the absence of particular groups within certain topics, and in the time limits on those minority groups that do exist.’ Coupled with fast-moving policy needs and funding restrictions, whilst there was the will to make a change, brokers lacked the clarity on what they could do, resulting in paralysis against the structures and a concern of ‘getting things wrong’.

Challenging structural barriers is important, but it takes time for them to change. In the short-term, supporting a more inclusive understanding of academic impact with public policy and creating opportunities for collaboration across institutions could help reduce the burden and increase engagement beyond the few.

Members expressed a lack of clarity on what they could do to bring about positive change for the staff that they engage with

Ways of Working and Workplace Communications

What the survey said: When opportunities for academic-policy engagement came to brokers, they reported using a range of approaches to identify experts, few of which had EDI at their centre. As one broker illustrated:

'A challenge I'm finding is that there is little central knowledge (or any good web information) for KE brokers to find experts easily in other parts of the university. Because of this, I end up engaging with only a few policy topics and academics that I know.'

Often the brokers are reliant on their own knowledge to identify experts rather than cross-university CRM systems. This again had the effect of falling back on go-to academics.

Where time permitted, some brokers did use social media, as well as opportune encounters to expand their networks. However, there was a perception that mass communication of policy engagement opportunities is not effective at generating interest and uptake. Therefore, brokers often communicated opportunities for policy engagement through a personal approach to known academics, usually via an initial email.

When directly approached for support with engagement by researchers, it tended to be senior members of staff looking for funding or broker support. One respondent stated:

'White male professors are far more confident in putting themselves forward for opportunities, tend to be more able to free up time (possibly due to less out-of-work commitments), and have the best personal contacts to get started in the policy engagement process.'

The challenge: Without understanding the communities that brokers are working with and having no central systems for brokers to access to understand academic engagement profiles, members run the risk of forming their own 'usual suspects' bubbles within their institution. More needs to be done by members to proactively reach out and understand their own research communities.

Training

Training is a significant part of a KE broker's role within their institution. Most UPEN member universities offer some sort of training within their policy engagement offer. Initiatives vary: some are part of wider university training programmes whereas others are bespoke. Training was an activity where brokers sought to 'collate data about the attendees of this training, with some EDI fields included'.

What the survey said: Members were asked what they do to improve diversity in the cohort of training participants. Half of the brokers said that they feel they can achieve diverse participation in terms of protected characteristics, whereas the other half thought they did better on attracting diverse subject areas, as this quote shows:

'We have a significant number of women who attend training events and diversity in terms of nationality, but we don't have diversity in terms of subject. We have a large number of participants from social and medical sciences, but fewer from humanities and physical sciences.'

Some members specifically target under-represented groups and so 'focus efforts on engaging [Early Career Researchers] ECRs', women/identifying as women and LGBTQ groups using 'staff networks to highlight [training] opportunities, particularly opportunities tailored to certain groups'.

Members were also beginning to question the content of training, seeing this as a good place to profile a diverse range of engagement case studies and address the lack of EDI in academic-policy engagement head on, as this quote illustrates:

'Dedicate a section of the presentation to the current imbalance in those giving evidence (e.g. data from POST suggesting that traditional voices are senior male academics from the golden triangle) and reiterate that the UK Parliament and others are keen to hear from a diverse base. Extend offer of training and institutional support to those who feel they would particularly benefit. Not exclusive to those with protected characteristics, but a step in the right direction.'

Some mentioned a focus on accessibility and were starting to 'ensure venues and materials for training are accessible'.

The challenge: A range of ways to include marginalised groups in university training offers were reported. This means the offer of support across higher education institutions is not standardised, and for certain groups, this will mean they will be supported more at certain institutions compared with others, creating additional inequality.

The approaches to providing training to marginalised groups were notably 'top-down'. Specific groups were encouraged to participate in existing training, as opposed to working with their community to identify the needs and approaches that might suggest a training offer is more bespoke and collaborative.

Institutional funding for academic-policy engagement

Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAA) have been established to ‘connect the research landscape to accelerate impact – to embed timely and appropriate support for impact across all investments’ (URKI, 2019).¹ IAA are useful tools for many universities to fund policy impact initiatives. After the survey was launched, Research England also released its Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) funding for public policy.

Whilst not everyone who responded was responsible for IAA allocations, and not every UPEN member institution has access to them, those that did and are responsible for their administration gave varied responses to the question ‘*What (if any) steps are in place to improve diversity in the allocation of IAA funding or other funding for academic-policy engagement that you or your colleagues help to administer?*’

Responses fell on a spectrum and ranged from **unaware** e.g. ‘There are no steps that I am aware of to improve diversity in IAA funding allocation’, to **conscious**, e.g. aware of the need to improve diversity ‘using internal communications channels and targeted messages where appropriate’, to **active** e.g. ‘representatives of protected groups are on the review panel and steering groups. We ensure call text is not gender-coded. We provide the ProVC (research) updates on EDI information for internal awards from IAAs.’ None of the members expressed that they were **proactive** about getting in front of the issue and targeting diversity improvements.

