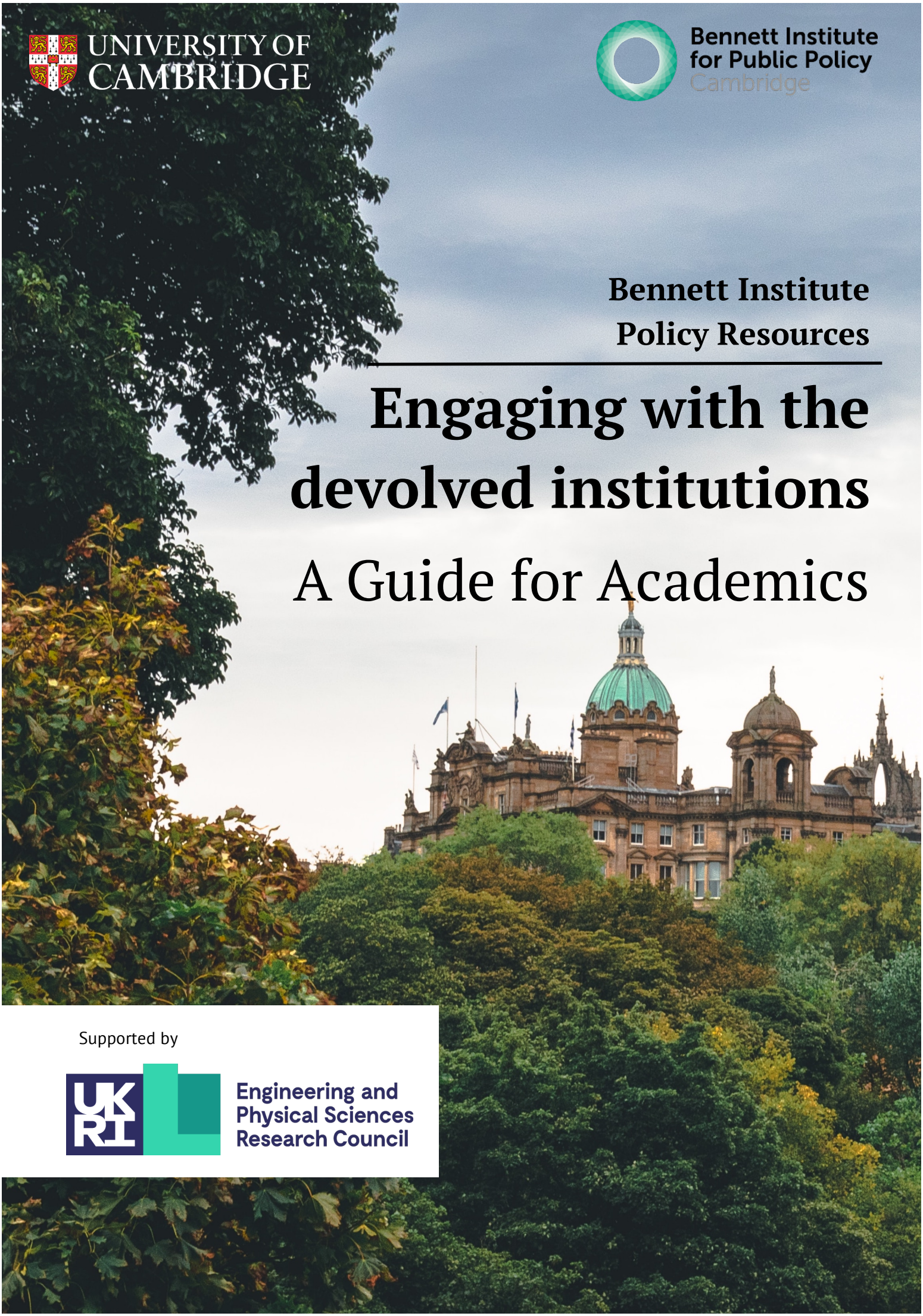

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# Engaging with the devolved institutions

## A Guide for Academics

Supported by

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## Introduction

There are many different routes and pathways for academics to engage with and potentially influence the devolved institutions. This guide sets out a number of ways you can engage. As with the UK Government and Parliament, which route you take will depend on what your motives are for wanting to engage and what impacts, if any, you are hoping to achieve. This guide has been supported by the EPSRC so is aimed at researchers with expertise in engineering and science although the advice is equally applicable to any academic who may want to become more policy aware. Clearly, below is all subject to change not least due to the outcome of when the UK leaves the EU, the Scottish Government's wish for a second independence referendum and the changing political context in Northern Ireland.

