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Staff Perspectives on Scaling the Impact and Influence of MU Research and Expertise on Public Policy.

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Table of Contents

Section I – Introduction

Why this consultation, why now?

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[1]. Many are using national research funding agencies to incentivise co-created research between academics and a wide range of beneficiaries.[2]

The Irish Government is no exception. Irish HEIs 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 Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) (the Challenges, Public Service Fellowship and, Science Policy Research programmes); the Irish Research Council (IRC) (New Foundations and COALESCE programmes and 'Roadmap on research for public policy' (jointly with the Royal Irish Academic (RIA)); and The Irish University Association (Campus Engage programme) have led the way. But plans are afoot for the introduction of a new suite of interventions targeted at broadening and deepening linkages between academic researchers and policy-makers - to be layered on top of and to complement actually existing and already achieved knowledge exchange initiatives.

The standout initiative is the focus on research for policy in the Irish Government 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."*

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[1] It is difficult to read any Government briefing on universities and their purpose today without encountering the lexicons of 'impact statements', 'civic engagement', 'translational research', 'capitalisation and catapults', 'proof of concept', 'useful learning', 'knowledge exchange', 'living laboratories', 'proto-typing', 'public problem-solving', 'logic models', 'challenge-based funding', 'team science', 'research commercialisation', 'knowledge quarters', 'spin-outs' and 'spin-ins', 'technology readiness levels', 'national interest statements', and 'societal value'.

[2] For example, Horizon Europe/European Research Council (ERC), US National Academy of Sciences (NAS), National Research Council Canada (NRC)/Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), German Research Foundation (DFG), French National Research Agency (ANR), Japanese MEXT Research and Development Agencies, Australian Research Council (ARC) and United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI), all have introduced various kinds of impact weightings in funding assessment criteria. Indeed, the ANU National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) now requires from every applicant a National Interest Test (NIT) statement, certified by Deputy Vice Chancellors of Research (DVCRs), explaining 'to a member of the general public how the proposed research can be of value to Australia'…..'why public money should be invested in such a research project'…. and 'how Australia's policymakers, communities and industries might draw on the research'.

By way of implementing Impact 2030, DFHERIS has already:

a) established a group to advise on and steer growing connections between higher education institutions and state bodies – comprising the HEA, IUA, THEA, research funders and the Royal Irish Academy.
b) established a network of research leads in Government Departments.
c) launched a public consultation in July 2023 entitled "Towards a Higher Education Research – Policy Engagement Framework – Public Consultation".

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."

By dint of the circumstances of its birth, Maynooth University has a track record of working with and contributing to public (policy) solutions, especially with respect to questions of social and spatial (in)justice. MU departs with a significant amount of reputation capital. Nonetheless, without prejudice to the good work, which is already taking place at MU, MU has yet to fashion a response which is proportionate to rising expectations and opportunities. This process demonstrates how MU is advancing this agenda and other Irish universities are now also doing so.

If it is to seize the moment MU will need to effect a step change in its impact related infrastructure, resources, and policies. We are fortunate that we are awake to the challenge and the opportunity. The 'Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028' (October 2023)[3] commits MU to the work of 'imagining and creating better futures for all'; has as one of its three core pillars 'impact' and promises to scale 'external engagement for real-world impact by strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships with enterprise, industry, Government and the community'. Furthermore, the Plan commits to the establishment of 5 cross-disciplinary research beacons to enhance the impact of research underway in MU. Clearly, action and implementation plans will be needed to take these commitments forward.

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[3] The Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028 was launched officially on 24 October 2023.

In support of such planning (while undertaken as a parallel project), Seán Ó Foghlú[4] and Mark Boyle[5] convened a series of eight 'open discussion meetings' which were organised on a cross-disciplinary basis (April to June 2023) to secure a better understanding, from the perspective of MU staff, of what MU might do next to help researchers unlock the full value of their work *for public policy*[6].   Following this, they drafted a discussion paper and conducted two briefing and refinement meetings[7], with the original participants and other interested colleagues, in September and October 2023. In total over 70 staff in MU took part in the meetings including researchers in all 3 Faculties, over 10 Departments and a number of research centres and institutes, as well as members of the University Executive and staff in the Research Office.

This report is an updated version of the discussion paper discussed at the briefing and refinement meetings. The primary aim of this report on 2023 consultation is to put some shape on and to place on the record the views which colleagues articulated during the consultation. The aim is that the publication of this report will now feed into further consideration by MU corporately of its next steps as well as feeding into further work that we will undertake.

We chose to focus narrowly on *public policy beneficiaries* specifically because we believe this to be an especially important but insufficiently systematically engaged stakeholder group for MU and because we are of the view this group requires bespoke engagement and brokerage mechanisms. It goes without saying that whilst treated in isolation in this report, any strategy for engaging policy communities will need to be nested inside and aligned to MU's wider impact action and implementation planning process.

