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# Knowledge Exchange with Local Authorities

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## Key points

- Enhancing relations between university researchers and local authorities
- Informing local government policy and delivery structures
- Developing local partnerships between LAs and universities for the public good

## Knowledge Exchange in Scotland

Knowledge exchange (KE) involves the multiple flows of ideas, skills and people between the research environment and the wider policy community, including local authorities (LAs). Whilst the act of sharing knowledge with someone else may occur quite reflexively, the impetus behind KE is to structure these dialogues by connecting different groups of people to foster learning through the sharing of knowledge and to stimulate joint approaches to common problems, leading to innovation.

Knowledge exchange has become a more prominent feature of Scottish government policies in recent years. This has reflected a desire to solicit high-quality research to inform and improve the development of policy and practice. Knowledge exchange in this sense has been motivated by social, economic and cultural objectives, whereby researchers are encouraged to communicate and apply their knowledge to address key issues facing society, and both 'sides' can come to value each other's expertise.

Despite the oft-perceived 'commercial' orientation of knowledge transfer, there is great potential to connect expert knowledge produced by higher education institutions (HEIs) to broader societal concerns. Different levels of government increasingly look to use university research to inform and shape policy in areas such as social inclusion, health and the environment. This is especially important to local authorities, which may have limited research capacity. Universities are one key resource for providing the specialist knowledge and expertise necessary to tackle major public concerns.

The development of new practices of KE between HEIs and local authorities (LAs) requires consideration of the ways in which knowledge produced by university research can inform the needs of LAs; how research can be improved through collaboration with LAs and be effectively used throughout the policy process, and ways of incentivising KE to all those involved. This bulletin aims to help facilitate this debate.

## Knowledge and Local Authorities

In delivering a range of key public services, local authorities hold a unique position in Scotland. As well as delivering locally, Scottish local authorities contribute to the achievement of the Scottish Government's strategic objectives and the successful delivery of the national outcomes.

The demands on local authorities are great. At the top of nearly every public survey ranking the importance of policy issues are concerns regarding the provision of better schools, efficient, reliable local transport systems, well-maintained local road networks, and safer, cleaner streets. These issues fall under the remit of local authorities, which are responsible for the delivery of effective and efficient services for the communities they serve. Councils are crucial to the public service delivery agenda. But they also do a lot more than

that. Councils have developed a stronger role in formulating policy as well as implementing it, becoming important vehicles for setting local priorities. With these new responsibilities, the pressures on local councils have increased rapidly.

One of the key needs of local councils is for access to high-quality, timely research in order to underpin these new policy and delivery roles. Knowledge has become a key resource for councils, but it is also one of scarce supply due to limited capacity. To that end, knowledge exchange is an important asset in the formulation and delivery of public services. Not only is it vital to strengthen the evidence base for the improvement of councils' operational and management practices, KE can also enhance the analytical skills, workforce development and policy-making capacity of councils.

**Examples of KE with Local Authorities**

- Research Institutes and Centres that act as focal points for collective expertise
- Policy Forums that provide a networking function
- Consultancy work for local authorities
- Knowledge Brokers/ Individual Boundary Spanning Posts
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Outreach activities (including policy and service delivery-oriented lectures, workshops, and other engagement activities)
- Joint research collaborations and partnerships in specific local policy and practice areas
- Training Programmes for local authority staff
- Policy Briefings
- User-friendly journals and newsletters
- Media Engagement
- Work placements and secondments for LA staff in HEIs
- Researcher, student and fellowship placements in LA organisations
- Training seminars for academics on how to connect research to local policy and practice, i.e. on media relations, writing briefing papers and engaging with research users

**What do Local Authorities do?**

Local government in Scotland is organised through 32 unitary councils that vary in size, ranging from the City of Glasgow (600,000 inhabitants) to Orkney Council (20,000). The power invested in local authorities is administered by councillors, who are elected every four years by registered voters in the council area.

Scottish local authorities are responsible for the delivery of vital public services in a wide range of areas, including education, housing, social work, public transport, local planning, roads and road safety, building control, urban development, libraries, and leisure & recreation. Local authorities also provide visible local democracy and democratic accountability for the decisions made in relation to these services.

Local authorities in Scotland are represented through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). COSLA seeks to promote the LA role at the devolved, state and EU levels, and to ensure that service delivery remains within a framework of local governance. It also engages in constructive partnerships with others to deliver shared agendas.

In November 2007, a Concordat was signed between the Scottish Government and COSLA, which set out the terms of a new relationship based on mutual respect and partnership. The Scottish Government and local government have since been working together to develop public policies in areas of key interest to local governments. These include policy on early years/early intervention, provision of support for kinship carers and young carers, and ensuring that access to a teacher for every pre-school child extends to children in placement with partner providers.