As with the UK Parliament and Government time spent observing relevant political discourse and debate can provide valuable knowledge to ascertain whether your input might be policy relevant and provide access to diverse networking opportunities. This will enable you to make effective contributions to policy discourse with more confidence. Build links and make networks and keep updated by following the devolved institutions that you are interested in. You'll find relevant website and Twitter details below.

## CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| How the Scottish Government works: the basics | 3 |
| Engaging with the Scottish Government – routes in | 3 |
| How the Scottish Parliament works: the basics | 4 |
| Engaging with the Scottish Parliament – routes in | 5 |
| How the Welsh Government works: the basics | 7 |
| Engaging with the Welsh Government – routes in | 8 |
| How the National Assembly for Wales works: the basics | 9 |
| Engaging with the National Assembly for Wales – routes in | 9 |
| Understanding the political context in Northern Ireland | 11 |
| Introduction to the Northern Ireland Executive: the basics | 12 |
| Introduction to the Northern Ireland Assembly: the basics | 12 |
| Engaging with the Northern Ireland Assembly – potential routes to explore | 12 |



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**How the Scottish Government works: the basics**

The Scottish Government comprises of the First Minister, Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers and civil servants. Unlike the UK Government Cabinet Secretaries do not lead a particular government department and ministerial portfolios do not mirror the organisation of the civil service. Instead, most Cabinet Secretaries, with the aid of a Minister(s), have portfolios spanning several different government directorates, staffed by civil servants. Directorates and their related public bodies are responsible for putting government policy into practice. Find out more about the Scottish Government. In Scotland the devolved policy areas include the following: economy, education, health, justice, rural affairs, housing, environment, equal opportunities, consumer advocacy and advice, transport and taxation.

*Keep up to date with the Scottish Government*

1. You can keep track of relevant Scottish policy announcements, press releases and Ministerial speeches by following the Scottish Government on Twitter: @scotgov and signing up to blogs of interest. Keeping up to date with political debate in Scotland means you'll be able to make best use of any 'windows of opportunity' to engage.

**Engaging with the Scottish Government – routes in**

Like the UK Government, engaging with the Scottish Government will largely consist of engaging with the Scottish civil service but offers the opportunity to get involved in the early stages of policy development. Below we set out different ways that scientific and engineering expertise can feed into the Scottish Government.

*The Scottish Science Advisory Council (SSAC)*

The Scottish Science Advisory Council, SSAC, is Scotland's highest level science advisory body providing independent advice and recommendations on science strategy, policy and priorities to the Scottish Government's Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (CSA). The SSAC advises on a broad range of scientific issues and policies to contribute to growing the economy and raising quality of life in Scotland. The SSAC's membership is drawn from across the STEM subjects, including both practitioners and users of scientific innovation, and is fully independent of the Scottish Government although its work programme is developed by its members in discussion with the Scottish Government. SSAC produces briefing notes to inform policy development.

*Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA)*

The Scottish Government's main source of science and engineering advice is their Chief Scientific Adviser, (CSA), for Scotland. The role of the CSA is to provide strong leadership and independent advice on science in the Scottish Government. The CSA also co-chairs the SSAC. The Scottish CSA is also part of the CSA Network.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. You can follow the work of SSAC or for further information contact the SSAC Secretariat team at: Scottishscience@gov.scot

2. Like the UK Government the Scottish CSA operates within a network of science and engineering officials, civil servants, in the Scottish Government who are part of the Government Science and Engineering, (GES,) profession. You can keep up to date with potential opportunities to engage via the GES blog.

