



Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education

Knowledge Exchange on Public Policy

Autumn 2007
Issue 1

Contents:

What is Knowledge Exchange?	1
Knowledge and the Policy Process	1
Why Engage in Knowledge Exchange?	2
Becoming part of the Exchange	3
Overcoming Disincentives	3
The Scottish Approach to KE	4
Knowledge Networks in Scotland	4
International Practice	5
New Forms of Devolved Policy-Making	6
Next Steps	6
About the Public Policy Action Group	6
References	6

Key points

- Informing and shaping Public Policy in Scotland
- Increasing the quality and impact of research
- Using evidence for the public good
- Building policy networks

What is Knowledge Exchange?

Knowledge exchange involves the two-way flow of ideas, skills and people between the research environment and the wider policy community. The application and movement of knowledge across institutional boundaries has been called many things – such as knowledge transfer and research utilisation – but the common motivation behind such endeavours remains the same. It is to create a set of dialogues between different groups of people, to foster learning through the sharing of ideas, skills and people, and ultimately to stimulate joint approaches to common problems that may lead to new research and innovative policy practices.

The act of sharing knowledge occurs through dialogue on a daily basis, perhaps without those ‘engaging’ even consciously realising they are doing so. Knowledge exchange has thus become embedded in our social interactions.

Yet in the realm of policy, knowledge exchange takes on a more specific meaning.

For policy-makers, it is characterised by the need to draw upon objective evidence to inform policy, whilst for researchers, it entails the communication and application of their knowledge in addressing the key issues facing society. In between these two objectives, there are numerous reasons to engage in knowledge exchange – for both those ‘using’ the knowledge and those ‘supplying’ it. These incentives for KE are examined on p. 2 of this newsletter.

When dealing with issues of public policy, it is also necessary to move away from the prevalent understanding of knowledge exchange as constituting a one-way process. Instead, it involves multiple exchanges between a range of actors – researchers, policy-makers, service providers, voluntary groups and private sector actors – who are concerned with improving the quality of research and policy, and thereby creating value for society as a whole.

Knowledge and the Policy Process

‘Knowledge transfer’ (KT) is commonly associated with commercial activities. With the rise of the global ‘knowledge economy’, university research – in the natural sciences and information technologies in particular – has been sought and utilised by businesses to further their commercial aims. Yet research has not only been used for economic motives. It has also sought to address key social, cultural and environmental problems, such as poverty and climate change.

Thus despite the commercial orientation of much KT activity, there is also immense potential to connect expert knowledge produced by higher education institutions (HEIs) to broader societal, cultural and environmental concerns. Governments are increasingly looking to use the knowledge

produced by university research to inform and shape policy on socioeconomic development, such as social inclusion, health and education. This is especially important to regional, local and devolved governments which may have limited research capacity. Universities are one key resource for providing the intellectual capital necessary to meet the needs of tackling major public concerns.

This requires consideration of how research can better inform public debate; how research being done in universities can be effectively used at different stages in the policy process from formulation to implementation of policy; and the ways of incentivising knowledge exchange to all of those involved. This newsletter makes a first attempt at addressing these issues.

*This newsletter was edited by Dr Eve Hepburn,
University of Edinburgh, on behalf of SFC*

Incentives for Academics:

- Influence policy agendas and increase the prospects of your research being applied
- Gain valuable skills, experience and contacts with users
- Rewards from research councils, which strongly encourage ‘user engagement’ in grant applications
- Increase opportunities for further research funding and career opportunities
- Financial incentives in the form of the Knowledge Transfer Grant (KTG)

Incentives for Policy-Makers

- Accessing innovative ideas and cutting-edge research
- Adding value to the organisations through joint collaborations
- Gaining access to objective evidence to inform policy-making
- Develop useful contacts and learn new approaches to problem-solving
- Improving policy and practice decisions and action through research knowledge

Why engage in Knowledge Exchange?

There is a wide range of benefits to engaging in knowledge exchange on public policy, which could have positive effects on the quality and impact of your research, the resources and standing of your university, and the social and economic wellbeing of your community.

Your Research

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 knowledge exchange activities, not only will you increase public awareness of your research, you will also increase the likelihood of influencing the policy agenda, and the chances of your research being applied in policy and practice. Engaging in conversations with policy-makers – especially at the initial stages of formulating research questions – may also improve the quality of your research. Policy makers can provide feedback and comments shaped by their experience that you may not necessarily receive from an academic audience.

KE activities and networking may in themselves lead to joint research projects with policy actors. This will allow you to gain valuable skills and experience, and to develop new contacts and networks within the policy community. Joint collaborations may also create new funding avenues and lead to other career opportunities.

