

Policy Engagement Guide for MIML ECRs

How to start and what to expect

**A guide written by Sarah Schwarz and Marie Martine,
under the direction of Charlotte Ryland**

Executive Summary

Key Steps for Policy Engagement

- **Navigating government's priorities:** Understand the government's priorities and constraints in relation to your research, and identify the government department most likely to be interested in your project(s). The [Areas of Research Interest](#) (ARI) database is a useful starting point.
- **Establishing connections:** Begin by exploring resources and contacts within your home institution and [UPEN](#), including training opportunities. Attend in-person and online events and engage with intermediaries to build relationships with civil servants and other key stakeholders.
- **Effective communication:** Tailor how you present your research to your audience by translating it into concise, practical summaries that emphasise key evidence and actionable insights.
- **Trust:** Recognise the importance of confidentiality and navigate the political landscape carefully to establish and maintain a trustworthy relationship with policy actors.
- **Adapting to the policy world:** Understand the differing rhythms of academia and the policy world. To sustain momentum and impact, prioritise continuity in partnerships and be adaptable to the evolving needs of policymakers.
- **Understanding current trends:** Think creatively about how to adapt and present your work to align with current government priorities, such as environmental issues, technology and AI, and support for disadvantaged communities. Including these areas in your research will enhance its relevance and impact.
- **Mindset:** Cultivate a resilient mindset by focusing on your 'why' and your motivation to make a lasting impact.
- **Get inspired by past projects:** Reflect on successful past projects to guide and inspire your approach.

This document builds on Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett's report, "[Languages and Policy: Building Collaborations between Academics and Policymakers.](#)" [September 2024] Our analysis has been informed by Ayres-Bennett's and collaborators' work, and you will find references throughout as appropriate.

THE ROADMAP TO POLICY ENGAGEMENT

HOW TO START WITH POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Section 1 in this guide provides advice on where to start on your policy engagement journey, including identifying whom to contact, useful connections, and effective networking strategies.

1

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Section 2 is all about learning how to communicate effectively with policy stakeholders, as well as how to build trusted relationships.

2

CURRENT TRENDS

Section 3 discusses current trends and debates within the policy world and how you can creatively include them in your research.

3

POLICY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

Section 4 provides you with examples of past projects that combine language research and policymaking.

4

RESOURCES AND TRAINING

This section provides resources on policy engagement and training opportunities.

5

1. How to Start with Policy Engagement

Before thinking about policy engagement, researchers should start by understanding how policy making works. Here is a useful resource by the [Institute for Government](#).

Work with the government's ARIs

To engage effectively with policymakers and government stakeholders, researchers should creatively work with the [government's Areas of Research Interest \(ARIs\)](#). Government departments primarily focus on projects that address their established priorities; thus, research should resonate with these areas to capture their interest and support.

Prompts for researchers wanting to engage with the policy community

- What is the relevance of Modern Languages for policy?
- What is missing without that contribution?
- What are the risks [unintended consequences] of excluding language expertise?
- Make the case for your expertise!



Universities as first point of contact

In many cases, your home institution will already have an established network of contacts and resources in place, providing you with training and/or advisers.



