



*Society for Research  
into Higher Education*

# **What role does (or should) higher education research play in higher education policy? An exploratory study**

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## Introduction and background to the study

Since 1997, UK Government has emphasised evidence-based policymaking (Whitty 2006). Notably, this commitment has continued through subsequent changes of government. Yet, the aspiration of having 'evidence-based' policymaking is fraught with complexity. The very definition of 'evidence' is problematic. Firstly, there can be a multitude of evidences (Sumner, Crichton, Theobald, Zulu & Parkhurst 2011), of which research evidence is only one. Equally, there is a varying mix of values/ideology, professional knowledge and research evidence that inform policy (Lingard 2103). Education itself is politically and philosophically contested (Francis 2011), and any 'evidence base' or 'policy' is rooted within such a context. Secondly, there are many different types of research and these have a range of implications for practice. Research can be *of* policy (e.g. more critical, theoretical, and political) and research *for* policy (problem-solving, commissioned, and quickly turned-around) (Lingard 2013) and that research can be carried out by different people including consultancy firms, contract researchers, government analysts and academics. Thirdly, there are many disparate uses of research in educational policymaking (Weiss 1979 cited in Lingard 2013; Lingard 2013; Boswell 2014), such as legitimising, substantiating, or for political or tactical reasons. Fourthly, there is also a crucial role played by many and varied intermediaries and think tanks (Lingard 2013; Sebba 2011) often located in powerful closed networks (Ball & Exley 2010) that have an influence on the types of research drawn upon and or commissioned to inform policymaking. Finally, engagement in policymaking has not always been attractive to academics; policymaking and academia operate under different reward structures, academia rewarding original, highly-specialised research and policymakers requiring pragmatic and accessible findings (Lingard 2013; Francis 2011). The move to Impact Case Studies in the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) is raising reward for policy impact, which forms a key impact type in the REF (Kings College London and Digital Science 2015) and signalling a shift in emphasis. For researchers, the policymaking landscape is thus replete with social, political, technical and practical complexity.

This complexity is complemented with what is argued to be a significant disjoint between researchers and policymakers, whose 'relationship [is] inherently one of conflict or at least a site of mutual misunderstanding' (Whitty 2006, p.160). There are many practical reasons why researchers struggle to engage with policy and policymakers, but notably the speed at which policymaking happens, which often leaves researchers documenting change rather than shaping it (Francis 2011). Policymakers are often ambivalent towards academia (Ball & Exley 2010) and there is a host of reasons as to why policymakers do not like educational research. UK Government policymakers have criticised educational research as lacking rigour, failing to produce cumulative findings, being theoretically incoherent, ideologically biased, irrelevant, divorced from practice, inaccessible, and not cost effective (Whitty 2006, p.161). In terms of higher education research specifically, researchers have been charged with failing to address policymakers' criticisms (Locke 2009), resulting in a higher education policy 'research-free' zone (Locke 2009). The contemporary challenge, assuming there is value in higher education research playing a role in policy development, is to explore and explain this phenomenon in order to move towards this zone becoming more 'research-laden'.

Taking the above as a departure point, a critical and structured study of the current role that academic research, researchers and academic research institutions play in higher education policymaking was required. The ultimate aim was to provide insights and explanations for how research can better inform and shape future higher education policy with the key

objective to open up debates centred on the role that higher education research and higher education researchers play in policymaking.

## Approach to the study

The research used a mixed-methods approach of documentary analysis in order to inform an in-depth interview stage. Initial documentary analysis used methods from genre analysis (Swales, 1990; Bhatia 1997) to investigate higher education policy. We carried out policy analysis of five policy texts listed below (with particular attention paid to the Higher Education Green Paper):

- The Green Paper: Higher Education Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice> [referred to henceforth as ‘Green Paper’]
- Learning and Teaching Chapter (B3) of QAA Quality Code: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b> [referred to henceforth as ‘Quality Code’]
- Policy for open access in the post -2014 Research Excellence Framework: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2014/201407/> [referred to henceforth as ‘Open Access’]
- International education strategy: global growth and prosperity: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf) [referred to henceforth as ‘International Education’]
- Consultation on the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements for Town and Country Planning: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=3032#Vp-V8Zc8osU> [referred to henceforth as ‘Subject Benchmark’]

The genre analysis asked questions about the texts’ setting; its focus, purpose, audience, and relationship between writers and readers of the text; expectations, background knowledge and relationship with other texts (Paltridge 2012, p.79). The latter was of particular interest to show the relationship between specific policies and other texts, thus establishing a ‘network of texts’ (Fairclough 2003, p.30). We supplemented this analysis with a review of engagement with the Green Paper on the internet, where the first unique 100 returns on a Google search for the Green Paper’s title were captured using NCapture (in Nvivo11) and analysed to identify who was talking about the Green Paper and how.