Other brokers discussed that EDI data capture for IAAs was happening at their university, but not specifically around academic-policy engagement. As one broker stated: ‘The IAA manager does outreach across the university to promote IAA. [. . .] We have done a recent analysis of IAA coverage across departments and gender of PIs.’

The challenge: Whilst the survey captures some insight into IAA funding and how it is deployed to increase EDI within activities, there is not enough data to draw conclusions. It also doesn’t take into account Research England’s SPF stream or funding instruments, such as HEIF, which are used both to employ brokers and support KE activities.

Given the increased EDI monitoring by funders and the emphasis that they are placing on universities to embed EDI within funded activities, it would be helpful for this focus to be extended to academic-policy engagement initiatives. Specifically, addressing questions of *who* gets funded, the *level* of funding, and *where* that funding should best be deployed to support greater EDI in academic-policy engagement.

Endnotes Section three

- 1 UK Research and Innovation, (2019). ‘Delivery Plan 2019’. Available at: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UKRI-250920-DeliveryPlan2019.pdf>. Accessed, 16.06.2021.



Conclusion



Conclusion

With greater emphasis now being placed on the importance of diversity and inclusion in academic-policy engagement, and in support of UPEN members' own desires to be more inclusive, the primary aim of the report was to build a picture of where UPEN is on this journey.

A second focus was to signal to the policy arena the importance of EDI within all parts of the academic-policy engagement ecosystem and begin to highlight the importance of a joined-up agenda to support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The survey captures attitudes and challenges that UPEN knowledge brokers face in trying to ensure practices are diverse and inclusive. It shows that many members are starting from a blank slate in their work but are keen to make university policy engagement more inclusive and diverse.

Specifically related to knowledge brokers, challenges were identified within the systems of how experts are identified and how expertise is defined. At the university level, the variation between workplace cultures, and ultimately their investment into EDI practices, means that universities are operating in different ways in terms of their support for researchers wishing to engage with policy, whether through the provision of training or the way programmes are monitored and assessed. At the macro level, the structures behind REF and funding for policy engagement presents a challenge for EDI to feature high up on the priority list.

At the time of the survey, it was clear that no brokers were doing extensive work in this area, and people were unsure where to start. Since then, some members have begun to invest time and resources into furthering their understanding of EDI in their own academic-policy engagement practices. Therefore, there is a clear role that UPEN can play in collecting institutional findings and encouraging members to think more deeply about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in academic-policy engagement.

Quantitative data alone is not enough to articulate what *collective* next steps and actions might be needed. This is because academic-policy engagement is part of a research ecosystem, with multiple parts and actors. Further evidence-gathering interviews and more in-depth data collection would be useful to begin to interweave different parts of the system to create a holistic approach to increasing EDI in academic-policy engagement.

This report shows that there is much left to do to understand EDI in academic-policy engagement. Going forward, UPEN will continue to focus on embedding EDI within its work and supporting members to do the same. We will also look to engage our partners to support advancements in knowledge and a more inclusive academic-policy engagement landscape.

Limitations of this report

UPEN is an unfunded member organisation, and its sub-committees are comprised of knowledge brokers who are volunteers. The authors recognise there is further work needed to address gaps and limitations in the report.

UK geography: focus on England

UPEN members are based in all four nations of the United Kingdom. This report, however, focuses mainly on policy engagement in Westminster and Whitehall. Further work is needed to investigate EDI in policy engagement within the devolved legislatures, drawing on individual nations' data. UPEN has established a new sub-committee for devolved nations to support a diverse range of experts across the four nations of the UK and the EDI committee will work together with them to continue this work.

Inconsistency in, and lack of, data

We have tried to give an overview of EDI data within both academia and policy (see Appendix). However, we are aware that the data available does not provide a complete picture. Although statistics are available on some protected characteristics, they are not on others, and differences in how data is collected makes it difficult to draw conclusions about what the data means or how it should be compared.

The availability of data also presents challenges to highlighting the role of intersectionality in the distribution of policy engagement opportunities. We join many other organisations in calling for systematic collection of meaningful and comparable EDI data, and commit to consider

how we as universities can better do this and make use of it to drive academic-policy engagement activities.

Sample

At the time that we ran the survey (January–April 2020), UPEN's membership was 45, of which 29 brokers responded. As of September 2021, that membership is now more than 90, and the last year has seen inequalities put in the spotlight. Regular conversations are necessary to update UPEN members and others of progress made in EDI in academic-policy engagement.

A rapidly changing context

As this report was being written, reports were being published on the EDI data of research grant holders, individual institutions were working on EDI related issues, and progress was being made on the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).^{1,2,3} This is a fast-moving area, and as such there may be omissions. We look forward to continuing this conversation in the context of new developments.

