

Academic-Policy Engagement:  
How-To Guides

# Policy Outputs

## How-To Guide



# Policy Outputs

This guide offers practical and pragmatic advice on how to inform policymakers and better explain the significance of your research. These resources are perfect for anyone seeking to improve their policy writing skills. Readers will learn more about writing to support policy development, covering both what policymakers expect and how to provide the information they really need, with a focus on policy briefs, Select Committee written evidence and blogs.

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# Chapter 1. Policy Briefs

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# The role of policy briefs

A policy brief is a concise, standalone publication that focuses on a particular issue requiring policy attention” in our case, based on academic research.

A note on terminology: There is no one universal term used to describe documents that summarise academic evidence and contextualise it for policy issues and recommendations. Depending on the organisation, you may see the terms ‘policy brief,’ ‘policy paper,’ ‘research briefing,’ ‘evidence note,’ ‘briefing note,’ ‘research summary,’ etc. used interchangeably.

## Writing a policy brief can help you to:

- Inform policymakers (convey information) about an issue
- Act as a ‘hook’ for other activities (such as a policy roundtable event or meeting)
- Persuade policymakers to follow a certain course of action
- Extend the audience of research beyond the academic community
- Demonstrate your research credentials or build your reputation

# Writing an effective policy brief

## Things to consider before writing a policy brief

### *Target audience*

If you want your policy brief to generate impact, you need to consider which policymakers and stakeholders have influence in any given situation. There are visible decision makers – Government Ministers, politicians, parliamentarians and civil servants. There are also ‘hidden’ policymakers who also influence and shape policy such as lobby groups, campaigners, charities, think tanks and even academics.

## Intended outcomes

What kind of outcomes do you want your brief to achieve?

**Influencing individual policymakers' behaviours and attitudes:** Key decision-makers change rhetoric in public and private.

**Decision-making (legislation):** Introduction or change of legislation; budgetary commitments.

**Contributing to the development of policy, or a change in policy:** Research evidence is used to better understand the nature of a policy problem or to develop effective policy solutions; change in direction or withdrawal of policy; increased attention paid to issue by policymakers.

**New items appear in political discussions and in the media:** Influencing public debate or changing what is driving the national conversation could be an important objective, even if it does not lead to an immediate change in policy.

**Implementation of commitments:** A new technology or intervention is adopted; the quality accessibility, acceptability or cost-effectiveness of a public service has been improved; research is used to change current processes or services or identify new services to be provided.

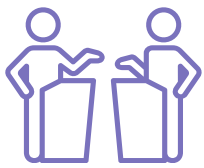
## Policy context

For the reader to act on the policy brief, the brief needs to be useful, and relevant to what is on the policy agenda. Check:

- **House of Commons Library briefings:** Provide an overview of the history of relevant policy decisions, as well as views of stakeholders (NGOs, lobby groups and media stories etc.).
- **POSTnotes:** these cover emerging areas of research which may well be of interest to policy audiences in the near future.
- **Upcoming Parliamentary debates, the media, NGO/think tank/charity websites:** find public or policy debates to 'hook' the brief on a topical issue to maximise its relevance. Media platforms to check include Radio 4 programmes such as Today/PM/The Westminster Hour or Think Tanks such as the Institute for Government/UKICE/Tony Blair Institute).



## Indicators of success



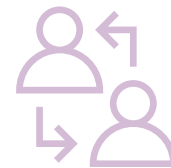
Whether policy debate was stimulated



Tracking if policy decisions were informed by research



The proposal of new legislation



Engagement with policymakers

# Formatting your policy brief

Writing a policy brief is not ‘dumbing down’ your research, rather it is about writing in plain English for non-specialist audiences. Writing a concise, well-formatted policy brief will help to overcome some of the reasons why policymakers may not read your brief, which include time pressures, academic articles behind paywalls, or lack of scientific training.

