InterAction

How can academics and the third sector
work together to influence policy and practice?

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Enabling Wellbeing

Research

InterAction `2016`

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Mark was appointed Carnegie Fellow at the beginning of 2015 to lead on the InterAction project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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! The Challenge

The impact of universities on public policy is less than might be expected, given their human and financial resources.

Both universities and the third sector are producers of knowledge and both are social actors.

Yet there are a number of practical and cultural obstacles which inhibit the potential for collaboration to be effectively harnessed.

Green Shoots

Some universities are taking active and innovative steps to greater engagement with civil society.

There are many examples of successful interaction often at the level of the individual academic or at the level of a project.

The four UK higher education funding bodies have introduced an open access requirement to make research publically available.

Analysis

Academic research is highly trusted but not readily accessible.

The narrow pursuit of rankings, income and outputs has often crowded out engagement with wider society.

The passive dissemination of research is unlikely to have significant impact.

The third sector has valuable experience of successfully influencing policy and practice.

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There is a trend to speak of knowledge exchange, knowledge mobilisation and co-creation of knowledge rather than knowledge transfer.

Evidence is only one part of a non-linear, power infused, complex process where social actors seek to influence for a variety of reasons.

Third sector organisations feel it can be their task to draw on foundational evidence from academics.

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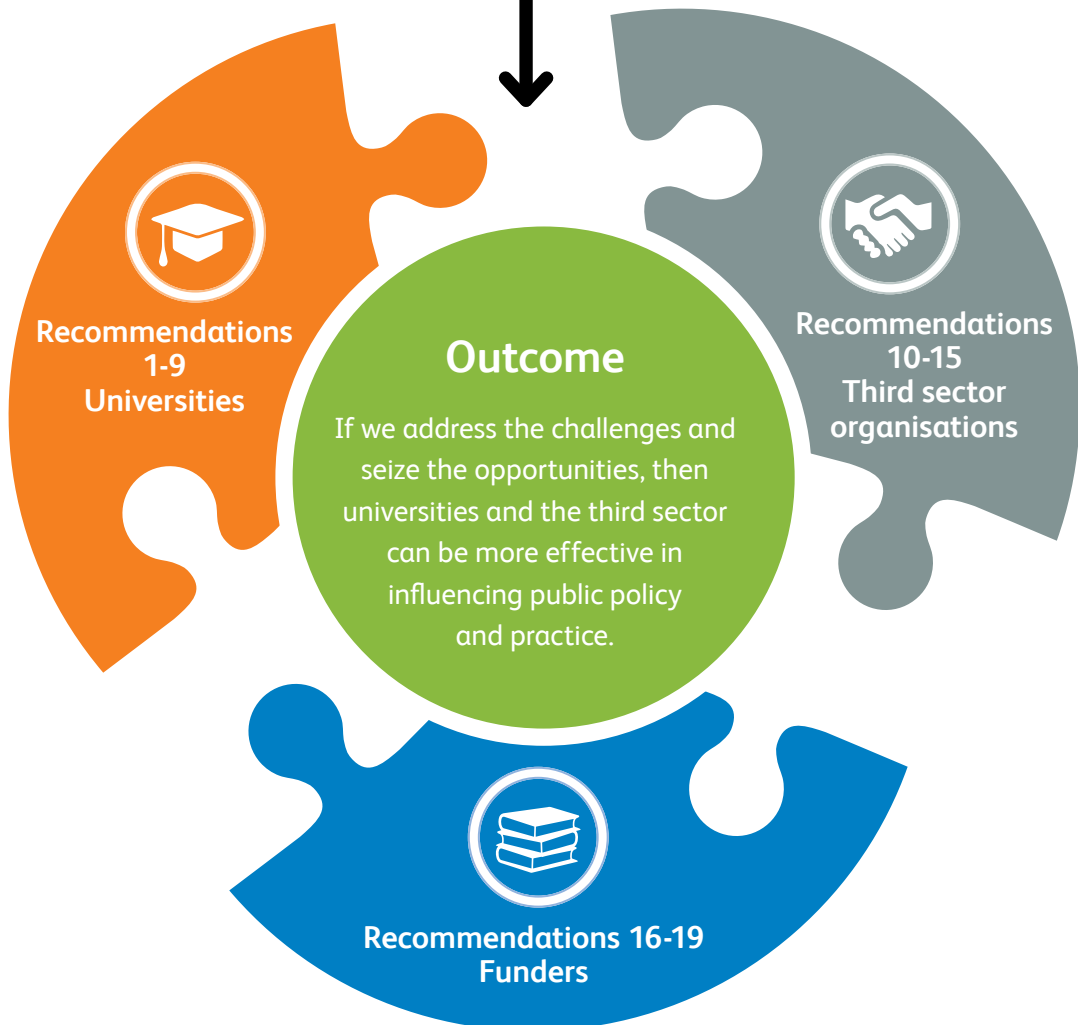
1. Introduction

This report seeks to explore what scope exists for academics and the third sector to work together to influence policy and practice, and how this might be done. It touches on the respective roles of academics and third sector organisations and asks whether these are likely to be complementary. It explores what barriers or obstacles may impede cooperation, and what methods of InterAction exist and have proved successful or unsuccessful in influencing policy and practice. It concludes with recommendations for universities, for third sector organisations and for other significant actors in this process including the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Research Councils UK and governments.

The report acknowledges that universities and academics may have different interests and goals from voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs), let alone larger campaigning organisations, even if they share similar values and motivations towards promoting the public good. They may also have very different ideas about what constitutes 'evidence' and how it should be produced and used.

A recent report from Manchester University, entitled 'Sir Humphrey and the Professors', (Talbot and Talbot 2014) addressed the question of how governments make use of academic research and expertise. It pointed out that the 200,000 academics working in UK universities represent a substantial potential resource to inform policymaking, and that most academics also participate in international communities of scholars with access to even greater pools of knowledge. It is not only governments who could draw on this resource, of course: it is potentially useful to policy and practice more generally.
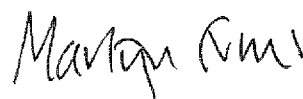
The Carnegie UK Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study showed that universities' research results are little used by policymakers and practitioners even though they are the most trusted source of evidence (McCormick 2013). This Evidence Exchange survey of 484 policymakers and practitioners showed that evidence from university research was the most trusted (always or usually trusted by 68% of respondents), but one of the least-used sources of evidence (frequently used by only 35% of respondents). Instead, evidence tended to be gleaned from the internet and the media, even though these sources were much less trusted.

The study also showed that policymakers and practitioners are often eager to find reliable evidence to inform their work, but that this was not a simple matter – too often, they were 'thirsty for knowledge while drowning in a sea of information'. Moreover, the Manchester study showed 'it is clear that the narrow focus of things like the Research Excellence Framework "impact" agenda is not what Whitehall wants. They are less concerned with the impact of a specific piece of research and much more interested in cumulated knowledge and expertise'. (Talbot and Talbot, 2014, 26). A number of studies have raised questions about how politicians and civil servants use (or misuse) evidence, leading to trenchant critiques of the concept of 'evidence-based policy', and this is considered in this report.

Third-sector organisations' research (and especially that of think tanks) was less trusted than university research, but their outputs were more likely to be read than those from academia. There is clear scope for universities and third-sector organisations to explore working together to influence policy and practice, building on the trust enjoyed by university research, while also capitalising on voluntary and community organisations' apparently greater success in reaching policy and practice.

Martyn Evans

Martyn Evans
CEO Carnegie UK Trust

2. Why work together?

At root, it may be argued that both universities and third-sector organisations have a shared interest in public service, promoting the public benefit and in broadly charitable purposes. Many are registered charities. Each may have an interest in achieving and demonstrating greater impact, however defined. But crucial differences may lie hidden beneath such high-level commonalities. At the Newcastle round table, for example, it was suggested that the academic world is motivated primarily towards the creation of knowledge and published journal articles, whereas the third sector is motivated primarily towards the delivery of social change and social impact. Organisational cultures may also differ.

Questions arise, then, of whether these potential partners share the same values and objectives in relation to the same publics. Do they have a common understanding of what constitutes evidence? Does each recognise and respect the other's role in producing knowledge and as a social actor, or is there a belief that only universities produce real knowledge and that this has to be transferred to 'users' to generate social impact? When might cooperation be mutually beneficial and are there circumstances in which it would not? What is the basis for cooperation, and on what terms might it proceed?

This section explores why, and under what circumstances, cooperation might be attractive to third-sector organisations and to universities, and we begin with a brief discussion of types of knowledge since concepts of knowledge (and of course trust) will be at the heart of any transaction or mutual relationship and knowledge exchange.

TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Academics often identify their role in relation to knowledge production and transfer, but they have no monopoly on knowledge creation – indeed, we increasingly refer to knowledge exchange, to co-creation of knowledge and to different types of knowledge. For example, the Alliance for Useful Evidence (an open-access network that champions the use of evidence in social policy) uses the simple dictionary definition of evidence: 'The available

body of facts or information indicating whether a belief of proposition is true or valid.' (NESTA/Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2016).

In particular, recognition is accorded to the value of tacit knowledge and experiential learning alongside more formal types of knowledge. Lam (2000) summarises a well-established body of work which distinguishes between *explicit knowledge* and *tacit knowledge* and suggests that the interaction between these two modes of knowing is vital for the creation of new knowledge. Human knowledge, she says, can be articulated explicitly or manifested implicitly (tacit):

- Explicit knowledge can be codified and acquired by formal study or deduction: it can be stored in objective forms in a single location and appropriated.

- Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is intuitive and unarticulated, acquired through practical experience ('learning by doing'), and cannot easily be aggregated.

The transfer of tacit knowledge requires close interaction, shared understanding, cooperation and trust. Moreover, it is action-oriented. Many scholars (eg Nelson and Winter 1982; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) have argued that new knowledge is generated primarily through the dynamic interaction and combination of these two types, and Lam (2000, 491) concludes that 'the learning

and innovative capability of an organisation is critically dependent on its capacity to mobilise tacit knowledge and foster its interaction with explicit knowledge.'

Furthermore, Lam considers where knowledge within an organisation resides, distinguishing between *individual knowledge* in the brains and bodily skills of individuals (and which is therefore lost if the individual departs), and *collective knowledge,* which exists between rather than within individuals, stored in the organisation's culture, procedures, routines and shared norms which guide its problem-solving activities and patterns of interaction. Lam then uses this analytical framework (explicit/tacit and individual/ collective knowledge) to explore the links between knowledge types, organisational forms and societal institutions, showing how these interact to shape learning and innovation.

Within her framework, universities might be characterised as 'professional bureaucracies', where individual professionals are the key knowledge agents whose formal training and professional affiliation gives them a source of authority and a repertoire of explicit knowledge, at least within their professional and disciplinary silos. Lam points out (2000, 492) that such 'embrained knowledge enjoys a privileged social status within Western culture' which might attract prospective partners to engage with academia. Less value is accorded to tacit knowledge, which is contained and circumscribed within the boundaries of individual specialisation. Some third-sector organisations may be similar, but many will be more organic, generating tacit knowledge through experimentation and interactive problem-solving in what Lam describes as an 'adhocracy' organisational form. For such organisations, in contrast to professional bureaucracies, 'the ultimate judges of their expertise are their clients, and not the professional bodies' (Lam 2000, 497).

Lam's paper goes on to make the case for combining explicit and tacit knowledges, and she argues that this is best encouraged through the 'J-form' organisation which:

> 66 Combines the stability and efficiency of a bureaucracy with the flexibility and team dynamics of an adhocracy. It allows an organic, non-hierarchical team structure to operate in parallel with its formal hierarchical managerial structure... It is at the team level, at the intersection between horizontal and vertical flows of knowledge, where the greatest intensity of interaction, learning and knowledge diffusion takes place. 99
>
> Lam 2000, 497-8

This is an important idea which will be picked up again later in this report. One question for us is whether such intersections between horizontal and vertical flows of (explicit and tacit) knowledge might be encouraged through partnership working.

WHY MIGHT THE THIRD SECTOR BE INTERESTED?

Both academia and the third sector are internally differentiated, and recognition of this diversity is essential. The third sector may be defined as:

> 66 The universe of organisations between the state, market and household characterised by their public benefit purpose, non-profit distribution constraint, independence from external control and voluntary nature. 99
>
> Murdock et al 2013

The range of organisations involved goes from the large/ specialist/ international/ professionalised to the small/ local/generalist/ volunteer-led. They may be lobbyists, service providers, schools, advocates, faith groups, infrastructure organisations; and

charities, voluntary organisations, cooperatives, mutual organisations, social enterprises or community groups. Some would include organisations with clearly sectional interests, such as trade unions, professional bodies and campaign groups. Some have a large staff of professional employees, while others rely only on unpaid volunteers. Most use 'evidence' of some sort to influence practice and/or policy: some do research; some commission research; many will have their work evaluated. Whatever their role and make-up, they play an important part in the public policy landscape, and the continued and increasing focus on evidence-informed decision-making, not least from government itself, is placing additional demands on the sector to demonstrate its impact.

Nevertheless, while alert to the differences between, say, Oxfam/Greenpeace, Wellcome/ JRF/Leverhulme, and small VCOs, some reasons emerged from our round table discussions why third-sector organisations might wish to engage with academia. At the Cardiff meeting, for example, Shelter Cymru explained that they work with academics in order to add academic knowledge and expertise to their own knowledge and expertise, specifically in terms of reviewing findings from existing literature and designing a research methodology. Sharing knowledge between sectors was also thought to lead to better dissemination and impact. Cooperation gave Shelter Cymru access to findings in peer-reviewed journals, which were otherwise hidden behind paywalls but might allow them to access academic research funding sources. Perhaps most importantly, involving academics contributed a 'rubber-stamp of objectivity, making their evidence more likely to be taken seriously.

