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Ruane, Frances

Working Paper

Research and policy making

ESRI Working Paper, No. 354

Provided in Cooperation with:
The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin

Suggested Citation: Ruane, Frances (2010) : Research and policy making, ESRI Working Paper, No. 354, The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin

This Version is available at:
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Working Paper No. 354

September 2010

Research and Policy Making*

Professor Frances Ruane

Corresponding Author: Frances.Ruane@esri.ie

* Paper delivered at the Royal Irish Academy.

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Research and Policy Making

1. INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to have the opportunity to present a lecture on *Research and Policy Making*. This topic is widely discussed internationally with an extensive international literature drawing on a range of different perspectives. The Irish literature is less extensive though the topic has received some attention at conferences and in lectures over the past decade.[1] I believe that the topic is particularly timely given the scale of current challenges facing us today and the need to ensure that Irish society engages positively with the difficult decisions we face. For this to happen, those engaged in the policy making process need to

- Ensure that people understand that tough decisions are unavoidable
- Accept that tough decisions must be linked to perceived fairness
- Show an awareness that they have learnt from what has happened in the past
- Recognise that persistent inefficiencies in policy design and delivery are now less acceptable, and definitely unaffordable.

Speaking as a member of the Irish research community, but in a personal and not a representative capacity, I believe that we should seek to contribute more evidence to informing the policy making process. The Royal Irish Academy is a doubly fitting place for this discussion. Firstly, over many decades it has hosted meetings of the *Statistical and Social Inquiry Society*, at which many of Ireland's major social and economic challenges have been discussed by researchers and public/civil servants. Among many such discussions were those in the 1950s leading up to the publication of *Economic Development*[2]. Secondly, over the past decade the Academy itself has challenged Irish researchers to contribute to policy discussions, and has hosted many conferences and events which have brought the research and policy communities together.

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[1] See, for example, the NESF conference on evidence-based policy in 2006. http://www.nesf.ie/dynamic/pdfs/Evaluation%20Conference%20Report.pdf

[2] One of the striking features of *Economic Development* is the absence of any references to Irish research. In fact, the only specific reference to published material refers to a paper by Sir Alec Cairncross in the *Three Banks Review*.

Let me say at the outset that what I will talk about this evening draws on my own experience as a researcher who has had a wide range of different experiences with the policy making process over the past thirty five years. Obviously I am taking into account my present perspective as Director of the ESRI whose mission is to deliver research that is relevant to policy. Let me just mention a few of these.

In the 1970s, when working in the IDA, I was struck by the dominance of administrative over economic influences on the design of policy, and the absence of any robust measurement of the impact of policy or of policy changes at that time. In the 1980s, when on the board of the NBST, I realised how difficult it is to develop and operationalise a strategy when its objectives were unclear

In the 1990s, as a member of two different national committees on education [the de Buitléir committee on student financing and the HEA committee on the size of the higher education sector], I encountered very different standards of research and analysis underpinning policy development. I also saw how research evidence that was not politically popular could be buried to allow policy to move in a contrary direction. I will return to this issue below.

In the early 2000s, as coordinator of an MSc course in policy studies and Chair of TCD's Policy Institute, I saw at close quarters the benefits to public servants and researchers having the opportunity to interact and work together on issues of common interest. I also faced challenges in seeking to engage academics in policy research and in participation in policy seminars.

Finally, in the past year, as chair of an expert group on resource allocation and financing of health care in Ireland, I witnessed the benefits that can accrue when researcher skills combine with expertise in advising on policy design.

In these and in other encounters at the interface between research and policy making, I have formed three main impressions:

- The policy-making process in Ireland could benefit from being more informed by research evidence
- The availability of policy-focused research depends on both institutional factors and on funding
- Our policy process could be improved by researchers and civil/public servants interacting more regularly.

This evening I am concerned with disciplines whose methodologies relate most directly to policy – economics, sociology, social psychology, political science, geography, demography, management, etc.[3] At the same time I should stress that much of the research of these disciplines is not directly related to policy and it would be a mistake to expect that it should.

My emphasis will be on economics, not only because it is my own discipline, but also because many of its concepts and frameworks are particularly relevant in the present climate. I do recognise the importance of other disciplines to the policy process and especially the need for multidisciplinary approaches in tackling many issues. As a researcher, I also recognise that research is only one of many inputs to the policy process.

I concentrate here on the contribution to the policy process of those civil and public servants whose job it is to analyse policy possibilities and present policy options (sometimes accompanied by recommendations) to the politicians. I will only make passing reference to the politicians, in the belief that civil and public servants rather than elected politicians are closer to the interface between research and policy.[4] Furthermore, in the interests of further focusing the lecture, I concentrate on the research community that is outside the policy-making bodies, leaving aside the issue of how researchers inside public bodies interact with their policy-making colleagues.

