# An IMPACKT Policy Toolkit for Academics

## Dion Curry
## Owen Williams

This toolkit is intended to help academics to navigate the world of politics and public policy in the UK. The pressure for academics to produce research that has a wider societal and political impact is increasing, but ways to fully develop and capitalise on the scope and influence that research can have in the wider world are not always clear. This toolkit is by no means exhaustive, but aims to give you an introduction to how policy works at local, regional, national and international levels.

## What level of government is responsible for what key policy issues?

**The European Union**

- Customs, trade and commerce
- Competition rules
- Conservation of marine biological resources

**Shared EU/Member State**

- The internal market
- Some social policy issues
- Economic, social and territorial cohesion
- Agriculture and fisheries
- Environment
- Consumer protection
- Transport
- Energy
- Some freedom, security and justice issues
- Some areas of public health and safety
- Research, technological development and space
- Development cooperation and humanitarian aid

**United Kingdom (Westminster)**

England does not have a devolved administration, unlike other areas of the UK, so some of the following legislative areas of competence are only applicable to England. Parliament may also legislate in areas of devolved competence, but only with the express agreement of each devolved

legislature. After Brexit, the UK government will likely be responsible for additional areas that currently fall under EU or shared competence.

- Business regulation
- Food
- Science and research
- Intellectual property
- Education and skills
- Defence
- Security
- Industrial strategy
- Civil service
- Fire and rescue services
- Housing
- Planning
- Culture, media and sport
- Local government
- Water and flood defence
- Marine policy
- Foreign affairs
- Immigration and nationality
- Climate change
- Agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
- International development
- Employment
- Welfare and pensions
- Health and social care
- Justice and policing
- Constitution
- Economic and financial matters
- Environment
- Transport

**Wales**

The following areas have been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales.

- Agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
- Ancient monuments and historical buildings
- Culture
- Economic development
- Education and training
- Environment
- Fire and rescue services
- Food
- Health and health services
- Highways and transport
- Housing
- Local government
- Public administration
- Social welfare
- Sport and recreation
- Tourism
- Town and country planning
- Water and flood defence
- Welsh language

**Northern Ireland**

- Health and social services
- Education
- Employment and skills
- Agriculture
- Social security
- Pensions and child support
- Housing
- Economic development
- Local government
- Environmental issues and planning
- Transport
- Culture and sport
- Civil service (Northern Ireland)
- Equal opportunities
- Justice and policing

The Northern Ireland Assembly can also legislate in the following areas with the consent of the Secretary of State. However, these powers normally rest with Westminster.

- Firearms and explosives
- Financial services and pension regulation
- Broadcasting
- Import and export controls
- Navigation and civil aviation
- International trade and financial markets
- Telecommunications and postage
- The foreshore and seabed
- Consumer safety
- Intellectual property

**Scotland**

Unlike in Scotland and Northern Ireland, all powers have been devolved in Scotland **except** those specifically reserved to the UK Parliament. Those reserved areas are:

- The Constitution
- Foreign affairs
- Defence
- International development
- The Civil Service
- Financial and economic matters
- Immigration and nationality
- Misuse of drugs
- Trade and industry
- Certain aspects of energy regulation
- Certain aspects of transportation
- Employment
- Social security
- Abortions, genetics, surrogacy and medicines
- Broadcasting
- Equal opportunities

**Local Government (UK)**

The UK also has several tiers of local government that differ in their functions and scope across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Although primarily reliant on funding from the devolved governments (and the UK Parliament in the case of English local government) they deliver services and perform vital functions that are most closely associated with the implementation stage of the policy cycle (see below).

