



An Roinn Leanáí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Irish Universities Association (IUA) and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and

Government Policymakers & Higher Education Researchers An Evidence for Public Policy Brokerage Event

Building Bridges for Evidence Informed Public Policy: Youth Wellbeing

Date: 1 March 2023

Venue: Tangent, Trinity College Dublin

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Introduction

This brokerage event, organised by the DCEDIY and the Irish Universities Association (IUA), will bring policy makers and higher education researchers together to consider how we can align current research with policy priorities in order to enhance the lives of young people in Ireland today and in the future.

The IUA is the representative voice of Ireland's research intensive, enterprise engaged, public universities. Based at the IUA, Campus Engage works to mobilise research knowledge and expertise to address our most complex societal challenges to support policy officials to inform, implement and evaluate high impact public policy, for societal good.

DCEDIY is the main government department responsible for youth policy in Ireland and one of DCEDIY's key strategic actions is to develop quality, evidence informed youth policy.

This targeted initiative includes both conference style addresses by key players in both youth research and youth policy, and three breakout brokerage sessions. These brokerage sessions will provide a space where policy makers and researchers can consider how academic research can address specific policy challenges relevant to the lives of young people in Ireland.

The objective of the brokerage sessions is to enhance understanding of current research, but also to inform and encourage future dialogue on new and emerging research agendas. The brokerage sessions will be chaired by Mary Doyle, Fergal Lynch and Seán Ó Fohglú, each of whom has very senior experience in both the civil service and in the higher education research sector. Each brokerage session will include a short input from a policy ‘challenger’ and responses from researchers who will highlight some key research trends in relation to the specific challenge. These inputs are intended to stimulate debate and dialogue amongst attendees in each session.

Who should attend?	Why should they attend?
<p>Policy makers and officials</p> <p>DCEDIY, Tusla and NDA officials working to drive evidence-informed solutions to address societal challenges which impact youth wellbeing.</p> <p>Research colleagues from other relevant government departments who have an interest in youth policy and can act as research brokers across the government system.</p>	<p>Policy officials will access high quality, and scientifically robust knowledge relevant to delivering on youth policy responsibilities. Policy officials can build their network of highly experienced and expert researchers from across Irish higher education. These researchers want to support policy officials to inform, implement and evaluate high impact public policy to make young people’s lives better. Policy makers will also get the chance to focus on the subject of Youth in a holistic way, and learn about what other colleagues in DCEDIY, NDA and Tusla are working on and where possible synergies may exist.</p>
<p>Academic researchers</p> <p>Expert researchers, with an outstanding record of generating research to address DCEDIY identified complex policy challenges, with and for young people.</p>	<p>Researchers will get the opportunity to build their network of policy officials, to inform policy officials of their latest research findings, and to support policy officials to draft and implement impactful policy. Researchers will also get the opportunity to better inform the future direction of their own research, based on dialogue and new understanding of gaps in evidence for public policy challenges, foresight needs etc.</p>

Briefing Paper for attendees

This briefing paper provides an overview of the context and purpose of this brokerage event. Our ambition is to provide a space where policy makers and researchers can consider how academic research can address key policy challenges relevant to the lives of young people in Ireland. Our aim is to enhance understanding of current research, but also to inform and encourage future dialogue on new and emerging research agendas.

In order to support this ambition, this briefing paper provides event participants with an introduction to:

- [1. National plans on research for public policy making.](#)
- [2. How DCEDIY supports the use of research and data in youth policy development.](#)
- [3. Selected policy challenges related to youth well-being.](#)

1. National plans on research for public policy making

The [National Development Plan](#) and Ireland's new Research and Innovation Strategy, [Impact 2030](#), promise to drive economic recovery and improve quality of life for all, including children and young people. Both national strategies present new models, which will support evidence informed public policy. Impact 2030 lays out ambitious plans to better align research and innovation investment with policy makers' needs to address Ireland's greatest societal challenges. These challenges include climate change and the need to transition to a climate-neutral society; economic transformation fuelled by technological and other change; greater international competition and geopolitical instability; increased mobility of talent; and the need to build societal resilience against the threat of shocks.