Endnotes Section four

- 1 Noone, H., Brown, L., Karlin, L., and Lauchlan, E. (2021) 'Newcastle University Policy Academy: Policy Engagement Research'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25405/data.ncl.14580012.v1>. Accessed, 18.06.2021.
- 2 Messenger, S. (2021). 'Effective use of digital communications to disseminate research-related parliamentary opportunities'. Available at: https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/assets/teams/post/keu_effective_use_of_digital_communications_to_disseminate_research-related_parliamentary_opportunities_2021_397kb.pdf. Accessed, 18.06.2021.
- 3 Messenger, S. and Foxen, S (2021). 'What works for knowledge brokers? Assessing the communication challenge of linking research to policy'. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/05/05/what-works-for-knowledge-brokers-assessing-the-communication-challenge-of-linking-research-to-policy/>. Accessed, 18.06.2021.



This section provides an overview of EDI in the university and policy contexts. It is not intended to be exhaustive but to highlight areas in need of attention and note where further research could be beneficial.

EDI in the university and policy

contexts

Introduction

The structural and systematic inequalities present within UK society are also a feature of the mechanisms underpinning academic-policy engagement. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) describe a way to understand, articulate, and address these inequalities. Below we present the definitions that frame our work.¹

Equity, as opposed to equality, recognises that people and groups are differently disadvantaged. An equitable approach attempts to address disadvantages to ensure that everyone has access to equal opportunities.

Diversity focuses on difference and whether this is reflected in a given setting or context. It is about understanding and, importantly, valuing the different perspectives, skills, life experiences, knowledge, and backgrounds of individuals.

Inclusion refers to whether diversity is valued and whether difference is a barrier to engagement. It is about whether the surrounding culture or environment enables people to participate fully and to be their authentic selves.

Protected characteristics

While there is a growing agenda around broader characteristics of difference and the intersectionality of areas of disadvantage, many UK institutions seek to address EDI issues in relation to the nine protected characteristics outlined in the UK Equality Act 2010:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

These characteristics are central to the EDI work of UPEN. UPEN recognises the importance of taking an intersectional approach to ensure discrimination and disadvantage are understood as overlapping and interdependent across multiple groups.

Additional considerations

UPEN recognises that within academic-policy engagement there are additional inequalities that need to be better understood. **At the individual level**, caring responsibilities, neurodiversity, attainment, and socio-economic factors can also impact on who engages with policy professionals and the ways that these engagements can take place.

The **higher education sector** can also present barriers for academic-policy engagement. Outlining findings from a survey of UK academics, Walker et al list these as including:²

- schedule and workload;
- lack of transparency over what the advice will be used for;
- lack of previous experience working with policymakers;
- lack of guidance on content of contributions.

Some of these have EDI implications; for example, researchers who are early career, precariously employed, disabled, or with caring commitments may find workload and scheduling more of a barrier to prioritising policy engagement. Some universities have central brokerage teams to advise

academics on policy engagement, but many do not.

The authors also note that geography can impact policy engagement, pointing out a bias towards academic witnesses in Select Committees, and REF impact case studies citing policy engagement, being based in London and the South-east.³

In addition, unconscious (or conscious) bias may skew policy professionals' concept of what expertise 'looks like'. Conflating expertise with title raises issues when considering the imbalanced profile of academics in the UK (in 2019, of 19,285 professors, nearly 13,000 identified as white men; 35 identified as black women.⁴ There may also be a tendency to reach out to the same known academics, resulting in others with just as much expertise being overlooked.

The scope of equity, diversity, and inclusion work within policy engagement is therefore broad, encompassing protected characteristics, geography and institution, and career stage.

EDI in university and policy: state of play

This section provides an overview of EDI in the university and policy contexts. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but to highlight areas in need of attention and note where further research could be beneficial.

First, we examine the nature of diversity and inclusion within the university workforce. This is important because if the sector itself lacks diversity, then this affects the pool from which diverse voices can be drawn to engage in academic-policy activities.

Second, we look at the distribution of research funding. This is important as it illuminates the effects that funders can have on driving diversity within universities, but it also highlights the lack of centrally published data on the effects of impact-related funding streams such as Impact

Acceleration Accounts (IAA) and the barriers this creates to supporting EDI. Also, winning a grant may open more opportunities for academic investigators to engage with policymakers compared to their non-funded colleagues. Although we have no evidence directly supporting this, grants often have policymakers as partners at national, regional, and local levels.

Third, we consider the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and what REF impact case studies tell us about the diversity of research where policy impact has been part of the submitted cases. REF is a significant driver of policy engagement and all the elements that underpin the journey towards that impact. Therefore, it provides a window into *why* universities support academic-policy engagement, as well as *how* REF panels interpret what policy impact is.