We structure this report around five themes that particularly animated participants:

- **Theme 1 – What do you mean by research?** The importance of understanding the varieties and types of research undertaken at MU before working to ensure that MU research adds more value for policy makers.
- **Theme 2 – Contribute to public policy yes, but on whose terms?** The importance of respecting the diversity of views MU staff have apropos the purpose of research and what an efficacious and probity rich social contract between academic researchers and policy officials might look like.
- **Theme 3 – But don't we do this already?** The importance of registering, recognising, and harvesting already existing MU contributions to enhanced public policy making before or as part of any new initiative.
- **Theme 4 - What's special about us?** The importance of establishing an identity for MU in this space and what this might mean for prioritising.

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[4] Seán Ó Foghlú has been working in the Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute with a view to strengthening the links between research in University and public policy development & effectiveness. He is also working closely with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in supporting it on the development and implementation of its policy approach in this regard.

[5] Prof. Mark Boyle works in the Geography Department and is also part of the Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute. He headed up the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place in the University of Liverpool from 2017-2021. He also undertook training in 2022 with Campus Engage is an ambassador for this work.

[6] Over 60 staff members participated. Meeting groups were carefully assembled to bring together colleagues engaged in university management, research support staff and academic staff from different disciplinary backgrounds.

[7] Over 40 colleagues took part in these seminars.

- **Theme 5 - If you want me to help policy makers, first help me!** The enhanced infrastructure and supports which MU might introduce to more fully unlock the potential of its research and expertise for better public policy.

Section II – Theme 1

Theme 1 – What do you mean by research?
Our question 'how can we better leverage our research for improved public policy?' frequently provoked the retort, 'by research activities what exactly do you mean?'

In the Discussion Paper for the briefing and refinement meetings we set out the following Capstone and Questions:

Capstone – Know thyself! Any work on self-development must be preceded by a significant investment in better self-understanding.

Questions

1) Does the typology presented in Table 1 capture the range of research practices at work in MU and that may be relevant to research for policy? If not, what is missing?
2) How attentive should any future MU endeavor and intervention to support the scaling of the policy reach of research be to variations in the types of research underway across MU? Is each type of equal priority? Does each type need bespoke supports?

It is clear that research at MU (and more generally) is a highly variegated social and intellectual practice that is enacted through a wide variety of modes. It is likely then, that any crude and blunt intervention to support to ensure that research adds more value for public policy will fail unless it is attentive to the granular specificity of the varieties of research which are being undertaken by staff.

When describing their research, participants frequently invoked classifications based on.

Identity of the research	Blue-skies, pure, applied, activism, advocacy, experimental, consultancy, advisory
Underpinning funding	Unfunded (part of an academic's work without additional funding), EU funding, SFI/IRC funding, other public funding, private funding, philanthropic funding
Scale of funding	From no additional funding to multi-million, multi-annual
Absolute scale	Size of the research team (PIs, Co-PIs, ECRs, Post-docs, Administrators, Project Managers)
Geographical scale	Research which extends across spatial scales, from the global to the local. Research undertaken in collaborations and networks which extend across spatial scales from global to local.
Temporal scale	Research undertaken over the short, medium, or long term.
Institutional location	MU wide, VP Offices, Faculties, Schools, Departments, Institutes, Centers, Clusters and Central Services Units

Level and extent of cross- and interdisciplinary collaboration.	For disciplinary specific to full spectrum Team Science
Level and extent of inter-institutional collaboration.	Wholly MU owned, MU led, MU partner.
Scale of impact	From small scale to huge societal change
Level of intersectoral collaboration	Academic or academic + private sector, public sector, third sector and/or civil society stakeholders

A further typology (see below) has been developed by Prof. Ó Riain (Sociology) as a summary of the range of the types of research activity that exist in MU, with a particular focus on social science. It is relevant to research for policy in that it arguably comprehends the range of research that needs to be comprehended by a framework to support such activity. We have not sought to edit Prof. Ó Riain's typology directly arising from the consultation. We understand that, while there is extensive detail in the below appendix, Prof. Ó Riain does not intend that it is comprehensive in taking on board all possible aspects of research and has been drafted more from a social sciences perspective, but this overarching typology (Table 1) might be helpful in guiding the design and roll out of supporting interventions further down the road.

Table 1 Prof. Sean Ó Riain's provisional typology of modes of research at work in MU (Focus on Social Science)

	Main features
Individual - Solo	Single scholar • Frames own research • Does research personally • Projects tend to emerge organically
Individual - Small Projects	Same as Solo mode but tends to be organised through sets of small research projects
Individual - Ongoing Clusters of Small Projects	Similar to above but focus on maintaining series of projects, typically funded
Large Project	Single major piece of funding backbones a multi-year project
Laboratory (includes capital needs)	Ongoing research centre with significant central costs that need to be funded on ongoing basis
Centre (with committed funding)	Ongoing research centre with significant central costs that need to be funded on ongoing basis

	Existing cost base is of staff
'Infrastructural Projects'	Specific type
	Project that provides key social science research resource to other researchers

Outside of this typology, research for policy can also comprehend a researcher, or group of researchers, working to advise and support in the policy-making process, perhaps through direct interaction with policy-makers, based on their knowledge and expertise, rather than necessarily undertaking research directly.

