

***'FROM SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH TO SOCIAL
POLICY MAKING'***

**ISPA POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE
11TH JULY 2014**

Dr. Kasey Treadwell Shine
Kasey.shine@welfare.ie
Social Inclusion Division
Department of Social Protection



Overview

- Role of Social Inclusion and Department of Social Protection
- Setting the scene: Key questions
- Research into policy – some thoughts on how it is done (or not)





An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

The role of the Department and Social Inclusion Division

- **Gathering evidence to inform policy**
 - Research and policy analysis: statutory function, in support of meeting DSP and Government commitments including outputs
 - Data and indicator developments (Irish and EU levels)
 - Consultation forums, peer reviews
- **Reporting and monitoring progress**
 - EU – National Social Report, National Reform Programme
 - Social Inclusion Monitor
 - Annual Social Inclusion Reports
- Assessing the impact of public policies and policy advice
- Building awareness, working with stakeholders

3





An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

Setting the scene

- **Key questions: Knowledge, ownership and receptiveness**
 - What is 'evidence'? Who 'owns' it?
 - How to move from 'research' to 'evidence' to 'policy'? (Knowledge processes)
 - What is the relationship between evidence and policymaking? Are policymakers and researchers 'ready' for this?
 - How has this relationship changed? Different ways of getting research into policy
- **Gathering 'evidence' to inform policy**
 - Asking the 'right' questions of the 'right' people, in the 'right' place, at the 'right' time: Context matters

4



Research into policy: some thoughts

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

- How it is done... or not:
 - Linear: research → policy
 - (Positively) contested: dynamic and iterative
 - Indifferent/negatively contested: closed or even hostile
 - As narrative? Research to policy as evidence-informed storytelling

It is not easy...

5



'Linear' research to policy

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

- Still the predominant method: 'Just the facts' – 'what works'
- Research is 'given' to policymakers to use – they essentially 'own' it
- Knowledge is 'transferred', 'brokered' or sometimes 'translated' by researcher or intermediate
- More recently, focus on making more 'scientific' the social research evidence – e.g. randomised control trials
- Often does not work: low receptiveness (policymakers don't want to know, or don't have the capacity or the time to utilise it)
- Ignores power dynamics and assumes everyone is on the same page (they're not!)

6





An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

(Positively) contested

- Growing recognition of 'evidence-informed' policymaking: Here are some facts, let's build them into policy tools
- Opportunity for knowledge to be more diverse, diffuse, a shared process – 'co-production' of knowledge
- That knowledge is jointly shared/owned and increases the chances it will be used
- Dynamic, iterative process that can increase receptiveness, openness to using research for policy
- Recognising context-dependent 'best possible solutions'
- But requires building trusting and respectful relationships – takes time, capacity building and resources

7





An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

Indifferent/ Negatively contested

- 'Don't give me the facts. I have already made up my mind.'
- Research into policy becomes 'policy-based evidence-making': Partial or selective use of evidence (conscious or not)
- Undermines value of research and evidence and can have ripple effects – policymakers see researchers/research as having an 'agenda'
- Researchers can struggle to understand hidden dynamics – political, macro-economic etc. that drive this negative reaction
- In extreme cases, researchers may need to consider whether to 'do no harm': That research can be used to justify negative outcomes – a very different form of evidence based policymaking!

8



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

As narrative?

- 'Evidence-informed storytelling': Towards a cultural view of research into policy
- Emerging from experiences of Irish policymakers' 'stories' as a way of making sense of, and driving choices for, policymaking
- Valid form of experiential knowledge but often based on a 'case study of one'
- Can researchers and policymakers become evidence-informed seanchaí (storytellers)?

9