These initial analyses informed the questions subsequently used in the interviews that formed the main part of the dataset. Twenty-six loosely structured, in-depth interviews, spread across three distinct samples of policy stakeholders were conducted: six funders and/or commissioners of higher education research; eight higher education policymakers and influencers of higher education policy; and twelve higher education researchers. The transcribed interviews generated rich, revealing, and abundant data. Initial analysis of the data was inductive (Thomas 2006), to produce emergent key themes from the data. A subsequent second-level of deductive coding was carried out following the identification of ‘time’ as a key theme. This drew on the work of Barbara Adam (1998; 2008), and specifically her *timescapes* perspective to recognise the multidimensional, multifaceted, and complex influence that time has on social life, and the life of policymaking and research specifically.

## Overview of key findings

The key findings are set out below. Firstly, the findings from the documentary analysis are presented. These findings informed the key areas explored in the following in-depth interviews. The section continues by presenting an overview of the initial analyses of the key findings from the interviews. The key areas to emerge from the analysis of the data through the lens of time (Adam 2008) follows. In the presentation of interview data, higher education researcher interviews are marked HER, funders HEF and policymakers HEP.

### Documentary analysis

#### Policy document analysis

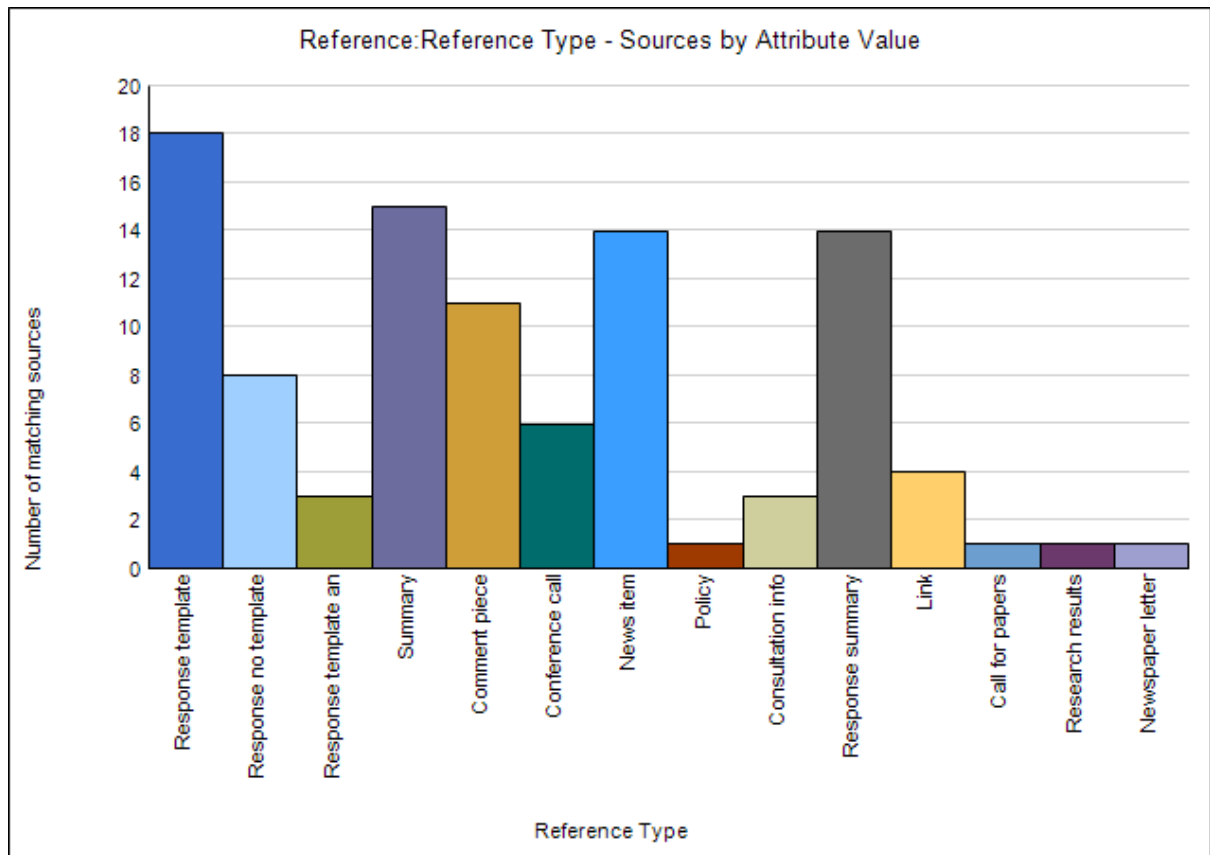
Genre analysis of the five sampled policies highlighted the following key findings:

