What works and why in government-academic engagement?

An analysis of research-policy engagement initiatives and their impact

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We mapped the activities of:

- Organisations running ... 428
- Research-policy engagement initiatives in over ... 1922
- Countries worldwide 41

We identified 9 different research-policy engagement practices, that speak to three different ways of thinking about how to improve evidence use in government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to improving evidence use</th>
<th>What do research-policy engagement initiatives do?</th>
<th>How many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linear</strong></td>
<td>1. Disseminating and communicating research</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Formal institutional requests for evidence</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Facilitating access to research</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational</strong></td>
<td>4. Building decision-maker skills</td>
<td>226</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Building researcher skills</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Building professional partnerships</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>System</strong></td>
<td>7. Strategic leadership</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Rewarding impact</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Creating infrastructure and posts</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linear approaches ‘push’ evidence out from academia or ‘pull’ evidence into government.

Relational approaches recognise that evidence use is social, relying on expertise and shared understanding. Relational initiatives aim to strengthen skills and support long-term collaborations.

Systems approaches aim to tackle barriers to improved evidence use and create more supportive cultures.
The mapping revealed a complex landscape in which many organisations and stakeholders promote engagement...

* University (540)
  - Academic research centre: 31%
  - Academic research institute: 19%
  - University team: 16%
  - Research network: 8%
  - University think tank: 6%
  - Cross-university initiative: 5%
  - University association: 5%
  - Academic research project: 4%
  - University initiative: 4%
  - Teaching partnership: 1%
  - University (540)

* Funders (190)
  - Independent research organisations: 120
  - Research-policy partnership: 190
  - Learned Society (156)

* Government (126)
  - Government office or department: 35%
  - Parliamentary initiative: 16%
  - Advisory bodies and committees: 15%
  - National policy body, agency or public sector research establishment: 6%

* Intermediary (232)
  - Policy bodies & agencies (86)
  - Think tanks (61)
  - Professional body (77)

*a Parliamentary initiative (51)
*b Business (21)
*c Non-profit initiative (7)
... across different policy areas and disciplines

Dominant topics of research-policy engagement initiatives (top 15)

1. Public policy ........................................ 476
2. Health .................................................. 273
3. Environment .......................................... 136
4. Multi-disciplinary ..................................... 118
5. Science, technology and policy ............... 85
6. Development ........................................... 78
7. Single disciplinary .................................... 64
8. Social Policy ............................................. 63
9. Research and innovation ......................... 55
10. Policing ................................................ 46
11. Professions ............................................ 45
12. Social Services ....................................... 44
13. Higher education .................................... 41
14. Economic Policy ..................................... 38
15. Local Government ................................. 37

A total of 57 organisations have made evaluations of their work available in the public domain

That's only 13% of organisations who have shared evaluations

Just under 3% of the initiatives we found

5% mixed peer reviewed and grey literature

About 16% of the literature we found had been peer reviewed

11% Peer reviewed

and over 70% of the evaluations were conducted by an independent evaluator
We found pockets of learning from evaluations that offer a rich and nuanced picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Policy</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Policing</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often new initiatives fail to draw on this existing learning. Many organisations funded multiple activities, used different policy engagement practices, and didn’t articulate clear goals.

To make the most of growing investment in research-policy engagement, we need clearer evidence about what works and how organisations can support each other to achieve shared goals.

Find out more: transforming-evidence.org