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Northumbria students gain policymaking experience through Civil Service challenge

The initiative saw students work in teams to formulate advice on a pressing issue which they presented to senior civil servants at DEC, giving them first-hand experience of how policy decisions are made at government level.

The Policy Challenge collaboration with DEC builds on the University's strong reputation for working with industry partners to offer high-quality, [real-world learning experiences](#) that enhance career opportunities – especially for students from backgrounds without ready access to professional networks.

Over several weeks, over 60 students from the undergraduate [International Relations and Politics](#) and [History and Politics](#) degree programmes developed responses to scenarios set by either the Department for Culture, Media and Sport or the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Teams worked to assess the case for and against the government departments providing funding for proposed initiatives, looking at the perceived benefits, risks, alternatives, and make a recommendation for or against supporting these proposals.

Throughout the process, they received guidance from university teaching staff, professional support staff and civil servants, helping them understand the complexities of policy development and decision-making, from initial concept through to ministerial presentation.

Teams prepared comprehensive presentations which they delivered to a panel of senior civil servants at Darlington Economic Campus. The proposals demonstrated innovative thinking, strong research skills, and a clear understanding of regional and national considerations and value for money principles.

The partnership extends beyond the Policy Challenge itself, with DEC representatives having attended Northumbria careers fairs and delivered talks to students about careers in the Civil Service. The University's Graduate Futures team is also supporting students interested in DEC's graduate recruitment opportunities, creating clear pathways for Northumbria graduates to pursue public sector careers in the North East and nationally.

Samuel Matuki Nyambu, one of the students who participated in the Policy Challenge, said: "Working with the team at DEC gave me first-hand insight into how international relations and policy analysis operate beyond the class. Through the project, I further developed my public speaking, teamwork and policy-focused research, while gaining a better understanding of how policy evolves in practice.

"Presenting our findings to government professionals was genuinely transformative. It confirmed that I want to work in environments where strategic thinking translates into real national impact. The experience strengthened my commitment to public policy and affirmed that a future career in the government is a path I intend to pursue."

Module leads, [Dr Siobhan Daly](#) and [Dr Xander Kirke](#) in the [School of Humanities and Social Sciences](#) at Northumbria University, said: "This collaboration with DEC has given our students an invaluable window into government policymaking and our students responded with enthusiasm and diligence to respond to the policy challenge. Over the course of the challenge, they've developed essential skills in team work and policy analysis, critical evaluation, and strategic communication while working on realistic scenarios. The feedback from civil servants has been overwhelmingly positive, and it's clear that this experience has enhanced our students' understanding of the policy process and their confidence as future professionals in any career path they embark on."

Dr Sara Gracey, Head of Engagement at [Darlington Economic Campus](#), said: "Darlington Economic Campus is delighted to partner with Northumbria University on this Policy Challenge. The students demonstrated impressive analytical skills and brought fresh perspectives to policy development. These collaborations between universities and the Civil Service are vital for building the next generation of policymakers and ensuring diverse talent is attracted to public service careers."

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Northumbria University is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's a significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

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