2021 In Review: Evidence for Policy

The need to link research based evidence to policy has arguably been more urgent and important in the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic than it has ever been before. In the first of a series of review posts, we have brought together a selection of posts focused around the ways in which academics and social scientists have worked to shape and provide evidence for policymaking throughout 2021.

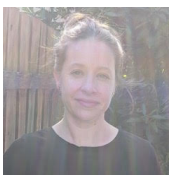### The hard labour of connecting research to policy during COVID-19:

 The worlds of policy and academia are often distant and can be difficult to span. In this post **Kathryn Oliver** and **Annette Boaz** reflect on their experience of working in the Government Office for Science to help produce the government's new Areas of Research Interest and the particular challenges involved in establishing and mobilising networks of researchers and policymakers to work towards shared goals.

Storylistening: why narrative evidence matters for public reasoning and how to use it:

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated narratives, qualitative or quantitative, can shape, guide and make sense of public policies. However, the way in which the listeners and readers of these narratives receive and engage with them is often taken as a given. By introducing the concept of storylistening, **Claire Craig** and **Sarah Dillon** outline how different narratives can contribute to and enhance the use of evidence in policymaking and present a framework for how qualitative and humanistic research can play a key role in this process.

The incompatibility of Nudge and Co-Design as tools for policymaking:

 The use of nudge theory to inform policy interventions in response to COVID-19 has re-opened debates over the politically paternalistic nature of governing by 'nudges' and has given momentum to calls to include the more participatory elements of co-design into policymaking. **Emma Blomkamp** and **Colette Einfeld** suggest in seeking to combine mutually exclusive elements of each practice, academics and policymakers risk blurring lines of authority and public trust in policymaking.

Analysts, Advocates and Applicators – Understanding and engaging with different actors in the evidence for policy movement:

Superficially connecting evidence to policy might seem like singular process that brings together different actors towards a common end. However, drawing on a qualitative study of professionals in the evidence – policy field, **Jasper Montana** and **James Wilsdon** present a new taxonomy for understanding the different groups working at this intersection and advise how researchers might engage with them effectively at different stages of their research.

Proving and Improving – Evaluating policy engagement is an opportunity for researchers and institutions to learn as well as demonstrate impact:

The challenges of evaluating the contribution of research to policy making are well documented. In this post **Chris Roche, Alana Tomlin, Ujjwal Krishna** and **Will Pryor** outline seven principles for effective monitoring, evaluation and learning for policy engagement. They were developed through consultation with researchers, support staff and others in a range of science and humanities disciplines at the University of Oxford and beyond. The authors suggest if research institutions want to be able to better demonstrate policy impact, they should approach monitoring and evaluation by building on the intrinsic motivation of researchers to learn and improve, rather than as an exercise in simply recording and proving impact.

What works for knowledge brokers? Assessing the communication challenge of linking research to policy:

Across universities and other research institutions, knowledge brokers play an important role in linking researchers to potential users of their research. Reporting on a recent survey, **Sandra Messenger** and **Sarah Foxen** highlight the challenges that knowledge brokers face and how, as a community of experts, open conversations on communication strategies may help stimulate personal reflection and input into individual and collective approaches to widening researcher awareness of policy engagement opportunities.

Connecting research to policy is complex, unpredictable and time consuming – so should we expect academics to do it on their own?

Earlier in the year the chief executive of UKRI, Dame Ottoline Leyser, argued that a research culture that prizes the figure of the 'lone genius' has stifled productive collaboration. Drawing on the experience of UCL's Faculty of Engineering Sciences Policy Impact Unit, **Jenny Bird** discusses five reasons that can make it difficult for individual academics to engage in the policymaking process and suggests that dedicated policy units present an important mechanism for supporting both learning about and increasing the impact of academic research on policy.

Are experts complicit in making their advice easy for politicians to ignore?

The role of experts in policymaking and debates over the extent to which politicians are being 'led by the science' have become prominent in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, **Christiane Gerblinger** argues that, rather than being a simple case of politicians disregarding sound advice, experts should attend to the way in which this advice is communicated and the elements inherent to particular forms of advice that make it easy for politicians to ignore or divert to different ends.

[The most consequential experiments carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic will be social](#):

The public image of the response to COVID-19 has been presented primarily through a scientific lens. However, as **Alana Couvrette** argues, the COVID-19 pandemic has been as intense a period of socio-political experimentation, as scientific. Drawing on examples of experimentation in a range of policy areas, she suggests the findings of these experiments are not only already influencing the emerging post-pandemic world, but potentially social attitudes to policy experimentation itself.

[The Cycle of Decolonisation: A tool for applying anthropology to policy and practice and achieving social justice](#):

Anthropology as a discipline is not always one that is closely associated with social policy and directly contributing to domestic policymaking. In this post, **Suriyah Bi** describes how through founding The Equality Act Review, she successfully united, researchers, those researched and politicians to drive policy change and how the cycle of decolonisation can be used as a method to bring marginalised voices to centre of political decision making.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below

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