



**Maynooth
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**Social
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Institute**

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**The Contribution of Knowledge Brokerage
to Building an Effective Evidence for
Policy Infrastructure in Ireland – Lessons
Learned from the Initial Series of
Pathfinding Knowledge Brokerage Events
in Ireland, 2022 to 2024**

**Seán Ó Foghlú, Mark Boyle, Maynooth University
Social Sciences Institute and Mary Doyle, Royal Irish
Academy.**

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Knowledge Brokers . . . Positioned at the interface between the worlds of researchers and decision makers, they are seen as the human force behind knowledge transfer whose tasks include finding, assessing and interpreting evidence, facilitating interaction and identifying emerging research questions - Vicky L Ward, Allan O House and Susan Hamer¹

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¹<https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-9-12>; 2009 Ward et al

Section 1 – Aim of this Paper

In line with many other countries, Ireland is currently building a systematic evidence for policy infrastructure of which Knowledge Brokerage is an important element. In order to support the development of these approaches, a number of events have been organised by state bodies to support the development of a Knowledge Brokerage system in Ireland, as an important contribution to the overall development and implementation of the research for policy ecosystem. This paper aims to describe and analyse these initiatives from a number of perspectives including setting them in context, summarising how they were planned and organised and looking at their impact. The paper further identifies the lessons that might be learned from them and suggests how future Knowledge Brokerage events might be organised to play an important role in the further advancement of research for policy in Ireland.

Section 2 – Background and Context to the Knowledge Brokerage events

Governments worldwide are calling upon Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate more clearly their value to society as anchor institutions and the societal relevance and impact of their research, scholarship and expertise. Many are using national research funding agencies to incentivise cocreated research between academics and a wide range of beneficiaries.

The Irish Government is no exception. Irish universities are being asked to step up and play their role in scoping impactful solutions to wicked and increasingly existential local, national and global public problems. Of course, a significant body of work has already been undertaken or is in train. In this area, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) (now Taighde Éireann) established a range of important programmes including the Challenges Programme, the Public Service Fellowship, and Science Policy Research programmes; the Irish Research Council (IRC) contributed extensively through the New Foundations and COALESCE programmes and through its work on the ‘Roadmap on Research for Public Policy’ (jointly with the Royal Irish Academy (RIA)); and the Irish Universities Association (through the Campus Engage programme) have led the way.

There have been traditionally many different ways for academics to be involved in the policy-making process. These include:

- Being members of Commissions/review groups/working groups established by Government Departments or agencies
- Being informal advisors to officials in the drafting of policy
- Speaking at and/or attending seminars organised by themselves, by Government Departments or agencies or by third-party groups such as think tanks
- Undertaking research for Government Departments or agencies and/or interested third party stakeholders (e.g., charitable groups)
- Undertaking research themselves that may be funded by Government agencies or others
- Publicising and disseminating the outcomes of research undertaken
- Engaging as experts in media discussion
- Engaging in movements for political change
- Engagement with the Oireachtas process – e.g., through giving expert evidence to an Oireachtas Committee
- Engagement with a Citizens’ Assembly process through giving expert evidence

A strong Government policy approach is now being advanced which is targeted at broadening and deepening these linkages between academic researchers and policy-makers – to be layered on top of and to complement existing and already achieved knowledge exchange initiatives. This is clearly articulated in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science’s (DFHERIS) “*Impact 2030: Ireland’s*

Research and Innovation Strategy”. Published in May 2022, this strategy seeks to strengthen connections between Government Departments and the public research system:

Starting with the establishment of the new Evidence for Policy function in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, we will improve the articulation of public policy needs to the research community so that they can engage proactively and creatively on this shared agenda. We will ensure that the requirements of the policy system are clear so that researchers, including early-career researchers, can engage and make a difference. We will develop engagement and brokering mechanisms between those involved in policy development and implementation and relevant researchers. We will encourage greater mobility between the two sectors, for instance, through a future Public Policy Fellowship Programme, building on the existing SFI initiative.

Impact 2030 has been welcomed and endorsed by the OECD who in a 2023 Public Governance Review titled “Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland” further advised:

it would be beneficial to consider how the Researcher Career Framework can include a specific focus on policy development relationships and support academics across their careers to engage with the policy development system through induction, coaching and mentoring by (senior) academics... Government departments may include in their strategies a short statement on their areas of research interest, which will facilitate the research community’s understanding of what are the most pressing sectoral policy questions.

The Government has made a significant commitment and investment in building out the evidence for policy infrastructure and in the next section we look in more detail at the progress which has been made in respect of this policy area.

The National Architecture for Research for Public Policy.

In the document “Research for Public Policy - An Outline Roadmap”² published jointly by the Royal Irish Academy and the Irish Research Council in September 2021, three development pathways were identified as follows:

Pathway 1	Building bridges, creating trust, offering opportunities;
Pathway 2	Joining up and scaling up what already exists;
Pathway 3	Knowledge management and brokerage.

² <https://research.ie/resources/publications/9038/>

Following on publication, work has been ongoing to design effective systems and structures to build out this important national infrastructure. Mary Doyle (2023)³ sets out the existing position in some detail, both in terms of policy development and of implementation arrangements. The principal areas that she refers to are grouped and summarised as follows:

Building the architecture in the higher education sector:

- The establishment of DFHERIS, the bringing together of responsibility for research policy into a single Government Department and the establishment of an Evidence for Policy Unit within the Department
- The establishment by the Unit of a key stakeholder advisory group that has been helping to develop an overall framework for evidence for policy.
- The publication of Impact 2030 – Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy (DFHERIS, 2022)
- The enactment of the Higher Education Authority Act 2022
- The announcement of a revised Science Advice Mechanism for Ireland
- A range of capacity building and university research for policy engagement work is being led by the Irish Universities Association through Campus Engage.
- The publication of the work of the Expert Committee on ‘Creating Our Future.’
- The announcement of the establishment of the Research and Innovation Policy Advisory Forum.

Development of structures within the civil service:

- The inclusion in the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2021) of a core theme focused on delivering evidence-informed policy and services.
- The leadership role has been clearly assigned to the Civil Service Management Board (which includes each Department’s Secretary General).
- A Civil Service Research Network has been established.
- The publication by DFHERIS (and a number of other Departments) of a Statement of Research Intent and Priorities to highlight areas of research interest to researchers.
- Other major work on mapping needs and resources and building capacity is ongoing under the auspices of the Research Network
- The role of the Institute of Public Administration in building civil service capacity generally is being strengthened by the consolidation of learning and development resources in the Institute.
- The Government is continuing to invest in building and enhancing capacity in evidence-based policy and services under the Civil Service Renewal

³ Doyle, Mary (2023). "Strengthening national capacity for policy engagement in Ireland: A review of progress" Administration, vol.71, no.3, 2023, pp.89-101. <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/admin-2023-0018>

- Programme, including, in particular, the Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service and the Irish Government Statistical Service
- The civil service is supporting the development of cross-sectoral initiatives that aim to strengthen links between the civil service and the university sector in the area of public policy development.
 - The publication of an OECD report on Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland.

