

# **Advancing knowledge brokerage for public policy in Maynooth University**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is a reflection on the process of extended engagement undertaken by the authors in Maynooth University aimed at unlocking the potential of research to inform policy-making in Ireland. It describes and reviews the diverse range of engagement and supporting activities that the authors undertook in Maynooth University and with other universities, government departments and agencies, and other partner organisations.

The programme of work has been and continues to be exploratory in nature and any insights are preliminary and tentative. That said, the extensive record of engagement undertaken, does lend support to three general observations. Firstly, knowledge brokering is a complex social and relational process that linear accounts fail to comprehend. Secondly, because knowledge brokering involves interactions between individual researchers and policymakers, and because many different organisations are involved (including universities, research funders, government departments and agencies), systems thinking can help in understanding and shaping knowledge brokering structures and supports. One final thought is that any productive learning from the engagement described here, was only possible because the various interactions were underpinned by conscious efforts to establish trust, mutual understanding and a respect for diversity of perspectives. Such an inclusive approach may be well worth reflecting on when seeking to formalise and systematise knowledge brokering activity at scale.

This work is ongoing at Maynooth University, and together with the Knowledge Brokerage research project that is now underway, promises a more integrated and holistic understanding of knowledge brokering for policy in Ireland.

*Keywords:* impact, knowledge brokerage, knowledge brokering, Maynooth University, public policy.

## Introduction

The process of engagement undertaken by the authors in Maynooth University (MU) on how to unlock the potential of research to inform policy-making was advanced in the context of the national policy approach led by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science (DFHERIS). The overall government policy approach was established in May 2022 in *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy* (DFHERIS, 2022). Published by DFHERIS, this key policy text signals a clear intent to strengthen connections between government departments and the public research system.

The authors progressed this series of engagement activities informed by their developing understanding of what knowledge brokerage means and what it involves. Seen as spanning the research-policy interface, knowledge brokerage is increasingly understood as a social and relational process driven by human interaction. It facilitates the bidirectional and dynamic exchange of knowledge, dismissing linear accounts which have been largely discredited. In this paper, knowledge brokering means the structures, processes and mechanisms that support the creation, dissemination, syntheses, sharing and use of research findings, with a view to improving policy. Similar terms include knowledge mobilisation and knowledge translation. This developing understanding will be outlined in some detail in the forthcoming publications associated with the 'Unlocking the value of research for public policy making and innovation: Mapping Ireland's key brokering structures and supports' project described below.

The initial part of the work at MU set out how the university has and could contribute to more effective and lasting interactions between researchers and policymakers. Building on these engagements with academics within a single university, subsequent phases of the work sought to engage a wider audience to better understand and support system-wide initiatives and approaches.

This paper describes the engagement and supporting activities that the authors undertook in MU and with other universities, government

departments and agencies, and other partner organisations. The work was undertaken in an iterative way and sought to establish and support a community of practice within MU and outside. This has allowed for flexibility of approach by the authors while also allowing for the development of relationships with system leaders and key stakeholders, including other higher education institutions, national and international organisations and funders.

The package of work as it has evolved comprises five interrelated phases and activities:

- Phase I – Initial work undertaken in Maynooth University – 2022 to early 2024 – focusing on the internal research for policy activities within Maynooth University;
- Phase II – System supporting work – testing and reviewing what works through pathfinding knowledge brokerage events;
- Phase III – Convening important conversations – the seminar series in Maynooth University – 2024–2026;
- Phase IV – Convening national conversations – national events jointly organised with partner organisations;
- Phase V – Moving towards building the architecture – the Knowledge brokerage research project.

This paper provides a chronological account of how a small team at MU has managed to grow and sustain a programme of engagement activities with an increasing number of people who care deeply about improving public policy and public services through better use of research. This is the first time that a programme of such engagement has taken place at an Irish university, and, for the purposes of this publication, the body of work provides an illustrative case study.