Local authorities have a key contribution to make to policy as a result of their local democratic accountability, and their ability to integrate the work of different agencies at a local level. LAs have also developed key responsibilities in policy development and practice in areas such as health and social inequalities, employment and community safety. This enhanced role of LAs would greatly benefit from working with university researchers, who provide a quick and effective conduit to international research and knowledge, which could help strengthen the evidence base of LA policies.

**Research and LAs in the UK**

Local authorities in the UK have been brought together into a closer partnership with UK research councils through the LARCI—Local Authority Research Council Initiative. LARCI acts as a knowledge broker between LAs and researchers, providing a response to the growing demand on LAs for evidence-based policy-making. By facilitating knowledge exchange at a strategic and operational level, LARCI encourages closer working relations between LA staff and academic researchers, leading to better informed research, policy and practice.

LARCI promotes access to useful research, funding sources and collaborative opportunities through a website, a quarterly e-newsletter and other publications, a seminar series, an enquiry service and a tailored brokering service bringing academics and practitioners together for collaboration in areas of mutual interest. In 2007, LARCI signed a Concordat with its members, setting out a stronger strategic relationship between LAs and Research Councils to:

*“Co-produce new knowledge: local government will support and influence the strategic research agenda, and through active knowledge exchange, will ensure practical and widely-felt benefits for society” (LARCI Concordat 2007)*

LARCI, the Economic and Social Research Council and the SFC, working with local authority partners, have also identified several objectives to enhance Scottish LA engagement with universities:

- to respond to the knowledge needs of local authorities in Scotland through a range of KE mechanisms;
- to promote the exchange of knowledge between researchers in Scottish universities and LA staff;
- to provide LAs with research-informed evidence to develop and review operational and management practices and service delivery;
- and to engage in KE to contribute towards the enhancement of local authority analytical skills and capacity.

## Why engage in Knowledge Exchange?

There is a wide range of benefits to engaging in knowledge exchange partnerships and networks with Local Authorities.

### The Academic Perspective

#### Improving Research

By canvassing input from local authorities on the current research challenges, knowledge exchange can help to improve the quality of your research. As well as gaining practical insights from policy practitioners into your chosen methods and analysis, knowledge exchange can ensure that your research maximises its practical applications and make a positive impact on local government policy and practice. KE activities may in themselves lead to joint research projects with LAs, allowing you to gain valuable skills and experience. Joint collaborations may also create new funding avenues and lead to other career opportunities. As many research funders argue, 'however good your research, there is little point doing it if nobody knows about it' (ESRC 2007). By engaging in KE activities, not only will you improve your research and raise public awareness of your findings, you will also increase the likelihood of influencing the policy agenda.

#### University Benefits

By engaging in knowledge exchange activities you will be part of a continuing tradition that seeks to open up the benefits of university research for the interest of the local community. You will also enhance the status and reputation of your university, and your research, in the eyes of local citizens as well from the perspective of research funding councils. This may also have a positive effect on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which should accord more importance to KE activities. This, in turn, leads to more funding, increasing student figures and improved quality of research.

#### The Public Interest

University staff often feel a public responsibility to disseminate their research more widely to benefit the community in which they live and work. Researchers may identify with the public interest elements of knowledge exchange, and seek to disseminate their knowledge to improve local government policy and practice in areas such as schooling, social policy, health care and housing needs.

### The Council Perspective

#### Accessing Resources

Knowledge exchange with university researchers offers local authorities access to the latest cutting-edge research that is relevant to local policy and practice. Owing to time constraints, pressures of implementation and delivery, and limited research resources, the in-house development of long-term research is often beyond the capacity of local authorities, whose main priorities are the delivery of high-quality public services. Engagement with individual researchers, university teams and research councils allows local authorities to ensure that their policy and practice is backed up by a strong evidence base from the country's leading researchers. It can also enhance the analytical skills and workforce performance of local authorities.

#### Influencing Research

Knowledge exchange with university researchers provides multiple channels for local governments to input into the research process. This may range from the provision of feedback on research project proposals and applications in the initial stages of the research process, to close collaboration with academics when collecting data, testing models and analysing information and statistics, to finally giving feedback on the outputs of research projects at dissemination events such as workshops and conferences. By engaging with academics throughout the research process, local authorities can ensure that research is relevant to them as users.