Institutional arrangements for funding research and innovation:

- The advancement of Research and Innovation Bill 2023
- Science Foundation Ireland has launched the SFI Science Policy Research Programme 2023
- The Irish Research Council continues to play a vital role in funding excellent research across all disciplines.

There has been a range of significant developments across all of these areas since DFHERIS was established and those developments have continued since the publication of Doyle (2023). Key recent developments include:

- The initial implementation of the SFI Science Policy Research Programme 2023 – Professor Mark 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, funded as part of this. The project is undertaking a comprehensive and granular mapping of research-policy brokering structures and supports currently in place across Irish Higher Education Institutions, public service research systems, and civil society organisations.
- The publication of “Towards a Higher Education Research - Policy Engagement Framework: Public Consultation, Background Paper, July 2023” by the Department and a subsequent consultative process.
- The appointment of a new independent Government Science Advisor
- The enactment of the Research and Innovation Act 2024.
- The establishment of Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland on 1 August 2024
- The establishment, in June 2024, by DFHERIS of a network of key advocates from higher education institutions on research-policy engagement
- The hosting of networking event, in October 2024, between Civil Service Research Network members and research leads/managers from across higher education institutions
- The outlining by DFHERIS at a number of public engagements of the high-level policy direction which will be included in the National Framework for Engagement which is to be established by the Department in 2024.
- The development of research impact funding by the Higher Education Authority which is supporting research for policy work in UCD and UL.

- The Royal Irish Academy through a range of activities including its membership of international Academies and working groups contributes significantly to the overall effort.

In addition, there have also been significant developments in Northern Ireland where Queens University has also recently announced the establishment of its Centre for Public Policy and Administration and Ulster University has announced its intention to an Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit.

There is clearly a momentum for change across all of those involved in supporting and advancing research for policy in Ireland.

In this context, it is helpful also to look at international activity and innovation in the European Union which is particularly relevant to the Irish domestic landscape.

European Union

The European Union has been very active in developing policy approaches to support research for policy. The Evidence-Informed Policy Making team is part of the Knowledge for Policy: Concepts & Methods Unit at the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC.H1)⁴.

The team’s main aim is to support researchers and policymakers to build and establish better connections between scientific knowledge and policymaking. It strives to position the Joint Research Centre as a global thought leader in the science for policy field. Its priority lines and actions to fulfill them are as follows:

- Creating new knowledge about concepts and methods at the science and policy interface,
 - The Enlightenment 2.0 programme provides an evidence base to help maximise the policy impact of scientific knowledge, throughout the policy cycle. The multiannual research programme seeks to understand the different drivers that influence political decision making in the 21st century.
 - It develops professional development frameworks for both scientists and policymakers to use scientific evidence to underpin learning and development strategies.
- Building capacity in researchers and policymakers in knowledge management for policy,
 - It organises an introductory course in evidence for policy for Joint Research Centre scientists, summer schools.
 - It organises training for policymakers in using evidence.

⁴ https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/about_en

- It wrote a handbook on evidence for policy that marries the latest research to its best practice experience.
 - It runs a Training of Trainers programme to foster a network of facilitators across the European Union to train scientists to operate in the science for policy interface.
- Strengthening science for policy eco-systems across the European Union by providing advice on public administration reforms and co-creating new approaches,
 - It organises the “Strengthening and connecting eco-systems of science for policy across Europe” workshop series to take stock, discuss and exchange experiences. This helps cocreate ideas and projects for the design and implementation of new structures, mechanisms, and instruments for strengthening evidence-informed policymaking across Europe.
- Nurturing a European and global community of those professionals committed to evidence-informed policy,
 - It is fostering a European network of active stakeholders in the science for policy ecosystems across Member States.
 - It actively engages with other key actors at the European Union level such as the Science Advice Mechanism, Science Advice for Policy · by European Academies, European Science Advisors Forum, and at the global level through collaboration with the International Network for Government Science Advice and other international organisations.

Section 3 – Developing New Approaches to Policy-Maker and Academic Engagement in Ireland and the EU

Arising from “*Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy*” there has been a focus on new ways of enhancing engagement between academics and policy-makers, using a variety of approaches which can be loosely titled at Knowledge Brokerage.

A range of events have been organized by state bodies in a variety of sectors to trial different methods and approaches and these are outlined in the attached appendices to this paper. These events have had a range of objectives but essentially, their primary aim has been to develop and support longer term connectivity between policy-makers and academics/researchers in defined policy areas with a view to enhancing the impact of research on the policies in those areas.

Some of the authors of this paper have been involved with a number of events from 2022 to 2024 as follows:

- Delivering Environmental Knowledge Effectively to the Policy-making Process, organised by the Environmental Protection Agency on 5 October 2022⁵
- 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 2023⁶
- 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 2023⁷
- Roundtable on Addressing On-Street Drug Dealing and Drug Use in Dublin’s North East Inner City, organised by the North East Inner City Initiative with Maynooth University and the Department of an Taoiseach on 17 May 2024⁸

All these brokerage events have publicly available reports.

Appendices 1 to 4 look in detail at each of the each of the four brokerage events set out above around the following themes:

- Preparation

⁵ https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/communicating-research/EPA_Science_to_Policy_Seminar_Report.pdf

⁶ <https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FINAL-IUA-DECDIY-Evidence-for-Policy-Brokerage-Event-report-1-6.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/42200/>

⁸ <https://www.neic.ie/assets/f/124946/x/efa7ce8b2b/report-from-roundtable-on-addressing-on-street-drug-dealing-and-drug-use-in-dublin-s-north-east-inner-city.pdf>

- Aim and purpose
- How the event on the day was organised and conducted
- Outcome, outputs and follow-up

Since the publication of “*Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy*” there have also been a number of other events with similar goals organised by Government Departments. Some of these are as follows:

- Summits arranged by Science Foundation Ireland in 2022 and 2023, with sessions having a particular focus on enhancing research for policy
- Agriculture and Climate Change – Science into Action Conference organised on 15 November 2023 by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- “Evidence for Reform: Where Research meets Policy” Research Conference, organised by the Department of Health on 10 November 2023⁹ which followed up on a conference the previous year
- Two Disability Policy in Focus Events organised by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in 2024
- Better Public Services Conference: Evidence-Informed Policy and Services, organised by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform on Thursday, 5 September 2024

While these events had many of the same goals, they have not all been as focused on policy-maker/researcher engagement and there have not, as yet, been published reports on all of them.

A range of other relevant activities have continued to be developed by other organisations, including universities, and these have often sought to develop innovation ways for researchers and policy-makers to engage in the context of the developing national and international policy approach.

⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/71765-minister-for-health-welcomes-evidence-for-reform-where-research-meets-policy-research-conference/>

Section 4 – Identification of Lessons Learned and Emerging Themes from four Knowledge Brokerage Events

The four events that are discussed in detail in this paper were all organised under the aegis of a state body and were organised in partnership with the academic community. The fact that a state body was the primary organiser for each of these events means that there was a decision made by each of the organising bodies to advance with these events and means, or at least strongly implies, that the state body anticipated that there was potential for its policy-making to be enhanced as a result of the engagement.