Finally, as research councils and higher education funding councils such as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), are placing greater emphasis on the need to orient academic research towards ‘user communities’ and public outreach, your engagement in knowledge exchange activities may be rewarded in terms of funding (such as the Knowledge Transfer Grant, details of which are on p4), which could, in turn, lead to more successful grant applications.

Your University

Far from the popular perception that universities are ‘ivory towers’ with little real interaction with the outside world, universities have historically had strong

links to their local communities, through their civic and economic engagement, as well as their relations with government and policy-makers. 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 public interest. By increasing your engagement in policy-making, you will also enhance the status and reputation of your university, and your research, in the public eye as well from the perspective of research and funding bodies. This may also have a positive effect on the Research Assessment Exercise evaluations, which should accord more importance to KE activities. And this, in turn, leads to more government funding, increasing student figures and improving the quality of research.

Your Community

University staff may also feel a public responsibility to disseminate their research more widely to benefit the local 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 policy and practice in areas such as social policy, economic development, health care and the environment.

The ESRC provides a good example of how social science research can have an important impact on public policy. It documents how surgeons working in Manchester “can now perform 700 extra operations a year following a successful partnership project undertaken by researchers at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology...The research team set out to tackle the problem of the under-utilisation of expensive operating theatre resources. Their solution came in the form of a bespoke Management Information System which resulted not only in many more operations but also a potential annual saving for the NHS Trust of £400,000” (ESRC 2007). This scheme has since been adopted by hospitals across the country, thus benefiting the NHS as a whole. This case study clearly demonstrates that academic research can improve the quality and efficiency of public services, in the interests of society as a whole.

How to become part of the Exchange

There are countless ways in which you can become involved in knowledge exchange. More 'traditional' KE activities include: promoting and participating in seminars that address a policy issue and in which policy-makers are involved, giving public lectures, undertaking consultancy work for the government or parliament, fostering media relations to increase public outreach, issuing policy briefings that clearly state the key points of your research findings, organising and participating in work and student placements and secondments, engaging in joint research collaborations and providing training and continuing professional development (CPD) courses tailored to the needs of policy-makers.

Yet there are other, more specific, ways in which you can engage in knowledge exchange on public policy. Networks are a key mechanism by which to exchange knowledge. As KE is primarily concerned with building relationships and making connections,

networks provide the most effective mechanism for improving research—policy interaction. Networks themselves come in a variety of forms with different purposes, timescales and funding. Some networks may be focused on a specific policy area and may involve a wide range of different actors, whilst others may cover a variety of policy areas but may be contained within one institution that has formal external relations with stakeholders.

More institutionalised forms of KE include the creation of research institutes and centres, which may be jointly managed and funded by HEIs and governmental agencies, or which are fully autonomous but provide expert research for public consumption. Individual partnerships, including joint research collaborations, can be undertaken with policy actors. Such projects may address a specific policy area and could last from months to years.

Overcoming disincentives to KE

Although there is much evidence to indicate that institutional engagement with public policy forms of knowledge exchange will continue to grow, there are a number of factors that may act as a disincentive to these developments. Two of the main factors inhibiting supply-side activities are the focus on 'what counts' for the Research Assessment Exercise, and the lack of time for unrewarded public and policy 'outreach' activities. The RAE in particular pushes researchers towards traditional indicators of recognition and impact (Ozga 2006).

However, the usefulness of research is also part of what funding councils and RAE panels judge quality on, although this varies between panels and funding bodies and may not always be clear to academics. Other factors that may affect the response of academics in HEIs to KE activities include their disciplinary location, career stage, material conditions of work, institutional pressures and personal motivations (Ozga and Jones 2006: 2).

To overcome these barriers to knowledge exchange, it is necessary to create the right incentives and recognition of academic involvement in KE activities. These could include the training and funding of academics

to engage in KE activities, sabbaticals that have a public policy-influencing focus, mid-career fellowships to allow academics to develop KE projects, policy-makers 'in residence' within universities to exchange skills, and creating grants focussed on knowledge brokerage.

In addition to supply-side incentives, there is a need to acknowledge boundary differences between the two communities, especially regarding motivations, incentives and timescales. The academic world values and rewards understanding rather than action, and it is entirely possible for academics, even in policy relevant fields, to be entirely occupied with deepening understanding, perhaps of a narrow subject. Meanwhile, policy-makers who seek clear and reliable evidence that can inform and support policy, may not welcome detailed, impenetrable academic evidence, or may not even be equipped to use it well. Thus, any action to promote knowledge exchange on public policy needs to pay attention to the nature and extent of demand for research knowledge (Nutley et al 2007).

