
Final Report to Economic and Social
Research Council

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

Steve Johnson
Gareth Williams

November 2011



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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1. Executive summary

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned Consulting Inplace (in collaboration with Old Bell 3) to undertake an exploratory study to evaluate the impact of social scientists. This research took place between September 2010 and January 2011 and sought to assess the impact of ESRC and other investments in the higher-level skills of social scientists through a case study of the Welsh Government¹.

The study

This exploratory study illustrates the ways in which social scientists working in, with or for the Welsh Government influence its activities at a number of levels, ranging from strategic policy development to day-to-day operational issues. The study focuses in particular on social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications and suggests that the research skills and experience acquired through such study are widely (but not universally) seen as valuable assets within the organisation, especially when they are combined with generic competences such as communication and consultancy-type skills. The work of social scientists impacts on Welsh Government activities through a range of mechanisms that are not always easy to identify, and research participants identified a number of barriers to policy impact. The report makes several recommendations to help address these issues.

Social scientists in the Welsh Government

Welsh Government social scientists make relatively limited direct use of specific subject knowledge acquired through postgraduate research. Few are engaged on a day-to-day basis in research activities that are comparable to their postgraduate studies and those in analytical roles spend much of their time on managing external projects, rather than undertaking research themselves. Postgraduate research qualifications are especially useful in enabling Welsh Government social scientists to assess the quality of proposals, publications and/or reports, particularly in relation to the robustness of methodologies employed. In some cases, possession of a PhD qualification provides the social scientist with an element of confidence and credibility in dealing with internal policy customers and external academics.

Several of the social scientists participating in the study held roles that were not primarily analytical, ranging from director-level personnel to project managers to people concerned with the operational implementation or monitoring of policies. In all cases, these respondents identified significant benefits from their study that enabled them to perform their roles more effectively, with resulting improvements in the quality of policy-making and/or practice.

Senior managers recognise the actual and potential contribution of social scientists to the quality of policy and practice. There is less consistency in view about the specific benefits of postgraduate research training, as opposed to more general knowledge of subject areas and research methods. The consensus is that the

¹ At the time of the study, this was the Welsh Assembly Government. Following the 2011 Assembly elections, it was decided that the Welsh Assembly Government should be re-named as the Welsh Government. In order to maintain consistency, the latter term is used throughout this report.

personal characteristics and approach of the individual social scientist are often more important than their level of qualification or area of specialisation.

Research studentships and internships

Collaborative research studentships and PhD internships have had limited impact to date, mainly due to small numbers. There is broad support for the principle of improving links between Welsh Government and academic research through this route. However, early responses to a recent call for eleven PhD student internships were disappointing (although more applications were subsequently received), suggesting the need for more work to be done to bridge the gap between the academic aspirations of students (and their supervisors) and the Welsh Government's need for research that meets identified policy needs.

Role of external social scientists

Social scientists external to the Welsh Government play an important role in providing the research underpinnings for strategy and policy development. Membership of advisory or expert groups is an important mechanism for influence, in some cases providing direct access to policy makers and Ministers. The relationship between the Welsh Government and external social scientists is stronger in some disciplinary than others, and informal links play a key role, backed up by semi-formal mechanisms such as seminars and workshops. Respondents identified scope for such mechanisms to be developed further.

Senior managers all recognised the benefits of drawing on academic research and the evaluation suggests that improved understanding between the two groups would benefit from the further development of skills and capacity among Welsh Government analysts to facilitate more effective 'translation' of academic research into policy conclusions.

Respondents expressed broadly positive views about the impact of external social scientists, but found it difficult to identify specific examples of direct policy impact. External academics typically had limited direct contact with politicians and/or senior policy-makers, so found it hard to say whether and how their work had an impact. Conversely, policy-makers may not always be aware of the extent to which evidence reviews or evaluations were underpinned by the knowledge of external experts.

Respondents also recognise the potential for inconsistencies between the objectives and culture of academic researchers and those of policy-makers. In particular, frameworks such as the Research Excellence Framework may, in the view of some informants, militate against policy-focussed work by academics. Also, the relatively small scale of the Welsh population and economy may not provide sufficient scope for academics to produce articles suitable for publication in international journals.

Good practice examples of research impact

Respondents provided a number of examples where they felt that external and internal social scientists and policy-makers had worked together effectively to address key policy issues, including the work of placement fellows - academics on attachment to the Welsh Government, working on a number of policy issues identified as having high priority.

The most frequently-cited example is the **Child Poverty Expert Group**, which provided guidance and support to the work of a team of Welsh Government analysts from different disciplines that put together the evidence base underpinning the 2010 Child Poverty Strategy. The **Economic Research Advisory Panel** was also mentioned as a useful forum that enables Welsh Government economists to keep up with the latest developments in economic research and to discuss them with leading economists in workshops and through other more informal mechanisms. Numerous other small-scale examples of the effective use of external advice suggest broadly positive impacts on policy and practice. Examples include:

- **Public service improvement** researchers, internally and externally, are supporting the work of the relevant Director.
- The **Older Peoples Strategy** benefitted from the setting up of a research sub-group and a number of secondments from Welsh HEIs.
- An Academic Sounding Board informed policy thinking in relation to a White Paper on the **future of social services**.
- **Local government research**, for example the evidence review that underpinned the Beecham Review of local service delivery, was conducted by external organisations with input from Welsh Government social scientists.

Mechanisms of research impact

The overwhelming view from respondents in all positions is that it is difficult to specify and measure precisely how the knowledge and expertise of social scientists impacts on policy and/or practice within the Welsh Government. It is even more difficult to isolate the additional impact arising from the use of social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications. The majority view is that it is beneficial to the organisation to have such people working in analytical and non-analytical roles, particularly due to their up-to-date knowledge of research methodologies and the thorough, critical and questioning approach associated with PhD work. The quality of externally-commissioned research is felt to be better where it is specified, managed or quality assured by experienced researchers.

The findings of this study are in line with other literature which suggests that the impact of research rarely follows a linear pattern whereby researchers review the available evidence and commission or undertake research to fill gaps, feeding the results into the policy development process, thus ensuring that policies are as evidence-based as possible. Several respondents pointed out that a significant proportion of research activity is focused on evaluation rather than on evidence-building to inform policy development. This reflects the view (corroborated by previous studies) that research is only one factor influencing policy making, with political considerations often playing an important role. The input of special advisors is also important in some cases, as are pressures from the media and lobby groups.

Barriers to research impact

The relative speed of the policy and research processes was noted by many as a key factor constraining the influence of social scientists. There is often an imperative for policy decisions to be made relatively quickly. In contrast, good quality research or evaluation can take time to undertake. Other perceived barriers to the impact of social scientists include:

- In large organisations, it can be hard to know where to find the necessary expertise
- Organisational structures may affect the interaction between social scientists and policy makers
- Some managers, politicians and/or policy-makers may rely on anecdotal evidence, views of trusted advisors and/or media reports, rather than research evidence
- Some analysts (internal and external) may lack the communication and consultancy-type skills to interact effectively with policy colleagues

Conclusions and recommendations

Our overall conclusion is that social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications play an important role within the Welsh Government and without doubt exert a positive influence in ensuring that the quality of evidence feeding into the policy-making process is higher than it otherwise would have been.

We identified a number of good practice examples and it is clear that social scientists who acquire an understanding and preferably practical experience of the policy process are the most likely to feel that their work has been influential. The input of such people is appreciated by a wide range of managers and stakeholders with and without social science backgrounds.

The relationship between internal and external social scientists is also very important. This relationship is developing over time and it is clear that the presence of qualified social scientists within the Welsh Government helps to ensure that external academics address policy issues, and that their work is ‘translated’ internally to ensure maximum policy impact.

Our recommendations are based on the findings presented in this report and in particular are focused on actions that might be taken by ESRC, the commissioners of this research. However, there is a clear role for Welsh Government, HEIs and others in taking these recommendations forward successfully:

- We suggest that ESRC explore the scope for ensuring that **PhD training programmes** address the types of communication and ‘consultancy’ skills that have been identified as key to the success of social scientists working in a policy context.
- In relation to **collaborative studentships**, there is a case for ensuring that interaction between the student and the organisation is more than nominal, and that the students’ supervisors become more closely involved in the collaborative process.
- Organisations such as the Welsh Government need to raise awareness of and spread good practice about the positive impacts of working in **partnership with external social scientists**. There is also an important role in this process for HEIs and for funding bodies such as ESRC.
- The instigation of a pro-active **awareness-raising campaign** to convince academics of the value of policy and practice focused research, going beyond the achievement of success in the Research Excellence Framework.
- **Placement Fellowships** have potential to promote partnership working at a reasonable resource cost, and our findings could be used to promote the benefits of such programmes more widely. It is important to emphasise the benefits to all parties, including the scope to generate robust research findings that can be translated into policy recommendations as well as academic outputs.

2. Background, aims and objectives

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned Consulting Inplace (in collaboration with Old Bell 3) to undertake an exploratory study to evaluate the impact of social scientists. This project seeks to assess the impact of the ESRC and other investments in the higher-level skills of social scientists through a case study of the Welsh Government.

2.1 Background: social scientists in the Welsh Government

The creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 marked the start of the devolution of Westminster powers to Wales. More recently the Government of Wales Act 2006 allowed the Welsh Assembly Government² to form Welsh laws (Assembly Measures). As devolution of powers increases over time so does the influence of the Welsh Government's actions on Welsh society. As a result those civil servants working across devolved areas such as health, the environment and education supporting the members of the Welsh Assembly become ever more influential. Among these individuals are personnel with advanced skills and knowledge that have been developed through post-graduate social science qualifications. Understanding how the human capital of these social scientists impacts upon others within the Welsh Government and therefore on policy formation, and indeed perhaps ultimately the rest of society too, is the principal objective of this investigation.

This evaluation provides evidence on the extent to which those with social science post-graduate, and particularly doctoral, qualifications are influencing those around them and policy, and also the routes through which this occurs. The evaluation also examined the different barriers to impact. The outcome of this research is a series of informed conclusions supported by detailed qualitative data. This evaluation is an important addition to existing research on impact generation from ESRC investments, delivering valuable insight into the working practices of those individuals for whom the ESRC has provided training and/or funding support.

2.2 Scope of research and our approach

This evaluation was designed to be exploratory in nature, examining the different routes through and ways in which social scientists influence policy and practice in the Welsh Government, which agreed with ESRC to act as an initial case study organisation. As a result, the approach taken was predominantly qualitative, focussing on consultation with different groups of key individuals to reveal perceptions and experience of impact.

For the purposes of this study, we defined a 'social scientist' as someone who is qualified to MPhil, PhD or equivalent in a subject area covered by ESRC funding. Individuals who are studying for such qualifications are also included in our definition of social scientists.

² Following the 2011 Assembly elections, it was decided that the Welsh Assembly Government should be re-named as the Welsh Government. In order to maintain consistency, the latter term is used throughout this report.

During the course of the evaluation, we consulted the following groups:

- Individuals working for the Welsh Government with (or working towards) social science post-graduate research qualifications (e.g. PhD, MPhil)
- PhD students working in partnership with the organisation through collaborative studentships
- Line managers and senior policy staff at the Welsh Government, as end-users of social science research
- Qualified social scientists participating in various forms of collaboration with the Welsh Government (e.g. advisory roles, consultancies, contracted research, secondments etc)

Central to this project is an assessment of the nature and extent of impact that has occurred. We have also reflected upon social scientists' knowledge and skills from a wider perspective, for example whether attribution problems mean that the true level of impact tends to be underestimated, and to what extent might working practices be adjusted so as to magnify the impact generated from the knowledge/skills transfer processes.

