

Social Science Evidence and the Policy Process: International Insights

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[The International Advisory Group \(IAG\) of the UK Academy of Social Sciences](#) organised a series of five half-day seminars between October 2013 and April 2014 under the overarching title of 'Social Science Evidence and the Policy Process: International Insights'. Professor Linda Hantrais, CIS Fellow and chair of the IAG, convened the series, assisted by CIS Fellow Dr Ashley Lenihan, who co-convened Seminars 1 and 5. The Centre for International Studies sponsored the seminar alongside SAGE and Routledge/Taylor and Francis. Venues were provided by the Alliance for Useful Evidence, Europe House, British Library and Department for Education.

Invited contributors to the Seminars were drawn from a wide range of national and international organisations, and the UK participants represented national and local government departments, academic and non-academic research institutions, think tanks and media/journalists.

Seminar Aims and Objectives

Presenters, respondents and other participants were invited to explore innovative approaches to making effective use of social science evidence in policy formation in different countries, policy settings and domains, and to consider the conditions under which these models could be transferred cross-nationally.

Accordingly, the aims of the series were:

- To conduct a critical appraisal of the relationship between research evidence and the policy process;
- To gather insights from international innovations in the use of social science research evidence in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy;
- Specifically, to explore the kinds of capacity building required within and across the research and policy-making communities in order to develop a community of practice and an evidence-oriented culture;
- To assess the advantages and drawbacks of applying particular methodologies, such as Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs), in developing, implementing and evaluating policy in different policy settings and domains;
- To identify the potential for policy learning across countries through analysis of what works, and why, in different policy and societal contexts;
- To assess under what conditions innovative policies and policy evaluation techniques in other countries could be transferred to the UK;
- To publish and present findings from the seminars in web papers, academic and practitioner journals, and policy briefs;
- To contribute to capacity building by providing bespoke end-user workshops on relevant topics.

Seminar Themes and Structure

The first half-day Seminar provided a framework for the series, with speakers introducing and illustrating three transversal 'themes' in the evidence-policy relationship from international perspectives, namely: evidence intermediation / brokerage, hierarchies of evidence, and evaluation of evidence.

In Seminars 2, 3 and 4, invited speakers addressed specific topics – ageing and generations, healthy living, and education – in key areas of evidence-based policy from an international and multidisciplinary perspective. They drew on the three core 'themes' in analysing the reasons why a particular policy was introduced; the conditions under which it did (or did not) work; the institutional capacity needed to support policy innovation and scrutiny; how the policy's effectiveness was assessed; and under what conditions such a policy might be applied in the UK.

The final seminar drew on international insights to provide a critical overview of findings from the series, and to illustrate the lessons learned about how evidence can be made to work for policy.



Ashley Lenihan (CIS) in conversation with Edwin van de Haar (CPB, Netherlands) and Jill Rutter (Institute for Government) at Seminar 5, 4 April 2014, Europe House.

Dissemination

Summaries of the presentations and discussions, together with PowerPoint slides, are available on the [Academy's website](#).

Full versions of the presentations and discussions at each of the Seminars can be accessed as [Professional Briefings](#).