

Policy Engagement for Biodiversity Primer 1

Biodiversity-related Policy and Why Academics Might Engage with It.

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A joint effort between science and policy can lead to substantial impact, especially when considering time-sensitive issues such as biodiversity conservation and climate change. This primer is an introduction to policy for biodiversity at the international, and UK national and local levels.

What is biodiversity-related policy? Principle-based commitments by governments and the mechanisms (i.e. policy instruments) for achieving them^[1] that impact on biodiversity.

Who makes biodiversity-related policy?

Policymaking for biodiversity happens across different levels, each with distinct actors, end goals, protocols for developing and implementing policy, indicators for monitoring policy, and scales of impact. For the UK context:

International Policy	National Policy in the UK	Local Policy in the UK
<p>Intergovernmental organizations, e.g. the United Nations.</p> <p>Policy can take the form of international commitments set out in multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).</p> <p>Decision-making typically takes place through intergovernmental negotiations and agreement, which are often facilitated by United Nations programmes and other global organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation.</p>	<p>Her Majesty’s Government comprising of ministers and their departments, e.g. Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), in England. The devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Policy can take the form of White Papers, manifesto commitments, budgetary decisions, and legislation passed through the Houses of Parliament.</p> <p>Policy development and implementation is facilitated by the Civil Service along with other public bodies, such as the Environment Agency or the Forestry Commission.</p>	<p>Local governments and councils, e.g. Oxford City Council or Oxfordshire County Council</p> <p>Local governments within different countries and counties within the UK have their own democratic structures e.g. civil parishes (England), local authorities (Scotland), unitary authorities (Wales), and district councils (N.I.).</p> <p>Policy can take the form of local regulations and legislation passed through the county councils and district councils.</p>
<p>Other ‘governance’ actors: The private sector, civil society organisations and individuals also take actions and decisions that lead to impacts on biodiversity at the international, national and local levels.</p>		
<p>Policy support organisations: In many cases, non-governmental actors also directly inform and influence public policy made by governments. Organisations at many levels – such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), The Nature Conservancy, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Wild Oxfordshire, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and more – are therefore other actors that can be engaged with to inform and influence policy for biodiversity.</p>		

What policy instruments are commonly used for biodiversity related issues?

Policy instruments for biodiversity vary depending on the different socio-political and biophysical contexts in which they are applied, and whether they are being deployed at global, national or local levels. Some examples include:

Legal and regulatory mechanisms	Implemented by governments, such as the establishment of protected areas to conserve biodiversity.
Economic and financial mechanisms	Aimed at changing behaviour by accounting for the value of biodiversity or the costs of its degradation. Examples include conservation easements, payments for ecosystem services ^{[2][3]} .
Rights-based and cultural instruments	May include customary norms that shape behaviour towards protecting biodiversity ^[4] .
Treaties, agreements and soft law	Deployed globally or at the national and local scales within a country. Examples of which are the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, UK's 25 Year Environmental Plan.

What can policy engagement by academics look like for biodiversity-related issues?

- At the international level, researchers might become an expert and/or external reviewer for reports issued by intergovernmental organizations such as IPBES, or [participate in species specific specialist groups](#) as part of the IUCN Red Listing process.
- In the UK, researchers might work with the Parliament House Libraries (for both Houses) and the [Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology \(POST\)](#), which provides impartial, non-partisan, peer-reviewed briefings. Researchers can also participate in [Select Committees](#) for that routinely call for evidence from relevant experts. With the UK Civil Service, researchers can work in [advisory groups](#) that provide technical information and do reviews of government policy. Researchers can also enter government on secondment.
- In the UK, early career researchers such as PhD students can apply to the POST graduate programs to develop briefings for parliament and the [Open Innovation Team](#) that brokers PhD placements in the UK Civil Service.

What value can academics, at different stages, get from connecting their research with policy?

- Academics engaging with policy strengthen their research impact and contribute to broader societal goals^[5].
- Policy engagement can lead to improvement in an academic's research by highlighting important information or data, refining research scope, revisiting underlying assumptions and supporting societally-relevant research.
- Engagement can lead to broader networks and lead to interesting and surprising collaborations. In some cases, new avenues of funding are also possible^[5].
- For ECRs, engagement with policymaking can improve science communication skills and provide exposure to career paths outside academia^[6].

What are some of the challenges that academics face when engaging with policy?

- Academics might deal with polarization of their research topic and might struggle to provide unbiased knowledge, without advocating a certain stance^[7].
- Academics have different motivations, goals, objectives, workflows and timelines of work which can be hard to align with those of policymakers^[8].
- Academics are limited in time and rewards in traditional academic settings making policy engagement difficult
- Academics might lack the knowledge and resources to understand the policy process. ECRs might be intimidated because of lack of confidence of being an expert, lack of science communication skills and lack of knowledge of engagement opportunities^[6]

References

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- ^[5] Oliver, K., & Cairney, P. (2019). The dos and don'ts of influencing policy: a systematic review of advice to academics. *Palgrave Communications*, 5(1), 1-11.
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- ^[8] Choi, B. C. et al. (2005). Can scientists and policy makers work together?. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 59(8), 632-637.