2.3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives for this evaluation were to:

- Identify and assess the extent and nature of the impact that social science postgraduates and academics have within the Welsh Government.
- Evaluate the processes through which impact may be or has been generated
- Document the ways in which social scientists contribute to the organisation
- Develop an understanding of the employer's appreciation and need for the higher level skills of social science post-graduates
- Inform the ESRC's investment in these areas, with a view to maximising future impacts
- Inform the development of methodology for future impact evaluation studies in this area

3. Policy and practice context

This study is part of an ongoing programme of research commissioned by ESRC to explore, and where feasible measure, the impact of social research activities supported by ESRC. Previous studies have focused on evaluating the policy and practice impacts of specific research programmes or centres, ‘tracking back’ from policies to identify research influences (conceptual and instrumental), and tracing the policy impact of ESRC investment in data resources. This study fills a gap by considering the role and impact of ESRC support for postgraduate research degree study in the social sciences.

3.1 ESRC impact evaluation programme

In its broadest sense, economic and societal impact can be demonstrated by the contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy by fostering global economic performance (specifically the economic competitiveness of the UK), increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy; and enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.

Many of ESRC’s evaluations of impact³ have used a “tracking forward” approach, taking particular research investments as starting points, and identifying the impacts that have arisen from the activities of these investments by tracing usage by policy-makers and practitioners. More recently, “tracking backwards” assessments have been trialled, using specific policy initiatives as starting points, to identify ESRC research contributions to these policy initiatives, and to provide quantitative assessments of the impact of those contributions using national policy evaluation data as benchmarks.

The ESRC recognises that the nature of social science research impact lies on a broad continuum, ranging from conceptual impacts (including informing debates, directions in thinking and culture that lead to developments in policy and practice) through to instrumental impacts (e.g. directly influencing changes in policy or practice), and capacity building impacts (through the transfer of people and skills across the researcher/user interface). Good progress has been made in evaluating instrumental impact, and a study to assess conceptual impact has recently been completed. This study to explore capacity-building impact generation will form a valuable addition to the ESRC’s portfolio of impact evaluation approaches.

3.2 ESRC support for postgraduate research degree study

One of the major routes through which impacts of skilled people can occur is through the employment or placement of doctoral graduates or students. The ESRC is the single largest funder of social science postgraduate training within the UK. It currently invests over £45m per year in postgraduate training and supports a stock of almost 3,000 studentships at any one time. The ESRC also funds a range of people exchange schemes such as business and government placement fellowships and knowledge transfer partnerships, where academics share their knowledge and skills with research user organisations.

³ Branching Out: New Directions in Impact Evaluation, ESRC, December 2010

3.3 Destinations of social science research graduates

The majority of individuals graduating with research degrees in the social scientists enter the education (and in particular the Higher Education) sector, reflecting the widely-perceived role of postgraduate research as an ‘apprenticeship’ preparing students for a career in HE research and/or teaching.

However, it is clear that not all postgraduate research students aspire to a career in HE, and not all of those who wish to enter HE are able to do so. Pressures on HE funding in coming years are likely to increase competition for academic posts and perhaps encourage research students to consider alternative career paths. Statistical information is limited, but it is clear that public administration – and in particular central government – is a likely destination for many such individuals.⁴

It is important, therefore, to understand the influence of postgraduate research training in the social sciences on the effectiveness with which individuals fulfil their roles and add value to their employing organisations as a result of their higher-level training, research skills and knowledge. This exploratory study aimed to do just that, through a case study of social scientists (defined for our purposes as individuals with a research degree qualification – MPhil, PhD or DBA – in a disciplinary area covered by ESRC) working in, with or for the Welsh Government.

3.4 Research on the use of evidence in policy-making

A number of researchers have investigated the relationship between research and the policy-making process, and this study takes account of their findings, notably the work of Carol Weiss, Sandra Nutley and others⁵. A useful synthesis of theoretical frameworks has been produced by Cozzens and Snoek⁶, and we use their work in section 5.2 of this report to present a framework within which to understand research-policy interactions within the Welsh Government. In brief, our research with the Welsh Government supports the view that no single model explains all of the mechanisms through which research influences policy, even within a single organisation. In particular, organisational and cultural factors play an important role in the process through which research findings are used in the policy-making and/or implementation process. Communication processes are therefore significant, as we elaborate later in the report.

⁴ Elias, P. and Purcell, K. The employment of social science PhDs in academic and non-academic jobs, ESRC, 2006; Vitae, What do researchers do? First destinations of doctoral graduates by subject, 2009

⁵ See for example, Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. and Davies, H. T. O. (2007) *Using Evidence: how research can inform public services*, Policy Press, Bristol; Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J. and Solesbury, W. (2003) *Models of research impact: a cross-sector review of literature and practice*, Learning and Skills Development Agency; Sanderson, I. (2002) ‘Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making’ *Public Administration*, 80(1), 1-22

⁶ Cozzens, S and Snoek, M. *Knowledge to policy: contributing to the measurement of social, health and environmental benefits*, Workshop on the Science of Science Measurement, Washington DC, December 2010

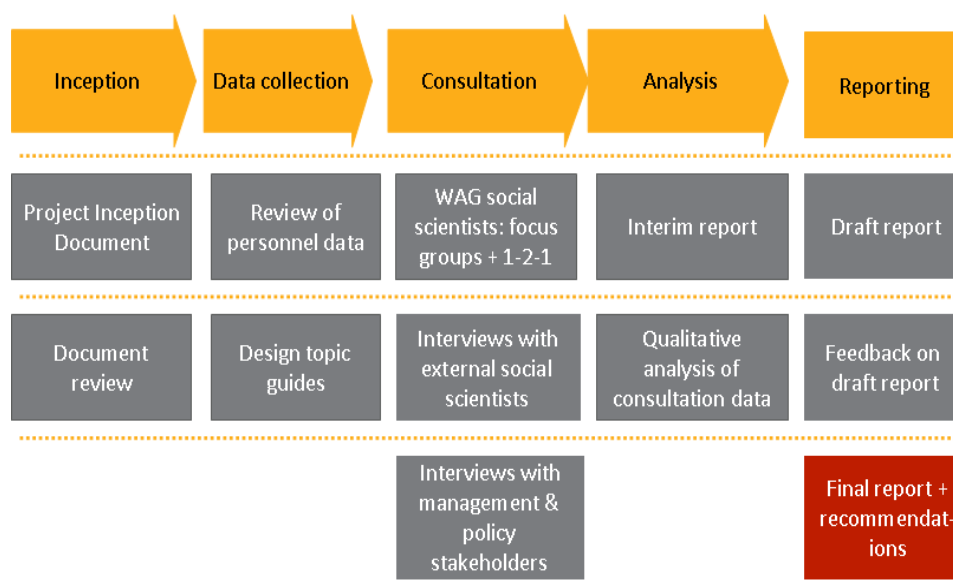
4. Methodology

The methodology was designed around qualitative primary research to explore the views and experiences of a cross-section of social scientists working in, with or for the Welsh Government. We facilitated focus groups and conducted in-depth interviews with individuals belonging to the target groups of social scientists. We also undertook detailed research with a cross-section of users and potential users of social scientists' skills at different levels and across different directorates and departments. The fieldwork took place between September 2010 and January 2011.

4.1 Overview of methodology

The methodology is summarised in Figure 4.1 below:

Figure 4.1: Overview of our approach



4.2 Data collection

We used information available from the Welsh Government to identify individuals belonging to the following groups:

- Social science doctoral graduates and postgraduate students working within the Welsh Government
- PhD candidates working collaboratively with the Welsh Government
- Line managers and senior policy staff at the Welsh Government
- Social scientists working with or for the Welsh Government in various capacities such as consultants, knowledge transfer partners, placement fellows or other forms of collaboration.

Details of numbers and types of individuals identified and engaged in the project are set out in the following sections.

4.3 In depth research with social scientists

The research comprised a combination of focus groups and one-to-one interviews and focused on:

- Individuals with/working towards social science post-graduate research qualifications
- ESRC-funded social science doctoral students working in collaboration with the Welsh Government

4.3.1 Focus groups with social scientists

With the assistance of the Welsh Government we identified 44 people within the organisation who appear from their personnel records to fit into the agreed definition of a 'social scientist' for the purposes of this study (i.e. people holding or working towards MPhil or PhD qualifications in a subject area covered by ESRC funding).⁷ All such individuals were invited by internal email to participate in the study and 15 expressed a willingness to do so. We also identified a number of staff members currently studying for higher degrees in the social sciences. Seven such individuals participated in interviews and/or focus groups.

We organised two focus groups and invited Welsh Government social scientists to attend. In the event a total of nine staff members participated in these sessions.

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain more information on how impact is generated by these individuals' knowledge and skills within the Welsh Government (see Appendix I for the focus group topic guide) and also to assist us to identify individuals to participate in the one-to-one consultation phase.

4.3.2 One-to-one consultation with social scientists

We selected five individuals from those that attended the focus groups to participate in follow-up consultations. These were chosen through a purposive process, primarily on the basis of the specific examples they provided of occasions that their knowledge/skills had an impact on policy-making or related Welsh Government activities. These in-depth interviews explored the perspective of each social scientist on the impact generation process, based on a structured but flexible topic guide. Topics included: respondent's background, training and employment experiences since completing their post-graduate research and their experiences of working in the Welsh Government to date (see Appendix).

Some individuals were unable to attend the focus groups, and we undertook short interviews with them to obtain their views on the issues pertinent to this research. Including the five follow-up interviews described above, we undertook a total of 22 interviews with social scientists (qualified and in the process of qualifying) working

⁷ This figure is our best estimate, given that the personnel system does not hold details of subject area of qualification for all employees, as it relies on self-reporting of qualifications by employees.

for the Welsh Government in analytical and non-analytical roles, not including the four individuals who attended focus groups but did not participate in one-to-one interviews. In total, therefore, 26 out of a possible 44 social scientists participated in the research.

This group is a small proportion of the 1600 or so people with first degree qualifications or higher who work within the Welsh Government, and just over half of all identified social scientists. The study was not intended to be statistically representative in any way, and Table 4.1 below illustrates that the interview participants provide a good cross-section of social scientists in terms of key indicators such as qualifications, subject area, seniority and job role. We were not able to obtain information in all cases on the source of funding for postgraduate studies; however it is clear that several research participants (at least six out of the 15 who had obtained PhD or MPhil qualifications) had benefitted from ESRC (or SSRC) funding.⁸

Table 4.2: Profile of social scientists participating in one-to-one interviews⁹

Job role	Division / department	Subject area of MPhil/PhD	Mode of study	Source of funding
Analytical				
Researcher	Social research	Geography	FT	ESRC
Manager	Analytical services	Regional studies	FT	ESRC
Manager	Social research	Operational Research	FT	ESRC
Researcher	Knowledge services	Public management	FT	nk
Researcher	Social research	Political theory	FT	AHRB
<i>Statistician</i>	<i>Statistics</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>
Researcher	European funding	Employment	FT	ESRC
Manager	Analytical services	Statistics	FT	SSRC
Non-analytical				
Manager	Local government	Finance	PT	WG
Director		Rural studies	FT	SSRC
<i>Team leader</i>	<i>Health / social</i>	<i>Social science</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>
Manager	Sustainable devt	Economics	FT	Other
<i>Policy officer</i>	<i>Sustainable devt</i>	<i>Public policy</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>
Policy adviser	Economics	Economics	FT	nk
Director		Organisational change	FT	Other
Director		Psychology	FT	nk
<i>Policy adviser</i>	<i>Health / social</i>	<i>Criminology</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>WG</i>
<i>Policy officer</i>	<i>Employment</i>	<i>International studies</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>
<i>Manager</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>
Manager	Education	Education	PT	Self
Advisor	Fire and rescue	Business organisation	FT	Self
<i>Advisor</i>	<i>Health / social</i>	<i>Social work</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Self</i>

Note: italics indicate respondents who were studying for higher degrees at the time of the research

Source: Consulting Inplace 2010

⁸ The original intention had been to undertake a brief online survey of Welsh Government social scientists. This was not undertaken, on the advice of the Welsh Government, due to the fact that the annual staff survey was being carried out at the same time as our research.

