

Evaluating Science Policy Practice Interfaces

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers and research funders are increasingly interested in improving the impact of research on policy. Science driven research, or research without meaningful engagement will not bring significant change. Society needs more effective and rapid responses to ever-increasing environmental and social challenges.

Scotland's centre of expertise for waters (CREW) delivers research in response to policy needs to help develop and implement water policy. CREW is a programme of individual KE projects and is using a wide range of KE mechanisms. *Evaluating Science Policy Practice Interfaces* is evaluating knowledge exchange in CREW to increase the centre's effectiveness.

Knowledge needs to be shaped by researchers and policy and the outputs communicated in the right way, at the right time, to the right people to produce outcomes which may have an impact. There are few worked examples of what makes for 'good' knowledge exchange that improves interaction. Nor are there agreed methodologies for evaluating these practices.



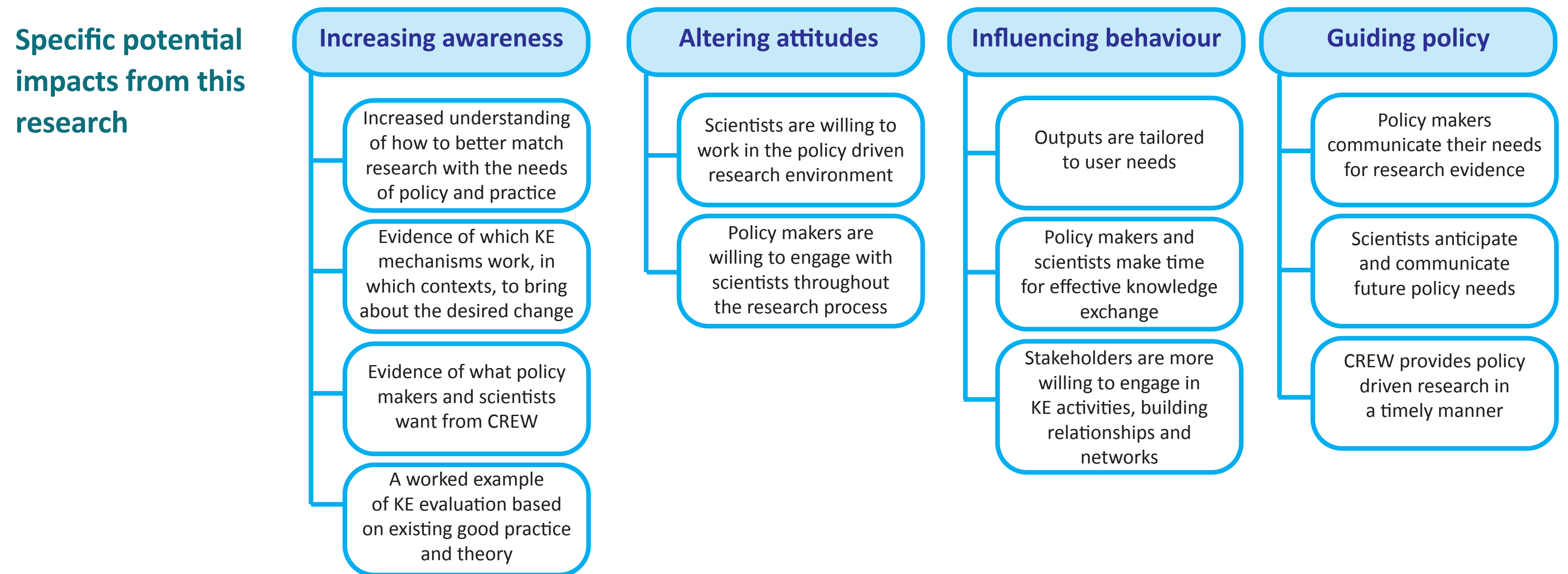
RESEARCH IMPACT

Research impact can include any demonstrable contribution to academic advances, society and the economy.

Measuring impact is extremely complex. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to separate out the effects of a particular KE initiative given the influence of wider social,

political, economic, institutional and cultural factors. Therefore it is essential that the processes within CREW are in place to allow impact to occur. Assessment of impact may ultimately use an assessment of the processes involved as a proxy. The potential impact of this research is on policy makers and scientists from other disciplines in assisting

them in co-constructing evidence based policy. This will increase research impact and benefit society through well-informed policy. The focus here is on assessing impact - not measuring. A focus only on measurement may lead to making what is measurable important, not what is important measurable.



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

There are limited practical examples of evaluating knowledge exchange. KE is highly context specific; 'catch-all' and generic methods for its evaluation are neither available nor appropriate. Our approach to this evaluation is summarised in the table below.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH METHODS	RESEARCH OUTPUTS
1. Understand existing science: policy: practice interfaces within CREW	a) Review of good practice guidance for KE evaluation b) Targeted review of literature on evaluating KE	a) Summary of findings b) Report
2. Measure and analyse how CREW's structure, members and activities contribute towards these interfaces	a) Develop evaluation protocol b) Establish baselines i) CREW planned activities ii) Stakeholder knowledge, views and preferences for CREW working c) Establish database to record data on operation of each aspect of CREW, including changes to plans	a) Evaluation plan b) Baselines i) Baseline of aims, KE mechanisms, outputs and target audiences ii) Stakeholder baseline c) Searchable Endnote file
3. Evaluate performance during CREW year 1. Suggest ways to improve links between research, policy and implementation	a) Compare baseline data with actual activities b) Interviews with project leaders to provide insights into project performance c) Collate data from evaluation activities and analyse performance	a) Summary of performance against baseline data b) Interview report, research summary c) Tables comparing plans and performance
4. Report on year 1 performance and make recommendations for future KE	a) Present findings from ESPI-CREW activities, and draw overall conclusions b) Develop a tool for future evaluation of CREW	a) Final report b) Model for future evaluation

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- At this early stage there is some evidence that progress is being made towards meeting CREW's aims. Strong links are in place between CREW and its stakeholders, helping to increase networks.
- KE mechanisms used by CREW include workshops, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Through these mechanisms, researchers are increasing their understanding of KE and gaining the necessary skills.
- Stakeholders found the CREW structure confusing and were unsure of how to initiate dialogue. Conversely, a great deal of positive feedback has been provided, though obtaining feedback has been patchy in CREW's first year.
- We recommend:
 - Integrating the desired outcomes of KE into research specifications.
 - Further consideration of some pertinent questions: impact evaluation for whom? Who defines what the impact is? How is practice shaped by the need to show impact?

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The *Evaluating Science Policy Practice Interfaces* project has produced a series of reports available from www.crew.ac.uk/publications