KE Mechanisms and Activities

- Research institutes and centres that act as focal points for collective expertise
- Policy forums that provide a networking function
- Consultancy work for the government and parliament
- Knowledge brokers/ individual boundary spanning posts
- Continuing professional development (CPD)
- Outreach activities (including public and policy-oriented lectures, workshops, and other public engagement activities)
- Joint research collaborations and partnerships in specific policy areas
- Training programmes for policy-makers
- Policy briefings
- User-friendly journals and newsletters
- Media engagement
- Work placements and secondments for policy-makers in HEIs
- Researcher, student and fellowship placements in government and voluntary sectors
- Training seminars for academics on how to connect research to the policy process, i.e. on media relations, writing briefing papers and engaging with research users

Funds allocated to the Knowledge Transfer Grant (KTG) for Scottish HEIs

2007/8	£19.1m
2006/7	£16.0m*
2005/6	£12.5m
2004/5	£9.5m
2003/4	£6.5m
2002/3	£6.3m
2001/2	£5.7m

* A dedicated funding stream of £0.5m to support cultural engagement activities was added to the KTG this year.

Source: www.sfc.ac.uk

“improve the flow of knowledge, expertise and ideas to businesses, enterprises and public services (KTG).”

The Scottish Approach to KE

There has been a growing commitment in post-devolution Scotland to facilitating KE. The Scottish Government has acknowledged that KE can and should be used to improve Scotland’s social and economic well-being. During her speech on Smarter Scotland in Parliament on 20 June 2007, Cabinet Secretary, Fiona Hyslop, spoke of the importance of ‘translating our research ideas into economic output’ and of using research ‘to underpin our health, wealth and well-being as a nation’. Such statements indicate that the Scottish approach to KE has moved solidly into the public policy realm.

The SFC has promoted two funding mechanisms for KE: *Promotion of Knowledge Transfer*, which supports infrastructure projects and awareness raising, and the *Knowledge Transfer Grant*, which provides the higher education sector with a long-term flexible funding stream to support KE activities. Investment in the KTG has almost quadrupled since it was established

in 2001, increasing from £5.7m to £19.1m . By weighting KTG metrics towards universities’ public outreach activities, the KTG in particular supports the application of research outputs ‘for the wider economic, educational, social, healthcare and cultural benefit of society’ (SHEFC 2001: 4).

One of the objectives in the Scottish Funding Council’s current corporate plan is to ‘improve the flow of knowledge, expertise and ideas, to businesses, enterprises and public services’. This has been matched by a substantial commitment in terms of resources and administration. In October 2005 the SFC established a Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee (RKTC). In addition, a Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Group (KTIG), was created in Spring 2006 to provide a strategic vision to develop the policy agenda in areas of knowledge exchange and innovation.

Knowledge Networks in Scotland

There is in Scotland a growing recognition of the potential benefits of harnessing social science research to public policy and practice. Individual Scottish HEIs are putting greater emphasis on KE between research and policy. This is evident in the creation of a Public Policy Network at Edinburgh University and a Scottish Policy Innovation Forum, coordinated by Glasgow University (Jeffery and Jennings 2006).

Moreover, individual Scottish HEIs have created research centres, institutes and networks devoted to topics pertinent to public policy, ranging from rural development to social justice. Many of them centres – such as the Fraser of Allander Institute and the Scottish Childcare and Protection Network - contribute actively to public debates and engage in outreach activities.

Financial support for establishing, and maintaining the work of these centres has been provided by the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government. Indeed, the SFC has invested in research centres through its Strategic Research Development Grant.

Knowledge Exchange is embedded in all of the Scottish Funding Council’s recent investments. One good example of this is the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), established in 2006 with support from the SFC and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. SIPR is a joint collaboration between 12 Scottish HEIs that undertakes high quality, independent research to inform policing policy and practice (see www.sipr.ac.uk).

In addition, at a national level, Universities Scotland has stressed the need for a wider application of knowledge exchange to address societal as well as economic issues and policy. ‘We want to apply [these principles that knowledge will always add value] to public policy, to improving civic participation, to creating a fairer Scotland, to our cultural and artistic life and to how we build Scotland in the world community’ (Universities Scotland 2002).

