**Manchester Policy Blogs - Editorial Policy**

1. **Purpose**

Policy@Manchester is dedicated to ensuring research and research-based expertise reaches key audiences, positively influencing public policy debates and outcomes regionally, nationally and (increasingly) internationally.

We have found blogs are one way – but certainly not the only way – to help achieve this.

But they should be viewed as an initial output to facilitate further engagement and stimulate interest, rather than an end in themselves.

When used in conjunction with other tools, such as media relations, events and targeted stakeholder communications, at the right time, they can bring about positive outcomes for researchers who are keen to see their work influence public policy debates.

**For this reason,** **we ask authors to discuss their reasons for writing a blog – and their desired outcomes - with us in the first instance.**

 **The aim of*Manchester Policy Blogs* is to;**

* promote a wider understanding and awareness of Manchester research that has relevance to public policymaking in the UK and internationally.
* facilitate the sharing and exchange of knowledge and expertise between researchers, policy actors and other external stakeholders.
* Provide a shop window and initial touchpoint for policy audiences to engage further with our research expertise

In addition to the above, writing for our blogs can provide a useful ‘first experience’ for those new to, or inexperienced in, policy engagement, helping hone skills and the approach needed for other types of policy engagement (such as policy briefings and policymaker presentations, and face to face meetings). This supports our ambitions to support young and new academics in developing effective policy engagement skills. However, all blogs published still need to adhere to the key principles below.

1. **Key principles**
* **Contact us before writing a blog.** Researchers intending to write and submit a blog, should speak to us first about the central idea/argument/angle, so we can offer expert guidance and support, and discuss a potential publishing date. This will help avoid a drawn out editing process that can result from unsolicited submissions that don’t meet our requirements, which can cause frustration. We undertake to respond to all inquiries about potential blogs within 3 working days; if an inquiry is pressing, we suggest phoning us directly (see our contact details below) to discuss what is possible.
* **Blogs must be no more than 1,000 words – and, ideally, shorter.**
* **We cannot guarantee to accept or publish unexpected, unsolicited blogs.** While we will still review them (we aim to do this within 10 working days), due to workload across the team, we are increasingly unlikely to be able to publish unsolicited blogs on demand with no or little notice.
* **Focus on your area of substantive expertise.** We expect contributors to write on topics and areas in which they have substantial and recent academic research expertise.
* **Ensure a clear public policy angle.** Blogs should deal with, and help further the debate around relevant public policy issues. They should consider the current public policy position, and suggest constructive ways in which to move forwards.
* **Blogs don’t represent a corporate view.** Blogs will give the views and opinions of the author(s), and not the position of Policy@Manchester, relevant funders, nor The University of Manchester.
* **Policy@Manchester reserves the right to make a final editorial decision.** An expression of interest by the team in a blog being written, and/or a commitment to review a blog submitted does not automatically guarantee it will be published. Where we decide not to publish a blog, the reason(s) will be discussed with the author, and we will endeavour to suggest alternative outlets for publication.
* **Declaration of interests.** Where authors have been undertaking work for – paid or unpaid – an organisation or body, which relates to the policy issue being discussed in the blog, this should be declared.
1. **What type of blogs do we want?**

We aim to publish blogs which can contribute to policy debates, highlighting the research and evidence base, and addressing possible implications and choices for policymakers.

We want engaging, easy to ready blogs that provide research-based analysis and insights on aspects of public policy in the UK and internationally. These blogs should link to our key themes. They should be a maximum of 1,000 words long, and ideally shorter.

We will draw primarily on the community of academics and researchers at The University of Manchester, but we welcome contributions from those working at other universities and reputable and rigorous research organisations.

Contributions should not take the form of academic papers. Nor should they simply be a description of everything that is wrong with a certain area of public policy. Blogs should try to be pragmatic in their approach and start from ‘where we are now’ and consider how we get from ‘here to there’, rather than simply suggesting a policy is wrong and arguing that an alternative policy should have been enacted at some point in the past.

It is expected that posts will contain some degree of opinion, but views expressed and claims made must be clearly linked back to relevant research and evidence. We positively encourage posts that stimulate and encourage lively debate where academic rigour is demonstrated.

***The research used as the basis for constructing arguments and making public policy recommendations does not necessarily have to have been undertaken by the author; policy makers and actors often tell us that they value experts who can draw together and summarise the latest research and thinking on public policy topics and make informed recommendations and suggestions based on this body of work. However, the policy area covered must still link to the author’s substantive area of academic expertise.***

We are also interested in discussing potential blogs with those working outside of the University, in areas of public policy (for example, third sector, charities and community organisations); but proposed articles must have some kind of evidence base to support central arguments, and cannot simply be opinion pieces.

However, in instances where public policy decisions have been criticised or questioned by authors (drawing on an evidence base), we will give senior public policy leaders the opportunity to respond, in order to support a balanced, healthy and constructive debate.