Section III – Theme 2

Theme 2 – Contribute to public policy yes, but on whose terms?
Our question 'how can we better leverage our research for improved public policy?' frequently provoked the retort, 'what do you mean by policy useful research and why should we be concerned with placing our research in the service of public policy?'

In the Discussion Paper for the briefing and refinement meetings we set out the following Capstone and Questions:

Capstone – Participants were supportive of scaling engagement with policy communities but varied in opinion as to the terms of such engagement. MU should be open to working with scholars who wish to contribute to the epistemic communities which frame public policy sensibilities as well as those motivated to testing and enhancing existing policy logics.

Questions

1) Does the typology presented in Table 2 capture the range of perspectives on the purposes of the research currently being undertaken in MU? If not, what is missing?
2) How can narrow and sectional understandings of the research-policy nexus be challenged and entrenched and dated categorizations be updated in favour of broader, plural, and polyvocal visions?
3) Could MU position itself as a national leader in scoping the shape of an efficacious and principled social contract between Irish researchers and Irish public policy makers - testing, debating, and workshopping competing visions?

There was a wide variety of views on this topic.

Participants identified that the authors had not indicated exactly what they meant by 'public policy'. Within the civil and public service, policy is not only made and implemented by Government Departments and the role of national agencies, local Government and regional assemblies is clearly important. There is also international policy made by transnational organisations of which Governments are members, such as the European Union. There is also the question of what areas count as public policy. In particular, there is a need to consider areas that don't get enough attention in the policy system – either because they don't get on the agenda or because people don't even frame them as issues. While the focus of many discussions has been on social policy and its implementation, there has also been reference to the role of arts and humanities in societal development and public policy underpinning this, as well as to the operations of the state more generally and how higher education research can assist in making these more effective.

Participants queried from where this latest imperative to demonstrate impactfulness has come; this then opened out to a wider discussion about the purposes of academic research.

A motif was - buyer beware! Is not surging interest within Governments and public research funding agencies for the 'impact statement' of course a statement in itself? Should we not tread carefully?

There was a perception by some participants that the impact agenda was being driven by vested "neoliberal interests and bureaucracies" arising from new public governance, management, and administration models. Universities were (once again) coming under pressure to commit more categorically to serving what Governments deem to be the 'national interest', by contributing towards solutions which Governments deem to be efficacious, to the twenty first century social, economic, and environmental problems they deem to be most salient.

Participants questioned whether submitting to international and national pressures of this sort was the way to go; if we want to scale our impact footprint, should we not embark on this mission based upon our own agenda (individual/department/faculty) for impact. All discussants were clear that alongside academic freedom, questions of societal purpose, accountability, and value were questions they considered to be of primary import and deserving of unconstrained interrogation. But some believed these questions were too consequential to be surrendered to what might be perceived to be an instrumental and shallow conversation on impact convened by the Irish Government or indeed by MU and confined to circumscribed registers.

As a corollary, there was some (but only some) wariness about who was behind the discussion groups, why they were being organised and what the organisers' intentions were.

There is evidently an ongoing debate elsewhere and in MU, sponsored by, but not confined to, social sciences subjects, concerning the means and ends and the responsibilities and accountabilities of academic research. We encountered no single MU staff position on this debate but instead observed a range of perspectives. Whilst more complex and nuanced than conveyed here, we might identify three loose strands of thought (Table 2). It would be wrong to suggest that participants were overly vexed by labels and insistent that MU prioritise any one of these strands to the exclusion of others – although some were clear in their preference. Most recognised that each brought laudable assets to the table, as well as suffering drawbacks.

There was also some discussion about the diversity of ways in which research and policy-making can interact. Whether this is at different stages on a researcher's career or indirectly with policy-makers. The long run impact of relationships between individual researchers and policy-makers and, sometimes, groups of these, was also noted.

Table 2 Academic perspectives on policy engaged research.

Perspectives on policy engagement	Virtue	Vice
Strand 1 Beyond/incidental to, the remit of academic research. The purpose of academic research was to produce 'pure' fundamental knowledge. This often entailed by necessity high risk blue skies research. Translating research into policy and practice was a skilled labor and certainly not one that academics should and could take responsibility for. It was the job of policy makers to decide what if anything they wanted to do with this knowledge.	*It is from the acorn of curiosity driven research that oak trees grow!* It defends academic investment in the production of fundamental research and recognises that high quality fundamental research underpins high quality applied policy research. We cannot fix what is broken unless we first understand what exactly is broken.	*We must not fiddle whilst Rome burns!* It potentially licenses academics to remain aloof and out of touch, to lock themselves away in ivory towers and to indulge in self-referential naval gazing.
Strand 2 Mandated because research is publicly funded and accountable to the public. It is public funding that supports academic research and researchers have an obligation to undertake useful, accountable, and translational research. Alongside fundamental research, it was the duty of the academic to undertake translational research – that is to produce 'applied' outputs which are high in impact, including and in particular practical, practitioner-oriented, problem-focused, and policy-facing scholarship and even hired consultancy.	*With freedom comes responsibility!* It reminds academics that as public servants they have an obligation to undertake work which has demonstrable public good and a duty to ensure that their work adds more value for improved public policy intervention and enhanced quality of life.	*We are not the intelligence wing of the corporate state!* It potentially leaves academics vulnerable to sectional and instrumental research funding models licenses them to overinvest in potentially inferior, uncritical, naive, and incorporated consultancy work.

