

Creating and communicating social research for policymakers in government authored by Jessica H. Phoenix et al.

Summarized by Hong Ching Goh

Title: Practical tips by ‘knowledge brokers’ for academic-policy communication

This article summarizes practical experience of a group of social researchers working for the British Government to help academics in creating and communicating their research with policymakers. They addressed themselves as ‘knowledge brokers’ who “effectively construct a bridge between the research and policy communities”. *Note: Knowledge brokers include academics working on research projects for government departments, individuals working in both government and academia, departmental social research expert groups (for example the Defra Social Science Expert Group) and government social researchers.*

The authors described the research methods of communication to policy makers in their research on post-Brexit agricultural policy in England: (1) to understand the farmers’ priorities and (2) to make sure that the farmers’ voices included in policy development.

According to the authors, the following points were essential to increase the impact of research project on policy development, i.e., (1) invite policy makers to take part in the farmer, (2) email faster each discussion highlighting farmers views and ideas, (3) using slide deck as the principle communication method, (4) Communicating the research findings in informal lunchtime bitesize session to provide safe space for the policy makers to ask questions, (5) conduct strategic meetings with senior management, (6) creating posters with eye-catching information.

Four recommendations were made, aimed to enhance the influence of evidence in decision-making process by improving the communication of evidence between academia and government. These include (1) make research relevant to policymakers; (2) invest time to develop and maintain relationships with policymakers; (3) utilise ‘windows of opportunity’; and (4) adapt presentation and communication styles to the audience. The authors also recognize that the recommendations are time consuming and do not always lead to the immediate desired results.

Apart from the recommendations, the authors also suggest the following to bridge the gap between policy and academia where academics (1) undertake fellowships and/or secondments with government to learn about policy making, (2) share experience with the government social researchers on working with policy makers to improve the links between academia and policy making, (3) draw on knowledge brokers to connect with policy-relevant knowledge networks and become aware of opportunities for new thinking.

In summary,

1. By inviting policy market to take part in the research, sending email after each discussion, using slide deck and creating posters, conducting informal bitesize sessions, and conducting strategic meetings with senior management, authors have increased the impact of research project on policy development.
2. Academics should make research relevant to policymakers, invest time to develop and maintain relationships with policymakers, utilise ‘windows of opportunity’, and adapt presentation and communication styles to the audience.
3. Undertaking fellowship/secondment, experience sharing of lessons learned with the government social research and drawing on knowledge brokers to collect with relevant knowledge networks may be essential to further bridge the gap between policy and academia.