### **Phase I – Initial work undertaken in Maynooth University – 2022 to early 2024 – focusing on the internal research for policy activities within Maynooth University**

The *Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023–2028* (MU, 2023) commits MU to the work of ‘imagining and creating better futures for all’; has as one of its three core pillars ‘impact’ and promises to scale ‘external engagement for real-world impact by strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships with enterprise, industry, Government and the community’. Furthermore, the plan commits to the establishment of five cross-disciplinary research beacons to enhance the impact of research underway in MU.

Since 2022, Seán Ó Foghlú, on secondment to Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute (MUSSI) from the civil service, has been working to strengthen the links between academic research in MU and public policy development, implementation and evaluation. Ó Foghlú has also been working closely with DFHERIS in supporting the department as it continues to develop and implement a national approach to research for policy engagement.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, Ó Foghlú held over 100 individual and small group meetings with staff across MU in order to understand and reflect on existing approaches and arrangements and to seek to develop ideas on how to strengthen connections between research and policy. This is the first time that such a structured and extensive approach to looking at these issues was undertaken at a university in Ireland. During this stage, Ó Foghlú also engaged with a wide range of other individuals and organisations outside MU – often working with Mary Doyle (a member of the Royal Irish Academy) and Dr Fergal Lynch (affiliated to the University of Galway at the time, also on secondment from the civil service).

As mentioned above, Ó Foghlú engaged with individuals in MU, among which was Prof. Mark Boyle, who had a common agenda with Ó Foghlú in seeking to unlock the potential of research on policy-making in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

They decided to work together to support and strengthen the links between research in MU and policy-making. From April to June 2023, Ó Foghlú and Boyle convened a series of eight open discussion meetings, which were organised on a cross-disciplinary basis to gather perspectives from MU staff, about actions that MU could take to unlock the full value of academic research for public policy. These accounts from the research community at MU were captured in a discussion paper. This record was tested and further considered in two briefing and refinement meetings with the original participants and other interested colleagues, which took place in September and October 2023. In total, over seventy staff in MU took part in the meetings, including researchers in all three faculties, over ten

<sup>1</sup> Prior to working at MU, Ó Foghlú held the position of Secretary General of the Department of Education for ten years.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Boyle headed up the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place in the University of Liverpool from 2017 to 2021. He undertook training in 2022 with Campus Engage and is an ambassador for this work – Campus Engage was a platform for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish higher education and was based at the Irish Universities Association.

academic departments and a number of research centres and institutes, as well as members of the University Executive and staff in the Research Office.

Building on the discussion paper, a final report was published in February 2024 (Ó Foghlú & Boyle, 2024a). The final report found that MU academic staff and those supporting research were of the view that:

given the crowded ‘impact’ landscape, which is crystallising nationally, the size of the institution, the importance of investing deeply in long term relationship building and finite monetary and time resources, it would be advisable for MU to invest judiciously in policy areas that might yield the most return. This conclusion, however, was tempered always with the caveat that, in so far as it is possible, no one who is keen to throw their energies behind this agenda should be excluded or left behind. (Ó Foghlú & Boyle, 2024a, p. 16).

The report concluded that there was ‘a strong message coming through from this work which is calling for more strategic leadership in the research for policy area in MU – in particular, how the organisational arrangements might be reimagined to support strategic long-term institutional approaches and support for researchers’ (p. 25). The report identified four enabling principles for institutional actions aimed at strengthening the policy impact of academic research:

1. Making it **possible**: Creating opportunities for policy engaged and impactful research.
2. Making it **easy**: Supporting researchers to unlock the full policy impact of their work.
3. Making it **normative**: Institutionalising and mainstreaming the pursuit of research impact on policy.
4. Making it **rewarding**: Incentivising researchers to invest time and effort in unlocking policy impact.

The research community at MU identified the need for a dedicated, sustainable and accountable resource at MU to ensure that research for policy is possible, easy, normal and rewarding.