Through this Strategy, Ireland will intensify its commitment to building a knowledge-based economy, building on existing competitive strengths and engaging intensively with the adoption of new and emerging technologies, which will be central to long-term economic, environmental and social sustainability at national and regional level.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) leads on Impact 2030 and has an ambitious strategy to strengthen connections between the higher education research sector and policy makers. Work is well underway to establish a civil service research network (CSRN), this will provide a forum for all departments, both those with established research programmes and those who have less experience in research engagement, to identify and share best practice in engaging with the significant research knowledge and expertise available through the higher education research sector.

The network will also inform an action plan and framework, to be drafted by DFHERIS, which will encourage the higher education research sector to play its full part in supporting those engaged

in policy within the civil service. This development will support and complement the ongoing work across the civil service to enhance evidence-informed policy development.

In recent years, there has also been an increasing focus on building capacity for evidence informed decision making across the Civil Service. The [Civil Service 2030 renewal strategy](#) commits to delivering evidence-informed policy and services, including a “continuous improvement approach to our policy development capacity”. Since 2012, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) provides an integrating cross Government service to enhance the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policy making.

In June 2022, the Government published the second report on Ireland’s [National Well-being Framework](#) (2022). The framework provides policy makers and researchers with a new approach to understanding people’s lives by bringing economic, societal and environmental impacts together under one Framework. The Wellbeing Framework places a particular focus on equality and sustaining well-being into the future, and is accompanied by a well-being dashboard which is published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

An important underlying thread across these policy documents is the need to build bridges between the civil and public service and the higher education research sector. The ambition is to help bring a more consistent approach to policy development, based on research evidence, public engagement, and high-quality public debate. This, in turn, will bring greater transparency and public trust in the improved policy-making process.

Over recent years there has been an increased ambition to drive evidence informed decision making across the government system in Ireland and internationally. Since its establishment, DCEDIY has sought to enhance available evidence, build capacity for evidence use, and ensure that the best available evidence is applied to policy development. DCEDIY, working with IUA, is now seeking to enhance its knowledge and access to research and evidence relevant to youth policy, with a focus on new and emerging research that can support key policy challenges.

2. How DCEDIY supports the use of research and data in youth policy development

DCEDIY is the main government department responsible for youth policy in Ireland and one of its key strategic actions is to develop quality, evidence informed youth policy.

DCEDIY is responsible for the provision of youth services and opportunities to young people in their communities. This enables them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential by strengthening their personal and social competencies. Across the Department several policy and corporate units are involved in work relevant to supporting the lives of young people in Ireland.

The Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) is engaged with the Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) in the Department to improve the data quality available from the sector. This is part of a broader recognition that future policy development in relation to youth services requires enhanced data collection and use, and a strong research base.

DCEDIY has responsibility for leading and driving reform in the area of youth justice. DCEDIY is also responsible for the Oberstown Children Detention Campus. The Department of Justice retains responsibility for youth crime policy and law, including crime prevention/reduction/detection, criminal proceedings and diversion and community sanctions (including community projects). The Youth Justice Strategy is available [here](#).

Despite much progress on youth well-being in recent years and a dynamic and broad research environment, many challenges remain in promoting the well-being of young people. DCEDIY is currently developing a new National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, which will address these key challenges, a blue print of that paper is available [here](#). The new framework will be a composite child and youth policy framework.

DCEDIY is developing this national framework in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC recommends that States should have a cross-Government funded Children and Young People’s Research Programme and DCEDIY is now looking to establish such an initiative. A new cross-government funded Children and Young People’s Research Programme offers the opportunity to amplify and accelerate existing research and policy developments, and to bring a renewed focus on generating research, which supports responses to the new and persistent challenges facing children, young people and their families.

The Youth Reform Strategy and Participation Unit in the department works to ensure that children and young people have a voice in policies, decisions, and services that affect their lives, at national and local level. In January 2022, DCEDIY published the [Final Review of the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making 2015 – 2020](#), and ran a public consultation and targeted survey process to inform the forthcoming National Participation Framework Action Plan.

