

# Inclusive practice in knowledge mobilisation: finding people and expertise to meet policy evidence needs



July 2025

# Definitions

## Diversity

*Diversity of people or participation* refers to people's protected characteristics, defined as age, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy and maternity leave status, disability, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. In this toolkit, we also include socio-economic status under diversity, recognising that it is not a protected characteristic.

*Diversity of knowledge or thought* in academic-policy engagement refers to a range of perspectives and ideas and includes career stage, geographical location, type of university, academic discipline, approaches and methods.

While diversity encompasses all the terms above, we should be careful not to reduce these varied aspects into a single interpretation. Similarly, we should avoid over-reliance on "representation" or "visible diversity" alone, as an individual from an underrepresented group will not automatically bring diverse viewpoints. All types of diversity and intersectionality must therefore be considered when working to expand the pool of academics engaging with policy.

## Expertise

There is no single definition of expertise; academic expertise typically implies dedicated research or scholarship in a particular field. People can provide their expertise and advice to inform public policy through a range of different routes, including advisory groups, networks and briefings.

## Knowledge mobilisation

Knowledge mobilisation describes a process for enabling the use of research evidence in policymaking, and public service design and delivery. Knowledge mobilisation usually consists of "a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and the ethically sound application of knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

Watch CAPE's "[Understanding Knowledge Mobilisation](#)" video to learn more about the role of knowledge mobilisers in academic-policy engagement.

## Knowledge mobiliser

A knowledge mobiliser in academic-policy engagement is an individual who acts as an intermediary between universities or research and policy, transferring knowledge, "finding, assessing and interpreting evidence, facilitating interaction and identifying emerging research questions".

Knowledge mobilisers can be located within universities or policy organisations, and may also be found in other organisations, such as charities. In universities, this role is often based in policy engagement units but can also be found in impact focused roles, communications, project management, and partnership development, as well as being undertaken by academics.

This role is vital in shaping evidence-informed policy practice, as knowledge mobilisers often work with a diverse range of individuals, including under-represented researchers.

<sup>1</sup> Jull, J. Giles, A. & Graham, I. D. (2017). Community-based participatory research and integrated knowledge translation: advancing the co-creation of knowledge. Implementation Science: <https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13012-017-0696-3#citeas>

# Introduction: Why this guide, and why now

This guide takes as its starting point two underpinning tenets:

1. the need to diversify the people who participate in academic-policy engagement; and
2. the need to diversify the knowledge which is involved in academic-policy engagement.

Evidence suggests that more **diverse views lead to better policy outcomes**, both in policy development and implementation. Engaging with the broadest range of researchers, across lived experience, values, disciplines, career stages, backgrounds, and methodological approaches, not only reduces the risk of policy failure but also strengthens the evidence system upon which the UK prides itself.<sup>2</sup>

As science minister and former Government Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance **has noted**:

*You don't achieve [effective scientific advice] if everyone comes from the same background, everyone has the same discipline, everyone has the same way of thinking, and everybody around the meeting agrees with each other because they've all got exactly the same set of experiences.*<sup>3</sup>

There is evidence across the research and policy ecosystem of efforts to embed more diverse and inclusive approaches. UKRI's EDI strategy (2023)<sup>4</sup>, the Welsh Senedd's Diversity and Inclusion plan 2022-2026<sup>5</sup>, and actions by the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology Knowledge Exchange Unit (2019) are all examples of this.<sup>6</sup>

More broadly, the Public Sector Equality Duty obliges public authorities and organisations carrying out public functions to improve society and promote equality in all aspects of their day-to-day business.<sup>7</sup>

Achieving meaningful diversity and inclusion takes sustained effort, resources and requires accountability.<sup>8</sup> It also needs environments where people feel safe, supported, and empowered to contribute meaningfully and engage in continuous learning. The responsibility should not rest solely on individuals to 'be confident' and navigate the system alone, nor should it fall to people from marginalised groups to help others through the process. Institutions and intermediaries should actively support participation before, during, and after engagement.

Leadership across universities and policy organisations must therefore take an active role in supporting inclusive pipelines of expertise and ensuring safe environments for all voices, particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds. Inclusion work requires time, space, and resources (for example, to support building relationships, funding diverse voices, or creating shared learning opportunities).