In parallel with their work underway in MU, Ó Foghlú and Boyle also sought to explore how other Irish higher education institutions can organise themselves to unlock the potential of research for policy-

making. They published a working paper entitled *How Irish Higher Education Institutions Can Organise themselves to Unlock Research for Policy* (Ó Foghlú & Boyle, 2024b) in January 2024. It set out the emergence of knowledge brokerage arrangements to support the impact of research on policy within the wider national agenda for evidence-informed policy-making, and reviewed pertinent international literature on knowledge brokerage. The working paper considered recent studies on the effectiveness of research-policy engagement activities, such as the work of Oliver et al. (2022, p. 704) who observed that 'Overall, the picture is of a vast and increasing mass of rudderless activity, which is busy rather than effective. Without clear goals, and without strategic coordination, it is impossible to pick out any signal over the noise'. Just as the engagement with academics at MU had highlighted the importance of institutionalising interpersonal links, Oliver and colleagues had drawn attention to the lack of system level institutional supports (p. 701) 'in the production and use of relevant evidence, but [that such links] need to be underpinned by long-term strategic and institutional support. ...We found few initiatives which could be described as attempting to operate at this higher systemic level'.

The working paper also detailed selected knowledge brokerage arrangements established within individual higher education institutions; as part of a network arrangement across multiple higher education institutions; and partnership type arrangements established between higher education institutions and government actors.

The working paper concludes by setting out a range of potential activities and functions to be carried out in a coherent and coordinated way in higher education institutions to support effective knowledge brokering for public policy. It also sets out the range of possible ways to do this and reiterates the potential of a dedicated organisational resource in MU acting as an enabling unit or hub.

## **Phase II – System supporting work – testing and reviewing what works through pathfinding knowledge brokerage events**

Ó Foghlú and Boyle have also sought to apply a range of approaches to unlock the potential of research to inform policy-making in Ireland, both involving MU researchers and more broadly. This has included supporting state bodies in organising a range of national knowledge brokerage events since 2022. In many of these activities they have worked with Mary Doyle and Dr Fergal Lynch.

Furthermore, seeking to explore approaches to MU researchers collectively impacting on policy, on 17 May 2024, Ó Foghlú and Boyle co-chaired a Roundtable on Addressing On-street Drug Dealing and Drug Use in Dublin's North East Inner City, organised in partnerships with the North East Inner City Initiative and the Department of the Taoiseach (Dublin North East Inner City, 2024). The roundtable arose from a desire for a fresh perspective on drug dealing and on-street drug taking, expressed by those from the North Inner City Community Coalition for the development of a new strategy for the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative. Around the same time, Ó Foghlú and Boyle approached government departments about the possibility of hosting a brokerage session on community safety and related issues involving an expert group of MU academics/researchers and policymakers. This approach arose from a collective desire amongst MU researchers to use their knowledge and expertise to help impact public policy and its implementation. This all took place in the context of the government policy to broaden and deepen linkages between academics and policymakers.

Arising from these developments, the NEIC Initiative considered the possibility of an engagement involving a number of key stakeholders in a roundtable discussion, including policymakers, those involved in the delivery of public services, the local community and academics/researchers from Maynooth University. A planning group was established, which included Ó Foghlú and Boyle among its members (who were the joint chairs for the event) and officials involved with the NEIC Initiative in the Department of the Taoiseach.

Significant planning and preparation was undertaken and a number of papers were prepared and distributed to reflect a range of different and useful perspectives, including four papers by MU staff. Almost fifty people were in attendance, including community sector representatives, MU academics and two academics from other institutions as well as policymakers and representatives of government departments and agencies responsible for policy implementation as part of the NEIC process. Ó Foghlú and Boyle completed a report on the roundtable (Dublin North East Inner City, 2024) that was published by the NEIC Initiative.

