

Institution: University of East Anglia
Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Reforming the Environmental Audit Committee
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research conducted by John Turnpenny shaped the recommendations of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC). In 2010, the EAC addressed the need to embed sustainable development across government policy-making. This followed the closure of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) and the end of funding for the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). The EAC determined to change how it engaged with experts, while reaffirming and expanding its role in the overall scrutiny of government sustainability policy. Turnpenny's findings formed the basis of two of the thirteen headline recommendations in the EAC's 2011 report <i>Embedding Sustainable Development Across Government</i>. In addition his suggestions helped influence significant changes in the way that the EAC operates, and contributed to its wider impact among other policy actors.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Turnpenny's Nuffield Foundation-funded research examined the creation and uses of evidence in policy-making, focusing on how the EAC collected and deployed evidence in evaluating and advocating policy. The research built on Turnpenny's long-standing interest in how 'boundaries' are drawn between evidence and politics, experts and advocates, and about who draws them, how and why. These are key questions within policy and political science, geography and science studies. The research sought to explain how this process of demarcation affects the legitimacy granted to policy actors, enabling or disabling 'ownership' of key issues. The central aim was to test and clarify understanding of these boundaries through a close empirical case-study of the EAC. It involved detailed content analysis of 21 EAC reports and 19 interviews with key actors. These formed the basis for a study of how the EAC drew boundaries and, more broadly, of the context, consultation processes, roles and influence of the EAC.</p> <p>Findings</p> <p>The research demonstrated that the EAC straddled boundaries between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence and policy-making generally, confronting government with diverse sources of information • different experts with diverse interpretations of data (thus becoming a site of conflict between scientists) • environmental interests, other interests and government • what is seen as a 'realistic' and what 'not a sensible' perspective; this affects who is called to give evidence by the EAC, and filters the presentation of evidence • institutions: between central government and parliament, for example • Whitehall departments themselves, enhanced by the cross-cutting nature of the EAC <p>More broadly the research showed that the EAC takes four roles:</p> <p>a) As knowledge-broker: acting as an intermediary between original researchers and policy-makers; an umpire between different arguments, legitimating contributors' positions by considering them 'worthy' of inclusion in a report (which in turn amplifies certain ideas in wider policy circles).</p> <p>b) As entrepreneur: the EAC sits at the intersection of 'problems', 'policy ideas' and 'politics', enabling it to raise the profile of particular problems, analyse and give credibility to potential policy solutions, and shift the political climate in ways that increase the likelihood of government action.</p> <p>c) As persuasive advocate: the EAC disseminates <i>ideas</i> (e.g. the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment) and helps - through its role as a credible voice - to ensure their wider acceptance. There is a clear synergy (and potential clashes) with the knowledge-broker role.</p> <p>d) As scrutiniser: the EAC holds government to account. Although its remit is limited the EAC can 'shame' government or be a 'critical friend' highlighting inconsistencies in policy.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Researchers

The EAC research was carried out between 2008 and 2010. The researchers were **John Turnpenny** (Senior Lecturer, School of Political, Social and International Studies, University of East Anglia), Duncan Russel (Senior Lecturer, Department of Politics, University of Exeter), and Tim Rayner (Senior Research Associate, University of East Anglia). The elite interviews were carried out between July 1st 2009 and 30th September 2010 with the support of the Nuffield Foundation Social Science Small Grants Scheme. The Principal Investigator for the grant was John Turnpenny. Turnpenny and Rayner have been at UEA since before the start of the research.

3. References to the research

The research was facilitated by a grant (£7477) from the **Nuffield Foundation's Social Science Small Grants scheme (SGS/37317)** (1 July 2009 - 30 Sep 2010).

Outputs – Peer-reviewed articles in leading journals:

- Turnpenny, J.R., Russel, D.J., and Rayner, T.J. (2013) The complexity of evidence for sustainable development policy: Analysing the boundary work of the UK Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38 (4): 586-598
- Russel, D., Turnpenny, J., and Rayner, T. (2013) Reining in the Executive? Delegation and Parliamentary Impact on the UK Government's Environmental Policy. *Environment & Planning C: Government and Policy*, 31(4): 619-632

Other outputs:

- Turnpenny, J., Jordan, A.J., Rayner, T. and Russel, D. (2011) Written evidence submitted In: House of Commons, Environmental Audit Committee (2011) *Embedding Sustainable Development Across Government, after the Secretary of State's announcement on the future of the Sustainable Development Commission*, Session, 2010-11, 1st Report, HC Paper 504, ev60. The Stationery Office: London.
- Turnpenny, J., Russel, D. and Rayner, T. (2010) *Sustainable Development and the impact of the Environmental Audit Committee* [Summary report for stakeholders – sent to all interviewees and a range of other academics (e.g. Susan Owens, Cambridge; Judith Petts, Birmingham) and senior officials within and beyond the UK (e.g. David Stanners, EEA; Gareth Fenney, Scottish Parliament)]
- Turnpenny, J.R., Russel, D.J., and Rayner, T.J. (2010) *Institutionalising evidence-based policy-making? The Roles Played by the UK Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee and the Drawing of Boundaries*. Paper at the IBG-RGS Annual Conference, London, 2 Sep 2010
- Turnpenny, J. and Russel, D. (2009) *Connecting Science and Policy: The Impact of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee on the implementation of sustainable development in the United Kingdom*. Paper presented at the Science in Society International Conference, Cambridge, 5-7 August

Justification of quality: The research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and the outputs were subject to rigorous peer-review in leading journals. The *Transactions* paper was chosen to be part of a Virtual Issue on 'New geographical frontiers', the theme of the 2013 Royal Geographical Society Annual International conference (www.rgs.org/FrontiersVI). According to the Managing Editor (Journals) of the Royal Geographical Society, "this collection brings together a selection of the best recent articles published in the RGS-IBG journals on this theme and presents an opportunity to freely access key articles in the field in a new way" (see section 5, E2).