*Take part in a Consultation*

A simple way to engage with the Scottish Government is by feeding your expertise into new or changing policies by responding to government consultations. The Scottish Government have stated they want to make it as easy as possible for those who wish to express their opinions on a proposed area of work to do so in ways which will inform and enhance that work.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. Find out about current consultations here. The Scottish Government have also set up a Consultation Hub which you can check out and sign up to relevant alerts.

*What Works Scotland*

What Works Scotland is an affiliate member of the What Works Network set up to improve the ways evidence can be used to develop and deliver public services in Scotland. The initiative brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and other academics across Scotland and beyond involved in the design and delivery of public services.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. You can sign up to receive What Works Scotland's newsletter or follow on Twitter, @WWScot, to find out if there are any opportunities to engage with or get involved.

*Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes (SEFARI)*

SEFARI is a consortium of six Scottish research institutes that delivers the Scottish Government funded Strategic Research Programme (SRP) 2016 – 2021 on agriculture, environment, food and land. It also hosts an impact hub, the SEFARI Gateway, which is a knowledge exchange and impact hub for SEFARI. The Gateway works to improve the flow of research and expertise, and actively engage with stakeholders and build collaborations.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. Given SEFARI aims to disseminate its knowledge to Ministers and parliamentarians it might be worth your while getting in touch to see if there are opportunities to link up at all and check out their blog.

**How the Scottish Parliament works: the basics**

The Scottish Parliament is responsible for scrutinising the work of the Scottish Government and making laws for Scotland and is housed at Holyrood in Edinburgh. The Parliament is made up of 129 elected Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) of which there are 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs. There is no second chamber within the Scottish Parliament, (i.e. equivalent to the House of Lords), so the Scottish Parliament committees have a particularly powerful scrutiny role in relation to legislation. Mandatory committees deal with areas such as equal opportunities, public petitions, parliamentary procedures and finance, and subject committees deal with specific policy areas such as health, education and transport. All Scottish Parliament Committees have powers to introduce their own bills, unlike Westminster committees, although in practice this doesn't happen that often.

As with the UK Parliament, relevant, credible, and independent research is essential for good scrutiny and debate. Within the Scottish Parliament, research is used for many purposes including committee work, constituents' enquiries, and preparing for debates.

*Keep up to date with the Scottish Parliament*

Time spent observing relevant political discourse and debate can provide valuable knowledge to ascertain what might be policy relevant.

1. You can keep up to date on Scottish Parliamentary business and get involved in discussions through various social media channels. Most committees have their own Twitter accounts and the Scottish Parliament also has a Gaelic Twitter account.

2. You can also sign up for a free weekly eBulletin newsletter for information about future debates, committee

meetings and events. The eBulletin also contains details of Bills that are in progress and opportunities for you to give your views on issues. The newsletter is produced each week, normally on Friday afternoon.

**Engaging with the Scottish Parliament – routes in**

*Member of the Scottish Parliament*
Academic research could help a Member of the Scottish Parliament, (MSP) to scrutinise policy and debate pressing issues of the day. Research can also help MSPs and their staff to answer queries from constituents or address issues in their local area. It may therefore be worth getting in touch with a MSP if you have a specific area of expertise that relates to a devolved matter. This can be a good way to raise awareness about your subject area that you think should be factored in to a particular policy decision. Though before you approach an MSP have a clear strategy in mind - think about what you want the MSP to do? Do you want them to raise an issue in a committee, or raise awareness about your research in a debate, or ask a Parliamentary question? As with approaching a Member of the UK Parliament make sure your input is relevant – does your research link to parliamentary business? Be clear, explicit and accurate with your engagement and what you want to achieve. Communicate as you would to any intelligent layperson.

- *Get involved:*

1. Find out which MSP is interested in your particular area of expertise. Each MSP has their own page on the Parliament's website which lists the Committees and Cross-Party Groups they sit on. It's also worth looking at individual party websites and /or individual MSP's personal websites to find out which policy areas they are actively involved in. Find out more information on individual MSPs.