The DCEDIY Statement of Strategy recognises collaboration and evidence informed policy as a key enabler to ensure successful implementation of its Goals and Strategic Actions over the period 2021-2023. The strategy commits to “ensuring that our policies are informed by the best available evidence and research”. Indeed, since the development of the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children’s Lives (2011-2016), the research and data landscape relevant to children and young people’s lives has transformed. Today Government has access to a vibrant academic research community and a growing administrative data resource.

DCEDIY has an established Research and Evaluation Unit and has recently established a Data and Analytics Unit. These specialist units have a central role in delivering research and data and in supporting access to the best available evidence for policy development in DCEDIY. The department has a strong track record in producing and commissioning research on a wide range

of topics related to youth policy and the challenges facing young people in Ireland today. To view our research publications, please click [here](#).

DCEDIY has promoted and managed the Growing up in Ireland (GUI) study since its commencement in 2006. Across Government, policy makers now have access to longitudinal data on children and young people. This study represents a very significant investment by the State in high quality research and data on the lives of children, young people and their families. GUI is also one of the most widely used data sets by researchers in Ireland and is firmly embedded in the broader research ecosystem. GUI is internationally recognised as part of the broader family of longitudinal research and is a fertile ground for all kinds of research relevant to the lives of young people. From January 2023, GUI data will be collected by the CSO and there is an ambitious programme of data collection across three cohorts: the two existing cohorts of young people born in 1998 and 2007/2008, as well as a new baby cohort who will be recruited in 2024.

The Department also committed to embedding a research culture through our knowledge transfer work. It runs regular research clubs for staff to discuss recent research on relevant topics and often invite researchers from higher education institutions to present their work to staff. For more information about how DCEDIY embeds research and data analysis see a recent [informative poster](#) which illustrates the Department's framework for evidence-based policy development.

3. Selected policy challenges for youth well-being

To inform this brokerage event, the Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) in DCEDIY reviewed the key policy and consultation documents and undertook a series of engagements with policy colleagues across a diverse range of issues relevant to the lives of young people. We asked colleagues to identify key policy changes, but also to reflect on the areas in which they believe they do not yet have access to adequate research and analysis. REU would also like to thank colleagues in the National Disability Authority and Tusla for their contribution to this process.

While a broad range of topics and issues were named, three thematic areas were identified as the focus for this brokerage event, each containing a small number of specific policy challenges.

Theme 1: *“Looking Forward” – how can we support youth wellbeing in early adulthood*

The new policy framework on children and young people will focus on the areas of most significant difficulty for young people, especially those who are vulnerable.

Policy officials across the Department and particularly in child policy and equality divisions have identified a policy challenge in relation to how we can provide intervention and prevention early in the progression of problems young people may face. For example, have we systems in place that can identify, prevent, and intervene early for young people leaving school or leaving care, who encounter problems or require support? What more can we do, given that these young

people are also adults and may no longer have much, if any, engagement with the state? In this context, research which focuses on prevention and intervention methods for young people would be of great interest to policy makers in the Department, Tusla and the NDA.

In this session, we also want to explore a related theme on youth wellbeing. Equality colleagues are interested in exploring the challenges teenagers and young people face in their transitions from second-level education to employment and/or further education and training, and into independent living as adults. What are the options they see as open to them in the short and medium term, and how does that affect the choices they make? Do they feel their backgrounds, family situations and personal characteristics affect their options? Equality legislation currently prohibits discrimination on nine grounds, and the possibility of adding another ground of socio-economic status is under consideration. Do these grounds help to recognise and describe specific difficulties being experienced by young people?

Theme 2: *young people, LGBTI+ and wellbeing*

In this session, we want to explore research work on young people and their well-being in relation to their sexuality. In this regard, the Department is building on an earlier 2021 study which explored the research landscape relevant to the lives of LGBTI+ youth (see [here](#))

This landscape report found that the objectives of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy (2019-2021) are well supported by research, but it identified gaps in the research evidence that need to be addressed, some of which are listed below.

