

# **Developing evidence for policy and practice in the Department of Education and Youth**

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## **Abstract**

This paper outlines the strategic approach being adopted by the Department of Education and Youth to deliver on its ambition to increase the role of research, evidence and data in shaping positive and effective educational experiences for all children and young people. The paper will describe key strategic actions which the department has been pursuing, in line with its Statement of Strategy, namely establishing a Research Section to drive and coordinate the department’s research activities; secondly, establishing an annual Education Research Summit built around Fíorú – a futures-oriented research network – to build linkages between the policy, research and practice communities; and lastly, building the administrative and collaborative infrastructure to deliver on the department’s research goals. The paper concludes by setting out a number of avenues through which the department can continue to support research, which is particularly relevant in the context of the upcoming National Convention on Education and the department’s planned education strategy ‘Our Schools, Our Future’.

*Keywords:* Department of Education and Youth, education networks, education strategy, educational research, evidence-informed policy, evidence-informed practice, futures research.

## **Introduction and context**

In recent years, the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) has substantially increased its activities with regard to research and evidence-informed policy and practice with the aim of ensuring that Ireland's education system meets the needs of all children and young people.

While research–policy collaboration between academics and policymakers is not new (Head, 2022), there is now a concerted cross-government effort to build a national architecture for research for public policy in Ireland. This is evidenced by increased activities simultaneously across the civil service, higher-education institutions and among research funders (Doyle, 2023; Ó Foghlú & Boyle, 2024). Existing research–policy collaborations take many forms and span all government departments and a wide range of academic disciplines. The government's aim is to build a national architecture which places such collaborations on a more strategic, sustainable and impactful footing, thereby further increasing the linkages between research and policy to address the myriad challenges faced by society.

In addition to research for policy, DEY sees research for practice as equally important, with policy and practice being viewed as mutually reinforcing elements of an evidence-based ecosystem. How research informs educational practice in the classroom and in everyday practices in schools, and vice versa, is an essential part of this research agenda. Within the department, the DEY Inspectorate plays a particularly important role in garnering evidence with respect to research for practice. The Inspectorate has a specific responsibility to generate and use research as part of its quality assurance and advisory role. It systematically gathers evidence through inspections of educational settings, analyses inspection data, and writes synthesis reports that inform policy development and educational practice. This role of the Inspectorate as both a generator and mobiliser of evidence reflects longstanding international trends in inspection systems that increasingly combine accountability with advisory and developmental functions (Ehren et al., 2015).

This important theme of research for practice is one shared with other departments, including the Department of Health; the Department of Climate, Energy and Environment; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration; and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality; as other contributions in this issue illustrate. Together,

alongside the vital role of research for policy, these departments share an interest in the frontline impact of research on and with practice.

The increased focus on research for policy and research for practice comes at a time of significant reflection for Ireland's education system where research, policy and practice are increasingly understood as operating in a reciprocal and mutually informing relationship. In particular, the National Convention on Education, to be held during 2026 and chaired by Professor Anne Looney, former Executive Dean of Dublin City University's Institute of Education, is a once in a generation opportunity for children, young people, parents, educators and wider society to help shape Ireland's education system for decades to come. The focus of the convention will be on primary and post-primary (secondary) schools, and the transitions within education. It will look at what is working well, what challenges need attention, and what changes may be needed in the years ahead. Alongside the National Convention, DEY and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality have launched a National Conversation on Education which is a national public consultation process on the future of education.

Recommendations from the convention will inform a new long-term DEY strategy for education in Ireland, 'Our Schools, Our Future'. Findings from the National Conversation will also inform the development of the strategy, 'Shaping the Future', which will set out the government's approach to building an affordable, high-quality, accessible early learning and care and school-age childcare system. Research will inform the convention and the development of these strategies throughout.