 **4. What makes a good public policy post?**

The best posts typically have the following elements:

* **Relevance** – A clear link to a current, substantive public policy issue
* **Research** – A new piece of research evidence, and/or reference to an academic debate or body of work that is relevant to current and topical public policy issues.
* **Recommendations** – What are the implications or choices facing policy makers?
* **Relaxed style** –direct and informal in order to be accessible to as wider audience as possible.
* **Reading further** – some links to additional sources and useful evidence to support your arguments. ***Please include these as links, not as standard academic references.***

 **5. Blogs not suitable for Manchester Policy Blogs**

* Blogs based mainly on personal experience or peripheral interests, outside of your primary area of research expertise
* Blogs that have no relevance to **public** policy
* Blogs purely about politics rather than public policy
* Blogs that simply describe the problem or criticise current public policy, but do not discuss potential solutions or ways forward
* Blogs that would only be of interest to other academics or those working in HE
* Blogs mainly about non-public policy; for example, a niche policy issue within a specific organisation

**6.** **Academic freedom**

As a unit within The University of Manchester (under the auspices of Policy@Manchester), Manchester Policy Blogs adheres to the core principle of academic freedom (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=16238>, but also the University’s Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=11846>).

 **7. Submission Process**

Assuming that an initial discussion of the proposed blog has taken place (see Key Principles above), when the initial draft is sent, it will be acknowledged by a member of the Policy@Manchester team within 3 working days.

Articles submitted will be reviewed by members of the team, who may edit the piece to enhance readability to the blog’s wider audience.

These edits may include:

* Shortening of text if the article is above our stated 1,000 word limit
* Removal of specialist jargon or overly academic language that might confuse the reader
* The addition of a narrative-style title to sum up the post’s main findings
* The addition of short introductory paragraph outlining the article’s author, their main arguments and findings, and any relevant background information for readers.
* Re-ordering of content to bring the main arguments to the top of the piece
* A sharper and more explicit focus on the key public policy aspects of the issue

Where edits are made, the final version will be sent back to the author for approval. Occasionally, further information may be requested. Once you have submitted a post**, please ensure you are available in the proceeding 72 hours to respond to suggested edits and suggestions** that are sent to you by the Policy@Manchester team.

Once articles are published, we are very happy to make further edits afterwards should the author deem them to be necessary. However, in the interests of transparency, these changes will be indicated.

**8. Further consultation**

Where there is any concern about the content of a blog submitted, and/or whether it falls within the scope of Manchester Policy Blogs and Policy@Manchester’s remit, publication may be delayed in order to seek further advice from the Policy@Manchester Senior Leadership Team and, if necessary, Editorial Advisory Board members.

It may also sometimes be necessary to consult with appropriate University staff, such as those working in Legal or Governance.

If this happens, and publication is likely to be delayed, the author(s) will be informed.

Occasionally, it may not possible to agree a final version of a blog which an author is happy with, and which meets our requirements outlined in the Editorial Policy. In these instances, we will advise authors on how articles could be adjusted to meet our criteria, and/or suggest alternative outlets.

 **9. Alternative outlets**

It’s worth stating that the opportunities for researchers to publish topical opinion and thought pieces have developed dramatically since Manchester Policy Blogs were first established in late 2013.

The University is a financial supporter of The Conversation and has strong links to be able to pitch blogs to them. The Media Relations Office also has connections with outlets such as CityMetric, BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post, which publish blogs and opinion pieces from academics. All these attract large readerships; some articles achieve tens of thousands of views, and in the case of The Conversation, are sometimes republished in national and international media outlets. Policy@Manchester also has good links with WonkHE, which publishes blogs specifically on HE policy issues.

We may therefore actively suggest and support publication in these outlets as a more appropriate option, depending on factors such as the proposed topic of your blog, what you hope to achieve by writing the blog, the strength of the public policy angle, and the target audience you want to reach.

 **10. Promoting your published blog**

Policy@Manchester will promote your blog initially and then regularly, once published, via its primary channels. However, experience tells us that greater reach is achieved when the author also promotes the blog through their own channels, and asks and encourages key people in their networks to do the same. **11. Timescales**

One of the purposes of having an initial discussion with a member of the Policy@Manchester team before writing a blog is to discuss a publication date that suits both parties and, importantly, helps maximise its reach.

Where this process has been followed and a specific publication date has been agreed, we will always endeavour to the best our ability to ensure a blog goes live on this date and that it is adequately promoted via our channels.

However, there may be some occasions where this is not possible due to competing and unforeseen demands and priorities within the Policy@Manchester team. Where this is the case, we will communicate this to the author(s).

While we do not encourage unsolicited submission of blogs that have not been discussed with someone in the team, and we cannot guarantee to publish them in any form, we will endeavour to assess and respond to these within 10 working days.

 **12. Republishing policy**

Where we receive requests for articles to be republished by third parties, we will check with the author(s) before granting permission. We request an attribution and link back to our blog site for all re-published blogs.

 **11. Contacts**

To discuss your idea for a Manchester Policy Blog, please email policy@manchester.ac.uk or contact a member of the team on 0161 275 3038.

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