

Improving the connections between policymakers and researchers

Hannah McKerchar and George Slim

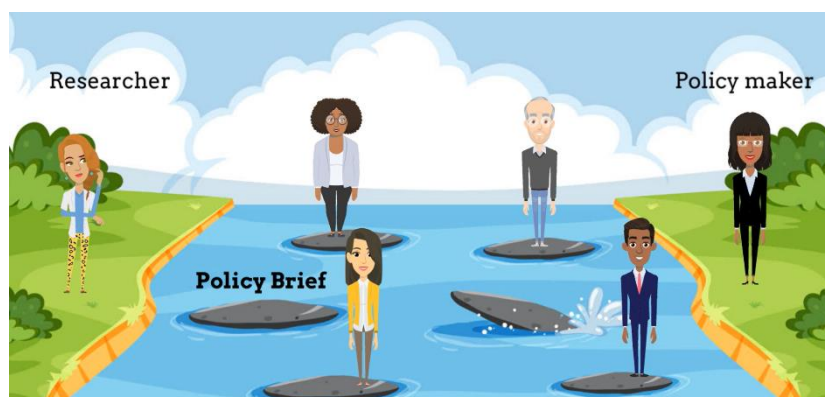
The initiative aimed at improving the connections between policymakers and researchers¹, successfully advanced into its third phase with a series of popular workshops in the main centres. The workshops provided a platform for researchers and policymakers to meet each other and make connections, which was a key objective. Creating spaces for such connections directly responded to the issues identified in the earlier phases that began before the challenging times of COVID-19.

Phase one

In 2021, as part of the first phase, an Office Fellow, Cate Roy, published an insightful paper, *Enhancing knowledge sharing between academics and policymakers in Aotearoa, New Zealand*.² Cate found that “[t]here are significant challenges associated with connecting the complex domains of academia and government. Bridging the two worlds is challenging. Researchers sometimes fail to understand the constraints, competing priorities, and complexities of the policy context. On the other hand, policymakers may lack research skills and might be tempted to look for research that supports predetermined conclusions rather than adopt an open inquiry approach.” But “[o]n both sides there are high levels of motivation and interest in engaging and a growing appreciation of the importance of research-informed policy. Among academics and policymakers there is a strong appetite to forge productive, reciprocal relationships.”

Phase two

In the second phase in 2022, an office intern³, Hannah McKerchar drew on the paper's findings to prepare resources designed to help researchers learn more about navigating the policy interface. These resources, which include a policy brief template and animated guides, are available on the website.⁴ The strong uptake of these resources, indicating a high demand for more tools to facilitate knowledge sharing and policy navigation, underscores the relevance and importance of the project.



Animation: Guide to preparing a policy brief, Hannah McKerchar

¹ <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/who-we-are/our-interns/connecting-researchers-and-policymakers/>

² <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pg/article/view/8018/7126>

³ Internships partly funded by the Riddet Institute.

⁴ <https://riddet.ac.nz/?view=article&id=272&catid=8>

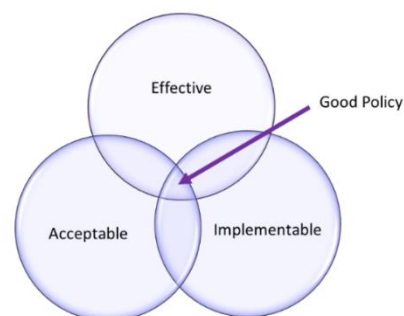
Phase three

The third phase of interactive workshops, held in late 2023 and early 2024, were aimed at early and mid-career researchers, research managers, and policymakers keen to build connections. The focus was to provide attendees with insights into the power of relationships in making evidence-based policy, how relationships are crafted, and how they are maintained when potential hurdles emerge.

George Slim's presentation on pressures policy analysts face when trying to connect to researchers, gave researcher attendees a greater understanding of the policy world. This was complemented by sharing Juliet's reflections on how research connects to policy.

Chief Science Advisors (CSAs) or a Departmental Chief Science Advisor (DSA) from Hīkina Whakatutuki | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) shared their experiences on building the science base in Aotearoa New Zealand.

After these introductory sessions, CSAs from a number of other agencies discussed case studies with a researcher and policy maker for each, highlighting the building of relationships and the tensions that can be placed on them. Topics covered by the panels in each workshop varied and included the COVID-19 response, the Sea Change Plan in the Hauraki Gulf, Kauri dieback, engaging with local government, forecasting and responding Cyclone Gabrielle, assembling decision-makers during Cyclone Gabrielle landslide dam, *He Uru Kahikatea: building young people's resilience through media and information literacy and digital citizenship skills*⁵, *Understanding the context within which gangs exist in Aotearoa New Zealand*⁶, *food loss and waste*⁷, and challenges faced by coastal communities.