Knowledge mobilisers are at the front line of brokering knowledge and relationships in academic-policy engagement. Although many are committed to equity, research shows that they frequently feel unsupported or unsure about their knowledge, particularly when it comes to identifying diverse experts.<sup>9</sup>

2 Oliver, K., & Boaz, A. (2019). Transforming evidence for policy and practice: creating space for new conversations. Humanities & Social Sciences Communications: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0266-1>

3 Breckon, J. (2024). How to grow universities' policy engagement functions. Wonkhe: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-to-grow-universities-policy-engagement-functions/>

4 UKRI. (2023). EDI strategy and action plans. <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-strategy/>

5 Senedd. (2022). Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-26: <https://senedd.wales/media/mqyhldxr/d-i-strategy-summary-e.pdf>

6 UK Parliament. Working to support more diverse and inclusive engagement between UK Parliament and researchers. <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/research-impact-at-the-uk-parliament/diverse-and-inclusive-engagement-between-uk-parliament-and-researchers/>

7 Government Equalities Office. (2013). Equality Act 2010: guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

8 Breckon, J. Hasenfuss, J and Jowett, L. (2024). How to grow universities' policy engagement functions. Wonkhe: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-to-grow-universities-policy-engagement-functions/>

9 Morris, S., Pike, L., Prince, M., Renberg-Fawcett, K., Stevenson, O., & Watson, K. (2021). Surfacing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion within Academic-Policy Engagement. Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN): <https://upen.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Surfacing-Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-within-Academic%E2%80%91Policy-Engagement.pdf>

Furthermore, these roles are often located outside EDI portfolios within organisations and lack the authority or organisational backing to implement systemic changes that could implement inclusive practices across their organisation as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Yet while knowledge mobilisers may be embedded in systems that cannot easily be changed by one person alone, they are not powerless to effect change for the better. They can work with others, and to a greater or lesser extent, “champion an ethical, over expedient, approach” and “challenge the design of academic-policy engagement”.<sup>11</sup>

Our experience in CAPE shows that greater openness about knowledge mobilisation practices and the strategies adopted matters and impacts inclusivity. Openness helps cultivate a culture characterised by transparency in decision-making, a commitment to continuous improvement, appreciation for diverse perspectives, and ongoing reflection on practice and power dynamics.

## How to Use This Guide

### *What is this guide for?*

We’ve created this guide to:

- **Support knowledge mobilisers** to go beyond ‘usual’ strategies to identify people and expertise within universities for policy engagement in ways that are inclusive and purposeful.
- **Improve the transparency** of processes for academic-policy engagement. For example, it could be used to initiate team discussions and inspire new ways of working with colleagues or organisationally.
- **Enable shared learning and reflective practice** to build collective understanding and action to strengthen the academic-policy engagement ecosystem.

### *What does this guide do?*

The guide provides:

- A range of practical methods for identifying people and expertise
- Suggestions on when and why to utilise each method
- Actions to take, considerations to keep in mind, and the potential benefits of each approach.