- Future research needs to include both LGBTI+ young people and their sources of support – families, teachers and youth workers
- We need to know more about how to improve well-being and resilience among LGBTI+ youth, not just focus on risks and negative outcomes. Future research needs to consider the positive aspects of LGBTI+ young people’s lives, involve their families, teachers and youth workers, and monitor initiatives to help ensure positive outcomes.”
- There is not enough high-quality research on transgender and intersex youth; more evidence is needed to know how best to improve their lives.

The NDA recently completed a survey on well-being and social inclusion which found that people with disabilities who also identified as LGBTQ+ had poorer well-being than being either disabled only or LGBTI+ only and research in relation to this topic would be worth exploring at this event.

Theme 3: *Civic engagement and future of democratic engagement*

DCEDIY is committed to ensuring that young people have a voice and a role in decisions that affect them, so it is important we are aware of the topics that matter to them. Recent GUI data showed that young adults today are less likely than their predecessors to engage in traditional forms of civic engagement such as belonging to a political party, or voting in a general election

(Gaby, 2017; Grasso, 2018; Sloam, 2016). Only half of those eligible had registered to vote, and only a third had actually voted in the General Election.

Growing Up in Ireland data also makes it clear that the nature of civic engagement is changing. Young adults are more likely than previous generations to engage in issue-based forms of participation, such as signing petitions, participating in demonstrations, and internet activism. From GUI we know that young people care deeply about critical social and economic issues such as housing, poverty, access to employment and climate.

Policy makers need to understand what changes in civic participation mean for policy development. Do we as policy makers rely too heavily on traditional forms and modes of civic and political participation to gauge young people's political views and concerns? Are there new ways of engaging young people in policy development? Policy makers would also like to learn more about research being conducted on the levels of civic and political engagement amongst marginalised groups of young people, such as members of the Traveller and Roma groups and young migrant people, in our local and national community structures. How do young people today make critical decisions about their lives? Who are the people that have most influence on their choices? More research in this space could inform strategies to support young people in their decision making regarding education, careers and life choices.



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Venue: Tangent, Trinity College Dublin, Business School, Pearse St, Dublin 2

DRAFT AGENDA

- 10.00 Tea & Coffee on arrival and available throughout proceedings
- 10.20 **Introduction from Chair**
Laura McGarrigle, Assistant Secretary, DCEDIY
- 10.30 **Welcome**
Prof Norelee Kennedy, Vice President Research & Innovation, UL (Chair of IUA Standing Group for Research & Innovation)
- 10.40 **Taking stock of the key challenges for youth policy in Ireland today.**
Orla Corrigan, Principal Officer, Youth Affairs, DCEDIY
- 10.55 **A new impetus for research informed decision-making: Impact 2030 Agenda**
Trudy Duffy, Principal Officer, Evidence for Policy Unit, DFHERIS
- 11.05 *Question and Comments from the floor.*
- 11.30 **Brokerage sessions: Mobilising Research Evidence for Public Policy**
Short policy challenger input and responses from researchers on existing and emerging research, followed by an opportunity for participants to discuss how best to respond to the challenges of promoting well-being for all young people in Ireland today.

Theme 1: “Looking Forward” – how can we support youth well-being in early adulthood.

Chair: Fergal Lynch, Senior Lead, Government and Public Policy Engagement, University of Galway.

Theme 2: Young people, sexuality and well-being

Chair: Mary Doyle, Visiting Fellow, Public Policy, Trinity College Dublin, member of the Royal Irish Academy

Theme 3: Civic engagement and future of democratic engagement

Chair: Seán Ó Foghlú, Senior Fellow in Public Policy, Maynooth University

12.30

Lunch and reflection

Reflections from Chairs of each Brokerage event.

‘Food for thought’ a representative from Tusla, NDA and D/FHERIS, DCEDIY and IUA will provide one key action point arising from the brokerage sessions

Lunch table discussion: How can we better support engagement between civil servants and academics researchers?

14.00

CLOSE