**Sheffield
Hallam
University**
Knowledge Applied



**Bennett Institute
for Public Policy**
Cambridge



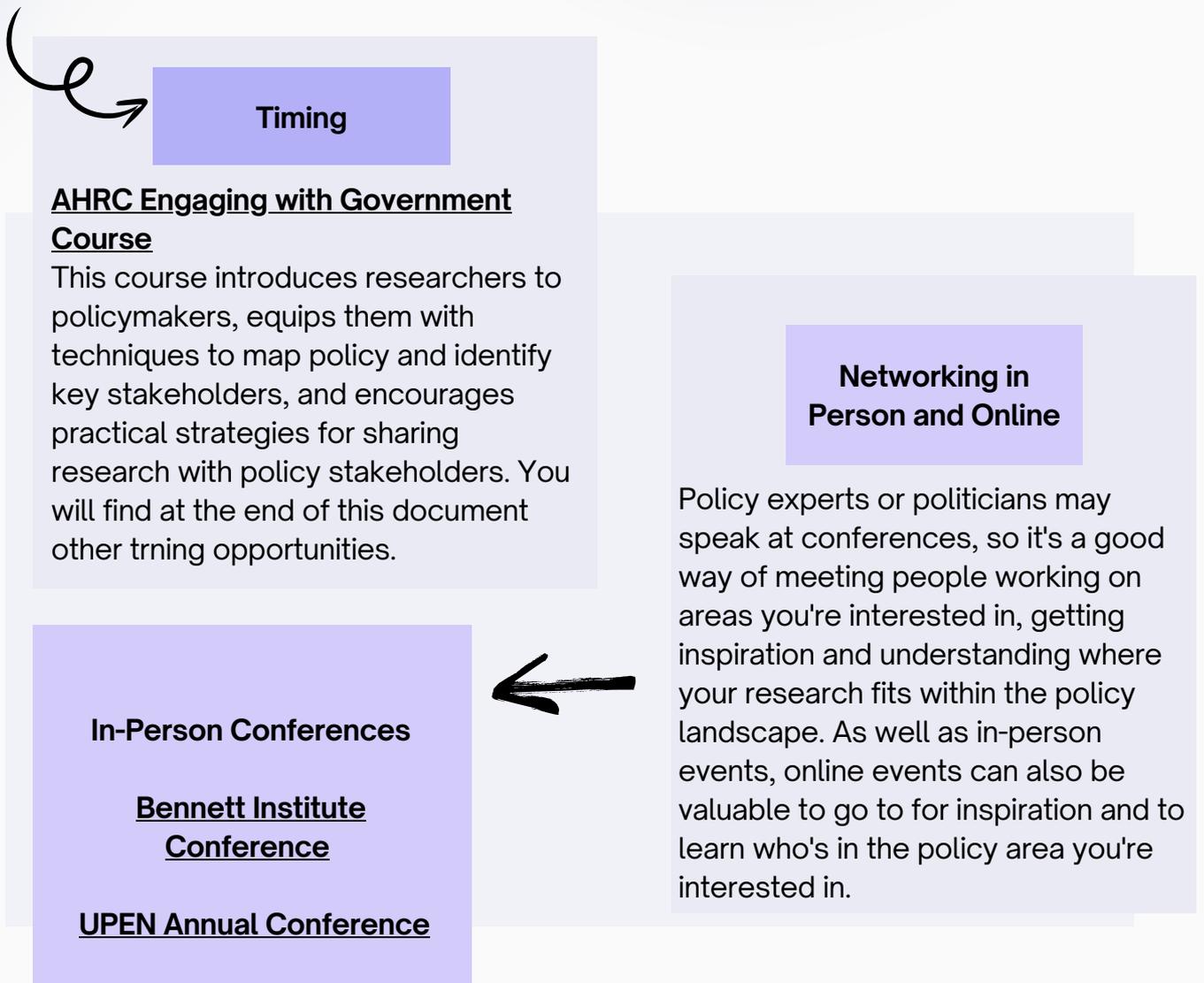
OPEN
OXFORD POLICY
ENGAGEMENT NETWORK



Additionally, the [British Academy](#), [UPEN](#), and the [AHRC](#) are good first points of contact if you wish to start with Policy Engagement. [The Institute for Government](#) offers [guidelines](#) and introductory training.

Networking

Collaborating with external partners is crucial for making research more global and purpose-driven, and it's a key way to drive change within the discipline.



Seek out your allies – people who have a demonstrable interest in modern languages already, with whom you can easily start a conversation about leveraging your expertise to shape policy.

These allies could be MPs and civil servants, but also researchers, NGOs, professionals, who may in turn have existing connections to the policymakers you want to ultimately reach. To find MPs, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages is a good place to start.

2. How to Communicate with Policymakers and Other Stakeholders

The key element to a fruitful collaboration between policy stakeholders and researchers is effective and sustainable communication.

Adapt to a New Audience

Condense your research into brief, impactful summaries with 4–5 key bullet points. Policy stakeholders are unlikely to read full papers but require clear, actionable recommendations. Use accessible language, avoid jargon, and emphasise results. Focus on quantitative evidence, as the government prioritises data-driven insights. See [Languages and Policy: Building Collaboration between Academics and Policymakers](#) by Wendy Ayres-Bennett for more details on means of communication.

Establish a Dialogue early

Try to involve policymakers or civil servants from the outset of the research project, rather than after it is completed. Researchers should individually determine the best way to engage while preserving their integrity and autonomy.