These events were organised in the wider national and international context of seeking to advance research for policy generally and seeking to develop relationships between researchers and policy-makers in particular. They are only one example of a range of possible other activities that the state bodies involved have been taking to do this. In particular, all Government Departments are now involved in the Civil Service Research Network and it has been working through an agenda of mapping out the activities of Government Departments in research for policy so that they can learn from each other and seek collective engagement on a range of issues. Among the activities that some Departments are advancing are the development of Departmental Research Strategies (for the Departments themselves and sometimes including the agencies under their aegis) and statements of Areas of Research Interest (ARIs).

There has been very rich material in feedback from both participants and organisers in this early engagement with structured Knowledge Brokerage in Ireland. Overall, it appears that the outcome of the deliberations has been helpful in informing and guiding developments to strengthen the science-policy interface for both funded research and internal organisational work on data, science and evidence.

A number of common themes have now emerged clearly which warrant more detailed consideration. There are discussed below.

Knowledge Brokerage as a Tool to Help to Build Bridges between the Policy and Research Systems

One of the key objectives in undertaking Knowledge Brokerage activities is to take a structured approach to increasing the interaction between the policymaking community and the research community and to build long term connections and relationships. A major benefit identified from each event is that they presented the interactions between policy-makers and researchers 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 is also clear that the major benefits from Knowledge Brokerage events occurs 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

There were a number of positive outcomes, some of which might have been anticipated and others which were less obvious at the outset.

Policy-makers reported they found that the events provided a useful opportunity to build their network of experienced researchers and, importantly, it gave them the opportunity to engage with researchers from a more diverse range of Higher Education Institutions. It gave staff working in policy and service areas an improved understanding of the potential and limitations of research to inform and support their work. This is captured very well by the following extract from the response of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth as follows: *“Staff in the Department are more confident engaging with researchers and there is a high demand for research, either commissioning new projects or engaging with existing work, from policy makers”*.

The events also opened up the possibility of longer term benefits for the internal operation of the host organisation where it gives the Research Division a better understanding of both the policy needs and 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 the department, including regular research clubs which bring together policy makers and researchers for short one or two hour sessions; half-day events and full day conferences such as the annual Growing Up in Ireland conference.

Support for Building Cross Departmental Relationships

There was a somewhat unexpected but welcome benefit identified in relation to cross Departmental working where Knowledge Brokerage events have been helpful for developing relationships with policymakers in other Departments and generating a shared understanding of issues. A specific example from the Youth Wellbeing event is that the Department of Children has also been requested to collaborate on a number of research projects with other Government departments and research teams in the area of youth wellbeing.

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 key unplanned outcome from the North East Inner City Roundtable was the openness and desire from many of the Maynooth University researchers/academics to be involved in further advancing on ideas and issues that emerged and to assisting in the work of the NEIC initiative generally.

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.

Good examples of capacity building which connected well to the Knowledge Brokerage events were put forward in the feedback received. For example, the EPA is actively building capacity to support the transfer and uptake of knowledge outputs from EPA-funded research by policy makers and implementing agencies through the EPA-IMPACT project. As a result, the EPA has now emerged as a recognised leader in knowledge transfer among research funding organisations in Ireland.

In another relevant initiative in the environment area, in August 2024 the EPA launched a Climate Fellowships Call 2024, with the objective of seconding up to four postdoctoral researchers from Higher Education Institutes to the EPA Climate Programme to undertake research on emissions statistics, climate adaptation, and climate science and policy.

In the Health area, a number of participants in Building Brides identified the need for greater support for networking opportunities for policy makers and researchers involved in young people's substance use work. Internal HRB discussions concluded that a sustainable cross-institutional research network on drugs and drug addiction research in Ireland, delivered through a competitive grant award, would be a demonstrable impact from an event such as this and was a feasible ambition.

The HRB has now developed a proposal to establish a research network for drugs and drug addiction from relevant health and social perspectives in Ireland, and in consultation with the European Union Drugs Agency. It is envisaged that the research network will comprise several research teams, representing different institutions and research topics. The network will support a cooperative approach to increasing policy-relevant knowledge in this field, in a way that an individual team could not do on its own. Funding has been secured to establish the network to engage the broadest possible group of stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds including legislation, policy, prevention, early warning, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, epidemiology, sociology and criminology.

Harnessing Potential to support Policy Development and Implementation

Respondents told us 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. In the case of the Department of Children these included:

- Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024-2028

- Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024-2028
- Action Plan for Youth Services
- Young Ireland: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People

The report is also informing the development of a cross-government Young Ireland Research Roadmap which the Department is leading on.

In relation to the EPA event, the report played a key role in feeding into the considerations of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, particularly in the inclusion of a Chapter on research in Ireland’s 2023 Climate Action Plan (and again in the 2024 plan) and in the development and publication by the Department of its Research and Innovation Strategy on 8 May 2024.

A number of themes that emerged from HRB event – “Building Bridges for Evidence-Informed Public Policy: young people and substance use” were considered in discussions in the HRB and between the HRB and the Department of Health. The HRB identified two particular areas in which practical support could strengthen existing developments and demonstrate the event’s impact. The two areas identified were (i) building prevention practice in Ireland and (ii) developing research capacity in Irish academic institutions and civil society. The Department of Health has clearly indicated its support for initiatives in these areas, and two significant new projects will begin in 2025.

In the Department of Children, a longer run strategic approach to planning engagements such as this is under consideration. In such future events, the possibility of including those with lived experience is to be considered, reflecting the value placed by the department on participative research.

The NEIC Roundtable report has been considered as part of the strategic development process of the NEIC and fed into the publication on 27 September 2024 of the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027 of the Programme Implementation Board for the North East Inner City Initiative. This is a very concrete realisation of the impact of the Roundtable. Many of the themes identified in the Roundtable report and some of the suggestions are reflected in the Strategic Plan.

Impact on Strategic Focus to Funding Research

An important question in this context is 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 level. Some interesting learning emerged from the events in terms of potential future approaches. The HRB’s first prevention event was held in September, explicitly presented as a follow up to Building Bridges and revisiting themes that emerged during that event. The event was targeted more at practitioners and drugs and alcohol taskforces than policy makers and researchers, but several Departments including the

Department of Children, Department of Justice and Department of Education staff who had participated in the November 2023 event also attended.

Important feedback on the Building Bridges event was that it did demonstrate the interest in prevention at senior policy level and the capacity of the Irish research community to produce evidence to inform prevention policy and practice. Building Bridges made it easier for the HRB and prevention experts to make the case for a review of prevention in Ireland and to champion prevention with a greater degree of confidence and expectation of support from policy.