In seeking to create a more positive interface between researchers and the civil/public servants, it is necessary to explore the key features of the Irish policy process. For the remainder of this talk, I am going to refer to civil and public servants as 'policy makers', following the informal use of the term in Ireland.[5] I set the discussion against a background where major policy challenges must be addressed if we are to get our economy back on track and maintain social harmony. Even the most cursory review of the rapid increases in current spending over the boom years suggests that *value for money* played an inadequate role in decision-making.[6] This was reflected in the growing gap between the rhetoric and reality in the late 1990s in relation to 'evidence-based policy'

[3] In practice many policies cover areas where the content of other disciplines is highly relevant, such as medical science, environmental science and engineering.
[4] Of course politicians' attitudes to research and to the role of evidence in policy formulation is vital.
[5] To an outsider, this term looks like a misnomer but it has become common parlance in Ireland over the decades to refer to 'policy makers and politicians'. This term is not seeing as denying in any way the constitutional role of Ministers in making policy making but to recognize that Minister make policy decisions based on the options put forward by the 'policy makers'.
[6] As revenues were pouring into the Exchequer, research or analysis that was critical of policy was not welcome and criticisms of individual policies on the basis of poor value for money were seen as petty and the expression 'just get it done not matter what the cost' became a mantra that meant any hard decisions could be avoided.

and evidence-based approaches to evaluation. [7] Over this period, we spent money on many 'nice to have' rather than 'need to have' projects and programmes, with little regard to evidence. Today's tough decisions need to be grounded in evidence if they are to command respect, acceptance and support, and we in the research community should contribute what we can to this process. In effect, we need to move from talking about evidence-informed policy making to engaging in it.

2. WHAT CAN RESEARCH OFFER TO THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS?

Let me begin by exploring what we as researchers and what research itself can offer to the policy-making process. Before doing so, let me set out how I see the complementary relationship between researchers in the research community and analysts within policy making bodies.[8] Most policy making draws on analysis provided within the system, and the analyst's task is to formulate the options to be brought ultimately for political decision making. When the analyst identifies new and/or more specialised issues that need to be considered, it is appropriate to engage with the outside researcher who is in a better position to undertake this work. Ultimately the findings of the researcher pass back through the analyst en route to where the decisions are taken.

Policy-making today is unavoidably complex, reflecting historic patterns, institutional structures, operational legacies, cultural influences, international constraints, etc. It is this inherent complexity that has increased the need for research inputs to develop the comprehensive frameworks or models which are required. However, it is important for both researchers and analysts to recognise from the outset that research is unlikely to provide a 'silver bullet' solution. So let me explore what the researcher can potentially contribute to policy design and policy evaluation.

What can the researcher provide in relation to the design of policy?

Let me start with theoretical/conceptual insights. These can be very important in terms of both clarifying assumptions and understanding mechanisms, especially in complex environments. Consider two simple examples from economics: opportunity costs and incentives. A proper understanding of opportunity cost ensures that a low accounting cost avoids underutilisation of capital resources, e.g., empty school rooms or office space, and

[7] Various presentations (including those from the Department of Finance) identified the need for a more evidence based evaluative approach but they were ignored. See http://www.dcu.ie/education_studies/ien/iendata/David%20Doyle%20Keynote%20Speaker.ppt http://www.dcu.ie/education_studies/ien/iendata/FRuane%20Evaluation%20Conference%20Presentation.ppt http://www.nesf.ie/dynamic/pdfs/Evaluation%20Conference%20Report.pdf

[8] In some circumstances there are also researchers within policy making bodies.

hence to inefficiency. In a complex environment, conceptualising and estimating this cost can be very difficult. In relation to incentives, we are all aware today of how much they matter and I think it is true to say that economists are 'hard-wired' to focus on them. The risk of perverse incentives is especially great where multiple layers of policy making can result in agents moving in the opposite direction to the policy's objectives. For example, academics will not focus on teaching if their promotion prospects depend solely on their research. Likewise, government agencies will not use funds efficiently, if they know that their budgets will be cut if they have unspent budgets at year end. And so on.

In areas where there are new developments, researchers are well placed to provide independent critical reviews of existing empirical evidence – both international and national.[9] The researcher's contribution may both simplify the policy-maker's decision and complicate it by drawing out elements that the policy-maker could otherwise have ignored.[10] Research in macro and finance today are obvious examples where researcher expertise can make a significant contribution, but not necessarily helping to make the policy-maker's job easier.[11]

The researcher can also contribute to the process of policy design by generating new evidence from existing or new data. For example, in designing tax changes, existing data can be used to measure likely responses to these changes. In some cases, policy experiments can be undertaken e.g., through randomised control trials. The time horizon here is clearly longer and points to the need for, and benefit from, research planning. The current investment in longitudinal studies of children and the elderly are examples of such research planning. Once in place, they will provide data for both academic research and policy analysis.

How can the researcher help measure the effectiveness of policy?

