Getting to 'good': Academic Engagement with Legislatures

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Underpinning research

- Began in 2019 following consultation with the UK's four legislatures

- Driven by desire to know what works, and what doesn't, in knowledge exchange between legislatures and academic researchers

- Connected to HE sector changes (particularly REF and KEF)

- Funded by the ESRC, supported by the UK's legislatures and by Research England

- Data: legislature strategies and evaluations; 62 interviews with legislature officials, University officials, academics and others.

- Outputs: main report, four legislature-specific reports, and blog posts:

  - https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/research-project/evaluating-academic-engagement-uk-legislatures

Successful KE: indicators and barriers

- How is it possible to know KE activities have been successful?
  - Link to REF and REF-defined 'impact'
- Our focus: distinguish KE from impact and explore effectiveness of process
- Barriers:
  - Research is not presented in clear, accessible and appropriate ways for legislatures
  - Research is not directly or obviously relevant to the work of the legislature
  - Lack of knowledge among academic researchers about the role of legislatures, their research needs, and expectations about research impact
  - Inadequate and uncertain recognition of KE activities by HEIs and by legislatures
  - Limited resources (time and funding) allocated for KE

What does 'good' look like?

An engaged legislature:

has a clear KE strategy; actively engages with universities and professional associations to disseminate opportunities for engagement; shares expertise on KE with other legislatures; has dedicated staff time allocated to pursuing and improving KE activities; curates a range of activities to engage academic researchers at different career stages, from different institutions, and from different backgrounds; provides appropriate recognition of academic participation in KE activities; and, monitors characteristics of those participating in KE activities.

An engaged university:

permits and supports fellowships with legislatures; has staff who are committee advisers; allocates dedicated staff time within workload models or other arrangements to facilitate KE; has staff who submit evidence to legislatures and participate in committee hearings; recognises and supports KE in its own right, not solely as a way to achieve impact; has dedicated internal funding opportunities for KE; hosts inward secondments and supports outward secondments; appoints officials from legislatures to steering groups and/or advisory boards; co-authors publications with legislature staff; recognises KE in workload models and in criteria for promotion; and, submits funding bids which include legislative staff as partners.

What does our report mean for universities?

1. Have an institutional strategy for KE

2. Support fellowships of academics places in legislatures and vice versa

3. Build KE time into workload models

4. Support staff to engage with select committees

5. Commit to reducing barriers to engagement for all researchers

6. Recognise and reward engagement, particularly through promotions criteria

7. Have internal funding competitions for projects that engage with parliaments

8. Encourage staff to co-author outputs with parliamentary staff and politicians

9. Fund open access for policy-relevant papers

10. Establish policy impact units

11. Promote and support syntheses of research findings

12. Offer or enable participation in policy impact training

'How universities can improve parliamentary engagement: a 12 point plan' Trasnsforming Evidence (blogpost) by Chris Tyler, Danielle Beswick, Sarah Foxen, Marc Geddes, Abbi Hobbs and David Rose (2020)

Outputs

- Final overarching report: https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/evaluating-academic-engagement-with-uk-legislatures-web.pdf

- Individual reports:

  - UK Parliament: https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/ukparl-iaa-report-final.pdf

  - Scottish Parliament: https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/sp-report-final.pdf

  - Welsh Parliament: https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/final-naw-report-final-eng.pdf (Welsh version available on website)

  - Northern Ireland Assembly: https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/nia-final-report.pdf

- Blogs:

  - How universities can improve parliamentary engagement: a 12-point plan: https://transformure.wordpress.com/2020/06/01/how-universities-can-improve-parliamentary-engagement-a-12-point-plan/ (with C. Tyler, S. Foxen, A. Hobbs and D. Rose)

  - New report on academic engagement with UK legislatures: https://www.upen.ac.uk/blogs/?action=story&id=106

- What next?

  - Marc Geddes is now finalising a report for the Select Committee Team in the House of Commons on what good evidence-gathering looks like (please get in touch for further details)

  - In October 2022, Danielle appeared as expert witness for a Scottish Parliament citizen panel on public engagement. She is currently working with a current UK parliamentary academic fellow on guidance for civil society organisations, aiming to help them to connect their members with parliamentary activities.