

## **The invisible made visible: using impact evaluations to illuminate and inform the role of Knowledge Intermediaries**

**Dr Catherine Lyall**

**ESRC Innogen Centre, University of Edinburgh**

**Dr Laura Meagher**

**Technology Development Group & Honorary Fellow,  
Innogen**



The Open University



# Who we are

- Catherine Lyall: Deputy Director, ESRC Innogen Centre, & Assoc Dean (Research Careers), College of Humanities & Social Science, University of Edinburgh. Research in science policy, interdisciplinarity, knowledge exchange
- Laura Meagher: Senior Partner, TDG, US & UK experience in science, policy, KE, innovation, economic development, interdisciplinarity, strategic change. Design, catalysis & leadership – and evaluation – of novel initiatives

# Outline

- Introduction: How impact evaluation can contribute to bridging the gap
- Twofold challenges
- Our approach: formative “meta-evaluation”
- Conceptual framework
- Key processes, roles, lessons
- An array of impacts (and proxy indicators?)
- Implications for Knowledge Intermediaries
- Conclusions

# How impact evaluation can contribute to bridging the gap

- Governments seek to promote innovation
- Governments seek to assess impacts of research
- Sensitive evaluations can uncover tacit knowledge of participants in “experiments”
- We can learn about subtleties of Knowledge Exchange processes leading toward impacts... and thus improve!

# Twofold challenges

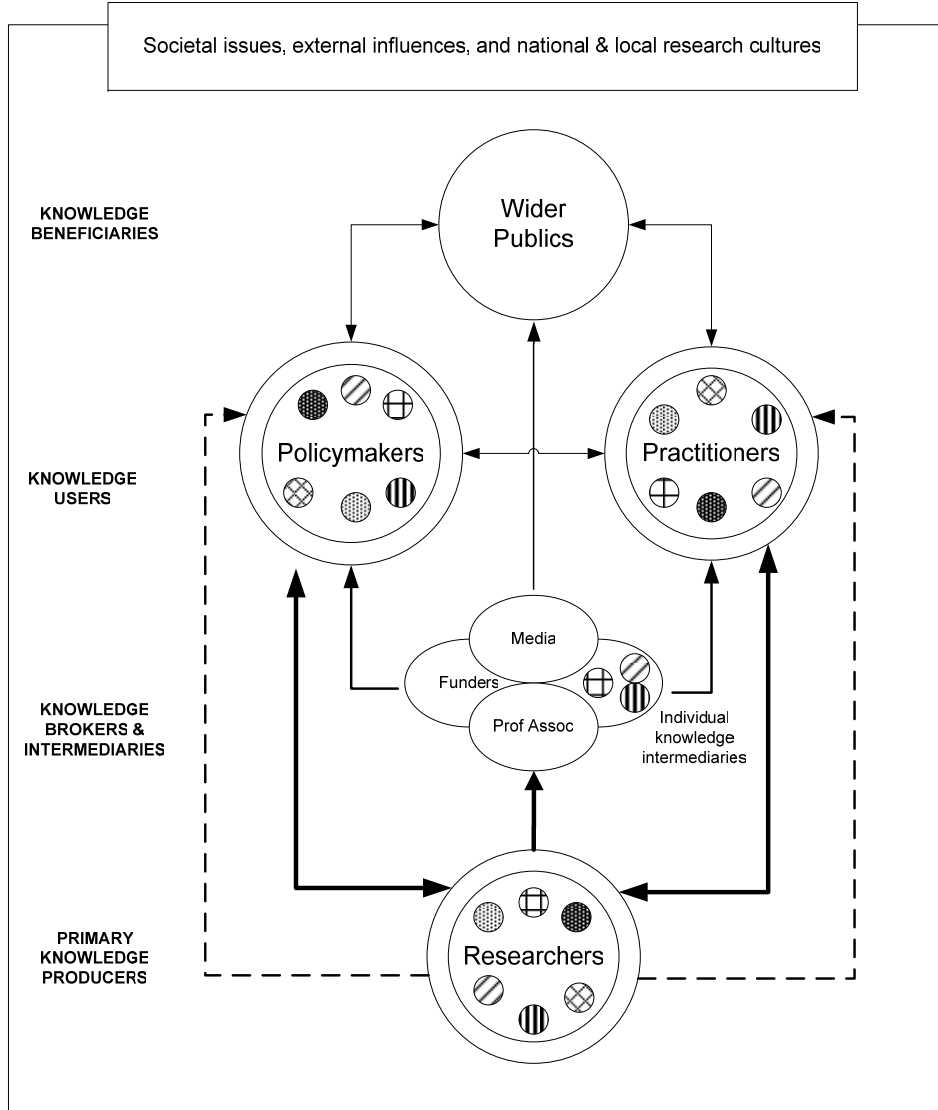
- Increasing demand for impacts as research ‘Return On Investment’
- Challenges of *capturing* non-academic benefits
  - “impacts” can be subtle & elusive, diffuse
  - many impacts are likely to be long-term, taking place in various forms at multiple levels, various times
  - attribution of causality is a nightmare
- Challenges of *generating* non-academic benefits
  - actual KE processes can be subtle & elusive
  - improvement of KE processes requires attitudinal & behavioural changes at multiple levels