Again, let me start with the theoretical insights which link the policy objectives to the policy actions and to measuring their effectiveness. Given the complexity of the policy environment, the effectiveness framework must be coherent so that the correct attribution of effects can be gauged. So, for example, to measure the impact of policies designed to promote innovation on labour productivity, one requires a framework that allows the effects of other factors, e.g., internationalisation, to be taken into account. By developing the relevant framework, the researcher can provide a structure that allows the proper

[9] Such a review should be distinguished from one that simply selects a few pieces of evidence to support a particular position or approach.

[10] In so doing, it may reduce future costs and difficulties of course

[11] Where the literature is well developed, the researcher provides little additionality.

interpretation of detailed project/programme analysis. This ensures that the measurement of the effects is robust and that the use of evidence is unbiased.

Most evaluation exercises are straightforward and can be done by policy analysts in departments and agencies. Any contribution from professional researchers will be most effective in the conceptualisation of the evaluation methodology, in the advice given during the process, and in validating the rigour of the process.[12] Where the institutional or legal setting is complex, researchers from several different disciplines may be needed to ensure that the approach is holistic rather than simplistic.

Yet another potential contribution from researchers is the identification of the additional information required for evaluation, drawing on theory and international evidence. So, for example, researchers could assist in designing measures to gauge the effectiveness of funds given to universities to promote campus company developments, or to assist Science Foundation Ireland in developing indicators for its different programmes. Those closest to the coal face are often not in a position to do this and may also find it more difficult to identify changes that can improve policy effectiveness.

In complex decision-making environments, theoretical insights, independence and time are invaluable as we are all at risk of being prisoners of our own thought processes and experiences, as the past decade illustrates only too well. Researchers who are prepared to engage with policy issues should be able to assist in identifying future problems and complexities. They can do so partly because they operate a longer time horizon than is available to the policy-maker. Of course the policy-maker has to be prepared for the possibility that the researcher's contribution may make his/her job more challenging as the policy-maker progresses the issue into the political domain.

3. WHY IS GREATER USE NOT MADE OF RESEARCH IN OUR POLICY MAKING PROCESS?

The context for policy-making over the past two decades has been dominated by the 'programmes for government' agreed by coalition partners and the social partnership framework. This combination has meant that major policy issues are decided upon in settings where there is great pressure to get consensus and where there is huge media hype. It seems to me that all the emphasis has been on the decision making process (the

[12] Sometimes independent analysts are required to undertake the evaluations to guarantee their independence, and where theses are very complex, researcher inputs are required, e.g., EU structural fund programmes.

winners and losers especially) rather than on the content, i.e., the decisions. Once supported by such a process, a decision is likely to be carried through even when it has not been subjected to prior careful analysis and adequate costing. Let me look at each of these dominating factors in turn.

Getting something into the 'programme for government' in effect ensures that a policy is likely to be adopted, but perhaps just as importantly, has the effect of terminating any substantive debate subsequently on the issue. From what I can see, this is what happened to the De Buitléir Report on student grants mentioned earlier: there was a commitment to increasing access to higher education in the 1993 programme (which led to the report being commissioned) but in the negotiations of the 1995 programme that shifted to a commitment to 'free fees'. This decision ran counter to the report's evidence that this approach would not be the most cost effective or fair way of improving access, and consequently the report was kept out of the public domain until after the decision was made. What can we learn from this? Unless research is publicly available to inform the 'programme for government' process, its potential influence may be quite limited; even when it is available, it may be ignored.

As in the case of the programme for government, social partnership agreements have been typically implemented without further debate in any forum. They do, however, potentially have more opportunity to draw on more research evidence through the underpinning work of the NESC, than does the programme for government process. In the boom years, however, it seemed to me that the focus became focused on what could be done readily rather than what should be done taking a longer term perspective. As the role of the NESC has become increasingly to support the partnership process, and produce consensus documents, it is no longer the source of major policy analysis that it was in its early years.

While the programme for government and partnership structures dominate, other elements in the institutional settings have a bearing on the use of research in policy-making. One factor is the balance within the Irish public sector between the civil service and the wider public service containing some 800 government agencies. Where in other countries government departments are often the centres of specialisation in relation to policy, in Ireland the specialist knowledge is particularly fragmented across these agencies, which have grown very rapidly in number of the past two decades. This fragmentation, which has been quite deliberate in some instances, raises issues as to where and how policy is actually made, given that in some instances, government departments no longer have the specialist knowledge or resources to develop policy. In this context, the articulation of research needs seems to me to be at risk of falling

between the agencies and the departments in some cases, resulting in potential duplications and omissions. The drift or shift of policy making to agencies has also increased the need for actions to promote 'joined up thinking' at the centre of government, and could be perceived as generating a greater distance between individual politicians and the entire policy formulation process.

A very positive feature of Irish policy-making, common to small but not large countries, is the use of external benchmarking.[13] This can be used to challenge thinking and inspire action when we benchmark ourselves against 'the best' or 'the most relevant'. I think that Ireland does this type of bench-making very openly and transparently even if does not always benchmark itself against the very best. But benchmarking should be viewed only as the starting point rather than the end point for analysis.[14] Comparative results do not always carry real meaning, and are potentially misleading, unless they are set in a properly defined framework. Typically more analysis, and sometimes more research, is required to draw out policy implications.