Strand 3 The purpose of academic research is to hold public policy, good and bad, to account, not to cosy up to policy makers. In was not the duty of Higher education institutions to serve as the intelligence wing of the Government. Academics should remain 'outside the tent' and should undertake 'critical' and 'radical' research and commit to scholar-activism and politicised advocacy. It was not their job to perform what might be termed 'flunky' scholarship or to be more polite, state compliant 'scholarship as a service' (SAAS), but instead to call out failures in Government policy.	*Research should catalyse disruptive public policy innovation because the status quo is failing!* It takes seriously the need to disrupt the status quo in search of public sector innovation and reform. If society is to build back better and fail forward new thinking will be required, not re-rehearsals of tired old policies. Society must not medicate itself on more of the same.	*We must not add to post-truth policy making!* It potentially licenses academics to practice the sorts of partisan scholarship that leads to 'principled non-participation' in policy engagement or values led (not evidence led) research which plays into critiques of post-truth public policy.

> **Theme 3 - But don't we do this already!**
> *Our question 'how can we better leverage our research for improved public policy?' frequently provoked the retort, 'you do know we do a lot of good work in this space already?'*

In the Discussion Paper for the briefing and refinement meetings we set out the following Capstone and Questions:

> **Capstone – It is clear that there exists a dense mesh of already existing research-policy relationships at MU. These organic relationships have taken time to build, and any new strategy might best begin by understanding and incubating existing high achieving or high potential knowledge exchange partnerships.**
>
> **Questions**
>
> 1) Does the typology presented in Table 3 capture the range of already existing researcher contributions to public policy at work in MU? If not, what is missing? How might the 6is be further developed as a typology to better understand MU staff's understandings of pathways to policy impact?
> 2) Building on the typology, how might a quantitative and qualitative mapping/audit of recent and ongoing projects and engagements which have sought to bring MU research and expertise to bear on policy concerns?
> 3) Should MU develop a Contact Relationship Management system (in conversation with RIS) to capture and log MU outreach with public policy institutions and their leaders and officers?

Participants wished to underscore that, by dint of its origins and underlying ethos, alongside fundamental research, MU has long sponsored and championed socially responsibly high-impact translational research. They were of the view that before embarking upon any project committed to scaling policy engaged research, MU needed first to better understand the breadth and depth of already achieved and actually existing policy engaged research.

Impact generally: As reported by participants, MU's research impact footprint undoubtedly comes in all shapes and sizes – directed at all kinds of users, stakeholders, beneficiaries and audiences; produced for (and often co-produced with) all manner of private, public, voluntary, activist, advocacy and other agencies: seeking variously to develop and apply new technologies, generate wealth, improve social welfare, health, education, and housing policy; tackle the global climate and ecological crisis, strengthen the legal and criminal justice systems, deepen appreciation of creative expression, the arts and culture; fortify professional practice, and enhance public understanding of science: deploying quantitative evidence and qualitative testimony, and; locally focused, embedded in Irish national, regional and local settings and globally facing, spanning nation-states, continents and even the world.

Policy impact specifically: Participants were at pains to point out that MU staff are already active in the space of translational research and knowledge transfer for enhanced public policy making. We encountered staff with brilliant already existing (but perhaps not formally narrated in the language of 'impact case studies') and many more staff (including Early Career Researchers) who were beginning to bring their work to bear on policy concerns.

But there existed a wide variety of understandings of what research for policy impact looks like – and no consensus. We identified 6 types of 'impact stories' - what we might call the 6is.

Table 3 The 6is of research-policy engagement

- **Innovation capture** - Whilst committed to fundamental research alone, some participants noted that they would not be averse to working in partnership with other communities with more capacity to ensure that their work adds more value for policy makers.
- **Information** – Recognising that evidence based public policy is increasingly predicated upon the use of data science, big data and data analytics, some participants pointed to the value they added to policy makers through identifying data deficits, data capture, infrastructure development, storage, analysis, and visualisation.
- **Intelligence** - Whilst prioritising their academic research, some participants underscored their interest in cascading and disseminating more comprehensively and judiciously their research findings to policy makers.
- **Influence** - Whilst objecting, in principle, or not especially invested in working in direct collaboration with policy makers, some participants were committed to activist and advocacy research which sought to influence (often through critique) policy orthodoxies.
- **Impact** - Some participants were enthused by the idea of working in direct partnership with policy makers and applying their research and expert-based knowledge by co-creating solutions with policy makers to agreed public problems.
- **Ideate** – Whilst it was perceived to be highly challenging, many participants believed that academics should seek to work with open policy makers and/or broader communities of influence others to create epistemic communities which pioneer the creation of new approaches to policy-making and new public policy sensibilities for high impact public policy innovation.