These reasons for the third sector to engage with academia emerged at many of our InterAction roundtables, and may be elaborated as follows:

- Working with universities was seen by third sector-organisations in very instrumental terms as a means to enhance the status and trust accorded to their own reports and attempts to influence policy and practice. 'Slapping a university label on it' in this way was said at the Edinburgh round table to have been highlighted in an ESRC seminar series on international NGOs' partnerships with academics.

- Accessing expert knowledge, or in Lam's terms, 'embrained' and 'encoded' knowledge, was also frequently mentioned. However, this was coupled with a complaint that the knowledge-producing role of third sector organisations themselves was often belittled or unrecognised by academia and funders of university research. The discourse of knowledge transfer was rejected by many third-sector organisations in favour of concepts of knowledge exchange and co-creation, although acknowledgement of a perceived hierarchy of evidence is implicit in the practice of 'slapping a university label on it'.

- A further reason was to access the various resources of universities, which were widely seen as being better resourced than many third-sector organisations. These resources were not necessarily financial, but might include academics' or students' time and accumulated knowledge, as well as the use of university facilities such as libraries and meeting rooms. VCOs might host student placements or propose work which might be undertaken as a student dissertation project, for example. A recurrent theme at every round table was the desire for open access to academic journals.

- Access to networks, including international experience, was another reason given by some third-sector organisations for engaging with academia.

- One of the recurrent reasons for third-sector organisations to approach universities was because they needed an evaluation of their work, usually to support a further funding application. Unfortunately such evaluation activity tends to have a low priority for academics, unless there is sufficient novelty for it to have potential to score highly in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise which dominates university life. It might be attractive for student dissertations, of course, though this brings less status and trust unless it is closely

supervised by an established academic. The development of methods for showing third-sector impact, for example in terms of social impact bonds, would be more attractive to academics. This illustrates the need for third-sector organisations and universities who wish to work together to develop an understanding of the contexts and funding landscapes in which each other works.

- Finally, at the Newcastle and Edinburgh InterAction round tables, it was reported that those working in the third sector find opportunities for self-reflection and space to think through their engagement with academia.

In support of third-sector organisations who wish to work with academia, the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), based at Edinburgh University has developed a manifesto for effective partnership (Morton, 2015a).

Another practical guide has been prepared by Evaluation Support Scotland's Knowledge Transition Network called 'Collaborating with academics' (ESS 2016).

Despite all these reasons for cooperation, the Cardiff round table articulated a common view that universities are not easy partners for the third sector. Although many academics engage with the third sector on a personal basis, it was felt that universities (as institutions) often see the relationship in terms of formal commissioning and fees, within which context they are expensive for VCOs. They were perceived as 'difficult to engage with – highly fragmented and siloed in the way they function and typically without a "knowledge management" system. Knowing who and how to contact is difficult, especially where inter-disciplinary working is required.'

But how do universities see themselves? And why might they be interested in working with the third sector?

WHY MIGHT UNIVERSITIES BE INTERESTED?

Many universities were founded to meet the needs of society – to meet the needs of growing cities in the UK in the 19th century, for example, or in the US to support agriculture (land-grant universities) and good citizenship (liberal arts colleges). Other universities were intended more as refuges from the world outside – places of quiet contemplation reflecting their monastic antecedents. At some stage, universities gained a general reputation as 'ivory towers', apart from society, due to a number of factors such as professionalisation of the academic career, national funding (rather than local) and the Oxbridge model (Barnes 1996). Collini (2012, 33) argues that by the mid-20th century our universities were expected to be beacons of culture, set apart from the grubby pressures of everyday life.

From 1981, UK universities became further divorced from society as 'central government took increased control of higher education... increased public funding for research followed narrowly-defined academic success encouraging universities to turn further inward and away from society.' (Goddard 2009, 6) A series of measures was introduced which led to 'the all-devouring audit culture that has since so signally contributed to making universities less efficient places in which to think and teach' (Collini 2012, 34) and which drove a narrow pursuit of rankings, income and outputs which often 'crowded out' engagement with wider society. University managements worldwide adopted a competitive 'entrepreneurial university' management model (Clark 1998) in response. This model has five essential elements:

- a strengthened steering core
- an expanded developmental periphery
- a diversified funding base
- a stimulated academic heartland
- an integrated entrepreneurial culture (Clark 1998, 2)

Together, these were said to enable universities by means of entrepreneurial action to transform themselves.

In 2009, Goddard set out to articulate the case instead for reinventing the engaged, civic university: 'one which provides opportunities for the society of which it forms part. It engages as a whole with its surroundings, not piecemeal; it partners with other universities and colleges; and it is managed in a way that ensures it participates fully in the region of which it forms part,' while also operating on a global scale (Goddard 2009, 5). This vision was adopted by Newcastle University and subsequently by a number of others.

In its *Vision 2021*, Newcastle University elaborated on what it means 'to be a world-class civic university'. As its Vice-Chancellor (Brink 2014) explained:

> **66 We pursue academic excellence in research and teaching, in keeping with the traditions laid down by Von Humboldt and by Newman. However, we believe that our role in the knowledge economy is not only to create knowledge and educate students. Our role is also to respond to the needs and demands of civil society. Universities are not there simply to create a private benefit, they should also serve as a public good. 99**

Across the University, colleagues are now working to try to realise this vision of a world-class Civic University.

The primary feature of a Civic University is its sense of purpose – an understanding of not just what it is good *at*, but what it is good *for* (Brink 2014). It pursues this by making an explicit link to the wider social and economic domain, aspiring to help tackle societal challenges. It seeks to deliver benefits to groups, networks and communities who are regarded not as passive recipients of the university's knowledge and resources, but valued as producers of knowledge and knowledge-exchange in their own right.

Reviewing existing research, Kempton and Goddard (2013) argue that in the 'un-civic' university (see figure 1a), the primary mission areas are teaching and research. Other activities are often sidelined as 'third strand' and pushed to the periphery unless specific targets are associated with them. This can create a 'hard' boundary between the core – where activities are fully supported and enabled – and the periphery – where activities happen in spite of and not always because of central support. Achievements within the periphery might tend to drift if the mechanisms to embed learning or good practice back into the core are not sufficiently robust.

In the civic university (see figure 1b), distinctions between core and periphery become blurred, and engagement is as embedded and relevant as other areas of activity. Strong overlaps evolve between the three domains. Where teaching and engagement overlap, there are effective outreach activities linked to student recruitment (widening participation) and augmenting the student experience (community work, volunteering, service learning). Where teaching and research overlap, there are enhancements to both. Teaching is linked to 'real world' issues and projects, while research benefits from the results of applied and relevant coursework. The overlap between research and engagement results in non-academic, socio-economic impacts, as researchers work collaboratively with non-academic partners to find solutions to specific needs and challenges in the wider world. This, in turn, helps inform further research by raising new questions and providing insights that would not be revealed from academic research alone. When all three domains overlap, the university is engaged in transformative, demand-led actions; its impact will be greater than the sum of each activity alone.

This vision of a world-class civic university also resonates with Brewer's advocacy for a 'new public social science':

FIGURE 1a: The 'un-civic' university

FIGURE 1a: The 'un-civic' university

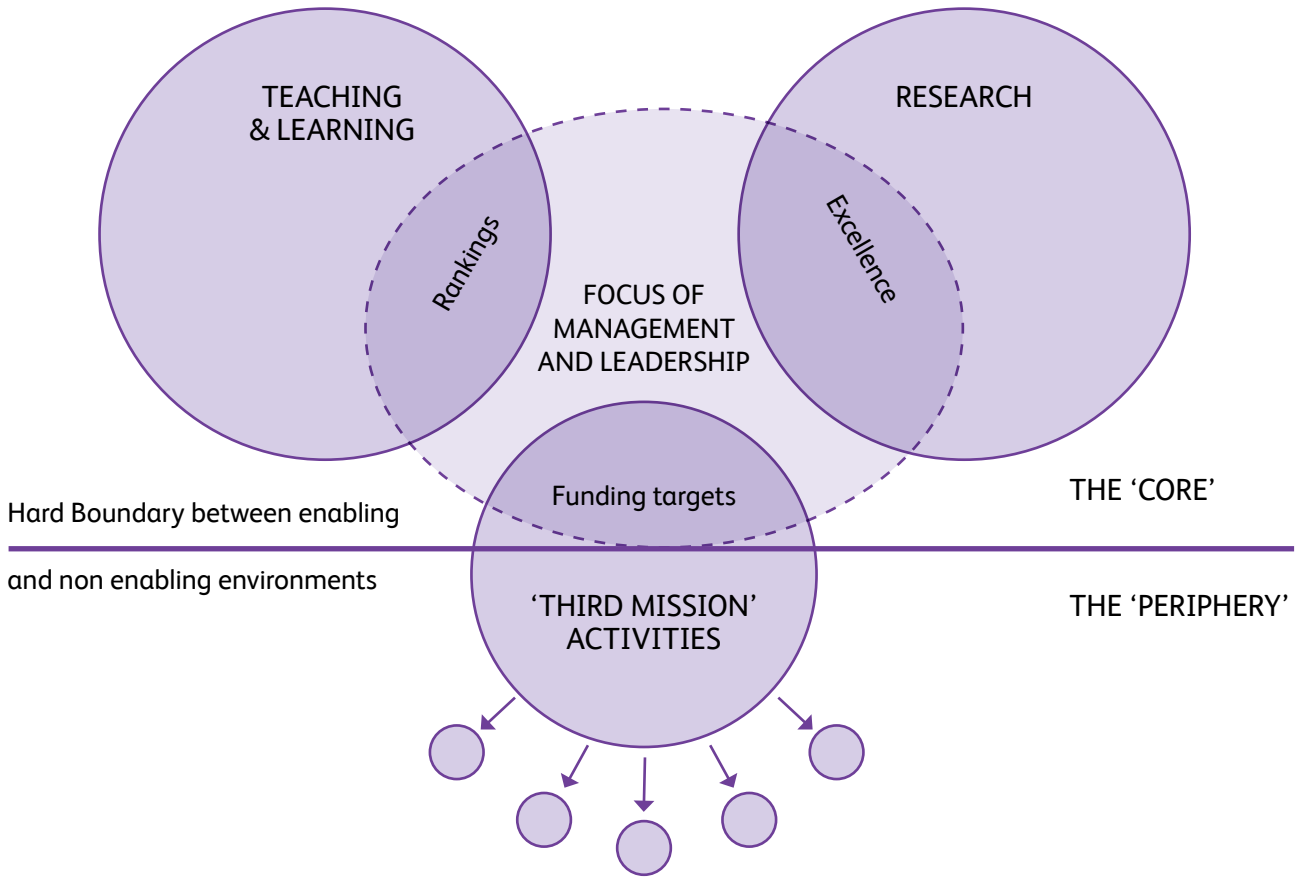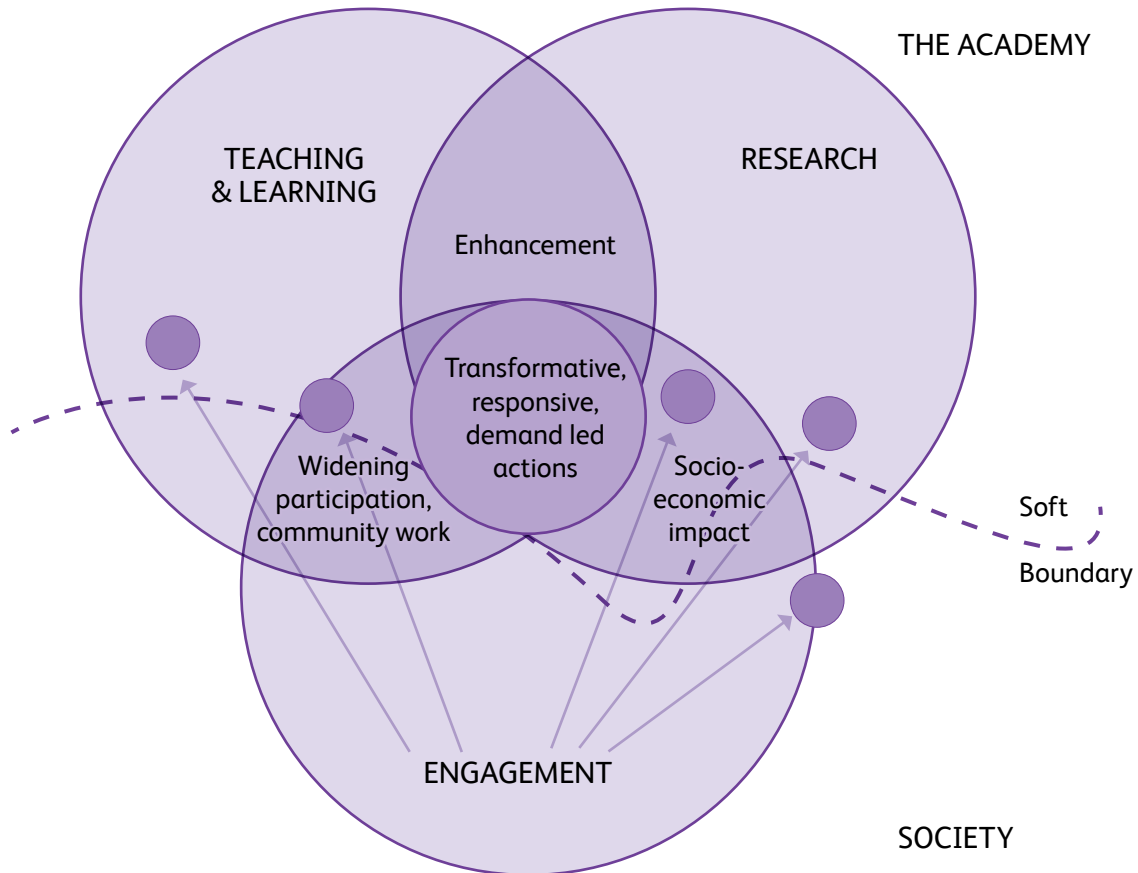**FIGURE 1b:** The 'civic' university

FIGURE 1b: The 'civic' university

> 66 **[informing] society about itself and the big issues that shape the future of humankind. This form of study simultaneously promotes moral sentiments and a sympathetic imagination by garnering a body of citizens educated to social awareness and appreciative of the distant, marginalised and strange other. This means that social science teaching and learning has civilising, humanising and cultural effects in addition to whatever use and price value [it] might have.** 99
>
> Brewer 2013, 169

To be a public good, Brewer argues, academia must transgress the boundaries between research, teaching and engagement; between disciplines; and between nations.

