ClimateXChange and the University of Edinburgh Energy and Society Network presents:

'Energy and Climate Policy Making: understanding policy effectiveness, expertise and evidence'

9th June 2017 at the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation (ECCI)

Introduced by Dr Mark Winskel and Niall Kerr (Univ of Edinburgh), with guest speakers Dr Jan Rosenow (Univ of Sussex) and Professor Paul Cairney (Univ of Stirling), and panellists Professor Jan Webb, University of Edinburgh and Ragne Low, ClimateXChange.

As the low carbon transition in Scotland reaches a critical phase the event considered how to understand energy policy effectiveness and how evidence is used in the policy development process. The event introduced the ClimateXChange project 'Policy Effectiveness in Energy Policy', followed by presentations from Jan Rosenow and Paul Cairney on the policy making process, understanding policy effectiveness and the role of evidence and experts. The meeting was then opened to comments from invited panellists and wider Q&A.

Dr Jan Rosenow

Jan is a leading expert in energy efficiency policy, who has a professional background as an academic, policy advisor and consultant. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Centre on Innovation and Energy Demand (CIED) based at Sussex Energy Group (SEG) of SPRU, the University of Sussex, and an Honorary Research Associate at the Lower Carbon Futures Group of Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute leads the European energy efficiency work of the Regulatory Assistance Project, a global think tank working on a transition to a sustainable and fair energy system. His research in recent years as focused on the effectiveness of energy efficiency policies throughout Europe, including a comparative review of housing energy efficiency interventions for ClimateXChange. His website is http://www.janrosenow.com/

Professor Paul Cairney

Paul is Professor of Politics and Public Policy, at the University of Stirling. He is a specialist in British politics and public policy, currently focusing on the ways in which policy studies can explain the use of evidence in politics and policy, and how policymakers translate broad long term aims into evidence informed objectives. As part of the ESRC Centre on Constitutional Change he was funded from 2013-15 to examine the policy capacity of Scottish institutions in the lead up to the referendum on Scottish independence. He has published widely in recent years including his most recent book 'The Politics of Evidence-Based Policymaking', 2016.

His blog on public policy is here - https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/

Meeting Notes

Niall Kerr introduced a recently started Edinburgh University project on 'energy and climate policy effectiveness', funded by the Scottish Government as part of the ClimateXChange research programme (see slides). The project is developing a method to understand energy policy effectiveness in terms of efficiency, equity and institutional capability. A pilot case study will apply the method to a heat-related policy issue in the first year of the project.

Jan Rosenow presented a case study of policy failure, and the limits of evidence-based policymaking: the UK Green Deal (see slides). Jan concluded that evidence which challenges prevailing beliefs in policy circles is often ignored, and believers are able to invent new 'evidence' which supports their beliefs. However, evidence eventually trumps politics.

He then distinguished between four types of evidence-policy-politics relations, according to the strength of the evidence base and the degree of politicisation: evidence-based policy-making; evidence-based politics; politics-based evidence making and post-truth politics.

Paul Cairney then spoke on the limits and questionability of evidence–based policymaking (EBPM). Invoking evidence can be used as a strategy to depoliticise policy debate. In the 1940s and 50s scientific techniques were applied to policymaking, based on questionable assumptions about the evidence-based character of policy making. The reality of policy is much messier and less linear than 'policy cycles' diagrams suggest: more of a 'Spirograph'. The reality is perhaps better captured by the model of interacting multiple policy streams, but with distinct stages.

Perhaps counterintuitively for researchers, policymakers are often not seeking more evidence: rather they seek ways to ignore evidence, to develop shortcuts and reduce ambiguity. For researchers, this means finding ways to tell simple stories.

Also counterintuitively, it is often too late to produce a 'solution' to a policy problem from scratch. Instead, it's more realistic to think about solutions waiting for problems – with policy entrepreneurs cast as surfers waiting for the big wave. It can be helpful to conceive of policy problems and solutions as independent streams, in the vein of Kingdon's multiple streams theory.

