

# UKAgeNet Policy Impact Framework

## Accelerating the Translation of Ageing Research into Policy

### Executive Summary

There is a widely accepted expectation that publicly funded research should contribute to policy development and societal benefit. In the field of ageing research, this expectation is particularly acute, given the scale of demographic change and the pressure it places on health, social care, labour markets and public finances. Despite this, the translation of research evidence into policy remains inconsistent and often slow. Differences in culture, incentives, language and timescales between academia and government continue to present significant barriers.

The UKAgeNet Policy Impact Framework has been developed to support researchers working on ageing-related topics to navigate these challenges more effectively. Its purpose is to provide practical guidance on how to plan for, initiate and sustain engagement with local, regional and national government, and with the wider ecosystem of stakeholders that influence public policy. The framework is grounded in experience from across UKAgeNet and draws on established evidence about how policy influence occurs in practice.

The framework has three core components. First, it supports researchers to understand the policy landscape by identifying the relevant government actors, parliamentary routes and external stakeholders for their area of research. Second, it outlines key actions that increase the likelihood of policy impact, including preparing the ground through profile-building, engaging policy stakeholders early and strategically, and framing research outputs in accessible and policy-relevant ways. Third, it brings together practical guidance and tools to support engagement, including advice on building a digital profile and tailoring communication for different policy audiences.

This document is intended for UKAgeNet members at all career stages and across disciplines. It can be used flexibly, whether to inform grant design, develop an impact strategy, prepare policy briefings, or plan engagement activities alongside an ongoing research project. The framework does not assume linear pathways to impact, nor does it guarantee policy change. Rather, it aims to increase the visibility, relevance and accessibility of ageing research, so that it is more likely to inform policy debates and decision-making when opportunities arise.

UKAgeNet will continue to refine and develop this framework over time and welcomes feedback and examples of good practice from its members. Through

collective learning and sustained engagement, the network aims to strengthen the contribution of ageing research to evidence-informed public policy.

## Why is a Policy Impact Framework Needed

Ageing research has a critical role to play in shaping public policy. Decisions taken by local, regional and national governments influence how societies respond to demographic change, population health, social care demand, workforce participation and inequalities in later life. Ensuring that policy is informed by robust evidence is therefore essential.

Despite this, the translation of research into policy is often uneven and unpredictable. While expectations around research impact have increased, researchers frequently report difficulties accessing policy actors, identifying the most relevant routes into government, and communicating findings in ways that align with policy priorities and decision-making processes. Policy makers, in turn, operate under tight time constraints, competing agendas and differing evidentiary needs, which can limit their engagement with academic research.

These challenges reflect well-documented differences between the research and policy environments, including contrasting incentives, language, timescales and institutional cultures. As a result, valuable evidence is often underused, opportunities for influence are missed, and engagement occurs too late in the policy cycle to shape outcomes meaningfully.

The UKAgeNet Policy Impact Framework has been developed to help bridge these and to increase the likelihood that ageing research is visible, accessible and relevant to policy makers when windows of opportunity arise.

By providing structured guidance on understanding the policy landscape, engaging strategically with government and influential stakeholders, and framing research outputs for policy audiences, the framework supports researchers to approach policy engagement in a more informed, proactive and sustained way.

## Components of the Framework

The UKAgeNet Policy Impact Framework is structured around three interconnected components comprising a catalogue of the most relevant stakeholders in the translation of ageing research into policy and practice (at local, regional and national levels); a list of the key actions associated with successful impact; and a section containing toolkits with practical suggestions.

## 1. Understanding the Policy and Stakeholder Landscape

Effective policy engagement begins with identifying who has influence over the policy area relevant to the research. This includes understanding where decisions are made across local, regional and national government, and recognising the wider group of actors who shape policy agendas and inform decision-making.

Stakeholders to consider beyond the UK government, MPs and policy makers in the civil service includes Mayoral Combined

Authorities, devolved governments, NHS trusts, NGOs, the media, trades, unions, think tanks, learned societies, research funders, third sector, professional bodies and faith and patients' groups, relevant industries, influential celebrities.