Training

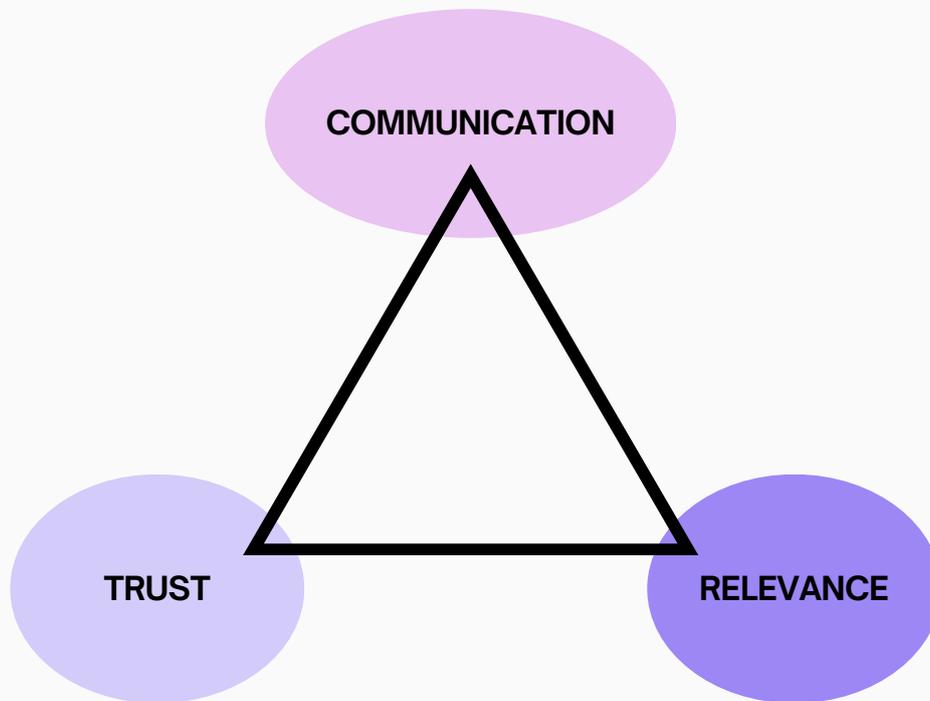
Undergo specific training and seek advice on how to interact with government, such as the resources available on [research impact at the UK Parliament](#).

Expectation Management

- Short-term projects are often more feasible between researchers and policy stakeholders.
- Stay positive and constructive, even with those who are not yet ready for long-term dialogue.
- Policymakers are frequently open to partnering in funding applications or serving as general project collaborators.
- Remain focused on your purpose: be clear about the change you seek and why it matters.

2.1 Effective Collaborations and Trusted Relationships

The most important ingredients of collaboration are communication, trust, and relevance.



Communication

- **Communicating Your Expectations**
 - Establish and communicate your expectations clearly. Effective expectation management is crucial; both parties should be aware of their limits, with researchers setting boundaries regarding their availability.
- **Honesty**
 - Genuine interest and honesty are essential for effective collaboration, ensuring that both sides invest time and effort and openly address any issues.
- **Public Media and Press Communication**
 - Researchers should understand the media landscape and the government's official communication channels, prioritising a collaborative approach when it comes to dealing with public media and press to foster strong relationships.

Trust

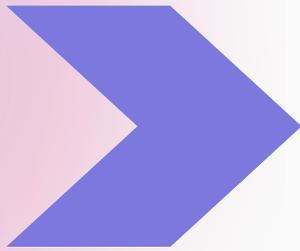
- **Sensitive Communication – Confidentiality is Key**
 - Confidentiality is crucial for both parties. Researchers must trust that stakeholders will not share unpublished findings, while policymakers expect researchers to refrain from disclosing details about ongoing projects. A trusted relationship allows frank criticism in private but necessitates measured public discourse, particularly on social media, to maintain trust and influence policy effectively. Public criticism, although sometimes necessary, can damage relationships and hinder policy impact.
- **Navigating Politics – Sensitive and Mindful Communication**
 - Be mindful of the political dimensions of policy engagement. Associating with politically vocal organisations or publicly criticising government decisions can impede future collaboration. Researchers may choose to focus on providing objective, evidence-based advice and may opt for anonymity to avoid political entanglement.