Several universities are now adopting slightly different approaches in order to realise this vision. Newcastle University has established three societal challenge themes (see box 1) and institutes explicitly to complement, and work across, the established structures of the University (Schools, Faculties, etc), which continue to promote excellence in research and in teaching and learning. These three institutes and themes provide the tangible foci for working towards 'excellence with a purpose'. Meanwhile, Cardiff University pursues its civic university vision through five flagship engagement projects, described below, and others, such as Sheffield and Liverpool, follow slightly different approaches (see box 2).

It is encouraging that several UK universities have committed themselves to a civic university vision, following Goddard's (2009) NESTA provocation and mindful also of pressure to justify public funding for universities. Nevertheless, there remain a number of substantial threats to the current revival of the civic university, outlined by Valance (2016).

The first of these is the *marketisation* of higher education. The shifting of the costs of higher education from the state and on to individual students, implicitly recasting them as consumers, encourages the view of higher education as a commodity and economic self-interest as the main reason for taking a degree. This undermines any notion of the public value of universities, engaging not just with the market but with civil society, which is the essence of the civic university vision.

The other notable threat to the revival of the civic university is market-based competition related to *globalisation* as well as neoliberalism. According to Valance (2016), this takes a number of forms, including a growing emphasis placed on world rankings of universities and the global mobility of students, staff and knowledge. Global mobility is not a concern in itself, of course: indeed, this interchange of cultures and ideas has many advantages. But an important component of the diversification of income sources required by the entrepreneurial university has been competition to attract students from other countries, often paying higher fees. This, in turn, has elevated the significance of world rankings of universities which serve as (flawed) indicators of quality to potential consumers in a global market. The danger is that pursuit of a civic university vision may be seen either as irrelevant to this constituency or as diverting resources away from league-table performance. After all, rankings are calculated on the basis of 'within discipline' measures of narrowly based outputs to the disadvantage of inter-disciplinary research, engagement and impact. Against this, there should be no inherent incompatibility between conducting engaged research and teaching and 'excellence' as measured in league tables: the challenge is to support the synergies between 'excellence' and 'purpose', as outlined earlier in this section.

Meanwhile, recently announced policy changes seek to encourage public engagement, potentially supporting the civic university vision. In December 2015, the UK Government accepted the recommendations of the Nurse review (2015) which aims to promote closer engagement between scientists and government. Among other proposals,

BOX 1: NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY – REALISING THE VISION OF A WORLD-CLASS CIVIC UNIVERSITY

The primary feature of a civic university is its sense of purpose – an understanding of not just what it is good *at*, but what it is good *for* (Brink 2014). All universities make positive social impacts, but it is this sense of purpose which distinguishes a civic university. A civic university sees itself as delivering benefits to individuals, organisations and to society. It means putting academic knowledge, creativity and expertise to work, to come up with innovations and solutions that make a difference. At Newcastle University, this combination of academic excellence on the supply side and a range of regional and global challenges on the demand side, has led to a reinvention of the traditional idea of a civic university.

Newcastle University pursues the world-class civic university vision in several ways. First and foremost, it is pursued through identifying *three societal challenges,* which (each led by a 'soft' Institute working across all the faculties and schools of the University) provide thematic foci for staff and students to work towards 'excellence with a purpose' through engaged teaching and research. The three societal challenges are:

- **Ageing**: How can we live better for longer in our communities and maintain our quality of life? www.ncl.ac.uk/ageing
- **Social Renewal**: How can people, communities and societies thrive when faced with rapid, transformational change? www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal
- **Sustainability:** How can we ensure there is enough for all, forever? www.ncl.ac.uk/sustainability

These institutes seek to contribute in three main ways. *First*, through generating new thinking to help address these societal challenges. *Second*, by engaging in the production and dissemination of high-quality research and scholarship that informs policy and practice at all levels, governmental and non-governmental. *Third*, by working on selected projects on a co-production basis with partners, including those from the third sector. While rooted in its region, the North East of England, and with a strong sense of place, Newcastle University seeks to make an impact internationally and nationally, as well as regionally and locally.

RCUK, the loose partnership of the seven Research Councils, should 'evolve' into a single, formal organisation (Research UK), and participate in a new Ministerial Committee intended to secure greater engagement between senior policymakers and the research community. To this end, RUK will manage a 'common research fund' (including a Global Challenges Fund of £1.5bn) to support multi-disciplinary research and cross-council research proposals which address cross-cutting societal needs.

This chapter has reviewed types of knowledge, distinguishing between explicit and tacit knowledge, and suggesting that new knowledge creation is often most dynamic at the intersections between horizontal and vertical flows of (explicit and tacit) knowledge. It has also considered the reasons why universities and third-sector organisations might wish to engage in working together to influence policy and practice. An important conclusion of this chapter is the recognition that both universities and third-sector organisations are knowledge producers and, moreover, both are social actors. Potential complementarities do exist, but the simplistic notion that only universities produce knowledge and that this must be transferred to users in a knowledge transfer process is outdated.

BOX 2: CARDIFF UNIVERSITY – TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES

Cardiff University is working on five engagement projects with communities from South Wales to sub-Saharan Africa, covering issues such as tackling poverty, boosting the economy, and improving health, education and wellbeing The Welsh Government, the Welsh NHS and local authorities, among others, will play vital roles to help ensure the projects are a success.

Professor Colin Riordan, Vice-Chancellor, said: 'This type of work is important to our University, which has had a long history of civic engagement since its founding. We have always worked in our communities in a multitude of ways and will continue to do so. It is a shared approach between the University and the communities, with the projects shaped by those involved. '

The five flagship engagement projects are:

- **City Region Exchange:** The University's work is helping to shape Cardiff Capital Region as it strives to boost the economy and create new jobs.
- **Community Gateway**: Residents will work with the University as equal partners to bring innovative schemes to life that will benefit their community, starting in Grangetown, Cardiff. The team is keen to develop 10 schemes and wants to hear ideas from within the community itself.
- **Community Journalism:** Communities lacking in access to local news will be supported to develop hyperlocal news websites.
- **The Phoenix Project:** Working in tandem with the Welsh Government's Wales for Africa programme, this project will operate in Namibia and aims to include everything from training medical staff and boosting communications, to strengthening local languages and mathematical skills among students.
- **Strong Communities, Healthier People:** This project focuses on health and wellbeing, initially in north Merthyr and selected areas of Cardiff. Each of these has its own distinct history, geography, economy and identity, but they share similar levels of poverty and social and economic exclusion.

3. What influences policy and practice?

In order to consider the potential for universities and the third sector to work together to influence policy and practice, we must explore how policy and practice are informed, and by whom. This has been the subject of considerable investigation, as we shall see.

Smith (2014) has categorised this vast literature into four models: rational evidence-based policy; value-oriented approaches (advocacy coalitions); network-based approaches; and ideational or 'enlightenment' approaches. We will consider the first two of these in this chapter. In this report, we are also able to draw on insights from various stakeholders' experience and from case studies presented at our InterAction roundtables and other seminars.

LINEAR, SCIENTISTIC MODELS OF POLICY PROCESSES

One thing on which there is general agreement is that the processes through which evidence informs policy and practice are complex, opaque and non-linear. This contrasts with the linear model of research 'impact' employed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) Research Excellence Framework (REF) to inform their distribution of funding to universities, and with the models deployed by the Research Councils in their assessment of funding applications. Brewer (2013, 127) claims that HEFCE recognises that impact is non-linear but, like the research councils, HEFCE is trapped within an audit culture and by the requirement to justify public spending on research in instrumental terms. This may change again following the UK Government's proposal to replace HEFCE with an Office for Students.

In fact, HEFCE's definition of impact is unproblematic in itself (HEFCE 2011, 26):

> 66 **An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.** 99

The problem is putting this into operation in a linear way during the assessment process. This had to include three elements: a high-quality research publication from which impact is derived; an impact of 'significance' and 'reach'; and a chain of evidence which demonstrably links the publication to the subsequent impact.

Further critiques of such a linear approach concern the different forms of knowledge and/or evidence which may or may not be recognised, with the suggestion that this model implicitly devalues the knowledge of non-academic stakeholders; the related argument for processes of knowledge mobilisation or knowledge exchange, rather than a one-way, hierarchical model of knowledge transfer; and a recognition that both evidence and the policy process are socially constructed and power-infused. Indeed, this has led many to speak of 'policy-infused evidence' as much as' evidence-based policy'. Nutley et al (2003b) argue that while simple, linear models of getting evidence into practice have appeal, they remain 'unsupported empirically'. These issues are returned to below.

It is not only in the REF exercise that naïve linear models of how research evidence feeds into policy and practice are assumed. Those outside academia frequently comment on how little understanding there is among academics of the operation of the policy process (eg see Murdock et al 2013, 425; Green 2006), and this was also a recurrent theme at our InterAction roundtables. A tendency is often ascribed to academics to think that publishing an erudite paper in an academic journal will, in itself, be sufficient to bring about change, without ever giving thought as to specifically how this might occur. This may be changing now under the influence of the REF impact agenda, with evidence emerging that the REF preparation had 'allowed researchers to

comprehend the impact of their work to a greater extent than before the exercise'. One respondent stated that it 'forced you to think more strategically about how you were going about achieving impact and what you needed in place strategically in order to develop [impact] going forwards.' (Manville et al, 2015, 8) How far this involves gaining a better understanding of policy processes is unclear.

A linear model presumes that there are distinct and logical stages through which the policymaking process progresses:

> 66 These are problem identification, consideration of available options, informed by an evidence-base provided by objective experts, consultation, decision-making and finally implementation. This suggests that policymaking is a rational process, value-free and the personal beliefs of policy makers and other actors are irrelevant. The reality is very different. Policymaking occurs in a context of values, ideology and political beliefs. Political ideology is a key driver of policy making and it is the basis on which political parties are elected. It is the foundation of democratic societies, and there can be a tension between sound empirical evidence and values, ideology and beliefs. 99
>
> Shortall 2013b, 2

One model which recognises some of this greater complexity, but is still essentially linear and scientistic, is the **evidence ecosystem**, emerging from the What Works centres. It uses the analogy of an oil pipeline and proposes a chain of activities, requiring distinct processes of research production, synthesis, distribution, transformation and implementation all working together as shown in Figure 2 (adapted from Shepherd 2007 by Sharples 2013).

The model has been proposed by Jonathan Shepherd, a former surgeon and member of the Cabinet Office What Works Council. His argument is that:

> 66 Discussion about evidence often includes references to "pipelines", or evidence supply, and "leaks" between evidence awareness and implementation. Like crude oil, evidence has to be generated, refined, distributed and used if it is to achieve its potential. Evidence needs to flow through the system. A series of 'pumps' – or product pushes and demand pulls – are needed. Pipelines need to connect with end users, and the evidence needs to be provided in usable forms as it is drawn through the system…institutions and roles that provide more than one function help connect the entire system and opportunities to develop these should be explored. Examples include the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which both funds evidence production and synthesises evidence, and clinician-scientists in medicine who both generate and implement evidence. When combined with public service vocation, the curiosity of researchers equipped with experimental skills is the beating heart of functional evidence ecosystems. By the same token, there are likely to be few acts more damaging to systems than separating researchers and practitioners. 99
>
> Shepherd 2014

FIGURE 2: Elements of an evidence ecosystem (adapted from Shepherd 2007a)
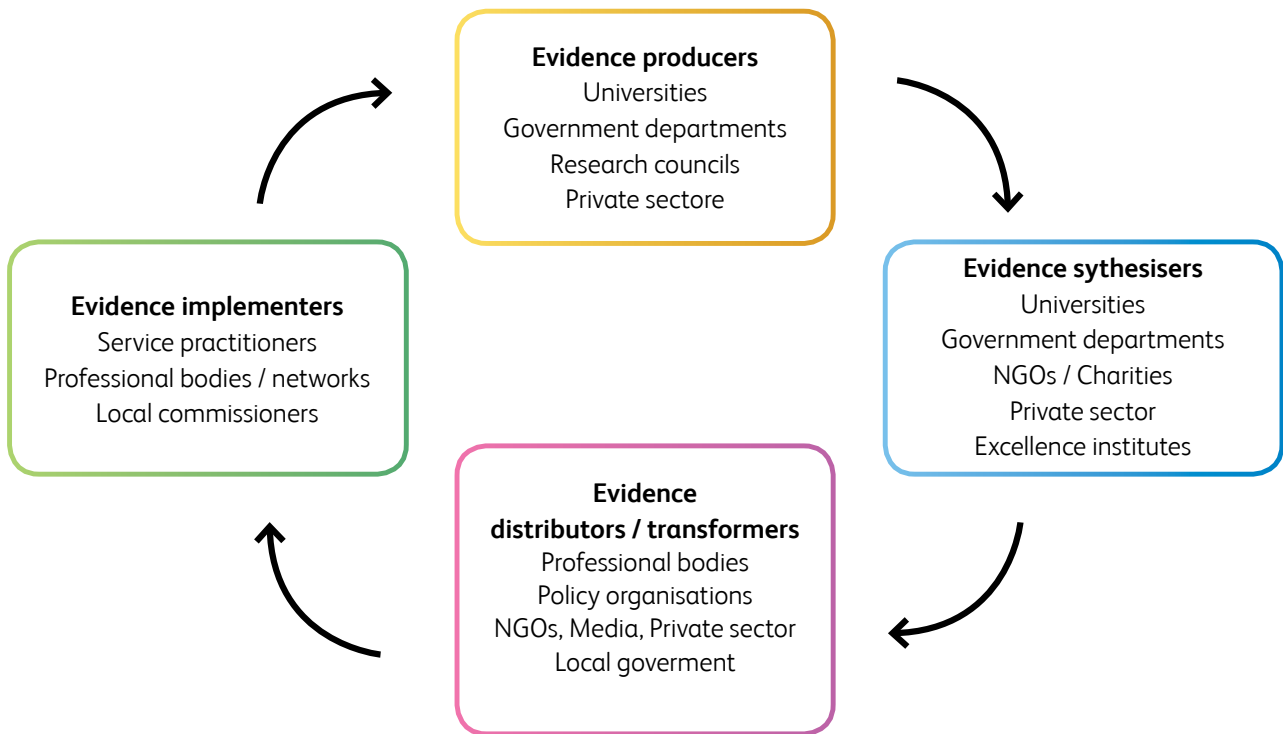
While more sophisticated than earlier linear models, the evidence ecosystem model still suffers from a number of weaknesses. Most importantly, it neglects the political, conflictual and ideological nature of the policy process and the role of power. It also seems to conceive of knowledge production or evidence production still as the preserve of 'scientists' in universities, government departments, research councils and private firms rather than acknowledging the value of evidence from other sources, such as experiential knowledge, or the role that others such as VCOs play as evidence producers. On the positive side, the model does highlight the importance of knowledge brokers and intermediaries, of evidence synthesis, and of capacity-building.