Effective engagement with the government begins with clarifying how your issue fits into the wider policy environment. This includes understanding whether the problem you are addressing is recognised by the government/policy makers as one requiring attention, and whether any recent or forthcoming events could act as focusing moments that raise its political salience. Information on where to find areas of interest to the UK government are in Toolkit 1. It also means identifying where decisions are made: is authority held in central government, by devolved administrations or within local government? Alongside this, it is important to understand who is shaping the policy, whether civil servants, public bodies or local authorities, and who will ultimately be responsible for implementing it.

Influence within the policy system rarely sits with formal decision makers alone. Policy makers listen to a range of external voices, including pressure groups, think tanks, media commentators and professional or sector bodies. Researchers should therefore consider which organisations hold sway in their area, whether there are recognised experts or public figures who might amplify their ideas, and whether relevant specialist groups or think tanks are active in the space. Relationships with affected communities can also strengthen the credibility and relevance of research evidence.

Taken together, these questions help researchers anticipate what might motivate politicians or officials to act and position their work in ways that align with existing agendas. Understanding who makes decisions, who shapes the conversation around those decisions, and who influences policy thinking is central to navigating the landscape effectively and identifying realistic routes to impact.

## 2. Key Actions to Increase the Chances of Impact

Research and good practice suggest several steps that can significantly increase the likelihood of policy impact, although success will always depend on current political priorities.

**Preparing the ground** begins with building visibility and credibility. This includes developing a clear public profile through accessible outlets such as blogs,

magazines or newspapers, and establishing yourself as a trusted source of evidence. Toolkit 2 provides guidance on strengthening your digital profile. Preparation also involves cultivating relationships with relevant policy makers or departments, for example by inviting officials to discuss your research or contribute to seminars, so that channels of communication are open before a policy opportunity arises.

**Strategic engagement with policy makers and other stakeholders** requires involving government officials and key stakeholders from the earliest stages of a project, ideally at conception, and maintaining regular contact as the work progresses. This could involve inviting officials or key stakeholders to join an advisory group, sharing periodic updates or meeting to discuss emerging findings. Early engagement also helps researchers understand the specific policy problems the government is facing at that moment, as well as any innovations being explored, allowing the research to speak directly to these needs. For guidance on engaging local and national government officials and select committees, see Toolkit 3. Impact is more likely when other influential stakeholders are similarly kept informed. Bringing them into advisory structures or maintaining ongoing dialogue helps build broader support around the research and ensures multiple voices can amplify the findings when policy windows open.

**Framing the outputs** is essential for policy relevance. It is essential that the research is robust and relevant to the identified stakeholder. This means producing reliable data with clear policy implications. These need to be packaged for specific audiences and in highly accessible forms, such as short policy briefing documents. Data transparency and public sharing foster trust and can facilitate adoption by policy makers and practitioners. Ways of framing inputs are also suggested in Toolkit 3.

## TOOLKIT 1

### What could motivate politicians to turn ideas into policy

Below are useful links as a way in to understanding the areas of interest at that moment in time and to build relationships for the UK government

- Areas of special interest which give details about the main research questions facing government departments and are also a “way in.”  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>
- Research at the department of education highlighting the research interests of the department of education  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/research#analytical-associate-pool>
- Open Innovation Team; They work with experts to generate analysis and ideas for policy  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/open-innovation-team>
- House libraries and POST  
<https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/research-impact-at-the-uk-parliament/knowledge-exchange-at-uk-parliament/>; <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/>;  
<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/>; <https://post.parliament.uk/>
- APPG  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmllparty/210127/contents.htm>
- Select committees <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select/>