### **Overarching aims of the Department of Education and Youth with regard to research**

Ireland's education system consistently performs well in international comparisons, reflecting high levels of student achievement and equity. Recent international assessments, such as the Programme for International Assessment published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), place fifteen-year-olds in Ireland among the top performers in OECD countries, with above average performance in science (OECD, 2023). The European Commission has also recognised the Irish education system as one of the most equitable in the European Union (European Commission, 2024). Building on this strong foundation, DEY now seeks to deepen

the role of research and innovation in sustaining and further enhancing educational outcomes. To do so, the department aims to significantly increase its role in Ireland's research, development and innovation system. This will necessitate further developing the research being conducted within higher-education institutions and other research-performing organisations relevant to the department's remit, alongside the development of the department's own research capacities. In addition, DEY aims to develop its own distinctive narrative as to how educational research and practice can empower other actors within the research, development and innovation system to better address Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges. This will include developing a distinct understanding of what research and innovation mean within an educational context and making the case for increased investment in the same. At present, in comparison with other government departments, the Department of Education and Youth has one of the smallest shares of the government's research and innovation budget. It is a key goal of DEY to increase its share of research funding, commensurate with the importance of the challenges it can contribute to addressing.

An array of challenges – some directly under the remit of the department and others on which education can collaborate and contribute – require increased investment, particularly in the social sciences, arts and humanities. Fostering boundary-crossing research that bridges disciplines, policy areas, and methodologies is crucial for the Irish public service in order to develop innovative solutions that address complex societal needs and drive systemic change. Inherent to this research agenda is both interdisciplinarity and co-operation across government departments and funding agencies.

With regard to research within the department's core remit, changing demographics (including a more culturally and linguistically diverse population), the need for high-quality and inclusive school settings, ensuring the well-being of students, the impacts of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the role of schools' estate planning in climate action, changing expectations of education, and the need to match the curriculum to a rapidly changing world, are just some of the issues that research and innovation can help policymakers within the department address.

With regard to research where DEY will need to work together with other departments, there are a range of key issues to address. These include how Ireland's education system can anticipate and meet the rapidly changing requirements of the world of work, and how

education can empower children, their families and communities, to meet the growing societal challenges in the world around them. Further challenges include how education can foster the system changes – in energy, transport, agri-food, health, etc. – needed to address climate change and other global crises; and how education can contribute to a collective vision for Irish society in a rapidly changing and uncertain environment, including strengthening the resilience of Ireland’s democracy.

In addition, by enhancing its monitoring and evaluation capacity, the department can ensure that resources are effectively targeted, enabling education to play a pivotal role in preparing society for the systemic transitions ahead.

In summary, through the strategic approach outlined in this paper, DEY aims to (i) increase its capacity for utilisation of research in, through and for policy and educational practice, including practitioner-led and practice-based research; (ii) work with other departments and stakeholders to empower innovation actors across the research ecosystem to better address Ireland’s present and future social, economic and environmental challenges; and (iii) foster significant increases in research funding to achieve these goals.

### **Activities – The department’s strategic approach**

While there has traditionally been a lot of research activity in the education sector, this has typically been fragmented and lacking a clear overarching framework. In order to provide a clearer direction in the face of mounting societal challenges, the Department of Education and Youth has adopted a strategic approach in pursuit of the aims outlined above. A number of elements of administrative and collaborative infrastructure are in place to strengthen and align the department’s research activities in a strategic manner.

A new research, evaluation and knowledge mobilisation section has been established, led at Assistant Secretary level with key proposals and developments presented to and guided by the department’s Management Board. A Research Policy and Practice Steering Group (RPPSG) is in place which brings together the department and its aegis bodies to inform and coordinate research for policy and practice and to act as a forum for strengthening coherence and vision between its members. An internal research evidence and data document is prepared for the Management Board every year highlighting examples of evidence-informed policy-making. Both the Management Board

and RPPSG are playing key roles in guiding the development of the department's research agenda.

In addition, DEY has developed a secondment agreement with University College Cork for one of the Research Officers in the department to work two days per week on a research project funded by the Environmental Research Agency. This unique arrangement within the Irish civil service is enabling a research-policy dialogue on futures-oriented concepts for societal transformation in response to climate change, and the other major challenges facing society and young people today. This secondment within an interdisciplinary university research group also reflects the approach being taken by the newly established Fíorú network which aims at the careful yet deliberate curation of a very diverse network of disciplines relevant to the myriad challenges faced by policymakers and practitioners in education. This in turn is grounded in the department's Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement, where teacher education has been established in a research-informed, university context, drawing on the full diversity of university research. Both the secondment and Fíorú are seeking to realise the full vision of what is envisaged there.