The report was considered as part of the strategic development process of the NEIC Initiative and fed into the publication of the *Strategic Plan 2024–2027* of the Programme Implementation Board for the NEIC Initiative. This is a concrete outcome of the roundtable. Many of the themes identified in the roundtable report and some of

the suggestions are reflected in the *Strategic Plan*. The roundtable event provided a timely opportunity to have a detailed focus on key themes and ideas on a topic of central importance to the strategic review of the work of the NEIC Initiative.

In January 2025, Ó Foghlú and Boyle, along with Mary Doyle published a paper which reviewed the roundtable and a range of further pathfinding knowledge brokerage events (Ó Foghlú, Boyle & Doyle, 2025). As well as the roundtable, particular knowledge brokerage events reviewed in the paper were:

- Delivering Environmental Knowledge Effectively to the Policy-making Process, organised by the Environmental Protection Agency on 5 October 2022 (Environmental Protection Agency, 2022);
- Government Policymakers & Higher Education Researchers, Building Bridges for Evidence Informed Public Policy: Youth Wellbeing, organised by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Irish Universities Association on 1 March 2023 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Irish Universities Association, 2023);
- Building Bridges for Evidence Informed Public Policy: Young People and Substance Use, organised by Irish Universities Association and the Health Research Board on 17 November 2023 (Health Research Board & Irish Universities Association, 2023).

The paper described each of the individual knowledge brokerage events, situating each in its particular context, analysing how each was planned and organised and assessing its reported impacts. The paper distilled lessons learned from the various events and suggested how future knowledge brokerage events might be designed and organised so that they play an important role in fostering, promoting and enabling research for policy in Ireland. The authors identified a number of common themes that had emerged and which they considered warranted more detailed consideration by those organising future events. These are summarised in the paragraphs below (Ó Foghlú, Boyle & Doyle, 2025, pp. 12–7).

- **Knowledge brokerage as a tool to help to build bridges between the policy and research systems:** One of the main objectives in

undertaking knowledge brokerage activities is to take a structured approach to increasing the interaction between the policy-making community and the research community and to build long-term connections and relationships. A major benefit identified from each event was that the interactions between policymakers and researchers were set out in a clear and well formatted way, making it easier to highlight the topics that were of particular interest to the variety of participants and those that were most aligned with the strategic objectives of the contributing organisations. However, it was also clear that the major benefits from knowledge brokerage events occur when they are embedded in an existing policy development process and are part of a planned long-term approach to policy formulation and implementation.

- **Impact from the public service perspective:** Policymakers reported that they found that the events provided a useful opportunity to build their network of experienced researchers and to engage with a diversity of researchers. It also gave them an improved understanding of the potential and limitations of research to inform and support their work. The events also opened up the possibility of longer-term benefits for the department or agency involved where its research team can reach a better understanding of the policy needs of the department involved on the one hand, and on the other, the ability of the wider research community to meet these needs. Some respondents cited learnings from the event as informing the planning and implementation of other knowledge brokerage events in their government department.
- **Support for building cross-departmental relationships:** There was a somewhat unexpected but welcome benefit identified in relation to working across a number of departments where knowledge brokerage events have been helpful for developing relationships with policymakers in other departments and generating a shared understanding of issues.
- **Within the research community:** Researchers found the brokerage sessions useful for enhancing their networks of policy officials and found the event helpful for informing the future direction of their research. This is clear in the feedback recorded in the reports on each of the events.