POWER RELATIONS: ADVOCACY COALITIONS AND THE SURVIVAL OF 'IDEAS THAT FIT'

An alternative model of the policy process is the **advocacy coalition** framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), which not only acknowledges but emphasises that this process is shaped by power struggles between the different agendas and objectives of those involved. In this model, civil society organisations with shared or complementary interests form shifting coalitions to pursue these interests. Such advocacy coalitions are eclectic mixes of organisations and social actors, including academics, which form on an issue-by-issue basis. There are normally at least two coalitions in competition with each other, and 'to win political battles rival coalitions primarily seek to analyse trends, using new evidence and information to show that their preferred ideas or solutions are working' (Bastow et al, 2013, 177). Evidence from academics is thus seen to be deployed, often as 'killer facts' or powerful narratives (Stevens 2011; see also Bevir and Rhodes 1998, 2006; Boulanger 2007), as a weapon in the power struggle between competing interests. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) emphasise the central importance of drama in raising the profile of an issue, with 'officially certified "facts" coupled with vivid emotional rhetoric' in social problem claims.

Within these coalitions, academics have two roles. More 'aligned' academics help one or more coalitions make their case, while more neutral academics play an 'arbitrating' role, helping actors

assess the plausibility of competing complex arguments. The 'aligned' academics act inside advocacy coalitions, shaping the ideas, evidence and currents of opinion. They are attractive to third-sector organisations because of their perceived commitment to 'objectively and dispassionately assessing evidence' (if only 'slapping a university label on it') and their clearer standards for evaluating arguments. Their role may be essential to coupling compelling human stories with 'cold, hard facts'.

The great advantage of this model is that it recognises the political nature of the policy process, and that this is far from neutral and value-free. Research on evidence-based policy has found the concept to be deeply problematic for this reason (Nutley 2003; Nutley et al 2003a; Pawson 2006; Denzin 2009; Monaghan 2010; Stevens 2007; Shortall 2012). There is an inherent tension between evidence and a parliamentary democracy, such that:

> 66 **If evidence is unpalatable with the public, or with the ideology and views of elected representatives, they have every right to ignore evidence and follow their instinct... what becomes important is not so much the evidence, but rather who decides what counts as evidence, and which evidence will be used; which intellectual voices are included and which are marginalized... effective lobbying by interest groups can be far more influential in shaping policy than 'robust' evidence.** 99
>
> Shortall 2012, 5

Recent examples which illustrate this point include drugs classifications (Monaghan 2009), foot and mouth disease (Miller and McTavish 2014) and DEFRA's badger cull (Grant 2009, Wilkinson 2007). As Scott (2012) has argued, policy processes necessarily reflect power, translated through political activity and public opinion, as well as evidence.

In a modification of the advocacy coalition model, Stevens (2007) offers a Darwinian analysis of the survival of ideas that fit. He argues that ideas may be findings, facts or recommendations produced by an array of groups, including academics, lobby groups and journalists, some of which will appeal to powerful supporters. Those that do have powerful supporters have an 'evolutionary' advantage, and will survive. Stevens is very clear that it is not the power of the idea that matters, but the power of its supporter (2007, 28), which might be a civil servant, politician, business, pressure group and so on (Shortall 2012). Similar arguments are made by McLaughlin and Neal (2007) and by Denzin (2009). In time, the power of interest groups themselves may be bolstered if they can deploy persuasive narratives or 'killer facts' coupled with compelling human stories to increase their public support, as elaborated by Oxfam and other third-sector organisations at our InterAction roundtables, and as proposed by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988), following Blumer (1971).

The actors in the policy process include not only interest groups and academics, but also politicians, civil servants and the institutions themselves. Their interests are recognised not only by political scientists, but also in the advocacy toolkits developed and employed by organisations such as Oxfam (Walsh 2015). Shortall (2012) shows how accepted ideas of priorities become embedded in organisations such as government departments over time, and close relationships are developed with certain interest groups: for example, MAFF/DEFRA has often been characterised as the political wing of the National Farmers Union (Miller and McTavish 2014; Wilson 1984). Policy priorities that become embedded in this way tend to be those that are favoured by (and capture the attention of) the public, stakeholder groups and politicians, and there may be no appetite for evidence that threatens the status quo. 'Elites may actively oppose some problem definitions, relegating some issues to a "politically enforced

neglect"' (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 64). Moreover, politicians use evidence selectively to create their own powerful narratives which will secure them a good press and re-election; civil servants may use evidence selectively to advance their careers, justifying particular policies within government and developing proposals which will find favour with their superiors (Stevens 2011; Shortall 2012). Meanwhile, the culture of policymaking is continually changing (eg open policymaking, professionalising policymaking, and the effect of spending cutbacks) frequently adding an overlay of 'organised chaos' (Wilkinson 2011).

PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

Brief mention should also be made here of a rather different way in which evidence informs policy and practice – via the public intellectual. The precise meaning of this term is rightly contested (Issitt and Jackson 2013), but a public intellectual is popularly understood to refer to an intellectual who participates in the public realm in addition to their academic and professional affairs. They have necessarily gained distinction in their own field of expertise and in addition contribute to public debate, perhaps also giving policy advice, whether in relation to their own field of expertise or more generally. This is relevant here because this role is widely remarked upon and valued by many of those engaged in the policy process. A key finding of Talbot and Talbot (2014) is that senior civil servants value academics' general expertise and accumulated knowledge of their field as much as, or more, than they do specific research outputs.

Moreover, such interactions as participation in advisory boards, or as Trustees, are a frequent way in which accumulated academic research is accessed over a long period by third-sector organisations as well as by many in government (Bastow et al 2013, 151, 178-181).

THE SPACE BETWEEN

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which evidence is thought to inform, and be deployed in, policy and practice. The principal message is that evidence is only one part of a non-linear, power-infused, complex process, which many other social actors seek to influence for a variety of reasons. Academic knowledge may be enlisted by others, including third-sector organisations, as a means of creating a powerful message to capture public opinion and political agendas. By the same token, academics might work with others towards their own ends. Often, it is accumulated knowledge of a field rather than the outputs of a single study that have currency.

Beyond the 'production' of evidence, all of the above models of the policy process emphasise a research mediation or knowledge-broker role, but this is much less clearly demarcated. This is often seen as a role for NGOs or other intermediary organisations, but sometimes considered a role which academia itself can play – notably in the case of the public intellectual. This crucial brokering role and the associated process of translating evidence into more useful forms is the central concern of the next section.
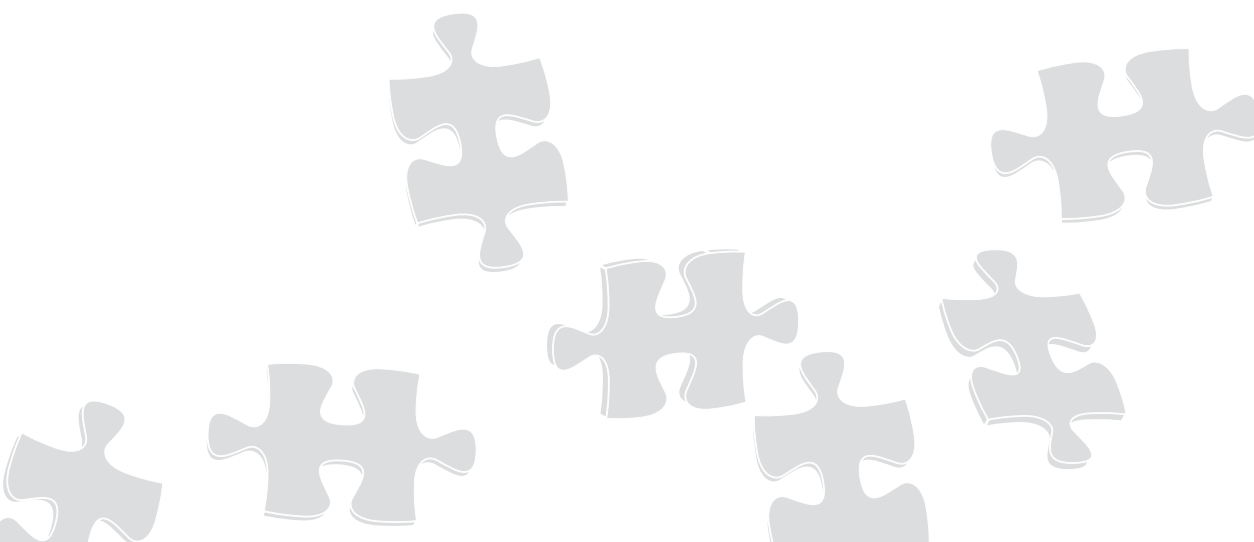
4. Alchemy, brokering and co-creation

'Perhaps one of the most significant shifts over the last 10 years in relation to practitioners' use of research has been the realisation that simply passively disseminating research – packaging and posting – is unlikely to have a significant impact on people's behaviours.' (Sharples 2013, 18)

The brokering/ translation of evidence into a more effective form appears pivotal, an insight reinforced in all of our roundtable discussions, and this is not only a question of whose role this is, but also of what form of alchemy is practised.

Some might question whether research brokering is alchemy (turning impenetrable science into intelligible accounts which can be useful in policy and practice) or reverse alchemy (turning gold-standard research evidence into base-metal superficiality). In a similar vein, some view popular TV scientists as debasing their subject, while others celebrate their role in educating and popularising understandings of new findings. But what is the 'magical' process involved, and who are the alchemists or magicians? There are a variety of processes, of course, and this section will review examples of these.

TURNING 'RAW EVIDENCE' INTO GOLD?

Often, it is assumed that bringing research to the attention of policymakers and practitioners requires no more than rewriting and summarising in plain, accessible language with diagrams and illustrations. The executive summary is one such form but, even here, it helps to tailor the summary to the expected reader. One highly successful model was JRF's *Findings* series, which summarised the outputs of research they had funded in a consistent style in four pages, the first page capturing the main messages in a few bullet points. This deceptively simple approach became much imitated, and benefited from the input of skilled knowledge-exchange writers and editors. Following the development of the internet, the form evolved into web-based summaries, increasingly with attractive

design and ideographics (see, for example, those used in the RCUK Rural Economy and Land Use programme, or by FUSE, the Centre for Translation Research in Public Health). The Carnegie UK Trust uses infographics and visual executive summaries to promote its work widely on social media. Web-based summaries have the additional virtues in they bring at least the gist of the research out from behind academic publishers' paywalls, and that they may readily be found through search engines, especially if skillfully prepared:

> **66** Evidence should be published in short, accessible formats; extensive use of social media such as Twitter, Linkedin and service magazines and newsletters as sources of evidence across all What Works sectors reflects the urgent need for this targeted approach to dissemination. Evidence that comes in indigestible, exhaustive forms, or which does not address the problems faced by practitioners and commissioners, does more harm than good. **99**
>
> Shepherd 2014, 6

More innovative approaches to communicating research findings have included short videos, stand-up comedy and collaborations with theatre companies. Newcastle University has used each of these methods. The University's Bright Club encourages staff to learn how to present their research findings as stand-up comedy; another

academic (Dr Paul Cowie) collaborated with Cap-a-Pie theatre company to produce a touring production 'The Town Hall Meeting' to dramatise public participation in planning, later awarded the 2015 Sir Peter Hall Award for Wider Engagement from The Royal Town Planning Institute.

Such methods may be helpful in reaching a wider public over considerable distances. But when it comes to targeting specific policymakers and practitioners, a more interpersonal, two-way approach may be more effective. Lavis et al (2003) proposed a model of knowledge translation based on the degree of engagement between researchers and potential users, introducing concepts of producer push, user pull, linkage and exchange, which emphasised the importance of developing networks and relationships in knowledge exchange. Other studies have confirmed that the more intense the relationship between users and researchers, the more likely that the research will be used (Amara et al 2004; Rickinson et al 2011). Indeed, a substantial body of evidence now suggests the efficacy of building long-term relationships with the policymakers and practitioners to whom the evidence is addressed, and many instances of this were given at our InterAction roundtables. These include secondments, face-to-face meetings, learning networks, communities of practice, and action research. As Sharples (2013, 18) notes:

> **Research use is emerging as a largely social process, with interaction and relationships being key factors in determining how evidence gets used and applied in practical settings... in this context, it is unsurprising that network-based approaches, which support direct engagement and dialogue between researchers and users, are proving to be particularly effective.**

Yet, he asks: 'Whose role is it to focus on this process – the developmental side of R&D?' We will return to this question of whose role it is, and indeed of who might fund this activity, shortly.