*Public Petitions*
Public petitions can be used to encourage the Scottish Government to act, whether this is through debating an issue, holding an inquiry or introducing legislation. Petitions must be something that is within the powers of the Scottish Parliament to do something about, and be about an issue of national policy or practice. Petitions must meet the specified format or they will not be considered. If your petition is accepted it will be published on the Scottish Parliament's website and scheduled for consideration by the Public Petitions Committee. The Petitions team will let you know when your petition will be considered and whether they will invite you in to give evidence in person.

- *Get involved:*

1. You'll find the specific format to use for petitions and other guidance here. Take a look at current and past petitions to learn more and see if this might be a relevant route for you to engage with the Scottish Parliament.

*Committees*
Committees play a central role in the work of the Scottish Parliament because, unlike the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament is a single-chamber parliament. Committees examine in detail the work of the Scottish Government, including its budget proposals; hold inquiries into subjects relating to the work of the committee; examine legislation, including bills and subordinate legislation; take evidence from witnesses to assist in their inquiries; and consider petitions that have been submitted by members of the public and groups who wish to raise an issue. In short committees are where MSPs scrutinise the work of the Scottish Government.

- *Get involved:*

1. By giving your views to a committee, you may influence legislation or the policies of the Scottish Government. You can write to a committee in response to a call for evidence, an inquiry or a Bill and suggest possible topics for committee inquiries. You can also attend committee events or interact with most committees through social media. Each committee is chaired by a convener and most of the current

committees have several MSPs as members. Members reflect the balance of the various political parties and groupings in the Scottish Parliament. Find out more about current committees that may be of relevance to you here. For example the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee may be of interest to you.

2. Committees can invite members of the public to give their views on the issues they are considering. They can also invite any person to attend a meeting as a witness. Witnesses give evidence related to the business of the committee. Detailed guidance on giving evidence is available here.

3. You could also join an Expert Panel. Several committees have developed their own 'Panels of Experts' or Advisors. They can provide advice to MSPs on a range of subjects relevant to the committee's remit. Committees place a notice on their web pages inviting nominations to act as advisers. Find out more by following the link to committees of interest here and sign up to alerts and Twitter feeds.

4. Discover further overall guidance on committees here.

*Cross-Party Groups*
Cross-Party Groups (CPGs) provide an opportunity for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to engage with external stakeholders, including academics, on a particular subject. CPGs are not formal parliamentary business and should not be confused with the Parliament's committee system. They do not have any power to introduce issues formally into the parliamentary or government systems but can be a useful way to engage, raise awareness about your area of expertise and help build relationships with relevant policy makers.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. Joining a CPG will enable you to meet with MSPs and other individuals and organisations who share an interest in your area of expertise. To join or attend a meeting of a CPG you should approach the group contact directly. An A-Z list of all CPGs and their contact details is available on the Scottish Parliament website along with a short video guide to the role that CPGs play in the Scottish Parliament and how you can get involved.

2. Of interest will be the CPG on Science and Technology whose purpose is to bring together MSPs and others, for example academics, with an interest in science and technology in Scotland. It aims to raise awareness amongst MSPs of important developments in science and technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine.

*Parliamentary Questions and Motions*
Parliamentary Questions provide an opportunity to obtain information or highlight an issue. As with Westminster there are written questions and oral questions that can be submitted by an MSP. Parliamentary Questions can be asked by any MSP to the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. Motions can be used to ask the Parliament to agree to something and are also submitted by an MSP. Motions are used by MSPs as a device to initiate debate or propose a course of action.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. You can find more detailed guidance on both parliamentary questions and Motions here and see if there may be a relevant opportunity to engage.

***Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe)***

Like MPs, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) work in a complex and fast-moving environment, often experiencing information overload. They often need

answers to specific questions, usually work to tight timescales, and need access to trusted information on complex issues from a range of sources. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) is the internal parliamentary research service for MSPs. SPICe relies on access to expert information and this is gleaned from many sources, including academic expertise.

SPICe provides impartial and confidential research and information services to the Scottish Parliament. Research can be used by SPICe to support Members' work in committees e.g. to inform committee inquiries; in debates in the Chamber for example to scrutinise the budget; in support of constituents, or to help prepare for meetings or public speeches. SPICe is staffed by information and subject specialists who need to be aware of key policy issues in their subject areas.