⁹ In the interests of preserving the anonymity of participants, only broad details are provided here

4.3.3 Consultation with collaborative students

Due to the relatively small number of collaborative students (ten) working with the Welsh Government at the time of the research, we attempted to conduct interviews with as many of this group as possible. Initial contact was made by ESRC, and we then followed up by email and telephone all students who agreed to participate, and for whom contact details were available.

In the event, we interviewed three out of the four collaborative students who indicated to ESRC that they were happy to participate, following a similar format to those conducted with social scientists (see above)¹⁰. In addition we asked all Welsh Government interviewees about their contact with and experience of collaborative students, and discussed the issue with the three external social scientists that we consulted (see section 4.5).

4.4 Consultation with line managers and senior managers

Using personnel data provided by the Welsh Government - and with the guidance of the Welsh Government liaison person - we undertook consultations with individuals responsible for managing or supervising social scientists, as well as departmental managers and senior managers at strategic level who are users or potential users of social science research¹¹. Eleven interviews were conducted with such individuals, representing a good cross-section of divisions and departments including:

- Public sector reform
- Local government
- Health and social services
- Economy and transport
- Education and skills
- Sustainable futures

4.5 Case studies of external social scientists

An important aspect of this study was to examine the contributions of qualified social scientists working in different capacities for or with the Welsh Government. This occurs in a number of ways, for example when individuals are on secondment, functioning in a part-time advisory capacity or when research institutes at Higher Education Institutions, consultancies or think tanks are contracted for research purposes, among other scenarios.

In consultation with ESRC and the Welsh Government liaison person we selected three examples of external social scientists collaborating with the Welsh Government and conducted detailed consultations with them. The three organisations visited were all research institutes operating in the Higher Education

¹⁰ Note that four students indicated to ESRC their willingness to participate; however in one case it was not possible to arrange a suitable time or place for interview

¹¹ Note that three of these respondents hold higher degrees in social sciences and are included in Table 4.2

sector in Wales, all of which were in receipt of some ESRC as well as Welsh Government funding. Further details are presented in section 5.1.4.

We briefly reviewed the outputs produced by the selected externally-based social scientists in order to prepare for the consultation sessions. The format of the discussion and topic guide was largely the same as that used for the in-depth discussions with Welsh Government social scientists. Through structured discussion with research institute leaders (and in one case with an academic who had spent some time as a placement fellow with the Welsh Government), we sought to ascertain the impact processes themselves as perceived by the informant as well as the extent they felt their collaboration had impacted upon the Welsh Government in different ways. In addition, our interviews with social scientists and strategic and operational managers, explored – where relevant - their experiences of working with external social scientists and their perceptions of the nature and extent of policy and other impacts.

4.6 Analysis

We brought together the evidence described above in the form of 37 interview transcripts and two focus group reports and a number of case studies of specific examples of impact generation. This data has shed considerable light on the ways in which social scientists contribute to the organisation and enabled detailed analysis of how their work furthers different objectives. Using techniques such as content and discourse analysis we have extracted the core messages from this qualitative material, and have built up a picture of the perceptions of different types of individuals involved with the Welsh Government on the contributions of social scientists.

The analysis has been guided by the research questions set out in the ESRC research brief and has concentrated on identifying barriers to impact generation, in addition to providing information on actual impact achieved.

5. Key findings

This section of the report presents the main findings arising out of this exploratory report, structured according to the aims and objectives summarised in section 2.3.

5.1 Impact of social science postgraduates and academics

Quantitative information on social scientists working within the Welsh Government is limited by the fact that the personnel data base does not contain full details of employees' qualifications, due to its reliance on self-reporting by employees. Moreover, it was not possible to undertake a bespoke survey of employees because of restrictions on the number of such surveys that could be undertaken at the same time as the annual staff survey. It is however clear from our qualitative evidence that the estimated 44 social scientists come from a range of backgrounds (personal, career and disciplinary) and, while many are working in specialist analytical posts, a substantial number are employed in roles that are not explicitly concerned with research. The following discussion distinguishes between these two groups.

5.1.1 Specialist social scientists within the Welsh Government

The Knowledge Services Department of the Welsh Government was established to bring together all analysts across the organisation within three teams covering social research, economics and statistics. Over 130 specialists are employed in the division. Personnel data do not allow us to establish precisely how many of these specialists have higher-level research degrees, but our research suggests that they are in a small minority of no more than 20 people¹². This sub-section summarises their activities and their perceptions of their wider impact within the organisation.

Key activities of those employed in social science roles typically comprise:

- Undertaking social science research tasks on a daily basis, for example: analysis of data, literature reviews, updating knowledge of research relating to individual areas of expertise, etc. Respondents noted that there is likely to be an increased need to carry out research in-house, mainly due to reducing budgets (an estimated 80 per cent of Welsh Government social research is commissioned rather than undertaken in-house).
- Working with external researchers – commissioning research (for example, preparing tender specifications, assessing tender submissions) and managing the research process (for example, managing consultants, assessing project reports prepared by external researchers). Feedback from interviewees and focus group participants suggests that this is an especially important element of the role of analysts within the Welsh Government, with relatively little time spent directly on research tasks.
- Liaising with researchers in UK government departments and other devolved administrations

¹² These figures are approximate as the data available to us does not always identify the subject of an individual's qualification and/or their current job role.

- Liaising with policy colleagues and in some cases specialist advisors working with the Government, for the purposes of planning research/analysis programmes, discussing project requirements, debriefing on research findings etc. Analysts tend to have limited contact with Ministers and politicians, apart from the most senior analysts.
- Working with collaborative studentships/placements, a relatively infrequent activity in the recent past.

The overwhelming balance of opinion among analysts consulted for this study is that it is the research skills (rather than subject specific knowledge, etc) of social scientists working for the Welsh Government that have the greatest impact on the activities of the institution. Some of the key points to emerge are as follows:

- Research skills are important to support evidence based policy making within the Welsh Government, although it is recognised that the policy development process is complex and may be influenced by factors other than the evidence.
- Higher level research skills enable more thorough examination of research, both in terms of proposed methods and outputs from the research
- Understanding and experience of research process gives greater insight into the commissioning process which is valuable in preparing tight specifications
- Social science research training gives individuals knowledge of methods and approaches that can be used to conduct a particular piece of research. This facilitates the use of methods/approaches appropriate to the needs of the research
- Social science training teaches individuals to think through research problems in a particular way, impacting on the research questions set, approach taken, etc. Social scientists add depth and different dimensions to discussions about research and policy
- Post-hoc evaluations play a role in supporting the development of policy and practice. Many respondents felt that analysts' input is most likely to manifest itself at the evaluation stage rather than at the start of the policy development cycle. Opinions differ as to the desirability of this; on balance analysts would prefer the balance of their influence to shift away from evaluation towards policy development.

Perceived barriers to policy impact

Many of the social scientists talked about adopting a pragmatic approach to their role in the policy process, recognising that research is one of a range of factors that are considered in the policy-making process. One respondent, for example, suggested that it would be more accurate to say that policy-making is 'evidence-informed' rather than evidence-based.

Respondents in analytical roles mentioned a number of barriers that they felt inhibited the potential for research to impact upon policy:

- **Nature of the policy development process:** It is often the case that research can evaluate policies but may have limited influence over their development.

- **Influence of Ministerial special advisers:** Respondents recognised that special advisers come from various disciplinary backgrounds, but felt that those with some social research training are more likely than others to take into account evidence based on social science methods¹³.
- **Manifesto commitments:** for example the ‘One Wales’ document sets out a number of pledges agreed through a negotiation process to form the coalition government, with varying levels of research/evidence input.
- **Policy appraisal process:** some respondents felt that the ‘policy gateway’ process does not always work as effectively as it should, meaning that some policies may get passed without a thorough appraisal along the lines of the Treasury ‘Green Book’ approach.
- **Speed of the policy-making cycle:** it is often difficult for research (for example evaluations) to influence the next stage of the policy cycle, due to the time it takes to commission and undertake high quality research.
- **Internal structural changes:** the establishment and merging of policy divisions and the fact that policy and (to a lesser extent) research staff move around, can make it difficult to maintain good communication with the people that research is aiming to influence.

Examples of research impacting on policy

Having noted some of the perceived barriers, we can highlight a number of examples brought to our attention during the course of the research, which demonstrate that social scientists do indeed play an important role in the policy process. The level of detail provided by respondents varies enormously and we present at the end of this sub-section some more detailed descriptions of the research-policy process.

The range of examples provided is illustrated by the brief summaries below:

- **Child Poverty Strategy** (see case study below): this was the most widely-cited example of policy being influenced by internal and external social scientists working together effectively with each other and with policy colleagues.
- **Public service improvement** researchers, internally and externally, are supporting the work of the relevant Director, who is trying to improve links with academics in order to get the best quality of evidence.
- The **Economic Renewal Programme** was informed through links with a wide range of economic researchers within and beyond Wales, including members of the Economic Research Advisory Panel (see case study below).
- **Research on deep rural areas**, undertaken by the (part Welsh Government funded) Wales Rural Observatory, attracted considerable interest, including a statement from Rural Affairs Minister Elin Jones, affirming the coalition government’s commitment to addressing the needs of rural areas.¹⁴ The researcher responsible

¹³ Note that the subject of this evaluation is the impact of social scientists and is not a study of the role of evidence in general in the policy-making process

¹⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8543868.stm>

felt that this piece of work was likely to influence policy, but was not clear through which mechanisms this influence might take place.

- The **Older Peoples Strategy** (see case study below), launched in 2003 and still current, benefitted from the setting up of a research sub-group which advised on the commissioning of external research, including a series of eight literature reviews conducted by Bangor University and a number of secondments from other Welsh HEIs. The sub-group also established an evaluation strategy. Statisticians also helped to establish the Older People's Monitor for Wales.
- Several respondents mentioned the **Commission on Welsh Government funding** chaired by Gerry Holtham, a leading private sector economist, as a good example of evidence-based policy making¹⁵
- An Academic Sounding Board of three professors of social policy informed policy thinking in relation to a White Paper on the **future of social services**, to be published early in 2011¹⁶.
- 'Kafka Brigade' research on **domestic violence**: this is of particular interest in that it adopted a qualitative methodology based around the experiences of people suffering domestic abuse¹⁷. The research focused on one 'typical' victim and worked with her to support her to share her story not only with researchers but with those responsible for implementing the relevant policies, as well as the Minister. This led to the adoption of a 65 point action plan by the Local Service Board in Rhondda Cynon Taff.
- A review of the work of **Community Councils** undertaken by the Regional Change and Development Research Group at Aberystwyth University was instrumental in the proposed adoption of measures in the Local Government Measure 2010 (five or six years after the research was undertaken)
- **Local government research**, for example the evidence review that underpinned the Beecham Review of local service delivery, was conducted by external organisations (MORI and Professor Steve Martin of Cardiff University). The research was managed by a PhD-qualified Welsh Government officer and entailed synthesis and analysis of a large number of interview scripts. The officer concerned felt that her PhD training helped to improve the quality of analysis and reporting and enabled her to work effectively with external experts. The result was a report that was widely felt to be comprehensive, independent and evidence-based. A number of the report's recommendations were being implemented at the time of this research.

