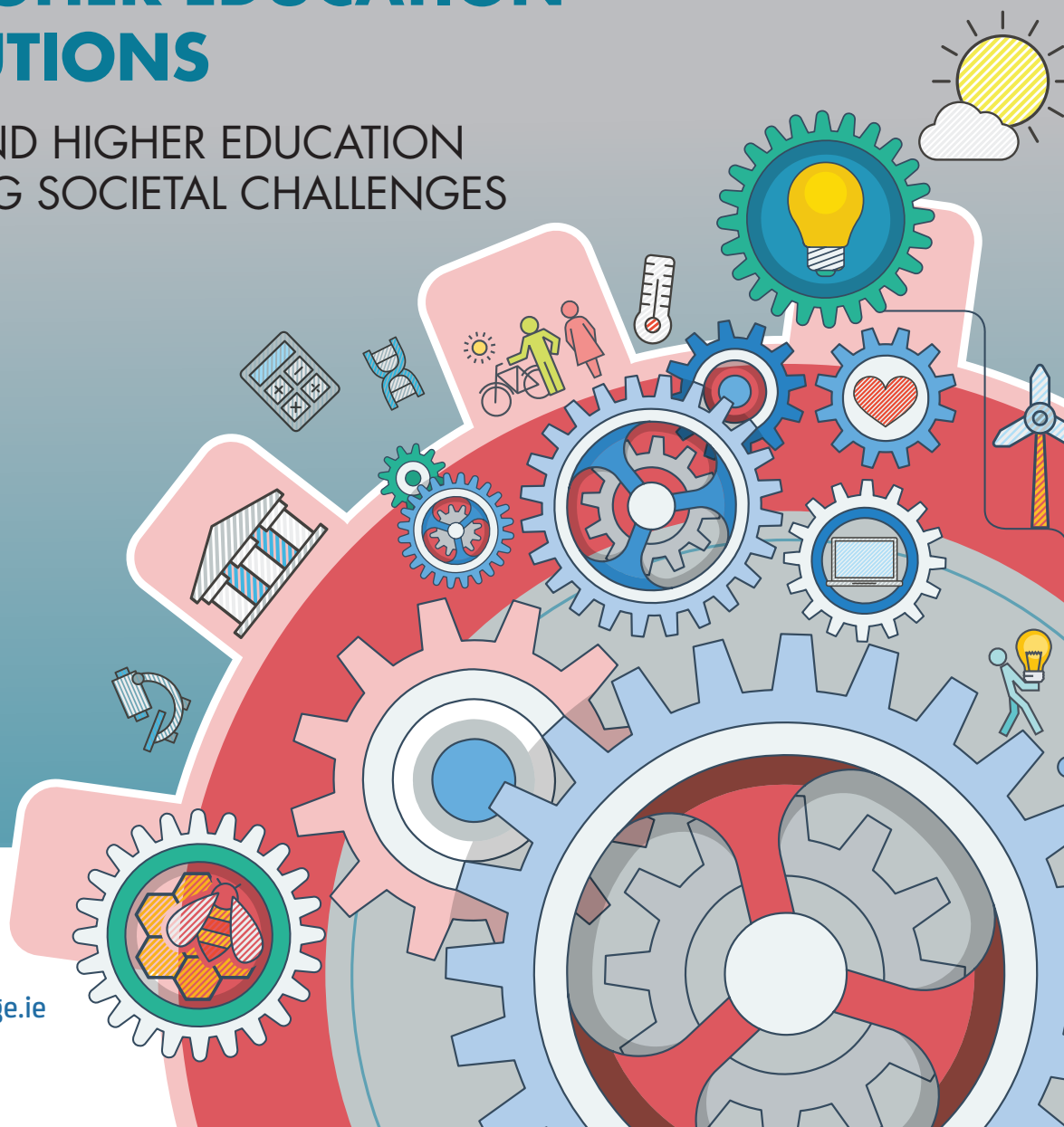


CAMPUS ENGAGE POLICY BRIEFING

ENGAGED RESEARCH FOR IMPACT

A POLICY BRIEFING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

SOCIETY AND HIGHER EDUCATION
ADDRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES
TOGETHER





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

WHAT IS ENGAGED RESEARCH?

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.

This definition and the recommendations for higher education institutions included in this policy briefing are informed by a year-long Campus Engage national and international consultation process. More than 320 researchers, policy-makers, staff from funding agencies and community partners were involved, feeding into the Campus Engage and the Irish Research Council report, *Engaged Research: Society & Higher Education Addressing Grand Societal Challenges Together*.

