Institutions of Scientific Policy Advice in Austria - Organization, Policy Areas, Framework

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Introduction

Science and research are highly valued in Austria and also enjoy a high level of trust among the population. The Austrian Academy of Sciences surveys this as part of its annual Science Barometer (see ÖAW 2023).[1] It is therefore not surprising that politics likes to rely on science and research in order to strengthen the factual basis of political measures on the one hand, and also to benefit from its trust. If a scientific study has proven something, it legitimizes political measures much better than if politicians were to say "we are doing this based on our perceptions or solely on ideological considerations". Science and research can be consulted as a reasonably reliable representative of "reality", but also as a "protective shield" against party-political criticism. Information and legitimization are the two essential functions of science in political consultation.

In Austria, scientific policy advice is provided by many advisory bodies (advisory boards, councils, commissions, expert groups) with an accumulation in certain policy fields (cf. Kevenhörster 2021) rather than by large and firmly established think tanks in an US-American way. This article attempts to provide an overview of this scientific policy advice in Austria. It focuses on those advisory structures that are institutionalized, legally anchored and have a clear scientific connection.

Research question and methodology

This article documents institutionalized advisory bodies in Austria at the interface between science and politics. It does not aim to evaluate the success of these advisory bodies, especially since success can be defined and measured in various different ways. Anyone wishing to do the latter will have to conduct extensive interviews with the scientific advisors on the one hand and the politicians receiving the advice on the other hand.

The advisory structures documented in this article must have a clear scientific reference, they must be "permanent" and have a legally sound basis. The fact that many individual researchers, as well as one-off discussion groups, also make a contribution to Science for Policy remains undisputed, but is not targeted by this Country Report. This is of course also due to the unsatisfactory basis for information. Many examples can be cited at the level of personal evidence, but it is not possible to create a consistent overview of participation in policy advice, successes and policy fields due to the diversity of individual initiatives.

The advisory structures documented below should cover the following three questions:

- Which research institutions provide Science for Policy advice and which institutionalized advisory structures (advisory boards, councils, commissions, expert groups, etc.) are documented?
- In which policy areas does Science for Policy occur more frequently and can this distribution pattern be explained?
- And can "recipes" be given for successful consulting activities?

[1] Roughly speaking, two thirds of the population trust science and scientists, which is more than in Germany or Switzerland. Scientists are overwhelmingly regarded as qualified, competent, experienced and also as responsible and honest. Only a third of the population is distanced from science and research to varying degrees.

Research facilities

Universities and universities of applied sciences

Scientists at Austria's universities are key players at the interface between science and politics. They speak out publicly, they make recommendations and they are consulted by political decision-makers. On the whole, however, the respective universities are reluctant to provide general policy advice. Rectorates rarely speak out on behalf of their institution on specific political issues.[2]

One exception to this is advice on higher education and research policy (Policy for Science). In order to achieve greater influence, universities and universities of applied sciences form interest groups and campaign for higher budgets, more autonomy, the right to award doctoral degrees, efficient study structures and much more. The individual areas of the universities "march" separately and are only brought together in the Hochschulkonferenz (HSK). In detail:

Universities Austria (UNIKO) sees itself as the voice of Austria's public universities and develops joint positions on issues of importance to university policy and society. Austria's 23 public universities are members, although the heterogeneity of the universities (technical universities, medical universities, universities of the arts, "comprehensive universities") makes it difficult to reach a consensus in some discussions. Nevertheless, Universities Austria is an important voice in the area of Policy for Sciences, and the counterpart to the Ministry. In this context, UNIKO repeatedly calls for sufficient funding for universities, a tightening of the liberal study law and a strict retention of autonomy.

Analogous to UNIKO, the Austrian Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK) exists in Austria. It is the mouthpiece of all 21 universities of applied sciences in Austria. Compared to the public universities, the universities of applied sciences are a relatively "young" higher education sector. It has undergone a rapid and impressive development since its launch in 1994, but still has to fight for public recognition. The task of the FHK is to represent the interests of universities of applied sciences and focuses - in addition to other tasks - on improving the financial and legal framework conditions.