Role of ESRC

The examples provided above demonstrate the wide range of research sources, research institutions and individual researchers that social scientists mentioned during the course of this study as having some influence on their work. Many of these researchers and institutions are, or have been, in receipt of ESRC funding to support research or related activities. This is an exploratory study, and we have not attempted to catalogue comprehensively the sources of research information and expertise used by the Welsh Government. Nonetheless Table 5.1 below provides an

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/icffw/home/about/?lang=en>

¹⁶ The interviewee did not identify these academics by name

¹⁷ The Kafka Brigade is an independent research group <http://www.kafkabrigade.org.uk/>

indication of the extent to which researchers and institutions noted in this study have links with ESRC.

Table 5.1: Researchers and research institutions noted during this study

Institution	Researcher(s)	ESRC link?
University of Cardiff	Steve Martin	Yes
	Patrick Minford	Yes
	Huw Beynon	Yes
	Garel Rhys	Yes
	Anne Crowley	nk
	Andy Pithouse	Yes
	Paul Milbourne	Yes
	Gareth Rees	Yes
	Mark Drakeford	nk
University of York	Jonathan Bradshaw	Yes
University of Bristol	Paul Gregg	Yes
	David Gordon	Yes
	Simon Burgess	Yes
LSE	Steve Nickell	Yes
	Gerry Holtham	nk
	Donald Hirsch	nk
	Steve Gibbons	Yes
Bevan Foundation	Victoria Winckler	nk
University of Swansea	David Blackaby	Yes
	Peter Sloane	Yes
	Ness Burles	nk
	Judith Phillips	nk
	Andrew Henley	Yes
	Vivienne Walters	nk
University of Warwick	Irwin Turbot (linked to Kafka Brigade)	nk
Aberystwyth University	Michael Woods	Yes
University of Bath	Ian Butler	nk
New Policy Institute	Peter Kenway	nk

Source: Consulting Inplace 2010

Policy impact case study 1: Child Poverty Expert Group

In 2005 the Welsh Government published its first child poverty strategy, *'A Fair Future for all our Children'*. Following the publication of this strategy, the Minister for Social Justice, Huw Lewis, announced that child poverty targets would be set for Wales and that the Welsh Government would legislate on child poverty, in addition to planned UK legislation.

The Welsh Government was determined to ensure that the subsequent child poverty strategy and action plan, to be published in 2010, was underpinned by a thorough review of the research and evidence. To this end, two key groups were established:

- An internal analytical team comprising around eight Welsh Government social researchers, economists and statisticians, along the lines of the research team working with the UK Child Poverty Unit
- An external advisory group (Child Poverty Expert Group) comprising academics – including ESRC-funded researchers such as David Gordon and Jonathan Bradshaw - and other experts on child poverty from across the UK. Members were appointed through a competitive process and the role of the group is to provide *'expert, evidence based advice on the action needed to tackle child poverty in Wales'*.

A key factor in the perceived success of this approach in bringing the research evidence to the attention of policy makers was the relationship between these two groups of researchers. A formal procedure existed through which expert group members peer-reviewed the draft papers produced by the internal analytical team. Arguably more important was a strong informal relationship that built up between the two groups; Welsh Government social researchers felt that they were *'able to talk to expert group members on a similar level'*.

The work of the analytical group, supported by the external expert group, is summarised in Annex 1 of the delivery plan produced as part of the 2010 consultation document¹⁸ which resulted from this work. The Child Poverty Expert Group also produced a number of bulletins, notes and recommendations on specific issues. For the most part, this material may be described as 'instrumental' in nature, focusing on specific policy or practice issues such as the role of 14-19 education, or discussing the most appropriate ways to measure and monitor progress.

One example of 'conceptual' impact relates to advice provided by an original member of the expert group, Jonathan Bradshaw (no longer a member). Professor Bradshaw encouraged the Welsh Government to adopt a wider concept of poverty than the mainly income-based focus of the UK approach. Concepts such as service poverty and participation poverty, reflecting a notion of poverty that emphasises people's ability to participate effectively in society, influenced the thinking of the Welsh Government and arguably resulted in a strategy document that is broader in scope than its UK counterpart.

The existence of the internal analytical team and the expert group (and the relationship between them) helped to develop a considered, evidence-based approach to the policy process in a number of ways, illustrated by two examples:

¹⁸ Welsh Assembly Government 'Child Poverty Strategy and Action Plan for Wales: Consultation Document', May 2010

- Households Below Average Income (HBAI) figures released while the strategy was being developed appeared to show a disproportionate increase in Wales. Peter Kenway, a member of the expert group, examined the figures and concluded that one important factor was the existence of in-work poverty, which in turn led to consideration of policy options on that issue.
- The existence of the two teams enabled rapid and evidence-based response to lobbyists, many (but not all) of whom based their views on *'bad research'*. The two teams had rapid access to Ministers, enabling the evidence to be put forward and potentially preventing ill-informed policy decisions.

The Welsh Government analytical team based its approach on reviewing the evidence thoroughly to identify the key policy levers and determine *'where are our efforts best placed?'*, taking into account the balance of powers between the UK Government and the Welsh Government. Research supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, notably a paper by Donald Hirsch¹⁹, was particularly influential in this regard. A complementary paper published by JRF and written by Victoria Winckler of the Bevan Foundation, provided a Wales-focused perspective²⁰.

The Welsh Government analytical team and Child Poverty Unit both feel that the resulting consultation document on the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan, published in May 2010 and due to be finalised in early 2011 following the consultation period, was strongly influenced by the evidence. The role of the expert group in providing critiques of earlier drafts was crucial in ensuring this perceived strong relationship between research and policy development.

The key themes set out in the child poverty strategy document were strongly influenced by the thorough review of the evidence base conducted by the analytical team, for example:

- Strong focus on early years and addressing inter-generational poverty: this mirrors the UK-wide approach and features, for example, the 'Flying Start' programme. Support for the whole family through integrated systems of support, is central to the policy proposals set out in the consultation document.
- The importance of work in tackling poverty: again this is reflected in the UK strategy, but the Wales approach places greater emphasis on tackling in-work poverty (e.g. through skills development), and is influenced by research that emphasises the wider benefits of work on mental, family and social well-being.
- 'Narrowing the gap' in relation to health and education, in parallel with measures to address early years and work-related issues

An important outcome of the evidence review process was recognition of the need to focus on long-term solutions, rather than 'quick wins', particularly in the context of issues such as inter-generational poverty. The inter-connections between different aspects of policy (e.g. the role of childcare) were also highlighted by the evidence review, although it was sometimes difficult for analysts to communicate with and influence different policy divisions within the Welsh Government.

The evidence review also focused attention on issues that might result in mismatches

¹⁹ Hirsch, D. *'What is needed to end child poverty in 2020?'*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

²⁰ Winkler, V. *'What is needed to end child poverty in Wales?'*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009

between evidence-based findings and political priorities. In particular, the evidence seems to point towards the need to target specific groups of people - rather than focusing on places - in order to most effectively address the factors associated with child poverty. In general, politicians (and often voters) tend to prefer initiatives that benefit places, for example the 'Communities First' programme.

A three-month public consultation process resulted in 168 responses, together with feedback from a number of consultative events. The response has been overwhelmingly supportive of the approach set out in the priorities and policy options set out in consultation document, suggesting that the evidence-based approach has had considerable success.

A number of factors appear to have combined to ensure that the development of the child poverty strategy for Wales between 2006 and 2010 represents a positive example of research influencing policy in a broadly successful way:

- **Support from political leadership:** Ministers involved in the social justice area have been very receptive to the idea that policies should be based on evidence, often influenced by their own professional backgrounds (e.g. one Minister was a GP).
- **Integrated analytical team:** bringing together Welsh Government researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds and different policy areas helped to implement a holistic approach.
- **Constructive expert support:** the expert group played an important role, formally and informally, in guiding (and in some cases challenging) the work of the internal team. A combination of academic expertise and more policy-focused Welsh Government researchers helped the process of identifying policy implications.
- **Long-term strategic perspective:** the topic of child poverty lends itself to a long-term perspective and most participants in the process seem to have recognised this
- **Existing body of research:** investment by JRF, ESRC (for example the work of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at LSE, the Centre for Market and Public Organisation at Bristol and the Institute for Fiscal Studies) and others ensured that the analytical team could draw on a considerable body of high-quality research, often underpinned by resources such as birth cohort studies (e.g. the Millennium Cohort Study), which are part-funded by ESRC.

The final version of the child poverty strategy will be published early in 2011 and policy initiatives will be developed and influenced thereafter. It is therefore too early to conclude definitively that research has had a positive influence on policy-making in this case. Nonetheless it is clear that the Welsh Government has made considerable efforts to ensure that all of the available evidence has been brought to bear on the development of the consultation document. In particular, the establishment of the expert group as a mixture of academic and policy researchers, and the development of a strong working relationship with the Welsh Government analytical team, appears to be a key success factor.

Policy impact case study 2: Economic Research Advisory Panel

The Welsh Government Economic Research Advisory Panel (ERAP) has been running for around 10 years. ERAP consists of economists and business people. Prominent past

members include Professor Steve Nickell of Oxford University and the (ESRC-funded) Centre for Economic Performance). Membership has changed over the years. Current members are:

- Emeritus Professor Garel Rhys, Cardiff University
- Gerry Holtham, formerly a senior economist at OECD and the Institute for Public Policy Research
- Simon Gibson, an economist with a private venture capital firm
- Professor Andrew Henley, Swansea University
- Chris Johns, economist at the Bank of Ireland
- Professor Janet Wademan, Managing Director of an IT and organisational development consultancy
- Ex-officio members from HEFCW, Jobcentre Plus and Welsh Government

The panel was established to provide independent advice to the Welsh Government on its programme of economic research, to promote sharing of economic intelligence between the Welsh Government and its partners, to advise on the dissemination of research and to examine how best to develop the capacity of Wales-based institutions to contribute to the economic research agenda.

Several interviewees, from the Welsh Government and from external organisations, commented positively on the work of the panel, which meets three times a year and produces regular reports to the Welsh Government.²¹ The most recent report, for example, mentions a recent Welsh Government seminar on the economics of ageing and forthcoming seminars on the economics of climate change, city regions, incentives in public services and fiscal decentralisation. In all cases, presenters and participants comprise a combination of Welsh Government officials and academic researchers. The report also makes recommendations regarding the Welsh Government's Economic Research Grant and comments on two current collaborative research studentships in the economics field.