4. Details of the impact

Overall, the research has had a significant impact on the conduct of policy at 'the boundary', affecting the conduct and organisation of a key government committee, changing its relationship to the larger environmental and sustainability policy community. It has thus had – and continues to have - an impact on the environmental policy-making process itself.

The impact process

Following the closure of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) and the end of funding for the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) in 2010, the EAC addressed the need to embed sustainable development across government policy-making through two sequential inquiries.

Based on the above research, a detailed 'summary for stakeholders' briefing was prepared, as was a written submission to the EAC's first inquiry. Consequently Turnpenny and Russel were called to give oral evidence to the EAC on 17th November 2010.

The evidence presented the challenges of integrating sustainable development into the machinery of government, and outlined recommendations for how the EAC might operate in the future.

Among the research team's recommendations were that the EAC should:

- focus on fewer issues, while minimising overlap with other Select Committees, to enable greater depth of analysis
- revitalise its cross-cutting role, enabling it to challenge established 'world views' of departmental Select Committees
- maintain the credibility, legitimacy and salience of the evidence it presents by drawing on the latest evidence, rather than just on familiar actors
- develop its 'entrepreneur' and 'persuasive advocate' roles, filling the vacancy caused by the abolition of the RCEP; it should be a legitimate and credible advocate of sustainable development across Whitehall, not 'captured' by any department's agenda or accepted norms of operation.
- be significantly better-resourced, particularly the Secretariat and specialists, with, for instance, support for more in-depth analysis for each inquiry. This would imply a more 'staff-driven' committee, so it would be important to maintain support of members to ensure EAC's legitimacy and accountability.

This evidence formed an important part of the EAC's inquiry report (EAC 2011a), and the basis for two of its thirteen headline recommendations to government (paras 73 and 78). The subsections on 'Parliamentary Scrutiny' (paras 63-69) and 'Wider Stakeholder Scrutiny' (paras 70-73) directly referred to Turnpenny et al.'s recommendations for greater engagement with a wide range of expertise at an early stage in the policy process to 'assist [government] in developing more innovative ways of addressing sustainability issues' (para 73/Recommendation 12). The fourth section of the report on 'A New Sustainable Development Strategy' was framed around Turnpenny et al.'s arguments for a coherent strategy to 'revitalise Government on this essential foundation for all policy-making' (para 78/Recommendation 13), including embedding sustainable development in the Treasury manual for policy appraisal, and potential use of sanctions for under-performing departments.

In its official response (HMG 2011), the Government agreed with Recommendation 12, but offered no clear mechanism for embedding the perspectives of such expertise in policy-making. The Government disagreed with Recommendation 13, arguing that overarching commitment to high-level principles of sustainable development and transparency allow 'both public and parliament to scrutinise our progress' (HMG 2011, Response to Rec 13).

In reply, the EAC acted directly on Turnpenny et al.'s research findings by:

- 1) Committing to improve links with academic institutions and the appointment of two specialist advisers (EAC 2011b, para 21).
- 2) Forming a sustainability knowledge network. This feeds diverse academic research directly into EAC inquiries, and advises on appropriate topics for inquiry. This network meets annually with the EAC under the auspices of the British Academy.
- 3) Pursuing a more 'seminar style' format in which different experts debate ideas, alongside its more traditional adversarial inquiry format – based on Turnpenny et al.'s recommendations to enable more in-depth discussion of ideas.
- 4) Considering a sequential approach to wide ranging topics with long time horizons (such as the measurement and auditing of wellbeing).

Impact case study (REF3b)

- 5) Reaffirming its 'scrutiniser' role, committing itself to monitoring 'changes in ... legislation and regulations and examine these where they might dilute sustainability' (EAC, 2011b, para 13) and to monitoring the 'development of ... impact assessment tools' (para 14) – i.e. appraising both policy and the instruments of policy appraisal.
- 6) Confirming the importance of international leadership on sustainability, and set out its role in this.

The Special Advisor to the EAC confirmed: *"the recommendations of the Turnpenney team have proved influential for the new ways of working of the Committee, which is continually exploring innovative approaches to its ways of working"* (email E1).

The research has also helped the environmental policy and research community by broadening the sources and depth of the evidence base upon which the EAC draws. For example, the Head of International Cooperation at the European Environmental Agency (email E4) reported that the research addressed issues of concern to the EEA, particularly in relation to the 'science-policy interface'; Policy Analysts at the House of Commons library (email E5) circulated it to other committees because they 'may be able to learn some lessons from it'; and the Sustainable Development Scrutiny Officer at the Scottish Parliament (email E3) asked for recommendations for Scotland based on the research.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

EAC [House of Commons, Environmental Audit Committee] (2011a) *Embedding Sustainable Development Across Government, after the Secretary of State's announcement on the future of the Sustainable Development Commission*, Session, 2010-11, 1st Report, HC Paper 504, ev60. The Stationery Office: London.

EAC [House of Commons, Environmental Audit Committee] (2011b) *Embedding Sustainable Development: The Government's Response*, Session 2010-12, 4th Report, HC877. The Stationery Office: London.

HMG [Her Majesty's Government] (2011) *The Government's Response to the Committee's First Report* (March 2011)

Email correspondence:

E1. Special Advisor to the EAC

E2. Managing Editor (Journals) of the Royal Geographical Society

E3. Sustainable Development Officer, Scottish Parliament

E4. Projects Officer, European Environment Agency

E5. Policy Analyst, House of Commons Library