

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

Literature review of the Evidence-based policy (EBP) debate, conducted for the [Evidence-based Policymaking: Lessons from the UK for developing countries](#) project

Cabinet Office (1999) Modernising Government White Paper. London, UK: The Stationery Office.

The Modernising Government White Paper, which was published in March 1999, sets out a significant agenda for reform of how government in the UK works. Enhancing policy making was identified as one of its five key commitments. The white paper indicated policy making should be a continuous learning process and that policy makers should make "better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals." This resource can be found at: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm43/4310/4310.htm>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Cable, V. (2004) Evidence and UK politics, Does Evidence Matter? Presentation as part of a ODI Meeting Series on 'Does Evidence Matter?'. London, UK.

Vincent Cable outlined 5 's's that limit the ability of decision makers to pursue an evidence-based approach: speed, superficiality, spin, secrecy and scientific ignorance. This resource can be found at: http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Meetings/Evidence/Presentation_3/Cable.html. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Davies, P. (2004) Is evidence-based government possible? Jerry Lee Lecture, presented at the 4th annual Campbell Collaboration Colloquium. Washington DC, USA.

This paper presents the case of the UK government as evidence-based. Evidence based policy has become a major part of the government's approach to policy making and the machinery of government. The paper attempts to define evidence-based policy and considers the role of evidence in the policy-making process. It presents a thorough examination of the different types of evidence in use, the methods used for gathering and appraising, with best practice examples. This resource can be found at: <http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/downloads/JerryLeeLecture1202041.pdf>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Davies, P. (2004) Policy Evaluation in the United Kingdom. Paper presented at the KDI International Policy Evaluation Forum, Seoul, Korea, May 19-21, 2004.

The United Kingdom Government uses a wide range of evaluation methods to ensure that policies, programmes and public services are planned and delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible. A major driving force for high quality policy evaluation in the UK is the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making. This requires policy makers, and those who implement policies, to utilise the best available evidence from national statistics, academic research, economic theory, pilots, evaluations of past policies, commissioned research and systematic consultation with delivery agents. The Government's strategy for public spending and taxation also provides the context within which policy evaluation takes place in the UK. This resource can be found at: http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/docs/policy_evaluation_uk.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Hornby, P. and Perera, H.S.R. (2002) A development framework for promoting evidence-based policy action: drawing on experiences in Sri Lanka. *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 17(2), 165-183.

Most developing countries have embarked on one form or another of health sector reform as a result of the global trend for health and health care reform that has emerged during the past decade. One consequence is that the issue of health sector performance is moving higher on the agenda of many developing countries, and particularly that of the corporate performance of health sector staff. Along with this movement has come increased attention to strengthening evidence-based management decision-making. To date, studies on measuring health sector performance,

have had little impact on developing country health systems and have been limited to explorations primarily at an operational level. However, there is a growing recognition that there is a need to strengthen the policy function of ministries and their ability to monitor policy impact. This resource can be found at: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/94515814/ABSTRACT>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Le Grand, J. (2003) *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

This book by Julian Le Grand focuses on public policy and the role of the market. A key aspect of the discussions is whether providers of service do what they consider is good for society (knights) or do what they think is good for themselves (knaves). For BRP, the key is to identify which characteristic is present and concentrate on appealing to that. Unfortunately, life is not simple and public service providers may be motivated by both characteristics at once - with the implication that people will need to 'appeal to both knightly and knavish instincts' (The Economist, 1 November 2003, p 96).

Marston, G. and Watts, R. (2003) Tampering with the evidence: A critical appraisal of evidence-based policy-making. *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs* 3(3), 143-163.

'Evidence-based' policy-making discourse is popular among a diverse range of policy communities. Following the United Kingdom, there is growing interest in evidence-based policy-making in Australia. The evidence-based policy movement raises important questions for those interested in public affairs and the politics of policy-making in Australia. However, the meaning and practice of 'evidence-based policy' are contested. The article attempts to critically appraise the emergence of evidence-based policy in Australia, addressing the question of whether evidence-based policy will live up to its promise as an idea whose time has come. This resource can be found at: http://www.australianreview.net/journal/v3/n3/marston_watts.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Moseley, A. and Tierney, S. (2004) Evidence-based practice in the real world. *Policy Press - Evidence and Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice* 1(1), 113-120.