REF is a significant driver of policy engagement and all the elements that underpin the journey towards that impact

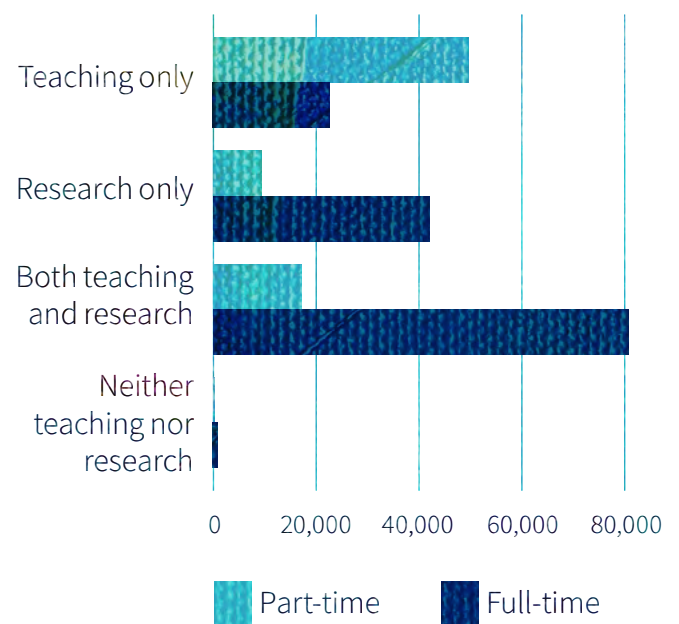
EDI in the UK university

The figures outlined below show that the diversity of academic talent from which knowledge brokers can draw from is developing, though doing so fastest in more junior roles. The policy world often demands senior experts to provide them with evidence, meaning EDI gains in academic-policy engagement could be slow.

Employment

The size of the UK higher education sector is indicated by data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which shows that for the year 2018/19 there were 217,065 academic staff and 222,885 non-academic staff in UK higher education. This represents a steady growth in staff numbers over the past two decades. Of the academic staff, 31% are on teaching-only contracts, 24% on research-only contracts, and 45% on both teaching and research contracts. Overall, 66% of academic staff are on full-time contracts. Part-time contracts are far more prevalent in teaching-only roles (70%) whereas less than 20% of those on contracts that include research are part-time employees.⁵

Figure 1
UK HESA data on employment in the sector



Ethnicity

HESA Higher Education Staff Statistics Bulletin shows that of academic staff with known ethnicity, 17% were Black, Asian and minority-ethnic in 2018/19, an increase from 16% in 2017/18.⁶

Latest data from Universities UK on academic professorial staff for the UK show that Black, Asian and minority-ethnic academic professors account for only 10% of the total UK professors. In 2017–18 there were 1,495 Black, Asian and minority-ethnic male academic professors and 445 Black, Asian and minority-ethnic female academic professors. This compares with 12,810 white male academic professors and 4,565 white female academic professors.⁷

Cost centre and sex

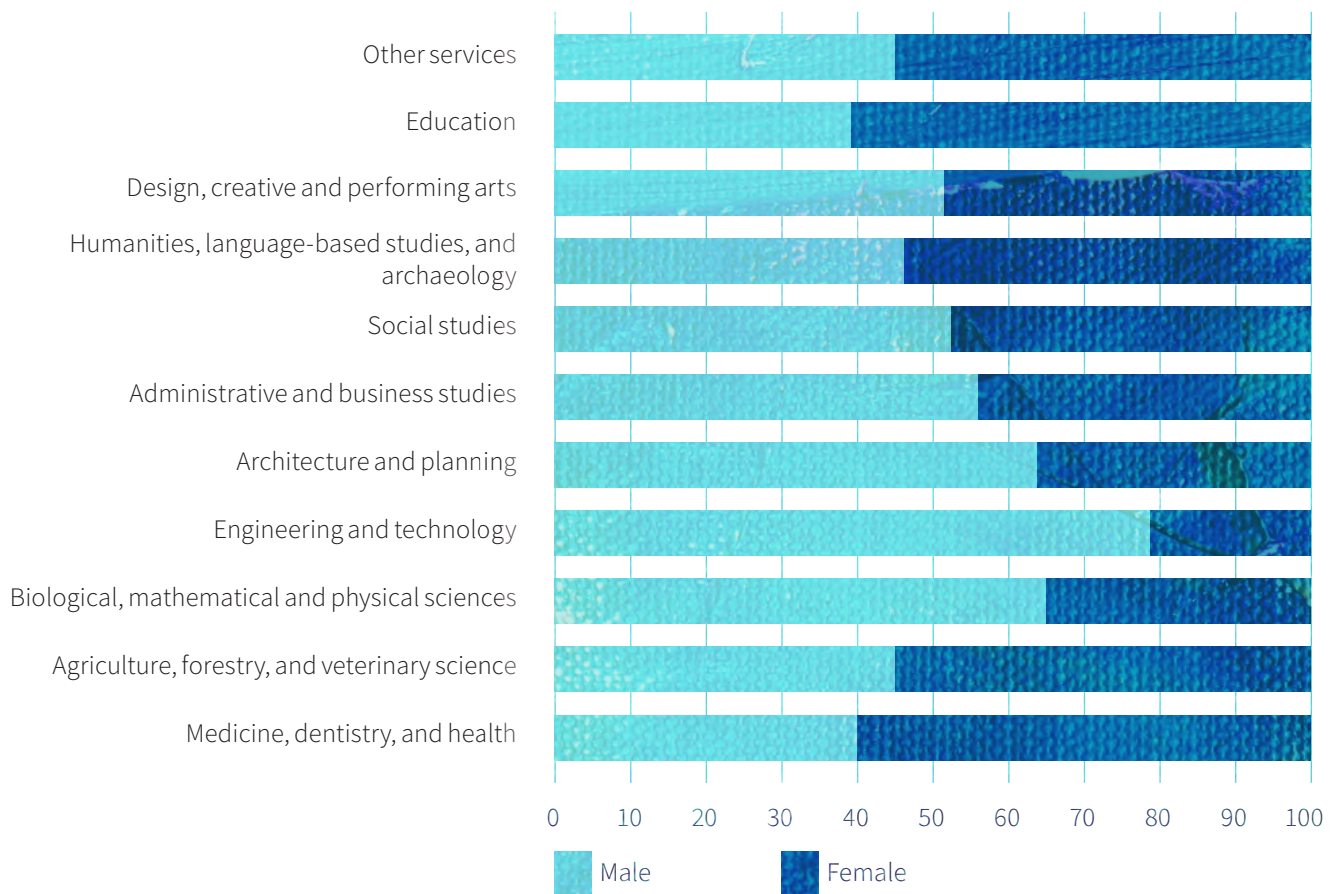
The HESA data on sex by cost centre group (i.e. discipline group) for 2018/19 shows that the groups with the highest proportion of male academics are: Biological, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences, Engineering and Technology, and Architecture and Planning.⁸ The groups with the highest proportion of females are: Medicine, Dentistry and Health, Education, and Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science.

