Institution: University of Stirling
Unit of Assessment: 19. Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Optimizing European Union policymaking by improving the use of evidence
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 - 2020
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name: Paul Cairney	**Role:** Professor of Politics and Public Policy	**Period employed by submitting HEI:** 2013 - present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - December 2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No

1. Summary of the impact

Paul Cairney's research has been fundamental to a shift in European Commission strategy and practice towards the use of evidence in policymaking, providing a framework that improves policymaking by bridging the gap between policy and evidence. Improvements to Commission policymaking processes have come through collaborative engagement with Commission staff (in the Joint Research Centre), to transform its principles and practices. This co-produced research is embedded in Commission policy and practice, including:

- The JRC's work supporting Commission policies (n= 733 policies 2018-2019),
- Capacity building and the professional development of Commission policymakers and government scientists,
- Optimization of how Commission staff and their partners use evidence for policy.

The European Commission describes his research's impact, on the working practices and effectiveness of EU policymakers as *fundamental to its new ways of thinking*. This shift of thinking has helped the EU to implement policies that are more rigorous in their use of evidence.

2. Underpinning research

How can governments help maximise the impact of academic research in policy?

Cairney's book *The Politics of Evidence-Based Policymaking* (EBPM) and related work [**R1-5**] combines theoretical and empirical insights from policy studies to explain why there often appears to be a large mismatch between the supply of evidence by researchers and demand by policymakers. It advances academic knowledge of EBPM, uses these insights to reframe scientific debates, and informs strategies within governments to reduce the 'evidence-policy gap'. It found that existing EBPM studies focused too much on the 'barriers' to the use of evidence (creating an 'evidence-policy gap') from the perspective of scientists frustrated with politics and politicians. It reframed this literature, highlighting the importance of framing and storytelling to influence policymakers' demand for evidence, and helping researchers and practitioners understand complex policy processes in which there are many policymakers in multiple levels and types of government. This research advanced an award-winning agenda to translate policy scholarship into practical lessons for policy and practice (**R3** won the journal's best article award).

The research described above - and engagement that has stemmed from this - has helped transform the ways in which academics in multiple disciplines *and* policymakers conceptualise policy impact. This research agenda now informs strategies by policymakers (and influencers) in many governments, all of whom seek to close the gap between the supply of and demand for academic research to inform policy. As such the research/impact connection reflects close co-production:

(1) Cairney co-authored one piece of underpinning research [**R2**] with three staff of the European Commission; (2) It sets the KMP agenda within the Commission *and* describes knowledge of Cairney's research as essential to the effectiveness of KMP organisations, which makes it a research output [**R2**] *and* impact output [**S2**].

3. References to the research

R1. Paul Cairney (2016) *The Politics of Evidence Based Policymaking* (London: Palgrave Pivot). DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-51781-4 (*cited extensively by the European Commission*)

R2. Lene Topp, David Mair, Laura Smillie, and Paul Cairney (2018) 'Knowledge management for policy impact: the case of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre', *Palgrave Communications,* 4, 87. DOI: 10.1057/s41599-018-0143-3

R3. Chris Weible and Paul Cairney (2018) 'Practical lessons from policy theories' Policy & Politics, 46, 2, 183-97. DOI: 10.1332/030557318X15230059147191 (*Winner of the Ken Young Best Paper prize in Policy & Politics*)

R4. Paul Cairney, Kathryn Oliver, and Adam Wellstead (2016) 'To Bridge the Divide between Evidence and Policy: Reduce Ambiguity as Much as Uncertainty', *Public Administration Review*, 76, 3, 399–402. DOI: 10.1111/puar.12555

R5. Adam Wellstead, Paul Cairney, and Kathryn Oliver (2018) 'Reducing ambiguity to close the science-policy gap', Policy Design and Practice, 1, 2, 115-25. DOI: 10.1080/25741292.2018.1458397

4. Details of the impact

The following activities are described chronologically to highlight the policymaking context and strong connection between pathways to impact and key outputs. In each case, the JRC provides the evidence and narrative of clear impact. Overall, they show that Cairney's research has influenced directly the ways in which the European Commission (a) describes policymaking and the role of evidence in policy, (b) trains scientists and policymakers, and (c) optimizes the ways in which Commission staff gather and use policy-relevant evidence.

The context: the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) at the heart of the 'science-policy interface'

The JRC (a) employs over 2000 scientists to provide a science and knowledge service to policymakers, and (b) provides training to scientists and policymakers, to maximise the value of scientific research to policymaking. Under its Strategy 2030, the JRC is the manager of scientific knowledge for EU policies and therefore at the centre of the 'science-policy interface': embedded in the Commission, producing knowledge supporting EU policy, and seeking to maximise the policy relevance and impact of scientific evidence. In short, to influence the JRC is to influence the EU's policies on evidence use and, ultimately, EU law and policy.

The key impact outputs, as described by the JRC

Cairney's research has significantly impacted how the JRC has supported European Commission policies (n=733 policies since 2018, source: JRC Annual Activity Reports). The JRC "expect[s] Cairney's impact on our work to continue beyond 2020*"* [Testimonial from JRC; **S1**].