This paper presents the practical problems of implementing evidence-based practice (EBP). Despite growing awareness of and enthusiasm for EBP implementation of such practices is a demanding task and one which presents many difficulties. Three broad categories of challenges are detailed in the use of EBP in social care; cultural, (where action is valued over reflection) infrastructural (little investment in research training, reducing the incentive for practitioners to use research within practice) and practical (the difficulties of accessing and keeping up-to date with relevant research). Each area is explored using actual examples drawn from implementers. Despite these hurdles, creative, practical steps have been taken by social care staff to promote EBP within their workplaces. This resource can be found at: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/ep/2005/00000001/00000001/art00007>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Mulgan, G. (2003) *Government, knowledge and the business of policy-making*. Facing the Future Conference, Canberra, 23-24 April 2003.

The author highlights the new environment in which governments are now operating; a far more knowledge rich context, and a more informed public. Although evidence based policy making is far from new, the current policy arena demands knowledge rooted in diverse sources, highly integrated in both theoretical and practical expertise. This resource can be found at: http://www2.dwaf.gov.za/dwaf/download.asp?f=CDs%5CODI%5CMulgan_2003.pdf&docId=1166. Last accessed 4/8/2009

National Audit Office (2003) Getting the evidence: using research in policy making. The Stationary Office.

This report assesses how government departments procure research and how well that research is being used to improve service delivery and develop policies. It is based upon an assessment of research activities in three government departments, as well as discussions with other department and stakeholders. Examples of best practice are presented : a fellowship programme jointly funded between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Economic and Social Research Council which explicitly aims to build research capacity in both technical excellence and strategic thinking; id21,an internet dissemination service (www.id21.org) established and funded by the Department for International Development to communicate research findings to policymakers and practitioners.This resource can be found at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/02-03/0203586-i.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

National Audit Office (2003) An International review on Governments' research procurement strategies. The Stationary Office.

This report presents the results of an international review of how the governments of five countries in North America and Europe procure and manage research to improve service delivery and policy development.This resource can be found at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/02-03/0203586-ii.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Nutley, S. (2003) Bridging the policy/research divide: Reflections and Lessons from the UK. Facing the Future: Engaging stakeholders and citizens in developing public policy. Canberra, Australia: National Institute of Governance Conference.

'This paper draws upon data from the UK to argue that there is the potential for policy decisions to be better informed by research evidence than has hitherto been the case. This requires an investment in research, some rethinking of policy processes, and the development of mechanisms for bringing research and policy closer to one another.This resource can be found at: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/academiclinkages/nutley/tgls-nutley.pdf>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Nutley, S., Davies, H. and Walter, I. (2002) Evidence based policy and practice: Cross sectors lessons from the UK. ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy Making and Practice: Working Paper 9.

This paper advocates for the rigorous use of evidence to improve and better inform public policy making and professional practice. Contrary to widely held views, evidence is commonly used in many circumstances; however the nature of this evidence varies greatly. However rather than promoting the need for evidence-based policy, the article recognises the sometimes limited role that evidence can, does, or even should, play. Consequentially the authors would prefer the term 'evidence influenced', or even just 'evidence aware' to reflect a more realistic view of what can be achieved, while at the same time emphasising the potential for methodological pluralism.This resource can be found at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cppm/NZ%20conference%20paper%20final%20170602.pdf>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Omamo, S.W. (2004) Bridging research, policy and practice in African Agriculture. International Food Policy Research Institute; Development Strategy and Governance Division, DSGD Discussion paper No. 10.