In this context I find it helpful to distinguish between two different types of benchmarking. The first are macro type benchmarks where a lot is hidden behind the aggregates and quite misleading impressions can be created because economies / societies have different structures as well as scale. Global competitiveness is one such index and another, which received considerable attention in recent weeks, is the index that measures university quality – such as the Shanghai or the Times Higher Education. Let me dwell briefly on this latter index. Ireland's ranking is typically linked to our expenditures on science and technology. So if we have slipped or increased in the ranking, what does this tell us about our research policy? I would suggest that it tells us very little and that what is needed is an analysis of what is in the index and a contextualising of the key elements. Such an analysis might then yield good or bad news for the policy process, but in the absence of a framework, it says almost nothing that can guide us. Arguably for a small country, the more interesting index would be one that looked at the higher education sector overall, rather than at individual institutions.

The second type of benchmarking is more micro in type – where very specific measures are made across countries. The OECD's education indicators from PISA [Programme for

[13] The Competitiveness Council is an example of a body that has used international benchmarking to challenge actions and policies.

[14] For example, we feature strongly on indices of globalisation and certain innovation indices because of our export performance. However, our export performance should not be compared with that of countries that do not have an export platform economy such as ours. In the Irish case a clear distinction needs to be made between the export ratios of foreign and Irish-owned countries.

International Student Assessment] are one such example. They provide a basis for comparing competencies in language, maths and science for students at around 14 years of age across OECD countries every three years. In 2006 we were just at the OECD mean for maths and science but very far behind Finland which was often the 'comparator country' for us throughout the boom years. [We were well above the mean for language.] These results provide a reasonably objective validation of the commonly held perception that we have a maths/science problem in the second level. A key issue for us is whether our position has improved or deteriorated since 2006; the next set of PISA results come out this coming December.

But is it possible that the problem starts earlier, i.e., at primary level? At present we do not know as we have not yet participated in the OECD's TIMMS [Third International Mathematics and Science Study], which measures maths and science competencies of children at around 10 years of age.[15] I understand that consideration is being given to our participating in TIMMS 2011 – and this would be an important investment for Ireland. The OECD metrics provide a valuable source of benchmarking across a range of areas but, if we want to improve education policy, then these indicators, which are good but not perfect, should be the starting point for analysis and not the end point.

A further feature of the Irish policy-making process is the extensive use of 'expert groups' operating over relatively short time periods to develop major strategies. While other countries use such groups from time to time, we seem to use them more frequently. What exactly are their roles? Are they intended to generate new ideas in an area, to generate more policy coherence, or develop a wider consensus? What does their regular use imply about expertise within the relevant departments or agencies? And what is the basis for the 'expertise' and how do they make use of existing research evidence?[16] In raising these questions, I do so as someone who has spent the past year chairing such a group, which I believe worked hard and produced a good report. Looking across the system, I am puzzled at where these expert groups fit into the policy-making system.

In this same context, I think it useful to consider Ireland's calling on the OECD for external expertise in key areas. When and why do we seek its assistance? Is it because we lack the expertise locally or rather because we have difficulty hearing tough messages – in effect is the OECD's role to provide an external voice? In Ireland, it seems to me, that

[15] The most recent TIMMS was undertaken in 2007.
[16] A review of the impact and effectiveness of expert groups would make a very interesting thesis topic!

the status of an OECD report carries an authority which is quite remarkable, and with a presumption that its recommendations should be accepted without question.[17]

The quality of any OECD report depends on the skills of the team, the validity of the international comparisons they make, on whether or not the policy-makers have identified the right questions, and on the quality of Irish research that feeds into their work. Even if the report is excellent in its own terms, I believe that there is still a need for a real debate on its conclusions and recommendations before they are accepted. It would be desirable that the relevant researchers in Ireland should contribute to this debate, so that the role of the OECD becomes more one of challenging us and helping us to identify possible policy solutions rather than being seen as providing us with the ultimate solutions.

There is much discussion today about the need for policy to be evidence based. There is, however, a world of difference between a policy which is 'evidence-based', in the sense that there has been an independent, comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the research evidence with the implications for policy drawn out, and a policy which is based on the selective use of external reference points (either research or policy) without any rationale. Similarly, the adoption of a policy because it 'seems to work in Country X' may not be prudent, especially when the policy setting is different and the policy has been introduced relatively recently, so that its merits have yet to be evaluated.

This brings me to my final point in relation to why the use of research has been less than optimal in Ireland. We are a nation of story tellers and we like good anecdotes. In my view, we in the research community have been quite poor at producing anecdotes to illustrate our scientific or theoretical findings. Consequently, the unpopular message coming from a good research project can be immediately trumped by the unrepresentative anecdote from vested interests or the media. Most people are not in a position to judge the difference between the representative and unrepresentative anecdote. The comment that 'I don't deal with statistics – I deal with real people' is often uttered with pride – in reality such a comment should be interpreted as saying 'I don't deal with real people, I deal with a few people I know'. We researchers need to address this issue in how we present our research to the wider public.