# Our approach: formative “meta-evaluation”

- Formative vs summative evaluation
- Learning from multiple evaluations
- Deep evaluation capturing insights & lessons learned
- Deconstructing processes & roles in Knowledge Exchange leading toward impacts
- Consideration of dimension of time, developmental change



# Contributing evaluations

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Scope/Format</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Research Development Grant SHEFC (now SFC)	Multiple, separate centres	Various emerging areas in S&T, often interdisciplinary and/or inter-institutional collaborations, KE goal
Responsive mode grant (ESRC)	Individual grants	Diverse areas, Psychology (prior to KE emphasis)
People at the Centre of Computers and Information Technology (PACCIT) Programme (EPSRC, ESRC, DTI)	Large, multi- project programme	ICT (latter 17 of 30 projects had KE emphasis)
Research Brokerage (ESRC)	Large investments (e.g. centres)	Various brokerage mechanisms promoting communication and KE



Conceptual framework to elaborate flows of knowledge and interactions generating impacts from research

See Meagher et al. *Research Evaluation* (2008)

KEY  = Individuals (or subdisciplines) within wider organisations  = Organisations and institutions

# Learning from across Evaluations: Key Processes & Roles

- Two-way communication
- Dynamic relationship-building
- “Knowledge Intermediaries”
  - University units, dedicated centre liaison staff
  - Researchers
  - Funding bodies, media, professional associations
  - Wide range of *individuals* occupying “in-between space”
- Heterogeneity — researchers, projects, relevance, users & needs