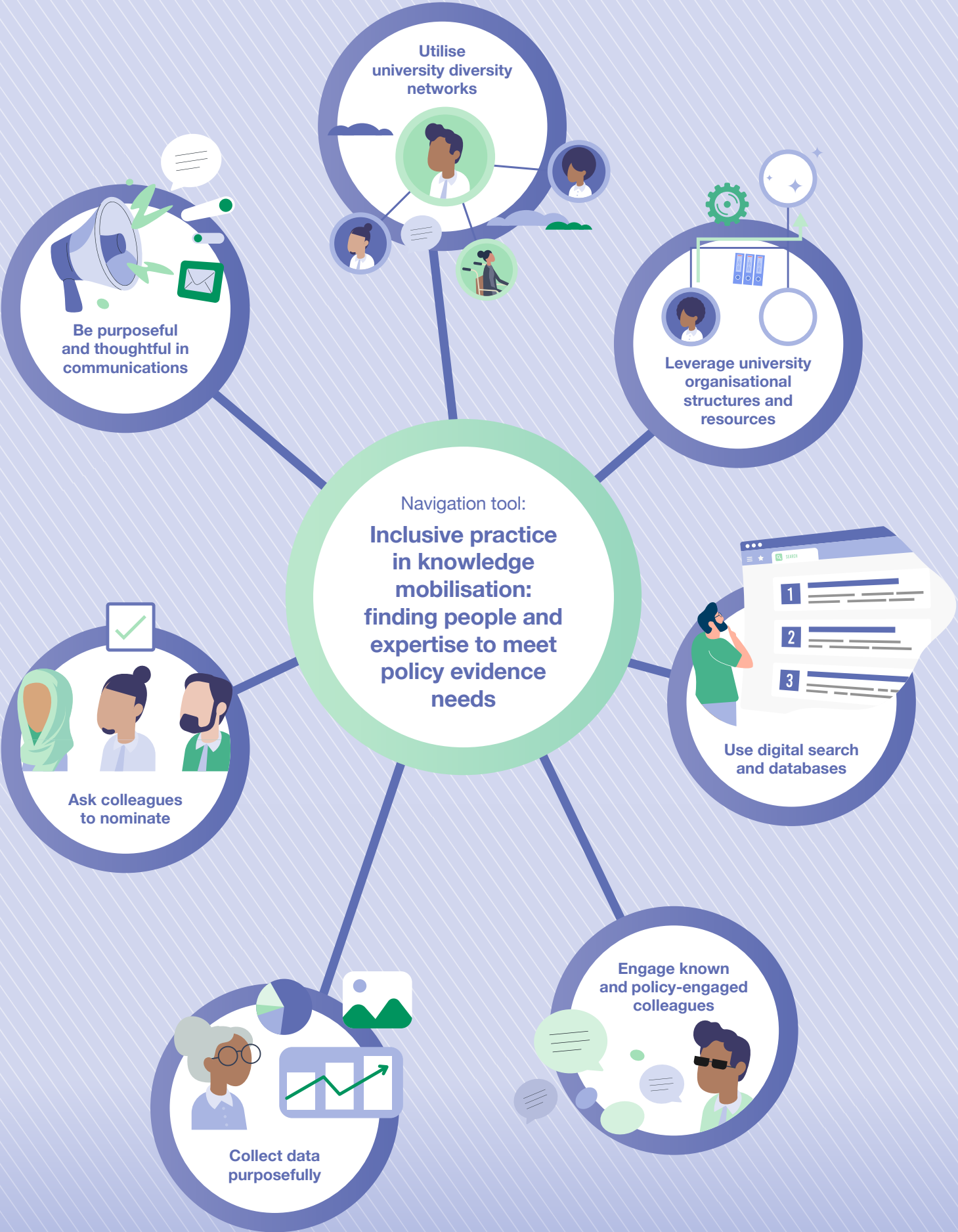
Each practice illustrates only one aspect of how people and expertise can be accessed within universities. The methods should be viewed as potentially multiple and concurrent, and may be used alone or in combination, depending on the circumstances. They can be employed as needed across different contexts and in accordance with policy needs, existing relationships, time constraints, institutional approaches, and other factors. They can also be applied within individual institutions or as part of multi-institutional engagement, where expertise across multiple institutions may be convened.

### *Limitations*

‘Diversity’ is multifaceted, context-dependent and goes beyond visible characteristics or institutional affiliation. No single guide can cover the full range of policy needs or institutional structures. Our intention with this guide is to start to build collaborative, inclusive systems, not perfect checklists.

<sup>10</sup> Bea, L., & Recio-Saucedo, A. (2024). EDI in academic-policy engagement: lived experience of university-based knowledge brokers and marginalised academics. Bristol University Press: <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/evp/21/1/article-p46.xml>

<sup>11</sup> Rattu, K., Renberg-Fawcett, K., & Stevenson, O. (2022). Surfacing equity, diversity and inclusion in academic-policy engagement. Royal Society of Edinburgh: <https://rse.org.uk/resource/surfacing-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-academic-policy-engagement/>



# Be purposeful and thoughtful in communications



## When might you take these actions?

- When circulating a call for recruitment to an advisory group for a government department or other policy organisation.
- When communicating, advertising and promoting engagement opportunities across the university, both in internal and external communication channels.
- When you are recruiting for Fellowships or similar placements.
- In calls for policy engagement funding awards.



**Be inclusive in your use of language and communicate the importance of diversity.**

**Ensure you do not default to narrow definitions of “expertise”: acknowledge the value of different career stages, disciplinary backgrounds, and lived experiences.**

**Incorporate best practice on inclusive recruitment.**

**Avoid using over-specialised language and acronyms as much as possible, as this will alienate those who are not familiar with the academic-policy ecosystem.**



### Benefits:

Confirms commitment to a culture of inclusivity.

Sets an example for others to use similar practices across the academic-policy engagement ecosystem.

Broadens audience reach and lowers the chance of the audience feeling alienated by the use of language.

Makes communication clearer.

Can support greater uptake of opportunities.



### Be aware:

Dominant academic or policy cultures often shape who is perceived as “credible” or “policy ready”, which may inadvertently exclude those with non-traditional research profiles, early career academics, or individuals from marginalised backgrounds.

Requires understanding of your own unconscious bias and how language can contribute to the exclusion of certain groups – working with EDI teams and undertaking EDI training can support you in this.





