Chapter 11
Policy-Related Barriers

Abstract This chapter deals with the recurring barriers relating to policy—at different stages in the cycle—from the initial stage of communication and development, through to implementation, and feedback from those on the ground about impact and new requirements. It points to the importance of establishing regular meaningful dialogue with all the stakeholders if emerging risks (and opportunities) are to be identified and addressed in a timely way, and to the need for Universities to take a more active role in supporting this dialogue. The first section concentrates on the very recurrent funding policy issues and the policies that respondents felt were most effective for the sector, and for companies themselves. The second section concentrates on the extent to which poor implementation of policies can hamper rather than help in practice. Lastly this chapter looks at the barriers to feedback and collaboration between companies and policymakers, highlighting the economic cost of failure to harness what users know about the cluster landscape on the ground and the potential to learn from other sectors that have harnessed this to advantage.

11.1 Barriers at Different Stages in the Policy Development Cycle

Most of the recurring barriers that were described in the case studies, related in some way to how policy was developed or implemented—and we have used a very simplified framework in Fig. 11.1 as something of an advance organiser for discussing the barriers and concerns that were most typically raised. Sect. 11.2, on Policy, looks at the many barriers associated with existing policies. The policy cycle facilitates the understanding of policy-making by breaking the complexity of the process into states (policy, implementation and feedback). In reality, however, as Stone et al. rightly point out “policy making is messy” (Stone 2011).

Section 11.3, on Implementation, looks at the recurring issues associated with putting policy into practice. Section 11.4, on Feedback, highlights the lack of opportunities for some groups to communicate their needs, and help shape policy that adequately meets them. (This is also taken further in Chap. 12, which looks at Communication and Collaboration).
The research concentrated on understanding the perceived failings of existing policies to reflect their needs, and the needs of the cluster, in key areas such as innovation, and finally, what changes stakeholders felt would better meet the needs of company, cluster or sector.

If the main aim of policy was to meet the needs of stakeholders, and facilitate progression to long-term economic goals such as energy security, employment, innovation and economic growth—it was perceived by the majority of company managers as woefully inadequate—and often quite unnecessarily so.

The perceived problems here fell into three categories—those related to the existing policies themselves—those related to the process of informing policy development—and the process of implementation, which often had unanticipated effects. At each of these stages, SMEs felt they were insufficiently taken account of, despite being the principal actors in the cluster responsible for generating innovation and regional employment.

### 11.2 Barriers Related to Existing Policies

We look first at the perceived problems with the policies in place at the time of the interviews and the surveys. Some of the barriers were about the failure of policy to meet specific needs, and some of them were more general such as the lack of coordination of policy, and the lack of long-term stability in funding policy that is required for companies to risk investing limited cash flow in ambitions or long-term projects.