- *Get involved:*

1. SPICe is building on existing engagement practices to allow Parliament to better understand what is happening in academia (and vice versa). If you are looking for more information on academic engagement opportunities contact SPICe via academia@parliament.scot and keep up to date with other potential avenues for engagement by following SPICe on Twitter: @SPICe_Research

2. SPICe also runs an Academic Fellowship Scheme to enable academics to work on projects within the Scottish Parliament and also co-managers a Knowledge Exchange Network which provides knowledge exchange between academia and policy makers and promotes events and activities. Find out more here.

*Scotland's Futures Forum*
Scotland's Futures Forum is the Scottish Parliament's futures think-tank. It works on a non-party basis to promote research and to stimulate debate on the long-term challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces, with the aim of informing MSPs and other interested stakeholders. It hosts discussions and seminars and presents ideas to engage and challenge Scotland's parliamentarians. These events often include academics and external experts who are willing to share their expertise.

- *Get involved:*

1. You can keep up to date with the work of Scotland's Futures Forum here: @ScotFutures or get in contact ScotlandsFuturesForum@parliament.scot to see if there are any opportunities to engage.

**How the Welsh Government works: the basics**

The Welsh Government is the executive body for Wales and is comprised of a First Minister, 12 Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers and the Counsel General who is the Chief Legal Adviser to the Government. They are supported by civil servants who work across devolved areas that include key areas of public life such as health, education and the environment. The Welsh Government develops and implements policy for Wales which is set out at the start of each new Assembly with a five year forward looking Programme for Government. The current programme covers 2016 – 2021. As there is a five-year policy making cycle this might affect when and how academics can contribute.

*Keep up to date with the Welsh Government*
Keeping up to date with relevant political discourse could open up potential avenues to engage with policy that you may have not considered.

1. You can sign up to get regular email newsletters about announcements or follow the Welsh Government on Twitter: @WelshGovernment

**Engaging with the Welsh Government – routes in**

*Government Minsters and the Welsh Civil Service*

Like the UK Government, engaging with the Welsh Government, including civil servants, offers the opportunity to get involved at the early stages of policy development before a policy even goes through the parliamentary process. Unlike the UK Government though, the chance to engage and potentially influence may be easier in Wales due to the smaller size of Government. Although direct engagement with a Minister may still be difficult to achieve, you can start by identifying which Minister and then which policy group has relevant linkages with your area of expertise. The Government is made up of the Permanent Secretary's Group; the Office of the First Minister and Brexit Group; the Health and Social Services Group; the Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group; and the Education and Public Services Group. Also, like the UK Government, the Welsh civil service is a non-political administration that supports Welsh Government ministers, irrespective of the party that is in power.

- *Get involved:*

1. It's been argued that as the Welsh Government is small and relatively accessible it may be easier to engage directly with a relevant Government Minster about your area of research expertise than it is in the UK Government. Practical advice about writing to Welsh Ministers is here.

2. Realistically though, given its likely Welsh Ministers are just as time poor as their UK counterparts, they also rely on others, both permanent civil servants and their Special Advisers, to act as 'evidence filters' for them. So you may have more luck engaging with a senior civil servant for the policy areas that may align with your areas of expertise. You can find contacts via the Government organisation chart.

3. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government provides a useful indicator of priorities and the legislative programme over the next few years. You may want to check it out to ensure any engagement you make aligns with specific challenges that Ministers are prioritising. Framing your research in a way that resonates with the policy agenda of Ministers is more likely to have impact.

*Knowledge and Analytical Service*

The Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Service, (KAS), consists of about 80 staff providing in-house analysis to both Ministers and Government policy teams. It is made up of a mixture of social researchers, statisticians, economists, geographers, librarians and operational researchers. KAS collates, analyses and presents research evidence and data for Welsh policy makers and provides analytical capacity for each Government directorate.

- *Get involved:*

1. You can sign up to receive a regular newsletter about statistics and research in the Welsh Government to monitor upcoming projects and any calls for evidence.

*Policy Consultations*

The Welsh Government publishes policy consultations which you can respond to as a way of raising awareness about your area of expertise.