A particular initiative emerging is the establishment of an Addiction Research network whose focus is to support Irish institutions and civil society actors to take advantage of new research funding opportunities that will follow the establishment of the European Union Drugs Agency. The new agency is currently working on a programme of research prioritisation in this area. This will establish a separate drugs-related funding stream which will be administered through Horizon Europe and related funding mechanisms.

This is a really important example of the possibilities which exist for harnessing the combined knowledge resources in this area across the State in support of a more strategic approach to health promotion research and bringing to bear combined expertises in supporting funding applications.

Similarly, the event and the report fed into the implementation of the strategic approach of the EPA to research funding and to the nature of its research calls, including, for example, its Fast Track to Policy funding and its Climate Fellowships Call. In November 2023, the EPA relaunched its revised Fast-track to Policy Funding scheme. Fast-Track to Policy Funding aims to deliver rapid-turn-around evidence reviews to address urgent and emerging policy questions. Since its launch, six projects have commenced with additional proposals currently under consideration.

The importance of documenting and recording the outputs of KB 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. In the Department of Children, after the event took place, an article was prepared and published on the department's internal staff website which included links to all of the presentations from the day. This was particularly useful for staff who were unable to attend the event but who are working in an area relating to youth wellbeing. Outputs from the event were also published on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) and included a full report of the day, the presentations, a graphic record of the day and the background paper for the event. Publication of these resources, both internally and publicly available, is helpful for other researchers and policy makers who are new to the area of youth wellbeing.

The importance of documenting and recording the outputs of knowledge brokerage events like this has become increasingly apparent following staff turnover in both the research support function and policy areas of the department. It would be useful to think about the

possibility of establishing a central KB 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.

In planning future events and making the valuable approaches identified above sustainable, it will be important that this work is seen as a core tool for both policymakers and researchers and an integral part of their ongoing approach to their work.

Section 5 – Lessons Learned and Emerging Suggested Approaches for Future Practice

In view of the above, it is clear that well organised Knowledge Brokerage events can contribute substantially to the emerging evidence for policy infrastructure. However, it is equally clear that to operate effectively, they need to be carefully planned and resourced. While there is no single way to organise such events, significant reflection needs to be put into their planning. It is quite likely that as the research for policy interface is advanced, the nature of these brokerage events may develop. This could particularly be the case if brokerage systems emerge along the lines of systems that have been established in other countries.

It is suggested that that the most important issue to consider by a state body in seeking to organise a brokerage event is how it fits into the state body's own strategy to advance research for policy. All Government Departments are currently seeking to develop on their existing approach in the context of national and international policy. A range of tools exists to support this work of which Knowledge Brokerage is an important one. However, brokerage events need to be organised in a way that is clearly part of this developing strategic thinking in the longer term.

These events also have the potential to really help to advance the research for policy agenda in the short-term exploration of issues and in the long-term development of networks of connection. They also can play a role in supporting the Futures and Scenario Planning work referenced in the OECD report.

It is really important that reflection and planning is undertaken for any such event. It is suggested that this should involve the state body involved and an organisation which can convene a broad range of academics (such as the IUA or an individual university). There is a real need to recognise the need to invest the time and resources in planning for the event, for running it and for managing the aftermath of it and planning for its impact.

Importantly, it should provide the opportunity for important conversations – both internal and external – including at Management Board level. Detailed dialogue is needed within the bodies involved in organising the events. An example of this is within a Department where a research function may be recently established and there may policy function operating separately.

There needs to be a shared understanding of what is the aims and purposes of the event both collectively and for the groups to be involved. These might be both short term and long term and may relate both to a specific policy under development and to the long run development of a research for policy ecosystem.

Thought needs to be given to all of the aspects of organization:

- How the day is run
- Preparatory material in advance – if possible, have a number of succinct pieces circulated at least a week in advance. This potentially requires a lot of engagement to develop and this engagement, whether internally or externally, could be viewed as one of the benefits of this approach.
- Who should chair the overall event and any breakout groups – the events that are examined in this paper all involved people in such roles with extensive knowledge and experience and the interface between research and policy.
- Having a report on the event, how is to be drafted and how any feedback is taken from any breakout groups
- Who should speak at a plenary session – keep it short and high level. At the same time, senior input at this stage indicates the importance of the endeavour and the issues involved and can really help place the event in context
- Who should give the initial inputs at a breakout group – balancing perspectives of academics and policy-makers, and making sure that they are clear on what is intended
- Who should be invited to participate – is it just academics and policy-makers or more broad
- How to get the right people to attend – this requires a lot of work and partnership with an academic body can really assist here
- How feedback afterwards will be sought – something short and meaningful
- How follow-up on the event will be communicated.

It is very helpful if the event is part of a general planned approach or process and that this is made clear.

All attendees need to feel that there is a potential to benefit from attending – this can be from immediate potential impact on policy or from the widening of networks

Finally, In the wider context, Sean Ó Foghlú and Mark Boyle published a paper in February 2024 on how universities can organise themselves to unlock research for policy¹⁰. The paper gives examples of intermediaries operating across universities and linking across all of Government. There are particular examples in sectors working with a range of stakeholders. This is a role that Government itself might be the one to seek to establish or to have the arrangements in place led by a Government Department with responsibility for the area.

¹⁰ <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/18289/>

Appendix 1

Delivering Environmental Knowledge Effectively to the Policy-making Process, organised by the Environmental Protection Agency

Preparation

The EPA put a lot of thought into the mix of expert presenters. The EPA let a wide range of stakeholders and policy-makers that it works with know about the event and invited them to attend. There was also a public advertisement of the event. While the agenda was circulated in advance, with the aim and purpose clearly stated, there were not any further papers circulated in advance of the event.

Aim and purpose

The event was positioned as part of the continuing role of the EPA in encouraging and supporting research on issues of relevance to its role and in providing science and data to support evidence-informed decision making. It was also organised, in part, in response to the 2019 OECD review of EPA which indicated that there may be opportunities for the EPA to engage more proactively in policy development and evaluation, leveraging its expertise and ensuring its evidence and research is policy relevant.

The EPA had a number of objectives in mind as follows:

- Sharing experiences and practices on producing evidence-based knowledge that can support policy creation and implementation.
- Bring together policy and practice experts - from the EU Commission, EEA and nationally - from whom it can learn how to strengthen and connect science and environmental policy.
- Connecting national government, implementation agencies and academia involved in the environment and climate policy areas.

The EPA also had a clear purpose statement:

Environmental and climate policy requires sound science and robust evidence. A key requirement of Ireland's research and innovation strategy, Impact 2030, is to strengthen the research-policy interface to address complex climate, environment and sustainability challenges using a whole-of-systems approach. EPA's new Strategic Plan 2022-2026 commits to supporting the policy domain through leveraging its expertise, evidence and research as well as delivering timely and targeted data and information to meet our stakeholders' needs. The use of science and expertise in policymaking has to be advocated in the face of populist opposition

to experts. Moreover, new ways of communicating science to the public and engaging with their concerns will need to be developed.