**Be inclusive in your non-verbal communications, such as photos, imagery and emoji use.**



**Benefits:**

Visual representation of diversity encourages engagement and demonstrates that all individuals are valued and respected, and part of the academic-policy engagement community.

Reflects modern communication standards which treat inclusivity as a norm.



**Be aware:**

Requires understanding of your own unconscious bias and ways that non-verbal communications can privilege certain groups over others.

May require training on digital accessibility.

Be mindful of using stock images as they can feel inauthentic, portray stereotypes and over-rely on visible markers of diversity.

# Utilise university diversity networks



## When might you take these actions?

- You have an enquiry from a policy professional or organisation who is looking for diversity of experts, research and expertise.
- The policy issue would benefit from the expertise or lived experience of an academic from an underrepresented group.
- You are organising a knowledge exchange event and want to ensure diversity of representation and voices.



**Work with multiple networks across university structures to enhance circulation of opportunities for academics from underrepresented groups.**



### Benefits:

Enhances equal access to opportunities and addresses poor EDI culture.

Helps diversify the pool of engaged academics and discipline areas.

Confirms commitment to a culture of inclusivity.



### Be aware:

Identifying underrepresented groups requires sensitivity, respect, and understanding of the complexities and intersections of identities and social dynamics.

Academics from historically excluded and discriminated groups may be wary of superficial inclusion or tokenistic approaches. Take care not to perpetuate extractive practices.

Consider the impact on individuals. Some staff with certain protected characteristics can end up always being called on as “representatives”. Ask whether those approached have additional requirements that can be accommodated.

Political, structural and social biases and barriers may make people from underrepresented groups less able or comfortable to contribute. Be prepared to offer support with briefing writing, meeting preparation, and other tasks.

Ensure you explain why an individual or group is being approached, what is on offer, and what will happen as a result. This allows those being approached to make an informed decision.

Staff may have genuine and significant concerns around engaging with policymakers and/or controversial policy agendas and might need direct support for navigating risk or impacts on careers.





## Use university Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) committees.



### Benefits:

Enables you to consider developing long-term strategies for inclusion rather than one-offs.

Committees have a remit to champion more diversity and inclusivity.

Potential to raise awareness of other policy engagement opportunities with underrepresented groups, e.g. training and fellowships.

Can provide advice and guidance.



### Be aware:

Membership of EDI committees is by invite or election.

Committees hold a strategic mandate and might prioritise other communications and messaging.

Not all members of EDI committees are interested in improving academic-policy engagement.



## Utilise university Early Career Researcher (ECR) or doctoral research networks.



### Benefits:

Targets ECRs directly who are often underrepresented in policy engagement.

Access to new and emerging research.



### Be aware:

ECRs may have less exposure to policy engagement and may need more support, including navigating policy interactions and speaking 'policy language'.

ECRs (including PhD students) may be unsupported by their supervisors who may also not be engaged with policy.

ECRs may have less material incentives to participate in policy engagement as their attention is focused on research production (e.g. peer-reviewed articles, patents) and other activities that weigh more heavily in traditional academic career development.

ECRs may be vulnerable to inequitable and risky power dynamics with knowledge mobilisers or with policymakers. For example, they may not have an established position, reputation, or source of income to bring into the university, and they are more likely to be in a fixed-term role.

# Leverage university organisational structures and resource



## When might you take these actions?

- A policy consultation requires cross-sector or interdisciplinary collaboration that your current contacts don't cover.
- To expand your outreach beyond personal or established relationships and disciplinary knowledge.
- To develop multi-lateral activities beyond your institution.
- In large institutions and / or where communications are devolved.
- To take advantage of existing infrastructure and relationships.



### Cascade opportunities via central policy engagement units.



#### Benefits:

Central policy engagement units have a comprehensive understanding of your institution's research landscape.

Dedicated policy engagement staff can effectively coordinate efforts to identify experts across various disciplines and departments.

They can leverage established networks and relationships and can often make suggestions, help identify experts within and beyond their institutions, and broker connections.

They may have access to databases or resources that facilitate expertise mapping within the institution, allowing them to identify experts based on their research interests, publications, and areas of expertise.



#### Be aware:

Not all universities have central policy engagement units and capacity is variable.

Not all academics will be signed up for newsletters.

Newsletters and social media items have lead times so may not be able to respond to urgent policy need.



## Collaborate with research 'pre-award' & 'post-award' teams.

### What is 'pre-award' & 'post-award'?

Pre-award and post-award teams are specialised teams within universities who support researchers in securing and managing funding. Among other skills and responsibilities, they will have in-depth insights of developing or existing research and associated researchers. They may also be able to ensure compliance with policies, regulations and requirements, and terms and conditions.



