Careers in science policy

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Careers in science policy

- What is policy…and what is science policy?
- Why does it matter?
- What does the job look like?
- What skills do I need?

About me

…No set career route!

- Studied Chemistry at University of St Andrews
- Worked in politics for the Labour Party – defence, foreign affairs, election campaigning
- Shaping employment support policy at Reed in Partnership
- ….to The Physiological Society

What is policy?

Make a change

- It is not…
  - A principle (e.g. agreement that science must be at heart of decisions)
  - A specific action (e.g. increased R&D spend)
  - Evidence gathered (e.g. SAGE evidence)
  - Rhetoric (e.g. tough anti immigration language)

- Policy seeks to obtain an outcome that otherwise would not happen.
- E.g. – a policy to make the UK an international partner of choice for UK life sciences.

- ‘A plan, course of action, or set of regulations adopted by government, businesses, or other institutions designed to influence and determine decisions or procedures’ (UK Department for International Development, 2005)

Who are the policymakers?

Who makes the decisions?

- Often seen as far removed from the scientists – but more alike than different
- Strong sense of purpose and conviction for their work. See the bigger picture

- Ministers
- MPs and Lords (Select Committees, backbenchers)
- Government (at all levels: national, devolved nations, regions…)
- Funding organisations (e.g. URKI)

How are policies made?

Not a linear process

- *“There's two things in the world you never want to let people see how you make 'em: laws and sausages.”* – Leo McGarry, The West Wing
- Messy process, not always rational, often opportunistic.
- Need to understand your audience: What is their motivation? What drives them?
- E.g. Government’s work on a 5 year electoral cycle so a policy that pays dividend in 25 years may be a hard sell.
- Don’t expect policymakers to come to you…we must show why we can help deliver their priorities.

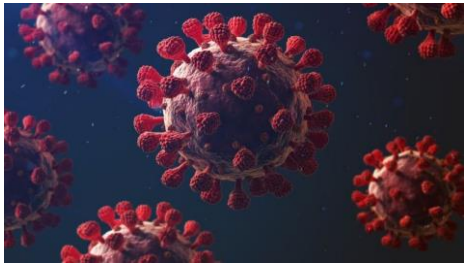
What is science policy?

Turn science into action

- A bridge between the scientists and decision-makers
- Shared common aim to deal with big global challenges

Science for Policy

Address the global challenges



Policy for Science

- Ensure UK has right funding and legislation in place for science research to thrive.
- For example:
  - How do we ensure R&D funding post-Brexit?
  - What infrastructure does the UK need?
  - What immigration policy does UK need to secure talent?

What does the job involve?

- Passion for using science to make a difference in the world
- Straddle both science and policy…(but understand tools may be different but motivation the same)
- Science communication: translate to a lay audience
- ‘The art of the possible’
- Tight deadlines

- Collecting evidence and data
- Producing reports to make the case
- Responding to consultations and questions
- Building relationships through networking

What skills & knowledge do I need?

- Must be flexible and creative
- Determination and resilience
- Be able to zoom in and out – Detail to big picture
- Understand the science and the political environment: why should the policymaker listen to you?
- Good communicator

- Being able to talk both “languages” of science and policy is essential

Where do science policy people work?

- Learned Societies
- Universities
- Government
- Funding agencies
- Charities
- Regulators
- Industry

Career development

- A relatively new field – no defined career path
- Opportunities to move between academia and more policy focused roles
- Salary range: £25k - £75k…very much depends on organisation/sector

What does The Physiological Society do?

A National Covid-19 Resilience Programme:

Improving the health and wellbeing of older people during the pandemic

Why should you consider science policy?

Fundamentally….

You are passionate about putting science into action to tackle the global challenges and make the world a better place.

Questions

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