Section V – Theme 4

Theme 4 - What's special about us?
Our question 'how can we better leverage our research for improved public policy?'
frequently provoked the retort, 'by focusing upon what we are good at or can be good at
and carving a niche out for ourselves in the emerging national landscape of knowledge
exchange for enhance public policy'.

In the Discussion Paper for the briefing and refinement meetings we set out the following Capstone and Questions:

Capstone – Whilst insisting upon the importance of leaving no interested party behind, participants recognised the real politic of investing wisely and efficiently. Staff time was stretched and time constraints acute – it was important to scale activity when and where it might do most good.

Questions

1) Does the list of MU's unique competitive strengths identify capture all the areas in which we might punch above our weight nationally? What other strengths and sources of competitive advantage do we leverage?
2) What might a minimum basic support ecosystem comprise? What supports should all interested staff be entitled to access no matter the nature or content of their research?

Participants were of the view that given the crowded 'impact' landscape, which is crystallising nationally, the size of the institution, the importance of investing deeply in long term relationship building and finite monetary and time resources, it would be advisable for MU to invest judiciously in areas that might yield the most return. This conclusion, however, was tempered always with the caveat that, in so far as it is possible, no one who is keen to throw their energies behind this agenda should be excluded or left behind. How best to reconcile these competing ambitions remained unresolved.

There was no clear consensus on what MU in unique about in terms of potential impact on policy-making – in truth, time constraints mitigated against sustained interrogation of priority assets and opportunities. Amongst the various options raised were:

Table 4 – Identifying potential MU Unique Competitive Strengths

1. Increasing the wattage of potential MU research beacons - to channel energy and resources into translating the work being undertaken in our beacons into demonstrable high impact and transformational public policy outcomes.
2. Accelerating the rise of next generation high impact scholar-policy leaders - to identify and invest in the development of ECRs who are invested in developing impact case studies and whose work has high potential.
3. Making the most of MU's connections with regional and local authorities – to gain competitive advantage by investing in strengthening MU contributions to sub-national policy making communities.
4. Making the most of MU's tradition of working with third sector and civil society organisations - to consolidate MU's status as a lead player in inequalities research, social and spatial inclusion and exclusion inclusion, and communities hitherto neglected in core public policy debates.
5. Using to good advantage the size of the institution, the link to the teaching role of MU to prepare students for policy-making roles, the strong culture of internal relationships across disciplines and the openness to interdisciplinarity to assemble novel, experimental and agile communities of Team Science.

To be clear again, notwithstanding the recognition of the need to ration scarce resources wisely, there was a collective agreement that MU ought to develop a minimum basic support ecosystem which all colleagues might access.

Section VI – Theme 5

Theme 5 - If you want me to help policy makers, first help me!

Our question 'how can we better leverage our research for improved public policy?' in the end provoked participants to identify a number of potential support infrastructures, resources and policies.

In the Discussion Paper for the briefing and refinement meetings we set out the following Capstone and Questions:

Capstone – It is clear that the resources available to effect a step change in policy engagement are lacking and that further investment in systems development, protocols, procedures, financial supports, staff buy outs, mentoring, capacity building. brokering events, and so on will be needed if this is to be an institutional priority. Where responsibility might lie, who will lead this initiative, what resources they will require and how they will build an efficacious support ecosystem are all pressing questions for the future.

Questions

1) Does the Dora framework provide a useful organising framework for thinking about advancing any future programme of supports – the who, how, why, where, and what of such a programme?
2) Are any obvious potential supporting instruments identified above that are not appropriate to consider within MU?
3) Are any obvious potential supporting instruments missing in the above application of the framework to MU?
4) Which of the above supporting interventions merit priority action?

The Center for Open Science's (COS) has designed a useful 'Changing the Research Culture Framework' to support HEIs who for various reasons wish to reset their research culture and drive changes in the behaviors of their research staff (Figure 1). For COS, no matter the context, nothing short of a 'whole of 'institution' approach will suffice. COS identifies five levels of intervention, represented in the form of a pyramid. These levels are progressive, reflecting the fact that successful implementation of higher levels depends on successful implementation of lower levels.

Figure 1 The Center for Open Science's (COS) Changing the Research Culture Framework
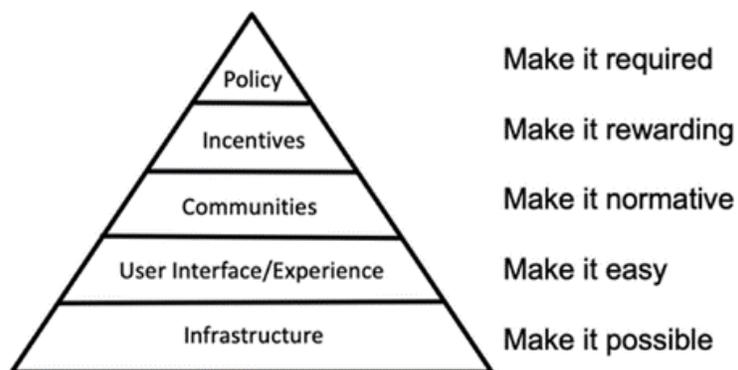
In the wake of the launch in 2013 of "The Declaration on Research Assessment" (DORA) on responsible research impact metrics and on the advice of DORA, many HEIs have sought to use COS's framework to pivot their research impact culture away from narrow and distracting measures of research impact (journal impact factors for example) and towards broader, more responsible and probity rich impact measures. MU has signed up to this framework. In the context of research for policy, the five interventions in the pyramid might be construed thus:

a) Making it possible: Creating conditions of possibility for policy impactful research.
b) Making it easy: Supporting researchers to unlock the full policy impact of their work.
c) Making it normative: Normalising and mainstreaming the pursuit of research impact on policy.
d) Making it rewarding: Incentivising researchers to invest time in unlocking policy impact.
e) Making it required: Mandating researchers to extract more policy impact from their work.

In the synthesis to follow we make use of this framework to put some shape around the views expressed by participants.

a) **Making it possible - Creating conditions of possibility for policy impactful research**
Participants expressed confusion over the crowded landscape of governance arrangements which has emerged to support policy engagement and impact – from Government, the HEI sector, and MU itself - and were not au fait with the array of existing infrastructure, resources, and policy levers. Simplifying this landscape and improving literacy of it will be vital primary labor if fertile conditions of possibility are to be created.

The kinds of issues which were raised include:
- Do MU colleagues know much about the surge in interest in Government in strengthening knowledge exchange – for example Impact 2030 strategy and the work being led by DFHERIS?
- Research funders from Horizon Europe and SFI to the Health Research Board are increasingly looking for impact but what does that mean and what opportunities are they making available for colleagues to learn more about impact?

- What are other HEIs in Ireland and elsewhere doing to scale the extent and reach of the impact of their research on public policy?
- For advice on impact should colleagues approach the RDO, External Affairs, Communications, Deans and Associate Deans Research, Directors of Research Institutes or whom?
- Should every Department have a trained policy lead contact person or administrator?
- To whom should colleagues turn if they have questions about unlocking the potential of their research for enhanced policy? Is mentoring available? Where can colleagues access relevant staff development opportunities?

Participants welcomed existing supports and advocated for further increase in the supports provided nationally (funding agencies), institutionally (central support services) and locally (faculties/schools, departments, research institutes). But they also had views on the imperative to simply and streamline and repurpose the support apparatus at work in MU to inject energy and clarity into the ambition. Whilst concerned that an imposed centralised policy engagement unit would come freighted with assumptions about impact and unhelpful disciplining metrics, participants were also alert to the problems of an overly distributive implementation machinery. There was a general support for the view that unless a properly resourced and clearly identifiable and accountable support and enabling unit was put in charge of facilitating research for policy connections and driving the agenda forward, it was unlikely that MU would make the step change needed.

b) Making it easy: Supporting researchers to unlock the full policy impact of their work.

Public Affairs Training
Generally, academics have insufficient understanding of how Government works and how public-policy is made. The result is that individuals (or small groups) themselves must embark on a solo, onerous, and protracted journey of self-learning. Huge investment can often be made for little reward. Apathy and frustration are often the result. It was noted that MU researchers come with a wide range of experiences, in Ireland and abroad. Many participants considered that a critical support MU needs to put in place is that of basic public affairs education and staff development training. Suggestions to this end included:
- Proving public affairs training to PhD students, early career researchers, groups of researchers whether in individual Departments or on a cross-disciplinary basis on how public affairs works generally and with respect to their area of interest.
- Developing bespoke guidelines/tool-kits (building on a number of useful national and international ones) on how to engage with policy-makers.
- Enhancing staff development training to include a policy impact strand - to build the skills and capacity of staff to more fully exploit viable pathways to impact.

Nature of Relationships with Policy-Makers
A core and recurrent theme raised by participants was the reality that they were time poor and that engagement with policy makers was time consuming and to be impactful required a

gestation period in which mutuality, trust, reciprocity, and co-creation can be built. Some felt that the level of investment required was onerous and would impinge on other aspects of their role (teaching, publishing in academic journals) to a fault. Others however, suggested that pursuit of high impact and long-term academic-policy relationships was something they might be invested if acute constraints on time could be relieved. Amongst the suggestions raised were:

- Availing of a formal partnering system to fast-track building policy networks.
- The potential for two-way secondments between the civil and public service and higher education.
- Greater recognition for impact work in time/teaching allocation models.
- The establishment of policy impact sabbaticals.
- Secondments into MU central services and impact related units.
- Seed funding for relationship and network building
- Supporting the engagement of researchers with state boards and working and advisory groups established by Government.

Brokering Service

The plans in the MU Strategic Plan for a one-stop-shop Partnership office for connecting MU staff wider stakeholder groups were commented upon favourably and participants looked forward to learning how the functions of the office would link with those of other central offices such as the Research Development Office. It was noted that there is initial mapping work commencing in the Partnership Office which is planned to look at all of MU's connections.

Both researchers and stakeholders often want to know who to connect with in a very nuanced way about what can be complex issues – identifying the right person requires a real and detailed understanding of the policy-making body in question or a way to get such an understanding quickly.