**Local Government (England)**

Most areas of England have two to three tiers of local government represented by County Councils (Tier 1), District, Borough or City Councils (Tier 2) and Parish, Town or Community Councils (Tier 3). Each tier performs increasingly specialised functions ever closer to the electorate. Occasionally, certain areas will only have one tier of government, represented by either unitary authorities, London boroughs or metropolitan boroughs. These perform all the functions of the other three tiers combined:

| County Councils (Tier 1) | District Councils Borough Councils City Councils (Tier 2) | Parish Councils Town Councils Community Councils (Tier 3) | Unitary Authorities London Boroughs Metropolitan Boroughs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education | Rubbish collection | Allotments | All powers of Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 |
| Transport | Recycling | Public clocks | |
| Planning | Council Tax collection | Bus shelters | |
| Fire and public safety | Housing | Community centres | |
| Social care | Planning applications | Play areas/equipment | |

| Libraries | Grants to local organisations |
|---|---|
| Waste management | Consultation on neighbourhood planning |
| Trading standards | |
| Economic development | |

## Local Government (Wales)

There are only two tiers of local government in Wales represented by unitary authorities in the form of County and County Borough Councils (Tier 1) and Town and Community Councils (Tier 2). Their functions are as follows:

| County Councils County Borough Councils (Tier 1) | Town Councils Community Councils (Tier 2) |
|---|---|
| Trading standards | Allotments |
| Libraries | Community centres |
| Leisure and tourism | Bus shelters |
| Environmental health | Public information signs |
| Refuse and recycling | Play areas/equipment |
| Transport and highways | Grants to local organisations |
| Housing | Consultation on neighbourhood planning |
| Education | Footpaths |
| Social services | Lighting |
| Economic development | |

## Local Government (Scotland)

Similar to Wales, there are also only two tiers of local government in Scotland, represented by unitary authorities called Councils (Tier 1) and Community Councils (Tier 2). Their functions are also very similar:

| Councils (Tier 1) | Community Councils (Tier 2) |
|---|---|
| Education | Allotments |
| Social care | Community centres |
| Highways and transport | Bus shelters |
| Economic development | Public information signs |
| Housing | Play areas/equipment |
| Planning | Grants to local organisations |
| Environmental protection | Consultation on neighbourhood planning |
| Waste management | Footpaths |
| Cultural and leisure services | Lighting |
| Trading standards | |

**Local Government (Northern Ireland)**

In Northern Ireland there is only one tier of local government in the form of Councils. These deliver a smaller range of services from their counterparts elsewhere in the UK:

| Councils | | |
|---|---|---|
| Most planning | Cultural and leisure services | Building regulations |
| Economic development | Community centres | Public conveniences |
| Waste management | Street cleaning | |
| Recycling | Tourism | |
| Environmental protection | Heritage | |

## How is Policy Made?

The policy-making process is complex and multi-dimensional, taking place over a long period of time and several overlapping stages.