But does the alchemy process require more than summarising and translation? Some see it as necessarily also synthesising and transforming evidence for practical contexts. Both Sharples (2013) and Shepherd (2014) place emphasis on 'knowledge translators' and argue for the use of systematic reviews (eg Cochrane or Campbell reviews) or meta-analyses as formal mechanisms for synthesising and presenting a large body of evidence: this is at the heart of the What Works centres. Shepherd (2014, 13) accordingly holds that: 'Knowledge translators are intermediaries who sift through the evidence and synthesise, consolidate and pump it to those in positions to capitalise on it in accessible and usable forms.' He goes on to argue, in the context of his evidence ecosystem model, that:

> **Whilst formal systematic reviews draw together quality-assured evidence on the effectiveness of different strategies, the production of such reviews is not enough, on its own, to promote uptake. Rather than teaching practitioners to search the literature, a process for which they neither have the expertise nor the time, knowledge translators should synthesise evidence and present it in short summaries. Practitioners are rarely systematic when looking for evidence, they can therefore assign too much significance to evidence that happens to cross their desks or which confirms their preconceptions. The role of knowledge translators, then, is to distil all the available findings into forms ready for use by service commissioners, practitioners or other users (p.13).**

In his view, these must then be broadcast through implementation networks, such as professional bodies, who can also help promote an evidence-reliant culture among their members. Sharples (2013, 13-14) acknowledges that "although they are certainly powerful tools for synthesising evidence, systematic reviews are not without criticism," principally that they overlook most evidence because of their stringent criteria.

While there has been an increased interest in commissioning formal research syntheses in recent years, for example through the What Works centres, there is also evidence both from academics and practitioners to suggest a less formal approach to research brokering and translation remains prevalent, and perhaps more consistent with the advocacy coalition model. Major charities such as Oxfam (Walsh 2015) have described a process, based on articulating a 'theory of change' and undertaking a power analysis, in which as noted above, they then use literature reviews, case studies and killer facts, alongside launches, stunts and human interest stories to create a powerful, simple narrative.

They argue that governments like this, because they talk their own language, adhere to legislative or negotiating timetables, and may help them to win the hearts of the public. This resonates with academic studies of how civil servants and politicians (over)simplify research findings to create narratives which can form the basis of policy. Stevens (2011), in his ethnographic study of the UK civil service, found that civil servants displayed a high level of commitment to the use of evidence, but they were overwhelmed by the huge volume of various kinds of evidence and by the unsuitability of much academic research to answering policy questions:

> 66 Faced with this deluge of inconclusive information, they used evidence to create persuasive policy stories. These stories were useful both in making acceptable policies and in advancing careers. They often involved the excision of methodological uncertainty and the use of "killer charts" to boost the persuasiveness of the narrative. In telling these stories, social inequality was "silently silenced" in favour of promoting policies which were "totemically" tough. 99
>
> **Stevens 2011, 237**

Stevens concludes that this selective, narrative use of evidence in policy and lobbying tends to distort academic findings to suit the interests of those in power in ways which all too often exacerbate disadvantage and inequality.

Whether the process is formal or informal, knowledge brokers are 'agents who support interaction and engagement with the goal of encouraging knowledge exchange, supporting research use and strengthening research impact' (Lightowler and Knight 2013, 319). In Lomas' view, they link policy and practice with researchers:

'Facilitating their interaction so they are able to better understand each other's goals and professional cultures, influence each other's work, forge new partnerships, and promote the use of research-based evidence in decision-making.' (Lomas 2007, 131)

WHOSE ROLE IS TRANSLATION AND BROKERING?

Many social actors in this process could potentially perform a research mediation role, including third sector organisations and researchers, but also funders, media, policy analysts and advisors, educators, lobby groups and think tanks (Sebba 2013, 397). In the literature, these are often termed 'knowledge brokers', who are seen to:

> 66 **Act as intermediaries or linkage agents, using interpersonal contacts to stimulate knowledge exchange, the development of new research and the application of solutions.** 99
>
> **Ward et al (2009, 271)**

Bastow et al (2013, 197-8) report that charity chief executives and research directors feel that this is a task for their organisations, drawing on foundational evidence from academics. They quote two senior officers of NGOs as follows:

> 66 **We're the ones who turn it into an advocacy product, because we're the experts in doing that and the academics are not.** 99

> 66 **Do we want to shape the contents? Yes, of course. But that is because we have a good sense of what will appeal to the public and how key messages need to be drawn out. There is always a tone we like to keep, and to be honest, we do shape all the research we commission, but that is to the benefit of the final product...** 99

Researchers who had worked with civil society organisations tended to acknowledge the skills that these partners brought to bear, according to Bastow et al (2013, 197), 'especially the ability to anticipate and look ahead at where policy debates were going, and what new policy-relevant research issues and opportunities were likely to come up'. Nevertheless, problems could arise where findings ran counter to the corporate messages of the NGO or to campaigners' strong ideologies.

Alternatively, the research mediation role may be played by intermediary organisations or individuals. Drawing on Ball and Exley (2010), Sebba (2013, 397-8) characterises this process in terms of *nodes* and *interlockers*:

> 66 **Organisations such as lobby groups and think tanks are the nodes connected to one another through a relatively small number of individuals described as interlockers who act as bridges between these organisations. These authors suggest that the interlockers have multiple positions sequentially and concurrently as trustees or council members for each other's organisations, writing, speaking and being members of panels at each other's events.** 99

Sometimes, these may be academics but, more often, they are not. To be credible, she argues, they must possess acknowledged expertise and familiarity with the users' institutional and practical problems. Cooper (2010) highlights five necessary attributes for effective knowledge brokers: an understanding of research methodology; a broad knowledge of the literature; experience both within academia and practice; sound interpersonal skills; and an ability to translate complex information into meaningful materials for users (see Sharples 2013, 19). Our own roundtable discussions emphasised

that effective knowledge brokers, research mediators, interlockers or 'boundary spanners' must above all be familiar with the culture and practices of all parties, from producers to users of evidence.

The Russell Group of elite research-intensive universities in its response to HEFCE's REF consultation in 2009 expressed some reservations, drawing attention to the risk of intermediaries taking the credit for academics' original work:

> 66 'It is not acceptable for a third-party institution to be able to take someone else's excellent research, carry out non-research activity to exploit this (eg collation of research findings) and then be able to claim the impact as part of its REF submission. This is essential to ensure that the REF and the subsequent allocation of QR funding continue to recognise and reward excellence in research rather than excellence in knowledge transfer or public engagement. 99
>
> **Russell Group 2009**

Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition of the contribution of such intermediaries, reflected for example in the Scottish Funding Council's consultation on proposals for a single national knowledge exchange office to harmonise systems and approaches to establishing linkages between academics and industry (SFC 2012, 5, quoted in Lightowler and Knight 2013).

So could universities themselves perform this knowledge mediation role? As Sharples (2013, 19) points out:

> 66 Traditionally – and some would say rightly – universities have so far played a relatively small part in this intermediary brokerage capacity, instead focusing on producing and publishing research, rather than directly engaging with research users. Where universities have made efforts to share their work, they have focused more on communication and dissemination rather than interacting with prospective research users. 99

Yet such interaction seems inherent to the civic university vision. Sharples argues that, whilst not all academics possess the necessary skills, there is potential for researchers to engage directly with practitioners to help them understand and apply research findings, perhaps through 'researcher in residence' programmes or secondments.

An alternative approach, reflecting many academics' lack of competence or interest in this role, has involved universities' employment of specialist knowledge brokers. Lightowler and Knight (2013, 318) observe 'an emerging and growing group of university staff with a remit to support the use, impact and dissemination of research'. Worryingly, but unsurprisingly, they find within universities:

> 66 A tension between the policy-level commitment to research impact and the value placed on knowledge brokerage and knowledge brokers at the institutional level. We show that funding models, short-term contracts, and posts combining knowledge exchange with other functions result in a transient professional group and a squeeze on knowledge brokerage, which limit the effectiveness of knowledge brokers in achieving research impact. 99
>
> **Lightowler and Knight 2013, 318**

BOX 3: NORTHERN RURAL NETWORK

The **Northern Rural Network**, run by the Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University, brought together researchers and 1,300 rural development practitioners from northern England. From 2000-2011, this was funded by the RDA and Northern Rock Foundation:

- To provide a forum to promote learning and understanding of issues and challenges
- To showcase applied research
- To facilitate the exchange of best practice and highlight innovation
- To provide a networking forum for rural development practitioners
- To use the dialogue within NRN to shape new academic and applied research agendas.

These were pursued through a series of events and activities, with evaluation showing NRN members valued learning from the substantive content and the networking opportunities. Researchers also gained much from the knowledge exchange. With the closure of both the RDA and Northern Rock Foundation, external funding ceased, and there is now little NRN activity beyond circulation of information to a mailing list and occasional NRN-branded events related to Newcastle University research. NRN was highly valued by the University and practitioners as a vehicle for engagement, but despite the University's best efforts after 2011 there was no longer a source for recurrent funding for such engagement activities.

Sources: Atterton J & Thompson N (2010) University Engagement in Rural Development: A case study of the Northern Rural Network, *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 5(3), 123-132. WiRE (2010) The Northern Rural Network Evaluation. http://www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk/about

The knowledge brokers they studied at the University of Edinburgh tended to be employed on fixed-term contracts; experienced high levels of job insecurity; were less valued within the university; lacked support, reward or recognition; and saw no career pathways ahead of them. Given this transience, 'universities would benefit from developing mechanisms to capture and share the learning developed through these short-term investments' (ibid, 329), and need to develop strategies for maintaining the contacts and relationships developed by brokers with external stakeholders during their employment. Alternatively, 'if universities wish to capitalise on knowledge-exchange employees for maximum impact, they need to provide secure employment and clear opportunities for development and progression, and show that they value experience and skills in this area'. (ibid. 331) Facer et al (2012) also conclude that research university- public engagement is very poorly resourced, especially compared with university – industry engagement.

Two further examples help to illustrate the importance of long-term, stable funding and institutional support (see boxes 3 and 4).

During 2010, NRN considered various options for the future and in this process, they reviewed the experience of other networks associated with universities. They found 'the problems that CRE had encountered with financial under-resourcing and the consequent implications for staff workloads were common to many HEI-run networks'. A rare exception is Edinburgh University's Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, who managed to transition to a more sustainable model following their initial funding from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC).

BOX 4: THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

The **Centre for Research on Families and Relationships** (CRFR) is a consortium research centre with partners from six Scottish universities. The Centre was established in 2001 and is based at the University of Edinburgh. The aims of CRFR are to:

- Produce high-quality, collaborative and inclusive research relevant to key issues in families and relationships.
- Act as a focal point, and promote and facilitate a network, for all those with an interest in research on families and relationships.
- Make research more accessible for use by policy makers, practitioners, research participants, academics and the wider public.
- Enhance the infrastructure to conduct research on families and relationships.

After initial funding from SHEFC, and then a call-on contract with the Scottish Government, CRFR was able to trade on its expertise and reputation in knowledge exchange to earn income from events, projects, training and advice. Involving and working with a range of partners and ensuring that its research findings are accessible are key aims for the Centre and it is one of the few research centres that has a dedicated knowledge exchange and impact team. As a result, it has become a leader in this area for over 10 years based on its approach to knowledge exchange, outlined below.

FIGURE X: CRFR's approach to Knowledge Exchange

Interactive:	Encouraging and involving researchers and users to meet, discuss and develop research, through building a research interest network, conferences, seminars, web-based activities, research advisory groups, tweets, blogs etc.
Keeping Connected:	Building relationships between researchers and relevant policy makers, practitioners and others over time to build trust and create shared agendas and sustain a joined upapproach, e.g. collaborations with Scottish Government, family organisations in the voluntary sector, and the NHS.
Open:	Freely accessible briefings, open events and web-based communications. Responding to research users and potential partners from small and large organisations, supporting small scale evaluations, developing joint research with partners e.g. Research Briefing 34 on sexual health was downloaded and distributed to hundreds of teachers.
Innovative:	exploring different approaches to communication, engagement and action, e.g. packaging short messages for political debate in 'why relationships matter' booklet; working with an artists in residence to support research participant's communication with service providers; developing new ways of linking research to action through the About Families project.
Reaching Out:	Developing ways of including different voices: children, schools, and older people; in research and research communication, e.g. the Listening to Children course, and the dementia café.
Supported:	Recognising the importance of supporting KE work through skilled staff: KE specialists, project workers, innovation and experimentation, graphic design, and events management.

Sources: http://www.crfr.ac.uk/ and *Knowledge Exchange at CRFR: Past, present, future*, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Briefing 57, November, 2011.

WHO PRODUCES EVIDENCE? KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION, BROKERING AND CO-CREATION.

In each of the models of the policy process reviewed earlier, rightly or wrongly, the production of evidence tends to be seen as the sole preserve of academics. This can no longer be taken for granted, however, with a growing acknowledgement that academia has no monopoly on knowledge or evidence. This is reflected in a tendency no longer to speak of 'knowledge transfer', but instead to refer to knowledge exchange, knowledge mobilisation, or co-production and co-creation of knowledge. Mitton et al (2007), citing Lavis et al (2003), explain that:

> 66 **Knowledge transfer emerged in the 1990s as a process by which research messages were "pushed" by the producers of research to the users of research. More recently, knowledge exchange emerged as a result of growing evidence that the successful uptake of knowledge requires more than one-way communication, instead requiring genuine interaction among researchers, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.** 99

This is acknowledged, for example, in Agenda 21 of the Rio declaration which called for 'the best scientific and traditional knowledge available' to be used in knowledge production for sustainable development, and for the development of 'methods to link the findings of the established sciences with the indigenous knowledge of different cultures'. (Pohl et al 2010)

Brewer (2013) argues that the 'wicked' nature of many of the challenges facing society today (in other words, their complexity and intractability) often requires such an approach Indeed, he argues for approaches which are problem-oriented as opposed to discipline-oriented. This requires 'public social science' not only to be transdisciplinary,

but also to collaborate with other social actors and publics, including government, NGOs and civil society, through co-production of knowledge to lessen the gap between researchers and the 'real world' of wicked problems. Necessarily, this requires social scientists 'to write to make themselves understood rather than for professional acclaim' (Brewer 2014, 11) and for their research activity to be engaged and accessible. But, in his view, connecting with other social actors and publics goes beyond effective dissemination, communication and open access, requiring genuine involvement of different publics in the formulation of the research problem and subsequent conversations with relevant publics at all stages of the research process (Brewer 2013, 187). Transcending boundaries is a major theme, therefore, whether these are boundaries between disciplines or boundaries between universities and society.