The Research Section has focused on three key activities to date: (i) consultation across departments to guide strategic action; (ii) the establishment of an annual Education Research Summit; and (iii) the launch of a futures-oriented research network, Fíorú. These activities will each be described in turn.

### ***Consultation with research units in other government departments***

The department appointed two Research Officers in July 2024 who immediately consulted widely with all other government departments to develop a template to increase the research activities of DEY and enhance its leadership role.

Based on these consultations, it was apparent that research units across most government departments are largely engaged in two parallel strands of activity. These are activities aimed at building internal staff capacities, and activities aimed at external engagement and strategy development. DEY has accordingly increased its activities in these two parallel and interconnected areas.

### ***Building internal staff capacity for evidence-informed policy and practice***

To date, this strand of activity has included the following range of related activities:

- The Research Section provides advice to staff on drafting and evaluating research tenders, formulating policy-relevant research questions, and utilising diverse research methodologies in their policy work.
- The section has developed and manages a research inventory of published and ongoing research and evaluation projects from across the department and aegis bodies to improve awareness and dissemination among staff of research findings and to avoid duplication.
- In line with other government departments, the section provides analytical and evaluation support from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service team and undertakes quality assurance/reviews of research reports.
- The Research Officers have also developed a quarterly research newsletter which is circulated to all staff in the department to raise awareness of research conferences, webinars, training and publications relevant to their work.
- Finally, the section brokers connections for DEY colleagues with external researchers that can be helpful for their work.

In developing these activities, the Research Officers held a number of participatory research workshops to get input from staff as to how best these activities could be prioritised and delivered.

### *Strategic external-facing activities*

To date, this strand of activity has focused on the establishment of an annual Educational Research Summit to bring together education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (teachers and principals) to focus on future-oriented research themes, and the launch of a futures-oriented research network, Fíorú, to act as a network-of-networks, bringing together existing educational networks involved in research for education policy and practice.

### ***Knowledge brokerage event and first annual Education Research Summit***

#### *Knowledge brokerage event*

As a first step towards developing an annual Education Research Summit, DEY, in collaboration with the Irish Universities Association (IUA), organised an Education Research Showcase and Futures Thinking Event, which was held on 26 February 2025 (Department of

Education and Youth & Irish Universities Association, 2025). This event had four main goals:

1. To demonstrate the department's ambition to increase the role of research, evidence and data in shaping positive and effective educational experiences for all children and young people.
2. To showcase research already being conducted by the department and its aegis bodies towards this aim.
3. To facilitate multidisciplinary people brokerage/networking in addition to knowledge brokerage.
4. To draw on the expertise of the education research community to help establish a futures-oriented network focused on the connections between research, policy and practice in and for education.

This knowledge brokerage and engagement event comprised a morning session focused on a research showcase and an afternoon session focused on supporting the establishment of Fíorú, the future-oriented research network.

The research showcase involved short presentations on ongoing or recently completed research projects being carried out by DEY and its aegis bodies to illustrate the already vibrant research ecosystem that exists within the department. The research projects showcased at this event included longitudinal studies of children's lived experiences, analyses of teacher supply and activity, teacher learning and formation, leadership in Gaeltacht schools, system infrastructure (school transport), and practice-based inquiry into inclusion and special education. The purposeful selection of these projects aimed to demonstrate that the department sees research as vital both for policy and for practice, values teachers and principals as knowledge producers, and sees evidence as central to building a future-oriented, resilient, and more inclusive school system.