Disability

For UK academic staff overall, for 2018/19, 92.84% have no known disability, 4.35% have a disability (including those with one or multiple disabilities), and the disability status of 2.81% is not known. Teaching-only staff have a slightly higher proportion, with a disability status of 5.27% compared to 3.41% for research-only staff and 4.22% for both teaching and research staff.⁹

Figure 2

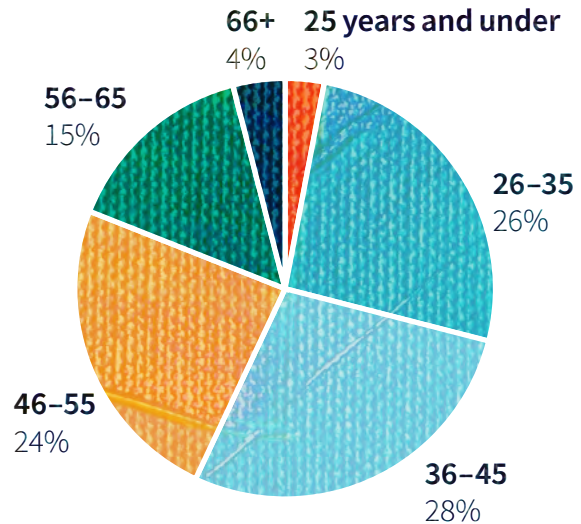
UK HESA data on employment by gender and area of work



Age

The age distribution of all academic staff, taken from HESA data for 2018/19, is shown in the table below.¹⁰

Age	% of academic workforce 2018/19
25 years and under	3%
26–35	26%
36–45	28%
46–55	24%
56–65	15%
66+	4%



Nationality

Analysis of HESA data by Universities UK (2019) indicates employment diversity in the sector by nationality.¹¹ For the year 2017/18, 69% of academic staff were from the UK, 18% from other EU countries and 13% from non-EU countries. The highest proportion of non-UK staff was in Engineering and Technology (44%), followed by Biological Sciences, and Mathematical and Physical Sciences (40%).¹²

Impact Funding

Policy-impact activities are generally not an incentivised or rewarded aspect of an academic's workload within their institution. Academics generally engage with the policy community either by using impact funding to source their costs or doing it unfunded on top of their existing workload. Impact Accelerator Accounts (IAA) are one source of impact funding; these may fund an academic's costs for engagement, but not their time, and are only available at some universities.

If an academic does not have access to funding, does not have spare time (for instance, because of caring responsibilities, or a temporary contract), or

their accessibility needs are not met, it can prove challenging for them to build engagement.

Whilst some IAA funding schemes have begun to collect EDI data and expect universities to report on EDI progress, no UKRI data (to our knowledge) has yet been published on the EDI characteristics of those awarded IAA funding. The below, therefore, provides more of a general overview of funding and diversity at UKRI.

Research Funding

The Nurse Review (2015), the review of the UK research councils that led to the formation of UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), highlighted the importance of ensuring diversity in funding options.¹³ It also recommended that funding mechanisms should be available for pilot projects and programme support and that they should be available for researchers at *all* stages of their research career (including those working part-time or returning from a career break).

