



UNIVERSITY OF  
LIVERPOOL

# Policy 101

How policy is made  
and how to influence  
it

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# Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will have:

- Gained understanding of how policy-making works
- Developed insights into how research and evidence is used in policy-making
- Begun to develop a personal policy impact plan

# Structure

- 13.00 Lunch and informal networking
- 13.30 Welcome
- 13.40 How is policy made and how to influence it – Professor Catherine Durose
- 14.10 Q&A
- 14.25 Interactive exercise 1: How to be heard
- 14.45 UoL Policy Engagement film
- 14.50 Interactive exercise 2: Developing a personal policy influence plan
- 15.05 Evaluation form
- 15:10 Next steps
- 15.15 Formal session close
- 15.15 Optional drop-in/ 1-to-1 advice with the Heseltine Institute team
- 15.50 Session close

# Definitions and descriptions of policy

- Whatever governments choose to do or not to do (Dye in Birkland, 2005: 18)
- The actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions (Cochran et al in Birkland, 2005: 183)
- Decisions by governments to retain the status quo are just as much policy as are decisions to alter it (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003: 5).
- Diverse activities by different bodies are drawn together into stable and predictable patterns of action which (as often as not) come to be labelled 'policy' (Colebatch, 1998: x)
- Policy designs are observable phenomena found in statutes, administrative guidelines, court decrees, programs, and even the practices and procedures of street level bureaucrats (Schneider and Ingram, 1997: 2)
- There is an underlying assumption that policy is a good thing, that it fixes things up. Policy makers are the ones who do the fixing (Bacchi, 2009: ix)

(Cairney, 2019, 2-3)

# What is policy?

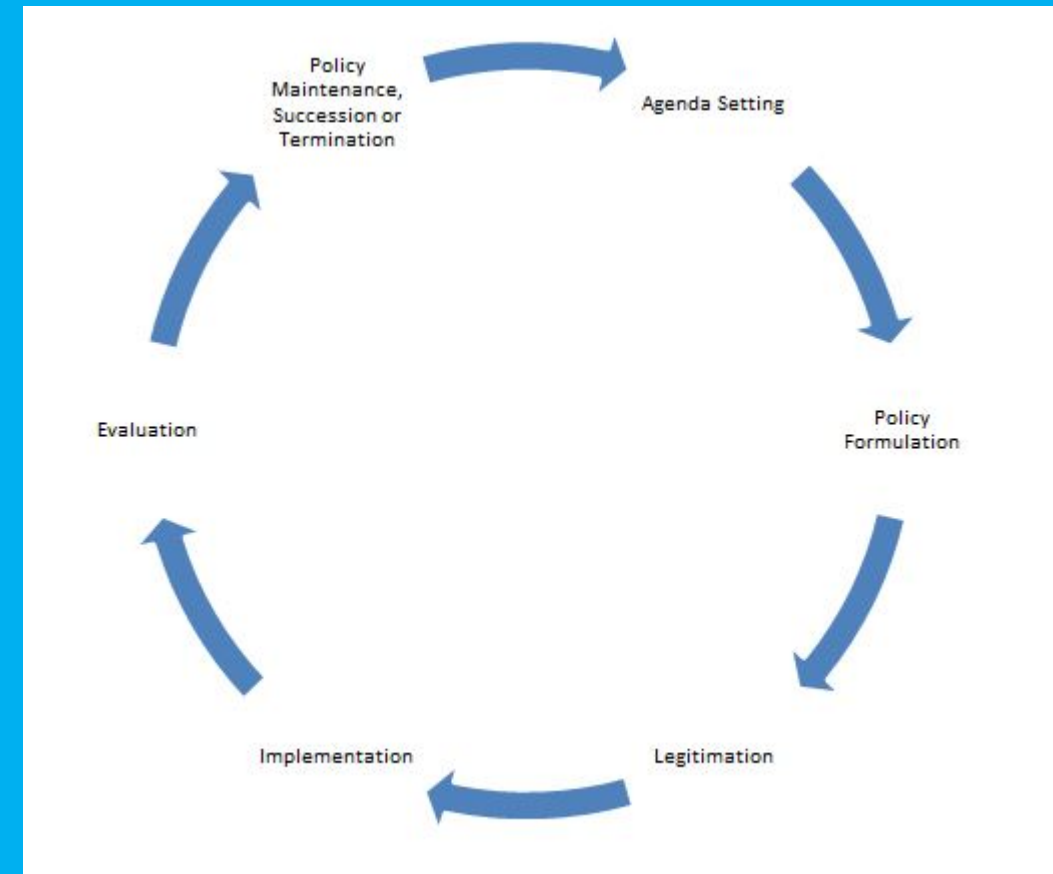
Policy is ‘the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes’ (Cairney, 2023)

But:

- How do governments analyse and make policy?
- Who influences and makes public policy?
- Where do they make policy?