Against a backdrop of a stylised context of policy making in Africa, the paper presents a comprehensive review and assessment of the literature on the role and impact of research in policy processes. Six major schools of thought are identified: the rational model; pragmatism under bounded rationality; innovation diffusion; knowledge management; impact assessment; and evidence-based-practice. The rational model - with its underlying metaphor of a "policy cycle" comprising problem definition and agenda setting, formal decision making, policy implementation,

evaluation, and then back to problem definition and agenda setting, and so on - is criticized as too simplistic and unrealistic. Yet, as the author points out, it remains the dominant framework guiding attempts to bridge gaps between researchers and policy makers. Each of the other five schools relaxes certain assumptions embedded within the rational model. For example wholly rational policy makers, procedural certainty, well-defined research questions, well-defined user groups, well-defined channels of communication. In so doing, they achieve greater realism but at the cost of clarity and tractability. A unified portable framework representing all policy processes and capturing all possible choices and tradeoffs faced in bridging research, policy, and practice does not currently exist and is unlikely ever to emerge. Its absence is a logical outcome of the context-specificity and social embeddedness of knowledge. A fundamental shift in focus from a "researcher-as-disseminator" paradigm to a "practitioner-as-learner" paradigm is suggested by the literature. It concludes with the issue of how to promote "evidence-readiness" among inherently conservative and pragmatic policy makers and practitioners and "user-readiness" among inherently abstraction-oriented researchers. This resource can be found at:
<http://www.ifpri.org/divs/dsgd/dp/papers/dsgdp10.pdf>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Pawson, R. (2001) Evidence Based Policy: 1. In Search of a Method. ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice - Working Paper 3.

Evaluation research is tortured by time constraints. The policy cycle revolves quicker than the research cycle, with the result that 'real time' evaluations often have little influence on policy making. As a result, the quest for Evidence Based Policy (EBP) has turned increasingly to systematic reviews of the results of previous inquiries in the relevant policy domain. However, this shifting of the temporal frame for evaluation is in itself no guarantee of success. Evidence, whether new or old, never speaks for itself. Accordingly, there is debate about the best strategy of marshalling bygone research results into the policy process. This paper joins the imbroglio by examining the logic of the two main strategies of systematic review, namely 'meta-analysis' and 'narrative review'. Whilst they are often presented as diametrically opposed perspectives, this paper argues that they share common limitations in their understanding of how to provide a template for impending policy decisions. This review provides the background for Part II of the paper which considers the merits of a new model for EBP, namely 'realist synthesis'. This resource can be found at:
<http://evi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/8/2/157>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Rondinelli, D. (1993) Development projects as policy experiments: An adaptive approach to development administration. London, UK: Routledge.

Rondinelli suggests that the policy process can be seen as a sort of social experiment. The policy process is less a matter of prediction, and more a matter of trial and error. Actors need to be able to readjust and adapt to unforeseen circumstances as the process develops. To address complexity and uncertainty of development policies, Rondinelli argues that 'success requires flexibility in planning and design, opportunity to adjust plans as projects progress, and continuous redesign during implementation'. This requires that formulation and implementation are more closely integrated in order to reduce the impact of uncertainties and unknowns.

Shaxson, L. (2005) Is your evidence robust enough? Questions for policy makers and practitioners. A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice 1(1), 101-111. Policy Press.

This article examines the reasons evidence for policy is needed. 'Evidence is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for any decision-making process'. It discusses where evidence is needed in the policy-making process, and the nature of the evidence base for strategy and policy. Working relationships between policy makers and their advisers are key: as policy makers come from a variety of backgrounds, developing a common language helps set discussions about the robustness of the evidence base on a sound footing. The article identifies five components of evidence

robustness (from a policy-making lens); credibility, generalisability, reliability, objectivity and rootedness or authenticity. These characteristics are disseminated and applied to the processes of policy making. This resource can be found at: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/ep/2005/00000001/00000001/art00006>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Solesbury, W. (1999) Evidence based policy: Whence it came and where it's going. ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice Working Paper 1.