In June 2020, UKRI published diversity data for its funding applicants and recipients for the past five years.¹⁴ This shows that from 2014–15 to 2018–19, the composition of applicants funded by gender and ethnicity has changed. The largest increase was a 10% increase in the proportion of ethnic-minority co-investigators from 12% to 22%; women/identifying as women co-investigators increased from 27% to 32%.

However, differences in awards by gender remained: women/identifying as women principal investigators had a 24% success rate in 2018–19 compared to men/identifying as men principal investigators at 26%. Women/identifying as women applicants for fellowships, however, had a 24% success rate compared to 16% for men/identifying as men fellowship applicants. White principal and co-investigators had higher success rates than those of an ethnic-minority background – with two percentage points difference for principals and nine percentage point difference for co-investigators.

Furthermore, women/identifying as women and ethnic-minority awardees tend to apply for and win smaller awards, with the women/identifying as women median-award value being 15% less than the median-award value for men/identifying as men.¹⁵ The median-award value for ethnic minorities is eight percentage points less than the median-award value for white awardees. The report includes further information on funding applications on the protected characteristics of age and disability.¹⁶

Whilst this shows an increase in percentage terms of women/identifying as women and ethnic minorities, which is positive, the data does not highlight nuances that are important to understanding EDI improvements in academic-policy engagement (see this letter from 10 Black women academics to UKRI for a powerful argument why this is needed).¹⁷ It is not enough to have diversity within the workforce as this does not ensure inclusivity. Neither is it enough to focus on women/identifying as women or minorities, as rarely do people fall into just one category. These figures need to be set against an intersectional perspective and a backdrop of impact and in particular be cross-referenced against policy impact to gain a true picture.

Analysis of ‘policy’ in the 2014 REF impact case studies

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the mechanism by which UK research-funding bodies aim to secure the continuation of a world-class, dynamic, and responsive research base across the full academic spectrum within UK higher education.¹⁸

Compared with REF2014, REF2021 has an increased emphasis on the importance of the ‘impact beyond academia’ element of the REF. The other elements include the quality of ‘outputs’ (e.g. publications, performances and exhibitions) and the ‘environment’ within institutions that supports research (of which policy engagement forms a part).

Following REF2014, a report by Kings’ Policy Institute and Digital Science on behalf of HEFCE examined the 6,975 impact cases submitted.¹⁹ It concluded that the impact beneficiaries varied considerably across the four REF Panels (Life Sciences, Engineering and Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities). Data mining of the cases showed that the topics with the greatest number of mentions were ‘Informing government policy’ and ‘Parliamentary scrutiny’ – these two impacts were inter-related and connected with ‘Community and local government’ which featured prominently (see Figure 7, Page 31 of the HEFCE 2019 report).¹⁹

‘Informing government policy’ was mentioned in 20% of impact case studies and ‘Parliamentary scrutiny’ in 17% of impact case studies – the overlap was quite small, suggesting that in the region of 33% of impact case studies examined included either one or both phrases. ‘Select committee’ was mentioned in 265 impact case studies, with 70% of these being in Social Sciences and 30% distributed evenly across other three panels. The report concludes: ‘From a policy perspective, this [report] reinforces evidence on the broad contribution that research makes to the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment, and quality of life in the UK and globally’.¹⁹

This analysis establishes the importance of policy impact and engagement in academic research by UK universities, which warrants a serious examination of how EDI plays out in the REF. The Stern Review of the REF comments that the REF itself improved awareness of equality and diversity issues in institutions.²⁰ For REF2014, there was a marked difference in the selection of men/identifying as men and women/identifying as women for the REF (67% of REF eligible men/identifying as men were selected, compared to 51% of REF eligible women/identifying as women). Furthermore, ethnic-minority UK and non-EU nationals had lower selection rates and the selection rate for staff with declared disabilities was lower than for those without.²⁰ Stern comments that measures to promote equality and diversity

and to mitigate the impact of individuals' circumstances in the REF are vital.

Recognising this, an Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) was established to advise the UK higher-education funding bodies, the REF team, and the REF panels on the implementation of equality measures in the REF2021. Additional measures were introduced for REF2021 to strengthen EDI, including the requirement to produce institutional and UOA Codes of Practice. Whilst these are welcomed, their creation is not without criticism.

Research England issued a statement in 2020 saying REF is under review. This comes as no surprise, since the 2014 REF there have been several reviews regarding its future. Diversity and equality feature strongly within the reviews and consultations. For example, the Metric Tide report discusses disciplinary diversity and support for the plurality of research and researcher career paths across the system.²¹ To achieve this, this report recommends institutions sign up to, or adopt, the principles of the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) to support more inclusive forms of output evaluation. Others have suggested utilising equity metrics to improve diversity and inclusion indicators (see Heller et al

[2014] for a discussion of this in health research).²² However, these ideas are not without critique; if the indicators that are used to define and measure success reinforce existing inequalities and hierarchies then policies and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion do exactly the opposite.