Above left: George Slim speaking in Tāmaki Makau | Auckland, above right: presentation graphic

⁵ <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/building-youth-resilience-through-critical-thinking-and-digital-citizenship-skills/>

⁶ <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/evidence-summary-on-minimising-harm-from-and-within-gangs-in-aotearoa/>

⁷ <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/food-rescue-food-waste/>

Featured CSAs at the workshops included:

- Juliet Gerrard (PMCSA)
- Mike Bunce (CSA, Te Papa Atawhai | Department of Conservation (DOC))
- Alison Collins (DSA, Kaitohutohu Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua | Ministry for the Environment (MfE))
- Gary Evans (formerly CSA, MBIE)
- Ken Hughey (formerly CSA, DOC)
- David Hutchinson (Departmental Science Advisors, MBIE)
- Gill Jolly (CSA, MBIE)
- Simon Kingham (CSA, Te Manatū Waka | Ministry of Transport (MoT))
- Ian Lambie (CSA, Justice Sector)
- Tracey McIntosh (CSA, Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora | Ministry of Social Development (MSD))
- Stuart McNaughton (CSA, Te Tāhutu o te Mātauranga | Ministry of Education (MoE))
- Emily Parker and Lousie Parr- Brownlie (Departmental Science Advisors, MBIE)
- Ian Town (CSA, Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health (MoH))
- Tom Wilson (CSA, Te Rākau Whakamarumarū | National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA))

Despite the unforeseen circumstances that prevented the CSA from NEMA from attending the Ōtautahi | Christchurch workshop, the remaining panellists from NEMA, Ashleigh Fromont and Rochelle Faimalo, rose to the occasion and comprehensively showed the importance of impact-based forecasting. Their demonstration of how crucial evidence is when making decisions in a world of uncertainty and multiple unknowns underscored the power of strong communication lines.

REALLY ENJOYED THE RANGE OF TOPICS SPOKEN TO AND THE ASPIRATIONS TO BREAKDOWN SILOS, FOSTER CROSS-COMMUNITY AND CROSS-DISCIPLINE COLLABORATION WITH A FOUNDATION ON WHAT MATTERS MOST; RELATIONSHIPS.

LINKEDIN COMMENT BY UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO ATTENDEE

It was heartening to see Cate's finding, that there is an 'overwhelming appetite on both sides' to bridge the gap between research and policy, proved correct, with an impressive demand for the workshops (figure 1). All workshops reached maximum (figure 2), with for example the first workshop in Te Whanganui-a-Tara | Wellington was oversubscribed⁸ in an afternoon. Slide decks⁹ from each workshop are available on the website.

⁸ There was no registration fee for the workshops but there was a booking system to manage numbers.

⁹ <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/who-we-are/our-interns/connecting-researchers-and-policymakers/>

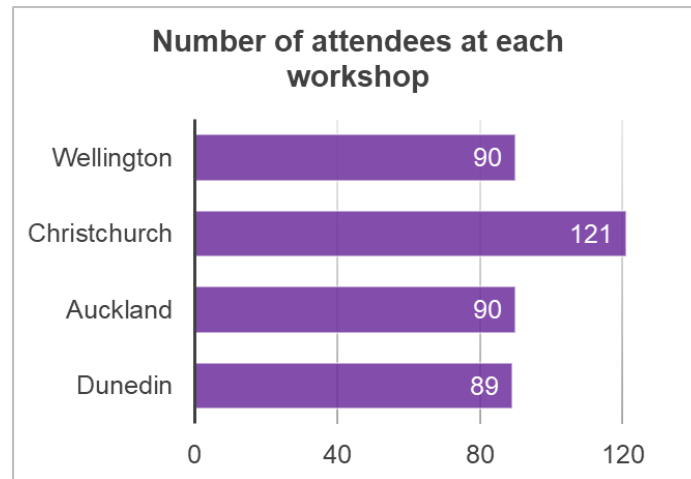


Figure 1: Number of attendees that attended each workshop.

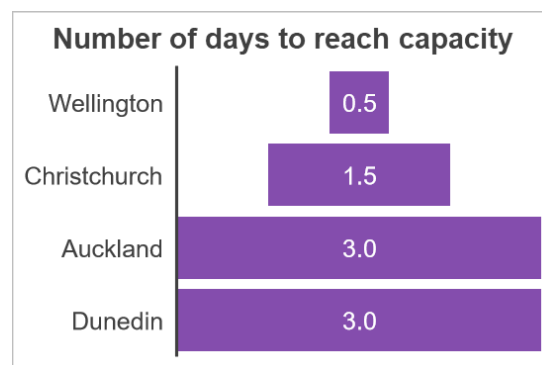


Figure 2: Number of days it took for each workshop to reach capacity.

Feedback from the workshops was overwhelmingly positive, with calls from more networking sessions, more locations, and more cooperative projects. There was a clear call for more diverse speakers at the Te Whanganui-a-Tara | Wellington and Ōtautahi | Christchurch workshops. The main points from post-event surveys were interest in themed-based discussions and more help connecting policymakers and researchers.

ONE OF THE BEST WORKSHOPS OF BEEN TO AT OTAGO UNIVERSITY.

LINKEDIN COMMENT BY UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO ATTENDEE

Thanks to the sponsor, the Australasian Research Management Society, attendees also had the opportunity to ‘speed-network’ with panellists and speakers in a semi-structured social setting. Many attendees and panellists made new contacts and connections, with some staying on after the workshop’s end.

Thanks to the host universities, Te Herenga Waka | Vitoria University, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha | University of Canterbury, Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology, and Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo | University of Otago. Each host received a copy of the post-event survey and recognises the large appetite for more connections and plan further, more targeted, events.



Above: Emily Parker (DSA MBIE) speaking at the Ōtautahi | Christchurch event



Above left: Juliet Gerrard (PMCSA) and George Slim (OPMCSA) speaking in Ōtautahi | Christchurch,
Above right - Tom Wilson (CSA NEMA) speaking in Ōtepoti | Dunedin



Above: Gill Jolly (CSA MBIE) speaking in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland.