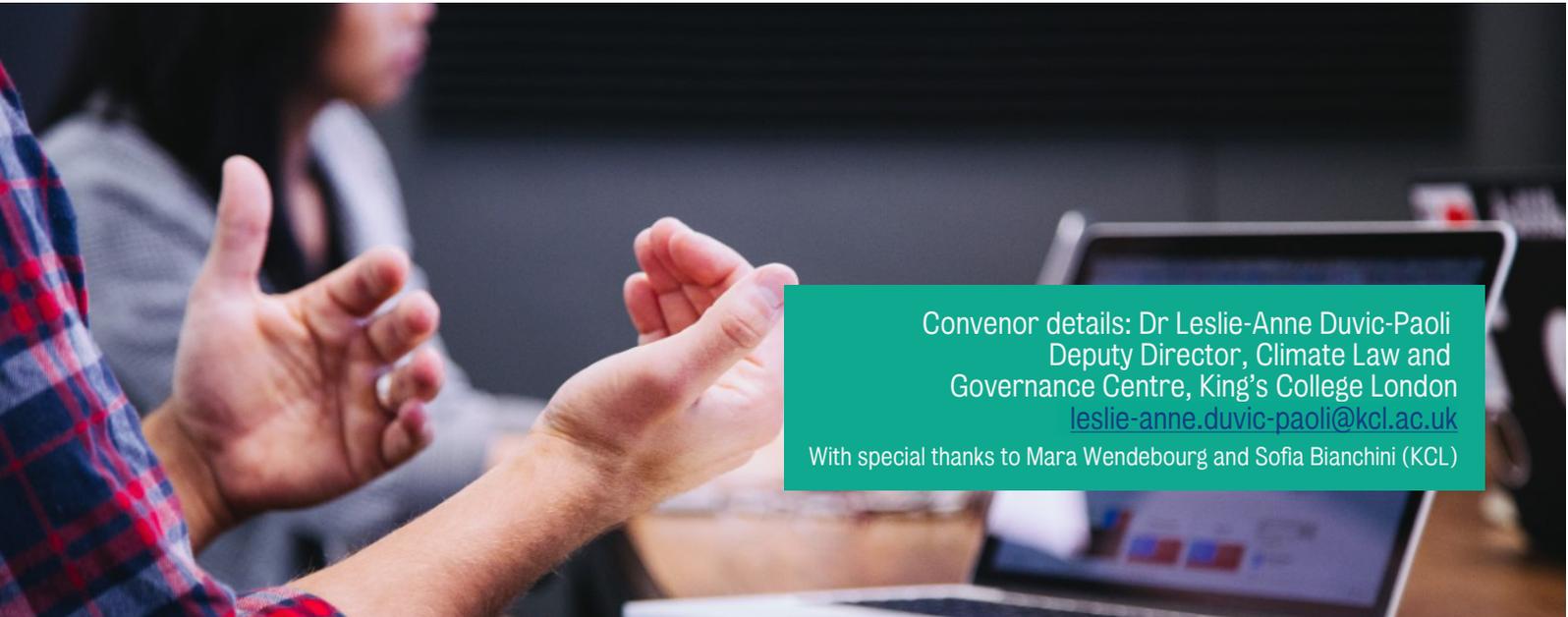


Organising an Online Knowledge Exchange Workshop: Lessons Learnt

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On March 19, 2021, a [knowledge exchange workshop on governing the clean energy transition](#) hosted by King's College London, and supported by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, was held virtually. It gathered over 25 speakers, both academics and practitioners in the field of energy law with the aim to facilitate exchanges to address the impacts of international energy law on regional, national and local transitions.

The workshop adopted a joint presentation format, whereby each policymaker or legal practitioner was matched with an academic before the event and the pair was asked to prepare a presentation together. This brief presents the lessons learnt from organising such an event, with the hope that it will help others replicate its format.



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The Platform on International Energy Governance recently held a workshop entitled 'Governing the Energy Transition: Local Action, International Ambition'. Could you describe the aims and format of the workshop?

The event provided a forum to **facilitate knowledge exchange between academics, legal practitioners and policy-makers** in order to make sense of on-going legal changes, allow the flow of new ideas and integrate academic expertise into policy thinking.

The objective of the workshop was to create new strategic relationships between practitioners and academics working in the field of energy law. To do so, the workshop followed an **innovative format**, whereby each policymaker and legal practitioner was matched with an academic before the event. They were asked to **prepare a presentation together** on a topic of their choice, based on their overlapping expertise.