The FHK, like UNIKO, the representatives of the private universities and university colleges of teacher education, as well as the Austrian National Union of Students are part of the Hochschulkonferenz, which advises the federal government on matters relating to the higher education plan.[3] The Higher Education Conference is a formalized interface between the stakeholders, the ministry and, more importantly, also politics. Developments in the higher education sector are discussed openly and planned as well as necessary legal measures are discussed.

Table1 : Science-based policy advice from university, non-university and other institutions

Intensity of policy advice	**Extent of autonomy**	
	Autonomy is comparatively low; tasks are more or less controlled by the public sector	**Autonomy is very pronounced; institutions decide for themselves on their specific institutional actions**
Policy advice is not a central task, teaching and research dominate		Universities of Applied Sciences, Universities Institute for Science and Technology Austria (ISTA), Austrian Academy of Sciences

[2] This does not affect the policy advice provided by rectors in advisory bodies on technical issues. Although they then act as experts and not as representatives of their institution. During the COVID pandemic, members of the rectorate of medical universities were sought-after interlocutors, but precisely because of their professional expertise and not because of their function.

[3] The Austrian Private Universities Conference (ÖPUK) represents the private universities and the Rectors' Conference of Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education (RÖPH) represents the public and private university colleges of teacher education.

		(OeAW), Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (LBG)
Advising political decision-makers is one of the central tasks	Environment Agency Austria (UBA), d (AGES), Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG), Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System (IQS), National Defense Academy	Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO), Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW); Momentum Institute, Agenda Austria, Eco Austria, Universities Austria (UNIKO), Austrian Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK)

Source: own compilation

Research institutions and research funding agencies

The central non-university research institutions and research funding agencies are listed in the Forschungsfinanzierungsgesetz (Federal Law Gazette I No. 75/2020).[4] This is a heterogeneous group of institutions that vary in difference of size, legal mandate and importance to the research system as a whole. The "flagships" of non-university research, such as Institute of Science and Technology Austria (ISTA) or the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW), are included, as are the two central research funding bodies, namely the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) for applied research and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) for basic research.

Due to the heterogeneity in this area, the interface to politics is not uniform. An institutionalized representative body, such as the various rectors' conferences, does not exist; only an informal group of the respective governing bodies was set up by the Austrian Academy of Sciences in order to bundle common interests and bring them to the attention of politicians - in the sense of Policy for Science.

The Austrian Academy of Sciences is somewhat of an exception among non-university institutions in terms of policy advice. This institution is a legal entity under public law under the special protection of the federal government, its patron is the Austrian Federal President and the chair of its Senate, a body intended to strengthen the link between science and politics, is held by the President of the National Council (first chamber of parliament). In its statutes, the Austrian Academy of Sciences also emphasizes that it takes a stand on scientifically relevant issues and prepares scientific reports for federal and state authorities. In contrast to other university and non-university institutions, the Austrian Academy of Sciences thus explicitly performs the Science for Policy task, albeit not at full strength.

The economic research institutes

In addition to universities and research institutions, individual research institutes have developed with a central focus on policy advice. However, this is not political consulting, which perhaps helps parties or ministries to identify policy strategies, but rather research institutes that take a research-based position on individual issues. Typically, these institutes are based in the field of economics and there are several of them.

WIFO was founded in 1927 as the "Austrian Institute for Business Cycle Research" by Friedrich August von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises and was renamed the "Austrian Institute of Economic Research" (WIFO) after the Second World War. It is a central advisory institute for the respective federal government, but is politically and institutionally independent. Its economic forecasts with the corresponding tax revenue estimates are decisive for the federal budget. The current head of WIFO, Gabriel Felbermayr, is a sought-after discussion

[4] The central research sponsors are the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT), GeoSphere Austria, the Institute of Science and Technology - Austria (ISTA), the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (LBG), the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) and Silicon Austria Labs. In addition, there are the central research funding bodies such as the Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft (AWS), the Christian Doppler Forschungsgesellschaft (CDG), the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD) and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG).

partner for political decision-makers, and its former head, Hans Seidel, was appointed State Secretary to the Federal Government in 1981. This shows a close interface with politics.

The Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) also plays an important role in economic policy advice. It was founded in 1963 by two well-known Austrians in exile, the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern, with financial support from the Ford Foundation, among others. The IHS has a broader disciplinary scope than the WIFO. It not only deals with economic topics, but also with issues relating to a sustainable economy, health policy and education policy. However, the economic forecasts, which are presented quarterly together with the WIFO forecasts, are central. The current director, Holger Bonin, is also a sought-after interlocutor for the media and politics and one of his predecessors, Martin Kocher, has served as Federal Minister of Labor and Economy. This is also a sign of the institutional proximity of applied economics and politics.

In addition to these two politically independent institutes, there are other economic research institutes that have a political affinity or a clear world view due to their founding history and funding structure. On the one hand, there is the Momentum Institute, which is largely funded by the Chamber of Labor, and on the other, Agenda Austria, which is financed by Austrian companies. Both see their primary task as informing the public and politicians. ECO-Austria is another research institute that is independent of party politics, is financed by membership fees from business and civil society and is active and successful in the field of third-party funded research on behalf of public institutions.

Dependent institutes in the areas of climate, health, education and security

The Environment Agency Austria (UBA) is an example of a thematically focused research institute that is not comparable to the scientific independence of WIFO or IHS. This is a former department of a federal ministry that was spun off in 1985 and transformed into a limited liability company. It is fully owned by the Republic of Austria and, therefore, has no independence in terms of content, comparable to a university or non-university research institution. Nevertheless, the UBA is an important institution at the interface to politics, as it performs central tasks such as collecting and analyzing data on the environmental situation and developing the basis for environmental policy decisions.

What the UBA is to climate and environmental policy, the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety GmbH (AGES) is for health policies (One-Health-approach). AGES is also a limited liability company that is wholly owned by the Republic of Austria and controlled by two ministries (Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protections and Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management). It is not an authority itself, but several federal offices are affiliated to it. Its remit is very broad and ranges from nutrition and food safety, medical market supervision, public health, animal health to radiation protection. Its tasks also include knowledge transfer and research.

Another large institution, Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG), is located in the health sector. Although GÖG has been spun off under company law and is no longer part of the Federal Ministry. It is not subject to directives in its scientific activities, but the president of the decisive board of trustees is the respective Federal Minister. GÖG functions as a national public health institute, develops health policy concepts, and also carries out operational tasks such as promoting projects or exchanging experiences with practitioners and political decision-makers.

The former Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (BIFIE) has undergone exactly the opposite development. In 2020, it was transformed into the Institutes des Bundes für Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen (IQS) and integrated into the Federal Ministry as a subordinate department. This is due to the specific tasks of the institute, namely the implementation of national and international tests (e.g.: Individual competence measurement, measurement of educational standards, participation in PISA or TIMMs), which are specified. The areas of responsibility also include the provision of evidence for educational policy decisions, even if this is not a priority.

Finally, the National Defense Academy is worth mentioning in the area of security. It is an agency subordinate to the Federal Ministry of Defense with central research and teaching responsibilities. In the field of security policy research, the National Defense Academy is fully autonomous and a leader in terms of content. Research includes addressing fundamental strategic questions of security policy as well as the preparation of data- and fact-based analyses of crisis and war zones. In the area of teaching, it focuses on the training of leaders (career and militia officers), including continuing education and foreign language training. The academy is headed by a commander, Lieutenant General Erich Csitkovits since 2011.

Institutionalized Science for Policy advisory groups

In addition to stakeholders, who are autonomous to varying degrees and, therefore, perform their tasks, institutionalized advisory groups should be mentioned in the field of Science for Policy advise. Some of these advisory groups have been set up to signal a willingness to find political solutions, while others have been set up to gather scientific expertise.