The afternoon session of the knowledge brokerage event took the form of a participatory discussion on the proposed futures-oriented education research network. During this 'futures thinking' session, the following three forward-looking questions were used to frame the discussion:

1. What narratives/types of transformation do you think should be the focus for future research for policy and practice in education? (For example, will technology drive change? Will

- climate change effect the delivery of education and the focus of educational research? Do we need to think differently about what learning outcomes we aim to deliver?)
2. What new ways of viewing things do we need to include in future research for education policy and practice? Whose voices and perspectives need to be included? What can different disciplines contribute to such reimagining?
  3. In this context, how can connections between researchers, policymakers and practitioners be most feasibly and sustainably supported to bring their collective skills and expertise fully to bear on outcomes for the system?

A range of learnings were garnered from this discussion which were subsequently used to inform the development of the futures-oriented education research network *Fíorú*, established in November 2025 (DEY & IUA, 2025). Key learnings included:

*Fíorú* should bring a futures-oriented, holistic and systemic approach:

- There is a need to adopt a holistic national approach towards research. Existing educational research is fragmented and lacks an overall strategy aligning all research towards common missions and goals.
- Given the context of acute global challenges and fragmentation of response, *Fíorú* should also bring a systemic focus to larger issues, such as educational equity, inclusion, AI, critical thinking, and should encourage collaboration rather than competition between disciplines, actors and perspectives.
- The network should facilitate ongoing engagement and debate on future visions and practices in education in Ireland and how research can support a future education system responsive to student's needs and a rapidly changing societal context.

*Fíorú* should also be inclusive and build on the range of educational networks already in place. The network will need to place value on different voices and on multidisciplinary ways of working. Given the existence of a range of existing networks, the role of the futures-oriented network may potentially be as 'a network of networks' concerned with bringing coherence and overall direction to the system.

In addition, the conversation at the brokerage event indicated that enhanced engagement with, and collaboration on, existing as well as

new research knowledge, should be a key objective of the network. Ways should be developed to make research findings more accessible to diverse audiences, including teachers, principals, policymakers and decision makers, parents and the wider public. Finally, it was suggested that the network should also encompass an international dimension to situate Ireland's educational response to future challenges in an international perspective. The brokerage event succeeded in demonstrating that there is broad support for an overarching research network that can create cohesion, co-ordination and increased collaboration in the education sector.

### *Annual Education Research Summit*

Building on the engagement at the brokerage event and its conclusions, the next step in the department's strategic approach to building its research for policy and practice capacities was the organisation of the first Annual Education Summit, which was held on 18 November 2025. While the brokerage event showcased research being conducted by the department and its aegis bodies, the Education Research Summit aimed to showcase research being carried out across the whole education research ecosystem.

The summit was designed to comprise a research showcase with parallel sessions of presentations on ongoing, or recently completed, research being conducted by academic researchers, practitioners and policymakers. The presentations were augmented by stands at the event from the department and aegis bodies showcasing their research work. The research showcase presentations were based on submissions to a call for abstracts issued by the department under the three future-oriented themes – 'Visions of future educational systems'; 'Future schools and educational settings'; and 'Future educational outcomes'.

The resulting book of abstracts for the 2025 Education Research Summit showcases a wide-ranging, futures-oriented research agenda that spans classroom practice, curriculum, leadership, digitalisation, AI, system governance, youth work, and alternative education provision. Its structure around the summit's themes stated above aimed to signal an explicit intent to position educational research as a driver of system-level change, with contributions from schools, initial teacher education providers, aegis bodies of the department, youth organisations, and community partners. As with the Knowledge Brokerage Event, the aim was to highlight how empirically rich and methodologically diverse the educational research ecosystem is, and to

cultivate professional connections between researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

The keynote at the summit was delivered by Professor Selina McCoy from the ESRI. Professor McCoy's keynote address traced the evolution of education research in Ireland from the 1965 'Investment in Education' report (FitzGerald, 1965), highlighting early focuses on inequality, gender gaps and longitudinal studies. It drew on the Horizon Europe EFFEct project to advocate rigorous causal methods alongside qualitative, systems-based approaches for evidence-informed policy, addressing inclusion, well-being, early school leaving, and equity for low socio-economic status and students with special educational needs. An important message in this keynote address was the need to include diverse voices in the research process and raise awareness of how pivotal post-school transitions can be for learners. As quoted in her keynote: 'There should be no numbers without stories and no stories without numbers' (Carter & Jones, 2025). Professor McCoy also stressed the importance of an evaluation culture in education, where interdisciplinarity, data linkage, and mixed-methods approaches should be 'business as usual'.

