

EVENT REPORT

Zoom, 22nd September, 9.30-12.30pm

The Scottish Policy Group (SPG) and Scottish Policy Research Exchange (SPRE) delivered our joint event on '*Demystifying Policy*'. This report provides a summary of speaker presentations and take away points.

We would like to say a massive thank you guest speakers, participants, SPG Committee Members and SPRE for organising and contributing to this event. Also a thank you to Policy Officers Nick and Beth for their support with delivering the outputs.

Ellie Wood (SPG) chaired this event and we had 53 participants in attendance including speakers. You can view the speaker information and download the event agenda if you wish [here](#).

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INTRODUCTION

Ellie introduced the event and shared a Mentimeter with participants. Quite a few people had informally engaged with policy and a few people had formally engaged.

Have you ever FORMALLY engaged with policy?



Have you ever INFORMALLY engaged with policy?



Chris Pollard (SPG Vice-Chair) and Nick Bibby (SPRE Director) briefly introduced the Scottish Policy Group and the Scottish Policy Research Exchange to participants.

SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

This section of the report summarises the main takeaways from our speaker presentations. The recording from this event will be shared on the SPG webpages in due course and for a summary of event and speaker presentations please see Bethany Chamberlain's blog [here](#).

Jeanette Hall - What is Policy? A Basic Introduction

- Policies are a set of principles to guide actions. They are influenced by a range of factors including values, science and economics – with none being more important than the other, not even science!
- International commitments and discussions, such as those taking place at COP26 in Glasgow this November, also influence national policy.

When writing for policy

- Simplify your work into plain English – policymakers are not interested in detailed technical information.

- Keep it brief.
- Make it relevant to current policy discussions and be timely.
- Be certain about uncertainty.
- Focus on the evidence and always be honest.
- Tell a story to bring a topic to life and explain why it matters.
- You need a so what factor!

Writing Policy Briefs – Nick Bibby

- Consider your audience – what do they already know and care about?
- Consider your message – what is the core focus? Drive this message home and build your piece around this.
- Consider your medium – how does your audience tend to acquire knowledge?
- Policy briefs are important tools for policymaker engagement.
- These should be professional but non-academic in style, short (2-4 pages) and focussed on a particular policy problem or question. Recommendations should draw naturally from the evidence you are presenting.
- What distinguishes a policy question from a research question is that policies can be implemented in the real world – always keep this in mind when devising recommendations as the more you can inform the discussion around implementation, the better.

Code Red for Parliamentary Scrutiny – Graeme Cook

SPICe

- Supports MSPs and their staff. Parliamentary Committees, Scottish Parliament Staff, and the public and media indirectly.
- Writes briefings regarding upcoming policy areas. This allows MSPs and other to gain info very quickly, but also by horizon scanning, it makes them much quicker to respond to queries etc.

COP26

- Scottish Parliament are running their own Legislators Summit. This event will include high profile speakers from Global North and South
- What role do parliaments have in the crisis? The 'Moment' – is aimed at young people. We will have events at Glasgow, including Blue Zone.

Tips to take away

- When writing for policy makers impartiality is important you have to be neutral. Take a balanced approach to writing and give both sides of the argument. Sometimes the evidence will point firmly in one direction and should reflect this.

- Committees hold government to account and scrutinise in much more detail. They happen in small groups that meet on a regular basis.
- Consultations are another excellent way to engage and are usually structured with clear questions. You can respond as an individual or with a group such as the BES.

Science into policy: tipping the balance – Chris Leakey

- Get your data into organisations (e.g. NatureScot use data and knowledge) – this helps establish yourself as a ‘go-to academic’ and is great for building working relationships with individuals in policy.
- Offer to help or shadow; there are groups like SPRE and SPG you can actively get involved with. This could also lead to opportunities to input into consultation responses.
- Keep up to date with policy affairs (check out the [Programme for Government](#)) and look up research pools like [SAGES](#) and MASTS.
- There are 10 research pools in Scotland, go to [Research pooling \(sfc.ac.uk\)](#) to find out more about them.
- Avoid lobbying – stay science grounded for your own integrity and be constructive by proposing solutions, not just presenting challenges.
- If preparing verbal evidence, be confident (there is a reason you have been asked!), keep it short, avoid jargon, use bullet points and provide links to further information. Research who the other panel members are and know the session focus (Parliamentary clerks will be able to give you this information).
- Try to anticipate conflicts or sensitive issues and prepare for these.

Environmental monitoring and policy: A journey from Scotland’s Highlands to the capital city – Lydia Neimi

- Lydia provided an overview of her experience of breaking into the world of policy through her work as a PhD researcher on pharmaceuticals in the environment.
- Maximise on your contacts and reaching out early to any stakeholders you work with who are involved with policy. It is also worth researching different funding streams as some want policy impact meaning the funders may be able to support you.
- She introduced the *One Health Breakthrough Partnership* [One Health Breakthrough Partnership \(ohbp.org\)](#). Which has a vision for non-toxic environment and brings together 4 agencies in Scotland.