To realise this goal more fully, participants suggested that a policy brokering, or match-making service could be developed.

- This might offer policy-makers the opportunity to seek advice or engagement on particular issues and a connection could be made with an academic or a group of academics to do so. This could be undertaken at different stages in the development of policy and could be on an off-line or confidential basis if necessary
- It could facilitate engagement by policy-makers with Maynooth on a live policy dilemma with a view to looking at options on how to address the dilemma with an updated policy and operational approach.
- It could facilitate visits by groups of policy-makers to the University to meet with colleagues on campus to discuss issues – this could range from a short session of a day to a longer engagement over a number of weeks
- It could facilitate academics and researchers in the University visiting agencies or Departments and being placed there to work for a period of time over a number of weeks and even months
- This might also offer an evidence synthesis service for policy-makers where they are seeking updates on the most recent and relevant research available on a topic.

- This might also advise academics on which policy-makers to contact about policy issues and make the introduction for them
- A series of seminars or informal discussions over a period of time could be arranged and facilitated involving academics and policy-makers
- The service could assist Maynooth academics seeking to engage with policy-makers at various stages of their research – initial development, implementation, and engagement after completion.
- The service could support the public affairs education discussed above.

Policy-makers getting involved in MU
Participants also noted that there are some good examples of involving existing and recently retired civil and public servants in advising on and engaging in activity in Maynooth University and, building on this, a policy could be established. Elements might include:
- Providing CPD opportunities in MU for policy—makers at different stages of their careers
- Seminars designed to engage policymakers with a view to commencing new networks of contact
- Encouraging civil servants to be collaborators in research papers
- Establishing advisory groups for Faculties, Schools, Departments and/or research Institutes of the university
- Expanding the use of adjuncts and strategically seeking out recently retired civil and public servants

In advancing with this approach, it was noted that the range of policy-makers in Ireland is very broad, but, nevertheless, it was suggested that care needs to be taken not to over engage with certain groups of policy-makers.

c) Making it normative: Normalising and mainstreaming the pursuit of research impact on policy
Participants noted that, if MU is to create a culture in which knowledge exchange for policy enhancement is valued and celebrated, a whole of institution approach was needed. Reference to impact needed to be baked into strategies at all levels of the institution, championed in public statements by senior leaders, and promoted through vigorous and strategic internal and external communications strategies.

There was general agreement about the need to demonstrate and describe impact but there was disagreement in relation to performance indicators. Clearly, success needed to be noted and celebrated as a matter of routine. But what might success look like? Examples of impact cases studies were described and supported to some extent, while concern was expressed about some of the ways in impact has been measured elsewhere, whether measures per se were possible at all, and if so, which indicators matter most. It was considered that it would be unhealthy were MU staff to be pushed towards overly instrumentalist impact metrics. Existing indicators were not broad enough nor narrative focused. Real impact may take many years to see and potentially measure. It was important that MU get the description and measurement piece right for failure

to do so would alienate staff and undermine their intrinsic motivation for doing this kind of work. DORA and Campus Engage were mentioned as having good resources on measuring impact.

Participants noted the importance of developing an internal and external communications strategy to embed the discourse of MU knowledge for policy exchange into the external and internal ether. Suggestions included:
- All communication about research for public policy could be brought together into a single website for Maynooth.
- Sharing good practice in research for policy through celebrating impact case studies
- Measuring the effectiveness of communications and sharing good practice
- The development of social media campaigns
- Communications should have a clear and efficient system for disseminating impact success stories

d) Making it rewarding: Incentivising researchers to invest time in unlocking policy impact
Participants who had partaken in this sort of work were keen to underscore the benefits accrued, personally and more widely. Wider appreciation of these benefits might engender greater staff enthusiasm. Benefits included·
- Opening up potential opportunities for research funding over time
- Enhancing the research performance of universities internationally via improved impact and dissemination metrics
- Seeing value in the work, recognition beyond academic outlets etc.
- Learning about the world the academic is working in, through policy discussions and engagement with those working in the area (harvesting a more dialogical approach approach)
- Bringing together academics who wouldn't otherwise be in conversation, e.g., people from opposing or at least different perspectives on an issue, and particularly people from different disciplines.
- Participating in interesting and relevant conversations can be a draw for academics with policy-relevant knowledge who don't immediately see themselves as policy researchers.
- Enhancing interest and engagement from students where real world policy-examples can be brought to their studies.
- Learning new research skills by engaging in problem-solving, tackling societal challenges and solutions-oriented research.

Some of the additional tools participants identified as potential rewards and incentives included:
- Recognising impact work in time/teaching allocation models.
- Offering light semesters for specific impact projects
- Consideration of a public recognition scheme in MU for this work
- Under the single salary public policy, university staff members cannot receive renumeration for sitting on boards. Might it be possible to relax this role even if only to allow board members to use such funding, if available, to invest in teaching and research support and/or to enable Heads of Department to procure compensation for time lost outside of Department activities?