#### Expanding Partnerships

Knowledge exchange enables Scottish local authorities to develop constructive relationships with universities and colleges, and to utilise these relationships to promote a vibrant local government agenda with innovative evidence-based policies. Local government and university researchers have much to gain from each other through research partnerships and the sharing of best practices. The act of exchanging knowledge, skills and people furthermore enhances the insights, self-awareness and outward-looking nature of organisations.

#### Incentives for Researchers:

- Influence policy agendas and increase the prospects of your research being applied
- Gain valuable skills, experience, insights & contacts with users
- Rewards from research councils, which strongly encourage 'user engagement' in grant applications
- Increase opportunities for further research funding and career opportunities
- Use your research to benefit the local community in which you live and work

#### Incentives for Local Authorities

- Access innovative ideas and cutting-edge research
- Enhance insights into research and problem-solving through joint collaborations
- Gain access to objective evidence to inform policy and services delivery
- Develop constructive relationships with researchers
- Influence the research process to ensure that research is relevant to local authorities as users

**Knowledge Exchange Project Themes**

- Assessing customer needs/demands and how these are balanced with resources
- Outcomes and impact assessment
- Strengthening democratic processes
- Improving and measuring productivity
- Effective partnership working
- Streamlining accountability

*“the two-way flow of people, knowledge and ideas between universities and local authorities and their partners”*

**Knowledge Exchange Project Conditions**

- Applications will be submitted by a single Scottish HEI either as a stand alone application or as a lead institution in a consortium with other HEIs and LA partners
- Each project must carry out the activities required of the call
- For each project the Funding Partners will provide a grant to a maximum of £80k. There must be a cash contribution of at least £20k for each project from the local authority partner(s)
- Successful applicants are required to cooperate with other successful applicants and with the organisation contracted to undertake the process and impact review

**Engaging with Scottish LAs Scheme**

In October 2008, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI) launched a scheme called ‘Engaging with Scottish Local Authorities’.

This is an open competition to commission five projects, lasting up to 12 months with up to £100,000, to enhance KE between Scottish-based academic researchers and local authorities. The closing date for the competition is **29 January 2009**. Applications should be sent to the ESRC: [Lesley.Lilley@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:Lesley.Lilley@esrc.ac.uk). Successful awards will commence in April 2009.

This call consists of two parts:

1. A competition to identify projects which will enhance KE between Scottish universities and local authorities, focussing on key local government priorities. One of the successful projects will also be funded to undertake a coordination role across all of the successful projects.
2. A process and impact review conducted independently of projects funded within the scheme, which would provide learning about best practice for future activities.

For an application form and guidelines, contact [knowledgetransfer@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:knowledgetransfer@esrc.ac.uk).

**1. KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE PROJECTS**

Proposals are sought for KE projects which are focussed on at least one of the six priority themes for local authorities (see upper left-hand box). It is important that the project theme(s) address an area of relevance to local authorities, e.g., demographic change, climate change, local economic development and regeneration and urban and rural situations. Projects should deliver a package of KE activities:

- **Synthesis of existing research:** a scoping study of existing research on the chosen theme with implications for local government in Scotland.
- **Impact generating activity:** projects which promote the impact of new or existing research by engaging with at least one Scottish local authority.
- **Placements:** funding to permit academics to work on projects within an LA setting and to enable individuals working in Scottish LAs to do likewise.
- **Seminars:** funding for 2+ seminars or workshops aimed at encouraging interaction between researchers and users of research within the LA sector.
- **Building Capacity:** activity that improves the capability of staff within Scottish LAs by developing skills and experience not easily acquired at work.

The call is open to researchers based in Scottish HEIs. Applications should be made by one lead institution, although multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional and multi-LA authority proposals are welcome.

**2. PROCESS AND IMPACT REVIEW**

Proposals are sought for a review of how KE projects have enhanced engagement between universities and local authorities in Scotland, their outputs and the short-term impact of those projects.

This contract is open to HEIs in the United Kingdom which are not eligible to apply for an award under the first part of this call, HEIs in Scotland that do not apply to the first part of this call and private sector organisations or consultancies. Up to £30k has been allocated for this project.

The successful contractor is expected to engage regularly with the partners in each project to monitor and review the processes of engagement, the outputs and to assess the significance and effect of the impacts. Applicants should state their previous experience in conducting evaluations and impact assessments, their methodology for this project, processes for interacting with funded projects, and metrics and outputs.

**3. COORDINATING ROLE**

An additional £10k is available for one of the successful applicants to coordinate projects within the scheme. This role will require liaison with all the funded projects, the Funding Partners, the media and the Steering Group for the scheme. Interested applicants are invited to bid for this role by including within their project proposal a section which sets out how the coordination function would be carried out.