Policy impact case study 3: Older People's Strategy

The Wales Older People's Strategy was launched in 2003 and respondents who had been involved in its development felt that it was an excellent example of evidence-based policy. The current head of evaluation helped consistently through the development of the Strategy to make sure that there was a good evidence base and to put in place an Evaluation Strategy from the very beginning. Indeed, there was a Research sub-group to inform the Strategy and the head of evaluation had "*stayed with it*" throughout the time since the Strategy was launched in 2003. This involved providing advice on commissioning external research e.g. on LGBT elders, ethnic minority elders.

- *"we've been able to get a much better insight into the place of research, if you like, because we've worked closely with them and they've led us by the nose....so that*

²¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/econoresearch/advisorypanel/reports/?lang=en>

we've made sure research is integral to what we do and not an add on".

The strategy development team also worked closely with Welsh Government social care researchers (including statisticians) to pull together the first ever Older People's Monitor for Wales. This was very successful. More recently, the Department pulled together a Digest of Information about Older People, which drew together material from general statistical sources.

One respondent thought that the Older People's Strategy was proof that working on a sound research base led to better policy. There had been a commendation from the International Federation on Ageing and the EHRC had also praised it. Recent comparative research argued that there had been far more progress in Wales in addressing older peoples' specific needs than in the other four nations²².

There were also quite extensive, though less formal, relationships with external academics over the development of Older People's Strategy (particularly with Swansea University) and the department had set up an Academic Sounding Board, consisting of three professors of Social Policy with different specialisms to inform thinking on the development of a White Paper on the Future of Social Services which is due to be published in 2011.

5.1.2 Social scientists in policy and other non-analytical roles

Eight of the PhD-qualified social scientists (or people studying for higher research degrees) interviewed for this study are in posts that are not explicitly concerned with analytical work, including a Director General, a number of departmental heads or equivalent and policy officers. While most of these informants reported that they had limited direct contact with internal or external analysts, our research provided clear evidence that such individuals value their higher level social science training and feel that it has helped them in their roles in a number of ways:

- Knowledge of relevant subject areas (e.g. economics) and/or methodologies, such as statistical or qualitative analysis
- Ability to communicate effectively with analytical colleagues, in some cases as a 'critical customer'
- Skill in specifying research objectives and methods, for example in relation to commissioning research from external bodies
- Ability to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' research, either where commissioned by the Welsh Government or used by politicians or policy-makers to justify their decisions, for example
- Development and testing of policy ideas, based on rigorous research methods, combined with a pragmatic approach to the policy process
- Direct application of research skills to projects – *'synthesising information, presenting it in an accessible way, probing to ask questions, critical thinking, balanced arguments and so on'* (Social scientist working on national policy review)

²² McCormick, J., E. McDowell and A. Harris *Policies for Peace of Mind: devolution and older age in the UK*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2009

- Ability to work effectively with external academic researchers - *'I don't get intimidated by experts'* (Social scientist in advisory role)

In most cases, however, social scientists in non-analytical posts were not using their subject area knowledge directly, the exceptions being where individuals had undertaken or were undertaking postgraduate research linked to their posts (e.g. PhD in local government finance, DBA). Similarly, they were not typically using the advanced research and analytical techniques that they had developed through their PhD work. However, several respondents noted that the types of skills needed to undertake a PhD are compatible with civil service requirements²³, for example the need to have an enquiring mind, interpret evidence in a robust way, including critical appraisal of the work of others, and to communicate effectively. The general consensus among this group was that it is helpful for the organisation to have people with research expertise in policy and related roles. Improved links between policy-makers and the research community are also felt to be desirable.

5.1.3 ESRC collaborative students²⁴

As described in section 4.3.3 it was possible to interview only three ESRC collaborative students who were working, or had worked, on PhD programmes funded by ESRC and undertaken in collaboration with the Welsh Government. Moreover only a small number of Welsh Government respondents and one of the external social scientists had direct experience of the collaborative research programme. Nonetheless a number of key issues arose during the process of our research:

- The fact that very few Welsh Government respondents had any direct contact with collaborative students suggests that there is scope to broaden and deepen awareness of its potential to provide additional resource and insight into key policy issues, supported by the expertise of academics in HEIs within Wales and elsewhere
- Indeed, most respondents in analytical and policy positions recognised the potential benefits of such a programme
- Students reported relatively limited contact with and/or feedback from Welsh Government staff during the course of their studies, with interaction being limited typically to discussion with a small number of analytical colleagues
- Students were positive about the benefits of working relatively closely with the policy process, in contrast to a more conventional PhD programme; on the other hand some potential conflicts were noted between their academic ambitions and the shorter-term applied focus of their research topics
- In general, collaborative students felt that their research training was geared more towards a career in academia rather than in policy. One student suggested the existence of an 'ivory tower syndrome' that adversely affects communication between HEIs and the Welsh Government:

²³ See for example the criteria used in the Capability Reviews (<http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/improving/capability/index.aspx>)

²⁴ Note that, in addition to ESRC-funded collaborative studentships, the Welsh Government has programme to support PhD internships, which was at the early stages during the time period of this evaluation

- *‘Social scientists are good at telling each other about their research, through journals, conferences etc. But are these sources of information used by [the Welsh Government?]*’
- Nonetheless, all of the collaborative research students felt that they had learnt some skills through working with the Welsh Government that would be useful for their future careers including *‘having the right mind set, critical thinking, analytical approach and a research mentality’*. Indeed one of the collaborative students who had completed his thesis felt that his PhD study had been instrumental in helping him to secure his current post within the Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government support for the further development of collaborative research is illustrated by the appointment of a knowledge exchange specialist and the establishment of 11 PhD internships, some of which are supported by ESRC. Despite this support and enthusiasm within the Welsh Government, initial response to this call for studentships was limited (only four applications), although a further seven applications followed a decision to extend the deadline for applications. This suggests a need to publicise these opportunities more widely and in particular to engage the HEI sector more fully.
- In addition to these studentships, the Welsh Government knowledge exchange programme incorporates placement fellowships (including four fellowships on data utilisation that ESRC has agreed to fund) and evidence symposia that bring together senior Welsh Government policy officials/analysts and leading external experts to challenge the evidence base on key cross-cutting issues. The first symposium, in September 2010, was on behaviour change; a second one, on measuring well-being, is planned for March 2011.
- Further analysis of responses from Welsh Government interviewees suggests that experience of and/or engagement with collaborative research studentships has been limited to date, with most respondents stating that they knew little or nothing about them. This is particularly pronounced at the more senior levels within the organisation. One strategic leader saw his division as being a potentially large user of the collaborative students programme, *“but it is very much work in progress”*. Another said that there was a lot of interest in knowledge sharing with the HE sector, but that there was some nervousness about appearing to favour one institution over others, for example in relation to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. A senior manager in another division felt that collaborative studentships could be a cost-effective way of securing research resources in the future.
- One of the external social scientists had two students on CASE studentships with the Welsh Government. He felt that Welsh Government engagement with the CASE programme had been *‘good, but it has been quite lumpy’*. The topics being researched by his supervisees are clearly relevant to policy, but there is some tension between the importance of applying research to the policy environment and the needs of researchers who have a view to an academic career.

5.1.4 External social scientists

The Welsh Government commissions the vast majority (estimated at 80 per cent) of its social research, analysis and evaluation work from a range of external researchers, notably:

- Universities

- Research units based at universities
- Research networks
- Consultants

In addition to commissioned projects, academics and other experts are often asked to act as specialist advisors on groups such as the Economic Research Advisory Panel and the Child Poverty Expert Group. We visited and interviewed three university-based social science institutes and asked Welsh Government researchers and other stakeholders to reflect on the impact of this work. The case study research institutes were:

- The **Welsh Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD)**: WISERD has been running since Autumn 2008 (with an effective operational start date of January 2009) and is co-financed by ESRC and HEFCW (this funding is until 2012 after which the plan is for WISERD to be self-financing). Cardiff is the hub university and the other members are the research-focused Welsh universities of Glamorgan, Swansea, Aberystwyth and Bangor. WISERD's remit is to develop the research infrastructure through access to data, capacity building, and knowledge exchange/transfer. They are working closely with the Welsh Government on the last of these. WISERD also undertakes research projects, both self-generated and through responding to calls for proposals, competitive tenders etc.
- The **Wales Rural Observatory** was an initiative which emerged from discussions at a seminar held by the Welsh Government shortly after the creation of the Assembly based on the recognition that the evidence base on rural Wales was quite weak. Since 2008, the Rural Observatory had had a formal link to the Wales Rural Plan and had been asked to cover all the axes of the Plan, including farming (which was originally not a focus). Essentially, the core elements of the work were three-yearly surveys of households and enterprises, and now also farming. The programme will have run for 10 years with £4 million of funding.
- The School of Business and Economics at Swansea University houses the ESRC/Welsh Government-funded **Centre for Spatial Economics** (jointly with the London School of Economics) and the **Welsh Economy Labour Market Evaluation and Research Centre (WELMERC)**. These centres undertake a wide range of economic research on the Welsh economy and Professor David Blackaby has been heavily involved in work for the Economic Research Advisory Panel, among other things. Specific research topics include economic inactivity and the funding of local government.

As stated above, our research suggests that higher-level social science research training is beneficial in terms of preparing Welsh Government staff to work with external researchers. The impacts of the training govern all the key areas of this relationship, including preparing good research specifications, managing the relationship with external researchers and robust appraisal of the research methods used and the research outputs produced. A number of the participants in the research suggested that this role of ensuring that externally commissioned research is fit for purpose is a key role of social scientists in the Welsh Government.

External social scientists had mixed views about the impact of their activities on policy, mainly because they felt remote from those within the Welsh Government

who were responsible for developing and implementing policy and in particular had limited contact with Ministers. Typically, external social scientists had extensive contact with Welsh Government analysts responsible for commissioning and managing research or consultancy projects and often through formal or semi-formal meetings or seminars to discuss current policy or research developments. Specific examples of collaborative activity include:

- Research undertaken by the Wales Rural Observatory on the impact of the recession on rural Wales, which had informed discussions at the Welsh Government economic summits
- Rural Observatory research into broadband in rural Wales, which aims to understand and assess the benefits and disbenefits of access to broadband in relation to factors such as the loss of rural shops and impacts of increased home-based working on the identity of rural communities. This research is match funded by BT.
- A report by the Rural Observatory on issues facing deep rural areas was well received by the Welsh Government, was mentioned in policy debate and was the subject of extensive media coverage
- David Blackaby has been extensively involved in a range of Welsh Government-sponsored research initiatives, as described above, and has been a member of several Welsh Government advisory committees and bodies, including the Programme Monitoring Committee for Objective 1 in West Wales.
- Professor Blackaby also has regular formal and informal contacts with the economics group at the Welsh Government, and in particular with the Chief Economist.
- The Swansea research centres have hosted two CASE studentships which were co-funded with the Welsh Government – one working on the gender pay gap and one on regional inequalities. Both of these areas are highly topical and Professor Blackaby felt that both should be of benefit to the Welsh Government. However he identified some tension between the importance of applying research to a policy audience and the need for a researcher who had a view to an academic career not to get trapped by focusing purely on Welsh issues which may be seen as too narrow from the perspective of the academic community.
- In general, WISERD enjoys strong and mutually-supportive relations with the Welsh Government. For example, it jointly organises seminars and workshops; and is developing the potential for placement fellowships and jointly-funded research studentships. It illustrates some of the advantages of a 'one-stop shop' that represents university-based researchers across a range of institutions and disciplines in providing an uncomplicated point of access to academic research for policy-makers.
- WISERD is supporting an initiative by the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University to establish a direct link between social researchers and politicians, with a physical presence next door to the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff Bay. This is seen as a key means of extending the scope of collaboration beyond the executive arm of government to the legislature itself.
- WISERD is also working closely with the ESRC Wales Doctoral Training Centre to develop opportunities for studentships and placements with the Welsh Government. This will be a key area for the development of social science research in Wales and its impacts on policy making.