In order to gain an overview, the websites of all federal ministries were "screened" and the advisory groups listed there were added to a database. In total and after critical reflection, there are 62 national advisory groups, a considerable number. If you include other advisory groups at the state and municipal level, you quickly come to several hundred advisory groups that work at the interface of science and politics with varying degrees of intensity.

Of the 62 advisory groups at the federal level, however, only ten are legally assigned a clear science-based task. Although professors are represented in most advisory groups, they usually remain in the minority and sometimes act as "finishers". Their task is not to incorporate scientific findings into their advisory work. Such advisory groups decide on prizes and awards, for example, or develop new concepts and strategies for selected issues.

The ten advisory bodies, which are enshrined in law and have a clear science-based mandate, are presented below. An eleventh advisory group - the Climate Assembly - is included because it is generally considered an innovative element. The presentation follows a disciplinary grouping.

Economic and financial policy

The Fiscal Advisory Council is an independent advisory body that analyzes the implementation of the budget and, in particular, the development of government debt against the backdrop of national and international capital markets (www.fiskalrat.at). It is currently chaired by Christoph Badelt, Professor Emeritus of Economic and Social Policy. The Fiscal Advisory Council emerged from the former Government Debt Committee in 2013 and is the "independent body for monitoring compliance with budgetary rules" required by the EU. The members of the Fiscal Advisory Council are not necessarily academics, but nevertheless have the relevant expertise in the field. The Fiscal Advisory Council has a public presence and is, therefore, effective.

The Austrian Productivity Board is another important body in the area of economic and financial policy (www.produktivitaetsrat.at). It is an independent body made up of five members from the fields of business, productivity and competitiveness. They are appointed by the federal government and the social partners. The National Bank and the Parliamentary Budget Service participate in the meetings in an advisory capacity, as do other persons with expertise and research experience. The establishment of the Austrian Productivity Board follows the EU Council Recommendation 2016/C 349/01. The central task of the Productivity Council is to analyze the competitiveness of the Republic against the backdrop of an ageing society, the transformation of the economy and the global context. The Productivity Council advises policymakers directly and indirectly through effective public relations work.

Table2 : Institutionalized advisory groups (Science for Policy)

Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership	Nomination by
Economic and financial policy				
Fiscal Advisory Council	Monitoring the public budget, in particular financial debt; analyses, reports, political advice	15	6	Federal government, social partners
Austrian Productivity Board	Analysis of the competitiveness of the Austrian economy; analyses, reports, policy advice	5	6	Federal government, social partners (employers and employees)
Social and health policy				
Old-Age Security Commission	Preparation of expert opinions and reports on the medium and long-term development of the statutory pension insurance system; to make proposals to ensure its financial viability	20	5	Ministries, trade unions, social partners, senior citizens' council, youth representatives, academia
Supreme Medical Council	Advising the respective Federal Minister of Health on all matters relating to the healthcare system	44	3	Ministry or Minister
Gen Technology Commission	Advising the relevant ministries on fundamental issues relating to the application of genetic engineering and the enforcement of the Austrian Genetic Engineering Act (GTG)	25	5	Ministries, social partners, Academy of Sciences, universities and others
Bioethics Commission	Advising the Federal Chancellor on all social, scientific and legal issues from an ethical perspective that arise in connection with the development of science in the field of human medicine and biology	15	3	Federal Chancellery
National Vaccination Committee	Technical advice to the Minister responsible for health regarding vaccinations	Minimum 8 (currently 17)	3	Ministry or Minister
Migration and integration policy				
Expert Council for Intergration	Evaluation, prioritization and development of integration policy measures	13	5	Federal Chancellery
Education policy				
Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education	Observation and Analysis of the Development of Teacher Education in Austria	6	5	Ministry or Minister
Climate and environmental policy				
Climate Assembly	Discussion and development of proposals for the measures required to achieve climate neutrality by 2040	100+15		Ministry or Minister
Security policy				
Science Commission (Ministry of Defense)	Scientifically sound advice to the department on broadly defined security policy issues	16 (executive)	5	Ministry or Minister

