Pathways to Impact in the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales: A Practical Guide for Researchers

www.campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/pathwaystoimpact

This website is a practical guide – rooted in theory, evidence and local knowledge – to help new researchers improve their political impact on the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales (the Senedd).

Recommendations

Know the political context
To have impact on the Senedd and Welsh Government, it is essential to understand the Welsh policy context. This requires a firm grasp of how these bodies work and which policy powers are devolved to them. The Welsh political context has unique features, such as its scale and proximity and terminology. There is a 5-year policymaking cycle in Wales, and this may affect when and how researchers can contribute.

Know the political landscape
It is vital to understand how policy is made and how research is used by Welsh decision makers. There are many different ‘paths to impact’ in the Welsh Government and Senedd mapped in our toolkit, and it is important to try multiple ‘routes.’ For the Senedd this means engaging with the Assembly Research Service, Cross-Party groups, calls for evidence, the Assembly Committees and their Clerks and Chairs, as well as Assembly Members, their researchers, party researchers, and Ministers’ Special Advisors. For the Welsh Government it means engaging with the Knowledge and Analytical Service, policy consultations, commissioned research, Ministers’ research teams or Special Advisors and civil servants. Try to participate in advisory committees and reference panels, or to amplify your voice through knowledge brokers and the media.

Know how to engage
Communicating your research findings clearly to policymakers, their advisors, and civil servants is one of the keys to impact. Successful engagement with your audience means being proactive, building relationships and reputations over time, and taking opportunities to draw attention to your findings. Present your findings in a way that is clear, concise and easy for decision-makers to grasp quickly. Be both strategic and opportunistic about how you disseminate your research, whether that is done directly to identified decision-makers, through conferences or roundtables, or by simply making your research more easily accessible.
Make your engagement count

Policymakers are more likely to consider and use research that is timely and seen as useful to addressing challenges faced by them and their constituents. Identify your key findings and their policy implications clearly. Specifically highlight why they are useful and relevant to Welsh policy. Think about how to frame them in a way that may help them resonate with policymakers or which helps deliver bad news ‘well.’ Be aware of the Welsh policy cycle, and look for the right time to engage decision-makers. Consider whether your findings are more likely to be useful in the short-term or are aimed at having a longer-term or formative influence, raising issues or framing them in new ways.

Be credible

Policymakers need to trust your findings to adopt their messages. Build a reputation for objective, high quality research. Demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the political context you seek to influence.

Know the obstacles ahead

No matter how good your research or your engagement plan, you may still not be able to have the impact you hope for on the timescale you seek. There are many barriers to achieving impact on policy, and it is important to be aware of these and recognise that while some of them might be overcome with effort, time or change in circumstance, others might be harder to obviate. Policymakers face competing pressures, and even the best communicated and highest quality evidence may not always be well received, or be enough to influence policy on its own. However, the strategies discussed above, and in the tool-kit on our website, will help you have the best chance for impact in the face of such challenges. These tools and tactics can help you overcome obstacles through good practice.

Project Summary

**Motivation:** To better understand how social scientists achieve research impact in the National Assembly for Wales & the Welsh Government.

**Purpose:** To outline the different routes social scientists can use to get their research before members of the devolved Welsh Assembly & Government, and to provide some practical tips and guidelines – in the form of an online tool kit – about how to both take advantage of these opportunities and maximise impact.

**Method:** Our research is grounded in the wider academic literature on the relationship between evidence and policy, and rooted in practical advice from Welsh policymakers, experienced researchers, and knowledge brokers. Our multi-faceted approach includes: an in-depth review of the academic and grey literature on evidence-based policy, knowledge mobilisation, and knowledge transfer; a review of relevant REF 2014 political impact case studies referring to the Welsh Government or Welsh Assembly; and over 30 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and researchers known for achieving impact in Wales.