### Scottish government

- Scottish Policy Research Exchange (SPRE)
  - <https://spre.scot/>
- SPRE: Resources to help policymakers and scholars connect:
  - <https://spre.scot/resources-to-engage-with-policymakers/>
- Scottish Parliament “Guidance for researchers: submitting written evidence to the Scottish Parliament”
  - <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spice/guidance-for-researchers-submitting-written-evidence.pdf>
- Scottish Parliament: Academic engagement opportunities:  
<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/academic-engagement>

- Scottish Parliament: Webinar: how academics can engage with the Scottish Parliament: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/academic-engagement/how-to-engage/webinar>

## TOOLKIT 2

### Guidance for Enhancing Your Digital Profile

A strong digital presence increases the visibility and impact of your research. The steps below help ensure that your online profile communicates your work clearly to both academic and non-academic audiences.

#### 1. Assess your online presence

- Google your name to see how easily your professional information can be found and search specific key words that best represent your research and search for them online to see whether your name is easily found. Adjust your online content to include these keywords so that your profile appears in relevant results.
- Check that publicly available information gives a clear, accessible description of your research interests and expertise.
- Make sure your profiles are understandable to non-specialists and include direct links to key projects.

#### 2. Engage in non-academic outreach

- Publish accessible pieces in blogs, newspapers and other public-facing outlets.
- Use these platforms to translate complex research into clear, engaging insights for wider audiences.

#### 3. Use social media strategically

- Share your work on platforms such as LinkedIn and Bluesky.
- Post updates, insights and publications to build connections and reach new audiences.
- Keep your LinkedIn or professional webpages current and informative.
- Add links to recent publications, projects and achievements.

## TOOLKIT 3

### Considering the target audience and the approach

#### Presenting research for a policy audience

This toolkit brings together practical advice for researchers on engaging with civil servants, MPs, select committees, local government and devolved administrations. It reflects lived experience and the realities of policy work, including fast-paced environments, competing priorities and limited capacity for reading or reflection. The guidance is intended to support researchers in understanding these contexts and navigating them more confidently and effectively.

There are some general considerations that apply when researchers engage with any of these groups, regardless of the specific policy setting. When preparing to write for a particular audience, researchers should think carefully about who that audience is and what matters most to them. This includes considering the role the audience plays in the policy system, the decisions they influence and the constraints they are working under. Structuring a piece for impact means being clear about the core message and ensuring it is easy for a policy audience to identify and act upon.

A helpful starting point for researchers is to be explicit about what they want their audience to do differently as a result of reading a document. This might involve changing a view, prioritising an issue, commissioning further work or using evidence in a particular way. Alongside this, researchers should consider the characteristics of their audience, including level of seniority, professional background and familiarity with research evidence.

It is also important for researchers to reflect on how much their audience is likely to know about the topic already and how interested they may be. Some audiences may have only limited prior knowledge or time, while others may be highly informed but focused on a narrow aspect of the issue. Thinking about what motivates the audience, and what else they are likely to be dealing with at the same time, can help researchers decide what to emphasise and what to leave out.

Careful attention should be paid to framing, language and tone. Using clear, direct language and avoiding unnecessary technical detail can make research messages more accessible. Where appropriate, images or familiar idioms can help make complex concepts clearer, particularly if they are fresh enough to capture attention rather than reinforce clichés. Researchers should also ask whether their message can be expressed more concisely without losing its core meaning.

Finally, researchers should consider which format will work best for their audience and purpose. This might be a formal report, a written submission, a short briefing

note or an email. Choosing the right format can significantly affect whether research is read, understood and used.

## **1. Working with Civil Servants in Whitehall**

Civil servants are often keen to use evidence, but this needs it to be accessible, relevant and delivered in formats that fit their working constraints.

There are two broad types of civil servants' roles:

- Analysts who scan the landscape, build networks, gather evidence quickly and identify gaps.
- Policy officials, usually generalists, who work to tight deadlines and engage with research in short bursts.

Understanding which group you are dealing with, helps you tailor your communication.

Challenges to engagement are shaped by several constraints, including severe time pressure, high staff turnover and poor institutional memory. Civil servants may also face limited budgets and capacity, varying levels of scientific training, difficulty identifying the right expert at short notice, and different expectations and working cultures across departments.