Source: own compilation

Social and health policy

An important Science for Policy advisory body is the Commission on the Long-Term Financing of Pension Systems, or "Old-Age Security Commission" for short. It is a statutory body (Federal Law Gazette I No. 29/2017) with 20 members and a chairperson. The members are delegated by the social partners, the trade union, the Seniors' Council and the Youth Council as well as selected ministries. Independent members from academia are in the minority. The task of the Pension Insurance Commission is to prepare expert opinions and reports on the medium and long-term development of the statutory pension insurance system and to make proposals to ensure its financial viability. However, the political contextualization of the commission ensures that the proposals are cautious and only effective in the long term. The committee, and in particular the chairperson, is bound to secrecy, which does not make it easier to implement proposals.

In the area of health policy, the Supreme Medical Council should be mentioned in more detail. It is established by law and an important advisory body to the Ministry on issues and matters relating to the healthcare system. The committee draws up recommendations and expert opinions that provide a technical basis for health policy decisions. The Supreme Medical Council currently comprises 44 members, and the Minister has appointed the current Rector of the Medical University of Vienna, Markus Müller, to chair it. The issues dealt with by the Supreme Medical Council are very broad, as it advises the respective Federal Minister of Health. The legislator has not restricted the area, which tends to be a disadvantage. If the policy does not clearly state what it wants, Science for Policy advise becomes a difficult undertaking, because the committee looks for the questions itself without knowing whether there is need for an answer. The Supreme Medical Council is also bound to secrecy, so it cannot approach the media on its own initiative.

Other important advisory bodies in the field of health care are the National Vaccination Committee and the Gen Technology Commission. The National Vaccination Committee - comparable to the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) in Germany - is an independent body of experts that makes vaccination recommendations for policymakers. The National Vaccination Committee discusses which vaccinations should be administered, at what age and in which health policy-relevant situation. The National Vaccination Committee is made up of experts with scientific knowledge and practical experience. It is not subject to directives “from above” and was extremely important, especially during the COVID pandemic.

The Gen Technology Commission (GTK) advises the competent authorities on the implementation of the Austrian Gentechnik-Gesetz (GTG) and on fundamental issues relating to the application of genetic engineering (e.g. field trials or placing products on the market). The Commission is made up of representatives of the ministries concerned with genetic engineering, social partners and scientific experts (from the natural sciences, medicine and ethics). It is independent and makes recommendations, which are submitted to the respective ministries and also to the Austrian Parliament in the form of a report.

The Bioethics Commission is an advisory body that is run out of the Federal Chancellery and advises the Federal Chancellor on all issues relating to the further development of human medicine and human biology. Its composition is highly interdisciplinary. Legislation stipulates that the subjects of medicine, molecular biology and genetics, law and social sciences, philosophy, theology and psychology have to be covered. In terms of content, it deals with difficult issues such as cryopreservation (freezing and storage of egg cells or embryos), compulsory vaccination and the handling of scarce resources in healthcare. A certain overlap in terms of personnel with other advisory bodies in the area of health is possible and can also be observed. The opinions of the commission are weighty and taken into account by the legislator.

Migration and integration policy

An interesting advisory structure was created at the beginning of 2010 in the area of migration and integration policy, partly as a consequence of real social problems and a failure to address them. The Federal Ministry of the Interior initiated the founding of a National Action Plan for Integration and established two advisory bodies. On the one hand, the Advisory Committee on Integration, is an institutionalized conference of those responsible for integration at federal and state level, with the involvement of the social partners and some NGOs.

The other body is called the Expert Council for Integration, constituting of twelfe experts, mainly from academia, and has been chaired by the author of these lines for many years. This independent council of experts evaluates the politically agreed proposals of the National Action Plan for Integration, prioritizes them and makes proposals for concrete implementation. In addition, it independently takes up issues and develops political measures for the integration policy-relevant fields of action such as education, language, work, housing, the rule of law and values. This Expert Council has influenced the public debate, created the conditions for statistical integration monitoring and accompanied the passing of the first Austrian Integration Act. A key factor in the success of the Expert Council was the cooperation between politics and science, which was not characterized by mistrust and mutual criticism.