- **A strategic focus on building capacity is key:** At the core of this agenda is the building of expertise in both the policy and research systems to support fruitful long-term dialogue, and the ability to work together. This is a really important aspect of developing good practice in co-creation, co-production and co-design capability in relation to policy. It requires a proactive approach from both sides to designing and putting in place well-considered arrangements to strengthen capacity.
- **Harnessing potential to support policy development and implementation:** Respondents told the authors of a number of significant strategies, action plans and policy proposals which were developed following the knowledge brokerage event, which demonstrated its relevance to the work of the organisation, influencing actions and informing priorities about future research requirements.
- **Impact on strategic focus to funding research:** An important question in this context was the impact that a systematic approach to knowledge brokerage might have on the overall national approach to the funding of research. Possible impacts identified in the literature include investment in co-creation of research and funding specifically targeted at building system capacity at both individual and institutional levels.
- **The importance of documenting and recording the outputs of knowledge brokerage events and disseminating them effectively:** A theme which has emerged strongly from the events is the need to pay careful attention to documenting the discussions and having an effective dissemination policy. The authors suggested the possibility of establishing a central knowledge brokerage repository or website where relevant material could be gathered together and made available to the wider community.
- **The need for careful planning to create a sustainable approach and the associated resource investment:** Finally, a major theme emerging is the necessity to recognise the significant investment of people and time as well as money in organising and hosting knowledge brokerage events. Each of the events involved intensive consultation and planning with a range of stakeholders and the design of a programme for a wide audience. High-level

leadership and commitment was essential, and this is a scarce resource.

The paper also suggested some approaches for future practice. A state body seeking to organise a knowledge brokerage event should carefully consider how such an activity fits into the state body's own strategy to advance research for policy. Knowledge brokerage events should be central to organisers long-term and strategic priorities, and should be deployed in a systematic way that routinely embeds research in policy-making processes.

### **Phase III – Convening important conversations – the seminar series in Maynooth University – 2024–2026**

In 2024, Ó Foghlú and Boyle commenced a series of seminars in MU to seek to deepen understandings and reflections around examples of researchers and policymakers working together. Since January 2025, Dr John O'Connor has been working with Ó Foghlú and Boyle on a number of initiatives, including the research for policy seminar series.<sup>3</sup>

There have been seventeen seminars to date (June 2026) and further seminars are planned for later in 2026 – the audience can join in person or online and recordings are publicly available. These seminars are unique in that the focus is more about the behaviours, values, motivations and personal learnings, and less about the technical and operational detail of the collaborative work undertaken together by researchers and policymakers.

Policymakers, including those from government departments and agencies, as well as from local authorities have been involved. Research funders and individual researchers from MU and other universities have also been involved. The series has been broadened to include charities involved in working with researchers and also has looked at the interactions and relations between researchers and politicians.

There have been a wide range of themes arising from the seminars. In the first instance, they have contributed towards the development of a community of practice, particularly in MU, but also more broadly with attendees coming from a range of backgrounds across Ireland

<sup>3</sup> Information about the seminar series is available here: [www.maynoothuniversity.ie/social-sciences-institute/enhancing-research-policy](http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/social-sciences-institute/enhancing-research-policy)

and beyond. The seminars have also allowed for detailed discussion on the nature of the relationships between those involved – looking at how interpersonal relations were established and have evolved over time. They have also enabled detailed discussions about the kinds of motivation and incentives that help to align research and policy communities. These dialogues have been designed to afford speakers an opportunity to speak at some length about their experience; to reflect deeply about what went well, what could be strengthened and potentially scaled up; and to speak openly about strengths and limitations within both the research and policy domains.

The diversity of participants has also demonstrated the wide range of those involved in the research for policy interface – many researchers and policymakers from a wide range of disciplines and organisations, those involved in local and national government, those involved directly in the political system or supporting it, research funders, dedicated knowledge brokering organisations, those involved in the community and voluntary sector, data experts and those who have spent time in both universities and government departments.

A wide range of research for policy approaches has been presented and a number of common themes have emerged, these include: the success of long-term approaches to relationship building, particularly on a network basis; the underpinning motivation of those involved; the centrality of professional integrity and clear role definition; the synergistic benefits of bringing together researcher and policymaker perspectives on an issue of shared interest; and the huge professional and personal positivity resulting from collaborations between researchers and policymakers.