# What is the best way to explain policy-making?

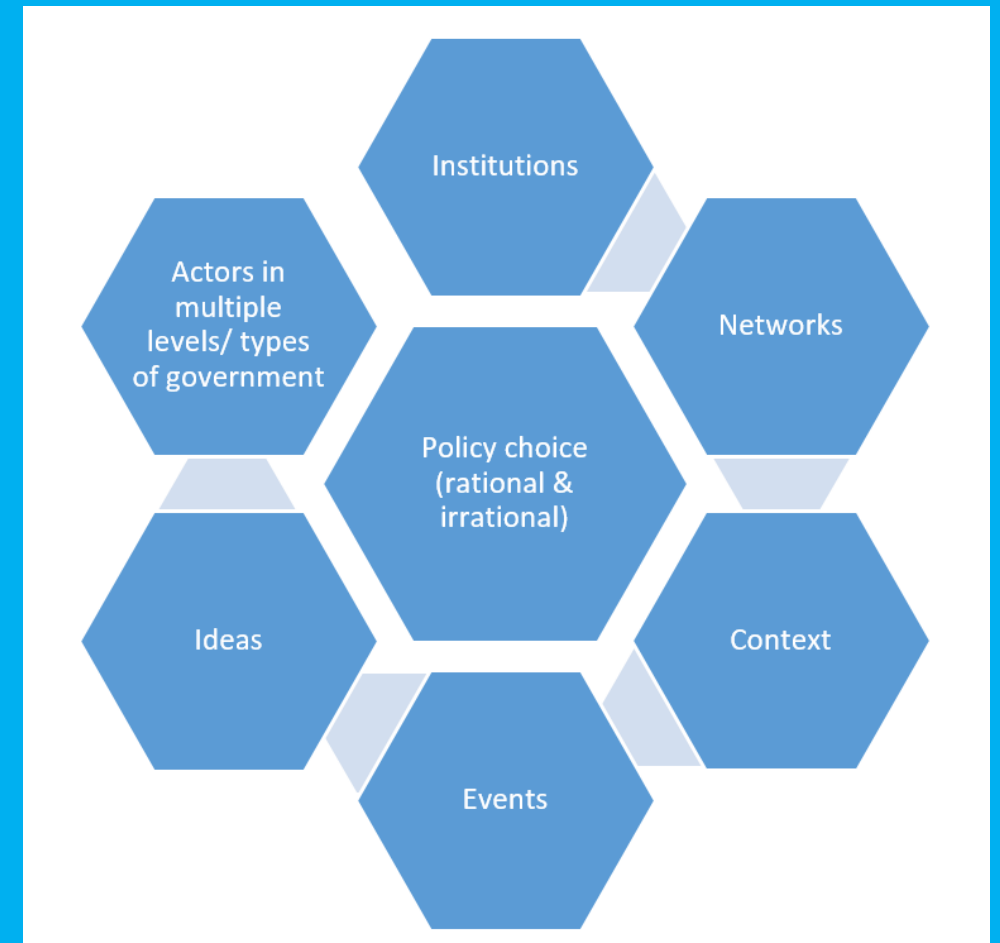
- A classic approach is to break policy-making into stages.
- This is an useful approach: simple, understandable, universal, fluid.
- But it's also inaccurate (Cairney, 2023)



Cairney, 2023

# What is the best way to explain policy-making?

- There are more complicated but better ways to describe policy-making
- Cairney's (2023) image emphasises how policy-makers deliberate and make choices within their policy-making environment.



# Evidence-based policy-making?

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0074rc0/the-thick-of-it-series-1-episode-1> (15.05 to 16.45)



# Evidence-based policy-making

- ‘Evidence-based policy-making’ responds to a perceived need for greater respect for expertise and attention to good-quality evidence.
  - So, arguing that policy-making should be scientific and less ‘seat of your pants’ or ideological.
  - Using a hierarchy of evidence to directly inform practice.
  - Supply side: produce better evidence and communicate it more effectively.
  - Demand side: reform how policymakers process and use evidence
- (Cairney 2023).

# 'How to' support evidence-based policy-making

A systematic review of 'how to' advice in the academic peer-reviewed and grey literatures, led to the following recommendations (Oliver and Cairney 2019):

- (1) Do high quality research;
- (2) Make your research relevant and readable;
- (3) Understand policy processes;
- (4) Be accessible to policymakers: engage routinely, flexible, and humbly;
- (5) Decide if you want to be an issue advocate or honest broker;
- (6) Build relationships (and ground rules) with policymakers;
- (7) Be 'entrepreneurial' or find someone who is;
- (8) Reflect continuously: should you engage, do you want to, and is it working?

