

The Japan Association of
National Universities



Facilitating Research Impact: The Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN)

Professor Matthew Flinders, UPEN Chair

www.upen.ac.uk

m.flinders@Sheffield.ac.uk

In this brief presentation...

- I am not going to provide a detailed description of what the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) does, or how it fits within the broader research, development and innovation ‘ecosystem’.
- That information is appended to the end of this presentation.
- I am going to focus on five questions. This will allow me to nurture a far more sophisticated discussion about the challenges and opportunities that a focus on impact creates.
- Big issues but very little time, very happy to follow-up and discuss after this event.

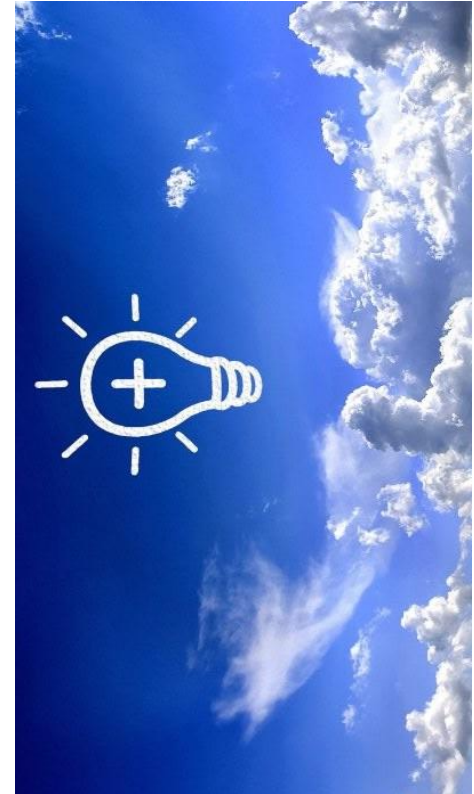
1. What does it mean to facilitate research impact?

- World class research, development and innovation systems tend to demonstrate one core quality – they facilitate the mobility of knowledge, people and talent across traditional disciplinary, professional and organizational boundaries.
- Facilitating research impact is about **facilitating mobility**....This involves building bridges, creating docking points, incentivizing behaviour and changing embedded cultures.
- There is also a need to delivered ‘structured serendipity’ by harnessing what has become known ‘the crucible effect’
- The UK now has a much stronger focus on research infrastructure and not just simply on funding more research.



2. Is impact the end product of research or does it arise much earlier?

- The ‘impact agenda’ has evolved from an initial focus on thinking about relevance as a final stage in the research process to what is now called ‘deep’ impact.
- This means that potential research-users are actively engaged throughout the research cycle as members of the research team. [co-design, co-production, co-delivery]
- Increased emphasis on challenge-led research funding, leading to a debate about creating space for fundamental or ‘blue skies’ research.
- We have gone beyond ‘demand-and-supply’ approaches to recognize how scientists often have to shape demand, and vice versa.



3. How do/did/would you change thinking around impact?

- The 'impact' agenda was initially received with a fairly high degree of skepticism, almost as a threat to the intellectual independence and professional autonomy of academics. This has changed.
- Scholarly excellence and societal impact can go hand-in-hand but initially this took some time to be understood.
- The HASS disciplines have huge potential to play a role in supporting forms of impact but rarely grasp the initiative.
- Needs to be more focus on the role and support for professional knowledge-exchange specialists.



4. How do you get from 'pathways to impact' to delivering and quantifying impact?

- With caution...'impact', 'relevance', 'social value', etc. are all complex issues and attempts at quantification need to reflect this.
- Different disciplines will contribute different dimensions to the impact agenda. Some of the most significant impacts will be almost impossible to formally acknowledge or measure.
- But generally narrative case studies, supported with different forms of evidence and supporting statements, provide a sound method of assessment.



5. Lessons learned...?

- Cultural changes takes time, as do institutions to adapt – incentives matter, as does leadership.
- Connecting and catalyzing research infrastructure needs to be established and embedded – like UPEN.
- Early career researchers are often far more open to engaging with the impact agenda than more established scholars.
- The ‘third space’ within universities is likely to grow as the impact agenda develops momentum.
- Trust – working across the research-policy interface demands the existence of high-trust, low-cost relationships. These take time to build and resources to maintain.





