

Policy Engagement for Languages ECRs

How to start and what to expect

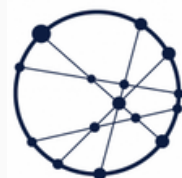
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The Queen's College
Translation Exchange



FACULTY OF
**MEDIEVAL
AND
MODERN
LANGUAGES**



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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." [January 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 prompts about policy relevance, identifying whom to contact, 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 Finding Your Why

As an early career researcher in languages, why should you engage with the policy world?

As an individual researcher, policy engagement can enrich your work and career.

- **Finding meaning:** policy engagement encourages you to think about how your research fits within current debates and policy challenges. The potential to have an impact on the world outside academia by influencing policy can increase your satisfaction and motivation.
- **Acquiring new skills:** policy engagement encourages you to find new ways of communicating your research, from short and actionable reports to audio-visual formats, and to collaborate across disciplines and beyond academia.
- **Funding opportunities:** research councils and foundations such as the AHRC are increasingly looking for research projects that include public and policy engagement.

Policy engagement can also make a meaningful contribution to our discipline by **changing the narrative around language research** and its potential to **address real-world challenges**.

Prompts to start thinking about the policy relevance of your research:

- **Think about the ‘big picture’:** what social issues does your research respond to? What current debates (in civil society and/or the policy world) could it contribute to? What are the real-world implications of your research?
- **Connect it with current policy needs:** research policymakers’ current needs (see part three on current policy trends) and try to connect your current or future research to these needs.
- **Public engagement:** think about a concrete project that engages with the public and could be translated into policy recommendations. Design outputs that are actionable and oriented towards public impact.

1. How to Start with Policy Engagement Contacts

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 work creatively 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.

Further prompts to think about the relevance of languages research:

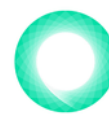
- What is the relevance for policy of Languages as a discipline?
- What is lost without that contribution?
- What are the risks [unintended consequences] of excluding language expertise?
- Make the case for your expertise!



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 advice.