- *Get involved:*

1. You'll find a list of all open consultations and can filter by key work and topic.

*The Wales Centre for Public Policy*

The Wales Centre for Public Policy is an affiliate member of the What Works Network and has had notable success in influencing Welsh Government policy so could be an excellent knowledge broker to link up with. The Centre works directly with Welsh Ministers to improve policy making and delivery. Based at Cardiff University it is funded by the Welsh Government and ESRC

but is operationally independent of government. It collaborates with researchers and policy experts from across the UK and beyond to deliver a rolling programme of work which is agreed with the First Minister.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. You can sign up to the Centre's newsletter or follow on Twitter, @WCfPP, to be alerted to any opportunities as they arise [1]or find out about ways in which you can engage.

**How the National Assembly for Wales works: the basics**

The National Assembly for Wales is the legislative body for Wales. Its role is to scrutinise the work of the Welsh Government. The distinction between the National Assembly and the Welsh Government is the same as between the UK Parliament and the UK Government. The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account. The Assembly is made up of 60 Members (AMs) who represent 40 constituencies and five regions across Wales.

The corporate body for the National Assembly for Wales is known as the Assembly Commission. The Assembly Commission has responsibility for the provision of property, staff and services to support Assembly Members. You can find out more about the difference between the National Assembly and the Assembly Commission here. The Assembly Commission's strategy for 2016-21 includes a specific commitment to '*leverage external expertise where necessary*'[2]. Making greater use of academic expertise to support the policy and legislative scrutiny work of the Assembly will help to deliver the Commission's strategic goal of providing '*outstanding parliamentary support and engaging with all the people of Wales*'[3].

*Keep up to date with the National Assembly for Wales*

Find out what the Assembly is interested in and see if there are any alignments with your subject area. Time spent observing relevant political discourse can help ascertain what might be policy relevant and help you tailor any communications accordingly.

1. The Assembly hosts a blog that is worth checking out or you can follow the Assembly on Twitter. See below for keeping up to date with particular Assembly Members interests.

**Engaging with the National Assembly for Wales – routes in**

*Assembly Members*

Assembly Members, (AMs), can use academic research to scrutinise Welsh Government policy, inform debate on topical issues and consider new legislation. AMs have support staff working for them, helping them access research and information. Academic research can help AMs answer queries from constituents or address issues in their local area.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. If you want to engage with an AM then keeping up to date with their interests will help you be policy savvy and foresee a timely opportunity to flag up your research or expertise. You can keep abreast of the political landscape by checking out the following:
    a. Find out more about the work of AMs including which Committees and Cross-Party Groups of interest they sit on. You can also find out anything that an AM may

[1] With effect from 6 May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales will change its name to the bilingual names Senedd Cymru and Welsh Parliament

[2] http://www.assembly.wales/en/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-commission-policies/Pages/abt-commission-policies.aspx

[3] http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Commission-strategy-English%20branded-(final)-en.pdf

have said on an area that is of interest to you by searching The Record.

b. Agendas and Business statements for Plenary meetings are published in advance. Plenary meetings are attended by all AMs and provide one of the key mechanisms for AMs to hold the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission to account, make laws for Wales and represent their constituents. If an upcoming debate is relevant to your subject area it might be worth contacting an AM to explain how your area of expertise could input.

c. The Assembly Research Service's blog In Brief publishes and blogs in advance about Government, Committee Report and Bill debates providing timely context and analysis. Subscribe to receive updates.

2. You can also work with AMs to propose ideas for new legislation via the Assembly Members Ballot. Ballots take place three or four times a year. Although most laws in Wales are put forward by Welsh Government Ministers individual AMs who win a Member Bill ballot also get the opportunity to introduce a proposed law. Find out more here.

*Assembly Committees*

Most of the work of the Assembly is carried out through Committees. There are five legislation Committees, five scrutiny Committees, (covering areas such as Sustainability and Health, Well-being and Local Government), and a number of other Committees dealing with issues such as finance and Assembly business. The Assembly's Committees carry out inquiries on different topics and compile reports in which they make recommendations to the Welsh Government, which it must respond to within six weeks. Academic research can also feed into these inquiries. Participating in an Assembly Committee, whether by providing evidence or applying to sit on one, can be an important way to engage with the policy agenda and to start building a trusted relationship with relevant Welsh policy makers.