- A placement fellow from one of the research institutes was working with the Welsh Government at the time of our research. This was felt to be a successful model, building good links with relevant Welsh Government research and policy staff. The institute director also felt that it was encouraging that Welsh Government staff were starting to attend departmental seminars and events in larger numbers.

In general, the feeling among external social scientists is that relationships between the Welsh Government and the HE sector have improved over recent years and that there is a good understanding within the Welsh Government (notably among social scientists) of the need for evidence and the importance of robust data. This is illustrated, for example, by Welsh Government financial contributions to boost the Wales samples for the Millennium Cohort Study and similar data sets. However, it is recognised that the decisions made by policy-makers are also influenced by factors other than the evidence.

All of the external social scientists interviewed for this study noted in some way the potential disjuncture between the needs of policy makers and those of academic researchers. To some extent this is seen as cultural, for example academics are driven by a desire to critically examine research topics that are of interest to them and/or relate to current theoretical or methodological debates; policy-makers are driven typically by more instrumental objectives, in most cases established by politicians and the political discourse. A further complication, as noted above, relates to the perceived limitations of Wales as a subject for research among those with academic ambitions. One respondent stated that:

- *'...high quality research is not a guarantee of influencing policy – (our) relationship with [the Welsh Government] is very supportive and friendly, particularly with the newly-created research division. What is less clear is how all of this relates to the policy departments ... Some are explicit that they don't know about social research and/or that they don't take any notice of social research!'*

The perceived divide between academia and policy-making is not only cultural, however. External social scientists and Welsh Government respondents noted that the quality of academic research (and consequent funding streams) in the UK is measured primarily by the Research Excellence Framework (REF). While this has a greater emphasis on policy and practice impact than the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), most respondents felt that REF considerations are likely to discourage academics from pursuing applied policy-focused research that is unlikely to result in peer-reviewed publications in highly-rated journals. While academic respondents broadly welcomed increased recognition of the importance of research that generates policy impact, the general feeling was that this would not be sufficient to encourage large numbers of academics to undertake policy-related rather than 'pure' academic work.

Welsh Government and external social scientists recognise this potential conflict of interest and are looking at ways of addressing it, to enable academics to pursue policy-relevant research while at the same time meeting REF objectives. Foremost among these is the potential for Welsh Government research reports to be subject to peer review.

Welsh Government policy stakeholders in general valued the contribution of external experts, with the Child Poverty Expert Group and the Economic Research Advisory Panel being cited as particular examples of good practice (see section 5.1.1). It is clear, however, that engagement between the Welsh Government and external social scientists, particularly those in non-analytical roles, is highly variable and often based on individual contacts and networks rather than any systematic or structured process.

Many of the same issues as listed above (section 5.1.1) have an effect on the impact that external social scientists can have on the activities of the Welsh Government, indeed often in exaggerated form. For example, the timescales associated with academic research (including PhD study) are typically measured in years, while policy makers are often looking for answers within weeks, indeed sometimes days.

Cultural differences are also important. The world of academic research is one of uncertainty and of very high thresholds in terms of the quality of data, methodology and analysis required in order to answer research questions. Policy-makers, and particularly politicians, tend to be looking for a higher degree of certainty than can be provided by most academic researchers. Similar observations apply to the presentation of research findings. Academics tend to value precision, detail and often length. Policy-makers typically require 'short sharp' outputs focussing on clear outcomes and implications rather than methods and caveats.

While the above observations are based to some extent on stereotypes, responses from across the Welsh Government and from our (small) group of external social scientists suggest that perceptions of the approach and culture of social scientists and policy makers are sufficiently widely held as to have an impact on the effectiveness of the working relationship between the two groups. There is also sufficient evidence to suggest that Welsh Government social scientists – both in analytical and non-analytical roles – exhibit a combination of the characteristics of academic researchers and policy makers. To this extent, social scientists have a potentially significant role to play in helping to address the perceived barriers summarised above.

Some of the respondents suggested ways in which the working relationship with external researchers could be improved. For example, plans to introduce peer review and to enable the researchers to publish papers relating to commissioned research may encourage more academic departments to tender for work. Other suggestions include:

- Introducing more call-off type arrangements to enable the Welsh Government to draw flexibly on the expertise and knowledge of academic researchers without the need to go through time-consuming procurement processes on each occasion. It also potentially allows for more joint working between Welsh Government analysts and external social scientists, helping to break down some of the perceived barriers noted in this report.
- Further development of placement fellow and related programmes to enable academic researchers (including PhD students and early career researchers) to spend some time working with Welsh Government researchers and policy makers

- Reciprocal arrangements would also enable Welsh Government analytical and policy staff to work within academic departments, to refresh their skills and knowledge, and to get a feel for the culture of academic research work
- Encouragement and support for the development of a network of ‘think tanks’ in Wales; several Welsh Government and external respondents felt that this network was under-developed and that London-based think tanks tended not to do full justice to policy issues affecting Wales.
- Successful semi-formal activities, such as the workshop programme run by Welsh Government economists, might usefully be expanded to other analytical and policy areas
- Greater sharing of information within the Welsh Government regarding informal and semi-formal relationships with academic researchers
- Look at ways to encourage wider academic participation in advisory or expert groups, in the light of changes to HE funding and research quality assessment, that may discourage such engagement
- More systematic approach to engaging with Welsh institutions that have international reputations for research (e.g. Cardiff University) while ensuring that the best expertise is sought from other universities across the UK

5.2 Process of impact generation

In line with research by Carol Weiss, Sandra Nutley and others²⁵, it is clear from this exploratory case study of the Welsh Government that the process by which social scientists (internal and external) influence policy is not a linear or simple process. The development of the child poverty strategy for Wales is quite close to an ‘ideal type’ whereby evidence was reviewed systematically with the input of expert social scientists and incorporated into the resulting strategy document. It should be noted, however, that the strategy is currently at the consultation stage and there is scope for a range of ‘non-research’ factors to feed into the final version of the strategy and (more likely) into specific policies implemented on the back of the strategy. Notwithstanding this important caveat, this example illustrates the potential for research to feed into policy from the beginning, rather than *post hoc* through evaluation.

The other examples of policy influence described in section 5.1.1 exhibit a mixture of the characteristics of the models set out by Cozzens and Snoek in their recent review paper²⁶:

- **Rational, linear or ‘knowledge-driven’** model: child poverty is nearest example, and our research revealed a number of examples of research being undertaken or commissioned during the process of policy development (e.g. older people’s

²⁵ See for example, Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. and Davies, H. T. O. (2007) *Using Evidence: how research can inform public services*, Policy Press, Bristol; Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J. and Solesbury, W. (2003) *Models of research impact: a cross-sector review of literature and practice*, Learning and Skills Development Agency; Sanderson, I. (2002) ‘Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making’ *Public Administration*, 80(1), 1-22

²⁶ Cozzens, S and Snoek, M. *Knowledge to policy: contributing to the measurement of social, health and environmental benefits*, Workshop on the Science of Science Measurement, Washington DC, December 2010

strategy, public service improvement)²⁷. However it is often difficult for respondents to identify clear links between research input and policy outputs/impacts, and our conclusion is that the linear model is not typical of policy impact processes operating within the Welsh Government. This is supported by the observation made by a range of respondents that research input tends to take place primarily at the evaluation rather than the policy development stage of the ‘policy cycle’.

- **Pluralism and opportunism**, involving pragmatic decision-making under uncertainty and incorporating a wider view of useful sorts of knowledge, including non-academic sources, local populations and civil society: this model more closely resembles the role of research in many of the policy development processes that were described to us during interviews and focus groups. Politicians and policy-makers typically take account of a wider range of sources of evidence than that which might be regarded by a trained social scientist as robust research evidence, with most respondents (including social scientists) recognising the legitimacy of this type of approach to policy-making. Respondents mentioned the influence of Ministerial special advisers, pressure groups (e.g. professional bodies or trade unions) and broader ‘public opinion’ considerations as key sources of ‘evidence’ considered by policy-makers.
- **Politics and legitimisation**, reflecting a view that power is infused through the knowledge process: this was alluded to by respondents, some of whom suggested that some politicians and/or policy-makers prefer to see research (including evaluations) that supports their political position. We were not, however, able to find robust evidence to substantiate the widespread existence of such a model of policy-making within the Welsh Government.
- **Relationship models**, based on relationships that develop within networks of collaborating research producers and users: this is very similar to the ‘pluralism and opportunism’ model and is perhaps the closest to describing the routes through which social scientists (internal and external) have an impact upon policy within the Welsh Government. Key to this model is the existence of a small but influential group of people with social science backgrounds – to PhD level – working in policy-making or related roles. This, coupled with advocacy of an evidence-based approach by some non social scientists in very senior positions, helps to create a number of formal and informal networks through which social scientists are able to exert influence on the policy process. This is not always the case, however, and the patchiness of these relationships alluded to by several respondents, means that there is a danger that the ‘politics and legitimisation’ model may predominate in some cases.
- **Systems models**, *‘embedded in relationships (and)...interwoven with the priorities, cultures and contexts of organisations and systems’*²⁸ (Best and Holmes): this appears to describe a model aspired to by those within and beyond the Welsh Government who seek to ensure an approach to policy that is evidence-based, but which reflects the realities of both the research and the policy processes. There is no one organisational model that will generate such a systems-based approach; indeed Welsh Government respondents expressed a range of views about the appropriate balance between having a centralised analytical resource (with some ‘bedding out’ of subject-specific teams) and models that involve analysts working directly within

²⁷ In this case, however, it was also important to note that the person leading policy development on child poverty was a former analyst, suggesting that the ‘relationship model’ (see below) has a role to play in explaining the policy influence of social research

²⁸ Wood and Holmes (2010), cited in Cozzens and Snoek *op cit*

policy divisions.

The systems described by these models also need to incorporate the relationship between internal and external social scientists and with policy-makers at different levels. Our research suggests that this is a key area for development, with several examples of good practice in some research/policy areas but also a range of barriers that will need concerted action to address.

The extent and nature of policy impact appears to depend to a large extent on communication and/or political skills of individual social scientists, rather than social science skills *per se*. Social science knowledge and skills (but not necessarily at PhD level) among ‘users’ of research helps to ensure that social scientists have a noticeable impact on policy, as does the existence of a positive culture from top down in some divisions or departments. However the policy development process and research processes do not always fit neatly together, regardless of the technical quality of research by internal or external social scientists. This suggests that pluralist, relationship-based models are the most appropriate (but not the only relevant) means of conceptualising the research-policy relationship within the Welsh Government.

5.3 Contribution of social scientists to the Welsh Government

Our research makes it clear that the contribution of social scientists internal to the Welsh Government is based less on their detailed knowledge of particular research areas and more on the skills and/or approach that they have acquired through postgraduate research training. Methodological expertise is particularly important for social scientists working in analytical roles, helping to ensure robust quality assurance of externally-conducted research and the commissioning of new research to high quality standards. Social scientists in non-analytical roles also tend to value this type of methodological knowledge as well as the thorough structured approach that is characteristic of postgraduate research study. Other key characteristics associated with postgraduate study include persistence, the ability to synthesise and make sense of large amounts of information and the confidence to defend arguments and deal with critical comments in a non-confrontational way.

