



# Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement

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## Northumbria University part of £3.9m national collaboration to support academic engagement with public policy

Northumbria University has joined forces with UCL and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester and Nottingham, as well as Parliament, Government and policy organisations, in a project to explore ways of improving academic-policy engagement.

The project, led by UCL, is supported with almost £4m of funding from Research England, with partner institutions contributing further resource, bringing the total value to nearly £10m.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, the need for reliable evidence which can inform public debate and policy has never been greater. With increasing pressure on public finances, it is also vital that local and central governments can be confident that their policy interventions will be effective and successful – and academic expertise has a crucial role to play in that process.

Now, thanks to a £3.9m award from Research England, the three-year Capabilities in Academic-Policy Engagement (CAPE) project aims to foster and support academic engagement with policy professionals, and enable greater understanding and cooperation between universities, national government, parliament and regional and local authorities.

CAPE is a partnership between Northumbria, UCL, and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester and Nottingham, with input and support from the Parliamentary Office for Science & Technology, the Government Office for Science, the Alliance for Useful Evidence, and the Transforming Evidence hub.

The project will support academic-policy engagement at scale and, crucially, will engage universities and policy stakeholders from across England. This will ensure a greater balance in the interests and expertise represented and ensure the project is addressing issues of policy beyond Westminster, to reflect the diversity of England's communities.

The CAPE project will pilot a range of interventions to improve the quality of academic input into public policy, enabling universities to respond to emerging and pressing questions in an agile, targeted way. By working in partnership, it is hoped that both researchers and policy professionals will be able to connect experts in their field more quickly, and co-develop effective interventions based on reliable evidence.

In addition, the project will develop a range of evidence-based tools and resources to support academic-policy engagement and establish a virtual Centre for Universities and Public Policy (CUPP) to provide a collaborative platform for networking and sharing knowledge.

Professor George Marston, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) at Northumbria University, said: "In the current environment, it is more important than ever that policy – both local and national - is developed by

government in a way that is supported by robust evidence. Universities can and do play a critical role in providing this evidence base.

"This area of research is of strategic importance to Northumbria University, and I am absolutely delighted therefore to see the success of this partnership of leading research universities and policy makers, which will lead to a step change in academic-policy engagement."

[Professor Matt Baillie Smith](#), co-director of [Northumbria University's Centre for International Development](#), is leading the University's involvement in the project. He said: "We are really excited to be part of this very important initiative. As we face the social, economic and environmental challenges of Covid-19, local, nationally and internationally, universities have a key role to play in supporting the development of the policies and approaches that are needed to cope and to re-build.

"Through the CAPE project, Northumbria will bring together its extensive local partnerships and networks, and research on processes of global development and social and environmental change, to foster knowledge exchanges that meet the new challenges we face. We are looking forward to working with UCL, Manchester, Cambridge and Nottingham Universities in this timely and important project, and to the important changes it will bring to academic policy engagement."

Professor David Price, UCL Vice-Provost (Research) and Principal Investigator said: "University research can offer a wealth of insight to inform complex policy questions. But neither universities nor policymakers are currently engaging as effectively as we might to ensure the translation of academic expertise into the policy sphere. I am delighted that UCL now has the opportunity, through this partnership, to explore the most effective ways of supporting and enabling academic-policy engagement and strengthening the links between universities and government at all levels."

Sarah Chaytor, UCL Director of Research Strategy and Policy and project co-lead added: "By addressing the existing barriers between universities and public policy organisations at a range of levels and working in close partnership across the project and with a wider network, we will be able to build our understanding of 'what works' in academic-policy engagement and how universities and policy stakeholders can work together to tackle national and regional policy problems."

David Sweeney, Executive Chair of Research England, said: “This project will make an important contribution to our emerging understanding of how universities can best support academics and researchers to engage with public policy and respond to the needs of policy stakeholders. We are particularly pleased to be supporting a consortium with widespread regional reach, which will help us to understand different geographical contexts and the important role that universities can play in and across regions as well as nationally.”

[Find out more about the CAPE project at www.cape.ac.uk](http://www.cape.ac.uk)

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