



CampusEngage

CAMPUS ENGAGE POLICY BRIEFING

ENGAGED RESEARCH FOR IMPACT

A POLICY BRIEFING FOR FUNDING AGENCIES

SOCIETY AND HIGHER EDUCATION
ADDRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES
TOGETHER



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ENGAGED RESEARCH FOR IMPACT: SOCIETY AND HIGHER EDUCATION ADDRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES TOGETHER

ENGAGED RESEARCH

Campus Engage and the Irish Research Council recently launched a report on *Engaged Research - Society & Higher Education Addressing Grand Societal Challenges Together*, informed by a year-long national and international consultation process. The following definition and recommendations for funding agencies included in this policy briefing are drawn from that report.

Engaged research describes a wide range of non-discipline-specific high-quality and rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement with the community and aim to improve, understand or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, including societal challenges. Engaged research is advanced *with* community partners rather than *for* them. For engaged research to be authentic, relevant research stakeholders meaningfully and actively collaborate across the stages of the research lifecycle.

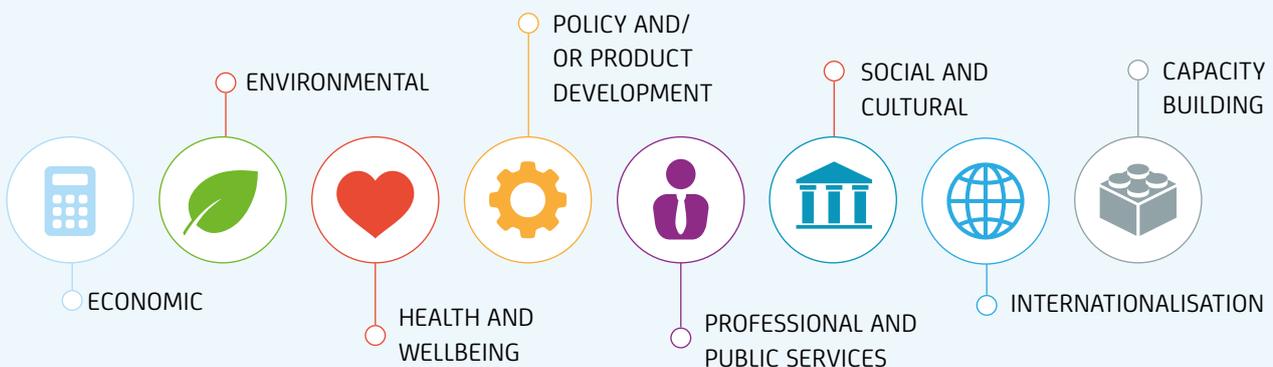
A great deal of engaged research literature refers to community engagement. In this context, community refers to a range of research stakeholders, including public or professional service and product users, policy makers, civil and civic society organisations, members of the public and other relevant stakeholders, including those most affected by the research topic.

THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGED RESEARCH

Engaged research realises impact by:

- Maximising the value of, and providing a better return on, public research investment;
- Utilising evidence-informed indicators to measure the desired success and impact of research, improving its quality, efficiency and productivity;
- Combining multiple sources of knowledge and increasing the re-use of data, decreasing duplication of efforts across disciplines and sectors;
- Responding to stronger demand for, and uptake of, new or improved policies, practices, products and services;
- Encouraging greater public support, trust, and understanding of the importance of research in our everyday lives.

The extent and diversity of engaged research undertaken in Irish higher education institutions illustrates a strong collective desire to co-create and share knowledge for positive societal impact in a research landscape that is more inclusive and responsive. As well as economic revenue and spin-out companies, engaged research realises tangible benefits across Irish society.



The Campus Engage Engaged Research Impact Framework (above) offers eight key categories to consider when assessing impact.

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POLICY DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

The requirement for higher education institutions to engage with a wide range of research stakeholders is integral to the higher education and research policy landscape.

- This requirement is one of three core missions in Ireland's *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. The need to find new ways for higher education to address its responsibilities towards the communities it serves in order to meet societal needs is articulated, with particular focus on engaged research approaches.
- As articulated in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, strong community engagement requires recognition in resource allocation and in metrics used to assess impact.
- The Higher Education Authority's *System Performance Framework 2018-2020*, which sets out national objectives and priorities, includes engagement in two of its six objectives. The *System Performance Framework 2018-2020*'s metrics, which form the basis of higher education institutions' Performance Compacts, refer specifically to engaged research activity.
- *Innovation 2020*, Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology, encourages all government departments and agencies to explore competitive funding mechanisms to stimulate solutions-driven collaborations with the community. The Irish Research Council and Health Research Board are specifically encouraged to target supports to increase the engagement of public entities and civic society in research which addresses societal challenges.
- All of these policy drivers respond in different ways to the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals*, which aim to address the global challenges we face.