The study highlighted many examples of social scientists external to the Welsh Government making direct or indirect contributions to the policy process through commissioned research, membership of advisory groups and informal relationships with Welsh Government researchers and/or policy makers. Moreover, participation in workshops, conferences, seminars and other knowledge exchange mechanisms helps Welsh Government social scientists to keep up with the most recent developments in research findings and methodology, as exemplified by regular seminars organised by the economics team (see section 5.1.4 for examples of formal and informal interaction).

In principle, Welsh Government social scientists play a key intermediary role as ‘translator’, in two main ways. Firstly, they are in a good position to convey to policy-makers and other non-specialists the key implications for Welsh Government activities of the most recent research findings. Conversely, Welsh Government social scientists tend to be the main point of regular contact with external social scientists, and play a key role in advising academics and others of emerging policy priorities

and concerns. Our research highlighted a number of examples of this process occurring quite effectively, most notably in relation to the development of the Child Poverty Strategy (see section 5.1.1). However, respondents noted a number of cultural and institutional barriers (including procurement procedures) that can inhibit the flow of information.

An academic based at one of the case study research institutes had been involved with the Welsh Government as a secondee (three days per week) and subsequently as a placement fellow (six months full time). This academic felt that these spells of work with the Welsh Government had provided them with valuable experience of working in a policy environment linked directly to their area of expertise. In addition, our interviewee felt that the placement fellowship scheme was a valuable way of overcoming the disadvantages associated with formal procurement, in the sense that it enables the Welsh Government to gain access to academic expertise at relatively low cost and without going through what are perceived as labour intensive and time consuming procurement processes. The impression gained, however, was that there was limited awareness across the Welsh Government of the potential for the use of CASE studentships or placement fellowships in this way.

While recognising the benefits of being attached to the Welsh Government for a period of time, the placement fellow felt that it was 'something of an effort' to juggle work within the Welsh Government with ongoing academic commitments such as developing and revising publications for journals. The informant found it difficult to comment on the impact that their work had on policy, partly due to the political nature of policy-making. Nonetheless the impression gained was that the placement fellow had provided an extra source of social science expertise in a policy department that had little or no access to such resources at the time. In the process it was possible to 'inform policy at the margins' and to provide evidence that might be used to influence future policy decisions.

Our interviewee felt that there was greater scope for the Welsh Government to access academic expertise in a 'clever' way through the available schemes such as ESRC Fellowships and CASE studentships. Conversely, HEIs need to be alert to the benefits that such schemes might bring them, as part of a wider cultural change including more positive attitudes to secondments and other forms of interaction with the practical world of policy-making. In the interviewee's opinion, the focus of the new REF on "impact" had yet to be translated into a more positive enthusiasm on the part of the academic community in Wales with "hands on" engagement with policy makers.

5.4 Appreciation of the need for highly-qualified social scientists

As noted above, senior stakeholders were in general positive about the contribution to the Welsh Government made by social scientists working in analytical and non-analytical roles. However, a degree of scepticism was expressed by many as to whether PhD qualifications provided significant added value in terms of skills and impact. Indeed some feeling was expressed that PhD qualified people may be too academic and/or not pragmatic enough in their approach. They may also lack some of the communication and 'consultancy-type' skills that are necessary to work effectively in a policy environment.

- *'PhD study gives you the basis of the process that you have to go through...it gives you knowledge of methodologies and a degree of maturity. The advice of people with these qualifications should have an impact on high-level policy decisions'*
- *'The added value of a PhD is not always clear. Some (people with PhDs) are sharp and clear, others are not. PhD study makes you question most things...'*
- *'PhD qualifications may be suited to a career in academia, but some may struggle with working in government organisations. A spell of work experience might help'*
- *'Putting staff through higher level academic programmes is good at changing the way people's heads work – and that is usually a good thing. (There is) a change in the way in which people were able to formulate concepts...think about evidence gathering, how they evaluated and drew on a wider range of models.'*
- *'Research in government requires more skills than what a PhD gives you, such as negotiation and managing relationships. A PhD can be a hindrance as you may understand things that others don't. The title is valued but the PhD is not.'*

5.5 Implications for ESRC investment in postgraduate training

As noted throughout this report, it is not possible to provide precise figures regarding the qualifications of Welsh Government staff, and no information exists in the personnel system regarding sources of funding for postgraduate research studies. An overview of the information provided by our interview respondents and focus group participants suggests that a minority of Welsh Government respondents with PhD qualifications (9 out of 25 respondents, including those pursuing collaborative programmes) had been funded by ESRC or its predecessor organisation. Several were self-funded or had been supported by the Welsh Government or other employers.

A key point made by several respondents was that postgraduate research training, particularly that supported by ESRC, is perceived to be geared towards students who aspire to an academic career. While this is helpful in many ways, for example in terms of ensuring understanding of the quality standards required of academic research, there is clear scope to incorporate other elements into the training programme. These include a range of communication and 'consultancy' skills, as well as an understanding of the policy context and policy impact of social research.

In relation to collaborative studentships, the research has relatively little to say, due to small numbers and limited awareness among Welsh Government informants. The information we collected suggests that to date there has been less collaboration than might be desirable, particularly between students and Welsh Government staff beyond immediate analytical colleagues. Limited interest in the latest round of opportunities is surprising and may reflect HEI attitudes to undertaking policy-focused research or perhaps the attitudes of potential students who still want to be academics.

The key importance of core research skills was emphasised by the majority of respondents, supporting the notion of 1+3 funding, a solid base of training in research methods and PhD topics that are not esoteric (although the last point is

moot – PhD subject is almost irrelevant for analysts and policy people, it is the research skills and training that count).

6. Discussion

This brief section sets out our observations regarding the implications of our findings for three key questions posed by ESRC, in relation to the effectiveness of knowledge and skills transfer processes, the attribution of impact to the influence of social scientists and the benefits and drawbacks of the methodology employed to identify impact .

6.1 Effectiveness of knowledge and skills transfer

The findings here are mixed, reflecting the early stage of concerted development of knowledge exchange activities and the modest resources (less than one full-time post) devoted to it within the Welsh Government. Limited evidence regarding collaborative research students and PhD internships (again at a very early stage) suggest that there is scope to improve the process of knowledge and skills transfer by engaging a wider range of Welsh Government staff in the process, and facilitating better interaction with the supervisors of collaborative students. The research highlights a number of instances where knowledge transfer was felt to be good, for example the interaction between Welsh Government researchers and the Child Poverty Expert Group, semi-formal relations between Welsh Government and academic economists and the successful evidence symposium series.

It is clear from the responses of Welsh Government and external social scientists as well as policy staff within the Welsh Government that there is scope to extend formal and informal relations between the Welsh Government and other researchers, perhaps through a programme of placements and exchanges. Greater use of workshops, seminars and other such forums would be beneficial, including Welsh Government staff presenting at university-based events. Some respondents felt that the procurement process did little to encourage knowledge transfer, and that greater use of call-off type arrangements would be more in line with academic culture and potentially beneficial to the Welsh Government.

6.2 Attribution of impact

Previous ESRC impact evaluation studies have confirmed that attributing impact to the direct or indirect influence of social research is a challenging task, and one which is only ever likely to result in approximations. In the case of assessing the impact of social scientists in general, rather than specific pieces of work, the task is even more complex. We have established that such impact often occurs as a result of the skills, knowledge, experience and characteristics of individuals, some of which are independent of their training as social scientists. Moreover, as noted above, the added value of PhD or equivalent status is widely but not universally recognised.

Nonetheless, we have been able to identify in some instances a chain of causation whereby the involvement of qualified social scientists can be said to have resulted in policy decisions or strategy statements that are unlikely to have taken place in their absence. In all of the policy examples set out in this report, other factors have influenced policy decisions, so it is difficult to separate out and measure the independent influence of social science. While models of policy impact are developing all the time, there are no established methods for attributing policy

impact to social research, still less so the multi-dimensional impact of social scientists, some of whom are not undertaking research, but are using their skills in policy settings.

6.3 Advantages and shortcomings of evaluation method

The methodology employed for this study was primarily qualitative in nature and was highly successful in engaging a range of informants within the Welsh Government, as well as three high-profile university-based research centres. Its success relied heavily on an excellent level of support from the Welsh Government and the goodwill of research participants, which to an extent relates to the relatively small size of the Welsh Government as an organisation. It may be challenging to translate into another setting, but we believe it would be a valuable exercise to explore the transferability of the methodology.

This study represents a major step forward in that it entailed a detailed qualitative investigation of the role of social scientists within a specific organisational setting. Our considered reflections on the methodology employed are as follows:

- The decision to pursue a primarily qualitative approach was clearly vindicated. Aside from the pragmatic point that limited relevant quantitative data exist, it is clear that understanding of the role of social scientists requires the type of in-depth study that is not feasible through quantitative surveys etc.
- The study was also successful in eliciting the experiences and perspectives of a full range of the key players in the policy and research system. In particular we have highlighted the important role of social science skills among non-analysts and also demonstrated the range of views that exist among senior manager and directors
- To a large extent the success of the study relied on the active cooperation of the Welsh Government, and in particular the liaison person, and broadly positive and supportive attitudes among all groups of Welsh Government staff
- Our attempts to contact and gather information from collaborative students was less successful, despite considerable effort on the part of ourselves and ESRC. It is not entirely clear why this is the case, but it perhaps diminishes the robustness of our findings about this group. There may be a case for ESRC to undertake a small-scale study of a broad group of collaborative students (i.e. not just those working with a single organisation) in order to build on this initial limited evidence base.
- The exploratory nature and relatively broad coverage of the research (in terms of respondent groups and policy areas) was appropriate to ensure that all angles were captured; however some depth may have been lost in relation to exploring the chain of causation between social scientists and policy impacts. Future studies might combine the organisational case study approach with the focus on specific policies that has been a successful feature of other ESRC impact evaluation studies.
- There is potentially scope to apply both ‘tracking forwards’ and ‘tracking backwards’ methodologies to assessing the impact of social scientists on policy and practice. For example the work of a group of (internal and external) social scientists might be tracked forward over a period of time. Conversely, policy initiatives could be ‘tracked back’ to assess the influence of social scientists on the conceptual and instrumental development of the policy.

7. Conclusions

This section summarises the conclusions we have drawn following detailed consideration of the research findings presented in this report. Our overall conclusion is that social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications play an important role within the Welsh Government and their presence helps to ensure that the quantity and quality of evidence feeding into the policy-making process is higher than it otherwise would have been.