The JRC testimonial outlines the continuous and multi-faceted impact of Cairney's research:

1. **Impacts on the public policymaking process.** "Cairney's research, and our co-produced work [**R2**, **S2**], has:
   a. Stimulated policy debate within the European Commission, both directly (in our published work) and indirectly (through the sharing of Cairney's research).
   b. Helped reform the processes we use to build professional capacity in the Commission.
   c. Produced a major piece of research synthesis to inform (knowledge management) policy.
   d. Informed the new analysis of existing policy problems." [**S1**]

2. **Impacts on practitioners and delivery of professional services.** "Cairney's research, and our co-produced work, has:
   a. Influenced the JRC's guidelines and training in KMP [Knowledge Management for Policy].
   b. Contributed directly to continuous professional development in the Commission, with a substantive and measured impact.
   c. Informed (and been cited directly in) more than one publication by the Commission." [**S1**]

The pathways to impact and connection to outputs

The impact process began in 2016, when David Mair (Head of Unit, Science Advice to Policy, JRC) invited Cairney to meet with senior Commission staff – including Vladimír Šucha, JRC Director-General - to discuss the implications of *The Politics of Evidence-Based Policymaking* [**R1**] for its impact agenda. They then pursued these collaborative activities:

1. Cairney collaborated with the JRC's Mair, Lene Topp and Laura Smillie. As the JRC state:

"In 2016 and 2017, Cairney worked closely with us to inform five participatory workshops [**S3**] designed to identify the skills required – in individuals and organisations - for effective Knowledge Management for Policy [KMP]. This work included academics, policymakers, science advisers, and 'knowledge brokers'" [**S1**].

At these events the JRC distributed a poster (Figure 1) 'to capture all key organisations which work to advance evidence informed policy conceptually and practically' [**S4**]. Evidence of the uptake of the research by staff across the JRC is shown in their statement:

"In 2016 our 'Snapshot of the Evidence Informed Policy Landscape' [**S4**] described Cairney as one of five experts to follow, and his book as key reading material (alongside a small collection of international agenda setting studies). Professor Cairney's work is known and respected among many European Commission staff" [**S1**].

Figure 1. Snapshot of the Evidence Informed Policy Landscape [**S4**]

2. Topp, Mair, Smillie, and Cairney co-produced **R2**, which identifies the skills essential to effective KMP. The JRC KMP Wheel (Figure 2) summarises the eight required skills for effective knowledge management in organisations. The article represents an initial impact output, since the EU's published work describes Cairney's research as essential to three of eight KMP skills ('Understanding Policy & Science', 'Communicating Scientific Knowledge' and 'Advising Policymakers').

3. This article's KMP research **underpinned the JRC's capacity building and skills development from 2017-present** (Figure 2). The JRC's internal evaluation (based on surveys of attendees) identified the significant impact of its KMP training. The JRC's testimonial states: "This research has contributed to the JRC's capacity

Figure 2. The Knowledge Management for Policy (KMP) Wheel. [**R2**, **S2**].

building and skills development from 2017-present". [**S1**]. Cairney and the JRC are also cooperating to provide this work to external researchers, such as via the European Research Council Horizon 2020 funded project IMAJINE (in which Cairney is Co-investigator).

4. The JRC produced a major expansion of its KMP agenda by initiating its Enlightenment 2.0 project. It describes 'E2.0' as a way to (a) harness interdisciplinary insights to help 're-design policymaking processes to allow facts, evidence and reasoning to play the part that they should in a liberal democracy', and (b) keep KMP high on the agenda of the President of the European Commission. Central to this project is the report *Understanding our Political Nature* [**S6**], which translates research into a form accessible to policymakers within the European Commission. Cairney and co-authors worked with the JRC on a key report [**S5**] that underpins *Understanding our Political Nature.* As the JRC explain:

> "In 2018 and 2019, Cairney was Lead Author (with Dr Kathryn Oliver) of the 'Public Policy, Public Administration, and Sociology' group, which synthesised social science insights (including Cairney's book [**R1**] and our co-authored article [**R2**]) to inform our final report *Understanding our Political Nature*. This report helps set the European Commission's agenda on the use of evidence and values in politics and policymaking." [**S1**]

The JRC is now using *Understanding our Political Nature* to "champion" the research findings (including **R1-R5**) to "change and adapt processes internally [to the European Commission] to optimize the uptake of evidence in political decision-making" [**S7**]. The JRC also considers Enlightenment 2.0 and *Understanding our Political Nature* as one of its most important achievements of 2019 [**S8, p8**], contributing to its strategic objective of more directly and efficiently supporting the policymaking of the European Commission.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Testimonial from Joint Research Centre (dated 13.12.19)

S2. Main Article. Lene Topp, David Mair, Laura Smillie, and Paul Cairney (2018) 'Knowledge management for policy impact: the case of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre', *Palgrave Communications,* 4, 87, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0143-3

S3. Supplementary article outlining participatory workshops 2016-7 https://static-content.springer.com/esm/art%3A10.1057%2Fs41599-018-0143-3/MediaObjects/41599_2018_143_MOESM1_ESM.docx

S4. European Commission Joint Research Centre 'Snapshot of the Evidence Informed Policy Landscape' (2017). Abstract from JRC describes it thus: "The infographic gathers together the main organisations, institutions, people and fora involved in the evidence for policy debate." https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/brochures-leaflets/snapshot-evidence-informed-policy-landscape

S5. Enlightenment 2.0 report, Public Policy, Administration, and Sociology https://paulcairney.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/cairney-et-al-enlightenment-jrc-report-final-3.12.18.pdf

S6. Joint Research Centre (2019) Understanding Our Political Nature https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/understanding-our-political-nature-how-put-knowledge-and-reason-heart-political-decision DOI: 10.2760/374191

S7. Presentation by Laura Smillie, JRC Policy Analyst, delivered at the European Geosciences Union Conference, 8 May 2020. Available online at: https://youtu.be/acJZeYd0xVE

S8. Joint Research Centre (2020) Annual Report 2019. DOI: 10.2760/546288