- These policy texts have different purposes: consultative (either tightly framed: Green Paper, or open: Subject Benchmarks); regulatory (Open Access); promotional and informative (International Education); or descriptive (Quality Code).
- The policy texts tend not to address people directly (e.g. little use of 'you'). If there is an addressee, it is often the institution. They do speak through the authorial 'we' (e.g. speaking on behalf of the government). The policies themselves are personified and able to carry out actions.
- All these policies contain assumptions and it is hard to know where they come from;
- The policies frequently made reference to other publications from their own organisation (e.g. QAA cites QAA, HEFCE cites HEFCE), or from other Government Bodies. The Quality Code provides links to further reading, but none of these were peer reviewed research.
- These policies were more likely to cite reports from organisations rather than individual researchers (with the exception of James Wilsden and Graham Gibbs).
- Green Paper and International Education make heavy use of number and figures, their sources were given; in contrast, there was no referencing of qualitative evidence.

This analysis showed there is limited space in contemporary higher education policy texts for higher education research. When research is cited, it is more likely to be quantitative. Critically, the key findings suggest that the work of research may well come at a different point in the policy process and may not be reflected in a final policy text.

#### Engagement with the Green Paper

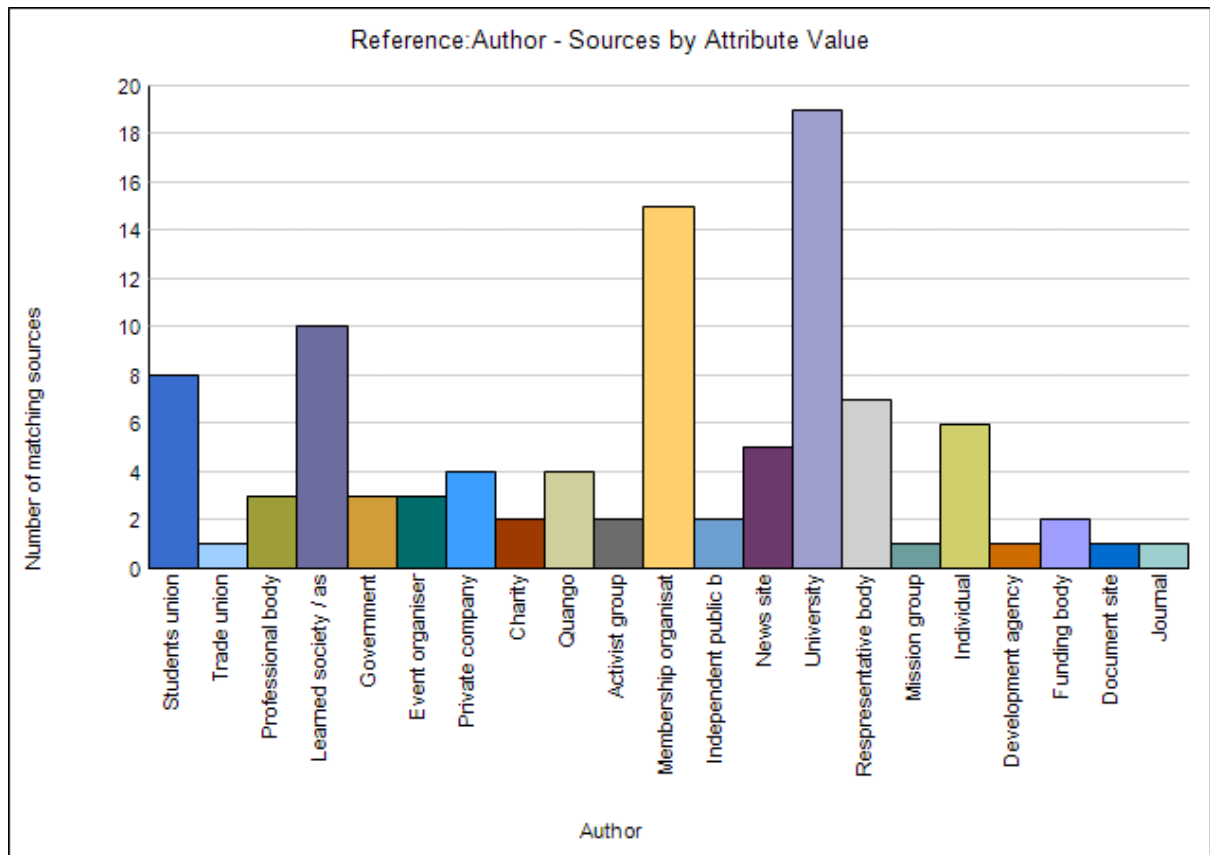
Analysis of the documents returned following the search for the title of the Green Paper highlighted who was engaging with it and how. Figure 1 shows the kinds of documents that were being produced that made reference to the Green Paper.