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**
Knowledge Applied



**Bennett Institute
for Public Policy**
Cambridge



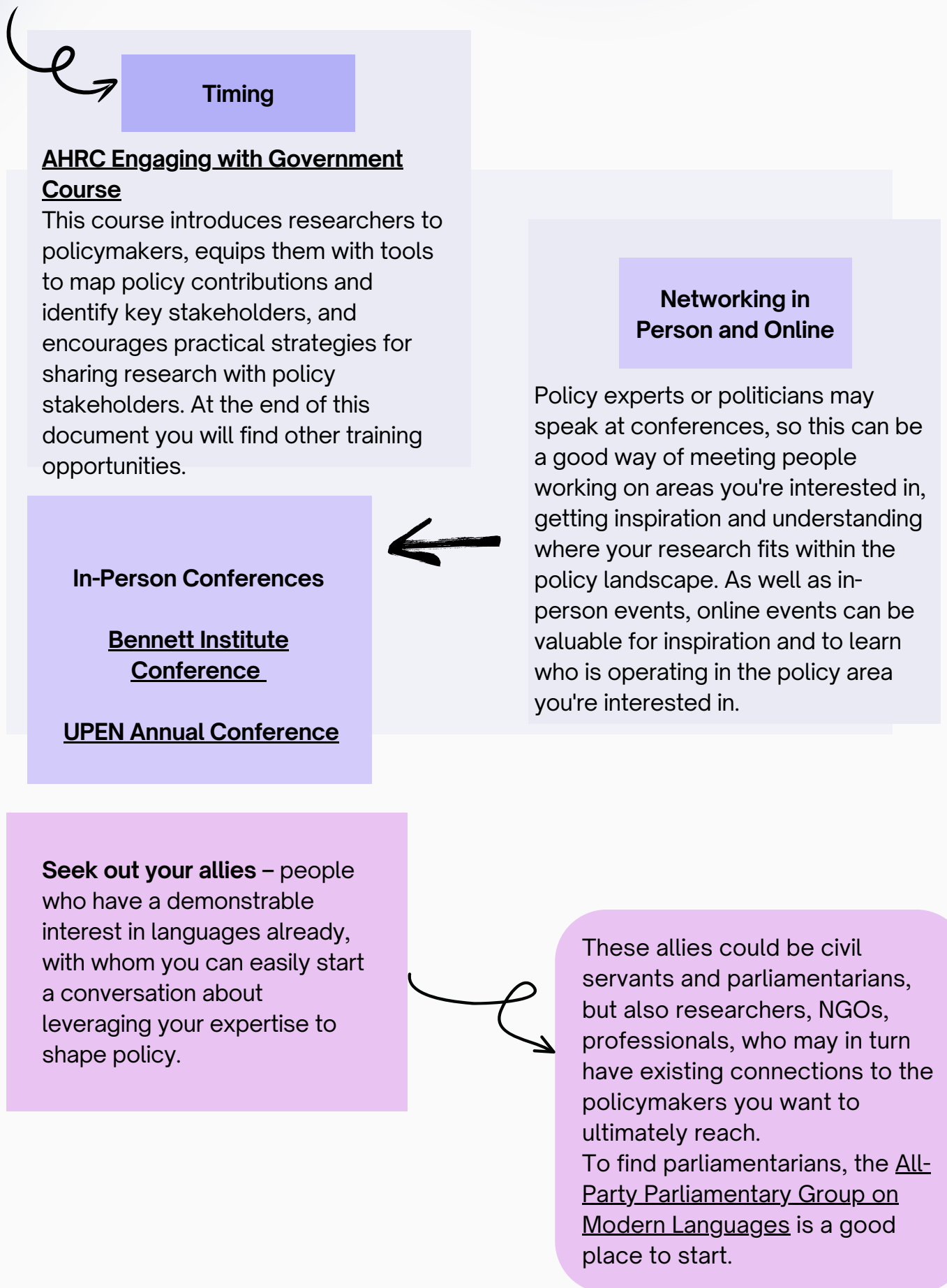
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Additionally, the [British Academy](#), [UPEN](#), and the [AHRC](#) are good first points of contact if you wish to start with Policy Engagement. [The Institute for Government](#) offers [guidelines](#) and introductory training.

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.



2. How to Communicate with Policymakers and Other Stakeholders

The key ingredient for 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 require clear, actionable recommendations based on evidence, and are unlikely to read full academic papers. 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

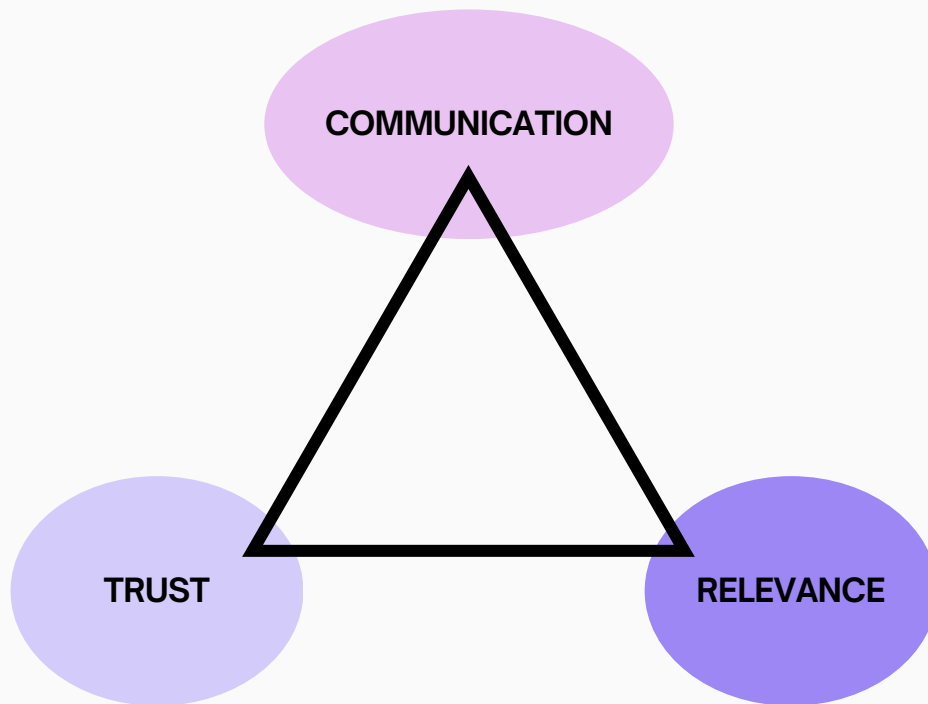
Undergo specific training and seek advice on how to interact with government, such as the resources available on [research impact at the UK Parliament](#).