Relevance

- **Understand the Constraints of the Policy World**
 - Recognise the constraints of the policy world, such as limited time, budget, and resources, which often hinder engagement despite a general appreciation for languages. Policymakers require swift, evidence-based advice rather than opinions, necessitating that researchers quickly produce relevant policy briefings.
- **Evidence-Based Advice and the ‘So What’ Question**
 - Policy actors seek recommendations grounded in theory and practice, with an emphasis on how past insights can inform future decisions. When presenting research, clearly articulate the desired action – whether influencing programmes or shaping curricula – since understanding the intended outcome is crucial for translating insights into actionable change.

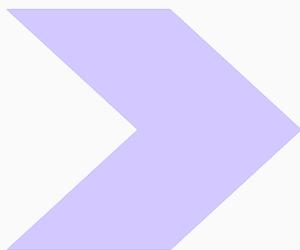
3. Current Trends in the Policy World

Three key areas: You could think of ‘hooking’ your research to the following areas that the UK government is currently interested in. The Department of Education (DfE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) are current consumers of language expertise.



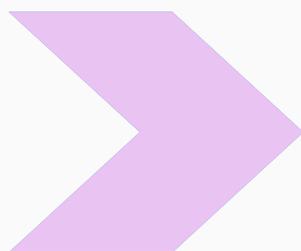
Environmental Issues

Policymakers look for language experts who can help them think creatively and critically about issues arising from environmental challenges.



Technology and Artificial Intelligence

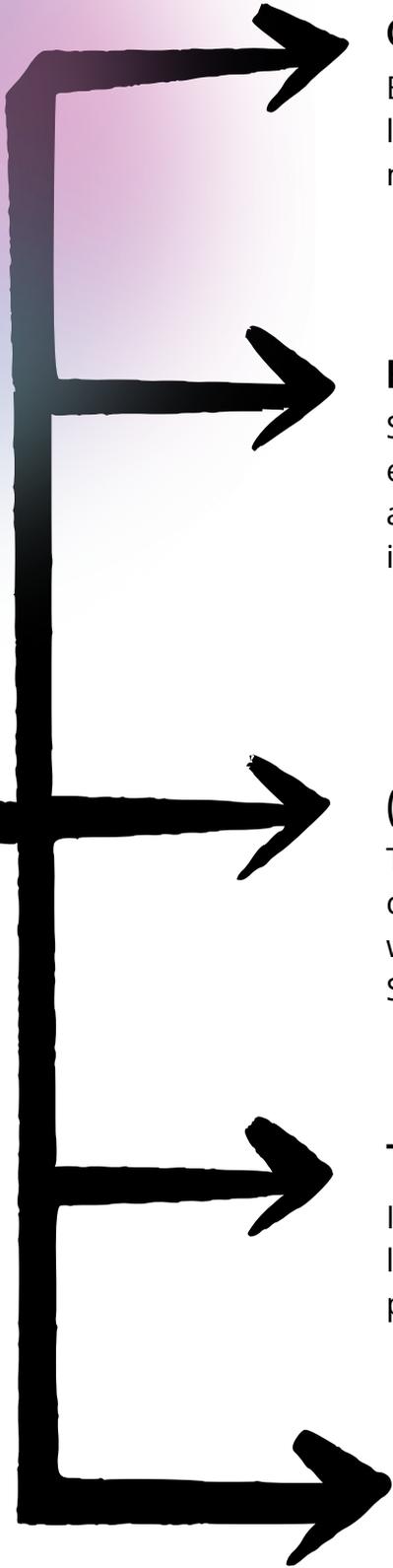
Generative AI has the potential to transform language learning through personalised experiences, real-time feedback, and immersive environments. Innovative applications include chatbots for practice, adaptive learning apps, and virtual reality (VR) for language immersion.



Supporting Disadvantaged and Marginalised Members of Society

Policymakers need language researchers to think creatively about accessible, multilingual resources and programmes that utilise language skills to enhance academic success and personal growth for disadvantaged students. Language expertise can also contribute to accessible and inclusive communication in public health

Within these three key trends (environmental issues, technology and AI, and supporting disadvantages and marginalized members of society), projects on the following issues concerning languages are currently trending in the policy community:



Global Languages

Brexit brought a new perspective. The government is now looking at Chinese (Mandarin), Russian, Arabic, and Korean and needs expertise on those languages and areas.