[17] While the calibre of OECD reports may be much higher than other local consultancy reports, these latter do not enjoy the same status, but unlike the OECD reports, they may not be published.

4. WHAT LIMITS THE AVAILABILITY OF POLICY-FOCUSSED RESEARCH?

The starting point for any discussion on the topic of engaging researchers more in policy research is to recognise that many of us in the research community have little incentive to do such research. Promotion in all research institutions is strongly linked to publications in peer reviewed journals. Consequently if the policy-relevant research topic does not have 'international journal potential' then the supply of research for policy will be limited, whereas research that has such potential is more likely to be undertaken.[18] This is an issue that has received a lot of attention in the UK since the introduction of the research assessment exercise (RAE) in the 1980s – it dramatically reduced the volume of research that was policy relevant in the UK while increasing the research outputs in areas where researchers could publish in international journals.

The response of the UK government has been to establish a system of funding directly research programmes that are relevant to policy. This has yielded a positive response as research funding can also be an indicator of researcher productivity for promotion. In practice, however, much of the policy research is being undertaken by the older rather than younger generation of researchers. This is probably because the older researchers already have tenure and seniority and hence their careers cannot be adversely affected by producing research that is policy focused. It is also probably due in part to these researchers having already assimilated the institutional knowledge that is necessary to be able to undertake good policy research.

Up to this point, there is no broad policy for funding policy research in Ireland – the approach varies widely across departments and agencies. For the most part, policy research in Ireland, as in other countries, is either funded by the state, by philanthropists and by charities. The state has been the key funder, with the balance between project and programme funding, and research and consultancy differing across departments and agencies. Sustained philanthropic sources of funding have been modest, with some striking exceptions, most notably Atlantic Philanthropies. Its activities over the past decades, in supporting research on children and on ageing, have demonstrated clearly the research community's wiliness and ability to respond to potential sources of research funding. In certain policy areas, most notably health and children, charities have also

[18] There has also been a growth in the number of policy journals which has increased the willingness of university academics to undertake policy research. In Ireland, the Economic and Social Review, the main local academic journal for economics and statistical sociology articles, introduced a policy section in 2009.

funded research regularly. In contrast to some of the larger OECD countries, there is very little public good research funded by the private sector in Ireland.[19]

Yet another reason why there has been less policy research in recent years in Ireland, and it may have quite a small effect, is the option open to some researchers, especially in economics, to use their skills to enhance their incomes through consultancy. I have the impression that the *pro-bono* driver all but disappeared in the boom years, prompted both by the widespread use of consultancy reports to support policy making and the apparent low levels of interest in using published research where major decisions were being made. Benchmarking and decentralisation come to mind.

One development in the past decade which has served to increase the availability of research to inform policy, namely, the increase in high quality Irish data, especially from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Researchers who work on Ireland with (anonymised) micro data are now in a position to undertake research that was previously not possible, and this research has what I term 'international journal potential'. Given the State's large investment in data collection, it is important to see these data being used in research.[20] The use of these CSO data has been slower than might have been expected, and this reflects the very considerable investment required by researchers to use any given data set and the need for teams to realise the potential benefits. The availability of these data enhances the possible synergies between academic and policy research. While the prevailing view is that journal articles require much more effort, the reality is that the robustness of policy research needs to be just as high as mainstream research and requires a much greater investment in institutional knowledge.

EU funding has been supportive of policy research in many areas, where cross-country comparative research is important. Such research requires building research networks and considerable institutional support, and sometimes local co-funding must be provided. A cause of some concern to policy makers in the past decade was the negative impact on the arrival of local funding sources on the take up of grants sourced in the EU. This was especially so in the case of the physical sciences, but it may well have been the case that the scale of EU-funded research was above the optimal level, given capacity.

Looking at the research that might feed into policy, one possible silver lining in today's dark clouds, in Ireland and elsewhere, is that the policy challenges we face are engaging

[19] The ESRI has received some funding of this type for published research but the view of the private sector is that it is government's responsibility to fund policy research.
[20] These anonymised data sets are now located in the data archive at UCD.

many academic researchers in the policy debate, an activity which will hopefully translate into research on these new issues.

5. WHY HAS THERE BEEN LITTLE PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND POLICY MAKERS?

Since it is difficult to assess the direct impact of research on policy, an important part of the process of researcher engagement with the policy process depends on the general relationship between the research and policy communities. More specifically, it often depends on the relationship between the individual researcher(s) and policy-maker(s). In days gone by when the two communities in Ireland were much smaller, when class sizes at universities were tiny compared to today, students knew their teachers, who in turn knew them, and the two communities knew each other well without having to make any particular effort. As time has passed, this has changed very significantly, and in many instances there are now relatively weak networks between the policy and research communities, something I saw myself at first hand at the Policy Institute in TCD, and less so at the ESRI because of our specific policy mandate.