#### Benefits:

Direct access to new, developing and "live" research in the relevant policy area.  
Better understanding of institutional processes and areas of expertise.



#### Be aware:

Research may be in the application or early stages and so findings are not available.  
Policy engagement is often not written into grants.  
Pre & post-award colleagues are not always aware of policy engagement because of the remit of their role.



## Work with REF and impact teams.



#### Benefits:

Teams are knowledgeable about impact, including policy engagement and impact.  
Teams have relationships with academics who have engaged with policy (especially those involved in previous or planned REF Impact Case Studies).



#### Be aware:

REF Impact Case Studies do not unearth all policy engagement; policy engagement can be broader than REF definitions.  
Not all policy-active academics will have contributed to REF.  
REF teams may not be engaging with policy engaged academics at certain points in the REF cycle.  
REF and impact agendas can exacerbate existing inequalities in academia, particularly for women.<sup>12</sup>  
Risk of privileging certain measures of success and metrics that demonstrate policy engagement.

<sup>12</sup> Yarrow, E., & Davies, J. (2018). The gendered impact agenda – how might more female academics' research be submitted as REF impact case studies? London School of Economics (LSE): <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/03/08/the-gendered-impact-agenda-how-might-more-female-academics-research-be-submitted-as-ref-impact-case-studies/>



### Work with department or faculty level communications staff.



#### Benefits:

Provides access to departmental or faculty newsletters, social channels, and / or intranet.  
Communications staff are usually aware of academics within their department, their research specialisms and emerging research findings.



#### Be aware:

Newsletters and social media items have lead times so this may not be the best approach if you have an urgent policy need.

It is best practice to provide copy for communications materials to ensure messaging is accurate.

Using customised links or Google Analytics (GA4) will allow you to track engagement.

External communication channels can have limited reach and narrow audiences.

Good levels of engagement require engaged subscribers or followers.



### Engage heads of schools, faculties, and departments.



#### Benefits:

Broader dissemination of the request through established channels.

Ability to tailor messaging for the particular field of study.

Indicates leadership support.



#### Be aware:

May only engage with known researchers.

Heads of schools and faculties have many other commitments.

Providing template emails and wording suggestions to disseminate can help.



# Ask colleagues to nominate



## When might you take these actions?

- You are working with a government official to develop a roundtable, and you know they want to bring in voices and geographies beyond those they already know.
- You are aware of an institute or centre at your university who specialise in a topic close to the policy need but you are uncertain who would be the most suitable academic to contact.
- You have an established relationship in place with an academic but you know the policy topic would benefit from a broader pool of disciplines and known experts.
- The policymaker already has a connection with an academic and is looking for complementary or interdisciplinary expertise.



**Ask colleagues with whom you have a relationship to nominate those whose expertise would match the policy need.**



### Benefits:

Academics will have a thorough understanding of which research expertise is pertinent to societal questions, issues, and benefits.

Colleagues may be aware of new and ongoing research that hasn't been published yet or innovative methods for policy thinking.



### Be aware:

Colleagues may nominate those with whom they have a closer relationship, potentially limiting diversity.

Nominated academics may be unclear on academic-policy engagement processes, and their role in informing policy, necessitating additional support and clarification.

Nominations may be skewed towards similar disciplines due to the way university research networks and academic careers are structured.

Unconscious biases could influence the nomination process, such as gender, race, or age biases.

If no mechanism is available for nominated academics to understand why they were chosen and how they can contribute to policy engagement, then communications may go unanswered.

Be clear with nominators about the importance of including underrepresented voices and breaking habitual patterns of selection that favour well-connected or senior academics. Encourage nominations that reflect diversity in background, discipline, and career stage.



## Request known academic to invite an Early Career Researcher (ECR) to shadow their engagement.



### Benefits:

Helps inspire new cohorts of academics to engage more with policy.

Provides opportunities to promote diversity through mentorship and familiarising academics with policy engagement processes.

Builds a wider community of academic-policy engagement.



### Be aware:

Known academics might not have the capacity to mentor ECRs during the academic-policy engagement process.

Ensure the ECR knows how they can add value to the engagement.

Allow for different styles of engagement.

The ECR might need additional support.



# Use digital search and databases



## Why and when might you take these actions?

- You are working in a fast-moving policy area and would like to identify relevant expertise beyond your immediate network quickly.
- You are not aware of an academic who has the expertise at your university to respond to the policy need.
- You are new to knowledge mobilisation at your university and need to develop a strong understanding of your institution's evidence base.



### Use university websites, news stories, and academic profiles to identify experts and expertise.



#### Benefits:

Allows for broader outreach than based upon personal relationships.

News stories, or news sections of university websites, can help locate latest work in relevant fields and show where research is in the public interest.

Online university databases will collate articles published by experts at that university.



#### Be aware:

Identification of expertise may require deep subject understanding.

University systems may not be easily searchable.

Staff profiles may not be up to date.

Policy engagement or interest in policy engagement is not always displayed in profiles.

Profiles can show some elements of diversity such as seniority or discipline but mask other characteristics i.e., protected or identity-based.

Assumptions should never be made about people's identities when considering diversity.



### Use web-based and publication search engines to find expertise.



#### Benefits:

It is usually easy to identify an academic providing your search terms are accurate.

You can use Publication Search Engines, such as Google Scholar or Academic.Edu to limit your search to bring up authors at your university only, and limit date ranges of publications.



#### Be aware:

Google Search will highlight academics who are already active in media or have a strong web presence.

Will bring up a university's "big hitters" first.

Can rely on academics using Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) techniques on their own webpages to appear on the first couple of pages of the search engine.



## Use research & evidence databases and repositories.



### Benefits:

Search databases collectively contribute to the accessibility and visibility of research and policy-related information and so offer valuable resources for identifying experts and understanding their contributions to policy-related issues.

Each university has a research repository which is drawn upon for various purposes (e.g. preparing for the Research Excellence Framework), and you can narrow your search to bring up the most recent publications e.g. journal articles. Many research repositories include research grants awarded as well as publications, so grant awards will include newer research areas which have not yet resulted in publications.

### Useful tools<sup>13</sup>

The Areas of Research Interest (ARI) database allows you to search for Areas of Research Interest from UK governmental bodies which outline their policy priorities. It is also linked to the UKRI Gateway to Research which shows funded research projects from which you can identify the principal and co-investigators on the projects.

The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) Konfer is a search tool that can identify experts for policy engagement. It highlights which experts are involved in which domains that are relevant to policy issues. This tool both facilitates the identification of experts and provides additional information, such as their areas of expertise and publications.

Policy Commons aggregates and provides access to policy documents and research outputs from across the world, containing a collection of policy reports, briefs, and research papers from various sources, including government agencies, think tanks, and NGOs.

Overton aims to be the world's largest collection of policy documents, parliamentary transcripts, government guidance and think tank research. Its comprehensive aim means that it may contain some self-published material, so data quality needs checking. Access to Overton requires a subscription. Overton has also launched a service, Overton Engage, in beta. A short period of free trial can be requested for Overton, and Overton Engage. Overton Engage can be set up to enable knowledge exchange professionals in universities to search on keywords, find published needs for research (e.g. Areas of Research Interest) and alongside, find identified academics at the university/institution who from a search of policy citations look to have relevant expertise.

Other tools include: Symplectic Elements, Gateway to Research, ResearchFish, Scopus

<sup>13</sup> Please note that some of these tools have limited free access or require a subscription to use.



### Be aware:

While these tools are useful, they come with caveats or limitations.

Repositories and databases may have gaps in coverage or outdated or incomplete profiles that exclude relevant expertise of individuals.

All online tools tend to lag in publishing information in real time.

There may be little or no data synchronisation with your university's knowledge management systems. You should calibrate experts against other sources to understand how relevant their research expertise is. Some online databases have subscription models.



## Use social media to search for expertise.



### Benefits:

Provides exposure for individuals engaged with policy questions and relevant research.

Provides recommendations from trusted networks or professional groups to identify reputable experts.

Those engaged on social media may be more likely to want to engage with policy.



### Be aware:

Not all academics use social media, and different platforms have different levels of academic engagement and demographics – be aware of social media trends.

Marginalised groups face higher levels of abuse on social media and so may not have visible profiles.<sup>14</sup>

There is a selection bias of those who do engage.

Your own algorithms might limit exposure to diverse academics and perspectives.

Sifting through large amounts of content to find expert opinions can be time-consuming and challenging.

Be mindful of privacy such as personal information.

<sup>14</sup> Yelin, H., & Clancy, L. (2024). Academics from marginalised backgrounds are facing online abuse.  
Wonkhe: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/academics-from-marginalised-backgrounds-are-facing-online-abuse/>

# Engage known and policy-engaged colleagues



## When might you take this action?

- The policymaker has an urgent policy need or a short deadline in which to explore the evidence for a policy problem
- The academic who is an expert on the policy need is already policy engaged and you know they are likely to respond quickly
- There is already an established relationship in place between the knowledge mobiliser and the academic.
- There is limited capacity to search further for expertise.