Discussions today will support the implementation of key environmental policy. This includes the Climate Action and Biodiversity plans, the Circular Economy strategy, and ongoing national policy development relating to air, water, chemicals, radiation and noise. We need to move our knowledge contribution from a 'know what' mindset to one more aligned to a synoptic and actionable 'know how' one.

The aim and purpose were clearly articulated in the materials in advance of the event and are included in the report on the event. They are very clear on the intention to build momentum towards enhanced input from research into policy.

How the event was organised and conducted

The event was organised in a relatively traditional way, with thematic inputs in a number of sessions with a number of speakers at each session, followed by opportunity for questions and answers and general discussion with the attendees. There were not any breakout groups. There were extensive opportunities for networking with breaks throughout the day.

The sessions were planned so that there was a flow from national and international policy context into examples set out by researchers whose work had impacted on policy.

Of particular note was the bringing together of the strands of discussion in a closing remarks by Eimear Cotter, Director, Evidence and Assessment, EPA.

Also of relevance was the plan to draft and publish a report on the event and for Mary Doyle to include her reflections in the report.

Outcome, outputs and follow-up

The report on the event set out that

During the course of the day a wide range of issues and topics were identified, bringing together multiple perspectives and ideas on where action might best be focused in the future. All agreed that this is a complex and long term agenda. There was acknowledgement that, at this point, posing a range of relevant questions was a useful input to the discussion. A number of important themes emerged strongly from the discussion which are considered below and which should help in laying the foundation for the next phase of work by the EPA.

The themes were grouped as follows:

- Taking a whole of system approach to the environmental research and evidence ecosystem
- Vision and Mission
- Information Provision
- Structural issues
- Relationship Management
- Capacity Building
- Funding Issues
- Improving Foresight and Scenario Planning Capacity

The issues identified in the themes were articulated in a very strategic and coherent way.

The report played a key role in feeding into the considerations of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, particularly in the inclusion of a Chapter on research in Ireland’s 2023 Climate Action Plan (and again in the 2024 plan) and in the development and publication by the Department of its Research and Innovation Strategy in 8 May 2024¹¹.

The findings of the workshop and its deliberations have informed and guided the work of the EPA in terms of strengthening the science-policy interface for both its funded research and also its own in-house work on data, science and evidence.

The event and the report fed into the implementation of the strategic approach of the EPA to research funding and to the nature of its research calls, including, for example, its Fast Track to Policy funding and, its Climate Fellowships Call. In November 2023, the EPA relaunched its revised Fast-Track to Policy Funding scheme. Fast-Track to Policy Funding aims to deliver rapid-turn-around evidence reviews to address urgent and emerging policy questions. Since its launch, six projects have commenced with additional proposals currently under consideration. Furthermore, in August 2024 EPA launched a Climate Fellowships Call 2024, with the objective of seconding up to four postdoctoral researchers from Higher Education Institutes to the EPA Climate Programme to undertake research on emissions statistics, climate adaptation, and climate science and policy.

The EPA is also actively building capacity to support the transfer and uptake of knowledge outputs from EPA-funded research by policy makers and implementing agencies through the EPA-IMPACT project. This project has been well received by policy actors and researchers as an innovative and highly valuable initiative. There are three main elements to the project:

1. undertaking policy-focused knowledge transfer activities,
2. evolving internal systems and processes, and

¹¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f7cc9-department-of-the-environment-climate-and-communications-research-and-innovation-strategy-to-2030/>

3. supporting capacity building and training on knowledge transfer for both the EPA Research Team and EPA-funded researchers.

The project has supported the EPA in developing a structured methodology to capture key knowledge outputs, to analyse and map the potential policy impact of these knowledge outputs and design and implement transfer pathways. As a result, the EPA has now emerged as a recognised leader in knowledge transfer among research funding organisations in Ireland.

As another example, the EPA led the delivery of Ireland’s first Climate Change Assessment which was published in early 2024. This provides a comprehensive, Ireland focused Assessment on our understanding of climate change and the options to respond to the challenges. The Assessment was authored by leading academics from across Ireland and produced in a co-creation process which deepened the connections and understandings between science and policy.

Finally, to support its own in-house work on climate statistics, data and evidence, the EPA established a new Climate Science & Policy Analysis Unit within the EPA Climate Programme to more effectively bridge the gap between climate statistics and evidence and policy needs.

Appendix 2

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

Preparation

This event was organised by the Department and the Irish Universities Association. Together they convened a planning group for the event, and they involved external experts in this group (including Mary Doyle and Seán Ó Foghlú).

There was significant reflection at the planning group on the aim and purpose of the event, the materials to be prepared in advance, who should attend and how the day would be organised.

In particular, there was an emphasis put on preparing a short background paper¹² which identified a number of themes about which policy-makers in the Department would include material on the issues that they identified as being needed. This, in itself, contributed to enhancing the dialogue internally between the policymaking function in the Department and the research function.

Emphasis was also placed on securing the right academic inputs and briefing all the speakers in advance. Care was taken on deciding who would be invited from policy-making and academic communities and there was also engagement with many of these in advance. Most of this detailed and time-consuming work was undertaken by the Department and the Irish Universities Association.

The three themes were selected by the Research and Evaluation Unit in the Department in advance of the event, following a series of engagements across the Department with policy colleagues working on a wide range of issues relevant to the lives of young people.

Invitations were issued to expert researchers from across the Irish higher education system, were identified by the IUA on the advice of professional staff within universities. Identification was based on a set of core criteria including recent, relevant published articles, and funding awarded on the specific thematic areas identified by department policy officials.

The Department sought to invite a range of policy makers that it worked with in Government Departments and agencies.

¹² <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/256702/e15b4eb6-7b55-40fa-8f3e-29ab0fc81830.pdf#page=null>

The reflections of the Chairs of the chairs of the thematic groups (Mary Doyle, Dr. Fergal Lynch and Seán Ó Foghlú) included in the Event report stated that

[The event] demonstrated that a short, well-prepared, carefully planned engagement can get to the heart of challenging policy issues, and bring together key actors who would not typically have the opportunity to exchange views in this way. The effectiveness of the event was greatly assisted by the detailed planning that went into organising it. This involved thinking on what themes to address and then drafting a short background paper to set up these themes for discussion. Furthermore, a lot of planning also went into sourcing academics and policymakers to take part, in particular the academics to set up the discussions in the three sessions.

. . . As is so often the case, the informal discussions before and after the event were especially useful in building connections and presenting opportunities for further engagement on specific topics.

Aim and purpose

The Background Paper for the event clearly set out that it would

bring policy makers and higher education researchers together to consider how we can align current research with policy priorities in order to enhance the lives of young people in Ireland today and in the future.

. . . These brokerage sessions will provide a space where policy makers and researchers can consider how academic research can address specific policy challenges relevant to the lives of young people in Ireland.

The objective of the brokerage sessions is to enhance understanding of current research, but also to inform and encourage future dialogue on new and emerging research agendas.

The report on the event summarised as follows:

In the background paper for the event we set out what we felt were the benefits of the event to both policy makers and higher education researchers.