## Structure

Item	Description
Title	Keep it short and snappy
Summary	Pull out the 3-5 most important points of the brief
Introduction and policy context	Short statement of the problem/question the brief is answering, link to a policy need and landscape
Key research finding	List the key findings from the evidence that link to the policy issue
Policy recommendations	Develop recommendations based on the evidence and policy context
Challenges and solutions	Explore any challenges and potential solutions
Next steps	Where do you go from here? What further research is needed?
Endnotes/citations	Include your references at the end
Contact information	Make sure people can contact you

# Tips for writing a policy brief

Tip	Description
Concise and focused	Short and to the point, limit of 4 pages
Emphasise implications	Focus on meaning, how does this answer the policy questions
Understandable	Minimise jargon but do not 'dumb it down'
Visually appealing	Use design elements (subheadings to break up large blocks of text) and figures, diagrams or images that amplify the written content

## Generating engagement with your policy brief

You can share your brief with policymakers through publishing online, targeted emails, social media, blogs, media activity or a publication event or webinar.

A policy brief in and of itself is not going to lead to impact. It is the engagement **around** a brief that will increase the likelihood of policy impact. Where possible, researchers should strive to **co-produce** policy briefs with the intended end-users and stakeholders, as opposed to simply writing the brief and then 'disseminating' it.



## Co-producing a policy brief

If you want to increase the likelihood that your policy brief will be taken up by policy audiences, consider co-producing the brief with relevant stakeholders. Co-production in policymaking describes academic and policy actors 'with different types of knowledge working together to contribute to a collaborative decision-making process' (Goulart & Falanga, 2022).

## The benefits of co-producing a policy brief include:

- improved knowledge-generation that merges practice-centred, political and technical knowledge; enhanced validity of policy recommendations
- increased ownership over the policymaking process
- development of meaningful relationships between researchers and policymakers

# Methods for co-producing a policy brief



## Identify collaborators

1. Identify stakeholders and partners who are involved in similar subject areas



## Determine the policy context and issue

2. Use calls, meetings, surveys, focus groups or workshops to determine what the particular policy issue is, the context ‘on the ground’ and how your evidence can help answer key questions, or develop policy recommendations



## Decide on a format

3. Identify what the best format, structure is and how it could lead to next steps – are there upcoming meetings, consultations, debates, events, projects?

## Draft the brief

4. Offer partners the opportunity to take ownership of particular sections, write a first draft based on discussions with partners or use an online platform like Sharepoint or Google Docs

## Peer review

5. Circulate for revisions and consensus

## Dr Joanne Littlefair, Lecturer in Biological Sciences, School of Biological and Behavioural Sciences

Dr Littlefair received Queen Mary Impact Fund money for a project on “Integrating airborne DNA technologies into protected species monitoring strategies and legislation.” She hosted an in-person workshop with technical leads from several governmental organisations to explore how her research findings could be integrated into existing biodiversity and air pollution monitoring programmes. With her participants, Dr Littlefair co-produced a cross-agency technical white paper outlining a roadmap for the incorporation of Queen Mary research into national monitoring programmes.



# Further Reading

## Parliamentary and Governmental Resources

- Government Statistical Service: [Guide on effective tables and graphs in official statistics](#)
- NIHR Policy Impact Unit in Behavioural Science: [Research engagement with policy makers: A practical guide to writing policy briefs](#)
- Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology: [How to Write a Policy Briefing](#)
- UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly and Welsh Parliament: [Writing for a Parliamentary Audience](#)

## Higher Education Institute Resources

- University of Sussex: [Guidelines on how to write a research or policy briefing](#)
- University of Bristol: ['Short and Sweet'](#) examples of research translated into briefings
- Cambridge University science and Policy Exchange: [Recording of a Policy Writing Workshop](#) with Dr Andrew Kaye, Government Office of Science

# Chapter 2. Select Committee Written Evidence Submissions

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# The role of Select Committees

Parliamentary Select Committees are a mechanism for Parliament to conduct investigative reports, launch inquiries and hold the Government to account.

Select Committees are usually made up of 11-12 members with administrative support provided by Clerks. Committees can conduct short, narrowly focused investigations or investigate broad, long-term issues. Committee meetings are open to the public to watch, either in person in Parliament or online at [parliamentlive.tv](http://parliamentlive.tv).