Education Policy

The Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education (QSR) was set up to ensure that teacher training courses are of a quality and needs-oriented nature. The legislator felt this was necessary because he wanted to ensure that the autonomously developed curricula of the providers of teacher training courses followed certain goals and principles. The universities and the university colleges of teacher education ultimately qualify students in the field of teaching for a single job market, and major differences would not be helpful. The Quality Assurance Council therefore, issues opinions in the assessment process for all teacher training curricula that are to be taken into account. In addition, the QSR observes and analyses teacher training as a whole, compares national developments with international ones and draws up proposals for further development for the Ministry of Education.

The six members are each appointed for five years; they are independent in the exercise of their functions and are not bound by any instructions. The QSR is supported in its work by an office. It reports annually to the Parliament.

Environmental and climate policy

The Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology took a completely different approach with the development of policy measures. These are not proposed by experts, but by a randomly selected panel of around 100 people. Statistics Austria selected these people from the population aged 16 and above with at least 5 years of main residence in Austria.[5] They are guided, informed and accompanied by a team of 15 scientists. So far 80 recommendations have been made by the members of the Climate Assembly, which were prepared by the team of experts but accepted through a voting procedure by the Climate Assembly.

The Climate Assembly does not really fit into the Science for Policy scheme, because science had to remain in the background in order to realize the idea of citizen participation. Nevertheless, it is an interesting model, that leaves room for doubt. The potential members had to actively complete a questionnaire and commit to working on the Climate Assembly. This resulted in a self-selection of people, who already are particularly interested in the topic. However, this no longer corresponds to the principle of random selection. This is the only way to explain why the 80 recommendations were almost always adopted unanimously. The "framing" was also predetermined. The focus was on climate protection measures, but not on the socio-political consequences.

[5] The procedure was complex and also problematic: Statistics Austria contacted a total of 2003 people randomly selected from the population register in two waves and asked whether they wanted to participate in the Climate Council. In addition, all participants had to be vaccinated or recovered and also PCR-tested, as the conditions for combating the pandemic applied. Furthermore, a questionnaire on climate change had to be completed. Of the total of 2003 people contacted, only 145 completed all the conditions, while 128 people ultimately agreed to take part in the Climate Council.

Security

The Science Commission at the Federal Ministry of Defense was established in 1992 as a commission following §8 of the Federal Ministries Act of 1986. The commission's term of office is five years, and the number of core members with executive functions is 16. In addition, there are six advisory boards that invite additional members to contribute in the fields of military history, military medicine, social sciences, security policy, defense technology and natural sciences, and economics. One of its key tasks is advising the relevant minister on departmental issues against the background of scientific research findings. The Science Commission thus serves as a link between the ministry and scientific institutions.

Institutionalized Policy for Science consulting

Following a political reform, various advisory groups in the area of Policy for Science were dissolved and replaced by an advisory body, the Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology and Innovation (FORWIT). It is a statutory body that submits proposals to the Federal Government for the further development of research, science, innovation and technology development. FORWIT consists of twelfe members whose qualifications are precisely defined by law and who are appointed by the ministries with research competence. In addition, the Federal Chancellery appoints the chair, which underlines the importance of this body.

The committee itself is not subject to directives, has an office and acts autonomously. FORWIT is organized as a legal entity under public law with full legal capacity and is financed from federal funds. Opinions are issued at regular intervals as well as on specific occasions and carry weight. This is certainly also due to the "fame and expertise" of the council members. For example, the former president of the ERC, Helga Nowotny, is a member, as is the president of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, Sylvia Schwaag Serger - and the current chairman Tom Henziger, was president at ISTA.
In the area of Science for Policy advise, other institutions can also make public statements and recommendations. But they are not advisory bodies in a narrow description, but interest groups such as UNIKO or the FHK. How uniform and politically effective the public recommendations are, is also depending on the coordination within the sector.