**Figure 1: Reference type**

Most documents relating to the Green Paper returned in the search were responses to the consultation. Consultation focussed responses accounted for 60% of the reference types. The interest in the Green Paper is shown through the Call for Papers for a special edition of a journal and conference call for events.

Figure 2 shows who authored these documents.



**Figure 2: document authors**

The most significant authors of the webpages related to the Green Paper were universities. Membership organisations (such as AMRC, SCOUNL, The Dental Schools Council) also featured along with learned societies (such as the SRHE, the Royal Society, London Mathematical Society) and students unions. Representative bodies (such as GuildHE and NUS) and individuals through blog posts and individual responses to the consultation are also present. The Government and its quangos and funding bodies are also represented. Figure 3 shows who was authoring what kinds of document.

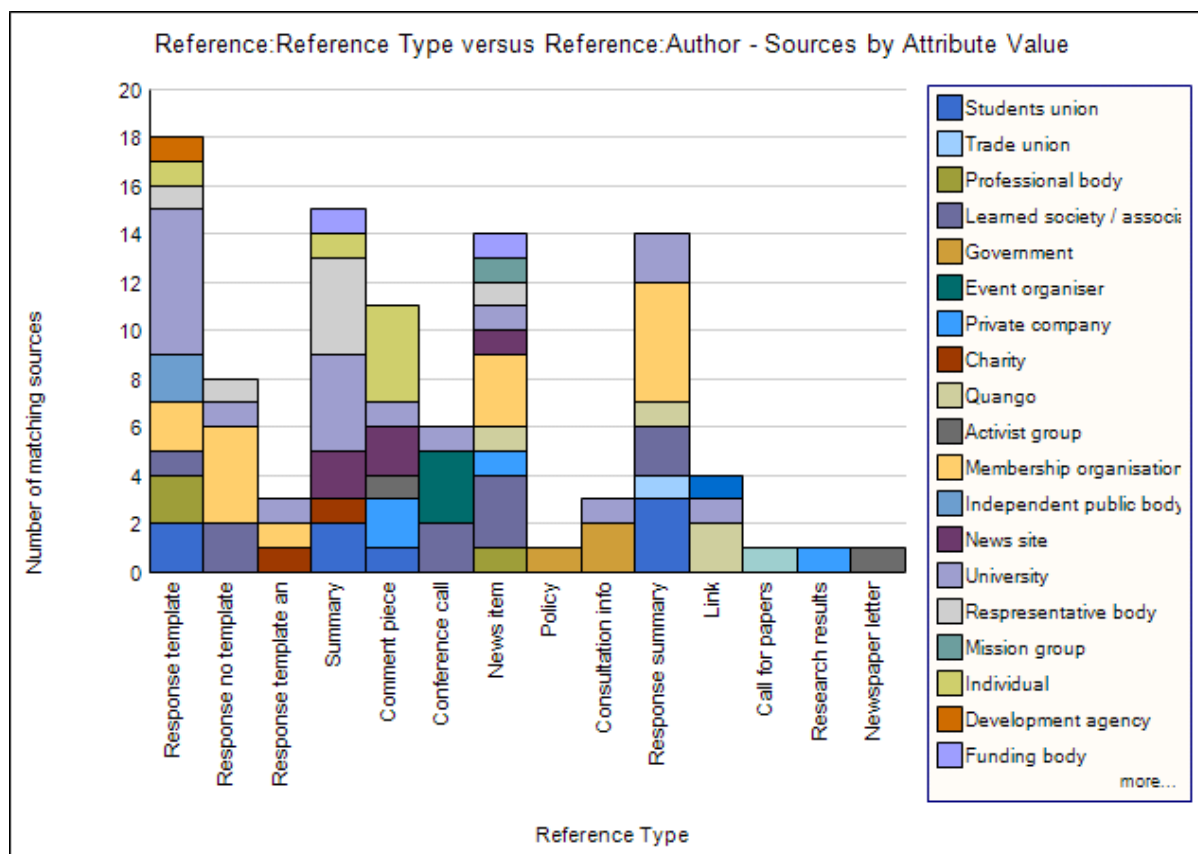


Figure 3: authors of types of document

Universities were responsible for most of the consultation responses, while comment pieces were written predominantly by individuals or featured on news sites. Conference calls were issued by event organisers and research results by a private company. The Government only authored the policy itself and information about the consultation procedures.

Overall, the analysis of the Green Paper highlighted a number of key themes, namely: the importance of engagement in the consultation process, the range of stakeholder that engage, and the importance of intermediaries. These themes helped inform the interview questions that were asked of higher education policy makers, researchers, and funders.

#### Interview analysis

What influences the use of higher education research in policymaking

From the perspective of a higher education researcher, our initial analysis identified five key areas that influenced the use of research in policymaking: what you know; how you say it; who you know; where you are and who you are.

##### 1. The importance of what you know

Higher education research has to be relevant and resonate with the concerns and interests of policy makers. Arguably, this plays to the idea that *'independent evidence only works when it confirms what ministers want'* (HEP) perhaps indicating policymakers preference for policy-informed evidence over evidenced-informed policy (see Hartley 2006).

Research is also only one area from which policy ideas flow. Ideas can also emanate from manifestos, government departments, non-governmental bodies, think-tanks, mission groups, individual ministers, special advisors, and representative bodies. This is clearly positive as it allows *'different voices to be heard'* (HEP); but, it means research ideas have competition and it can be difficult to predict whose ideas will be privileged at which point of the policy development process. Equally, many different institutions and actors provide