ENABLER OF CHANGE – THE ROLE OF PUBLIC FUNDING

These policy drivers are largely embedded in the mission, vision and values of Irish and European public research funding agencies and programmes.

- Recommendations made in the report of the independent high-level group on maximising the impact of EU research & innovation programmes, *LAB – FAB – APP: Investing in the European future we want*, call for mobilising and involving citizens to adopt impact-focused research missions that address societal challenges and mobilising researchers, innovators and other stakeholders to realise them. These recommendations underpin Horizon Europe, a €100 billion EU research & innovation programme that will succeed Horizon 2020.
- *“Under Horizon Europe, the European Commission will launch new missions with bold, ambitious goals and strong European added value to tackle issues that affect our daily lives... These missions will be co-designed with citizens, stakeholders, the European Parliament and Member States.”*
– European Commission, 2018
- One of the Irish Research Council's four mandates is to enrich the pool of knowledge and expertise available for addressing Ireland's needs, and to maximise collaboration whilst enabling knowledge exchange with societal stakeholders, enterprise, government and civic society. The Irish Research Council is currently finalising its 2019-2024 strategy, which will build on this commitment to support knowledge exchange and engaged research for impact.
- The Irish Research Council is collaborating with a range of specialised agencies across health, climate action, justice and equality, children and youth affairs, central statistics, and arts and culture as part of challenge-based funding for research that addresses national and global societal challenges.
- *The Health Research Board Strategy 2016-2020* focuses on developing strategic partnerships across academic, practice and policy spheres. Recognising that people are at the centre of health research, the Health Research Board aims to encourage greater levels of user involvement in the design and conduct of research activities. One of three focus areas for funding is research driven by strong collaboration and partnership between the research producers and evidence users, facilitating evidence-based decision making and robust evaluation.
- Science Foundation Ireland Research Centres, which are focused on strategic areas of importance in delivering scientific excellence with economic and societal impact, are required to provide evidence of engaged research activity as part of their key performance indicators. In the consultation process for the Science Foundation Ireland strategy 2020-2025, key themes include measuring broader impacts, promoting interdisciplinary research, engaging citizens and industry, and encouraging open access.

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ONGOING CHALLENGES TO ENGAGED RESEARCH FOR IMPACT

While national and European policy and funding opportunities in this area are growing, there are still challenges to scaling up effective engaged research across the Irish higher education and research landscape. These include: appropriate institutional infrastructure and capacity to support and create effective engaged research partnerships; understanding of diverse needs and expectations of stakeholders; competing timelines for researchers and research stakeholders; confidence in partnership approaches; understanding of the benefits of collaboration; and irregular funding opportunities. Ireland needs enabling structures and resources to achieve impact, and to further enhance Ireland's reputation as a good place to do research.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC FUNDING AGENCIES

A series of high-level recommended actions for funding agencies have been agreed to address these identified challenges. Public research funding agencies are called upon to honour the commitment that engaged research requires and support effective collaborations with community, beyond tokenistic box-ticking approaches. Funding must be channelled effectively in order to deliver on policy around engaged research for the benefit of all. This will promote excellence and help us to better position researchers nationally and internationally to drive knowledge and innovation.

- Embed engaged research principles in a larger number of regular funding calls, and in project evaluation that rewards authentic engagement;
- Align national research priority areas and funding calls to issues of public interest or concern, including societal challenges, as articulated by public or professional service and product users, policy makers, civil and civic society organisations, members of the public and researchers;
- Allow longer project timelines for engaged research projects to help address competing timelines for researchers and research stakeholders;
- Include funding for pre-proposal engaged research design and consultation, and for post-project impact assessment to help ensure diverse needs and expectations of stakeholders are met;
- Fund training on good practice for engaged research;
- Resource a national hub to support capacity building to offer a 'clearing house of expertise' and to provide a database of engaged research for impact case studies, researchers and support staff;
- Widen the existing innovation voucher and disruptive technologies funding initiatives to include societal innovation and engaged research criteria;
- Fund project management for larger-scale engaged research projects;
- Fund support staff to sustain engagement between community partners during and between funded research projects;
- Fund national and inter-institutional collaborations to build on existing collective knowledge and provide leverage for smaller-scale projects to develop into sustainable and impactful larger-scale projects that address issues of public interest or concern;
- Fund engaged research fellowships based in civic and civil society organisations of a sufficient duration to help ensure project impact.

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More information on Campus Engage can be found at www.campusengage.ie or by contacting kate.morris@iua.ie.

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