Ethnic minority UK and non-EU nationals had lower selection rates; the selection rate for staff with declared disabilities was lower than for those without

Summary – what does this mean for academic-policy engagement?

Many sources, from HESA workforce data to newspaper reports, have highlighted that universities lack diversity within their workforce. This affects the academic-policy impact pipeline. The huge variation in contract types for academic staff – whether a research or teaching focus, full- or part-time, permanent or fixed-term – and the need for academics to contractually meet core commitments of teaching and research have a filtering effect, in that not all researchers are free to focus on academic-policy engagement in the same way. If left unchecked, this can result in academic-policy engagement being undertaken by a pool of ‘usual suspects’.

At a research-funding level, better data is needed to break down the diversity of engagement from those who are awarded funding to engage directly in policy-impact work. We need a clearer picture of how the funding streams that are typically used to support academic-policy engagement, such as IAA, HEIF, and Research England’s Strategic Priorities Fund policy allocation, for example, are driving EDI and/or are replicating disadvantage within the system.

At an REF impact level, available data shows there was inherent inequality in the 2014 submissions. Following the REF2014 review, recommendations have been implemented to reduce this. New analysis will shortly be drawn from the submissions to REF2021 that should help to update this picture and provide checks and balances on the EDI actions that have been taken since REF2014. However, given REF’s importance in driving university cultures, and reward and recognition systems, it is also vital to understand what roles knowledge brokers have in supporting academic-policy engagement and to take these into account when making any new EDI recommendations.

EDI in UK policy arenas

In this section, we look at available data on policy professionals to provide a general picture of diversity in this area. We focus mainly on UK parliament and government, as these constitute the majority of UPEN’s policy engagement work, but in doing so we acknowledge that this is only a small part of the ‘policy’ in academic-policy engagement.

Employment data

Latest figures¹ highlight that representation of MPs is beginning to reflect the population – 13.8% of the UK population is from a minority-ethnic background and currently 10% (65 out of 650)² of MPs are from minority-ethnic backgrounds. However, none of the 20 Parliamentary Select Committees is chaired by someone from a minority-ethnic group.

The House of Commons professional services and support staff are also beginning to reflect society more broadly. From the data available in the House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service Diversity Monitoring Report 2020, there are two teams that are likely to be directly involved in academic-policy engagement. In the Chamber and Committee Team (CCT), 12% identify as an ethnic minority and 52% are women/identifying as women. 33% have caring responsibilities, and 7.5% identify as LGB+. In some areas, groups are underrepresented. For instance, those who work in CCT who identify as having a disability stands at only 6.8% (UK average is 14.6%).³

In the Research & Information services teams, representation from colleagues who identified as LGB+ stood at 13.8%, and those with caring responsibilities stood at 36%. 10% were from an ethnic minority and 46% identify as women. However, there were too few respondents who identified as having a disability to be included in the report.⁴

There are some similarities in the civil service (see Government D&I strategy for further information).⁵ Latest UK government figures show that 53% of civil servants are women/identify as women and

12.7% are ethnic minorities. However, there are more colleagues who identify as having a disability (11.7%). The proportion of ethnic-minority staff are in line with the wider population (12.6% in June 2019), whilst disabled staff are underrepresented (13.4% in June 2019).

Women/identifying as women, people who are disabled, and ethnic minorities are much more likely to be in junior roles, although this is changing. To support this change, the government has introduced initiatives both to fast-track employees through the grades and to bring in more diversity through initiatives such as its Summer Diversity Internship Programme.

According to Civil Service figures, representation of ethnic-minority staff varied significantly between departments, with 2.5% at the Welsh Government to 24.3% at the Department of Health and Social Care (Cabinet Office Diversity and Inclusion, 2019).⁶ This indicates that progress on increasing the diversity of the Civil Service is inconsistent, as recognised by government.

Diversity of workforce isn't the whole story; equity and inclusion need to run alongside. Academic-policy engagement requires more than just 'head count' to bring about research informed policymaking. It is not enough to purely have a seat at the academic/policy table, inclusion is about having a platform to fully participate.

Progress on increasing the diversity of the Civil Service is inconsistent

Parliament's approaches to EDI in academic-policy engagement

An inquiry report from the Liaison Committee on the effectiveness and influence of the Select Committee system noted that witness diversity was a 'common theme' in evidence received. The committee noted that women/identifying as women made up only 37% of discretionary witnesses in 2017–19, rising from 29% in 2015–16. They attribute this rise to committee efforts including putting witness diversity statements on their webpages and offering additional panel spaces to organisations who can provide diversity and have set a goal of 40% female witnesses by the end of the current parliament.⁷ The report is limited in discussion of other protected characteristics, saying: 'We have further to go on BAME representation and this should be an area of focus.' It encourages organisations to consider diversity when selecting witnesses, recommending: 'When deciding who to put forward as witnesses, organisations should share and respect our commitment to diversity and consider how a lack of diversity among their representatives might appear to the wider public and reflect on their sector.'⁸ Finally, it acknowledges a lack of data related to EDI monitoring to date, suggesting that committees 'should also be monitoring age, ethnicity, disability status, nationality, geography and income', and recommends monitoring of EDI data in the future.⁹

