

# Policy 101

How policy is made  
and how to influence  
it

Catherine Durose

Professor of Public Policy, Co-Director Heseltine Institute

May 2024

# 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

14.00 Welcome

14.05 How is policy made and how to influence it – Professor Catherine Durose

14.30 Q&A

14.45 Interactive exercise 1: How to be heard

15.00 Interactive exercise 2: Nurturing policy impact

15.15 Interactive exercise 3: Developing a personal policy influence plan

15.30 Formal session close

Informal 1-2-1 follow-up

# What is policy?

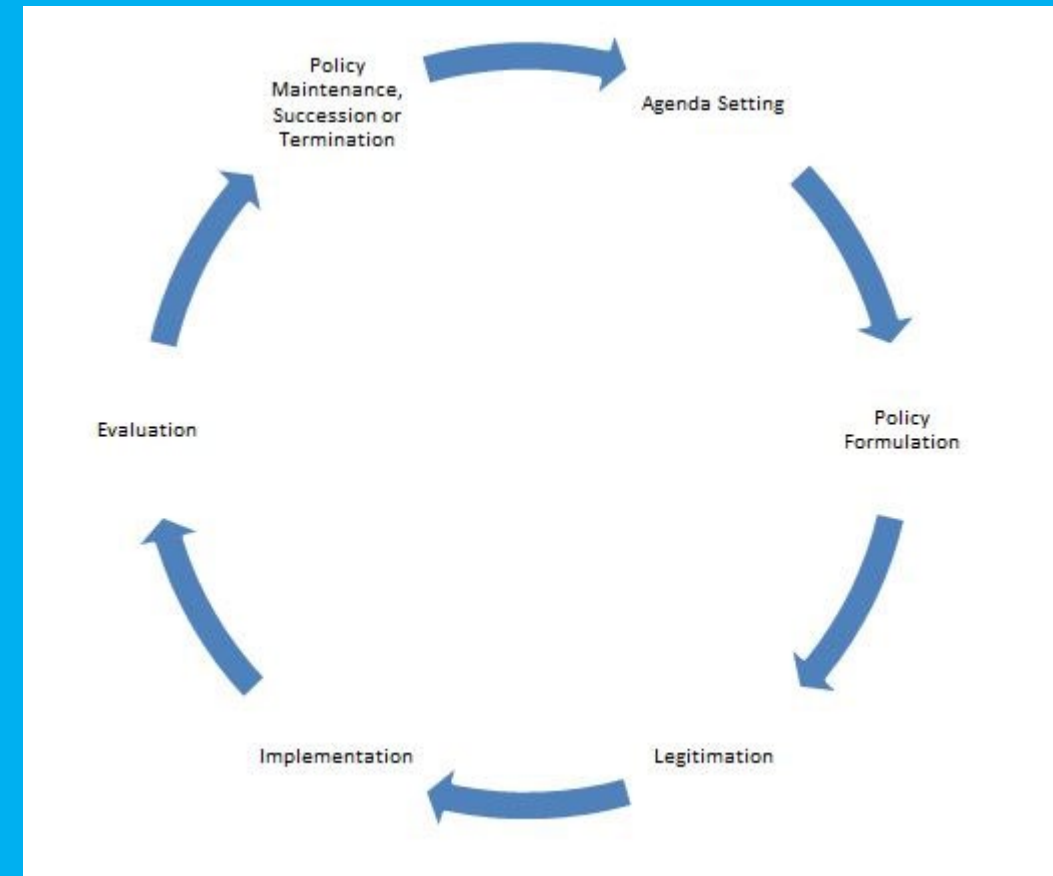
Policy is ‘the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes’ (Cairney, 2023)

But:

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

# How is policy made?

- 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

# 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, identified 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?

# Evidence-based policy-making?

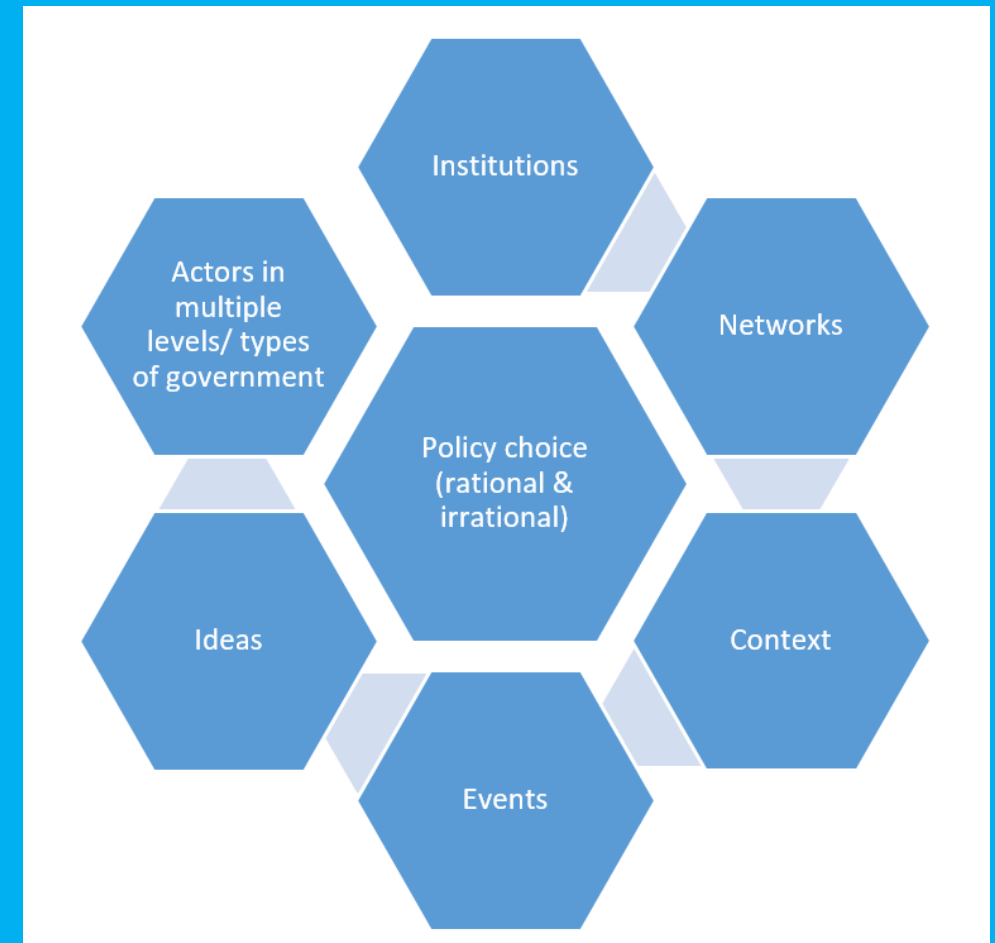
Heseltine Institute  
for Public Policy,  
Practice and Place





