

NCR Academic Symposium December 1st 2020 - Summary

Virtual workshop between the National Centre for Resilience, University of Glasgow and Scottish Government chaired by Prof Fabrice Renaud.

Discussion topic: *“What is preventing politicians, policy makers and practitioners from more readily using academic research and critical analyses of data to underpin the development of policy and practice?”*

Attendees

Professor Chris Chapman	Chair in Educational Policy and Practice, Director of Policy Scotland (Social Sciences College Senior Management) University of Glasgow
Iain Huggins	Senior Policy Officer, Risk & Essential Services Unit, Resilience Division, Scottish Government
Ailsa Mackay	Business Development Manager, NCR, University of Glasgow
Erin Moore	Head of ScoRDS, Resilience Division, Scottish Government
Prof Virginia Murray	Head of Global Disaster Risk Reduction, Public Health England
Kayleigh Parker	Project Officer, NCR, University of Glasgow
Prof Fabrice Renaud	Professor in Environmental Risk/Community Resilience, NCR Research Director, Chair to the NCR Steering Group, University of Glasgow
Marie Stevens	Head of Risk and Assurance and Civil Contingencies Policy Team for Covid-19, Resilience Division, Scottish Government
Dr Alexander Whitelaw	Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Policy, University of Glasgow

Summary of the discussion

The group considered the above topic and the discussion concentrated on exploring the barriers and challenges that face academics, policymakers and practitioners when accessing research, adapting and using research in policymaking and integrating that policy into practice.

The conversation was split into 3 sections for the group to explore:

- 1. What are the obstacles inhibiting the integration of research findings into the policy making process?**
- 2. What difficulties are there in the communication of research findings to policymakers?**
- 3. What prevents effective integration of policy into practice?**

There was an in-depth discussion where potential barriers were identified and a consensus reached on the types of issues that are currently faced.

These fell into themes such as:

- Logistical access to academics
- Cultural and hierarchy barriers in government, practice and academia
- Financial barriers
- Difficulties commissioning research

- Academic accessibility to policy desks
- Structural complexities in policy and political decision making
- Disconnect with existing networks

Key points to note

- There are no silver bullets, it will require an open and honest collaborative effort to bring the cultures together.
- There is appetite for government to improve connections with academia and academia recognises that research needs to shift to a more demand led approach.
- Universities have had mixed success at approaching government with research outputs. Some areas work hard to encourage researchers to share their work. The School of Interdisciplinary Studies is keen to explore more engagement with demand led work.
- Academics need to be realistic and pragmatic with their research outputs framed in the voice of the end user which are digestible and easy to use for policy to take forward.
- To make sure that end outputs meet budget, requirements and can be integrated into the policy making process the initial commissioned research question must be defined correctly to ensure that the outputs can be disseminated in a digestible format for end users.
- Literature reviews are useful to policy and can provide suitable evidence from existing research.
- Scottish government has a lack of transparency across areas so it is difficult for colleagues to understand how areas operate and how research is utilised, however opportunities for universities to collaborate with government data analysts and researchers would open up new channels of collaboration.
- Practice is supported to adopt policy change and to embed it, but there are so many policy desks jostling to have their changes noticed that practitioners who are responding have too much to do. Tasks are prioritised due to the demands and pressures of work. Many of the documents are confidential and can cause complications.
- Policy change is “done to” practitioners and it would benefit from a change in ownership from policy to practice to lead policy change. Practitioners need a stronger voice to better inform the policy process but this would be hard to implement.
- There are different mechanisms that the NCR can access to allow Scottish Government to gain access to as many academic gateways as possible. This would allow access to networks in the UK and internationally that can support and give access to wider research and advice.
- Rather than the NCR holding a list of academics it may be more useful to be the gateway to other networks. Useful resources for research related networks were shared with the group to be investigated.
- Some key groups were shared for the NCR to join. E.g. the UK Alliance for Disaster Research links all academics who work on disasters. The University of Glasgow is a member therefore the NCR can use this to identify the specialists in areas of interest on behalf of government.
- It is important to continue this dialogue and link all work to the Sendai framework. Prof Virginia Murray has offered to give guidance to the NCR in her capacity as Honorary Professor to the University of Glasgow.

Reference links

<http://www.ukadr.org/>

https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/DRG-10th-Anniversary-booklet_Nov-2019-1.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>

<https://www.icsei.net>

<https://spre.scot>

<https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk>

<https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-guidelines-national-disaster-risk-assessment>

<https://www.undrr.org/publication/hazard-definition-and-classification-review>

<https://www.ingsa.org/>

<http://www.naturalhazardspartnership.org.uk/products/science-notes/>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0232-y>

<https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13012-017-0589-5>

A full report will be distributed in 2021 and a follow-up symposium will be held to explore possible ways to make improvements and find solutions. Additional participants will need to be identified to ensure that both university and government academics can participate in the next discussion.