The Commons Select Committees shadow each government department and examine spending, policies and administration. Some Committees, such as the Public Accounts and Environmental Audit Committees operate across departments. There are also Joint Committees which include Members from both Houses (e.g. Human Rights, National Security Strategy).



Lords Select Committees do not shadow the work of government departments. Instead, there are permanent committees that cover broad subject areas (e.g. the Constitution Committee, Economic Affairs Committee) and special inquiry committees (e.g. AI in Weapon Systems Committee, Horticultural Sector Committee) that are temporarily established to investigate a specific current issue.

## Case Study: Prof Meg Russell (The Constitution Unit, UCL) and Dr Daniel Gover (School of Politics and International Relations, QMUL)

Throughout 2018, Professor Russell and Dr Gover provided written and oral evidence to the House of Lords Constitution Committee on the 'Legislative Process inquiry.' They first submitted written evidence. Based on their expertise on the UK parliament and constitution they were also invited to provide oral evidence to the Committee. Their written and oral evidence was cited in the Committee's report and some of their recommendations were supported in the government's response.

# The Select Committee inquiry process

One of the main ways Select Committees operate is through inquiries where they examine a particular area and then produce a report, which the government responds to.



## Inquiry launch

Once a Committee chooses a subject to investigate, they issue a 'call for evidence' and terms of reference which sets out the key areas on which the Committee wishes to receive evidence (similar to research questions).

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## Written evidence

The public is invited to respond to the call for evidence and terms of reference in the form of written evidence/submission.

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## Oral evidence

Committees hold public meetings where they interview a panel of invited experts and senior government officials.

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## Report

The Committee produces a report setting out what they have learned from the written and oral evidence gathered during the inquiry and the recommendations they have for the government.

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## Government response

The Government is obliged to issue a response to the Committee's report. The response will outline whether they will take any of the Committee's recommendations forward and if not, why. The Committee may follow up to the Government's response and the report may be debated in its respective House.

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# Engaging with Select Committees

To identify which committees in Parliament are most relevant to you, inquiries accepting written evidence, and upcoming oral evidence sessions you can start by checking the Committee [website](#). The Knowledge Exchange Unit's [weekly roundup](#) of newly launched inquiries and opportunities to engage with parliament is a useful email update to subscribe to.

## Why submit written evidence?

While it is a good opportunity to inform or influence the committee's thinking on the topic in question, you can also raise awareness of either your specific research findings or the wider evidence base. After submitting written evidence you could be invited to give oral evidence, which would enable you to have a more in-depth discussion with the committee, or be cited in their report. There is no need to expect a specific reference to your written evidence, you can still have influence, even if you are not directly mentioned.

## Structuring written evidence

### **Introduction**

Outline your role, your expertise and your contact details. This contextualises why you are interested in the topic and what knowledge and experience you or your co-authors bring.

### **Executive summary**

Set out your key points and key recommendations in bullet point form and in less than a page. This is particularly useful if the committee has received a lot of pieces of written evidence.

### **Core of response**

Use subheadings, bullets and numbered paragraphs to structure your responses in line with the terms of reference and to make it easier for you to cross-reference different sections. This can allow the committee to quickly identify your views on the topics on which they are seeking evidence. Aim for the core of the response to be as succinct as possible (less than 2000 words or 5 sides of A4 paper); short sentences and paragraphs will make your submission easier to read.

It can be helpful to use a template or formula to structure your writing:

- **Topic sentence:** Sentence that expresses the main point of the paragraph.
- **Explain/example:** Provide examples from your research or from the wider evidence base (does not have to be solely from your research) and explain your position.
- **Broader significance and recommendations (if applicable):** Outline the potential outcomes of a policy change and suggest recommendations for changes in policy, interventions, future research, etc. If your recommendations are easy to lift, it increases the likelihood they will be included in the report, potentially as a quote, or as a recommendation by the committee

## References

References do not need to be done in an academic style, you can use footnotes and hyperlinks.

# Top Tips

## Writing style and tone

- Use a neutral tone and avoid emotive language or being overly critical of the Government.
- Minimise jargon and define technical terms.
- Ensure your submission clear, concise and as easy to read as possible.
- Make your recommendations explicit so that there is no room for misinterpretation.
- Frame what you are saying within the policy context.