KTG Metrics

INCOME

WEIGHTING

Outreach	5
Enterprise Schemes	4
Consultancy	3.5
Continuing Professional Development	2.5
Industry, Government, & Service Providers	2.25
Licensing	1.5
Venturing	1

KTG Activities include:

- Developing staff skills to support KT activities
- Supporting dissemination of research outcomes
- Developing continuing professional and vocational education
- Increasing public understanding of academic research (www.sfc.ac.uk)

International Practice

Knowledge Exchange on public policy has become a key element of higher education policy in states, regions, cities and supranational organisations around the world. Below are a few examples of KE activities in a variety of different contexts.

Canada

The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation was formed in 1997 to facilitate evidence-based decision-making in the health sector. It was jointly established by the medical research council and the federal government, which also provided an initial endowment. The CHSRF aims its research at two main audiences: those managing the health system, and those making policies for it. It seeks to develop one-on-one encounters between researchers and decision-makers, which the Foundation argues is 'the most efficient way to transfer research' (Lomas 2000). In particular, it

Northern Adelaide

The University of South Australia (UniSA) provides programmes for disadvantaged groups within the Northern Adelaide community. This area is significantly disadvantaged according to national indicators, and was one of eight regions included in the 2001 Commonwealth 'Sustainable Regions' programme. The area was also targeted by the State Government for a strategic "whole-of-government" approach through a northern partnership of industry, education and employment.

UniSA has sought to build the capacity and resilience of the communities in which it works through collaborative and enterprising activities. In 2002, the University audited its community engagement activities in Northern Adelaide and found them to be numerous, diverse and highly regarded, but largely uncoordinated. As a major employer and a provider of higher education with a campus in Northern Adelaide (Mawson Lakes), the University decided to collaborate to achieve its community engagement

seeks to involve practitioners in the development of practice guidelines, in order to reach consensus, for them to take more ownership of the research (and to use research results in their policies). The CHSRF has a strict peer-review system for applications, and funds half the cost of the research and personnel it supports (the other half comes from cosponsors such as provincial governments). In communicating findings from the jointly defined research project, the CHSRF acts as a broker between researchers and policy-makers. It encourages researchers to prepare 'plain language' briefings, and helps to disseminate these to sponsoring policy-makers. The CHSRF has also developed a self-assessment tool for policymakers to use to assess their organisation's capacity to acquire, assess, adapt and apply research evidence.



'Map of the World', Lisbon.

Photo:

Zach Anthony

mission in a more strategic, focused and sustainable way. In response, it created the University of South Australia Northern Adelaide Partnerships. UNAP simultaneously pursues University and community goals by assisting the establishment of sustainable projects and activities designed to: increase participation in education; enhance professional skills by providing life-long learning opportunities for professionals who reside and work in the community; reduce skills shortages by promoting life-long learning and providing programmes that address employer needs; and improve social resources (www.unisa.edu.au/unap/default.asp; www.auqa.edu.au).

City of Vienna

The City of Vienna has developed a strategy that promotes and uses research on urban issues (such as sustainable housing and construction, waste management and resource management) by local universities and research institutions (Keiner 2006; www.wien.gv.at/ma22/pool/index.htm). The City has several programmes that supports individual researchers and students, and its Department of the Environment funds 50 projects based on applied research on the following themes: biotope monitoring, the use of indicators, the city's ecological footprint, innovative methods to analyse air quality, the analysis of the effects of subsidies and regulations, and material flow analyses. By providing a significant research budget (400 million EURO since 1997), the city can influence the research agenda, seek scientific advice on specific issues of sustainable development, and apply the results of research in its policies.

Europe

The European-wide Neighbourhood Housing Models (NEHOM), which is a consortium of 9 academic institutions, aims to create tools to better manage neighbourhoods and housing initiatives, in order to improve the quality of life in deprived urban settings (Keiner 2006; www.nhh.no.geo/NEHOM). To achieve this, the consortium has established cooperative links with national and local networks of public and private housing agencies across European member-states. It evaluates housing and neighbourhood initiatives, and encourages cooperation between states to develop policies that promote social inclusion. The objectives of NEHOM are (1) to build a dataset of best practices; (2) to develop guidelines for transferring effective housing and neighbourhood initiatives between countries; (3) to develop a toolkit of measures to assess the impact of initiatives on the quality of life; and (4) to inform EU urban strategies and disseminate information in cooperation with housing agencies at international conferences, the internet, publications and other media (CD-ROM).

