

‘This is an all too rare example of a book about policy-making based on direct observation. Interviewing, sitting in on meetings, Jo Maybin explores how civil servants craft policy. It is a complex, untidy process. Personal contacts and experience are all important; anecdotes can trump statistics; know-how about the policy process itself is essential. It is a convincing picture that makes many conventional assumptions look simplistic. Drawing on a formidable battery of theoretical perspectives, without ever clouding the clarity of her analysis, Maybin has made a subtle and sophisticated contribution to our understanding of how government works.’

– Rudolf Klein, *University of Bath, UK*

‘Officials and professionals live under the imperative to act. In this profound and elegantly written book, Jo Maybin explores what the implications of this universal but usually overlooked insight are for understanding the role of knowledge in organisations. Using a wealth of empirical data, she argues that the received view of professionals applying formal knowledge acquired in professional curricula is both misguided and misleading. Instead an ongoing flow of knowing, practical, situated, interactive and embodied, that emerges out of organisational practices – structures of meanings, rules, routines, competences, materials, spatial arrangements and affects – is what makes organisations tick. This book abounds with important insights for public administrators, policy analysts and organisation scholars.’

– Hendrik Wagenaar, *University of Sheffield, UK*

‘If you’re interested in the ways in which knowledge and knowing feature in the policy work of civil servants then you should read this fascinating account of their practices. Jo Maybin reveals the activities that take place behind the closed doors of a government ministry. She highlights the importance of personal encounters as civil servants develop their understanding of policy issues, the various approaches they use in making phenomena knowable and the know-how needed to “make policies happen”. The resulting narrative is enlightening, enthralling and enduring in equal measure – enjoy the read.’

– Sandra Nutley, *University of St Andrews, UK*

‘There is no shortage of guidebooks telling us how policy should be developed. Maybin asks how it is developed and why it is done this way. By watching what policy workers do, reading what they write and talking to them about their work, she shows us how they make sense of their task. We see clearly how they acquire and use evidence and how policy emerges from the “buzzing, blooming confusion” of government. Anyone wanting to understand the policy process – whether as a producer or as a consumer – would learn a lot from this book.’

– H.K. Colebatch, *The University of New South Wales, Australia*

‘Jo Maybin’s book sheds valuable light on the realities of policy-making within a government department, documenting in a non-judgemental way how civil servants acquire and apply knowledge, broadly defined, to help ministers develop and deliver their goals. Anyone in the research community seeking to engage with government will benefit from reading the descriptions of the practices inside the Department of Health which resonate with experience in many other government departments.’

– Jill Rutter, *Institute for Government, UK*

*Palgrave Studies in Science, Knowledge and Policy*

Series Editors: **Katherine Smith**, University of Edinburgh, UK; **Richard Freeman**, University of Edinburgh, UK

*Titles include:*

Ellen Stewart

PUBLICS AND THEIR HEALTH SYSTEMS

Rethinking Participation

Jan-Peter Voß and Richard Freeman

KNOWING GOVERNANCE

The Epistemic Construction of Political Order

Sudeepa Abeyesinghe

PANDEMICS, SCIENCE AND POLICY

H1N1 and the World Health Organization

Katherine Smith

BEYOND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

The Interplay of Ideas

Jo Maybin

PRODUCING HEALTH POLICY

Knowledge and Knowing in Government Policy Work

---

**Palgrave Studies in Science, Knowledge and Policy**

**Series Standing Order ISBN 978-1-137-39461-3 (Hardback)**

*(outside North America only)*

You can receive future titles in this series as they are published by placing a standing order. Please contact your bookseller or, in case of difficulty, write to us at the address below with your name and address, the title of the series and the ISBNs quoted above.

Customer Services Department, Macmillan Distribution Ltd, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS, England

---

# Producing Health Policy

## Knowledge and Knowing in Government Policy Work

Jo Maybin

*Fellow in Health Policy, The King's Fund, UK*

palgrave  
macmillan



© Jo Maybin 2016

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2016 978-1-137-58392-5  
All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2016 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-78656-5      ISBN 978-1-349-78654-1 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-78654-1

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Maybin, Jo, author.

Producing health policy : knowledge and knowing in government policy work / Jo Maybin.

Includes index.