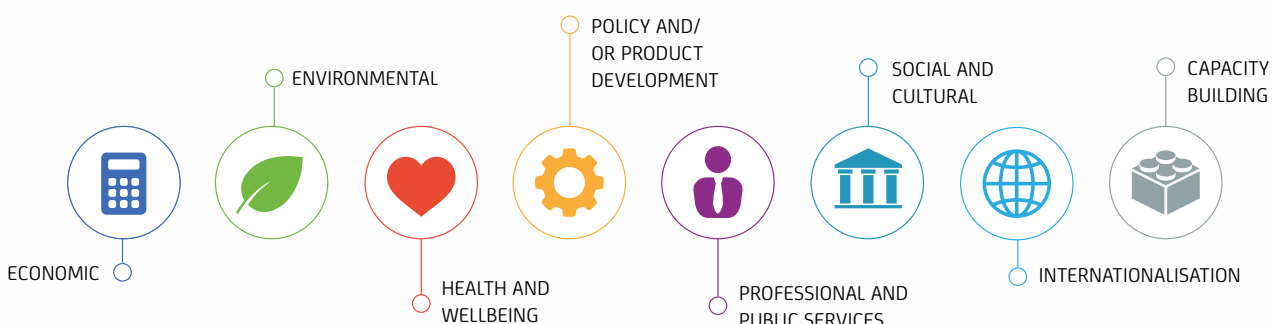
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGED RESEARCH?

The Higher Education Authority’s *System Performance Framework 2018-2020* sets out key objectives to create rich opportunities for engagement with society, and research excellence that impacts on society. Irish universities are committed to achieving these objectives. Institutional strategic plans highlight transformative student experiences, and research activities by students and staff that not only increase our knowledge and understanding, but also benefit local, national and international communities. The extent and diversity of engaged research undertaken in Irish higher education institutions illustrates a strong desire to co-create and share knowledge for positive societal impact in a research landscape that is more inclusive and responsive.

Engaged research is important in helping students and researchers to develop strong project management and investigative skills, along with transferable skill-sets, especially in leadership, ethics, communications, facilitation, networking and, occasionally, conflict-resolution. An investment in engaged research ultimately helps researchers at all levels to discover, and then develop, a community of practice that incorporates both professional and lived experiences – and it is at this frontier where exciting and impactful research can happen.

Engaged research enriches academic activities by co-creating ideas and enhancing their relevance. It reduces duplication of effort and improves the timeliness of discoveries, maximising the value of investment and often propelling research and research teams further along the pathway to impact. These are key metrics for research funding, as funding agencies and programmes are increasingly looking for indicators of engagement and impact.

Engaged research delivers excellence through collaborative rather than individualised approaches, across departments, institutions and sectors. Tangible benefits and the flow of ideas are emphasised across society rather than just within disciplinary groups. This helps to encourage greater public support, trust and understanding of the importance of research in our everyday lives.



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



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

WHAT ARE THE POLICY AND FUNDING DRIVERS OF ENGAGED RESEARCH?

- Ireland's *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* charges higher education institutions with finding new ways to address their responsibilities towards the communities with which they engage, in order to meet societal needs, while recognising that strong community engagement requires resource allocation and metrics for assessing impact.
- The Higher Education Authority's *System Performance Framework 2018-2020* sets out national priorities and includes engagement in two of its six key objectives:
 - Objective 2: Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community;
 - Objective 3: Excellent research, development and innovation that has relevance, growing engagement with external partners and impact for the economy and society, and strengthens our standing to become an Innovation Leader in Europe.
- *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020* metrics, which form the basis of the *Performance Compacts* agreed between the Higher Education Authority and higher education institutions, 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 community partners.
- All of these policy drivers respond in different ways to the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals*. Irish higher education institutions are increasingly incorporating these goals into their strategies and policies, to address local and global challenges.
- Under *Horizon Europe*, the €100 billion EU research and innovation programme that will succeed *Horizon 2020*, the European Commission will launch missions with ambitious goals co-designed with citizens, stakeholders, the European Parliament and Member States.
- The Irish Research Council's 2019-2024 strategy builds on its commitment to support knowledge exchange and engaged research for impact. Challenge-based funding for research that addresses societal challenges is available, with an emphasis on collaboration with a range of agencies across health, climate action, justice and equality, children and youth affairs, statistics, and arts and culture.
- The Health Research Board aims to encourage greater levels of public and patient involvement in the design and conduct of research activities. Its 2016-2020 strategy focuses on developing partnerships across academic, practice and policy spheres. One of three focus areas for funding is research driven through strong collaboration and partnership between research producers and users, facilitating evidence-based decision-making and robust evaluation.
- Science Foundation Ireland Research Centres, which focus on 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 Science Foundation Ireland's 2020-2025 strategy, key themes include measuring broader impacts, promoting interdisciplinary research, engaging citizens and industry, and encouraging open access.