# The politics of evidence-based policy-making?

‘Evidence-based policy making is a good slogan, but not a good way to describe the policy-making process’ (Cairney, 2023)

How do we engage with policy-making as it is, and not how it is idealised to be?

We need not only to supply information and build relationships, but to respond to the ways in which policymakers think and demand information (Cairney, 2023).

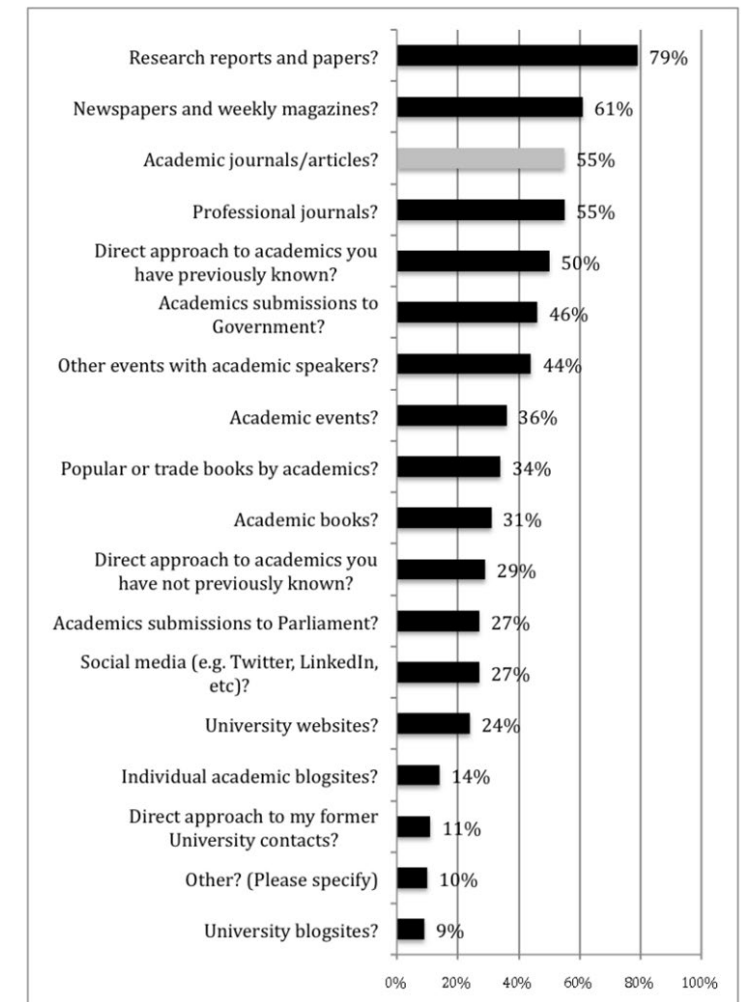


# What evidence do civil servants want?

- Diverse demands on academics, but positive about their role in policy-making.
- A preference for ‘pre-digested results’ of research, but not exclusively.
- Generalised expertise is valued as much or more than specific research.

(Talbot and Talbot, 2014)

Figure 2 Routes for accessing research by policymakers



# Conclusion

- We need to engage with policy-making as it is, rather than the way it is idealised to be.
- Policy choices are often made in imperfect conditions, with imperfect understanding, which mean that policy-makers often have to rely on ‘shortcuts’ (Cairney, 2023).
- A lot of the ‘how to’ advice on supporting evidence-based policy-making only appeals to rational shortcuts: improving the supply and packaging of information, and encouraging relationship-building.
- They ignore the wider political environment of policy-making, and the irrational shortcuts it demands.

# Conclusion

- Responding to this means engaging with how policymakers think and demand information (Cairney, 2023).
- To influence policy also involves framing and persuasion, this could be about working with others with similar ideas, beliefs or agendas
- Or about how to combine scientific information with stories to engage or appeal to policymakers.

**Any questions?**

# Interactive exercise 1

- Read the short piece, [‘How to be heard’](#), and in small groups discuss:
- How could you follow-up on these tips and suggestions to develop policy impact from your research?
- Prepare one key takeaway to share with the wider group



# Interactive exercise 2: developing a personal policy impact plan

- Watch this short University of Liverpool film, where Professor Thomas Fischer reflects on his experience of policy impact.
- Using the provided template begin to develop your own policy impact plan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb07jqw4KRw&list=PL45W8yW3tH7SS0AKvEGOzBAxu7lwSifJt&index=17>

# Next steps

- Evaluation
- Mailing list sign-up
- Drop-in
- Follow-up resources
- UoL Policy Engagement films: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/policy-engagement/>
- Next HI policy impact training session:  
**How to influence Parliament? 22 November 2023, 10-4**  
w/ Sarah Carter-Bell, Knowledge Exchange Manager, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.



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Stokstad, E. (2017) 'How to be heard'. *Science* 355 (6325), 572.

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