- Criteria for academic promotions might also increase the weighting attached to work of this nature.
- It was noted that Government Departments could be better at acknowledging the impact of researchers' work on policy and that this might help to enhance recognition in Maynooth.

e) Making it required: Mandating researchers to extract more policy impact from their work.
While the DORA framework appropriately looks at impact, the application of the DORA framework in relation to direct policy impact is not appropriate. There was no support for requiring policy impact from participants and we do not see a place for such an approach – we do not think it possible nor productive to make policy impact a requirement for MU faculty. Quite apart from the fact that this would not be serving of MU's own interests, given cherished academic values and the hesitancy among some staff to commit to translational high impact policy, compulsion and coercion could not (and should not) garner the necessary social license.

Section VII – Conclusion

What next, where next, when next?

The primary aim of this paper is to put some shape on and to place on the record the views which colleagues articulated during the range of meetings and seminars we organised in MU in 2023.

We believe that there is a strong message coming through from this work which is calling for more strategic leadership in the research for policy area in MU – in particular how the organisational arrangements might be redeveloped to support strategic long-term institutional approaches and support for researchers. We believe that most of the elements for this agenda are identified in this report and look forward to working with colleagues in its implementation.

Appendix 1

Table 1 Prof. Sean Ó Riain's provisional typology of modes of research at work in MU (Focus on Social Science)

	Main features	*Typical Outputs*	*Key resources*	*Research assistance?*	*Administrative assistance?*	*Funding Modes*	*Example*
Individual - Solo	Single scholar Frames own research. Does research personally. Projects tend to emerge organically.	Often books, though not necessarily.	Time. Some assistance.	Helping out with bits and pieces.	Helping out with bits and pieces.	External direct funding of research not as crucial. Elements like sabbatical and travel more crucial.	Note: Many world-famous social scientists follow this model.
Individual - Small Projects	Same as Solo mode but tends to be organised through sets of small research projects.	Typically, a cluster of 2-4 articles on the topic of each project. Sometimes integrated/ developed into a book.	Some assistance. Time.	Short-term part-time contracts to work on research activity on particular projects.	Need for knowledge of spending, Higher Education policies etc.	Projects often developed through funding applications. Tend to be relatively small scale.	IRC €10k grants.
Individual - Ongoing Clusters of Small Projects	Similar to above but focus on maintaining series of projects, typically funded.	Rolling articles and research reports.	Research assistance is central. Management of projects becomes more central to PI role.	Possibly a researcher on contract or a PhD student who works on a series of projects.	Grant applications and funding search as well as research, spending, HR etc. policies.	Search for funding linked to project development. Tends to lead towards more network applications.	EU network grants, multiple funding applications.

Large Project	Single major piece of funding backbones a multi-year project.	Rolling articles and synthetic book is usually a goal.	Management of projects becomes central to PI role. Research assistants central – often postgraduate and postdoctoral	Can be internal management structure, e.g., postdoctoral staff and postgraduate students. Stronger division of labour	Management of funder requirements. Range of research policy and practice requirements.	Often driven by ambitious definition of project (can emerge from clusters of small projects, but can also come from solo researcher getting big grant)	ERC
Laboratory (includes capital needs)	Ongoing research centre with significant central costs that need to be funded on ongoing basis.	Typically, articles reporting on rolling results.	Management of projects and of laboratory itself becomes central to PI role. Research assistants central – often postgrad and postdoc.	Postgraduate students and Postdoctoral staff are central 'labour' for the lab, not just students. Supervisory dynamics and ethical issues are different from above modes.	Management of the laboratory as small organisation. Management of funder requirements. Range of research policy and practice requirements.	Search for funding constant and essential. Loss of key resources can crush funding chances, which reinforces the poor functioning of the lab.	More common in some disciplines than others, can blur with 'Centre'
Centre (with committed funding)	Ongoing research centre with significant central costs that need to be funded on ongoing basis.	Typically, articles reporting on rolling results. Reports.	Management of projects becomes central to PI role. Research assistants	Postgraduate students and Postdoctoral staff are central 'labour' for the laboratory, not just students.	Management of the centre as cost and staffing centre. Management of funder requirements.	Search for funding constant and essential. In social sciences about maintaining reputations and networks more than equipment; can also	AIRO NCG

	Existing cost base is of staff.	Multiple modes.	central – often postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff. Search for funding for these researchers is central	Supervisory dynamics and ethical issues not as fraught as in laboratory model as the students are typically less co-dependent with supervisor than in laboratory.	Range of research policy and practice requirements.	relate to, e.g., data generation.	
'Infrastructural Projects'	Specific type. Project that provides key social science research resource to other researchers.	Key resources usable by other: Archive Survey data. Other research resources.	Research assistants central – often postgraduate students and especially a reasonably expert postdoctoral staff member. Somewhat thankless for a PI!	Need expert assistance. Career paths for researchers can be complex as own research publications etc. may suffer (get 'admin tracked')	Management of funder requirements. Range of research policy and practice requirements. External networking.	Usually needs central national or European funding to operate properly (rare in Ireland compared to other European systems).	IQDA (if funded to appropriate scale). DRI (at national level). European Social Survey. ISSDA.