'What works?' has become a buzz word in political spheres, and practitioners are showing a greater interest in demonstrating the efficacy of particular practices. The author examines the reasons for the recent upsurge in interest in evidence-based policy and practice in the UK. The entrance of a Labour government in 1997 with a pragmatic and anti-ideological stance is highlighted as a central cause. This resource can be found at: <http://kcl.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/45/84/wp1.pdf>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Sutton, R. (1999) The Policy Process: An Overview. ODI Working Paper 118. London, UK: ODI.

The paper offers an introduction to analysis of the policy process. It identifies and describes theoretical approaches in political science, sociology, anthropology, international relations and management. It then reviews five cross-cutting themes: (a) the dichotomy between policy-making and implementation; (b) the management of change; (c) the role of interest groups in the policy process; (d) ownership of the policy process; and (e) the narrowing of policy alternatives. The paper concludes with a 21-point check-list of 'what makes policy happen'. A glossary of key terms is also provided. This resource can be found at: http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp118.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Taylor, M. (2004) Bridging research and policy, Development studies association annual conference. Development Studies Association Annual Conference and Journal of International Development 17(6), August 2005.

Using UK domestic policy Taylor presents five interconnecting practical rules for turning good research into good policy. This resource can be found at: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/110568893/ABSTRACT>. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Thomas, J.W. and Grindle, M.S. (1990) After the Decision: Implementing policy reforms in Developing Countries. World Development 18(8), 1163-1181.

Implicit in many reform proposals is a model of the policy process that is roughly linear: a proposed reform gets on the agenda for government action, a decision is made on the proposal, and the new policy or institutional arrangement is implemented, either successfully or unsuccessfully. This article presents an alternative, interactive model of implementation that focuses on the conflict for development, and the resources that policy makers and managers are likely to require to sustain a reform in the face of such reactions. Central to the analysis is the assertion that characteristics of the reform being implemented will largely determine the kind of conflict it engenders, where such reaction is likely to become manifest, and what resources are needed for sustainability. The analysis suggests a framework for the strategic management of reform initiatives.

Upshur, R., Van Den Kerkhof, E. and Goef, V. (2001) Meaning and Measurement: an inclusive model of evidence in health care. Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice 7(2), 91-96.

This article argues that evidence-based approaches are assuming an increased significance in many health-care fields. The core ideas of evidence-based health care derive from clinical epidemiology and general internal medicine. Despite arising from a discipline primarily concerned with quantitative measurement, the definition is increasingly found to be too limited. There is an

increasing need for a more inclusive definition, which recognises the diverse disciplines and skills in health care and the variety of contexts in which evidence is used. As of yet the contribution of the social sciences, particularly qualitative methodology, has received scant attention. The concept of evidence has yet to be analysed systematically; what counts as evidence may vary across disciplines. It argues that given the level of heterogeneity, the assumption that there is a univocal notion of evidence may be problematic. Therefore the authors put forward a model of evidence that describes four distinct but related types of evidence: qualitative-personal; qualitative-general; quantitative-general and quantitative-personal. It goes on to discuss the rationale for these distinctions and their implications. The model serves to legitimise evidence from qualitative studies and places it on an equal footing with other forms of research, thereby increasing the range of admissible evidence in health-care decision-making. If the Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) is to become more accepted and better integrated into health care then the concept of evidence will have to be robust enough to resonate with the wider health care community. This resource can be found at: http://cys.bvsalud.org/lildbi/docsonline/2/9/192-104-Meaning_and_measurement.pdf. Last accessed 4/8/2009

Young, K., Ashby, D., Boaz, A. and Grayson, L. (2002) Social science and the Evidence-based Policy Movement. *Social Policy and Society* 1, 215-224.

There is a growing interest in 'evidence-based policy making' in the UK. However, there remains some confusion about what evidence-based policy making actually means. This paper outlines some of the models used to understand how evidence is thought to shape or inform policy in order to explore the assumptions underlying 'evidence-based policy making'. By way of example, it considers the process of evidence seeking and in particular the systematic review as a presumed 'gold standard' of the EBP movement. It highlights some opportunities and challenges represented in this approach for policy research. The final part of the paper outlines some questions of capacity that need to be addressed if the social sciences are to make more effective contribution to policy debate in Britain.