Pohl et al (2010) identify two different ways of conceptualising how interactive knowledge production proceeds. The first envisages the emergence of a new kind of organisation – the 'boundary organisation':

> 66 **'[These] exist at the frontier of the two relatively different worlds of politics and science, but have distinct lines of accountability to each and involve participation of actors from both sides of the boundary, as well as professionals who serve a mediating role.** 99
>
> **Pohl et al 2010, 268**

Thus, boundary organisations belong neither to the realm of science nor to the realm of politics. An example cited is the US Office of Technology Assessment. The second type, in contrast, involves so-called 'Mode 2 knowledge production', in which a new kind of research is said to evolve out of the collaborative endeavour of academic and non-academic actors.

> 66 **This process of knowledge production takes place at the intersection of the realms of science and non-science – the agora – a public space in which science meets the public and in which the public speaks back to science.** 99
>
> **Pohl et al 2010, 269**

In policymaking, for example, 'the role of science changes from simply providing technical information to the much more diffuse activity of assisting in the process of governance' (ibid). These two approaches may be illustrated in the following diagram (figure 3). In the first, the boundary organisation (BO) stabilises the margins between academic and non-academic communities; in the second, with co-production of knowledge, both realms overlap in a permeable space, the agora. In the latter, 'co-production of knowledge interferes with conventional research practices and self-conceptions (as well as roles) of researchers in a fundamental way' (ibid).

FIGURE 3: Two approaches to interactive knowledge production (Pohl et al 2010)
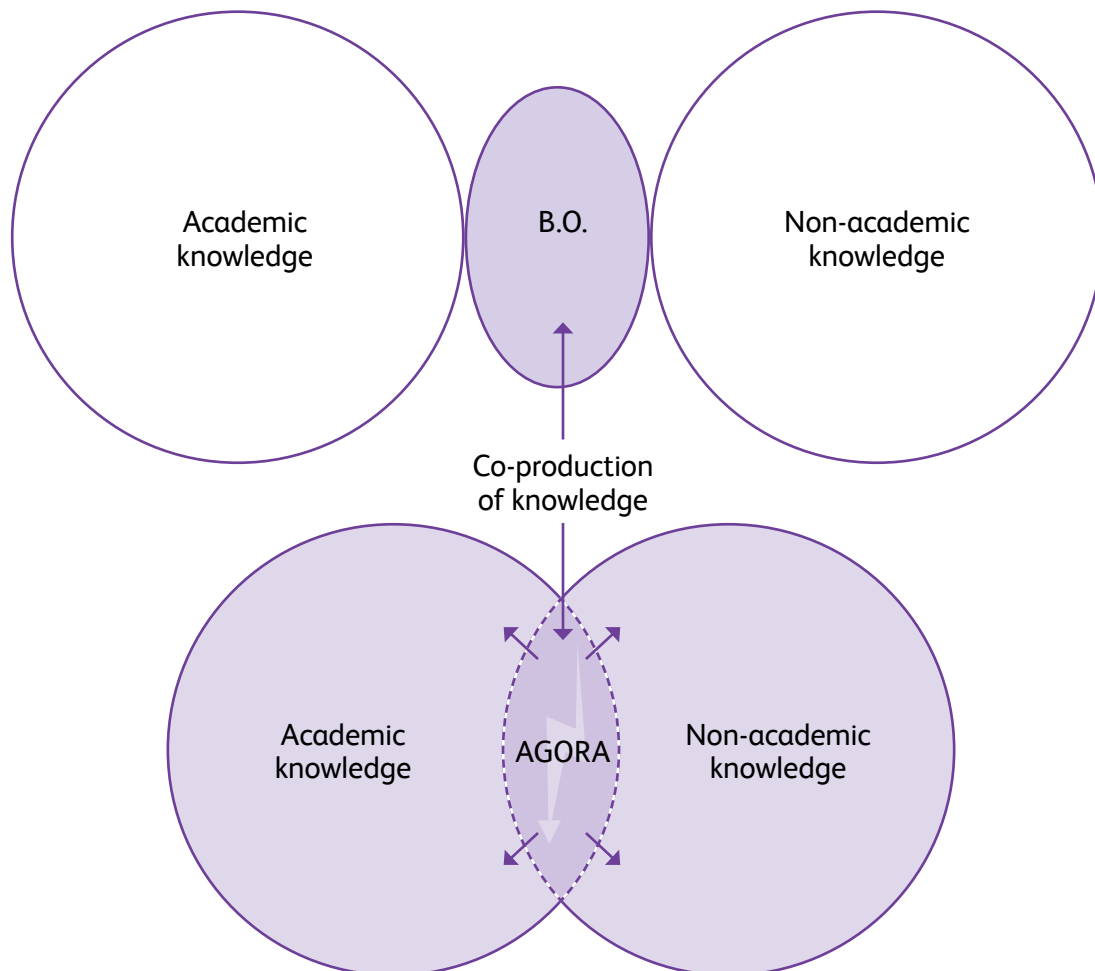
FIGURE 4: Co-researchers roles

Tasks	Traditional roles	CRFR/Childline
Develop agenda	shared	shared
Get funding	shared	shared
Define project	academics	shared
Collect data	academics	academics
Analyse data	academics	shared
Engage stakeholders	partners	shared
KE activities	partners	shared
Continued use	both	partners

Morton 2012

An example of this was presented at our roundtable in Edinburgh by researchers from CRFR. Morton (2015b, 15-16) has explained elsewhere the processes which her research followed and the benefits co-production delivered in this case:

> 66 **Relationships were key to creating impact in the examples here. At the heart of this sits the relationship between CRFR and Childline Scotland as partners. Existing working relationships with research users, were important in the creation of channels through which the research was communicated and used. In particular, research users' deep understandings of the context in which they operate, their actions to adapt research to suit the very specific needs of that context and their commitment to using research to 'make a difference' are key. Even with sophisticated knowledge exchange activities, research impact cannot be achieved from the research production side alone. Closer working with research users can help with creating relevant, timely research that will be taken up and used.** 99

The diagram above illustrates how CRFR worked with co-researchers, notably in sharing of roles, in the process of this project's evidence production and knowledge exchange.

Pohl et al (2010) identify three challenges which researchers must address in pursuing co-production, namely *power* (addressing power relationships between different actors); *integration* (ensuring that a common understanding emerges); and *sustainability* (ensuring that knowledge co-production serves the higher purposes, in their case, of sustainable development). Many authors have drawn attention to these first two challenges, specifically the loss of researchers' power and autonomy which necessarily accompanies the greater inclusivity arising from knowledge co-production (Nind 2014; Morton 2012).

The weighing of these advantages and disadvantages is an important issue for researchers and prospective partners, and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Indeed Ross et al (2003) suggest various types of collaboration according to the level of involvement acceptable to each of the partners, characterised as:

- Low: the academic leads, while the third-sector partner endorses and provides legitimacy for the evidence;
- Medium: the academic initiates and designs the project, while the third-sector partner provides ideas, information and tactical advice;
- High: both the academic and the third-sector partner are engaged significantly in the research and help to shape both the way it's carried out and the outcomes. This may mean dividing up tasks or working together on all aspects of the research.

These are elaborated in A Guide to Collaborating with Academics by Evidence for Success (2016). Another report on the potential of co-production has recently been published by the N8 Research Partnership (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016).

Joint production of knowledge has the advantage of incorporating not only technical knowledge, but also practical knowledge and experiential insight. It risks being seen as less 'objective' and independent, but conversely, it may be more trusted by those involved. By disrupting researchers' traditional roles it creates challenges for researches and prospective partners, and differing models of co-production may suit different cases.

This chapter has explored the process of alchemy – the somewhat magical processes by which research is transformed into forms which can be used in policy and practice, and discussed whose role this is. Whether this is performed by knowledge brokers or boundary organisations, or through a more challenging process of co-production, it is apparent that few resources are currently devoted to supporting this crucial task.

5. Interfaces: obstacles and opportunities

What scope is there then for InterAction, between academia and the third sector, and with policy and practice? Is there a complementarity of interest and roles? What obstacles and barriers present themselves? This section considers these issues and seeks to identify examples of successful InterAction which influenced policy and practice.

OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS

A number of obstacles and barriers emerged in our roundtable discussions and many are also identified in the literature. At every meeting, it was noted that universities are not adequately resourced by HEFCE for 'engagement' (and so this is often regarded as peripheral relative to universities' research and teaching missions). This may change with 'REF Impact', but that promotes a very particular and narrow model, as noted above. The 'civic university' model of Newcastle University seeks to remedy this by promoting engaged research and engaged teaching and learning, bringing engagement into the core as we have seen.

A second obstacle is the external perception of universities as divorced from reality, incomprehensible and impractical: for example, Murdock et al (2013) report that many NCVO members see little value in working with academics because of their perceived lack of relevance, timeliness, accessibility and commitment. Similarly, Bartunek and Rymes (2015) found several reasons for the gap between academia and practice:

> 66 'One reason is that the ways academics and practitioners think about many issues is very different. A second is that academics' time horizons are much longer than practitioners; while practitioners often need to make decisions quickly, academic research typically takes a much longer time. Yet another is that academics and practitioners use different types of communication styles; the language in academic articles often isn't very readable by practitioners. Next, while some groups of academics advocate strongly that in order to be rigorous, research cannot be relevant, other academics counter that rigour and relevance are very compatible. Finally, academia and management practice often have different incentives. Publishing a scholarly article is more of an incentive for an academic than a practitioner, while solving a particularly crucial business problem is more of an incentive to a practitioner. 99

Pohl et al (2010) have emphasised the need to integrate different actors' 'thought styles'.

Associated with this was universities' impenetrability to anyone from society, industry or government. Interviews with entrepreneurs running small businesses in the rural NE, as well as studies elsewhere, show that people who do wish to interact with universities have little idea how to make contact. This is confirmed by the experience of Brighton University's Community University Partnership Project (CUPP) and by that of FUSE, the ESRC Centre of Excellence in Translational Research in Public Health, consisting of five NE universities: both have had to develop accessible gateways through which publics may contact them (see boxes 5 and 7).

A third impediment mentioned at every roundtable is the lack of access to published academic outputs, hidden behind paywalls unless they are 'open access' publications, as well as restricted access to

university libraries. Since most research is publicly-funded, it was generally argued that these outputs should be common property and open to all.

Fourth, a widespread contention was that governments and NGOs don't listen to academics, because they are risk-averse, use impenetrable jargon, talk mainly to each other, don't adapt their messages to the real world, and are not lobbyists (Green 2006).

Finally, the issue of resources was problematic on a number of levels. Charities' incomes and levels of volunteering have fallen as a result of the banking crisis and subsequent austerity, reducing not only donations but also the ability of local authorities to contribute. A recent report from the Lloyds Bank Foundation (2016) shows that small and medium sized charities are especially badly affected. One roundtable participant told us much community activity 'is located in imminent/ permanent crisis,

FIGURE 5: Changes needed for better co-production

The main institutional changes highlighted as being important were the following:
- More recognition of the value of co-produced research, and promotion opportunities for researchers involved
- Greater understanding of what constitutes success and excellent outcomes for different parties
- New training programmes for staff and doctoral students to develop relevant skills and attitudes
- Revised, less conservative peer-review processes
- Greater commitment to partnership building, reciprocity and reflective learning
- More understanding of how problem-solving capacities are enhanced through co-production

The main changes in practice highlighted as being important were the following:
- More effort to learn from the process of research, rather than deliver findings
- More funding to sustain partnerships between research projects
- More understanding of, and funding for, the shared development of research questions
- Greater knowledge of the value of non-project- based interaction, and new spaces for interaction
- More appreciation of 'unspecified' expenditure in co-production budgets
- More funding for the time of non-academic partners, and more understanding of the associated ethical issues
- Greater understanding of the difference between partnership and co-option
- Development of appropriate forms of accountability
- Greater awareness of the scope of the problems for which co-production is suitable

Source: N8 Research Partnership briefing, 12 March 2015.
http://www.n8research.org.uk/co-producing-knowledge-the-future-of-social-science/

human and capital, resource and sustainability, prejudice and discrimination, creativity and burnout – something in the academy we don't feel.' Even before this, the costs of undertaking research in universities were staggering to small community and voluntary organisations, used to managing on small, insecure budgets. Even large charitable trusts are unwilling to pay the full economic costs of university research. From universities' perspective, this made it hard to employ staff to work with third-sector organisations, even if overheads were waived, unless funding could be obtained from a third party, such as a Research Council. Should such funding be found, the disparity between the resources of university researchers, VCOs' officers and volunteers bubbled under the surface of the partnership. Often, external partners expect universities to work with them pro bono, but while this does occur formally on an occasional basis (and informally many individual academics do give their time freely) this is not seen by university managers as a viable model, especially as funding for universities is also transformed.

An N8 research programme on co-producing knowledge, led by Heather Campbell of Sheffield University, has identified a number of obstacles and suggests changes which might help build better relationships between academics and non-academics in research. See Figure 5.