disparate types of evidence, including research evidence, for policymaking, which compete and may be in tension with academic research evidence. Furthermore, certain types of evidence are privileged in policymaking: *'you're probably better off, on the whole, doing quantitative research because politicians like numbers. It's scale and it's a trust in numbers'* (HER). Qualitative research is perceived as more complicated, messier and incapable of supplying the clear-cut answers to the questions that policymakers pose. This is problematic for the higher education research field where relatively small-scale qualitative research projects are common.

Policymakers do value working with academics because of their objectivity and independence; yet, for some researchers, engagement is about income generation. Commissioned research, which is competitively bid for, is likely to result in the kinds of things that policymakers want to know, yet it can also blur a higher education researcher's role and the extent to which they can provide objective and independent evidence. When compared with analysts, who are situated within a government department, academics are more at liberty to say that their research does not support a policy direction because their *'job is not at stake'* (HEP). Yet, the REF, and its emphasis on impact, is muddying the water by muddling short-term impact gains with what the higher education researcher interviewees almost unanimously saw as the long-term collective endeavour to develop understanding and extend knowledge through longitudinal and more critically-orientated exploratory research.

2. The importance of how you communicate what you know, or 'how you say it'

Policymakers did not have ready access to academic articles and indicated that those they did read were inaccessible or the findings out-of-date. For engagement purposes, academics' ideas and findings need to be made more quickly accessible through different forms of media. Indeed, the researchers recognised this but conceded this required learning to write in different ways - researchers need to be, *'bi-lingual [...] and find the right kind of voice for different kinds of audiences'* (HER). Such activity requires a certain media savviness as *'your idea that you've perfected over many years gets distorted and turned into something else and becomes nothing that you know'* (HER).

3. The importance of access to policy networks, or 'who you know'

Access to powerful policy networks was deemed crucial. In some cases, access was achieved through strategic self-promotion: via social media or event attendance; or through formal invitations to sit on committees, attend meetings, join steering groups or provide evidence for discussion; and, importantly, informal communication channels and networks featured large: e.g. telephone conversations, meetings, and chats. Whilst the dominance of informal communication channels and networks is problematic (due to lack of transparency and representativeness), they do provide opportunities for all stakeholders to test ideas, develop proposals; position and influence ideas; seek and understand opinion and power dynamics; gain knowledge of coming events and a way to understand and provide control. Access was associated with a level of secrecy and opaqueness. It was clear though that intermediaries, such as think-tanks, learned societies, funding bodies, mission groups, and action groups, as more permanent, and sometimes more powerful policy network members, play a useful, structured role in negotiating connections between policymaking stages, evidence bases and established higher education research expertise.