**Figure 3.1 – The Policy Cycle**
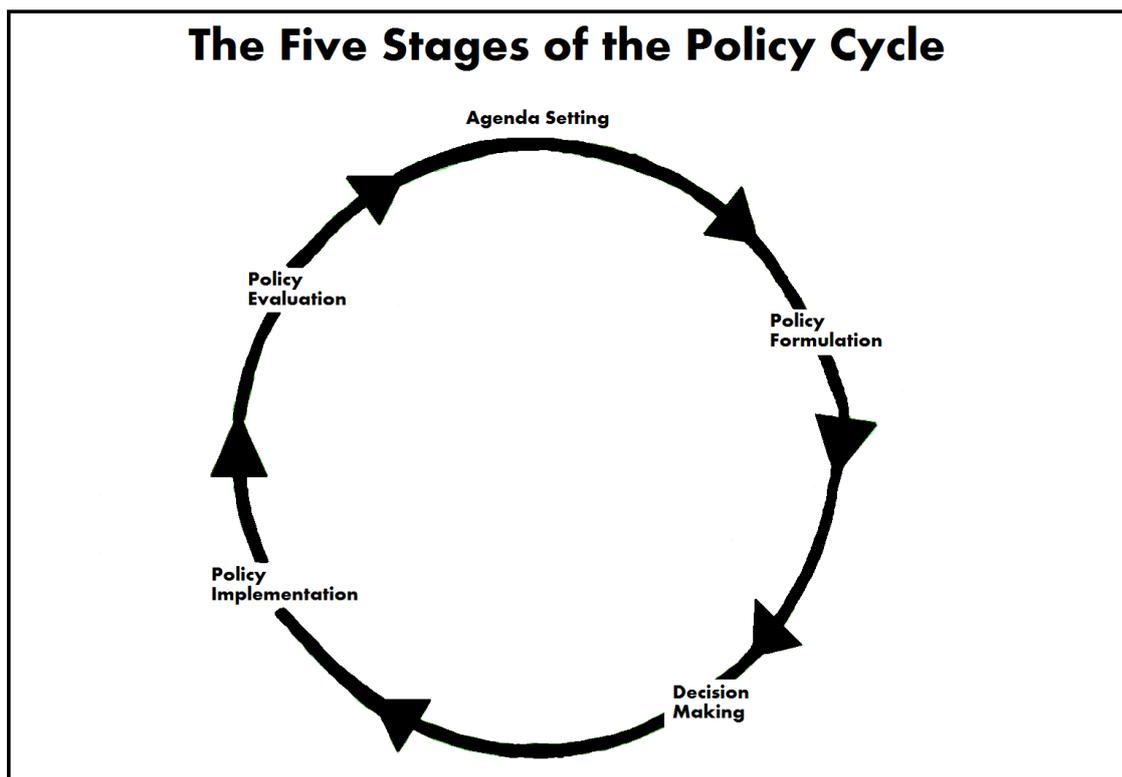


Taken from Curry (2015). *Network Approaches to Multi-Level Governance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. Adapted from Howlett, Ramesh and Perl, 2009.

The policy cycle is an elegant but somewhat reductive way of understanding how policy is made. It draws a clear through-line between the conception of a policy problem, the development of policy goals, formulation of policy options and delivery of a chosen option that meets the policy goals.

*Agenda Setting*

In order for policies to be developed, the government must first be made aware of the issue. If the issue is not on the policy agenda, a policy will not be developed. Often times, agendas are set, or at least influence, by *policy entrepreneurs* who operate both within and outside politics to push certain agendas. However, all types of actors, from government to individual citizens to interest groups to business and more can influence the policy agenda. These may take the form of important government officials, influential think tanks, or key non-governmental organisations and actors. In addition, *policy windows* act to facilitate the introduction of some issues onto the agenda. For instance, key international climate change forums can push environmental issues more prominently onto the agenda, or tragedies and crises like plane crashes, environmental disasters or terrorist activities may also influence the agenda. Kingdon identified three 'streams' of that have to interact to push something into a prominent place on the agenda. First, the *problem* stream identifies issues as central or prominent and affects the perception of the salience of the issue in the public's mind. Second, the *policy* stream ensures that there are experts and policy-makers looking at the problem and proposing solutions. Finally, the *political* stream ensures that there is governmental will, public support and sufficient political interest in tackling the issue. **Academics can play a key role in getting policy initiatives on the agenda by engaging with politicians, media and the public about the relevance and impact of their research.**