WHAT ARE THE ONGOING CHALLENGES TO ADVANCING ENGAGED RESEARCH?

While local, national and international policies and funding opportunities support engaged research, there are still significant challenges to scaling up effective engaged research across the Irish higher education research landscape. These include:

- Lack of appropriate institutional infrastructure to support and maintain quality research partnerships;
- Little institutional reward or recognition for engaged research activities, reflected in academic workloads and promotions procedures, as well as few career pathways for sustaining or growing engaged research;
- Few structured opportunities to network and engage with diverse stakeholders early in the research lifecycle in order to understand what research is needed;
- Competing timelines for researchers and research stakeholders, along with irregular funding opportunities and an over-reliance on competitive funding calls to support engagement activities;
- A focus on one-off engagements, rather than long-term involvement in setting and addressing research priorities;
- Little or no training to facilitate and support engagement and involvement by community partners;
- Failure to value the time, contributions and lived experiences of community stakeholders;
- Confusion as to the benefits, roles and responsibilities in partnership approaches for all collaborators;
- Inappropriate allocation of resources to cover labour and costs for all collaborators;
- Insufficient integration of engaged research methodologies into undergraduate and postgraduate education.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A series of recommendations for higher education institutions were agreed as part of a year-long Campus Engage national and international consultation process. Challenges to advancing engaged research can be addressed by the following actions. Enabling institutional infrastructure must be developed and resources effectively channelled in order to implement policy and practice on engaged research for the benefit of all. This will help to promote research excellence and better position researchers nationally and internationally to achieve impact and social change, as knowledge and innovation leaders.

- Include a clear commitment to engaged research in institutional strategic plans, embedded into research, innovation, teaching and learning activities;
- Identify a senior leader to strategically implement engaged research policies, with responsibility for advancing enabling infrastructure to promote and support higher education institution-community research partnerships;
- Broaden research metrics to recognise and reward the impact of engagement in realising societal benefits;
- Provide institutional reward and recognition for engaged research and reflect this in hiring and promotions procedures;
- Identify and develop research career pathways to encourage sustained engagement between researchers and community partners;
- Accommodate flexible scheduling and timetabling of workloads to facilitate engaged research activities;
- Ensure engaged research is integrated into undergraduate curricula, and postgraduate and doctoral training;
- Put in place simplified payment/reimbursement systems and processes that facilitate partnering and that accommodate non-university staff;
- Allocate funding for engaged research travel and conferences, application writing supports and transdisciplinary team development;
- Develop local communication and information systems to facilitate disciplines, departments and colleges in capturing past and ongoing engaged research projects, promoting mutual learning and avoiding duplication of effort;
- Develop resources including case studies, methods toolboxes and evaluation frameworks in order to share lessons learned and to support researchers;
- Provide and fund structured networking opportunities with higher education staff for interested public or professional service and product users, policy-makers, civil and civic society organisations, and members of the public who are interested in collaborating;
- Provide and fund training on good practice for engaged research, in partnership with public or professional service and product users, policy-makers, civil and civic society organisations, and members of the public.

The Campus Engage Steering Committee and the Irish Research Council are grateful to the authors of this policy briefing: Kate Morris and Colm O’Hehir, Campus Engage, IUA; Nora Trench Bowles, IUA; Campus Engage Engaged Research Working Group members: Sarah Bowman and Michael Foley, Trinity College Dublin; Prof Maura Adshead, University of Limerick; Prof Sinead McGilloway, Maynooth University; Dr Catherine Bates, Technological University Dublin; Dr Padraig Murphy, Dublin City University; Ann Lyons, National University of Ireland, Galway; Dr Éidín Ní Shé and Alex Boyd, University College Dublin; Dr Ruth Hally, University College Cork.

More information on Campus Engage can be found at www.campusengage.ie.
Contact details for the Campus Engage IUA team can be found at www.campusengage.ie/about-us/iua-team.

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