# Some other Lessons Learned

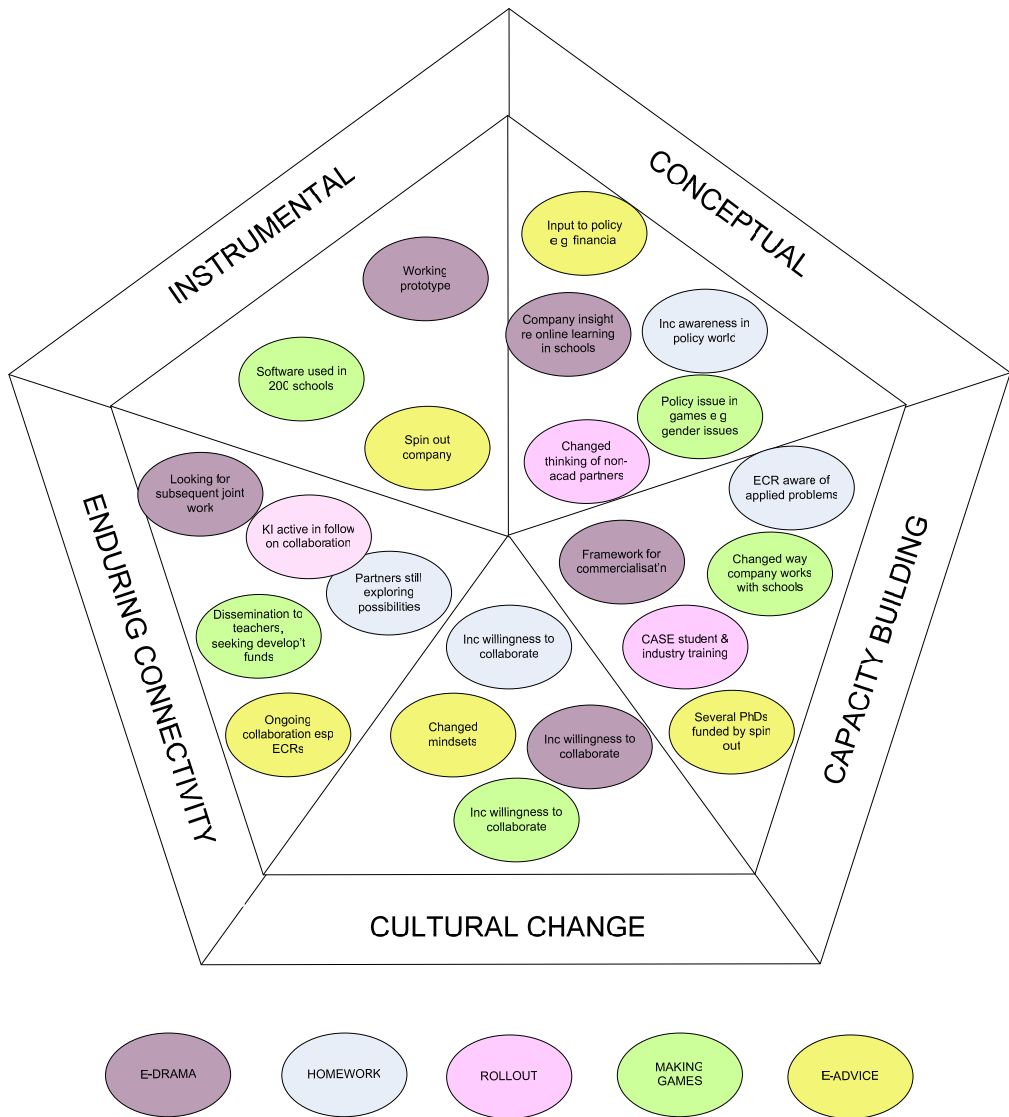
- Value and support generation of impact
- Foster early and continuing interactions between researchers & users
- Make the most of facilitating role(s) of Knowledge Intermediaries
- Recognise roles, provide incentives and opportunities to share tacit knowledge

# An array of impacts (and proxy indicators?)

- Instrumental use
- Conceptual use
- Capacity-building

*Recommendation:* Include “Attitudinal and Institutional Change” and “Enduring Connectivity” (between researchers and prospective users) as both impacts and also proxy indicators of future impacts

*Recommendation:* Encourage self-aware changes in attitudes & institutional support and also provide support for follow-on activities



ECR = Early career researcher

Examples of impacts generated by five PACCIT Case Study projects

(Meagher, 2008 *Impact of Evaluation of People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies*)

# Implications for Knowledge Intermediaries as Impacts Develop over Time

Stage	Characterised by:
1	Dialogue/networking between academics/non-academics
2	Joint knowledge exchange activities, e.g. workshops, training, reciprocal visits between academics/non-academics
3	Active ongoing collaboration, e.g. follow-on research, new pilot projects
4	Utilisation of research <i>ideas</i> , e.g. informing new policies or company research strategies
5	Utilisation of research <i>findings</i> , e.g. impact on policy/practice, use in development of new products

# Can Knowledge Intermediaries contribute to understanding of impact generation/tracking?

- Act as a translator and broker
- Encourage reflection & sharing of insights
- Inform organisational learning
- Facilitate the capture of impacts and “impacts-in-progress”

# Conclusions (1)

- Knowledge Intermediaries play varied, critical roles in bridging research and policy/practice
- Knowledge Intermediaries are themselves heterogeneous, so making good use of them can take different forms

# Conclusions (2)

- If evaluation of non-academic impacts recognises the importance of processes (not just formal outputs), evaluation will be more appropriate, organisational learning can take place AND processes can be improved to enhance likelihood of future impacts.

# Conclusions (3)

- Knowledge Intermediaries can be well-placed not only to learn from evaluations, but also to:
  - Facilitate processes
  - Stimulate learning about processes
  - Encourage improved processes
  - Log/track subtle achievements over time as impacts and impacts-in-progress

# Contacts

C.Lyall@ed.ac.uk

Laura.meagher@btinternet.com