Ó Foghlú and Boyle have also provided training in MU and on behalf of Research Ireland to researchers outside MU on how policy works and how researchers can engage with policymakers. They have also offered advice to individual researchers and groups of researchers.

#### **Phase IV – Convening national conversations – national events jointly organised with partner organisations**

Ó Foghlú, Boyle and O'Connor organised two national events in 2025, in partnership with other organisations. The first of these was jointly organised with the Royal Irish Academy and focused on research for policy and the role of universities. Held on 21 January 2025, the seminar looked to add impetus to the implementation of the national

policy approach being advanced by DFHERIS.<sup>4</sup>

Through the use of two case studies – one from the University of Liverpool and one from University College Dublin – the conference encouraged reflection within and among universities on what approaches and actions they might take to be more effective in seeking to enhance the impact of research on public policy.

The second event was a one-day national conference on 11 November 2025.<sup>5</sup> It was a collaboration between DFHERIS, the University College Dublin Policy Interface and MUSSI (the authors). The main theme of the conference was ways to co-create a stronger research-for-policy ecosystem in Ireland. The aim of the event was to further the national conversation about how one builds systemic, co-ordinated connections between research and policy, so that high-quality evidence can more readily inform all stages of the policy-making process. Taking a systems approach to the development and coordination of research–policy engagement, the conference brought national and international system leaders together to:

- 1 Promote cross-sectoral and intra-organisational collaboration to increase impact.
- 2 Provide all-island and international perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of such collaboration.
- 3 Contribute to the co-creation of a ‘shared vision’ for a more systematic, inclusive and productive research–policy interface in Ireland.

In the report on the conference, the rapporteur, Mary Doyle, set out that the decision to actually hold a conference on evidence-informed policy-making was a massive step forward in advancing this important national agenda. Also, the fact that it was co-organised by two universities and a government department made it unusual – maybe even unique. She referred to the organisers’ vision for greater collaboration and for experimenting with a different way of doing things across the research ecosystem in itself.

Doyle identified four themes arising from the conference:

<sup>4</sup> Details of the seminar and an audio recording of the event are available here: [www.ria.ie/2025/02/05/recent-seminar-on-evidence-for-policy-and-university-structures/](http://www.ria.ie/2025/02/05/recent-seminar-on-evidence-for-policy-and-university-structures/)

<sup>5</sup> Information on the conference is available here: [www.maynoothuniversity.ie/social-sciences-institute/enhancing-research-policy/research-policy-conference-2025](http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/social-sciences-institute/enhancing-research-policy/research-policy-conference-2025)

- **The importance of connectivity:** Doyle highlighted that the mapping of the evidence-informed policy-making ecosystem in Ireland was currently the crucial next step (this is addressed in detail below). She also highlighted a range of projects underway that will assist in this, including the one being undertaken by the authors.
- **The importance of structured conversations and how we build those bridges between researchers and policy-makers:** She stressed the need to think about how we communicate better in all directions – both researchers and policymakers – and how we communicate the results of research, and how that gets into policy.
- **The need to build the absorptive capacity on all sides:** Doyle highlighted the role of funding agencies in building capacity, not just Research Ireland and the Health Research Board, but also the wide group of funding streams available into the research system.
- **The issue of knowledge mobilisation and the need to engage in some learning by doing,** by trying things, by experimenting a little bit: She suggested a collective effort to design effective approaches to this complex area. In so doing, she pointed out that our risk-averse culture can impact negatively on such approaches.

## **Phase V – Moving towards building the architecture – The Knowledge Brokerage Research Project**

Boyle is the Principal Investigator on the ‘Unlocking the value of research for public policy making and innovation: Mapping Ireland’s key brokering structures and supports’ project, working with O’Connor and Ó Foghlú, and Prof. Linda Connolly. It was funded as part of a Science Foundation Ireland (now Research Ireland) Science Policy Research programme, and is a two-year project that commenced in January 2024.

