

Working More Closely Together – guidance for scientists and policy officers (e.g. government officers)

Advice for Scientists

Cultural Issues

- Policy officials are busy people. They need academics to assist them in their work and have a responsibility to listen to what you say. Officials may well have mechanisms already in place to collect evidence from scientists.
- You may not always be aware that your published research has been used to influence policy, yet policy officials are very grateful for this source of evidence.
- Policy Officers have tight deadlines and are often looking for information that might already be current consensus in your field but be unknown to them.
- Elected Ministers are the final decision-makers and policy officials are responsible for giving evidence-based advice to these Ministers in order to help them make the best possible decision. Policy officials often need to gather as much relevant information as they can in order to help the Minister make the best possible decision that can be made within a very short timescale.
- Other non-scientific evidence may also need to be taken into account as well as scientific evidence that differs from your own.
- Policy officials need to have information at an early enough stage to make a difference; this may mean that they want to know about your half-formed thoughts and well-informed opinions not just the final results of your research.
- They will then need to put proper review and evaluation mechanisms in place and may want to come back to you for refined answer at a later stage.
- Full details of the principles under which policy officials and other civil servants work can be found in the civil service code:
http://wales.gov.uk/about/career_opportunities/civilservicecode/?lang=en

Useful techniques

- Ask what mechanisms exist to enable you to advise policy officials and make use of these if you can.
- When asked for input look for materials that are already on your shelf and might be of use to policy officials (and can be provided quickly and easily) e.g. literature searches that you have carried out as part of funding applications, published material etc.
- Offer to name government departments as beneficiaries in funding applications and to keep policy officers up-dated on progress. If the application is successful put a diary marker in place around the middle and end of the project so that you can pass on your formative and final results.
- If you think that your research may be relevant to the work of policy officials, register with the Wales Environment Hub: <http://www.werh.org/>

- Understand the limitations of your knowledge and know when to ask another expert (scientist or policy maker).

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Advice for Policy Officials

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- Scientists are busy people, generally working to long term, planned deadlines where it can be difficult to build in short term requirements to meet officials' immediate needs.
- Cause and effect are complex and you may not get a simple answer.
- Time scales for getting information (particularly research results) can be much longer than you might expect.
- Scientists are concerned with the need to be precise and certain about their answers and may be reluctant to give you incomplete or partial responses before their research is completed.
- Scientists may need to remain anonymous (if you are asking them for partial answers of this type) in order not to infringe their academic responsibilities.
- Conversely they will expect proper acknowledgement if you make use of their published or finished works.
- When scientists are applying for funding they often have to indicate the beneficiaries of their work, which may include policy makers and politicians.

Useful techniques

- Create simple procurement/bidding systems, which maximise the number of successful outcomes and keep any administration to a minimum.
- If you have very small amounts of money (e.g. £1000) and specific questions you may need to use ecological consultants rather than academics.
- If you are able to provide a more flexible brief where the scientist can agree the details with you over a longer period as the work progresses (e.g. formative evaluation) then an academic may be interested simply because of the unique opportunity that you are offering.
- Give as much notice as you can for events or information gathering exercises.
- Make use of literature reviews to get a general picture of the thinking of a number of academics in the field.
- Offer to be named as a beneficiary in funding applications and ask to be kept up-to-date with progress. If the application is successful put a diary marker in place around the middle and end of the project so that you can make use of the results.
- **It is vitally important that you understand and retain any caveats, restrictions or conditions associated with the advice you are given. These may make all the difference.**
- Understand the limitations of your knowledge and know when to ask the expert.