When do policymakers accept and reject policy recommendations?
Lessons from the UK Climate Change Committee

Key messages:

- The UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) provided no less than 700 recommendations to the UK Government on climate mitigation and adaptation between 2009 and 2020.

- The Government responded to 592 of the CCC's recommendations and accepted 23% of them. Of those accepted, only 2% were accepted in full.

- Recommendations were more likely to be accepted if they were repeated from a previous report, cross-sectoral, and did not contain quantitative targets.

- Other climate advisory bodies can learn lessons from the UK's experience.

Centre for **Climate Change**
and **Social Transformations**

CAST is a global hub for understanding the crucial role that people play in fighting climate change. The CAST team is based across five UK institutions, including the University of Bath (our centre hub), the University of Manchester, the University of East Anglia and Cardiff University, as well as the charity Climate Outreach.

Introduction

This briefing is intended as a resource for climate change advisory bodies and anyone interested in the policy influence of their recommendations.

Climate change advisory bodies now exist in over 40 countries, including the UK, France, and Denmark. Their primary role is to produce recommendations for national policymakers. However, our understanding of their influence on the policymaking process is limited.

This briefing summarises the findings from a recent research project, to which CAST researchers contributed.

The project addressed two research questions:
1. How did the UK Government respond to the CCC's mitigation and adaptation recommendations between 2009 and 2020?
2. How, if at all, were the characteristics of the recommendations associated with government responses?

The Government's responses to the CCC's recommendations were analysed using a content analysis that categorised each response as either acceptance, rejection, or non-committal. A regression analysis analysed the association between these responses and six recommendation characteristics, specifically: addressee, sectoral focus, quantitative targets, recommended action, level of challenge to the policy status quo, and repetition.

For full details of the methods used, refer to the open access published paper: The policy impact of climate change advisory bodies: government responses to the UK Climate Change Committee's recommendations, 2009–2020.

Results

Previous research identified that the CCC provided no less than 700 mitigation and adaptation recommendations in its annual progress reports between 2009 and 2020. Our more recent research found that the UK Government rejected nearly half (47%) of the CCC's 484 mitigation recommendations and gave a non-committal response to a further third (31%). The findings were similar for the 108 adaptation recommendations that were responded to between 2015 and 2020: 49% were rejected, and 24% received a non-committal response.

Certain recommendation characteristics were associated with different government responses.

Mitigation recommendations were:
- More likely to be accepted if they were cross-sectoral (these recommendations were over four times more likely to be accepted than those with a singular sectoral focus).
- Less likely to be accepted if they focused on the buildings sector and included targets, such as a quantitative objective or delivery timescale.
- More likely to be rejected if they addressed a government department that did not have statutory responsibility for climate change.

Adaptation recommendations were:
- More likely to be accepted if they repeated a previous recommendation.
- More likely to be rejected if they pertained to flood risk management.
- Less likely to be rejected if they were supportive of the Government's prevailing policies, values, and beliefs.

Evaluation of the regression models revealed that the characteristics of recommendations could not fully account for the variation in government responses to recommendations in either policy area. In other words, other factors not analysed in this research can also affect government responses.

Conclusions and lessons

This CAST research has matched climate advisory body recommendations with government responses and demonstrated the statistical relationship between the two for the first time. It revealed that certain recommendation characteristics are associated with different responses.

Therefore, we have identified three lessons that advisory bodies around the world can learn from the UK experience:

1. **Provide short, clear, and direct recommendations.** Not only are these more positively received, but they also enable advisory bodies to hold governments accountable for their responses to recommendations and subsequent (non-)implementation.

2. **Address recommendations to a single, engaged government department.** Recommendations are more likely to be rejected if addressed to departments that do not have relevant remits and powers.

3. **Be tenacious and repeat recommendations over time.** Although recommendations may be rejected initially, repetition is a predictor of acceptance. Policymaking often requires multiple rounds of discussion before a decision is reached.

Further reading

- Dudley, H., Jordan, A., and Lorenzoni, I. (2022). Advising national climate policy makers: A longitudinal analysis of the UK climate change committee. Global Environmental Change, 76, 102589. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2022.102589

- Dudley, H., Holmes, J., Jordan, A., and Lorenzoni, I. (2025). The policy impact of climate change advisory bodies: government responses to the UK Climate Change Committee's recommendations, 2009–2020. Climate Policy, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2025.2497881

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