### ***Launch of Fíorú – A futures-oriented network of networks***

The first annual Education Research Summit was also the platform for the launch of Fíorú – the Department of Education and Youth's futures-oriented educational research network. Fíorú is an important element in the department's strategy for building national research infrastructure and capacity relevant to children and youth, and is a commitment in the current *Statement of Strategy* for the department. As outlined above, discussion on the format and aims of the network was a central focus of the knowledge brokerage event held on 26 February 2025 (DEY, 2025).

The Fíorú network will bring together policymakers, researchers in higher-education institutions, education practitioners, research funders, and think-tanks and policy advisory organisations. It is intended to serve several strategic objectives.

It will act as a forum for articulating a strategic, holistic futures-oriented vision for education research and for increasing research funding and activities for the same based on evidence-based impact. It is intended to support practitioners in each domain (research, policy, practice) to ensure that policy and practice for all children and young people draw the best insights from relevant, quality, reliable research, evidence and data. In addition, it will demonstrate the impact of

research on education on social and economic progress in accessible ways to a diversity of audiences. Fíorú will place the holistic development of the child and young person, in the context of the contemporary social and technological change, at the centre of the network's activities, and will provide a link between existing networks working in the education sector, and with other new members who wish to join.

The following mission statement has been adopted to guide the future development of Fíorú: Our mission is to create a dynamic and inclusive network that brings together researchers, policy makers, and education practitioners in Ireland. Through collaborative inquiry, evidence-informed policy development, sharing of innovative practices and a focus on implementation, we strive to shape a future-focused education system that prepares children and young people for current and future societal changes. Our goal is to empower every child and young person to achieve their full potential in an ever-evolving world.

From interviews conducted with existing education research networks, such as the Teachers' Research Evidence Exchange, the Educational Studies Association of Ireland and the Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland, among others, a futures focus was welcomed because it was simultaneously relevant to the work of existing education research networks but also different enough to not compete with their current work. It is intended that a futures focus will also allow participants to critique the present in ways they might not otherwise do and creates a space for members to think beyond the pressures of the everyday. DEY is strongly supportive of this initiative through the engagement of the research unit in co-organising Fíorú events with network partners, and providing strategic direction and cohesion, including through the Fíorú newsletter.

The following three sub-groups have been adopted for the initial establishment of the network:

- **Visions of future educational systems:** This sub-group will lead the futures visions work of the network. Areas within the scope of this theme could include:
  - horizon scanning;
  - international responses of school systems to multiple crises or approaches to futures planning;
  - impacts of technology on education futures;
  - responses to disruptions including climate change and AI.

- **Future schools and educational settings:** This theme will bring together research on the various aspects of ‘the school system’ in a holistic and future-focused way. Areas within the scope of this theme could include:
  - curriculum development;
  - future team-teaching approaches;
  - future of the school built environment;
  - future school leadership.
  
- **Future educational outcomes:** This theme will focus on the changing educational outcomes required to address changing societal trends. Research areas may include:
  - the future of assessment;
  - evaluating holistic educational outcomes (including mental health and well-being), and resilience;
  - competencies for democratic citizenship;
  - future metrics for resource allocation.

An option to register for a Fíorú mailing list was offered in the first instance to all delegates of the November 2025 summit and all members of existing partner networks. It is intended to incrementally grow the scale of activities of the network as it matures, and as membership grows. In the initial year of operation of Fíorú, it is proposed to focus on the three core activities which can demonstrate objective and immediate benefits for members. These are: (i) the annual ‘Reimagining Education Summit’; (ii) a Fíorú newsletter, which will provide a roundup of Fíorú events and key member publications/updates; and (iii) a number of online and in-person ‘spotlight’ events focused on the network’s three themes.

These activities will help to build a holistic picture of Ireland’s educational research ecosystem, as well as supporting the further development and growth of Fíorú’s partner networks.