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) set up a Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) in 2018 to develop and support engagement between researchers and parliamentarians. It has recognised the issue of a lack of diversity in policy engagement and states:

'Parliament . . . welcomes contributions from people from different career stages, disciplines, institutions and backgrounds.'¹⁰ Specific actions it is taking to support EDI include:

- Information gathering, such as surveys and diversity monitoring;
- Reviewing processes and undertaking equality analyses;
- Advocating for inclusion across parliament;
- Engaging with specific underrepresented groups.¹¹

As part of its commitment to improving the effectiveness of KE in legislatures, in 2019 POST launched a specific work stream to support engagement from a more diverse group of academics. POST has specifically identified groups that they are keen to work with women/identifying as women, ethnic minorities, academics with disabilities, and those working in non-Russell Group universities.

Still ongoing, its focus for driving diversity includes providing support through its fellowships programme, mentoring, and the Parliament for Researchers training initiative. Current data shows promise in that in March 2020, 1,100 experts responded to a POST survey. Of those 1,016 were affiliated with UK universities, and of those university affiliations, 51.4% were non-Russell Group and 48.6% were Russell Group. POST argues that this shows evidence of increased institutional diversity in researcher engagement with UK parliament (POST, 2020).¹²

Government's approaches to EDI in academic-policy engagement

Government has invested in equality work in recent years. The Government Equalities Office (GEO) was established in 2007 and has led the implementation of the Equality Act 2010 across government and the country. GEO supports and advocates for the meaningful use of equalities impact assessments in decision making. The purpose of these assessments is to 'ensure that our policies, services and legislation do not discriminate against anyone and that, where possible, we promote equality of opportunity' (Ministry of Justice, 2011).¹³ Assessments are used across all policy areas, and at a national and local level. Further to this, GEO has identified priority areas of work, including policy related to women/identifying as women, sexual orientation, and transgender equality. A key way that the GEO engages with the research community is through the Workplace and Gender Equality Research Programme (WAGE) network via its COVID-19 Equalities Hub Observatory. The observatory aims to map relevant evidence-based research on how the pandemic is impacting those with a protected characteristic. The information is shared across key stakeholders in government departments, parliament, and the academic community.

Over a similar period, the UK Government has developed mechanisms aimed at enhancing the government and the civil service's access to a more robust evidence base; notably What Works Networks and departmental Areas of Research Interest.

What Work Networks aim to improve the way government 'generates, translates, and adopts' high-quality evidence in decision-making (Cabinet Office, 2013).¹⁴ There are ten What Works Centres to date and their key remit is to act as a bridge 'between the producers of evidence (often, but not always, in academic institutions)

and the consumers of evidence (public service commissioners and professionals)' (What Works Network, 2018).¹⁵

Government departments began publishing Areas of Research Interest (ARI) to signal to the research community their mid- to long-term evidence needs, following recommendations in the Nurse Review in 2015. ARIs aim to increase government departments' engagement with researchers and evidence to improve policy (Government Office for Science, 2017).¹⁶ Since the first ARI were published in 2018, the Government Office for Science has championed them across departments. Its commitment was evident in the 2019 Government Science Capability review (Government Office for Science, 2019),¹⁷ where it was recommended that ARIs should:

- be published and refreshed annually
- be co-created by 'chief scientific advisers, analysts, and heads of policy profession in departments', and
- 'provide potential collaborators with the key information (including the availability of data) that they need to engage effectively with the relevant research questions.'

To support the initiative, ESRC funded two ARI Fellows. The ARI Fellows (2020) worked on the existing ARI to identify key questions that cut across the departments, helping to meet the objectives of the review to support government with its Covid recovery response. This resulted in the development of the Rebuilding a Resilient Britain programme of work, which comprised nine working groups.

Mechanisms for researchers to engage with policy professionals in government and in the civil service are in place. However, it is unclear how

EDI is embedded into programmes; for instance, what measures are used to ensure opportunities to engage consider barriers to engagement? In the ‘What Works Network: Five Years On’ report, for example, we learn that the purpose of the network is to ensure that ‘spending and practice in public services is informed by the best available evidence’ without defining what ‘best’ means and how to access it. Furthermore, the report does not highlight how experts are identified. ARI documents send a strong signal that researchers

are welcome to reach out and engage, but it is not yet common practice for departments to review how accessible and inclusive, or not, this route to engagement is. In addition, as there is no direct funding attached to ARI engagement, researchers will either need to source support elsewhere or, as mentioned previously, will engage with ARI on top of their current workload (which may naturally occlude those with caring and childcare duties, and those with additional support needs).

Endnotes Contexts

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