*Policy Formulation*

After an issue is introduced on the policy agenda, different ways of dealing with the issue and potential solutions start to be developed. Numerous actors can still be involved at the formulation stage, although fewer actors are involved than at the agenda-setting stage. Key actors include political and bureaucratic actors who start to shape the potential policy solutions. During formulation, evidence is first appraised and then followed by discussion and deliberation on this evidence. Policy options are then formulated and consolidated. Policy options also face constraints, which may be substantive and endemic to the policy issue itself (for instance, climate change policies are limited by our current scientific knowledge of the problem, or reducing poverty or providing additional services are constrained by financial considerations) or procedural (i.e. limited by the structure and form of the government and how legislation is passed or policy adopted). Policy-makers may use different *policy instruments* to develop policy solutions. These include but are not limited to informational campaigns (e.g. smoking cessation advertisements and information, or development of performance indicators and benchmarks), binding legal instruments (regulation or laws about the issue), financial tools (e.g. the introduction of carbon taxes, or tax breaks for businesses to encourage economic growth) or organisational change (e.g. privatisation of certain industries, or the creation of a Department for Exiting the European Union to deal with policy issues that arose after the Brexit vote). Evidence-informed policy-making is becoming a key initiative in policy-making. **Academics can be important in formulating policy options by presenting or submitting evidence and engaging with politicians on potential solutions to policy problems.**

*Decision-Making*

After a number of policy options have been developed, a decision must be made about what solution to choose. Except in case of direct democracy such as referenda or plebiscites, decision-making tends to involve the fewest number of actors and is usually limited to politicians and others

with formal public decision-making powers. Often, non-decisions or retention of the status quo can also be seen as a policy decision.

*Implementation*

Once a policy direction has been chosen, it needs to be carried out, also known as the implementation phase. Notably, the actors involved in implementing the policy are often different from the ones who have decided the policy. For instance, public servants, local governmental levels or even non-governmental actors may be required to implement decisions that were made by higher governmental levels. Implementation is not always straightforward either, as original policy goals may be displaced or distorted when it is put into practice, and there may be unintended consequences to the policy that were unforeseen.

*Evaluation*

Policies are not static and may change over time due to political, technical or other factors. In addition, policies may not effectively address the policy problem, or may not meet the policy goals as they were originally stated, or the policy goals themselves may have changed. Therefore, once a policy has been implemented it must be evaluated. These evaluations may be carried out at the behest of the government or independently, and they may be conducted by governments themselves or they may be carried out by think tanks, non-governmental organisations, pressure groups or citizen groups. Policy evaluation also acts as a chance to learn from previous policy decisions, and as such fits into the policy cycle as it performs an adaptive role in developing the next iteration of policy in the area. Policy evaluation goes deeper than judging a policy as a 'success' or a 'failure', as success or failure are often political designations themselves. For instance, a successful policy for a Conservative government may look very different to a successful Labour policy. Policies can be evaluated on several grounds. First, they may be evaluated administratively, which mainly focuses on efficiency questions and whether the policy is 'value for money'. Second, judicial evaluations look at the legality of policy choices. Third, evaluations may be of a political nature, which are more often based on normative considerations of what people think a politically 'good' option is. These evaluations provide policy feedback and can result in a continuation of the policy, a reform to the policy or complete termination. Many policies are reformed over time, with complete success and complete failure rarer. **Academics can play an important role in evaluating policy, as the push for evidence-informed policy-making requires a higher level of expertise in evaluating the outcomes of policy. However, care should be taken as these evaluations can also be used to political ends that drift from the evidence-informed approach adopted by academics.**

## Key Committees

**UK**

Committees conduct a significant proportion of policy discussion and investigation within both the House of Commons and House of Lords. Commons select committees, which produce inquiries and reports on a variety of topics, are particularly relevant to academics for their potential to produce policy ideas and recommendations.

A full list of House of Commons select committees can be found at
http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/

Some of the key select committees that have clear connections to academic research include:

- Science and Technology Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/)
- Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-energy-industrial-strategy/)
- Culture, Media and Sport Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/)
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Sub-Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-sub-committee/)
- Health Committee (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/)
- Transport Committee (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/)
- International Development Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/)
- International Trade Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-trade-committee/)
- Justice Committee (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/)
- Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
  (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-and-constitutional-affairs-committee/)

**Wales**

Committees within the National Assembly for Wales, as with the other devolved legislatures, operate in a similar manner to committees within the UK Parliament.