## SPiRiT Pilot Projects

In June 2008, seven Scottish universities were awarded a share of more than £500,000 by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to contribute to informed public policy making.

The funding, which comes from the Council's new strategic priority investment in research and innovation translation (SPiRiT) scheme, has been allocated to projects covering health, human rights, the environment and civil justice. The aim of the SPiRiT scheme is to stimulate frequent, two-way flows of ideas between universities and people involved in policy-making.

The SPiRiT scheme was announced during the first of a series of three conferences in October 2007 organised by the SFC to promote universities' knowledge exchange into public policy initiatives in Scotland. The projects, which were assessed by an international review panel, have been selected as year-long pilots that will be continuously evaluated.

### BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE

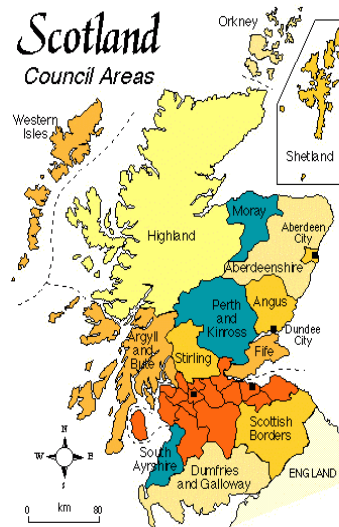
BSL: UPTAKE (British Sign Language: University Partnership Towards Accessible Knowledge Exchange) is a project run by Heriot-Watt University. With a focus on linguistic access for the Deaf Community using British Sign Language (BSL), this project proposes to radically intensify knowledge exchange in the interests of advancing public policy development on Deaf issues. Specifically, the project will appoint a bilingual (BSL and English) Knowledge Exchange Associate who will lead a range of activities including; developing a blog, seminars and workshops and a monthly newsletter.

### ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

This proposal focuses on the direct needs of policy officers by investigating and establishing a knowledge transfer mechanism between university scientists and policy makers in order to bridge the gap between environmental research and local decision makers. The project, led by researchers at the University of the West of Scotland, will develop key links between local governments and HEIs and establish a Local Knowledge Exchange (LoKE).

### SISTEMA SCOTLAND

Researchers at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD), based in Glasgow, seek to develop and test an innovative method of knowledge exchange with public policy clients in Scotland. The project will utilise the recently launched *Sistema Scotland* project, a highly topical and relevant public policy initiative. *Sistema Scotland* brings the distinctive methodology and philosophy of Venezuela's El Sistema to the Raploch area of Stirling in this pilot initiative. This unique social regeneration project has made orchestral musicians out of 500,000 young Venezuelans, transforming the lives of many underprivileged and at-risk youths in the process. RSAMD hopes that this project will also help many young people in Scotland.



### EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Following the establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the aim of this proposal by the University of Edinburgh is to promote best practice on equality and human rights in Scotland. The project seeks to foster understanding of the key concepts and the effective implementation of policy in key Scottish institutions. This proposal builds on an existing network and will include an on-going web-based discussion forum, four think-tanks and a conference, with a view to fostering KE across sectors and between national and local levels.

### PROMOTING SELF-CARE

Researchers based at Robert Gordon University are developing a knowledge exchange network for policy makers, practitioners and researchers in order to promote self-care for long term conditions. KE events will include plenary discussions, policy dialogues, joint training workshops and an 'informed decisions' toolbox.

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Napier University researchers have designed a project that supports statistically informed decision-making and modelling in local authorities. The main purpose of the project is to exchange knowledge about the use of Scottish Government statistics and the application of statistically informed decision making in local councils. This is proposed through a research study on Ayrshire Council to explore the use of statistics, training within local authority partners, and a series of workshops.

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The key focus of this project is to increase physical activity for health in 'hard to reach' groups. Heriot-Watt university researchers will investigate and deliver innovative methods of transferring knowledge between the academic community, policy makers and practitioners within the field of physical activity, concentrating on adolescent girls as a 'hard to reach' group. The proposal includes a workshop, web forum, developing a model for work placements/ shadowing and an expert panel workshop.

### CIVIL JUSTICE

Researchers based at the University of Aberdeen have proposed the development of a capacity-building project in civil justice. The aim is to establish a 'Civil Justice Network for Scotland' consisting of academics and policy-makers. Its overarching purpose is to address the acknowledged deficit in empirical research which is severely hampering the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing civil justice system, and inhibiting options for reform.