# Understanding policy-making as it is

- The policy cycle is simple, but it's also inaccurate
- 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.
- Often relying on 'shortcuts'



# 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?

- Be pragmatic
- Understand the shortcuts that policy-makers rely upon
- Pay attention to framing and persuasion

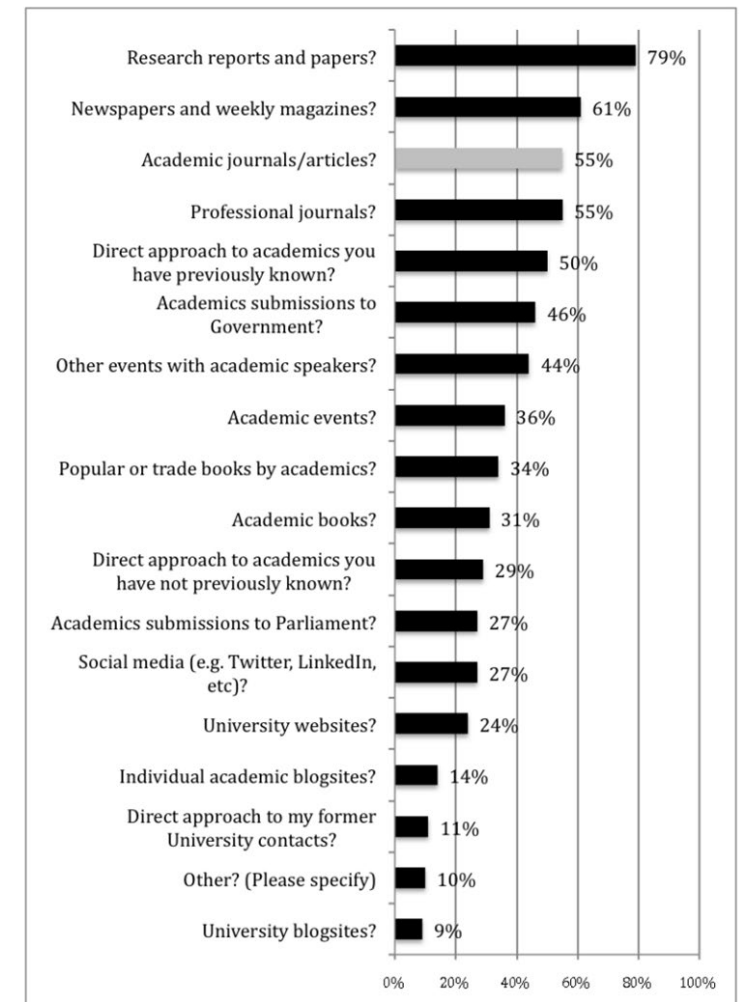


# What evidence do civil servants want?

- 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

- Policy-makers are positive about the contribution that academics and their research can make to informing and shaping policy.
- There is a lot of helpful guidance on how best to meet that demand, often focusing on the packaging of our research and building relationships.
- But we also need to engage with policy-making as it is, rather than the way it is idealised to be.
- This means we need to put ourselves in the place of policy-makers and recognise that the evidence doesn't speak for itself, but needs to be framed and persuasive in ways that appeal to what policy-makers need.

**Any questions?**

# Interactive exercise 1: How to be heard

- 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: Nurturing policy engagement

- Watch these two short clips sharing different stories of seeking policy impact
- What resonates here for you?

# Interactive exercise 3: Developing your policy impact plan

- Using the provided template begin to develop your own policy impact plan.



# References

Cairney, P. (2023) *Understanding public policy: theories and issues*. Third edition. Bloomsbury.

Cairney, P. (2017) 'The politics of evidence-based policy-making'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.268

Oliver, K. and Cairney, P. (2019) 'The dos and don'ts of influencing policy: a systematic review of advice to academics'. *Palgrave Communications* 5, 21 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0232-y>

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

Talbot, C. and Talbot, C. (2014) *Sir Humphrey and the professors: What does Whitehall want from academics?* Manchester: Policy@Manchester.

# Resources

Heseltine Institute  
for Public Policy,  
Practice and Place

[Heseltine Institute policy impact training](#)

[University of Liverpool policy engagement hub](#)



# CONTACT

Catherine Durose

[catherine.durose@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.durose@liverpool.ac.uk)

Heseltine Institute  
for Public Policy,  
Practice and Place