➢ *Get involved:*

1. Details of all current committee consultations and enquiries can be found here along with contact details for all Committees that may be of interest. Keep an eye on Assembly Committee remits and register an interest with the Committee Clerk if you think your work is relevant - that way you won't miss any calls for evidence.

2. Like the UK Government when Assembly Committees start investigating an issue they will publish a 'call for evidence', setting out what areas the inquiry will cover, usually on a Committees webpage. Anyone can respond. It is normal practice for the National Assembly to publish evidence provided to a Committee on its website. Detailed guidance about providing either written or oral evidence to Assembly Committees is available here: Getting involved with Committees.

3. Staff that support Committees can also draw on the expertise of external researchers to help them identify topics for future inquiries, to maintain and update their subject knowledge and identify specific researchers to act as witnesses or specialist advisers. Senedd Research, (see below), also provide expert briefings for Committees and support to develop specific question areas. So make contact with the lead researcher covering your area of expertise and start establishing a working relationship to find out if there are opportunities to engage with a

Committee of interest. You'll find contact details here at the bottom of this page.

***Cross-Party Groups***

Assembly Cross-Party Groups provide a forum for AMs from different parties to meet in order to consider and discuss shared interests in particular subjects. Cross-Party Groups may be set up by AMs in respect of any subject area relevant to the Assembly. A group must include Members from three political party groups represented within the Assembly. Cross-Party Groups are not formal Assembly groupings though and they have no formal role in policy development. However, they host talks and also hold inquiries, both of which may be informed by academic research.

Of interest will be the Cross-Party Group on STEM which brings together AMs and others with an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Wales. The Group aims to raise awareness, amongst AMs, of important developments in STEM, both technological and educational; and how policy issues impact upon these areas.

- *Get involved:*

1. You can find a list here of all the Cross-Party Groups and details for the Cross Party Group on STEM.

*Assembly Research Service*

The Assembly Research Service, Senedd Research, is the key resource for many Assembly Members and Committees but also external stakeholders. It provides non-partisan research evidence and briefings and specialist parliamentary support to all 60 Assembly Members and the Assembly's Committees. Senedd Research also run a number of initiatives, see below, specifically aimed at encouraging academics to engage with their work. It's staff need access to evidence and will draw upon many sources, including academic expertise, to provide research briefings to support Assembly Members.

- *Get involved:*

1. Senedd Research produces a widely read blog called In Brief which you can subscribe to. Keep an eye on this to monitor upcoming programmes of work and see if there are topics or projects to which you can contribute. You can also follow Senedd Research on Twitter: @SeneddResearch

2. You can make contact with the lead researcher covering your area of expertise and start establishing a working relationship. You could offer to contribute to a briefing or a blog post, assist with peer review or brief a relevant researcher on you area of expertise to help raise your profile. Senedd Research has about 30 research staff each covering a specific subject area. You'll find contact details here at the bottom of this page.

3. The Academic Fellowship scheme enables academics at a senior (post-PhD) career level to spend time working with the Research Service on a specific project, where it will have mutual benefit to both an academic and to the National Assembly for Wales. Information on future schemes will appear on this page shortly.

**Understanding the political context in Northern Ireland**

Understanding the political context of a country is essential to your ability to engage with policy effectively. This is of particular significance in Northern Ireland which faces unique governance challenges. In 1998 the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement established a bespoke power sharing devolved executive and assembly. However, the history of power sharing since 1999 has been volatile with the executive collapsing several times. During these periods the UK government has suspended devolution and imposed direct rule from Westminster. Following the most recent collapse, in 2017, the UK Government has not stepped in, instead preferring to

maintain pressure on Northern Ireland parties to return to Government. However, this did not happened and instead the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has been responsible for the day to day running of the country with limited Ministerial direction. Senior civil servants have continued to work within the scope of the policy direction set by Ministers before the collapse. As civil servants are unable to develop new policy and/or change policy direction, an academic's ability to influence policy in Northern Ireland was constrained - hence this section is brief. However, at the time of writing, an historic deal between the Northern Ireland parties, brokered by the UK and Irish Government, has restored the power-sharing government again and the Northern Ireland Assembly has reopened.