I. Title.

[DNLM: 1. Health Policy—Great Britain. 2. Health Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice—Great Britain. 3. Public Health Administration—Great Britain. WA 540 FA1]

RA418.3.G7

362.10941—dc23

2015033201

# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1 Knowledge and Policy in the Literature	12
2 Knowledge Sources	38
3 Learning through Interaction	64
4 Analytical Practices	83
5 Articulating People, Ideas and Instruments	107
6 Forms of Knowledge and Knowing in Policy Work	129
Appendix 1: The UK Department of Health, 2009–11	143
Appendix 2: Studying Practices in Practice	150
<i>Notes</i>	156
<i>References</i>	159
<i>Index</i>	168

# Illustrations

## Figures

A.1	Department of Health structure, 2009	148
A.2	Policy and strategy directorate structure, 2009	148

## Tables

1.1	Typologies of knowledge forms	31
1.2	The characteristics of knowledge as knowing	36
3.1	The Socratic elenchus and idea-testing	75
A.1	Civil service grading structure	144

# Acknowledgements

This book is based on research undertaken at the University of Edinburgh in 2008–13. That research was made possible by a Graduate School of Social and Political Science Research Student Award and a Sir Bernard Crick Fellowship from the University of Edinburgh, and by the support and flexibility of my employer, The King's Fund. My particular thanks go to Anna Dixon, former director of policy at the Fund, who was supportive from the very outset of the project. My past and present colleagues there, including Natasha Curry, Chris Naylor, Ruth Robertson and Rachael Addicott, have been especially great sources of friendship, encouragement and advice.

The participants of this study made time in their busy diaries to talk with me about the nature of their work, and to allow me to watch them in action. Being studied is necessarily uncomfortable, and more so in a politically sensitive context. It would have been easy for them to ignore or decline my invitations, but instead they put energy and attention into reflecting on my questions and supporting me to make sense of what I observed. I was truly humbled by the skill with which they negotiated their professional roles, and the dedication they displayed to public service. Sincere thanks to all of you for your help.

Like many of those participants, I think best in conversation with others, and I have had some excellent interlocutors over the course of this project. Friends, peers, advisers and examiners have offered invaluable insights into both the content of the study, and the nature of research and writing work. Particular thanks must go to Stefanie Ettelt, Rudolf Klein, Rosie Peppin Vaughan, Tom Welch, Jenny Bangham, Rosanne Flynn, Sara Shaw, Harriet Knight, Rosalind Cavaghan, Anna Whitelock, Sotiria Grek, Kat Smith, Hal Colebatch, Hendrik Wagenaar and Christina Boswell.

Sarah and Adam took me into their flat on Valleyfield Street in 2008 as a friend of a friend, and provided me with a home on my many visits to Edinburgh over the following five years. Their hospitality and friendship made it possible to think and work after a long commute in an overloaded week and I am so glad they have remained such an important part of my life.

Richard Freeman has been an outstanding teacher and friend. I have benefited immensely from his generosity with his ideas, time and

enthusiasm. Working on this project truly felt like learning with as well as from Richard, and his intellectual companionship enabled me to produce something of which I am truly proud (no mean feat for a self-critical perfectionist). I hope I can pass on to others at least some of what he has taught me.

I am very lucky to also have a family who understand what I have been doing and why, and who have given me moral support and practical advice. They have mostly been excellent at judging when to ask about the project, and when not to. My heartfelt thanks go to my mum and her partner, Janet Maybin and Seth Sethna; my dad and his wife, Ross Fergusson and Nicola Yeates; my brother Simon Maybin; my uncle and his partner, Malcolm Fergusson and Kate Laughton; and my partner's parents, Jane and Michael Gillon.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner of fourteen years, Duncan O'Connor, and our son, Calvin. Duncan had some initial reservations about whether starting a part-time research project that required me to commute between London and Edinburgh was the best idea I had ever had. In spite of that, from the get-go Duncan has given me inestimable emotional, intellectual and practical support, which has made this undertaking so much more manageable than it might otherwise have been. Best of all, he showed me how to enjoy it.

Calvin, whose existence became known the morning after completing this research, is re-educating me on the humanness of people, and has kept up his lunchtime nap long enough to enable this book to be written.

This book is derived, in part, from an article published in *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* on 13 June 2014, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13876988.2014.919738>, and a book chapter published in Freeman R. and Sturdy S. (eds.) (2014) *Knowledge in Policy: Embodied, Inscribed, Enacted*, Bristol: Policy Press.