Home/Heritage/Community Languages

Supporting home, heritage, and community languages, expanding beyond the traditional focus on French, German, and Spanish—which constitute 92% of language entries—to include languages like Arabic and Polish.

(Inter)Cultural Communication

The government is looking for knowledge in cultural communication; specifically, in how to best communicate with (marginalised) communities to achieve policy measures. Some are interested in behavioural science.

Transitioning between Language Key Stages

Improving the transition between different key stages in language education, with a particular emphasis on enhancing primary language provision.

Innovative Methods

E.g. combining languages research and behavioural sciences.

3. Current Trends (Continued)

Ongoing debates in both policy circles and academia question why languages should engage with the policy world. Researchers seeking to collaborate with policymakers should familiarise themselves with these discussions to understand potential hesitations and effectively persuade sceptics.

Qualitative versus quantitative approach

The question is not to either adapt to the government's preference for a quantitative approach or continue to convince policy stakeholders of the value of qualitative research. Many policymakers are aware of the advantages of a qualitative approach. Just note that when justifying public money expenditure on large-scale projects, quantitative data is necessary.

The relevance of languages to policymaking

Create awareness of the importance of language expertise for the policy world; few policy stakeholders engage with language researchers, often viewing language expertise as limited to translation and not recognizing its broader significance. It is crucial to shift this perception and build awareness of the importance of language expertise in policy work, including aspects such as communication, cultural understanding, and literacy.

Humanities Research and Policy Impact

Humanities researchers need to convince civil servants and policy stakeholders that their research has applications in real-world scenarios and is relevant to the implementation of government policies. Language research in particular, is essential to understanding communication and interaction (e.g. public engagement with laws, societal norms, and regulations).

Academia and career progression

Institutional rewards for humanities research is often disconnected from policy and future-thinking. Humanities researchers often lack recognition within their institutions for policy-engaged research. To better collaborate with the government, academia needs to shift its values and reward systems which will help build trust in the relevance of research. (Cf. [The Researcher Development Framework](#) and its inclusion of policy engagement)

4. Examples of Policy Engagement in Practice

The Language Hubs Programme

The Language Hubs programme aims to provide nationwide support for schools teaching languages through a hub model. This involves 15 lead hub schools, each supporting multiple partner schools, with funding allocated annually for their initiatives.

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the Language Hubs programme, led by the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) aims to increase the number of pupils studying a language at GCSE and will encourage pupils to continue to study languages at advanced level, nurturing a lifelong interest in languages.



Cultural Translation and Interpreting Covid-19 risks among London's Migrant Communities



This project examined the flow and translation of Covid-19 information across London's diverse linguistic landscape, including languages such as Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, and Yoruba. It aimed to understand how migrant, ethnic, and minority communities in London receive Covid-19 information and how its cultural context influences their responses and daily practices. This project by the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics & Centre for Translation Studies (SOAS), University of London, was funded by the UKRI and the AHRC and worked with online surveys mainly amongst ethnic and minority communities, focus group interviews, and narratives from collected public information.

Transnationalizing Modern Languages (2014–18)

The Transnationalising Modern Languages (TML) project, funded under the AHRC's Translating Cultures scheme, examined mobility, identity, and translation within modern Italian cultures. By focusing on key instances of Italian mobility, TML explored how these movements shaped global cultural interactions.

Through collaboration with cultural associations, schools, and policy makers, TML investigated heritage, cultural memory, and educational practices. It reframed modern languages as a discipline focused on the interaction of languages and cultures across global networks, highlighting its relevance to contemporary challenges. In partnership with the University of Namibia, TML extended its research into translation and education, demonstrating the practical applications of its findings. You can access the project report [here](#).



Voice21



Voice 21, a UK-based charity, aims to improve students' speaking and listening skills—termed oracy—to enhance their learning and future prospects. By working with schools, Voice 21 integrates oracy into curricula and teaching methods, helping students articulate ideas and engage effectively.

The charity's initiatives, including educator training and oracy curriculum development, have shown that focusing on oracy boosts students' reading progress and confidence in communication. The '[Voicing Vocabulary](#)' report highlighted the benefits of an oracy-centred approach, particularly for disadvantaged students.