### Contact known academics in policy area.



#### Benefits:

Allows a swift response to policymakers in time-sensitive situations.

There is a higher chance of engagement from academic.

You can leverage known experts who have experience of policy engagement.



#### Be aware:

Provides a limited diversity of opinion.

Can enforce existing paradigms of thought without challenge.

Risks engaging the same academics repeatedly, and can inadvertently champion a similar demographic of engagement, i.e., engages the “usual suspects”.

# Collect data purposefully



## When might you take this action?

- The policy professional might want to understand your commitment to inclusive and diverse academic-policy engagement.
- You might want to identify disparities within the engagement process, to build more equitable opportunities for academics.
- You are keen to move the dial and prompt intersectional approaches to academic policy engagement.
- You want to understand representation, understand disparities, or shape inclusive strategies within your institutional context or in relation to particular opportunities.



### Consult EDI teams for advice on the collection of protected characteristic data.



#### Benefits:

Leverages existing institutional tools, frameworks, and resources with embedded EDI data collection considerations.

Ensures inclusive and respectful categories that allow for multiple identities and non-binary options.



#### Be aware:

Recognise that not all participants will want to share their information in relation to protected characteristics, and so data may not always fully capture all identities or experiences.

Stay up-to-date with changes in EDI best practice to ensure categories are inclusive and respectful, allowing for multiple identities and non-binary options.

Intersectional analysis in small sample sizes can end up identifying individuals, therefore it is not always possible or appropriate all of the time.

Protect privacy, confidentiality, and seek informed consent to ensure participation is voluntary and people are happy for their name and expertise details to be shared with policy professionals. Use a privacy statement to help with this.

Provide feedback loops to ensure the data collection process is inclusive, relevant and aligned with EDI best practices.

Recognise the importance of intersectionality in capturing diverse identities and experiences.

Ensure compliance with legal and institutional guidelines, such as GDPR and Article 8 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and HESA's Data Quality requirements.

Acknowledge any data collection needs to be proportionate and never collect data for the sake of it.

Approaches to data should be driven by a clear purpose, underpinned by trust, and designed to avoid reinforcing the very exclusions it seeks to address.

## Appendix: Co-developing this guide with knowledge mobilisers

Throughout the project, CAPE delivered a range of academic-policy engagement interventions and undertook monitoring and evaluation of our funding streams, training activities, and fellowship programmes. We also convened forums on knowledge mobilisation practice and conducted a policy perceptions survey. All activities provided some EDI data. While reviewing this data, a key question emerged: what matters when matching policy demand with academic expertise?

In CAPE, we used a broad approach to identifying academics, such as when matching expertise with our incoming policy fellows. However, as we started analysing patterns in our data, we questioned how inclusive our practices were and if the EDI data was sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions.

In response, CAPE created a prototype guide based on our experience of inclusive practice during the project and the questions we were grappling with. Aware that we were limited to CAPE partners, which only provide a snapshot of academic-policy engagement, we sought to broaden the discussion and co-design the final product with the sector.

During the testing period, users were offered a journaling template to record their feedback. This tool helped users record what sections they used, in what context, and how useful or relevant they found the content. Feedback was shared in various formats: some participants submitted completed templates, while others participated in a facilitated group discussion. Their insights directly shaped the final version of this guide.

The table below is a synthesis of the notes from the group discussion and how we have addressed the feedback. We think it is important to share the feedback received. The guide's limitations are CAPE's own, not those of the user group. While not all suggestions could be implemented within the scope of this project, this does not diminish their importance. Rather, it reflects the ongoing nature of inclusive practice, which requires continuous development, collaboration, and resources.

For example, a gap identified was the lack of EDI data collected on participation in academic-policy engagement, which we have not directly addressed.<sup>15</sup> Other gaps identified have been addressed, but elsewhere in CAPE, through our open-access toolkits and resources. For example, we explore the concepts of co-creation, the disruptive allocation of resources, and systems to support the democratisation of evidence, with the broader aim of contributing to the knowledge on how to create more ethical systems and structures.<sup>16</sup>

"Inclusive Practice" can be employed alongside the following CAPE resources:

- [Hosting Policy Fellows: a guide for Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [Engaging with Evidence Toolkit](#)
- [Co-production in Regional Academic-Policy Engagement](#)

We welcome further developments in this space.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, S., Pike, L., Prince, M., Renberg-Fawcett, K., Stevenson, O., & Watson, K. (2021). Surfacing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion within Academic-Policy Engagement. Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN): <https://upen.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Surfacing-Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-within-Academic%E2%80%91Policy-Engagement.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Scholars such as Boswell (2022) and Bea and Recio-Saucedo (2024) have similarly argued that achieving equity requires more than equal opportunities — it requires the deliberate, targeted allocation of resources to ensure equal outcomes.