For policy makers we proposed the event would give them the opportunity to:

- *access to high quality, and scientifically robust knowledge relevant to delivering on youth policy responsibilities;*
- *build their network of highly experienced and expert researchers from across Irish higher education, to inform their work;*

- *focus on the subject of Youth Affairs in a holistic way and learn about what other colleagues in DCEDIY, National Disability Authority (NDA) and Tusla are working on and where possible synergies may exist.*

For researchers, we proposed the event would give them the opportunity to: build their network of policy officials;

- *inform policy officials of their latest research findings;*
- *support policy officials to draft and implement impactful policy; to better inform the future direction of their own research based on dialogue and new understanding of gaps in evidence for public policy challenges, foresight needs etc.*

The report on the event also includes feedback from participants and they were positive about the aim and purpose for the event.

How the event on the day was organised and conducted

The event was organised with a number of speakers setting a national context at the start, followed by opportunity for questions and answers and general discussion with the attendees.

This was followed by three parallel brokerage sessions. The particular aim of these was to build awareness of current research evidence on youth wellbeing, and to inform and encourage future partnerships between researchers and policy makers on policy foresight, and new and emerging research agendas. The brokerage sessions were chaired by Mary Doyle, Dr Fergal Lynch and Seán Ó Foghlú. The sessions included a short input from a policy ‘challenger’, and responses from higher education researchers, who highlighted latest research empirical evidence, trends, policy options in relation to the specific challenge. These inputs were intended to stimulate debate and dialogue amongst all attendees in each brokerage session.

There was a closing plenary session allowing for feedback from the groups and some open discussion.

The reflections of the Chairs of the chairs of the thematic groups included in the Event report stated that:

Inevitably, there are things that could be done differently in future such events, including the balance of time between initial inputs and group-based discussions,

so as to maximise the opportunity for debate and discussion. This reflects much of the feedback from other participants. Future events could, for example, have a shorter context setting session at the opening, and allow time for (perhaps) a larger number of smaller groups with longer time to consider the research/ policy matters being discussed.

Outcome, outputs and follow-up

The report on the event includes reports on each of the brokerage sessions.

The reflections of the Chairs of the chairs of the thematic groups included in the Event report highlighted

- The event allowed a Government Department to present its priorities and key research
- questions in a collaborative setting, and for research experts in the area to highlight their work in response.
- The smaller group discussions were particularly valuable, enabling discussion of work underway and identification of areas where gaps exist.
- The informal discussions were especially useful in building connections and presenting
- opportunities for further engagement on specific topics.
- A clear lesson is that given the extent of policy issues that are shared across Government
- Departments and agencies, it is important to reflect this in the spread of invitations.
- Thought needs to be given on how to support researchers within and across the academic
- community in Ireland to come together to discuss and develop topics of common interest.
- In terms of discussion at the three groups, common themes emerging were the welcome interaction between participants, the valuable exchange of information and ideas, and how even a short discussion can help identify interesting perspectives and avenues for further research.
- The three sessions were very useful in synthesising many valuable messages and in highlighting gaps in information or research. They also put a welcome focus on the existing and potential sources of data and information available to guide both policy and research.

The reflections concluded that

Overall, there is a strong case for maintaining the momentum created by this first brokerage event, and to involve more researchers and policy officials in them. Events of this kind offer a unique approach to policy debate and collaboration and

have the potential to become a valuable mechanism for the future, if they can become established as a recognised means of policy discussion.

The impact of the knowledge brokerage event on Youth Wellbeing can be considered through different lenses. Immediate feedback from participants was sought and collated on the day of the event. The feedback from participants was very positive, with people noting the energy and enthusiasm generated. Almost all policy respondents (19 out of 20) said it provided a useful opportunity to build their network of experienced researchers. The same number said they found the event useful for informing their work on youth wellbeing policy. 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. Suggestions for improvements related to time management and the time allocated to particular sections. This indicates that care must be taken when planning such events to avoid trying to do too much at one event. Another significant benefit of the event included the opportunity to engage with researchers from a more diverse range of HEIs.

After the event took place an article was prepared and published on the Department's internal staff website which included links to all of the presentations from the day. This was particularly useful for staff who were unable to attend the event but who are working in an area relating to youth wellbeing. Outputs from the event were also published on gov.ie and included a full report of the day, the presentations, a graphic record of the day and the background paper for the event. Publication of these resources, both internally and publicly available, is helpful for other researchers and policy makers who are new to the area of youth wellbeing.

Longer term benefits for the research function within the Department include a better understanding of both the policy needs and the ability of the wider research community to meet those needs. Staff working in policy and service areas also have an improved understanding of the potential and limitations of research to inform and support their work.

A number of significant strategies, action plans and policy proposals were developed by the Department in the year following the event. This demonstrates the relevance of the knowledge brokerage event to the work of the department, influencing actions and informing priorities about future research requirements. These included:

- Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024-2028
- Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024-2028
- Action Plan for Youth Services
- Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People

In seeking feedback on the impact of the event and in analysing this, it is clear that the report is also currently informing the development of a cross-government Young Ireland Research Roadmap which the Department is leading on. Participating in cross-government knowledge brokerage events such as this one (other similar events include a disability-themed event hosted by IGEES in 2024) has been helpful for officials in the Department to develop relationships with policy-makers in other Departments, and to generate a shared understanding of issues.

The importance of documenting and recording the outputs of knowledge brokerage events like this has become increasingly apparent following staff turnover in both the research support function and policy areas of the Department. A longer run strategic approach to planning engagements such as this is under consideration. In such future events, the possibility of including those with lived experience is to be considered, reflecting the value placed by the department on participative research.

Learnings from the event have informed the planning and implementation of other knowledge brokerage events in the department, including regular research clubs which bring together policy makers and researchers for short one or two hour sessions; half-day events' and full day conferences such as the annual Growing Up in Ireland conference. Staff in the Department are more confident engaging with researchers and there is a high demand for research, either commissioning new projects or engaging with existing work, from policy makers. The Department has also been requested to collaborate on a number of research projects with other Government Departments and research teams in the area of youth wellbeing.

Appendix 3

Building Bridges for Evidence Informed Public Policy: Young people and substance use, organised by Irish Universities Association and the Health Research Board

Preparation

This event was organised by the Health Research Board and the Irish Universities Association. Together they convened a planning group for the event and they involved external experts in this group (including Mary Doyle and Seán Ó Foghlú).

There was significant reflection at the planning group on the aim and purpose of the event, the materials to be prepared in advance, who should attend and how the day would be organised.

In particular, there was an emphasis put on detailed agenda which identified a number of themes (identified after detailed consideration within the HRB) about which policy-makers in the Department would include material on the issues that they identified as being needed. Emphasis was also placed on securing the right academic inputs and briefing all the speakers in advance. Care was taken on deciding who would be invited from policy-making and academic communities and there was also engagement with many of these in advance. Most of this detailed and time-consuming work was undertaken by the HRB and the Irish Universities Association.