Voice 21 advocates for oracy's inclusion in the national curriculum, emphasising its role in reducing educational disparities, improving academic outcomes, and fostering employability and civic engagement

5. Resources and Training

Where to start?

- [Engaging with policymakers as a researcher in the Arts and Humanities: a guide to how, what and why – UPEN](#)(Short UPEN blog by Arlene Holmes-Henderson)
- Introduction to Policy Engagement and ‘how to’ Guide for Researchers by the University of Cambridge
- [AHRC guide to policy engagement for humanities researchers](#)
- Inspiration from researchers already engaging with policy with OPEN:
- [Researcher Stories: Shaping policy on oracy and Classical languages \(youtube.com\)](#)(Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Senior Research Fellow in Classics Education)
- [Researcher Stories: Understanding migration in the UK \(youtube.com\)](#)(Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Oxford Migration Observatory)

How to engage with policy

- [How to engage with policy makers: A guide for academics in the arts and humanities](#) (more detailed guide than the above, by the Institute for Government). Further guides by the IFG can be found [here](#).
- [Research to policy impact: strategies for translating findings into policy messages, University of Oxford](#)
- [Humanities and Policy Engagement. An introduction for researchers, TORCH](#)
- *Storylistening: Narrative Evidence and Public Reasoning*, Sarah Dillon and Claire Craig. The book offers “a theory and practice for gathering narrative evidence that will complement and strengthen, not distort, other forms of evidence, including that from science.” More info [here](#).
- [Communicating evidence to policy makers – what works best?](#) By Caroline Wood (Chartered Institute for Public Relations). Includes case studies of good practice.
- [Communications & engagement – CREDS](#)
- [Languages and Policy: Building Collaborations between Academics and Policymakers](#), Wendy Ayres-Bennett

List of relevant organisations

- UPEN (University Policy Engagement Network)
- AHRC
- UKRI
- British Academy
- ILCS (Institute for Languages, Cultures and Societies)
- HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute)
- Institute for Government
- Cultural institutes (e.g. Goethe Institute for German)

Resources for engaging with the UK Government:

- UKRI 'Engaging with Government' course
- "One-stop shop" to search for research topics that the government is interested in
- Search for research interests under different government departments (Areas of Research Interest or 'ARI's)
- Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit @UKParL_Research; keu@parliament.uk
- Parliament Office of Science and Technology - POST publishes impartial, balanced and peer-reviewed briefings that make evidence research accessible to Parliament, offers training through the POST Fellowship and other schemes, and holds seminars and events for parliamentarians and the public, inter alia (<http://www.post.parliament.uk>; @POST_UK).
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages <https://www.ciol.org.uk/appgml> - a cross-party alliance of MPs with interest in promoting languages
- Search for select committees on areas relating to your work: Find a committee - Committees - UK Parliament
- The Department for Education is running a Language Hubs outreach programme with schools

Further reading on languages and education policy

- [Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Reframing language education for a global future](#) (PolicyBristol, University of Bristol)
- [The Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World](#) (2018)
- [The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages](#) (RAND)
- [‘The demise of modern languages has been greatly exaggerated’](#) by Wendy Ayres-Bennett, Charles Burdett, Emma Cayley
- [‘Teaching modern languages without culture will harm global relations’](#), Charles Burdett
- [‘Is the final nail in the coffin for modern languages?’](#), Patrick Jack
- [Policy Briefings - Modern Languages Leadership Fellow](#)
- [Languages, Society and Policy](#) - A journal connecting research in linguistics and languages, cultures and societies with policy and the public.
- [History and Policy | Connecting historians, policymakers and the media](#) – online journal
- [The Humanities in the UK Today: What’s Going On?](#) (Higher Education Policy Institute)
- [Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills](#) (The British Academy)

Opportunities for funding, policy fellowships, etc.

- AHRC (ESRC has similar schemes)
- UKRI Policy Fellowships (info about the 2023 scheme [here](#))
- UKRI Policy Internships
- British Academy: *Innovation Fellowships Schemes: Route B Policy-Led*

Careers in policy

- Find jobs and tips on the [Civil Service Careers](#) page
- The [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) website has internal vacancies
- [Routes into policy careers for linguists](#) – The Translation Exchange blog, [The Queen's College, Oxford](#)
- Consider exploring policy roles at cultural institutes, [think tanks](#) and [charities](#)