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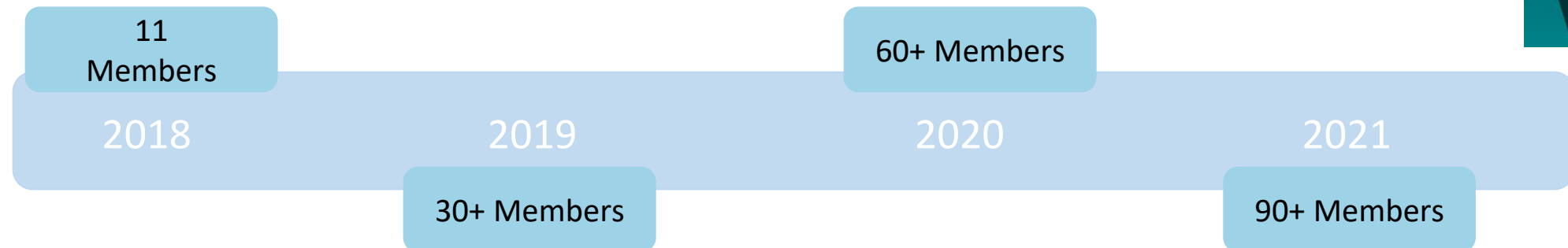
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“We can do more working together”

- UPEN is the leading boundary-spanning platform connecting universities with policymakers in the United Kingdom.
- A core element of underpinning research-infrastructure (academics and professional knowledge-exchange professionals).
- Working across local, regional, devolved, national and international governments.
- Not just governments but the private sector, voluntary and community sector, parliaments and legislatures, etc.
- Increasing international partnerships (RIC, ARIS, etc.).
- Over two-thirds of Higher Education Institutes in the UK are UPEN members.
- The focus is on navigating the science-policy interface in an efficient and effective manner.



Our Members



Our Threefold Mission

1

Broker: To harness the collective research power of UPEN members to increase the impact of research on public policy.

2

Collaborate: To collaborate with policy professionals to provide coordinated, diverse and efficient access to evidence and expertise.

3

Learn: To share learning and best practice around knowledge exchange and policy impact between UK universities.



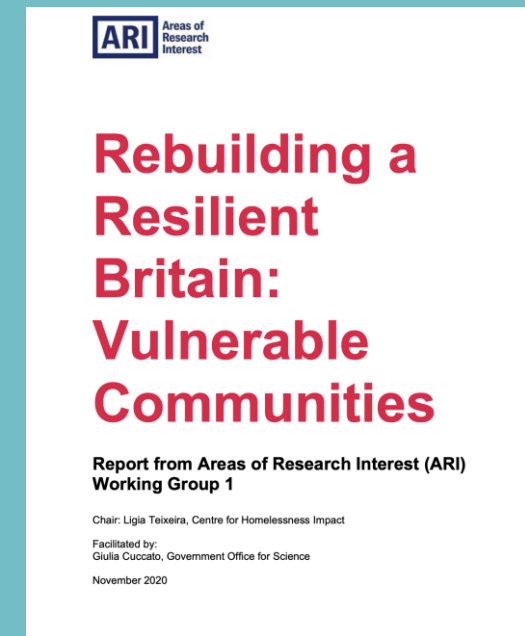
1. Broker

We are a **‘one stop shop’** – a central point for policymakers to connect with researchers



2. Collaborate

Working with stakeholders to improve the mechanisms of academic- policy engagement and **shape the agenda**



Building a network

STEPPS
Strengthening & Transferring Evidence
for Policies & Politics Society



RESEARCH
IMPACT
CANADA | Turning
research
into action

CAPE Capabilities in Academic
Policy Engagement



THE
ROYAL
SOCIETY



**The
British
Academy**



ARIS
Advancing Research Impact in Society

SAPEA
Science Advice for Policy by European Academies

Universities
Policy
Engagement
Network



27–28 April 2022
in Brussels and online

Science advice under pressure

REGISTER NOW

A CONFERENCE BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S SCIENTIFIC ADVICE MECHANISM

Science advice must deliver fast. But this challenge puts science for policy under pressure.

- It must be clear and direct, even when the evidence is complex, incomplete, uncertain and controversial.
- It must maintain the highest standards of independence, even while working closely with policymakers.
- It must stay true to the values of science in a politically and socially complex world.

In other words, science advice must reconcile certainty with speed, clarity with caution, and neutrality with political acumen. Is any of this even possible?

3. Learn

We **share experiences** with members and stakeholders about how to foster world class research that underpins policy

- 200+ blogs written by our members and key stakeholders
- 50+ training events, roundtables and member meetings
- 3000+ twitter follows
- 10,000+ visits a month to the UPEN website
- Clear and concise 'docking points' e.g. weekly bulletin



UPEN Subcommittees

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Government Departments' Areas of Research Interest

Professional Development

Communications

UPEN's future

International

Regional and Devolved Engagement



Key Areas of Focus 2021-23

Government department's Areas of
Research Interest

Equity, diversity & inclusion

Professional Development

Communications

Sustainability of the network





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secretariat@upen.ac.uk