## Connect with Committee clerks

If you are considering submitting written evidence to an inquiry, contact the Committee's clerk, contact details will be made available on the inquiry's webpage. Clerks are receptive to emails from academics and will often be able to schedule a short call with you. This will give you the opportunity to learn more about the Committee's priorities, whether there are specific areas or topics they are seeking information on, and how to best tailor your submission. If they have not yet finalised their list of oral witnesses, this is also a good opportunity to put forward names of people they might wish to consider.

# Further Reading

See a list of [open calls to submit evidence](#) to Select Committees

[Find out more about Select Committees](#)

Subscribe to [email alerts](#) about Select Committee inquiries

Commons Select Committees: [Guide for oral witnesses](#)

Lords Select Committees: [Guide for oral witnesses](#)

## Resources

UCL's Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER) [Select Committee Written Evidence Submission Online Template](#)

# Chapter 3. Blogs

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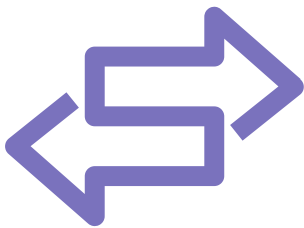
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# What is a blog?

Academic blogs are becoming one of the mainstays for analysis, commentary and the exchange of ideas in many fields of study. Blogs communicate findings in a simple, concise, ‘conversational’ manner.

Academic blogs are defined by relatively short written contributions on open platforms in contrast to longer, ‘standard’ academic journal articles that often sit behind paywalls. They are diverse in terms of their purpose, style and audience, all factors that should inform the approach that you take when writing a blog.



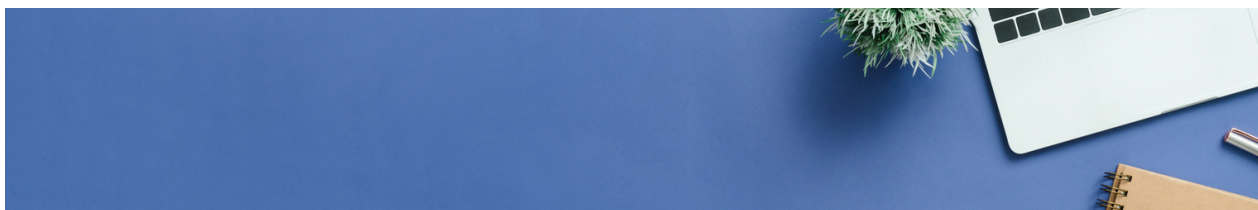
## Content Blogs

These are typically non-technical summaries of your research and can help policymakers, other academics, and those in the media to understand your research. Content blogs can be considered research and exchange pieces that share and contextualise key findings from research projects with wider audiences beyond academia.



## Analysis/Comment Blogs

Comment pieces allow you to use your research to inform public debate and shape the national conversation. Analysis pieces offer informed discussion and commentary on aspects of current affairs in general or contemporary issues in your field of study/research/experience. These pieces are usually time-sensitive as they are often written in response to an event.



# The value of blogs in policy engagement

Blogs can link policymakers to academic pieces of work and to potential academic collaborators. Policymakers based outside of academic institutions may not have access to non-open access journals so a blog condensing and drawing the 'so what' out of a piece of research may be the only way they can consume the research.

Academic blogs are an important vehicle for sharing your research with and offering your analysis to colleagues, policymakers and the wider world. While blogs remain largely supplementary to other forms of academic writing, their shorter format, potential reach and faster publication times make them an important part of academic-policy engagement. As a researcher, writing blogs and engaging with media sources can raise personal, departmental and institutional profiles and impact, in turn attracting funding and participants.

## Blog structure

### **Title**

Craft a title that is short (it should fit on one line) and explanatory (it should make clear either your main argument or the principal question you address).

### **Introduction**

If you are unsure of how to start your blog, figure out the single most important takeaway of the article and ensure this is articulated in the very first sentence. Your opening should be short, direct and draw your audience in.