4. The importance of location, or 'where you are'

Prestigious (e.g. Oxbridge, Russell Group) universities benefit greatly from positional power; other institutions could play a powerful role only in particular areas (e.g. widening

participation). In the main though, certain higher education research centres (such as the Global Centre for Higher Education) were seen as influential players in policymaking. Their geographical position also resonated with the view that the 'pull' of London is extremely strong - *'you have to be within five minutes of Westminster' to have any impact at all* (HEF). London is where policy is made: meetings, events, conferences in London are more likely to attract policymakers or influencers. It is worth also recognising the serendipity of influence: being in the right place at the right time, which often comes down to *'luck'* (HER). Certainly, being in London or travelling to London to attend meetings and events related to policy will at least be an attempt to make your own luck.

#### 5. The importance of 'who you are' for any potential influence

When higher education researchers are perceived to be the 'go to' person, they are likely to have more influence; you become *'a face within the network'* (HEP). To be a face and have influence you had to have *'academic kudos'* (HEP), a reputation through research and publication to garner credibility. The journey to policy influence can thus be long and contemporary policy networks trusts established researchers rather than new entrants. There was also the view, of course, that some academics ideologically cannot engage with particular governments, and equally some policymakers will not engage with certain academics, who they perceive to be *'only interested in beating an ideological drum'* (HEP), thus making it easier to ignore their research regardless of its rigor, relevance and reliability. There were also views in the data that highlighted the inability for higher education researchers to be objective as they engage in research where they are both observer and intricately connected to what is being observed.

This initial analysis has demonstrated how complex the role that higher education and higher education researchers play in the higher education policy process. There is no single, simple route to policy influence; instead it is messy, opaque, and often the result of luck due to the connections the researcher has, where they are located, what they have done before, and the timeliness of their research. Throughout this first sweep of data analysis, references to time, in its different guises, surfaced. This led to the second phase of data analysis.

#### Timescape analysis

Drawing on Adam (2008, pp.7-8) there are seven different elements of time: timeframe (bounded time), temporality (the irreversible passage of time), timing (synchronisation), tempo (speed, pace, intensity), duration (extent of time), sequence (order of time), and temporal modality (past, present and future time). We used these elements to code our data; two of the key 'times' as expressed in the data: 'timeframe' and 'timing' are presented below.

The 'timing' of the research in the policy making process

This analysis confirmed our original findings about research needing to fit the policymakers' agendas and prevailing policy concerns: referred to as an *'alignment of ideas'* (HEP), *'finding fertile ground'* (HEP) or *'fashion'* (HER). Researchers need to be aware of how the policy development process happens and where in that process academic ideas, evidence and outcomes might impact. This suggests that there is a clearly defined policy process. While the UK Government Treasury's 'Green Book' of policymaking presents a rational policy cycle as the desired policy process (Hallsworth with Parker & Rutter, p.25), the reality is that policymaking is by no means cyclical, staged or rational. It is developed in a *'messy, unstructured, hard to follow way'* (HEP), meaning that *'choosing your moments to try to influence is absolutely imperative'* (HEF).

Higher education research funders help to ensure that existing research is visible to policymakers and try to select projects to fund that *'will be most timely'* (HEF). This recognition of timeliness suggests the often temporary nature of policy influence - *'I'm in a moment where, you know, currently people are interested in what I've got to say. That will last for a certain limited amount of time'* (HER). This contrasts with areas of research with greater longevity in the policy landscape that did not totally go away, instead *'it bursts at regular intervals'* (HER), ensuring the more sustained engagement with policymaking. Indeed, it is through *'the ongoing discussions or tensions between those organisations and those interests [i.e. the other actors involved in the policy development process] that generate higher education policy'* (HEP).

Researchers can deal with timeliness by being more strategic and *'keep an ear to the ground'* in order to consider the things *'that politicians are hot on at the moment'* (HER). Alternatively, researchers can recognise that *'you have to be opportunistic and try and identify the gaps and the spaces, and then try and fill them'* (HER). These quotes both suggest that researchers may have to target and align their outputs to the policy landscape. However, sequencing the need for evidence to fit policy at a particular time and within a different timeframe means independence, objectivity, rigour and reliability can be compromised in the desire to deliver relevance and timeliness.

