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26th September 2023

Our ref: EPAC-1323

Re: Public Consultation on a Higher Education Research Policy Engagement Framework

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this public consultation on a Higher Education Research Policy Engagement Framework.

We recognise and fully support the significant efforts of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) to advance the role of research and evidence in informing the development of robust policy, and we welcome this proposal to develop a framework to support engagement and knowledge sharing between policy practitioners and the higher education research sector.

While recognising that this consultation is directed primarily at the research community, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the EPA's direct experience as an independent scientific agency in facilitating engagement between research and policymakers, and to share the outputs from a recent EPA event that brought together these communities which may be useful to DFHERIS in informing the development of the Framework.

The EPA has been funding environmental research in Ireland since 1994 with a focus on generating knowledge and evidence to support effective environmental policy development, implementation and broader decision-making. Our latest ten-year research framework [EPA Research 2030](#) sets out the EPA's ambition to put science and innovation at the centre of environmental protection in Ireland. Through our engaged research programme, we have gained significant experience in fostering effective engagement between researchers and policymakers and promoting proactive transfer of knowledge to ensure that EPA-funded research informs the development and implementation of robust policy.

As part of these efforts, in October 2022 the EPA convened a national seminar on Environmental Science to Policy. This important inaugural event brought together policymakers, knowledge transfer practitioners and scientists from across the Irish Government and academic systems to consider issues around how best to deliver environmental knowledge more effectively to the policymaking process. The [reflections paper](#)¹ published by the EPA after the event includes a number of recommendations that may be useful to consider in developing the Framework:

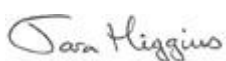
- Leadership is needed to build out a strong framework within which national environmental research and science activities can be better mobilised and aligned in support of national policy, joining- and scaling-up existing and future strategies;
- Develop informal but sustainable networks/communities of practice across organisations, with an initial focus on those active in the research-evidence policy interface;
- Practical and proactive ways must be developed to move from individual relationships between policymakers and scientists to a system based on institutional trust which values and supports long term, sustainable policymaking and implementation;
- There is a need to strengthen multi-stakeholder approaches to support policy development, finding new and innovative ways for policymakers and scientists to work together in support of policy objectives and a greater focus on *ex post* evaluation;
- Recognise and develop capacity in areas related to knowledge management, brokerage and synthesis.

Knowledge co-production and effective knowledge transfer require an inclusive and proactive approach that must be embedded in the culture of research funders, research performers and research users. DFHERIS, through its leadership role in implementing *Impact 2030*, can support the building of capacity, practice and structures in these areas to drive more efficient knowledge transfer from research to policy.

Finally, we reiterate our strong support for the recognition of research informing policy in this consultation, as well as in other national strategies including *Impact 2030* and the *Civil Service Renewal Strategy*. We advocate that research for policy be placed on an equal footing alongside research for knowledge and research supporting jobs/growth.

We are happy to discuss any of the points raised in this submission in more detail and welcome the opportunity to contribute further as the Framework is developed.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Tara Higgins
Programme Manager, Evidence Programme

¹ <https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/communicating-research/epa-environmental-science-to-policy-seminar-2022---seminar-reflections-paper.php>