To engage effectively, lead with a short, clear summary of your main finding and why it matters. Explain only what they need to know and avoid academic detail unless it is specifically requested. Be concrete by offering numbers, timelines, case studies and examples. Use formats they can act on, such as short briefing notes, one-page summaries, Q&A documents or a PowerPoint highlighting key points. Avoid sending a paper on its own and always provide key messages first. Where possible, connect with empathy by telling stories about people or groups they care about. Short face-to-face or virtual conversations can also be effective. Given high staff turnover, understanding how long someone has been in post can help you gauge their level of knowledge.

When working specifically with analysts, provide quick access to evidence and concise figures, and keep caveats to a minimum. They can discuss methodology with you if needed. Their preferred format is often a PowerPoint, with key points clearly stated and the relevance of the data made explicit at the outset.

## **2. Engaging with Members of Parliament (MPs)**

MPs are generalists, and their engagement with research depends heavily on relevance, timing and constituency connection. When deciding whether to engage with an issue, MPs will consider whether it affects their constituency, whether it aligns with their party's priorities and their personal interests, and how visible it is within media and public debate. They may also assess its relevance during the

pre-election cycle, particularly where it could influence voting preferences, and whether championing the issue strengthens their political identity.

Effective engagement usually begins with requesting a short face-to-face meeting, as personal contact matters. Before approaching an MP, it is important to research their interests and current priorities. Communication should be succinct and simple, clearly setting out what the research is about, what it has found and what the end goal is. Researchers should demonstrate clearly how the issue affects the MP's constituents, using brief, well-chosen statistics or infographics where helpful. Human stories and quotes can make an issue more tangible, but written materials should be kept extremely concise.

There are several ways MPs can raise issues in Parliament. Early Day Motions (EDMs) can be tabled to signal support and gather signatures. Westminster Hall debates allow MPs to raise specialist issues and receive a response from the government. Urgent Questions can be used where an issue requires immediate attention. All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal, cross-party groups with no official parliamentary status, but they provide a platform for MPs and peers to discuss specific topics. Researchers may be invited to present findings to an APPG, which can help raise their profile. Some APPGs, such as the APPG on Longevity, may also provide funding for research in areas of particular interest.

Because health and social care are devolved matters, researchers should also consider parliamentary routes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland when seeking policy impact.

### **3. Engaging with Select Committees**

Select committees influence policy debate primarily through their inquiries and recommendations. To engage effectively, researchers should identify the committees most relevant to their work and follow their inquiries closely. This can be done by monitoring committee websites and signing up for updates, which helps ensure engagement happens at the right moment. Building relationships with committee staff is also important, as they are key gatekeepers. However, it is worth remembering that staff may not always have detailed subject knowledge of the specific area under inquiry.

Written evidence should be punchy, novel and clearly structured. Including case studies can help illuminate the lived experience behind the issues and strengthen the impact of submissions. Evidence should be written for lay readers, using a compelling narrative to capture attention and make key points stand out. At the same time, it is important to maintain a balanced and factual approach and to retain key technical points to preserve credibility. Researchers should also be aware that committees may sometimes approach an inquiry with an existing political framing in mind.

When giving oral evidence, it is important to come prepared with two or three memorable take-home messages. Contributions should be succinct, flexible and

clearly explain the researcher's unique contribution to the inquiry. Watching previous evidence sessions can help to clarify the expected tone, style and format.

#### **4. Working with Local Government and Devolved Administrations**

Local authorities and devolved bodies often welcome evidence, but they need to see clear value and relevance to their priorities. They are most interested in research that aligns with their current policy agenda and demonstrates clear, practical benefits for residents or service improvement. They tend to value evidence that can be translated into action, such as pilot projects, as well as opportunities to evaluate existing programmes independently.