Invitations were issued to expert researchers from across the Irish higher education system, were identified by the HRB and IUA.

Aim and purpose

The meeting was designed to encourage closer relationships and to build trust and an understanding of existing and future policy needs on young people and substance use. These connections will also help to align new and existing evidence about young people and substance use with Government policy priorities.

The report on the event identifies that:

Civil service and academic researchers can work well together to inform policy. Ireland needs to provide knowledge-exchange infrastructure and opportunities for researchers and civil servants to build trusted relationships and understanding.

The report on the event also includes feedback from participants and they were positive about the aim and purpose for the event.

How the event on the day was organised and conducted

The event was organised in a very similar way to the youth policy event with a number of speakers setting a national context at the start, followed by opportunity for questions and answers and general discussion with the attendees. Following learning from the youth policy event, the duration of the opening plenary was quite short.

This was followed by three parallel brokerage sessions. The particular aim of these was to build awareness of current research evidence on young people and substance abuse, and to inform and encourage future partnerships between researchers and policy makers on policy foresight, and new and emerging research agendas. The brokerage sessions were chaired by Mary Doyle, Dr Fergal Lynch and Dr Orlaigh Quinn. The sessions included a short input from two policy ‘challengers’, and responses from higher education researchers, who highlighted latest research empirical evidence, trends, policy options in relation to the specific challenge. These inputs were intended to stimulate debate and dialogue amongst all attendees in each brokerage session.

There was a closing plenary session allowing for feedback from the groups and some open discussion.

The report on the event also includes feedback from participants and 90% of respondents found that the format of the event worked.

Outcome, outputs and follow-up

The report on the event includes detailed reports on each of the brokerage sessions summarising the inputs and the discussions.

The report also includes a number of emerging themes from the event as well as recommendations.

The emerging themes identified were as follows:

- There is a need for a knowledge-exchange infrastructure and opportunities for researchers and civil servants to build trusted relationships and understanding.
- Stakeholders need to be involved and engaged from the earliest stages of policy development and through implementation.
- Substance use among young people is complex and off-the-peg solutions will not likely work.
- Access to timely data is crucial for evidence and there is a need to make data more accessible and useful (e.g. linked) to better inform public policy decision-making.
- There is a need to evaluate public policy implementation and ensure that we revise and amend policies based on the evidence of what is and is not working.

- Research-funding cycles and access to programmatic funding need to be made available.
- University research infrastructure needs to be reimagined to deliver on the ambitions of research policy outlined in Impact 2030.

The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Build a trusted network
- Enable lived experience to inform evidence
- Improve access to datasets
- Create long-term dedicated funding at institutional level

The event fed into the thinking behind a new evidence for policy research programme which was launched by the Health Research Board in January 2024.

A number of themes that emerged from *Building bridges for evidence-informed public policy: young people and substance use* were considered in discussions in the HRB and between the HRB and the Department of Health. The report on the knowledge brokering event was an important part of these discussions as it presented the interactions between policy-makers and researchers in a clear and well formatted way, making it easier to highlight the topics that were of particular interest to participants and those that were most aligned with the strategic objectives of the HRB.

The HRB identified two particular areas in which practical support could strengthen existing developments and demonstrate the event's impact. The two areas identified were building prevention practice in Ireland and developing research capacity in Irish academic institutions and civil society. The Department of Health has clearly indicated its support for initiatives in these areas, and the HRB has indicated that two significant new projects are to begin in 2025.

Participants in the Building Bridges event heard that, while environmental measures may have led to reductions in alcohol consumption and other benefits, progress on implementation of interventions that target individuals directly has been more mixed.

In response to discussions during Building Bridges, HRB decided to organise a series of events focused on prevention themes. These will lead up to the European Society of Prevention Research's conference in Dublin in 2026, which the HRB is organising. The Department of Health was similarly well disposed towards supporting prevention projects, and have agreed to fund a review of prevention services in Ireland.

The HRB's first prevention event was held in September 2024, explicitly presented as a follow up to Building Bridges and revisiting themes that emerged during that event. The event was targeted more at practitioners and drugs and alcohol taskforces than policy

makers and researchers, but nevertheless a number of staff from Government Departments who had participated in the November 2023 event also attended.

The event demonstrated the interest in prevention at senior policy level and the capacity of the Irish research community to produce evidence to inform prevention policy and practice. Building Bridges made it easier for the HRB and prevention experts to make the case for a review of prevention in Ireland and to champion prevention with a greater degree of confidence and expectation of support from policy.

A number of participants in Building Brides identified the for need for greater support for networking opportunities for policy makers and researchers involved in young people’s substance use work. Prior to the event, the lead for drugs and alcohol research in HRB had discussed possible impacts from the event with colleagues in the HRB’s Research Strategy and Funding division. These discussions concluded that a sustainable cross-institutional research network on drugs and drug addiction research in Ireland, delivered through a competitive grant award, would be a demonstrable impact from an event such as this and was a feasible ambition.

The HRB has developed a proposal to establish a research network for drugs and drug addiction from relevant health and social perspectives in Ireland, and in consultation with the European Union Drugs Agency. It is envisaged that the research network will comprise several research teams, representing different institutions and research topics. The aim is that the network will support a cooperative approach to increasing policy-relevant knowledge in this field, in a way that an individual team could not do on its own. The ERB is engaging with the Department of Health on funding for this.

In September 2024, the Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy announced that €150,000 of additional funding specifically for a research network on drugs addiction.

Appendix 4

Roundtable on Addressing On-Street Drug Dealing and Drug Use in Dublin’s North East Inner City, organised by the North East Inner City Initiative with Maynooth University and the Department of an Taoiseach

Preparation

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 Initiative (NEIC).

Around the same time, there was an approach to Government Departments from Maynooth University (MU) about the possibility of hosting a brokerage session on community safety and related issues involving an expert group of MU academics/researchers and policy-makers. 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 context of the Government policy to broaden and deepen linkages between academics and policy-makers.

Arising from these developments, the NEIC Initiative considered the possibility of an engagement involving a number of key stakeholders in a roundtable discussion, including policy-makers, those involved in the delivery of public services, the local community and academics/researchers from Maynooth University.

A planning group was established involving MU (Mark Boyle and Seán Ó Foghlú who were the joint chairs for the event) and officials involved with the NEIC Initiative in the Department of the Taoiseach. There was significant planning and preparation undertaken by this group:

- Reflection and decision on how the roundtable would be organised
- Identification of the key themes
- Work within MU to bring together a wide range of academics from a range of disciplines
- Engagement with representatives of the community sector
- A number of papers were prepared and distributed to reflect a range of different and useful perspectives: North Inner City Community Coalition Input; a General briefing note from MU, 3 Thematic discussion papers from MU and; 3 background papers on related areas of Government policy.

Almost 50 people were in attendance including those from the community, MU academics and 2 other academics, as well as policy-makers and Government Departments and agencies responsible for policy implementation as part of the NEIC process.

This Roundtable was different from the 3 other examples in that there was involvement of those with a community perspective in it.