'Timeframes' of research and policymaking

The timeframes of research and policymaking are very different to the extent that *'a piece of work that's designed to feed into the policy making process, the world has often changed by the time it appears in a learned academic journal'* (HEP). Indeed, *'commissioning academics would often be too slow'* (HEP) for the fast-paced nature of policymaking and that can be both off-putting and discouraging for academics. Even calls for evidence, responses to consultations, and invitations to comment can be problematic due to the timescale for the response: *'that's a pressure because that adds to all the other things you've got to do that day, and it can mean that you're up early finishing off the other things'* (HER). This fast-slow dichotomy also reflects the different career trajectories of higher education researchers and policymakers. Academic careers are ordinarily long and relatively stable; it takes time to develop reputation via publishing, research impact and income generation. Established academics are more likely to have the reputation necessary to be engaged by policymakers; yet, policymakers did point out that *'it's the same names coming up over and over again'* (HEP). Additionally, *'the big names in higher education research are all retiring and a lot of people are stuck ... trapped in heavy teaching loads ... in head of department jobs which kill creativity'* (HEF). There are undoubtedly competing demands on academics' time, and limits on capacity to develop relationships with the policy network.

The above is in sharp contrast to the policymakers and policy influencers who constantly move around within their organisations: *'if you're dealing with policymakers that might mean civil servants, then the whole culture of the civil service is that if you're on a prestigious career track then the whole point is that you move around a lot'* (HER). A policymaker reinforced this: *'I don't even know if I'm going to be in the same post [laughs] by the time you finish your research project.'* (HEP). Interesting relationships can and do occur between policymakers and researchers; but research can take longer than a typical civil service post. Sustaining and establishing longer-term relationships and networks can be problematic; when key contacts move on, researchers can experience a loss of power and influence and need to start developing their contact base again.

The effort is, within the timeframe of research and policymaking, in the establishment of live and active networks that help to align the vagaries of sequencing higher education research with the policy process. This might go some way towards solving what a policymaker identified as a major challenge: '*University research over here, and government policy over here, and, I think, I think there's a continuum and the key is how you make that work*' (HEP). The analysis of higher education research and policymaking through the lens of time helps to highlight some of the features that make the worlds of the two constituent groups different, thus reflecting the claim that researchers and policymakers operate in 'parallel universes' (Brownson, Royer, Ewing & McBride 2006), while also recognising where similarities exist. Greater understanding of the different 'universes' and their specific pressures, priorities, and practices, will encourage deeper empathy and routes into more effective collaborative working. With this in mind, we will further develop our *timescapes* analysis, as outlined in our dissemination report.

## Concluding remarks

This report has given an overview of the research that was carried out as part of an SRHE Fellow Award exploring the role that higher education research and researchers play in higher education policymaking. The combination of documentary analysis and in-depth interviews resulted in rich and abundant data about an area that has received little specific research attention. As we move forward, we intend to work on further refining and expanding our analysis, and continuing to disseminate our findings through different channels as set out in our dissemination report.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, our research has shown precisely how complicated the national policymaking process is and that there is no single and simple answer to the use of research evidence in its making. In line with other researchers, this study has shown that higher education research is only one of many forms of evidence that influences policy, and often not the most important. Indeed, our documentary analysis showed extremely limited reference to, and by implication, impact of, research in policy texts. However, policies are clearly 'more than text' (Lingard & Sellar 2013), and our interviewees identified points in a traditionally-defined rational policy cycle (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl 2009) when evidence is supplied or generated for policymakers (e.g. in shaping ideas, supporting or confirming policy decisions, or evaluating policy implementation). Yet, it quickly became apparent that such a rational and legitimized view of policymaking is neither a realistic nor an accurate reflection of the reality of contemporary policymaking. Policymaking is complex, opaque, time-pressured, and subject to a range of influences and drivers. Timeliness, relevance and the alignment of ideas are key drivers. Commonly, any research needs to be turned around quickly to support fast-paced policy development and has to 'work with' the prevailing political agenda (Whitty 2006). Interviewees suggested that policymakers favoured large-scale, quantitative research, what Lingard (2011) had termed 'policy as numbers', in the often mis-guided belief that it provides uncomplicated and generalizable solutions to their problems.

With regard to the provenance of research, the data showed a preference for research emanating from prestigious institutions. It does not appear to be the quality of research that is important here (as it frequently is not, see Cherney, Povey, Head, Boreham & Ferguson 2012), it is more a case of familiarity (the policymaker being an alumnus from Oxbridge, for example). Moreover, familiarity allows individuals access to the policy networks that this research has shown to be crucial to influencing policy development.