To find participants, I initially drew on my network, sending invitations to colleagues, and I then diversified the guest list by looking for and reaching out to relevant stakeholders to create pairs. We introduced the two participants to each other, presenting their area of expertise and suggesting a broad presentation topic. The workshop was an invitation-only event and applied the Chatham House Rule. To foster in-depth discussions, a dozen 'engaged listeners', selected for their expertise, attended the event. In parallel, we invited two prominent keynote speakers to introduce the context and themes of the day.

Overall, we had participants from varied types of organisations, including intergovernmental organisations, think-thanks, non-governmental organisations and law firms. Academic participants were based in the UK, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, Taiwan and the US.

Do you recommend having a knowledge exchange workshop of this type coincide with larger political debates or events, so that it can feed into ongoing discussions?

I think it depends significantly on the type of political event that the workshop could feed into. A knowledge exchange workshop held in conjunction with, for instance, an international climate summit can benefit from more publicity and can possibly mobilise policy-makers more easily. At the same time, my experience is that some questions can be politically sensitive and some stakeholders are not necessarily free to speak openly. In addition, they do not always have enough time to devote to an academic workshop. All in all, I think it is best to **hold knowledge exchange workshops when the stakes are fairly low and when practitioners have time to engage with new ideas**, and then use the partnerships created at the event to feed into subsequent discussions.

How did participants react to the format?

They were enthusiastic about the format of the event, which they felt provided a solution to the multiple barriers to knowledge flows that exist between academia and policy-making/legal practice in the field of energy law. Participants noted that academics and practitioners were often talking to different audiences and felt that **formal opportunities to facilitate exchanges were missing**. By joining the event, they hoped to **gain new knowledge on the field of energy governance, better understand the current policy challenges and find or discuss innovative ideas**.

It seems that this format can be easily replicated in other fields of research. What advice would you give to academics thinking about designing a workshop like this? Did you face any challenges, and how did you address them?

Academics and practitioners work and think in different ways. It is important to highlight how attending such a workshop can be valuable for both sides, and to take into account the busy schedule of all, including policy-makers whose priority might not be to participate in such an event. It is possible that some pairs will not manage to find the time to work together and organisers need to think about how to adapt the workshop in case this happens.

In addition, it is essential that the format of the event is coherently understood by everyone. This means giving **clear instructions in terms of the type of collaboration and output that are expected**. This could, for instance, be that participants co-produce their presentation, but it could also be that they adopt a speaker and commentator approach.

Another challenge can relate to the **scope of the workshop's theme: it needs to be broad enough to include diverse viewpoints but narrow enough to be useful**. For this workshop, we decided to adopt a bottom-up approach: participants expressed their interest in questions they wanted to discuss under a fairly broad theme and we then built the programme around those topics. Having this flexible approach was stimulating because it showcased a variety of perspectives and brought new questions to the table; in addition, several participants noted that it gave them the opportunity to learn about topics that they do not otherwise work on. However, in my view, focusing on a more constrained question would have had the advantage of creating a more coherent and tight-knit group.

How was your experience holding the event online?

The event was initially planned to be held in Brussels last year but had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We then rescheduled the event and held it virtually. The limitations of holding a knowledge exchange workshop online are evident, and relate to the limits of networking without interpersonal, informal, relations. However, I found that virtual events also have advantages: in particular, it made it **easier to mobilise academics and practitioners from all over the world** that would not have had the time or funds to travel to Brussels. As a result, the event was more **diverse and inclusive**. I have tried to compensate as much as possible the absence of in-person contacts, in particular by **sending participants to smaller break out rooms during the coffee breaks to facilitate informal discussions**, an initiative that was well received by the participants.

Finally, what was your 'monitoring and evaluation' plan? Do you think your workshop achieved its goals? Does it fit into a longer-term plan?

We were able to evaluate the impacts of the event thanks to **two online surveys**. Both surveys were short, with five open questions, and were sent by emails to the participants before and after the workshop. The first survey aimed to understand the participants' motivations for joining the event, to clarify their expectations, and to hear about what they considered to limit knowledge flows between academics and practitioners. The second survey was interested in finding more about how the participants had worked together, how they benefited from the event, whether it influenced their work and how they foresaw their collaboration continuing. In these surveys, **participants noted that they enjoyed working in pairs and called it a 'rewarding' and 'enriching' process**.

We hope that the workshop will lead to more **long-term collaborations**. We learnt that pairs planned to keep in touch and several had **common publication plans**. The format worked well to **build bilateral relationships** but did not necessarily foster the feeling of cohort we expected. This was, however, a successful first step and we hope to continue engaging with the group, possibly by following up next year with another event that would invite back some of the pairs to tell us about how their collaboration progressed.