An important aspect of the project has been the establishment of a project advisory group, which includes representatives from both providers and users of policy-relevant research in Ireland. This group meets quarterly and has been a vital way of engaging with system leaders and stakeholders.

The overall purpose of the project is to improve understanding of how knowledge brokering is organised in Ireland and the functionality

of underpinning structures, systems and processes. The high-level research questions are:

- What is the nature of the knowledge brokering structures designed to inform policy-making in Ireland?
- What do practitioners report as barriers and enablers for effective knowledge brokering structures and supports?
- What implications arise for key stakeholders in the Irish research–policy interface?

The project has developed an initial conceptual framework that sees knowledge brokering as a relational and dynamic activity that takes place within a wider ‘ecosystem’ of interrelated and interdependent actors and interactions. Key ecosystem actors include researchers and their funders, research users and intermediary organisations. Mapping Ireland’s national research for policy ecosystem and the varied knowledge brokering processes that constitute the connective tissue of that ecosystem, will have practical benefits for system leaders. Identifying system components and understanding their functions, capacities and interactions, can help to better predict and modify system behaviours and boost the productivity of the research for policy ecosystem.

The research project has adopted a systems thinking approach in identifying key system actors and their roles; mapping interactions and interconnections across the system; and assessing capacity and capability for research–policy engagement at organisational and system level. Emerging findings from this study, suggest that knowledge brokering activity can take place at individual, organisational and system levels, with implications for central coordination, monitoring, resourcing and overarching governance. The study has collected survey data from both the policy-making and research communities, and has undertaken a systematic review of existing studies on the effectiveness of knowledge brokering interventions. Analysis and findings will add to the evidence base on knowledge brokering that MUSSI has been accumulating over recent years.

## **Conclusions**

This paper provides an account of how a small team at MU has managed to grow and sustain a programme of engagement activities

with an increasing number of people who care deeply about improving public policy and public services through better use of research. Through a deliberative, inclusive and open process of engagement and scholarly activity, their efforts have produced valuable insights into the institutional capacity of MU and other research performers to unlock the contribution of their research for public policy. The work programme has also generated insights into the wider research for policy system and advanced the idea of systems thinking as central to ensuring that policy deliberations and decisions are informed by the best available research. The paper has highlighted learnings taken from five discrete phases of engagement activity.

The programme of work has been, and continues to be, exploratory in nature and any insights are preliminary and tentative. That said, the extensive record of engagement undertaken, does lend support to three general observations. Firstly, knowledge brokering is a complex social and relational process that linear accounts fail to comprehend. Secondly, because knowledge brokering involves interactions between individual researchers and policymakers and because many different organisations are involved, including universities, research funders, government departments and agencies, systems thinking can help to understand and shape knowledge brokering structures and supports. One final thought is that any productive learning from the engagement described here, was only possible because the various interactions were underpinned by conscious efforts to establish trust, mutual understanding and a respect for diversity of perspectives. Such an inclusive approach may be well worth reflecting on when seeking to formalise and systematise knowledge brokering activity at scale.

This work is ongoing at MU, and together with the Knowledge Brokerage research project that is now underway, promises a more integrated and holistic understanding of knowledge brokering for policy in Ireland. The authors have also made proposals on how to strengthen research for policy supports within MU. Such proposals have fed into thinking within MU on new arrangements that are being established.

The work would not have advanced to the extent that it has done without the establishment of the overall national policy approach by DFHERIS and the continued partnership with them. Moreover, it would also not have advanced in this way without the co-operation of many individuals (in particular, Mary Doyle and Fergal Lynch) and organisations referred to in this paper who pro-actively engaged with the authors.

In recent times, a project supported by the European Joint Research Centre under the Technical Support Instrument and led by DFHERIS, aims to develop an overall roadmap for Evidence Informed Policy in Ireland. There have been very valuable experience and knowledge gained, and relationships built through the wide range of work described in this paper and it will form an important contribution to the European Joint Research Centre project.

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