Aim and purpose

The aim of the Roundtable discussion was to have a constructive and inclusive discussion on the topic. There were three groups of participants at the meeting reflecting policy-maker/implementation, community and academic/researchers' perspectives. The aim of the Roundtable was to build upon, augment, supplement and further catalyse the already existing work being done by the NEIC Initiative in this space. The NEIC Initiative had already piloted, for example, innovative intersectoral dialogue fora and innovative community partnership models to support its development of new models of service supports in the areas of community policing, community safety and tackling drug dealing and drug use. The aim of the Roundtable was to create further value by convening a unique collection of communities (academic, public policy, community) in a unique way (a short intense focus on a particular priority).

Importantly, the Roundtable was part of the ongoing strategic work of the NEIC Initiative which was undertaking a review of its strategic objectives and drug use and dealing was one of the important topics under consideration. The Roundtable provided an opportunity to bring multiple stakeholders together to explore and examine this persistent phenomenon in the NEIC. It sought to build on important work already undertaken at a national level and within the NEIC and to help to increase understanding of the many factors underlying the problem of on-street drug-dealing and drug use in the area. This work was also to take account of the recent reconstitution of the North Inner City Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

The Chairs for the event reflected in the report that

It was a happy coincidence that the need for a new element to the development of the NEIC strategy coincided with the openness of academics/researchers in Maynooth University to be involved.

They further noted:

There was significant preparation from Maynooth University where the two co-chairs engaged widely to bring together sixteen academics from a wide range of disciplines, each of whom had a particular expertise in some aspects of the range of issues involved and many of whom had direct experience of working with the NEIC community. The academics/researchers broke into three groups – one for each theme – and drafted detailed papers on a combined basis. Apart from the planning sessions that Maynooth academic/researchers collectively took part in, a convener organised the sub-groups of academics/researchers and ensured that the material was drafted. A common and shared analysis emerged from this work which had not been fully anticipated among a group who may not all have known each other well. In addition to the papers prepared for each of the three themes, Mark Boyle also

drafted a general briefing paper (building on the material prepared by Maynooth University academics) which helpfully brought together themes arising from the other papers.

The North Inner City Community Coalition provided a very helpful paper to inform the event. It was particularly useful that this was available to the researchers/academics in developing their papers. The Coalition also provided some further material and links which informed the preparation and organised a premeeting of those attending from the community to assist in planning for their engagement at the Roundtable.

The report on the event also includes feedback from participants

How the event on the day was organised and conducted

The event was organised in a very similar way to the youth policy and drugs events with a number of speakers setting a context at the start. These inputs were followed by a presentation by Trevor Vaugh of Maynooth University who is on secondment to the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. His presentation was titled “Bridging Perspective: Creativity in Collaboration” and sought to encourage a creative and open approach from all participants.

Following the plenary session, all attendees were assigned to one of three breakout groups, each of which discussed key issues and challenges for over 90 minutes. The breakout groups were chaired by Mary Doyle, Dr Fergal Lynch and Dr Seán Redmond.

There was a closing plenary session allowing for feedback from the groups and some open discussion.

The Chairs for the event reflected in the report that

The NEIC Initiative and the co-chairpersons from Maynooth University worked together on the design of the agenda. Particular care was taken to ensure that the first plenary session set out the overall aims of the Roundtable while not being too lengthy or dense. There was also a deliberate attempt to get everyone to engage openly at the breakout groups by having Trevor Vaugh’s input. All these elements seem to work quite well. There can often be too many overlapping introductory speakers, often repeating each other, and this was avoided. It was really important to have the inputs from Liz Canavan [Assistant Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach] and Jim Gavin [Chairperson of the Programme Implementation Board

of the NEIC Initiative] given their key roles. We consider that Trevor's input did help set people up to be open in their engagement and set a really good tone.

In designing the breakout sessions, the NEIC Initiative and the co-chairpersons from Maynooth University worked together to identify the three themes and these were not contested. Each of the groups coming to the Roundtable undertook a lot of preparation. It might have been helpful if the papers could have been circulated a few days earlier.

Outcome, outputs and follow-up

The report on the event includes detailed reports on the Roundtable as well as on each of the brokerage sessions summarising the inputs and the discussions. It also includes a summary of the feedback from attendees and some reflections and recommendations from the chairs. All of the papers circulated in advance are also included in the report.

Interestingly, as well as documenting the discussions on the day, in the report the 2 Chairs also reflect on the themes for the day and make policy suggestions for further consideration within the NEIC process.

We would see a number of high level themes coming through the papers prepared for the Roundtable and the dialogue at the Roundtable:

- *It is not contested that numerous factors, at an individual, family, community and wider societal level, interact in often complex ways to give rise to behaviours associated with drug use and abuse*
- *To meaningfully address the issues of drug use and drug dealing there is a need to acknowledge of the root causes of these behaviours and the strongly intergenerational experience of poverty, structural inequality and exclusion of the communities living in the NEIC, as well as the prevalence of similar behaviours and harms, albeit conducted in a more private way, in richer communities.*
- *There have been extensive new approaches to collaboration and partnership as well as new initiatives in the area as a result of the NEIC process and the community has been involved in these in a new way*
- *There is a need to develop further the trust in place between those living in the community and those overseeing and delivering services in the community.*
- *There is a need to protect and positively enhance the reputational capital of those in the community by providing positive narratives*
- *There is a need to develop further the collaboration evident in the NEIC initiative and at the Roundtable (involving community groups, policy-makers, service-deliverers and the academic community)*

- *There is a need to build further on the collaborative work underway in the NEIC initiative in the design and implementation of services for the community and there is potential to involve the academic community in this*
- *There is a need to develop further the coherence, co-ordination and effectiveness of the services being delivered in the community*
- *There is a need to further support and incentivise people in the community and people working in the community in taking leadership roles and leveraging social networks in advancing the development of the community*

It is also necessary in thinking about future ‘north star’ situations (i.e., how the NEIC wants it to be) to recognise that there are existential threats and pervasive fear faced by community members in the day-to-day. Some community leaders, with direct or indirect experience of previous campaigns to engage directly with drug dealing are involved in engaging the behaviour on the streets, albeit subtly. Unless the here and now issues are dealt with, then fear and coercive influences may impede, or de-rail, attempts at progressive improvement. There is potential to seek to leverage those with local knowledge more in advancing NEIC initiatives.

A key unplanned outcome from the Roundtable was the openness and desire from many of the Maynooth University researchers/academics to be involved in further advancing on ideas and issues that emerged and to assisting in the work of the NEIC Initiative generally.

The report has been considered as part of the strategic development process of the NEIC and fed into the publication on 27 September 2024 of the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027 of the Programme Implementation Board (PIB) for the North East Inner City Initiative¹³. This is a very concrete realisation of the impact 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.

¹³ <https://www.neic.ie/assets/f/124946/x/681ffb85f4/neic-strategic-plan-2024-2027-final-doc-18-09-24.pdf>