Table3 : Institutionalized advisory group Policy for Science

Policy area	Council	Task	Number of members	Duration of membership	Nomination by
University and research policy					
	Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology and Innovation	Advising the Federal Government in the areas of research, science, innovation and technology development	12	4	Federal ministries with research tasks, Federal Chancellery

Source: own compilation

Science for Policy - effective?

This compilation of advisory institutions and bodies has documented its diversity and complexity. However, it also shows that scientific advice is sought out wherever there is a large gap between scientific knowledge and knowledge available in politics. Economic policy is a good example for this. Economic policy is complex and the achievable goals are contradictory. Those who pursue a spending-oriented policy may accelerate inflation, while those who invest too little slow down inflation and could risk a possible economic downturn. Profound advice from excellent economists is very welcome in such a situation, as it is within the health sector. When it comes to the approval of vaccinations, the fight against epidemics or the use of genetic engineering, politicians are right to rely on scientifically sound advisory bodies.

Is Science for Policy being practiced successfully in Austria? This question cannot be answered so easily. This is also because the criteria for successful advisory activities are unclear (see: König 2024). However, based on observation and our own experience, four dimensions are important.

1. Autonomy. A high degree of autonomy is important for active and successful consulting activities. Those who dictate everything upfront and do not allow the advisory body any freedom will only get what has been ordered. Scientific expertise can only develop if it is not too restricted in terms of subject matter. On the other hand, too much autonomy is detrimental because the interests of policy-makers could then be missed at the end of the advisory activity. If politics only specify broad subject areas (e.g. health, education, economy), then the committee can lose its way. Conclusion? It is necessary to offer the greatest possible autonomy in a clearly limited subject area.

2. Trust. Establishing a certain level of trust between an advisory body and the politicians being advised is very important. A resilient relationship of trust is based on careful handling of the media. If the politicians being advised learn from the media which political measures are advisable or to be rejected, this seriously jeopardizes trust. On the other hand, a resilient relationship of trust is based on careful interaction with one another. It requires political thinking on the part of the scientific community. What is reasonable for a politician to advise and what is not must be considered. In addition, there is also a concrete knowledge of what is politically feasible and what is not.[6] An advisory body must accept this limitation of the scope of thought if it wants to be heard (see: König 2024, p7). Anyone who cannot not accept those terms should not accept the specific task.

   Conversely, politicians should accept science, not misuse it for political purposes and not shy away from strong personalities as chairs of advisory bodies. They sometimes make life difficult, but they help the cause. Politicians should also accept the results of science and not change, omit or interpret the results in their own interests. Reports should always be published; anything else jeopardizes the trust within an advisory body, but also the public's trust in the advice.

3. Resources. Advisory bodies need staff support to be successful. Members of advisory bodies usually have a demanding main job. It is therefore important to facilitate the advisory activity as much as possible by having an office process literature, setting-up appointments, but also by having resources available to close knowledge gaps in a targeted manner. Active advisory bodies have office staff, rooms and perhaps also scientific support staff.

4. Training. Finally, it is important for institutions that operate and engage at the interface between science and politics to strategically commit to this and take appropriate precautions. Members of these institutions should be trained for their political advisory role. That could include practice dealing with media as well as learning how to deal with attacks on social media or political opponents. And institutions should make their members aware that the line between scientific advice and political enforcement should not be crossed. The Vienna Theses on Policy Advice, drawn up by the Leopoldina and the OeAW, have clearly stated this.

Science for Policy is an opportunity for evidence-based policy. But Science for Policy should be more than just a fig leaf, more than just the transfer of trust from science to politics. If it is done well, politics and science can both profit. Politics gains quality and science identifies what triggers politics. The epistemization of the political is both an analytical description of the state of affairs and a normative demand (cf. Bogner 2021).

Literature

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[6] During the COVID pandemic, experts called for pupils to be "enclosed" by Plexiglas walls to reduce the risk of infection. The quantities were not taken into account, perhaps because they were not known. For 1.1 million pupils in Austria, many times more Plexiglas walls would have been needed, which would have had to be stored or disposed of after the pandemic. Thankfully, this requirement was never realized.

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