

Being Heard: Making The Most Of Your Evidence

I spend my time helping organisations to get their points across to Government and really understand how Government works. Sometimes this is when comments are invited, other times we have to help fit the outcomes of the research to the Government's agenda.

I was pleased to speak on a panel at the [Westminster Forum's](#) conference on evidence-based policy making and share my thoughts on how to best engage with government policy-making. This blog is based on comments.

Research isn't always commissioned or timed to coincide with the demands of the Government. That just makes my job a bit trickier.

Whatever the research and whoever is producing it, especially across the academic sector, they need to demonstrate impact. What better way to show this than through engagement with policy-making audiences?

So I help get the research results to the right policy-makers. But it's not about the right policy-makers but also about understanding the needs of those audiences.

You need to understand them – what their priorities are, what their timescales are, their interests and so on.

Especially when you are dealing with civil servants, who should be your best friends, then you have to understand the political pressures that they face.

What else would help?

- I'd say thinking about the impact at the start, not leaving it to the end when the results might get handed across to your press team. That means it becomes part of the report, not simply a sales job at the end.
- Direct engagement with policy-makers is essential but do not ignore indirect engagement as well, media, social media, stakeholders who may influence them etc. Who and what do they listen to?
- Think about where your reports are made available and how, so if audiences look for it they can find it easily and the format works for them
- Don't fall into the trap of thinking only about the launch of a new report or piece of research. Don't be afraid to revisit them as opportunities arise. My approach is always to encourage a proactive approach. So yes the launch may get some good media coverage but come back to as maybe a Select Committee launches an inquiry into the area. Use that as your opportunity. Government consultations as well. There are a range of ways of being proactive so don't waste the work that has been put into it.

Remember that these audiences need evidence to support and justify their decisions. So they need you. That is especially the case if the issue is a controversial one.

Some things to avoid – jargon, lack of clear conclusions, and lack of solutions to problems identified – don't just make it a moan!

Have an appreciation for the teams in your institution and use the expertise. They will be getting research from a whole range of departments. If you make their life easier then it is easier for them to help you. They are then better able to deliver the results you are seeking.

But the engagement should take place over time, it's not a one-off process. It's about reputation and building trust. This is about you, your colleagues, your department, your institution. They are interlocked. You are part of a bigger narrative. You cannot simply turn up and expect to be listened to. It takes time, effort and resources.

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