ENGAGED RESEARCH POLICY BRIEF

GOVERNMENT, HIGHER EDUCATION & SOCIETY WORKING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

A BRIEFING FOR SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS & POLICY MAKERS

THE CHALLENGE OF IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

The Programme for Government sets out an ambitious and transformative agenda for every Government Department. Over the next five years, senior civil servants will be tasked with developing the detailed policies and work programmes that address significant societal challenges including, amongst others, rebooting the economy, delivering on health and housing, and addressing climate change.

The Programme for Government promises to drive economic recovery and improve quality of life for all. It also commits to 'a New Engagement Model' to advance societal impacts across policy commitments such as a commitment to ending Direct Provision and achieving a reduction in carbon emissions per annum from 2021 to 2030.

COVID-19 – LESSONS LEARNT AND LOOKING FORWARD

Campus Engage believes Ireland's experience of COVID 19 demonstrates the efficacy of Government and Society working together. Ireland's 'Community Call' illustrated the extra capacity that Government gains by working with researchers and the public to inform Department's policy and practice decision-making. This connectedness is now pivotal to rebuilding the social and economic wellbeing of Ireland and the EU.

The experience of COVID-19 teaches us that if we are to tackle grand societal challenges effectively, we need to work together. Controlling the threat of COVID-19 requires empirical data and practitioner expertise, alongside public and service users' insights, to develop effective and responsive guidelines and protocols.

In the words of Professor Philip Nolan, Chair of the Epidemiology Modelling Group, National Public Health Emergency Team, June 2020:

In order to improve our public services, we must base decisions on information provided by the service user's lived experience; that is, the experience of a health practitioner on the frontline, or the individuals accessing public services."

MEETING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES WITH ENGAGED RESEARCH

Engaged research encompasses a wide range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement with research users and stakeholders to improve, understand or investigate issues of public interest or concern. Engaged research is advanced in collaboration with government and community research stakeholders rather than for, or about, them.

Research and innovation policies and funding calls, both in Ireland and across Europe, are actively promoting and supporting engaged research and innovation. There is an emphasis on joined-up initiatives that address our greatest societal challenges, enhance the impact of research, and offer a better return on public investments.

By working together, society, Government and higher education can advance the missions within the Programme for Government, capitalising on public investment in research and the knowledge it produces, to deliver positive societal impacts.

CAMPUS ENGAGE – DRIVING ENGAGED RESEARCH IN IRELAND

Based in the Irish Universities Association, Campus Engage is dedicated to embedding, scaling and promoting engaged research in order to deliver excellence and societal impact through collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs), government departments, agencies, funding agencies, civic and civil society, and wider society. A goal of Engaged Research is to enable evidence-informed policies and practices to improve implementation pathways for impact. Engaged Research can also foster greater public support for, and trust in, science and research in our everyday lives.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT MISSION - A NEW GREEN DEAL

Ireland is consistently failing to meet European Union environmental targets on carbon emissions. This is predicted to cost the Exchequer €600 million a year in fines from 2020 (ESRI, 2018). It is also predicted that these fines will increase due to growth in industrial activity and within the population. Carbon pricing is also due to climb from €30 to €85 per tonne. This financial burden will soon fall on product and service users, and businesses. Currently, discussion is focused on how to deal with the financial cost, not the causes, and this broken model urgently needs to transition to a greener and fairer deal.

Engaged research for impact can play a fundamental role in this transition. By working together, Government, researchers, environmentalists, the public, farmers, and the aviation industry can co-design new policies, services, and technologies, advancing innovative solutions to reduce emissions. Beyond that, investing in research has a significant multiplier effect. By bringing those most affected individuals and communities to the table, relevant Departments are supporting the 'transition pathway' towards new models, while changing end-users' attitudes and behaviours, building capacity for necessary change.

SHARED FUTURE – SHARED GOALS: PROGRESSING POLICY GOALS WITH ENGAGED RESEARCH

Campus Engage wishes to support Government Departments and agencies in championing integration of engaged research to advance evidence-informed policies, practices and services, to enable evidence-informed decision-making that delivers real and lasting impacts, aligned with the missions identified in the Programme for Government.

The benefits of Working together include:

1. Produces rigorous scientific evidence to inform government policy and practice;

2. Reduces costs as working with university-based academic experts on engaged research is generally more cost effective than working with private consultants;

3. Opens doors and builds trust with diverse local and national communities and stakeholders, and access to their knowledge, buy-in through collaboration;

4. Guides decision making based on comprehensive understanding of societal challenges, their causes, effects on diverse stakeholders, and collaboratively tested solutions;

5. Facilitates participation of traditionally under-represented, or marginalised groups in policy research, design and implementation;

6. Results in greater acceptance, support and impact of public policies;

7. Supports attitudinal and behavioural change as a result of stakeholder involvement in new policy, products or practices.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR IMPACT – A CASE STUDY PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT MISSION – PROVISION OF HOUSING FOR ALL

We believe that everybody should have access to good quality housing to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and located close to essential services offering a high quality of life.

Prof Michelle Norris, UCD is working with government on reforming Irish social housing funding. Her engaged research, with not for profit housing agencies, local government, NESC, and international Policy makers from Denmark and Austria, indicated that relying on central government grants had made Irish social housing vulnerable to cutbacks in harsh economic times. Her evidence indicated that replacing grants with loans would spread out the costs of providing social housing, making it more affordable for government and incentivise social housing providers to manage and maintain their dwellings more efficiently. Prof Norris successfully implemented this evidence-informed strategy through her work as Chair of the board of the Housing Finance Agency. Between 2011 and 2019 the Agency increased its social housing lending from €7.6 to €616 million. This action delivered 8.262 (is this figure correct?) additional social housing units. In 2020 she was appointed as expert advisor to the United Nations' Housing 2030 programme which aims to improve the capacity of national and local governments to formulate policies that improve housing affordability and sustainability.

WHAT YOU AND YOUR DEPARTMENT CAN DO

1. Align your Department's Programme for Government objectives with the funding calls of our national funding agencies. The funding calls that address societal challenges include the Irish Research Council's Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenge Research Fund (COALESCE) and SFI's Future Innovator Challenge-based Funding.

2. Promote inter-departmental dialogue, commitment and infrastructure to work in partnership with Irish HEIs on engaged research for evidence-informed policies, practice and innovations.

3. Work with Campus Engage to consult with colleagues and funding agencies to identify a list of societal challenges and issues of public interest, and launch new funding agency calls, such as: COVID-19; the European Green New Deal; and Affordable Housing Scheme.

4. Work with colleagues, funding agencies, HEI leaders, and colleagues in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to define impact metrics and methods for monitoring research and innovation impact across key categories including: economic, environmental, health and well-being, public and private services, policy, practice, social and cultural and skills, etc.

5. Put in place inter-departmental information management systems to support novel collaborations and to better utilise existing data, thereby avoiding duplication of effort and reducing spend.

6. Develop and publish an open access policy to encourage sharing and use of public research findings and data across Government Departments and agencies.

Campus Engage is working to bring higher education researchers and communities together to address our greatest societal challenges. Knowledge generated in partnership with policy makers, product and service users, and civic and civil society is more likely to be useful to society and have impact. We look forward to building partnerships between higher education and Government to address societal challenges together. This document was written by the members of the Engaged Research Working group of Campus Engage with input from expert policy advisors and funding agency leaders.

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Sign up to our mailing list for training, funding call information and further support services **info@campusengage.ie**

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