COMPLEMENTARITIES AND BRIDGES

Despite these obstacles, as we saw in Chapter 2 there are many good reasons for academia and the third sector to work together, not least being the shared wish of many university staff and those in the third sector to 'make a difference', and a common commitment to an ethic of public service.

There may also be strategic reasons for cooperating. It has already been noted above that academic research is highly trusted, because academics are viewed (somewhat naively) as 'objectively and dispassionately assessing evidence'. Meanwhile, third-sector organisations are regarded as much more 'practical', responsive to the 'time-attention cycle', and able to 'raft and engineer traction for their campaigns', though this

may be more characteristic of the larger NGOs perhaps than of smaller VCOs. These are seen widely as offering potential complementarity, but there are a number of caveats.

Several suggestions have been made by third-sector organisations of what might be done to enable/support InterAction (eg. Murdock et al 2013):

- The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) suggests twitter/social media; joint events and seminars; e-newsletters; website, but recognise other activities are needed beyond e-communication to build momentum, interest and followers.
- NCVO suggests building a recognition of shared values and complementarity, bridging the different worlds by seeding or supporting cross-sector networks and activities, and working on communication and translation (such as brief 'state of the art' syntheses prepared by NGOs, not academics).
- Long-term investment and relationship-building – a recurring theme in all the literature is that it is essential to develop a culture of mutual learning: 'dynamic, reciprocal and non-linear', and long-term relationships of trust. This was reiterated in all of our InterAction roundtables and has thus become a familiar theme in this report.

There are many examples of successful interaction, most often at the level of the individual academic or at the level of the project. One example of this would be my own work in the early 1980s on Scotland's rural housing, recently recounted by Young (2015). In this, I worked closely with practitioners from across rural Scotland, drawing heavily on their experiential, professional and political insights as well as my own academic perspective, to co-produce a report *Scotland's Rural Housing: A Forgotten Problem?* which was refined and agreed by the whole group and proved highly influential. There are very many other examples at this level, such as CRFR's work mentioned in Chapter 4.

It is rare, though, to find an instance of a university as an institution making a strategic commitment to working in this way, and the work of Brighton

BOX 5: COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

Brighton University's **Community University Partnership Programme** (CUPP) has drawn on long-term philanthropic funding and HE Innovation Funds. This has been a flagship project of the University since 2003, with strong personal support from the highest levels. CUPP's aims are:

- Ensure that the University's resources (intellectual and physical) are available to, informed by and used by its local and regional communities.
- Enhance the community's and University's capacity for engagement for mutual benefit
- Ensure that CUPP's resources are prioritised towards addressing inequalities within our local communities

At the core of their community of practice approach is shared expertise and shared passion for a joint enterprise. They see 'boundary work' by people who straddle the different cultures being brought together as helpful: these might include those who have moved from a practitioner role to an academic role, or vice versa. Their lessons learnt from their experience are: establish a shared language to talk about processes, structures and definitions; work with the willing; secure funds to buy out time of academics and practitioners; play to the strengths of the university; emphasise practice rather than structure; think about where to hold meetings etc; emphasise the positive; use boundary spanners to broker relationships; enjoy the relationships; and be creative in dealing with normal University processes and procedures. The result is a 'culture of joint working' where 'different expertise is recognised, accountability is reciprocal and learning is mutual'.

Sources: Hart, A and Wolff, D (2007) Developing local 'communities of practice' through local community-university partnerships, *Planning Practice and Research*, 21: 1, 121-138; and Wolff (2015).

University's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) is therefore of particular interest. It seems to embody many of the lessons emerging from this report.

This chapter now turns to review a few specific examples of opportunities to address issues emerging from this report and which could assist the third sector and universities to work together to influence policy and practice. These are: open access, service learning and embedded gateways. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of such opportunities.

AN OPPORTUNITY: OPEN ACCESS TO ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

Recent announcements from HEFCE and the UK Research Councils supporting 'open access' to academic publications offer hope that most academic research will now become freely available to non-academics, rather than hidden behind commercial publishers' paywalls.

RCUK stated: 'Free and open access to publicly-funded research offers significant social and economic benefits. The Government, in line with its overarching commitment to transparency and open data, is committed to ensuring that such research should be freely accessible. As major bodies charged with investing public money in research, the Research Councils take very seriously their responsibilities in making the outputs from this research publicly available – not just to other researchers, but also to potential users in business, charitable and public sectors, and to the general public.' Similarly, and crucially, HEFCE announced in 2015 that 'following extensive consultation, the four UK higher education funding bodies have introduced an open-access requirement in the next REF. The core of the policy is that journal articles and conference proceedings must be available in open-access form to be eligible for the next REF.'

Without going into the details of how this will work, this announcement is a game-changer which will

transform the culture and practice of academic publishing. From 2016, there is now a compelling incentive for all academic papers to be freely available to all, often immediately, but in any case, after a short embargo period of a maximum two years. This accepts the argument that publicly-funded research findings should be publicly available.

AN OPPORTUNITY: SERVICE LEARNING

One specific opportunity to build greater interaction between academia and the third sector is through 'service learning'. According to Jacoby (1996): 'Service learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve learning outcomes.' In other words, service learning is an educational approach which combines formal teaching and learning with the opportunity to serve in the community and learn

through this pragmatic, 'real-life' experience. Common methods include placements, internships, volunteering, community service or fieldwork – in all cases, this is combined with reflection which is usually the basis of assessment. Many academic institutions now embrace service-learning, particularly in the USA (see box 6 below outlining Cornell University's ambitious 'Engaged Cornell' initiative, which sees service learning 'not only as an innovative experiential pedagogy, but also as an approach to research, organizational learning/ institutional change and community development'(Kiely 2007)).

Students learn in several ways through service learning, and most research to date has focused on identifying these various dimensions. But there are also benefits to the partner organisations and to communities, including the volunteering itself which increases the capacity of the partner organisation, along with any specific skills which the student may

BOX 6: CORNELL UNIVERSITY: *ENGAGED CORNELL* INITIATIVE

Cornell University has engagement and community-based learning as a core objective, and the university has embraced a new goal of integrating service-learning into the institution's academic mission. It believes that learning linked to the experiences of service and stewardship, and knowledge grounded in the connections between the exercises of intellect and the practical solutions to social problems, can be the hallmark of the Cornell graduate. To this end, *Engaged Cornell* is a $150-million, 10-year initiative, launched in 2014. The initiative aims to empower all Cornell students to become active citizens and to tackle critical challenges by participating in hands-on, practical learning experiences in communities at home and around the world. An initial $50 million gift from the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust launched the initiative.

The intention is that *Engaged Cornell* will create a new model and direction for higher education – one in which public engagement is deeply ingrained, fully institutionalised and effectively taught and implemented. Through this initiative, students graduating from Cornell will enter the world as educated global citizens who practise respect and empathy; seek collaboration, cooperation and creativity; embrace differences and diversity in all aspects of their personal, professional and civic lives; and are dedicated to working together to help solve some of the world's most intractable problems. Amongst other things, this will:

- elevate student participation in high-quality community engagement to 100%;
- enable academic departments across Cornell University to offer community-engaged learning courses across all disciplines, at both the introductory and advanced levels;
- develop and support hundreds of new community-university partnerships around the world.
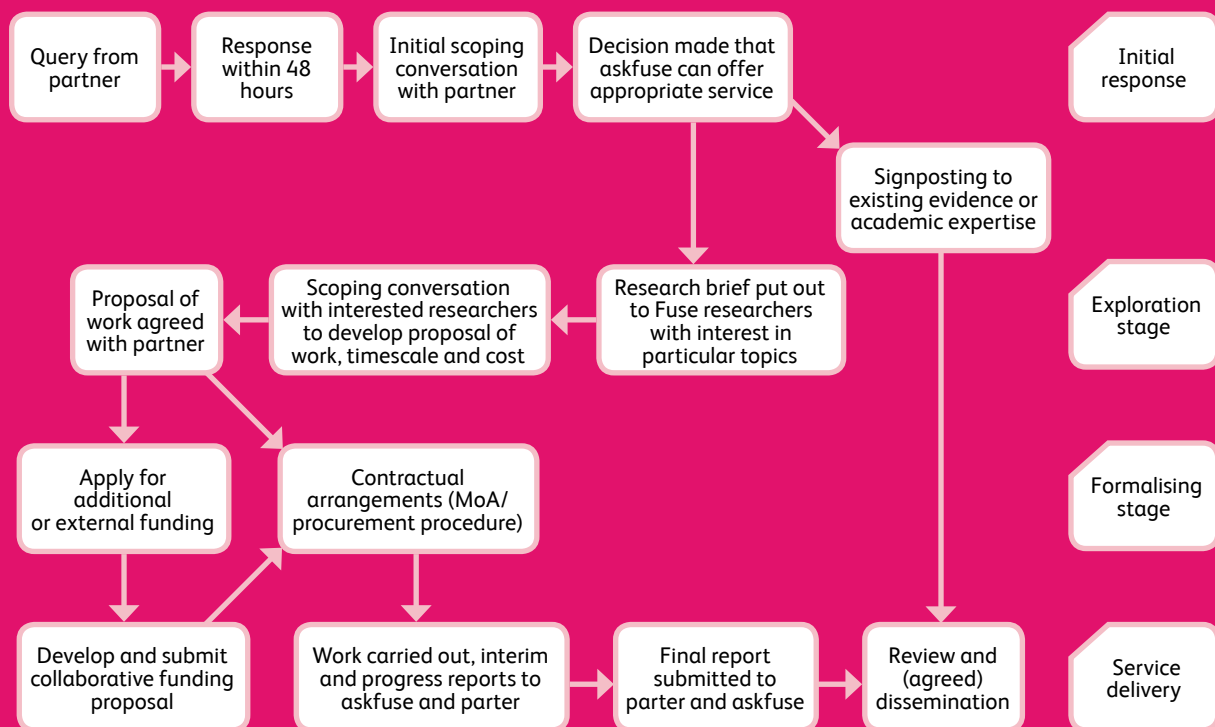
Further information: http://engaged.cornell.edu/ and www.now.cornell.edu/engaged/

BOX 7: ASKFUSE

Fuse (the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health) is the brand name of a partnership between public health researchers across the five universities in NE England: Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside. The focus of Fuse is about working with policymakers and practitioners, enabling research findings to be understood and applied to public health issues, such as diet and exercise or socio-economic inequality. Fuse is one of five UK Public Health Research Centres of Excellence, supported with core funding from the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, ESRC, MRC and National Institute for Health Research, under the aegis of the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC). It is funded until May 2018, having launched in June 2008.

In 2013, Fuse launched AskFuse (a rapid response and evaluation service for policy and practice partners that aims to work in collaboration with external stakeholders) to find research solutions for addressing pressing local issues. AskFuse aims to respond to a broad range of research requests from the health, wellbeing or social care sectors. Through a (core-funded) knowledge brokering gateway, AskFuse draws on the expertise of relevant academics and provides outputs that are 'useful, timely, independent, high-quality and in plain English'. They respond within 48 hours and work collaboratively with partners throughout the process. This is illustrated in the following diagram:

Query from partner → Response within 48 hours → Initial scoping conversation with partner → Decision made that askfuse can offer appropriate service	Initial response
Signposting to existing evidence or academic expertise	
Proposal of work agreed with partner ← Scoping conversation with interested researchers to develop proposal of work, timescale and cost ← Research brief put out to Fuse researchers with interest in particular topics	Exploration stage
Apply for additional or external funding / Contractual arrangements (MoA/ procurement procedure)	Formalising stage
Develop and submit collaborative funding proposal → Work carried out, interim and progress reports to askfuse and parter → Final report submitted to parter and askfuse → Review and (agreed) dissemination	Service delivery

About a third of enquiries have come from public health teams in local authorities in the NE. Details (and an informative animation) can be found at http://www.fuse.ac.uk/askfuse/

bring and which might be a source of new ideas, energy and enthusiasm. Crucially for this report, service learning also affords the opportunity for the third-sector organisation and the university to overcome the familiar barriers to interaction and to build a long-term relationship which can promote joint working and engagement for their mutual benefit.

Service learning is less common in the UK, although it is being introduced in some universities (Nottingham Trent and Brighton were mentioned). All our universities will have placements on certain courses, though, and most also have student volunteering. At Newcastle University, more than 2,000 students engage in volunteering each year through Go Volunteer (formerly SCAN: Student Community Action Newcastle), for example.

AN OPPORTUNITY: EMBEDDED GATEWAYS

As noted above, numerous studies reveal that people and small businesses outside universities find them impenetrable institutions. A member of the public or a community or voluntary organisation seeking a relevant point of contact in a university to discuss their research-related query, often encounters a huge, incomprehensible organisation whose website is structured according to supply-side logic (faculties, departments, degree programmes) rather than according to demand considerations or user needs. Some university websites are searchable by keyword, or provide a list of 'experts' by topic and these may be of some help. However, the most helpful innovation is an embedded gateway.

This offers an easy-to-access portal (an email address or phone number) for the public to make an initial approach and for their interest to be passed on by a knowledge-broker to the most relevant researchers in the university for action and reply. Some requests will be simple to respond to ('Is there any research on the impact of rural school closures?') and only require a reply email with an attachment or weblink. Others may be more substantial, such that a conversation begins which might lead to a joint funding application, for example. In the case of AskFUSE, given below, this work is funded by UKCRC: without such funding the university itself must consider whether to resource an embedded gateway.

This chapter has reviewed the obstacles and barriers to cooperation between academia and the third sector, notably the impenetrability of universities to publics, and the perception that they are divorced from reality, incomprehensible and impractical. The lack of resources for university engagement along with the precarious resourcing of the third sector were further factors. However, there were genuine reasons for academia and the third sector to work together and examples were given of successful collaboration.