A brief overview of how the executive and assembly should function is therefore set out below together with a couple of routes to potential engagement at this current time.

**Introduction to the Northern Ireland Executive: the basics**

The Northern Ireland Executive is a multiparty, power-sharing executive which means it is a form of government involving guaranteed group representation. It is headed jointly by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and although they hold different titles, they have equal powers. There are ten further Ministers and two Junior Ministers who hold responsibility over the devolved issues. They are appointed rather than selected, with positions shared across the political parties according to their share of the vote.

Northern Ireland holds powers to make primary legislation. Policy areas that are transferred to Northern Ireland include: education, health, housing, transport, road safety, environment, sports, arts and leisure, wildlife protection, agriculture, forestry and fishing, economic development, employment and training, fire and ambulance services, and tourism. Westminster retains responsibility for defence, foreign policy, raising taxes, security, policing and justice.

*Keep up to date with the Northern Ireland Executive*

You can follow the Northern Ireland Executive on Twitter to keep abreast of political discourse.

**Introduction to the Northern Ireland Assembly: the basics**

The Northern Ireland Assembly is the devolved legislature for Northern Ireland and is responsible for making and enacting laws on transferred matters in Northern Ireland and for scrutinising the work of Ministers and Government Departments. It is housed at Parliament Buildings on the Stormont estate in Belfast. There are 108 elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) that represent 18 constituencies. They are elected every four years. The Assembly conducts its work through 11 Statutory Committees, which deal with specific departments, and six Standing Committees, which deal with MLA standards and privileges and Assembly business and procedures.

*Keep up to date with the Northern Ireland Assembly*

Find out about all the different Social Media channels you can use to keep up to date with the Assembly. You'll find links to subscribing to a newsletter, following the Assembly on Twitter and subscribing to various mailing lists of interest.

**Engaging with the Northern Ireland Assembly – potential routes to explore**

*All Party Groups*

All Party Groups (APGs) continued to meet even with the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly. APGs provide a forum by which Members of the Legislative Assembly and external stakeholders can meet to discuss shared interests in a particular cause or subject and can provide an

opportunity to gather cross-party support on a particular issue.

- *Get involved:*

1. To find out more about the activities of specific APGs you can find contact details provided by each Group on the Assembly website.

2. Of particular interest will be the APG on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, (STEM), which aims to bring together Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and others with an interest in STEM with the aim of raising awareness among MLAs of important developments in this area. Find out if there are any opportunities to get involved or share your knowledge by contacting the Secretariat Support Contact.

*Northern Ireland Research and Information Service (RaISe)*

Given the political context in Northern Ireland there has been limited opportunities to engage with Northern Irish policy but it may be worth your while keeping up to date with the work of RaISe if you wish to find out about potential ways you can engage in the future. RaISe provides impartial information and research services for Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), their staff and the secretariat. Of interest will be RaISe's in-depth analytical briefings regarding policy, legislation and public finance which are relevant to Assembly business and the articles published on their blog, Research Matters. The blog provides short, topical articles primarily for MLAs and their support staff, but also for a wider audience.

In the past RaISe has also co-delivered a seminar series to provide a non-partisan forum for MLAs, their staff and Assembly staff to consider academic research. This is known as the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) which aims to promote evidence-led policy and law-making within Northern Ireland and provide a forum to present and disseminate academic research in an accessible format.

- *Get involved:*

1. For past KESS programmes have a look here. Although KESS programming is currently suspended, due to the political circumstances, they do aim to resume as soon as possible. It may be worth getting in contact with KESS to open up communication raise@niassembly.gov.uk or follow on Twitter to keep alert to when their future seminar series will return: @RaISe_KESS

2. Check out their blog, Research Matters, and find the link to subscribe to it at the bottom of the page. There may be opportunities to contribute so it's worth getting in touch with RaISe staff and make the first steps to engagement: raise@niassembly.gov.uk

**www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk**

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