Lobbying and Preparing for Policy Work – Stuart Housden

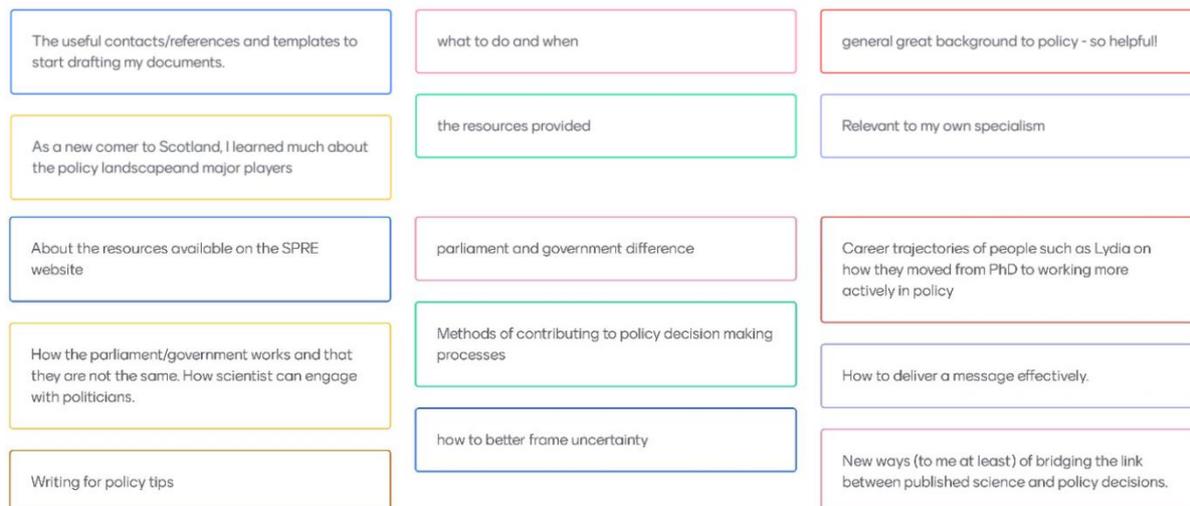
- Policy makers want to work with scientists to make sure their policies make sense. For example, RSPB employs around 70 post doc scientists.
- Don't be intimidated by approaching policymakers. You are experts and you will know infinitely more than the people asking questions in a parliamentary committee etc. Calm, clear, and hone in on the areas that you know are important.
- Policy change and legislative change does not happen overnight. It takes a long time, partly because people will have a different view, eg people who benefit from the current system. Farm subsidies in CAP.
- Often scientists assume that producing peer-reviewed research will lead to the desired changes. This is not true as there are so many other factors to consider.
- Horizon scanning is important. You can position yourself as an organisation or a group of scientists to get yourself ahead of the game and be in a position where you can advise. Being ahead of the game is very important. Get to know who is writing it.
- Getting your ideas into green paper, white paper, consultation documents can be much more effective than oral evidence later when the foundational ideas have been set out. You need to get your ideas in as early as possible.
- It is vital to understand the motivations of those who may challenge you in the future.
- Get to know civil servants who work in the regulation of your area.

EVENT FEEDBACK

What was the most useful thing you learnt?

Mentimeter





Q&A PANEL MAIN TAKEWAYS & TIPS

- Nick: SPRE has a [weekly round up of consultations](#). If you are stuck about something regarding a consultation, you can call up a parliamentary clerk and ask.
- Chris Leakey: when giving evidence, you know more than the people asking the questions. Practice on your friends and family first.
- Nick Bibby: try and persuade senior academics or others who have been asked to give evidence to take you along if you are PhD/post doc
- Lydia Niemi: reach out to policy-relevant people early on in a project/job. Building relationships is key.
- Graeme Cook: the people asking the questions are just people. They are looking for answers to their problems. They aren't looking to trick you.
- Stuart Housden: a key skill is interpreting scientific data/jargon and writing for a lay person. Also get to know the sectors that challenge the data you are providing.
- It is definitely possible to move from academia to policy/government. More and more people are as there are fewer postdocs than PHDs.
- Chris Leaky: emphasise your skills, and know that no one ever knows how to do a job on day 1, there will be lots of learning on the job.

CASE STUDY SESSION TAKEWAYS & TIPS

Nick Bibby and Dave Bell from SPRE took over for this optional part of the training. It focused in on the further resources shared before the event and provided the audience a chance to get involved in the discussion. We have summarised some key takeaway messages here:

- Dave Bell - It is not just the evidence that is important. Being able to present evidence actually gets people together in a room, and can start to form a network of people that are then engaged in that issue. You have to explain your evidence in terms that policy makers understand, whether that is economic value or other things.
- Dave Bell - It is not just the content of your academic papers that is significant. You need to learn as much about context as you can, including the networks of people who work on the different aspects of an area of a problem.
- Nick Bibby – It is not your job to produce policy. You don't need to worry too much about your evidence leading to drastically wrong policy.
- Ellie Wood – You will be asked to work on things that you are not a specialist in if you move into policy work, you need to be comfortable being flexible.
- Nick Bibby – Helpful for research too. Writing for a lay audience really makes you think about your research, your subject area and really tests your understanding.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Scottish Policy & Research Exchange guide on 'how to get started' with policy engagement](#)
- [Pushing research evidence only gets us so far](#)
- [Keep it complex](#)
- [Science communication demands a critical approach that centres inclusion, equity and intersectionality](#)
- [Welsh example of how evidence has been used for policy change: Nature Recovery Report](#)

FURTHER LISTENING

- [40 minute talk on 'Shaping policy with evidence'](#)
- [34 minute talk on 'Why do policymakers seem to ignore your evidence?'](#)
- [1 hour 34 minute panel discussion on 'Politics, power and the use of research evidence'](#)