Expectation Management

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

2.1 Effective Collaborations and Trusted Relationships

The most important ingredients for 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

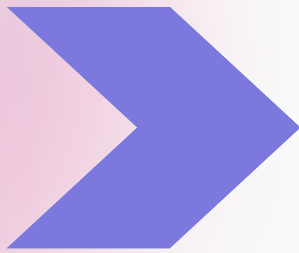
- **Sensitive communication – confidentiality is key**
 - Confidentiality is crucial for both parties. Researchers must trust that stakeholders will not share unpublished findings, while policymakers expect researchers to refrain from disclosing details about ongoing projects. A trusted relationship 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 – 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. These can hinder engagement even if the individuals involved are aware of the value of languages research. Policymakers require swift, evidence-based advice rather than opinions, meaning that researchers often need to produce relevant policy briefings quickly.
- **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.

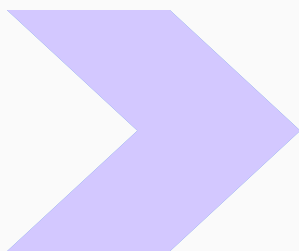
3. Current Trends in the Policy World

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



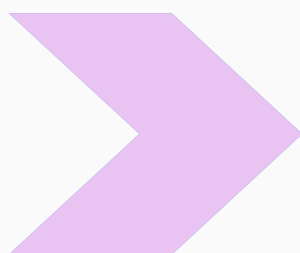
Environmental Issues

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 marginalised members of society), the following issues concerning languages are currently live in the policy community:



Global Languages

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

Home, Heritage and Community Languages

Supporting home, heritage and community languages, expanding beyond the traditional focus on French, German, and Spanish, 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 Key Stages in languages education

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

Innovative Methods

For example, combining languages research with 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

This is not a simple either/or: either adapting to the government's preference for a quantitative approach, or convincing policy stakeholders of the value of qualitative research. Policymakers are generally aware of the advantages of a qualitative approach. But it is important to note that when justifying public expenditure on large-scale projects, quantitative data is necessary.

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).

The relevance of languages to policymaking

Part of our collective work as researchers is to raise awareness of the importance of languages expertise for the policy world. Few policy stakeholders engage with language researchers, often viewing language expertise as limited to translation/interpreting and not recognising 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.

Academia and career progression

Institutional rewards for humanities research are 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 19 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 is led by the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE). It 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 UKRI/AHRC-funded project, based at the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics and the Centre for Translation Studies (part of SOAS University of London), examined the flow and translation of Covid-19 information across London's multilingual communities. This included languages such as Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, and Yoruba. It explored how cultural and linguistic factors shaped the reception of public health communication among migrant, ethnic, and minority communities through online surveys, focus groups, and analyses of public narratives.

Transnationalizing Modern Languages (2014–18)

The Transnationalizing 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](#).



Voice 21



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, Professor of Classics Education and Public Policy)
- [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?](#), 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 - 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

- [Languages, Society and Policy](#) - A journal connecting research in linguistics and languages, cultures and societies with policy and the public
- [Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills](#) (The British Academy)
- [Policy Briefings - Modern Languages Leadership Fellow](#) (AHRC)
- [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 (*Times Higher Education*)
- ‘[Teaching modern languages without culture will harm global relations](#)’, Charles Burdett (*Times Higher Education*)
- ‘[Is AI the final nail in the coffin for modern languages?](#)’, Patrick Jack (*Times Higher Education*)
- [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)

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](#)

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