### ***Strategic partners and participation in cross-departmental research fora***

The DEY Research Section’s activities have also included a focus on strengthening the department’s partnerships with external bodies, including Research Ireland, the IUA, Technological Universities Association (TUA), and the ESRI, which are now acting as partners in the development and implementation of the department’s vision for

research. The first Education Research Summit, for example, was organised in cooperation with IUA and TUA. Another concrete example of this enhanced engagement is the department's participation in Research Ireland's 2026 Public Service Fellowship call.<sup>1</sup> The department's project is entitled 'Measuring and Implementing Effective Inclusion Policies in Primary and Secondary Education' and will be led by staff in the Inspectorate section of the department. In addition, DEY is participating fully in the various national fora aimed at strengthening research-to-policy and research-to-practice, including the Civil Service Research Network and the Impact 2030 Steering Group. These fora provide valuable opportunities for sharing knowledge and expertise across a wide range of relevant activities. Examples of such valuable knowledge-sharing, which DEY has benefited from, have included good practices in providing access to journals by civil servants, discussions on research ethics guidelines for policy research, and sharing practices on rapid evidence assessments for use by civil servants in specific policy areas. The Department of the Taoiseach's *Policy Handbook: A 'Real World' Guide to Policy Development* (Department of the Taoiseach, 2025) also underlines the importance of the utilisation of data and evidence at all the different stages of policy design, implementation and evaluation that is guiding the Department of Education and Youth's activities.

## Next steps

This section briefly outlines the next steps which DEY is undertaking to further its strategic aims with regard to research for policy and practice.

### *Developing a statement of research needs*

DEY's recently published *Statement of Strategy 2025–2028* (DEY, 2025) includes a commitment to 'Support Ireland to be a leader across a broad range of fields, to identify and publish research priorities to support greater co-ordination, involvement and collaboration'. As mentioned, DEY is also currently overseeing the Convention on Education, which will be held during 2026. Recommendations from

<sup>1</sup> This initiative offers researchers in higher-education institutions the opportunity to be seconded to government departments and agencies to work on specific projects that utilise their expertise in improving policy and practice outcomes.

the convention will inform a new long-term Department of Education and Youth strategy for education in Ireland, *Our Schools, Our Future*. Given this confluence of events, there is a unique opportunity to develop a statement of research needs that addresses both the short- and longer-term priorities identified as part of the National Convention and the National Conversation. The scoping of this statement of research priorities has commenced.

### ***Knowledge mobilisation and knowledge flow***

A key objective for DEY is to better align the diverse research taking place within Ireland's universities and universities of technology, across multiple disciplines, with educational practices in schools and classrooms. Research groups conducting innovative research, from enhancing democracy to tackling climate change, often produce knowledge outputs which could be used to enhance student learning. The channels for translating these knowledge outputs into practice include, for example, inclusion in the curriculum, initial teacher education and professional development, tool kits for classrooms, and focused activities such as projects and learning labs. The nature of the school environment, which includes limited teacher time, multiple demands on the curriculum, and limited teacher capacity to engage with research outputs, however, provide challenges for the uptake of such research outputs in the classroom. A key challenge for DEY, supported by the Fíorú network, is how to ensure, where appropriate and relevant, that research informs classroom practice. Exploring mechanisms which can enable greater knowledge mobilisation and more effective knowledge flows from research to school practice is a key area of focus going forward.

### ***Funding for education research***

As stated earlier, in comparison with other government departments, the Department of Education and Youth has one of the smallest shares of the government's research and innovation budget. The department's share of the government budget appropriations or outlays for research and development (GBOARD) is less than 1 percent. There is a clear need to develop a holistic narrative to drive the development of Ireland's educational research system and substantially increase the department's allocation of GBOARD. This is a challenge that Fíorú and the annual Education Research Summit aims to address.