### **Core of response**

Writing a blog differs greatly from traditional academic writing. Whereas the key findings and conclusions are typically placed at the end of an academic article, in a blog the important information is front-loaded. Outline the critical information (e.g. who, what, when, why) at the beginning of the body of the blog. Subsequent paragraphs can build the narrative and provide more detail on areas such as the methodologies you used, outputs generated, impacts, implications and significance in relation to wider policy contexts.

## Length

Most blogs range from 800 to 1300 words and 'long reads' can be from 1300 to 2000 words. Your writing needs to be concise and to prioritise the key points you want to make.

## Citations

A blog piece does not require substantial signposting as you would in an academic journal article. In general, the preferred form of citation is an in-text hyperlink. If unavoidable, a small number of footnotes can be used but this should be limited to five with an absolute maximum of ten.

# Blog style

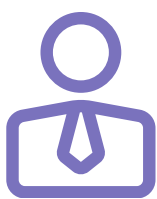


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## Images, graphs and infographics

Consider how images and graphics can enhance the content of the blog.

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## Be professional

While a blog is a relaxed piece of writing that can be written in a personal style, it should still be professional. You should always have your blog proofread before publication. Think about your spelling, grammar, and sentence structure, to ensure your blog is an easy and enjoyable to read.

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## Writing style

Academic blogs should use concise sentences and short paragraphs. Generally, the writing style is much more informal and 'conversational' than it would be if you were writing an academic journal article, policy report, policy brief, etc. If your article will be read by a broad audience, technical concepts should be made accessible. If your contribution will be read by colleagues or those with the requisite knowledge, avoid explaining basic parameters and concentrate on your arguments.

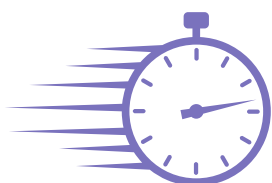
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## Timing

Before publication of an academic journal article, you can use blog contributions to preview your work, setting out some of the background ideas of your research. After publication, blog pieces can enable you to increase the impact of your research by distributing it to a wider audience (including through links to full publications). Additionally, when you give a talk or speak at an event, translating your remarks into a blog can be a convenient way of sharing them further in written form.

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# Publishing and promoting your blog

## Choose a platform that fits your objectives

When publishing your blog, consider which blog platforms might best meet your objectives, in terms of readership, possible feedback or discussion, or increased recognition within a particular community. Blog platforms that are particularly relevant to policy-related topics include [wonkhe](#) (the higher education sector), [The Conversation](#) (informed commentary and debate on world issues), [LSE Blogs](#) (knowledge exchange platform for academics, policymakers and journalists on a range of topics) and Queen Mary's in-house [Mile End Institute Blog](#) (British politics).

Instead of submitting a piece directly to a blog, contact the editors first so you can tailor your contribution as needed and to check, for instance, that you are not submitting something on a topic for which they already have material. You might also be able to agree on delivery and/or publication times, which can be useful for planning.

Before sending your article to a blog, take the time to read its style guide and look through some of its recent articles, to ensure that your submission fits that style. For instance, if all the articles on a blog include a summary at the start, write one yourself in the same format. While your contribution will be evaluated on the basis of its arguments and how well they are communicated, ensuring that your article meets all the stylistic standards can expedite publication. For university blogs, at least, most are run by editors and have their own contribution guidelines, publication policies and editorial structures.

## Promote your blog

After your article has been published, take the time to publicise and record your work, from sharing it on social media, to including it on your online researcher profile, to telling your department/institute so it can be included in the next newsletter. Many blogs publish with Creative Commons licenses, which allow material to be freely republished on the same terms, so it might be the case that your article is reposted elsewhere.



# Further Reading

Anthony Salamone. University Association for Contemporary European Studies, '[How to write for an academic blog.](#)'

[Examples of blogs](#) written by Queen Mary academics

## Find out more

The Queen Mary Policy Hub publishes a regular bulletin providing news of upcoming training and policy events, resources, and funding opportunities.

Sign up at [qmul.ac.uk/mei/policy-hub/](https://qmul.ac.uk/mei/policy-hub/).

We are happy to support other policy focused activities - please get in touch.

## Acknowledgements

This guide was prepared by Audrey Tan and Thomas Chidwick

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## Contact

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