Effective engagement begins with identifying the right teams to approach. This may include policy and strategy units, public health leads, health and wellbeing boards, or combined authorities. When preparing a briefing or presentation, materials should be short, direct and free from academic language. Messages should be adapted to the local research agenda, and researchers should offer concrete outputs such as reports, workshops, tools or policy pilots.

Engagement is most effective when it starts early in the project rather than only at the end. Being transparent about your goals helps build trust and supports longer-term collaboration. Researchers should focus on shared priorities and recognise that different authorities may have different interests. If one council is not aligned with the research topic, it may be more productive to approach another that is. It is also important to recognise that officers are highly committed but extremely resource-constrained. Maintaining ongoing relationships is valuable, and proximity matters, as in-person meetings can still be important.

Researchers can be valuable partners for councils, as many lack in-house analytical capacity and value independent evaluation. Collaborations with researchers can also help strengthen business cases for funding bids.

When working with devolved administrations, connecting with older people's groups and lived-experience organisations can strengthen the case for engagement and amplify researchers' voices when approaching ministers or officials. It may also be helpful to showcase research within your institution or facility and invite MPs to attend.

#### **5. Working with POST (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology)**

POST provides impartial analysis for Parliament and relies on expert input from researchers. Researchers interested in contributing can find guidance here:

Contributing to POST research as an expert see here

<https://post.parliament.uk/contributing-to-post-research-as-an-expert/>. There are several ways to contribute to POST's work. Researchers can respond to calls for experts during the development of POSTnotes, apply for a POST Fellowship, which typically lasts three months, or engage in parliamentary inquiries so that their work becomes visible to POST staff.

To identify opportunities, researchers can sign up for POST alerts and the KEU newsletter (<https://post.parliament.uk/subscribe/> and [parliament.uk/keunews](https://parliament.uk/keunews) respectively). Following POST on social media ([linkedin.com/company/post-uk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/post-uk)) and monitoring forthcoming POSTnote topics can also help researchers spot areas where they can offer relevant expertise.

The likelihood of being invited to contribute as an expert increases with visibility within the parliamentary system. This can be built by responding to calls for evidence, having publications cited, or engaging with parliamentary enquiries. Over time, repeated contributions help establish name recognition, which in turn increases the chances of being approached directly by POST.

## **6. Commons and Lords Libraries**

The Commons and Lords Libraries provide rapid, impartial briefings to MPs and peers. Their publications are available online and can help make research accessible, although the libraries do not hold journal subscriptions. They operate in a fast-paced and reactive environment and respond to both public requests and confidential enquiries from MPs and peers. The Commons Library is larger and has a more specialist team, while the Lords Library is smaller, more generalist and often more accessible to researchers.

To engage effectively, researchers should email [keu@parliament.uk](mailto:keu@parliament.uk) with a brief introduction before their issue becomes topical, and then reconnect when it is relevant. A short summary of no more than 250 words should set out the researcher's expertise and its relevance. Library staff may get in touch when there is a clear business need for that expertise. However, given high staff turnover, it is important to reconnect when your expertise becomes topical. Researchers should also have a ready-to-use policy brief that can be incorporated into debate packs.

## **7. Members of the House of Lords**

Members of the House of Lords, or peers, tend to focus on a small number of causes and may act as champions for well-evidenced issues. They often have more time than MPs and can sustain engagement with research over longer periods, making them valuable allies for building long-term policy impact.

Peers have several ways to raise issues using research evidence. They can table oral or written parliamentary questions, requiring ministers to respond and placing evidence on the public record. They can speak in debates and during the scrutiny of legislation, including at Committee and Report stages, where research can shape how issues are framed and understood. Peers can also table amendments to legislation, often drawing directly on research to propose changes or highlight unintended consequences. In addition, many peers are active in Select Committees and All-Party Parliamentary Groups, where they can invite researchers to give evidence and help ensure research findings inform reports and recommendations.



To identify peers with interests relevant to your research, researchers can use [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com). Searching speeches using relevant keywords can help identify members who have previously spoken on related issues and may be more receptive to engagement.