In this context, how can evidence 'win the day'?

Paul identified 3 conditions:

- To help policymakers reduce ambiguity by framing evidence around a dominant definition
- At times of major policy change, reflecting a shift in attention, reference points or currency of debate
- Where there are multiple streams, and no single solution frame dominates

Climate change is in a number of ways a 'worst case' for evidence based policymaking: diffuse, long term and ambiguous. Even much more favourable cases struggle to develop EBPM; for example, local public health epidemics such as smoking, and cases where randomised controlled trials are feasible.

The meeting was then opened up to a panel discussion and Q&A from the room. The joining panellists were Professor Jan Webb, University of Edinburgh and Ragne Low, ClimateXChange.

Ragne argued that evidence can support policy change, but researchers need to consider very carefully how to convey their message. Jan stated that although she has a commitment as an academic to 'speak truth to power', there were difficulties about the 'policy effectiveness' framing.

Questions and observations from attendees

- It is incumbent on researchers ('evidence producers') to listen and adapt: research-policy exchange should be seen as a two-way process.
- How will the new research project's method understand 'effectiveness' in terms of equity, efficiency and institutional capacity? These are qualitatively very different types of criteria.
- Policy effectiveness can be more straightforwardly understood as the delivery of a policy object or target at minimal cost, without causing other knock-on problems. Energy policy has

a poor track record of unanticipated costs or consequences – for example, the promotion of biofuels in transport and diesel cars.

- How can we learn from policy errors / failures to improve? This seems lacking, especially in a context of weak institutional memory / continuity. We have 'what works?' centres, but not 'what doesn't work?'
- The policy effectiveness project seems to be addressing two different issues: the effectiveness of *assessment methods* used in government (such as the Treasury 'Green Book'), but also actual *policy outcomes*. These are distinct problems.
- There is an institutional issue of policy and regulatory scrutiny: in UK financial and economic policy the independent Office of Budget Responsibility is a key holder of data and independent scrutiny, but who has this responsibility in Scottish Government energy and climate policy? Without institutionalised independent rigorous scrutiny we can end up in a world of alternative facts (see spoof journal).
- It's worth thinking about underlying structural explanations for research-policy relations, embedded economic logics, which seem to act almost autonomously.

<u>Responses from the panel</u>
Jan Rosenow: the Regulatory Assistance Project is an attempt to develop longer term peer-to-peer relationships between researchers and policymakers (see Jan's last slide).

There are tensions between technocratic and democratic / participatory methods for policy development and assessment. What happens to EPBM in more participatory contexts? US state level forms of scrutiny are generally transparent – a useful example.

Jan Webb: with reference to some of the policy failures in energy policy, diesel cars etc. there are political contexts: the shrinking of the state, with reduced capacity for learning. There are also embedded institutional issues in the UK, especially the Treasury and its influence on departmental strategies in Whitehall.

Mark Winskel: the institutions for evidence synthesis and advice, and policy implementation, are raised in the recent Scottish Government draft energy and climate documents, but this is a key issue. The public agency model is attracting interest in Scotland, but more as an asset owner / delivery agency than an independent evidence-holder.

Beyond Jan Rosenow's account of the Green Deal, there are few papers which address public policy failure in energy and climate policy; a recent one addressed innovation policy in Scotland, but these it is difficult for researchers to directly address policy failure because of political sensitivities. The Institute for Government published a recent paper on policy restlessness in UK policy: 'All Change'. Palgrave Communications recently published work on learning between different policy cases.

Paul Cairney: evidence can be thought of as the 'active ingredient' in research policy exchange, but the supporting structure is often as important, in understanding effectiveness. Transfer and implementation are neglected in discussions of EBPM, but they are critical to effectiveness.

There are distinct ways to think about research-policy development and relations, including; randomised controlled trials, storytelling approaches and an 'improvement method' logic. The latter is based less on learning from international best practice, but conscious effort to improve domestic policy making; it is now popular in some areas of Scottish public policy.