## Scottish Funding Council

### E-MAIL:

[hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk)

### WEBSITE:

[www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk)

PHONE: 0131-313-6500

FAX: 0131-313-6501

**Public Policy Action Group (PPAG),  
Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Group, Scottish Funding Council:  
[AnnMillar@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:AnnMillar@sfc.ac.uk)**

## Other Contacts

- ESRC Knowledge Transfer Team:  
[www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)  
[david.ridley@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:david.ridley@esrc.ac.uk)
- Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI), c/o ESRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UJ,  
[andrea.turner@esrc.co.uk](mailto:andrea.turner@esrc.co.uk)
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5XZ,  
0131-474-9200  
[carol@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:carol@cosla.gov.uk)
- Local Authority Research Intelligence Agency (LARIA) in Scotland, Paul Davidson  
Tel: 01786 443327  
[www.laria.gov.uk](http://www.laria.gov.uk)  
[davisonp@stirling.gov.uk](mailto:davisonp@stirling.gov.uk)
- Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer Team, Office of the Chief Researcher AND Heads of Analytical Services. See:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)  
[Gill.Clark@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Gill.Clark@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

# Scottish Government and ESRC Knowledge Exchange Activities

The Scottish Government (TSG) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) are strong advocates of knowledge exchange on issues of public policy. Whilst the Scottish Government has argued that KE should be used to improve Scotland's social and economic well-being, the ESRC has made KE a central plank of all research activities. Both ESRC and TSG have sought to increase KE activities through partnerships, placements and networks.

The ESRC Knowledge Transfer Team offer a knowledge brokerage service, acting as a conduit between researchers and users, through working relationships with government departments, local government, regional development agencies, and the voluntary sector. The ESRC and TSG have established a number of joint KE activities, including the following opportunities:

- **ESRC/TSG Public Policy Seminar Series**, which aims to bring the best social science concepts and evidence into the policy arena and to stimulate discussion on how policy might be developed based on these insights. Past seminars, with participation from researchers, government analysts and policy practitioners, have included discussions on the environment, health, fishing communities, and demography.
- **ESRC/TSG PhD Scheme**, which supports PhD research to inform the development or implementation of policy

in Scotland. The jointly funded scheme encourages the use of applied research to inform public policy. It also encourages universities to retain and grow emerging academic talent with the skill set to provide utilitarian research output for a policy audience. The scheme funded 4 PhDs in 2006, 9 in 2007 and 11 in 2008.

- **ESRC/TSG Placement Fellow Scheme**, which provides for academics to be appointed as ESRC Placement Fellows in Scottish Government departments. The scheme aims to promote KE between academic departments and the government, and to provide career development opportunities for both parties. In 2008, five Fellows were placed in the government. ESRC/TSG also run a 'reverse' placement fellowship scheme, enabling practitioners to spend time in universities
- **ESRC/TSG Internship Scheme**, which provides an opportunity for ESRC PhD students in their second or third year to work with the Scottish government for 3 months to undertake a short-term project. The scheme offers students improved understanding of policy formulation, networking opportunities and work experience. In 2008, 15 ESRC PhD students completed internships.

For more information on any of these schemes, please contact Vikki Milne at the Scottish Government KT Team:  
[Victoria.milne@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Victoria.milne@scotland.gsi.gov.uk).

## NORFACE Seminar Series

The University of Edinburgh has received funding from NORFACE (New Opportunities for Research Funding Co-operation in Europe) to organise a seminar series on *Evidence and Policy* with the University of Iceland, National University of Ireland, University of Oslo and Erasmus University in Rotterdam. The seminars, led by Prof. Sandra Nutley ([Sandra.Nutley@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Sandra.Nutley@ed.ac.uk)), who also chairs SFC's Public Policy Action Group, and Sarah Morton, Director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships ([s.morton@ed.ac.uk](mailto:s.morton@ed.ac.uk)), aim to advance international and comparative understanding of the use of different forms of knowledge and evidence in the policy process through the sharing of ideas across jurisdictions.

The project has comprised three seminars on *Types of Knowledge for Evidence-Based Policy* (Edinburgh, November 2007), *The impact of evidence-based policy on the social sciences and vice versa* (Rotterdam, March 2008) and *Improving the use of Evidence in the Policy Process* (Oslo, October 2008). A final workshop, to be held in Dublin in March 2009, will allow participants to meet to reflect on the learning so far, finalise dissemination plans, and make plans for future joint work as a network or in smaller collaborative groups. The seminar series produced a number of reports on the types, use and impact of knowledge on evidence-based policy, which can be accessed here:  
[www.cfr.ac.uk/norface/publications.html](http://www.cfr.ac.uk/norface/publications.html)