## Synthesis of user feedback collected via the test and learn period

Theme	Summary of Feedback	Action Taken	Status
<b>Values, Purpose, Definitions and Terminology</b>	Embed values (e.g. mindfulness, purpose); clarify diversity-related terms.	Integrated throughout introduction and main text.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Real-World Scenarios</b>	Include real case studies to support application.	Not included in current scope.	<b>Out of scope</b>
<b>Mindful Communication</b>	Ensure clear, jargon-free, gender-neutral language. Some felt this area still lacked clarity.	Language revised; “mindful communication” flagged for further refinement.	<b>Partially addressed</b>
<b>Measuring and Identifying Diversity</b>	Clarify how to identify and track types of diversity.	Framing and guidance on data added to introduction and main sections.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Contextual Customisation</b>	Tailor guidance to different project needs and roles, not one-size-fits-all.	Addressed in “How to Use This Guide” and throughout.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Continuous Learning</b>	Encourage ongoing, iterative engagement—not checklist use.	Woven into structure and introduction.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Structured vs. Flexible Tools</b>	Better signposting by user role or type of engagement.	Not included in current scope.	<b>Out of scope</b>
<b>Training and Capacity Building</b>	Support toolkit with training or workshops.	Not within scope of this version.	<b>Out of scope</b>
<b>Abstract vs. Practical Balance</b>	Balance values/principles with clear “how to” steps.	Addressed through expanded introduction and framing.	<b>Partially addressed</b>
<b>Safety in Policy Engagement</b>	Support emotional and structural safety for marginalised groups.	Not included in current version.	<b>Out of scope</b>
<b>Toolkit Limitations &amp; Continuous Learning</b>	Acknowledge limits of toolkit alone to create systemic change.	Addressed in the introduction and conclusion.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Proactive Use of Toolkit</b>	Emphasise early, intentional use—not just retrospectively.	Addressed in the introduction and “How to Use.”	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Challenges Identifying Expertise</b>	Barriers to finding accessible, diverse experts.	Acknowledged and included in framing.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Bias and Assumptions in Policy Engagement</b>	Surface and challenge unconscious bias in expertise selection.	Not in current scope.	<b>Out of scope</b>
<b>Institutional Buy-in and Leadership</b>	Require leadership and systemic support for EDI goals.	Included in introduction and recommendations.	<b>Fully addressed</b>
<b>Data Sensitivity</b>	Handle EDI data with care—particularly protected characteristics and socio-economic factors.	Addressed in introduction and data sections.	<b>Fully addressed</b>

## About this publication

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We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following knowledge mobilisers and thank them for participating in the test-and-learn exercise and embarking on this journey with us. We are grateful for their time and input, as it has significantly improved this guide.

- Aiysha Qureshi, University of London
- Alice Tofts, UCL
- Dave Blackbell, Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE)
- Elizabeth Lomas, UCL
- Ethne James-Souch, UCL
- Gareth Giles, University of Southampton
- Hannah Durrant, Welsh Centre for Public Policy (WCPP)
- Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett, Yorkshire & Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN)
- Laura Bea, University of Southampton
- Lisa Hodgson, Durham University
- Max Gillingham, University of Nottingham (Now UCL)
- Megan Groom, University of Cambridge
- Rosalind Phillips, Welsh Centre for Public Policy (WCPP)
- Sarah Welsher, UCL
- Sinéad Murphy, UCL

## About CAPE

Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) is a knowledge exchange and research project that explores how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals, funded by Research England. We are a partnership between UCL and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Northumbria and Nottingham in collaboration with the Government Office for Science, the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, Nesta and the Transforming Evidence Hub.

## About CAPE resources

CAPE's resources are developed collaboratively with our policy partners and using practice-based experience. Our toolkits and guides are designed to be flexible so they can be adapted to meet the specific needs of different university and policy systems. These resources are intended as an entry point into addressing common challenges in academic-policy engagement and to inspire new and deeper forms of engagement. We encourage practice-based feedback on all CAPE resources, to improve their efficacy and to ensure that future resources cover the needs in academic-policy engagement.