As Ball and Exley (2010) have shown, there has been a shift away from the traditional 'partners' in policy development (which included academia) to more informal policy networks. The opportunity for higher education researchers to impact upon policy is dependent on their being active and influential in those networks, and some higher education researchers are well-known within policymaking circles. Definitively though, our research cannot point to an instrumentally rational set of guidance on how to become a member of such networks, nor indeed their rules of engagement. Profile seems important though, and actively networking and disseminating research outcomes widely is fundamental to having higher education research used as evidence, or to higher education researchers being invited and engaged by policy networks to sit on committees, provide opinion, research and possibly influence. Two specific things did appear to increase the likelihood of a researchers' profile being on policy network radars was found to be increased by two things: their ability to be seen to be representing or influencing public opinion (publishing in mainstream media, for example) and, engaging in networking activity within the geographical location of London. Notably though, it was also found extremely important to recognise that significant effort and skill are required to actively engage with policy networks. Not all higher education researchers have the luxury of resource to engage as described above and indeed, not all academics are willing to engage regardless of available resource.

In terms of the risks and benefits involved for researchers, although being an active player in policy networks and having research widely disseminated via multiple media outlets does tick boxes for the REF, it does not come without dangers for higher education researchers. Engagement in higher education policy networks raises questions surrounding objectivity and independence – key currency for all academics and the maintenance of academic integrity was deemed important for the researchers we spoke to. To not compromise their scholarly or ideological integrity, some researchers may choose to stay at a critical distance from policymakers. In this context, intermediaries (including learned societies such as the SRHE) can play a role in helping to connect policymakers with research evidence that they do not have access to. This is also particularly useful for newer researchers who might not yet have the profile that means that they are deemed credible and trustworthy by policymakers. More established higher education researchers, who already have access to policy networks, can also adopt such a brokerage role; indeed some of our researcher interviewees did state that they were as likely to highlight the research of others as they were their own when meeting policymakers and influencers. The critical distance that brokerage can bring is also particularly important for higher education researchers to maintain, at least symbolically, objectivity and independence, and mitigate against criticisms levelled at higher education research and its potential bias due to its focus on itself.

Intermediaries, then, are key. Our study showed the importance of the media as an intermediary for communicating research to policymakers. The media can act as a useful conduit for what Weiss (1979, cited in Lingard 2013, p.122) called 'percolation' (i.e. 'the complex dissemination and percolation of research knowledge over time changing the assumptive worlds of policymakers'). Here, it is the more subtle 'feeding into public debate' (Whitty 2006, p.170) that could ultimately influence, and more deeply impact on, policy. Based on the above findings and the data analysed to date, the following recommendations emerge for higher education researchers wishing to engage more in policy networks and have more of an impact on higher education policy development.

## Recommendations

1. Actively engage with policymakers and policymaking events. Go to events, listen and respond. Network. Build in the space in terms of time, and the resources in terms of finance, into any research bids.
2. Try to spend time in the policymaking world (through a secondment or a placement) or at least seek out collaborations with policymakers, and foster the professional relationships that ensue.
3. Seek to disseminate the findings of any project through traditional academic channels but also through specialist channels of the media such as *Wonkhe*, the *Times Higher Education*, and also even the wider media such as the broadsheet and tabloid press. Build this into research bids so it becomes almost habitual. Then your research will have wider reach, including not only policymakers, but also the public more generally.
4. Learn how to 'translate' what you write for the different audiences and media you are writing for. Be aware that the different audiences of the academic press and the popular press operate differently in terms of the style and format of the output and 'change writing hats' accordingly.
5. Be careful in this translation that the nature of the content communicated will differ according to the audience involved. Remember that the academic audience will have certain criteria that need to met (such as grounding in theory and literature) that may differ greatly from the criteria of other audiences such as the popular press (such as how it tells a story). Adapt these to the appeal and be careful not to allow for misrepresentation. Do not compromise your research findings or your academic integrity.
6. Embrace the serendipity of policy engagement and seize the opportunities when they arise that are relevant to what you are working on and of interesting to you.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the SRHE again for their support for this project. The team has learnt a lot from the work so far and we look forward to sharing our findings more widely as we move ahead. Equally we would like to thank William Locke (IOE, UCL) who has been our critical friend on this project. His feedback and encouragement throughout has been extremely useful and gratefully received.

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