The weak links have been reinforced by the philosophy in our civil service system of creating strong generalists rather than specialists. This has the effect of policy-makers regularly changing roles thereby undermining any relationship built between a Department and that researcher, as that policy maker moves to another role either within that Department or in another Department. Furthermore, the new appointee may have no specialist knowledge of the area and a different set of analytical skills than his/her predecessor. And this problem is compounded by the increased specialisation in research over the past two decades.

In my view, the building of a strong interface between researchers and policy makers will not happen without concerted effort on both parts – I will return to this issue below.

6. WHAT IS NEEDED FOR A MORE PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN ACADEMICS, POLICY MAKERS AND POLITICIANS?

Since the stated purpose of my talk is to explore how a more productive engagement could take place between researchers and policy makers, let me make some suggestions coming from a researcher perspective. Given the challenges we face to reduce public expenditure and get greater value for what we spend, we need to realise whatever possible benefits we can from research. These are likely to come from research that

throws light on where resources can be targeted better. I am not implying here that there are endless branches of low hanging fruit but rather that analysis should be able to help us prioritise expenditures on policies that are of greatest value. Such research should also promote more debate about policy, counteracting what may be an excessive amount of consensus.

Let me address each of the groups separately and then look at what might be done by both combined. In doing so, it is important to distinguish between what relates to the individual and what relates to the organisation

Researchers

As a researcher, I believe that we can increase the accessibility of our policy-relevant research to policy makers by providing accessible (non-technical) summaries/abstracts of our research projects and findings. This can happen through webpages and a research bulletin system. This would cover research published in international peer reviewed journals, which would not necessarily be known to policy makers. Such summaries might also be included in working papers and the practice could be extended to PhD theses undertaken at Irish universities.[21] Yes it may be a nuisance, but it is a low cost and arguably a good discipline for the researcher to summarise his/her findings in an accessible form, and where relevant, draw out their policy relevance. The benefits of knowledge spillovers to the policy community and to students could be considerable,

Economists engaged directly in policy research could consider developing 'case studies' to illustrate the generality of their findings. This is an approach that is already mainstreamed in parts of sociology where 'mixed methods' are adopted. As noted above, it would provide the representative anecdote and reduce the impact of the unrepresentative ones.

Possibly the greatest challenge for researchers who wish to engage in policy research is that policy research often requires multi-person teams and occasionally multidisciplinary teams, because of its scale. While the social sciences are moving towards more team-based research, the tradition of the single scholar is still very strong and the tradition of the single discipline even stronger. There is significant learning needed for people to work in multidisciplinary teams, especially if their education has been highly specialised.

Finally, what can the research institution do to support a better engagement? For the most part, the institution cannot be the driver – this happens at the researcher level. However,

[21] Such summaries could be encouraged by research institutions and made mandatory for research that is funded from the public purse (e.g. IRCHSS).

there are some ways in which an institution can support better engagement. For example, it can make it clear that it values policy research, for example, through acknowledgement of policy research and engagement in the promotion process. Secondly, it can signal support through a positive attitude towards postgraduate research and teaching programmes in policy areas. Finally, it can facilitate policy engagement through providing support for the interface and by ensuring that its funding mechanisms account properly for the funding stream that may be associated with policy research.

Policy Makers

While the individual researcher can do a lot to promote positive engagement with the policy maker, it seems to me that the individual policy maker can do very little to promote greater engagement with the research community without action and support at an institutional level. In other words, the culture towards research within a department or agency will have a major influence on the behaviour of policy makers within that organisation. So let me, from the vantage point of a researcher who has engaged with the policy community in different guises, make some suggestions to stimulate discussion on how policy making institutions could foster greater engagement with the research community.

It has always seemed to me to be something of a paradox that, in a country where public discourse for two decades has emphasised the *knowledge economy* and *knowledge society*, the civil service has continued to pursue a human resource strategy that effectively penalises specialists by either narrowing their career prospects or by forcing them to de-skill. It seems difficult to argue that the principle of 'knowledge driving innovation and change' should not operate in the civil service and that what is needed is a combination of generalists and specialists. To evolve, this would mean that the specialist skills of people entering the civil service would be retained and developed.

In the case of economists, this could be done by developing a *government economic service* such as exists in the UK, where economists develop their skills and institutional knowledge by moving across departments but in each instance continuing to use and develop their economic skills. What is crucial with the UK model (which operates in Northern Ireland also) is that there are clusters of economists in different areas so that they can share knowledge and learn from each other. It has the further benefit of flexibility as skilled resources can be moved readily across departments as needed. Having greater specialist expertise within the civil service, and this does not just relate to economists, would allow policy makers access to further benefits from externally-

produced research, whether Irish or international. [22] This would also facilitate building relationships with the relevant researchers, allowing a greater two-way flow of knowledge.