The chapter ended with a few specific examples of opportunities to address issues arising from this report, namely open access, service learning, and embedded gateways.
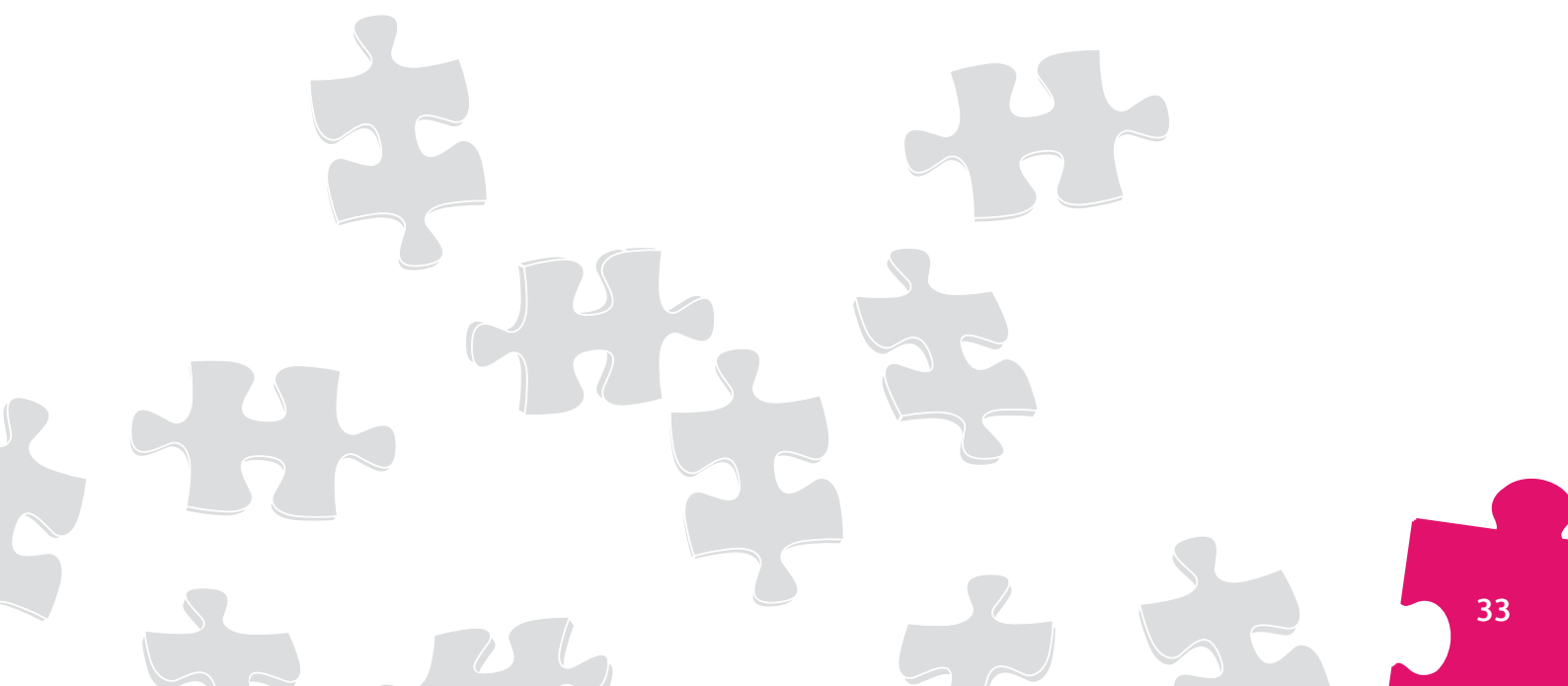
6. Conclusions and recommendations

This report set out to explore what scope exists for academics and the third sector to work together to influence policy and practice, and how this might be done.

COMPLEMENTARITY?

The report began by considering why universities and third -sector organisations might wish to engage in working together to influence policy and practice. Third-sector organisations work with academics to enhance the status and trust accorded to their work, as well as to access academics' knowledge and universities' resources and networks. Similarly, academics sought to access their partners' experiential knowledge and sometimes their links with policy and practice. Beyond this, many universities seek to put their knowledge to use, not only instrumentally for REF Impact case studies, but more fundamentally because of a renewed vision of the civic university. This tends to confirm the potential for complementarity suggested in the introduction.

Fundamental to this potential for complementarity would be an ability to combine different types of knowledge. A distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge is helpful here, since research suggests that new knowledge creation is often most dynamic at the intersections between horizontal and vertical flows of (explicit and tacit) knowledge. Such interactions may be fostered by academia and the third sector working together, so long as it is recognised that both are knowledge producers and social actors.

Universities are perceived by many in the third sector as uneasy partners: difficult to engage with, highly fragmented and siloed, using impenetrable jargon, and naively unaware of the policy world. Two specific issues frequently raised were the restricted access to academic outputs (behind paywalls), and difficulty in knowing who and how to make contact. A number of other obstacles to collaboration have been identified in this report.

INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE?

Working together is one thing, but how might this help to influence policy and practice? Evidence is only one part of a non-linear, power-infused, complex policy process, which many other social actors seek to influence for a variety of reasons. Academic knowledge may be enlisted by others, including third-sector organisations, as a means of creating a powerful message to capture public opinion and political agendas. By the same token, academics might work with others towards their own ends. It is vital in working together, that both partners develop a shared understanding of what is expected of them and how their work will be used: in some cases it will be better to walk away.

Increasingly, it is recognised that simply 'packaging and posting' research findings is unlikely to have an impact: the focus has shifted from 'dissemination' or 'knowledge transfer' towards 'knowledge mobilisation' or 'knowledge exchange', with numerous studies emphasising the importance of building networks and long-term relationships of trust between academics, their partners and policy and practice communities. Often, it is accumulated knowledge of a field rather than outputs of a single study that have currency.

It is widely reported that few academics or universities have a sophisticated grasp of policy processes, and larger third-sector organisations argue that only they can offer this expertise as partners for universities. Most studies identify a need for 'knowledge brokers' not only to bridge the gap between the realms of science and policy, but also to synthesise and transform evidence into an effective and usable form for policy and practice, through a process akin to alchemy. An essential feature of knowledge brokers is that they understand the cultures of both worlds. Often,

this role is performed by third-sector organisations of various types (from lobbyists to think tanks to respected research funders). Some academics can transcend this divide. A few universities employ specialist knowledge brokers, but their long-term effectiveness is often constrained by low status, insecure contracts and lack of career pathways. Whoever plays this crucial intermediary role, it appears that it is currently under-resourced within and beyond the university system.

Two alternative ways of conceptualising interaction between academics and non-academics to influence policy have been proposed. The more conservative model relies on a boundary organisation or knowledge intermediary who sits between the two worlds of science and policy, each of which retains its integrity and stability. The more radical model involves co-production of knowledge through the merging of these two realms in ways which interfere with conventional research practices and roles of researchers, such that science goes beyond providing information and becomes involved in the process of governance itself. Neither

of these alternatives is inherently better than the other, and various types of collaboration may be appropriate in different circumstances and for different partners.

After discussion of the obstacles to interaction, and some examples of good practice, a few specific opportunities are identified in this report, namely open access, service learning and embedded gateways.

Finally, a number of explicit recommendations may be derived from the analysis, and these are directed at universities, at third sector organisations, and at the organisations which regulate and fund UK research through the dual support system.

See the next page for our recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities should:

1. Provide embedded gateways through which third-sector organisations and other publics can make contact with relevant researchers in what are perceived to be impenetrable and siloed institutions.

2. Employ specialist knowledge exchange workers to facilitate interaction between the worlds of social science, policy and practice. These will be more effective if accorded recognition, security and career pathways.

3. Invest in mechanisms to develop and support long-term relationships with selected third-sector partners and networks.

4. Explore innovative ways of providing spaces for intersection of vertical and horizontal knowledge flows.

5. Encourage secondment opportunities (both inward and outward) as a means of facilitating knowledge exchange and 'boundary spanning'.

6. Develop training and staff development programmes to build the capacity of academics to work with third-sector organisations, to understand their worlds, and to include codes of practice towards mutual benefit.

7. Develop training and staff development programmes to build an understanding amongst staff of policy processes and how to engage with policy worlds. Consideration should be given to involving third sector partners in such programmes.

8. Embed the use of Project Advisory Groups including policy and practice partners relevant to the research project, as a means of informing the research, promoting impact and developing relationships. Representatives from VCOs should be paid for their contribution and valued for their insight as well as their role in dissemination.

9. Explore further the role which service learning might play in building engagement with the third sector, in addition to its other merits.

Third Sector Organisations should:

10. Engage proactively with universities to develop an understanding of potential partners' opportunities, constraints and perspectives. This might involve dialogue, training and staff development activities.

11. Enlist academics onto their Boards, on Project Steering Groups or Advisory Groups, or in other voluntary roles.

12. Invest in innovative ways of finding spaces for intersection of explicit and tacit knowledge flows.

13. Have a clear idea of why they are engaging with academia and what is on offer, in order to prioritise and not overcommit.

14. Consider the merits of secondment (outward or inward) with academic partners.

15. Consider whether to offer volunteering opportunities to students, and in particular whether to engage in service learning provision.

HEFCE and RCUK should:

16. Resource the provision of embedded gateways through which third sector organisations, businesses and other publics can make contact with researchers in (what are perceived to be impenetrable) universities.

17. Explore ways in which REF Impact guidance could admit and reward non-linear processes of knowledge mobilisation and co-creation.

18. Consider possible funding models for translation and co-creation of research, bearing in mind the under-resourcing of knowledge brokering and imbalances of financial resources between different sectors.

19. Continue encouragement of open access to publicly-funded academic outputs.

7. Participants invited to the InterAction Roundtables

NEWCASTLE

Richard Baker, Newcastle City Council

Sarah Banks, Durham University

Carol Botten, VONNE

Lindsay Cross, West End Refugee Service

Jo Curry, Changing Lives

Professor John Diamond, Edge Hill University

Warren Escadale, Voluntary Sector North West

Councillor Nick Forbes, Newcastle City Council

Barbara Gubbins, County Durham Community Foundation

Erica Haimes, Newcastle University

Emeritus Professor Patsy Healey, Newcastle University

Peter Hetherington, Town and Country Planning Association

Sarah Jackson, University of Liverpool

Professor John   Mawson, Durham University

Jeremy Phillipson, Newcastle University

Prof David Raper, Manchester Metropolitan University

Pat Ritchie, Newcastle City Council

Janet Shucksmith, Teeside University

Dr Peter Simpson, N8 Research Partnership

Penny Wilkinson, Northern Rock Foundation

Rob Williamson, Community Foundation Tyne and Wear

Sally Young, Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service

Tony Chapman, Durham University

EDINBURGH

Pat Armstrong, ACOSVO

Professor Jan Bebbington, University of St Andrews

Nick Bland, What Works Scotland

Dr Christopher Boyce, Stirling University

Graeme Brown, Shelter Scotland

Dr Chik Collins, University of the West of Scotland

Pippa Coutts, NESTA

Gemma Crompton, Alcohol Focus Scotland

Sarah Davidson, Scottish Government

Prof Susan Deacon, University of Edinburgh

Sir John Elvidge, Carnegie UK Trust

Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Heriot-Watt University

Ken Gibb, University of Glasgow

Annie Gunner Logan, Coalition of Care and Support Providers

Calum Irving, Voluntary Action Scotland

Claire Lightowler, University of Strathclyde

Jamie Livingstone, Oxfam Scotland

Susan Lowes, Marie Curie

Professor Duncan MacLennan, University of St Andrews

Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland

Jo McLaughlin, The Robertson Trust

Des McNulty, University of Glasgow

Vivien Moffat, IRISS

Sarah Morton, Centre for Research on Families & Relationships

Prof Sandra Nutley, University of St Andrews

Dana O'Swyer, Capability Scotland

David Robb, OSCR

Professor Douglas Robertson, University of Stirling

Carolyn Sawyers, BIG Lottery Scotland

Martin Sime, SCVO

Susan Smith, Third Force News

Mary Taylor, SFHA

George Thomson, Volunteer Scotland

Alison Todd, Children 1st

Charlie Woods, Scottish Universities Insight Institute

CARDIFF

Nick Andrews, Swansea University

Dr Simon Brindle, Welsh Government

Rosie Cripps, Cardiff University

Rhian Davies, Disability Wales

Duncan Forbes, Bron Afon Housing

Dr Adrian Healy, Cardiff University

Sheila Hendrickson-Brown, Cardiff Third Sector Council

Ruth Marks, WCVA

Prof Steve Martin, Public Policy Institute for Wales

Prof Paul Milbourne, Cardiff University

Heledd Morgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

Anna Nicholl, Nesta

Dr Helen Paterson, Wrexham County Borough Council

Richard Pickford, RSA

Prof Ian Rees Jones, WISERD

Martin Rhisiart, University of Glamorgan

Michelle Wales, Shelter Cymru

Lee Waters, IWA

Sir Adrian Webb, BIG Lottery Fund

Catriona Williams, Children in Wales

Emyr Williams, Public Policy Institute for Wales

Victoria Winckler, Bevan Foundation

LONDON

Andrew Barnett, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK

Ben Cairns, IVAR

James Georgalakis, Sussex Uni

Duncan Green, Oxfam GB

Prof Chris Ham, King's Fund

Nancy Hey, What Works Centre for Wellbeing

John Hills, LSE

Prof Donald Hirsch, Loughborough University

Jeremy Holmes, Carnegie UK Trust

Ed Humpherson, UK Statistics Authority

Dr Robin Jackson, British Academy Policy Centre

Richard Jenkins, ACF

Stephen Khan, The Conversation

Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham

Ed Mayo, Co-operatives UK

John Mohan, University of Birmingham

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Marc Stears, Oxford University

Jane Steele, Carnegie UK Trust

Emma Stone, JRF

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Lisa Weaks, Kings Fund

Teresa Williams, Nuffield Foundation

David Wolff, Community University Partnership Program (CUPP)

Steve Wyler, Consultant

Rebecca Wyton, National Citizens Service

Penny Young, NatCen

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The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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April 2016