## **Conclusions and learnings on supporting evidence-informed policy-making**

DEY has made significant progress in a short period of time in establishing structures to advance its objectives to increase the role of research, evidence and data in shaping positive and effective educational experiences for all children and young people. Activities to date have included the creation of a dedicated Research Section to coordinate and lead research activity; the establishment of an annual Education Research Summit to support knowledge brokerage and collaboration; and the establishment of a futures-oriented research network, *Fíorú*, to deepen connections between the policy, research and practice communities. Over time these elements can support the development of the collaborative infrastructure needed to support the department's strategic ambitions at a systems level.

In addition, internal capacity-building is being advanced to support the significant programme of research being commissioned and carried out across the department in various policy units to inform their work, along with expert analytical and evaluation support from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service team.

In the immediate future, DEY is taking steps to develop a statement of research needs, and to enhance knowledge mobilisation and knowledge flows across the research–policy–practice ecosystem. The DEY Inspectorate provides an instructive model in this regard in that it makes significant contributions to the evidence base as part of its inspection regimen and thematic and evaluative studies.

In addition, the National Convention on Education and the National Conversation both offer valuable opportunities to inform the further development of the department's research agenda and to identify crucial areas where more evidence is needed to inform decision-making and ensure young people are receiving the education they need to flourish in a rapidly changing world.

Two reflections are offered based on DEY's experiences to date. First, with regard to progress to date, a variety of positive factors have contributed to the successful establishment of the Research Section, the annual Education Research Summit, and *Fíorú*, alongside the other research activities undertaken. The list of internal enabling factors includes leadership and support at the highest levels within DEY; strategic capacity within the Research Unit and its leadership – enhanced by the secondment relationship with University College Cork; a willingness to enable experimentation; Research Officers'

prior research experience and networks; openness of staff within DEY and its aegis bodies to engage, share and support the establishment of DEY's initiatives; and guidance from the Management Board and the RPPSG. The list of external factors which have enabled progress includes the openness, collegiality and generosity of colleagues from research units across government departments in sharing their expertise and experience; the enthusiasm shown by many across the wider research ecosystem (IUA, TUA, ESRI, partner networks of Fíorú, academic researchers across many disciplines, among others); and the existence of structures such as the Civil Service Research Network and the Impact 2030 Implementation Forum which allow for knowledge-sharing and networking on specific issues.

Timing, of course, is also a critical enabler. The focus by government on research for policy and research for practice, along with the establishment of the National Convention on Education, provide a fertile context for pursuing DEY's ambition.

A second reflection relates to the risks and opportunities ahead. Ireland's pursuit of greater use of evidence for policy and evidence-for-practice comes at a time when societies the world over face multiple crises which will determine the future that today's children and young people will inhabit. This confluence of crises, which includes climate change, environmental destruction, destabilising levels of inequality, the erosion of democracy and rise of authoritarianism, war, and the disruptive impacts of new technologies such as AI, has been termed the polycrisis (Lawrence et al., 2022). The severity of the contemporary polycrisis demands a new approach to research and innovation that includes but moves beyond a focus on technological solutions, to embrace research that strengthens not only the economy but the resilience and imaginative capacity of society. This new transdisciplinary and whole-of-society engagement with research and innovation to address complex societal problems is the new frontier which researchers and policymakers across Europe and further afield are currently grappling with. The research agenda which DEY is pursuing, which it shares with departments across government, fits firmly within this new frontier and provides the opportunity for an unprecedented level of cross-department vision-setting and collaboration to address the polycrisis. The newly established Educational Research Summit and Fíorú, Futures-oriented research network) can form part of the national research and innovation infrastructure necessary to pursue that goal. In this context, the issue may be less about access to research and more about ensuring that

reliable, trustworthy insights from research reach practitioners through networks such as Fíorú, the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, Teachers'-Research Evidence Exchange and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, so they can be translated into practice to support learners.

In conclusion, this paper has aimed to outline specific structural initiatives which the Department of Education and Youth has established, including a dedicated Research Section, the annual Education Research Summit, and the Fíorú network. These structural initiatives aim to enhance Ireland's educational 'research ecosystem' so that research, policy and practice, can better reinforce each other. Perhaps the most prominent of these challenges is to work with those involved in education delivery to support them in effectively implementing evidence-informed policy, thereby ensuring that research evidence demonstrably impacts classroom practice and learner outcomes.

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