For those with the requisite skills and interests, greater mobility could be promoted into and out of the public service to broaden skill sets. In parts of the public service, there may be opportunities for research analysts to engage in projects with researchers, as happens in the USA and Canada, for example. Developments of this type cannot happen without the support and leadership of those at the helm of the public sector; their support is a necessary signal of the new sense in which the public sector is more embedded in the knowledge society. Higher participation by career public servants in post graduate education could generate great benefit for the public sector, especially if it were part of a comprehensive strategy of engagement. And such engagement should be spread across institutions to ensure diversity of experience and reduce risk of 'group think'.

Where work is done by researchers on a commissioned basis for government departments or agencies, it seems to me that there should be an understanding that the researcher will submit the relevant components to academic journals for publication so that the findings can enter the public domain.[23] This would increase the benefits from research itself through wider dissemination; indeed, it seems rather contrary if the public funding of research were to lead to results that are not 'public'. This approach would also increase the attractiveness of policy research to potential researchers.

A further attraction to researchers of undertaking policy research can be the access to data that are within government departments and agencies. There are numerous examples where these data, appropriately anonymised, have been used by researchers, for example, the Forfás data on enterprises.

I would like to suggest that departments and agencies which have not already done so, should consider developing their existing data strategies to incorporate a research dimension. This would enhance the value of the data strategies and help to clarify when analysis should be conducted in-house, when it is appropriate to involve consultants and when researchers should be involved. Reflecting on my experience at the ESRI, I would suggest that programmatic rather than project funding is more suited to research. The ESRI has several such research programmes which operate extremely well and are

[22] In the case of other skills, increased mobility into and out of the civil service might be appropriate.
[23] This may involve some public organisations reviewing their approach to their intellectual property rights in relation to the research.

overseen by steering groups which are an opportunity for on-going engagement between researchers and policy makers.[24]

The existence of a research strategy within departments/agencies would also provide an assurance that any funds dispersed by departments would be done so as part of a coherent whole. They would also help to sustain the momentum of the research process, and to reduce risk in relation to investments in research due to a change of personnel.

Policy Makers and Researchers

What extra can be achieved when the two groups combine to foster engagement? For a start, working more closely together would help establish a clearer understanding of each group's roles and requirements.[25] This would allow more productive and realistic interactions, thereby enhancing benefits and reducing potential tensions between researchers and policy makers.[26] It would help in turn to foster commitment on both sides to building a meaningful research agenda,[27] which would see researchers publishing policy outputs (using relevant peer review processes) and academic outputs (in peer reviewed journals). Interactions with policy makers could stimulate research into new issues, and when linked to pilot studies involving multidisciplinary teams, could generate significant new research possibilities.

One of the greatest potential gains from researchers and decision-makers working more closely together is that it would inform, support and promote societal wellbeing in the face of vested interest groups. The nature of many good policies is that the potential beneficiaries are widely dispersed and consequently do not have the resources to promote such policies, e.g., a broader tax base, a patient-centred health system, etc. The nature of many weak policies is that they have concentrated beneficiaries who consequently have the resources to lobby for these policies, e.g., abolition of the bank levy in 2007. While we are good in Ireland at bringing stakeholders to the table, in the absence of evidence and analysis, I wonder how we can expect them to engage with the totality of issues rather than simply their own stakeholder agenda. In effect, if the stakeholder is only at the table to protect his/her interests and is not challenged by hard evidence, then we are at

[24] Examples of such programmes are one in second level education (in relation to junior and senior cycle policy) and on third level (in relation to policy on access, financial supports and retention).

[25] This involves understanding of incentives and clarity of and respect for roles and governance by both sides – challenges of different discourses and timelines – role of representative anecdotes

[26] Increased understanding of their different roles and respect for the different objectives and constraints on both sides would also reduce tensions between researchers and policy makers.

[27] There is no point if researchers are undertaking policy relevant research simply to meet institutional overheads. Similarly, there is no point in policy makers who claim to support research while believing that they know the answer already and really have nothing to learn.

risk of simply having a collection of vested interests carving up the ‘cake’ rather than a group of thinkers who can make a ‘better’ cake to the benefit of all rather than the few.

Yet another potential benefit of cooperation is that a researcher perspective could help support the development of data systems, by identifying ways in which data could be developed for future research or evaluations. Such developments would serve to allow measurement of policy effectiveness in due course.

But there are potential costs – and the most obvious is that, in a small country context, such interactions would promote ‘group think’, especially if people were only comfortable with consensus. This could be avoided by having open dialogue events, under the Chatham House Rule, and greater acceptance of the value of critical thinking on both sides. Such events were relatively limited in the past decade, and the *Statistical and Social Inquiry Society* has been poorly attended by policy makers over that period. I would suggest that if the debate is one sided – either with the researcher pronouncing and the policy maker silent, or with the policy maker picking holes and the researcher disengaging, the potential benefits of engagement are likely to be negligible. These Chatham House events will not happen unless they are organised by some body or group **and** supported by researchers and the leadership in the policy community.

7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This lecture has attempted to start the process of addressing the question of how we can foster greater engagement between researchers and policy makers in Ireland today. Greater engagement could be particularly useful at a challenging time and would allow more benefit to be realised from the investments we make in research. Let me conclude by suggesting that, for such an engagement to succeed and contribute to our policy making process becoming more research and evidence-based, it must have strong support across the full political system. Could it be that we are at a good time to seek such support?