A full list of National Assembly for Wales committees can be found at
http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/committees.aspx

Committees with clear connections to academic research include:

- Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
  (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=444)

- Constitutional & Legislative Affairs Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=434)
- Culture, Welsh Language & Communications Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=445)
- Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=446)
- Equality, Local Government & Communities Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=447)
- External Affairs & Additional Legislation Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=449)
- Health, Social Care & Sport Committee (http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/committees/Pages/Committee-Profile.aspx?cid=448)

**Northern Ireland**

A full list of Northern Ireland Assembly committees can be found at http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/

Committees with clear connections to academic research include:

- Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/agriculture-environment-and-rural-affairs/)
- Communities Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/communities/)
- Economy Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/economy/)
- Education Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/education/)
- Health Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/health/)
- Infrastructure Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/infrastructure/)
- Justice Committee (http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/justice/)

**Scotland**

A full list of Scottish Parliament committees can be found at http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/committees.aspx

Committees with clear connections to academic research include:

- Culture, Tourism, Europe & External Relations Committee (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/european-committee.aspx)

- Delegated Powers & Law Reform Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/delegated-powers-committee.aspx)
- Economy, Jobs & Fair Work Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/economy-committee.aspx)
- Education & Skills Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/education-committee.aspx)
- Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/environment-committee.aspx)
- Equalities & Human Rights Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/Equalities-Human-Rights-Committee.aspx)
- Finance & Constitution Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/Finance-Constitution-Committee.aspx)
- Health & Sport Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/health-committee.aspx)
- Justice Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/justice-committee.aspx)
- Local Government & Communities Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/local-govt-committee.aspx)
- Rural Economy & Connectivity Committee
  (http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/rural-committee.aspx)

# Research Services

Each legislative institution of the UK and devolved regions operates its own, impartial and independent research service to provide factual information and statistics concerning key legislation and general subjects of interest to elected members and their support staff. The briefing papers produced offer potential agenda setting devices that may influence, and be influenced by, topics that interest policymakers themselves.

**UK (Westminster)**

Operated by the House of Commons Library, the Commons Library Service produces a large range of briefing papers summarising key facts and impartial analysis of legislation proceeding through Parliament, in addition to subjects of more general interest that impact upon policy

A full list of topics explored by the service can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/topics/topical-issues.htm

**Wales**

The Assembly Research Service operates in a similar manner to Commons Library Service and research services within the other devolved institutions but focuses more explicitly on topics of interest to Assembly Members

A full list of subjects can be found at http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/research/Pages/ResearchDocuments.aspx

**Scotland**

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) operates as the independent research service supporting elected members with research briefings and statistics in the Scottish Parliament.

A full list of subjects covered by SPICe can be found at http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/18457.aspx

**Northern Ireland**

The Northern Irish Assembly has its own equivalent to the other research services in the form of the Research and Information Service (RaISe).

A full list of RaISe publications can be found at http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/research-and-information-service-raise/research-publications/

**Further Reading**

Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (2004). *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bardach, E. and Patashnik, E. (2016). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. London: Sage.

Buonanno, L. and Nugent, N. (2013). *Policies and Policy Processes of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Cairney, P. (2012). *Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Curry, D. (2015). *Network Approaches to Multi-Level Governance: Structures, Relations and Understanding Power Between Levels*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dodds, A. (2013). *Comparative Public Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Dorey, P. (2014). *Policy Making in Britain*. London: Sage.

Howlett, M., Ramesh, M. and Perl, A. (2009). *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kenealy, D., Peterson, J. and Corbett, R. (2015). *The European Union: How Does It Work?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knill, C. and Tosun, J. (2012). *Public Policy: A New Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moran, M. (2015). *Politics and Governance in the UK*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morphet, J. (2014). *How Europe Shapes British Public Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Pal, L. (2014). *Beyond Policy Analysis*. Scarborough: Nelson.

De Vries, M. (2016). *Understanding Public Administration*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wallace, H., Pollack, M. and Young, A. (2015). *Policy-Making in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.