Scottish Funding Council

Email:

hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk

Website:

www.sfc.ac.uk

Phone: 0131-313-6500

Fax: 0131-313-6501

Other Contacts

Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer Team, Office of the Chief Researcher and Heads of Analytical Services. See: www.scotland.gov.uk
Gill.Clark@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Universities Scotland:
www.universities-scotland.ac.uk

Scottish Parliament Information Centre:
spice@scottish.parliament.uk

Research Councils UK
www.rcuk.ac.uk

ESRC Knowledge Transfer Team: www.esrc.ac.uk
david.ridley@esrc.ac.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation:
www.jrf.org.uk

Scottish Council for Voluntary Orgs:
www.scvo.org.uk

Your University's Knowledge Transfer Office

New Forms of Devolved Policy-Making

The new Scottish political system offers increasing opportunity for greater policy divergence from England. But that requires a base of evidence and ideas, distinct from the knowledge base of the UK government. It appears that the attempts to create a more collaborative form of governance in post-devolution Scotland may be 'influencing the ways in which KT is thought about, especially in relation to public good and public policy issues' (Ozga and Jones 2006: 4).

KE on public policy is especially important for smaller (regional or devolved) jurisdictions that have limited resources and research capacity. Knowledge exchange is

important to regions to: build research capacity by drawing on the intellectual capital of the region to inform policy; utilise the networks and short lines of communication between actors in the region to forge a common territorial interest; draw on the social capital in civil society to create a more collaborative yet pluralistic policy community; and use KE to support policy innovation and divergence from the centre (Hepburn 2007). Knowledge transfer on public policy is therefore critical to the development of Scotland's society and economy. There are clear benefits in forging closer relations between researchers and policy-makers by identifying relevant research issues; improving the quality of research; and forging shared interests and objectives.

Next Steps

This newsletter aims to provide a better understanding of knowledge exchange on public policy. The next question is how you can use this information to get involved in the exchange. Your first step is to consider what you want to get out of KE and what your main objectives are: who do you want to work with, what kind of impact do you want your research to have, and how much time can you dedicate? Once you've considered these objectives, there are a number of people you should get in contact with. A useful exercise is to search for existing networks in your areas of interest. Other important points of call are your head of department or the knowledge transfer officer in your school. They can put

you in touch with colleagues working in your area, who may have links with relevant policy actors. Your university may also have a KT office that can provide you with further information. Other sources of advice are the research council websites. You may want to start contacting those stakeholders that you wish to work with. Identify a small group to begin with, such as analytical services staff in the Scottish Government, and present your ideas to them. If you agree to collaborate, you should now consider funding possibilities. Contact the SFC for more information on KE funding mechanisms.

About the SFC Public Policy Action Group...

The Public Policy Action Group (PPAG) was established in June 2006 under the auspices of the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Group (KTIG), which is chaired by Mervyn Jones at the SFC. It is one of four groups set up by KTIG – the others examine KE in cultural and economic development and in the college-sector.

PPAG is chaired by Professor Sandra Nutley, and draws its membership from higher

education institutions (HEIs), local and regional government, public service providers and voluntary organisations. The group's initial remit has been to outline plans to enhance Scottish HEIs' knowledge exchange on public policy for consideration by the SFC as part of its discussions on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. For more details contact: AnnMillar@sfc.ac.uk.

References

- ESRC (2007) Introduction to Knowledge Transfer: www.esrc.ac.uk
- Hepburn, E. (2007) 'Building Regional Policy Communities', ECPR General Conference, Pisa, 6-9 September 2007.
- Jeffery, C. and S. Jennings (2006) 'Connecting the Supply and Demand for Policy Ideas in Scotland', *Public Service Review: Transport, Local Government and the Regions*, Issue 9.
- Keiner, M. (2006) 'Urban Sustainable Development – Bridging the Gap between Research and Action', RELAY, Brussels: European Commission DG for Research.
- Lomas, J. (2000) 'Using Linkage and Exchange to Move Research into Policy at a Canadian Foundation', *Health Affairs*, Vol 19, No 3.
- Nutley SM, Walter I and Davies HTO (2007) *Using Evidence: How research can inform public policy*, Bristol: Policy Press
- Ozga, J. (2006) *In the Public Interest? Research, Knowledge Transfer and Education Policy*, Inaugural Lecture, Edinburgh University 25 Jan.
- Ozga, J. and R. Jones (2006) 'Travelling and embedded policy: the case of knowledge transfer', *Journal of Education Policy*, 21: 1.
- Scottish Executive (2000) Report on the Knowledge Economy Cross-Cutting Initiative (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/government/ketf_ccr.pdf)
- SHEFC (2001) Knowledge Transfer Grant Circular Letter HE/24/01. (<http://www.shefc.ac.uk/library/>)
- Universities Scotland (2002) *The Knowledge Society*. Downloadable at www.universitiesscotland.ac.uk/Publications/KS/pdf.