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	353	Market Regulation and Competition; Law in Conflict: A View from Ireland, Implications of the Panda Judgment Philip Andrews and *Paul K Gorecki*
	352	Designing a property tax without property values: Analysis in the case of Ireland *Karen Mayor, Seán Lyons* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	351	Civil War, Climate Change and Development: A Scenario Study for Sub-Saharan Africa *Conor Devitt* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	350	Regulating Knowledge Monopolies: The Case of the IPCC *Richard S.J. Tol*
	349	The Impact of Tax Reform on New Car Purchases in Ireland *Hugh Hennessy* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	348	Climate Policy under Fat-Tailed Risk: An Application of FUND *David Anthoff* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	347	Corporate Expenditure on Environmental Protection *Stefanie A. Haller* and *Liam Murphy*
	346	Female Labour Supply and Divorce: New Evidence from Ireland Olivier Bargain, Libertad González, *Claire Keane* and Berkay Özcan
	345	A Statistical Profiling Model of Long-Term Unemployment Risk in Ireland *Philip J. O'Connell, Seamus McGuinness, Elish Kelly*
	344	The Economic Crisis, Public Sector Pay, and the Income Distribution *Tim Callan,* Brian Nolan (UCD) and *John Walsh*

	343	Estimating the Impact of Access Conditions on Service Quality in Post *Gregory Swinand, Conor O'Toole* and *Seán Lyons*
	342	The Impact of Climate Policy on Private Car Ownership in Ireland *Hugh Hennessy* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	341	National Determinants of Vegetarianism *Eimear Leahy, Seán Lyons* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	340	An Estimate of the Number of Vegetarians in the World *Eimear Leahy, Seán Lyons* and *Richard S.J. Tol*
	339	International Migration in Ireland, 2009 *Philip J O'Connell* and *Corona Joyce*
	338	The Euro Through the Looking-Glass: Perceived Inflation Following the 2002 Currency Changeover *Pete Lunn* and *David Duffy*
	337	Returning to the Question of a Wage Premium for Returning Migrants *Alan Barrett and Jean Goggin*
2009	336	What Determines the Location Choice of Multinational Firms in the ICT Sector? *Iulia Siedschlag, Xiaoheng Zhang, Donal Smith*
	335	Cost-benefit analysis of the introduction of weight-based charges for domestic waste – West Cork's experience *Sue Scott* and *Dorothy Watson*
	334	The Likely Economic Impact of Increasing Investment in Wind on the Island of Ireland *Conor Devitt, Seán Diffney, John Fitz Gerald, Seán Lyons* and *Laura Malaguzzi Valeri*
	333	Estimating Historical Landfill Quantities to Predict Methane Emissions *Seán Lyons,* Liam Murphy and *Richard S.J. Tol*

332 International Climate Policy and Regional Welfare Weights
Daiju Narita*, Richard S. J. Tol,* and *David Anthoff*

331 A Hedonic Analysis of the Value of Parks and Green Spaces in the Dublin Area
Karen Mayor, Seán Lyons, David Duffy and *Richard S.J. Tol*

330 Measuring International Technology Spillovers and Progress Towards the European Research Area
Iulia Siedschlag

329 Climate Policy and Corporate Behaviour
Nicola Commins, Se*án Lyons,* Marc Schiffbauer, and *Richard S.J. Tol*

328 The Association Between Income Inequality and Mental Health: Social Cohesion or Social Infrastructure
Richard Layte and *Bertrand Maître*

327 A Computational Theory of Exchange: Willingness to pay, willingness to accept and the endowment effect
Pete Lunn and Mary Lunn

326 Fiscal Policy for Recovery
John Fitz Gerald

325 The EU 20/20/2020 Targets: An Overview of the EMF22 Assessment
Christoph Böhringer, Thomas F. Rutherford, and *Richard S.J. Tol*

324 Counting Only the Hits? The Risk of Underestimating the Costs of Stringent Climate Policy
Massimo Tavoni, *Richard S.J. Tol*

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Kelly C. de Bruin, Rob B. Dellink and *Richard S.J. Tol*

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T. Callan, C. Keane and *J.R. Walsh*

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Paul K Gorecki

319 Negative Equity in the Irish Housing Market
David Duffy

318 Estimating the Impact of Immigration on Wages in Ireland
Alan Barrett, Adele Bergin and *Elish Kelly*

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Seamus McGuinness, Elish Kelly, Philip O'Connell, Tim Callan

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Delma Byrne and *Seamus McGuinness*

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Thomas Conefrey and *John Fitz Gerald*

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Kostas Mavromaras*, Seamus McGuinness,* Nigel O'Leary, Peter Sloane and Yin King Fok

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Alan Barrett, Séamus McGuinness, Martin O'Brien and *Philip O'Connell*

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Christopher T. Whelan and *Bertrand Maître*

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