- Welsh Government social scientists make relatively limited direct use of specific subject knowledge acquired through postgraduate research. However, postgraduate research qualifications are useful in enabling Welsh Government social scientists to assess the quality of proposals, publications and/or reports, particularly in relation to the robustness of methodologies employed. In some cases, possession of a PhD qualification may provide the social scientist with an element of confidence and credibility in dealing with internal policy customers and external academics.
- This gateway/facilitator role is of key significance in ensuring that social scientists influence policy in a way and to an extent that is appropriate, given the range of other factors that impact on the policy-making process. Our evidence suggests that possession of a PhD, in and of itself, does not guarantee that a social scientist can play the gatekeeper/facilitator role effectively, though it may help in some circumstances.
- Several of the social scientists participating in the study held roles within the Welsh Government that were not primarily analytical. In all cases, these respondents could identify significant benefits from their study that enabled them to perform their roles more effectively, with resulting improvements in the perceived quality of policy-making and/or practice.
- Senior managers across the Welsh Government in general recognise the actual and potential contribution of social scientists to the quality of policy and practice. The consensus is that the personal characteristics and approach of the individual social scientist are often more important than their level of qualification or area of specialisation.
- Mixed views were expressed about the desirability of a centralised analytical resource, with strong support from many quarters but some senior managers in particular emphasised the benefits of analysts working closely with the policy teams that they are supporting. Some also felt that analysts were not always responsive to changing policy needs, and that analytical work programmes are sometimes too rigid to respond to the realities of the policy-making process.
- Collaborative research studentships have had limited impact to date, mainly due to small numbers. There is broad support for the principle of improving links between the Welsh Government and academic research through this route. However, there is more work to be done to bridge the gap between the academic aspirations of students (and their supervisors) and the Welsh Government's need for research that meets identified policy needs.
- Social scientists external to the Welsh Government play an important role in providing the research underpinnings for strategy and policy development. Membership of advisory or expert groups is an important mechanism for influence,

in some cases providing direct access to policy makers and Ministers. The relationship between Welsh Government and external social scientists is strong in some disciplinary areas but patchy in others. Informal links play a strong role, backed up by semi-formal mechanisms such as seminars and workshops. Respondents identified considerable scope for such mechanisms to be developed further, to the potential benefit of academics, Welsh Government social scientists and policy-makers.

- There is some evidence of the potential for placement fellows and similar arrangements (e.g. part-time secondments) to contribute to addressing some of the perceived barriers to more effective working between policy-makers, Welsh Government social scientists and external academics, although the small numbers involved to date make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.
- Senior managers all recognised the benefits of drawing on academic research taking place in universities within Wales and elsewhere. Links between policy-makers and academics vary in strength and nature and policy-makers, and the Welsh Government would benefit from increased skills and capacity to enable more effective ‘translation’ of academic research into policy conclusions. This is one of the main positive attributes ascribed to some, but not all, PhD-qualified social scientists working in analytical and policy roles within the Welsh Government. There appears to be scope for these individuals to play a leading role in developing training programmes and/or guidance material to help other colleagues (PhD-qualified and otherwise) to acquire this vital skill set.
- Despite broadly positive views about the impact of external social scientists, respondents found it difficult to identify specific examples of direct policy impact. External academics typically had limited direct contact with politicians and/or senior policy-makers within the Welsh Government, and respondents also recognise the potential for inconsistencies between the objectives and culture of academic researchers and those of policy-makers.
- Respondents provided a number of examples where they felt that external and internal social scientists and policy-makers had worked together effectively to address key policy issues. The most frequently-cited example is the Child Poverty Expert Group, which provided guidance and support to the work of a team of Welsh Government analysts from different disciplines that put together the evidence base underpinning the 2010 Child Poverty Strategy. The Economic Research Advisory Panel was also mentioned as a useful forum that enables Welsh Government economists to keep up with the latest developments in economic research and to discuss them with leading economists in workshops and through other more informal mechanisms.
- The overwhelming view from respondents in all positions is that it is very difficult to specify and measure precisely how the knowledge and expertise of social scientists impacts on policy and/or practice within the Welsh Government. It is even more difficult to isolate the additional impact flowing from the use of social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications. The majority view is that it is beneficial to the organisation to have such people working in analytical and non-analytical roles, particularly due to their up-to-date knowledge of research methodologies and the thorough, critical and questioning approach associated with PhD work.
- However, for a number of reasons set out in this report, the impact of research does not typically follow a classic linear pattern whereby researchers review the available evidence and commission or undertake research to fill identified gaps, feeding the

results into the policy development process, appraising options against the available evidence and ensuring that policies are as evidence-based as possible. The fact that a significant proportion of research activity is focused on evaluation is a cause of frustration among some, but reflects the widely-held view that research is only one factor that feeds in to the policy making process, with political considerations – such as the manifesto commitments of the coalition government in Wales - often having an important influence. The input of special advisors is also felt to be important, as are pressures from the media and lobby groups.

- The relative speed of the policy and research processes was noted by many as a key factor constraining the influence of social scientists. There is often an imperative for policy decisions to be made, and new policy initiatives to be implemented, relatively quickly. In contrast good quality research or evaluation can take time to undertake. Other perceived barriers to the impact of social scientists include:
 - The size and structure of large organisations such as the Welsh Government may affect the interaction between social scientists and policy makers
 - Some managers, politicians and/or policy-makers are not as tied to the idea of evidence-based policy-making as are most social scientists, in some cases relying on anecdotal evidence, the views of trusted advisors and/or media reports
 - Some analysts (internal and external) may lack the communication and consultancy-type skills to interact effectively with policy colleagues and adopt a pragmatic approach to influencing policy decisions

- Our overall conclusion is that there is ample evidence that social scientists with postgraduate research qualifications play an important role within the Welsh Assembly Government and without doubt exert a positive influence in ensuring that the quantity and quality of evidence feeding into the policy-making process is higher than it otherwise would have been.

- The relationship between internal and external social scientists has also been identified as very important. This process is patchy and it is clear that the presence of qualified social scientists within the Welsh Government helps to ensure that external academic address policy issues and that their work is ‘translated’ to ensure maximum policy impact. Our research has identified a number of shortcomings in this process that would benefit from a response from the Welsh Government and/or ESRC.

8. Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the findings presented in this report and in particular are focused on actions that might be taken by ESRC, the commissioners of this research. They revolve around (i) gearing the research training programme more closely to the needs of students who may be considering a career outside academia (ii) ensuring that collaborative studentships are as embedded as possible within the collaborating organisation (iii) facilitating greater formal and informal interchange between academic researchers and policy organisations (iv) exploring ways of reducing the perceived disjuncture between academic and policy objectives (v) supporting broader knowledge transfer activities between academic institutions and policy organisations.

This was an exploratory study, designed to test out a qualitative approach to investigating the role of social scientists in relation to one organisation. As such, the findings described above and the recommendations presented in this section should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive. In some cases it would be advisable to undertake further investigation in other organisational contexts before implementing specific recommendations. Having said this, we are confident that the recommendations presented below are soundly based on the research evidence and, if taken forward, would help to enhance the contribution made by ESRC to improving the impact of internal and external social scientists working in and/or with policy organisations such as the Welsh Government.

8.1 A broader-based research training programme

It is clear from our research that analysts and senior managers within the Welsh Government value the rigour of the PhD research training process in ensuring that students acquire the highest possible levels of expertise in social science research methods. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that much, but not all, PhD research training is based on the (often implicit) assumption that the vast majority of students are seeking academic careers. While there should be no difference in terms of research methods and associated technical skills, it is suggested that ESRC explore the scope for ensuring that PhD training programmes address the types of communication and ‘consultancy’ skills that have been identified as key to the success of social scientists working in a policy context. These skills are qualitatively different to those associated with, for example, presenting a conference paper or writing a paper for an academic journal.

It would be helpful to encourage policy-makers from organisations such as the Welsh Government, and especially people with PhD qualifications in social science, to contribute to seminar programmes and to provide advice to PhD students who express an interest in a non-academic career. Exercises could entail asking students to summarise, verbally and in writing, the key findings of their work (or the literature they have reviewed) and set out the implications for policy. Welsh Government social scientists and policy makers could act as mentors to encourage students to

acquire the skills necessary to communicate complex ideas and findings into language suitable for the policy environment.

8.2 Embedding collaborative studentships

While noting the small sample of collaborative studentships participating in our study, the evidence seems to be suggesting that such individuals are not as embedded as might be desirable, in the sense that the students felt that they had limited contact with or feedback from the Welsh Government staff with whom they were working. Similarly, very few Welsh Government respondents in our study were familiar with or had contact with the collaborative studentship programme. There appears to be a case for close working between ESRC (as sponsor of the students) and the host organisation to work out ways of ensuring that interaction between the student and the organisation is more than nominal. Furthermore, there is a strong case for developing mechanisms through which the students' supervisors become more closely involved in the collaborative process. One possibility is to include a requirement for regular supervisory meetings, to include at least one host organisation representative, and/or to establish a workshop series at which students, supervisors and host organisation staff are able to exchange views.

8.3 Facilitating formal and informal exchange

Our research uncovered examples of highly effective interaction between internal and external social scientists and Welsh Government policy-makers. In some cases (advisory groups, seminars) these were linked to formal or semi-formal mechanisms; in others they were based on informal relationships, often linked to the study or previous employment of senior Welsh Government officials or analysts. It is clearly important for organisations such as the Welsh Government to raise awareness of and spread good practice about the positive impacts of working in partnership with external social scientists. There is also an important role for HEIs and for funding bodies like ESRC. Placement fellowships and similar schemes clearly have great potential to enable policy organisations to make use of the expertise of academic researchers in a way that can be much more effective than conventional contract research. Yet our research suggests that this is not widely known within the Welsh Government (and in all likelihood other similar organisations) and perhaps ESRC could play a role in the proposed awareness raising exercise.

Similarly, the view was expressed by some of our informants that HEIs tend not to value the benefits of academics getting involved in collaborative work as much as they might do, particularly considering the increasing attention being paid to 'impact' as an indicator for the Research Excellence Framework. Again, it seems that ESRC (perhaps working together with the funding councils) has a potentially important role to play here, raising awareness among research leaders and senior managers, as well as among research active staff. Case studies of current or past placement fellows, secondees or members of advisory bodies (who are typically high-profile academics with good publication records) would be useful in this context.

8.4 Addressing perceived disjuncture between academic and policy cultures

One of the more surprising findings from this research is the relative lack of confidence among academic respondents (most of whom are positive about policy-related research) and indeed within the policy community, about the potential for the REF focus on 'impact' to encourage more academics to engage in policy-focused activities such as those we have reviewed in this research. The prevailing view appears to be that little is going to change and that ultimately 'traditional' academic indicators (notably peer-reviewed publications) will carry considerably more weight than impact indicators that are the subject of intense debate.

A twin-track approach would seem to be appropriate here. The Welsh Government is considering introducing a peer review process for all of its externally-commissioned research, in the expectation that this will not only increase research quality, but encourage more academic researchers to undertake applied research. Our research suggests that this will be a useful exercise (not least by involving 'new' researchers in the peer review process) and it would be helpful for ESRC to monitor its success and help to communicate lessons across other government organisations.

The second track of this approach might entail a pro-active awareness-raising campaign – led by ESRC and the funding councils, with the support of the Welsh Government and others – to convince academics and their leaders of the value of policy and practice focused research. This value goes beyond achieving success in the REF; our research indicates that participating academics feel that they benefit from interacting with policy bodies and (although we did not specifically investigate this) it is likely that undergraduate and postgraduate students will benefit from the wider perspectives that academics gain from this process.

8.5 Supporting broader knowledge transfer activities

The Welsh Government has been active in promoting – internally and externally – the benefits associated with knowledge transfer activities such as placement fellowships, secondments, knowledge exchange seminars and so on. Our research has identified some successes associated with this (embryonic) strategy; it is clear that even more success is likely to be gained through close working between the Welsh Government and ESRC, which could be replicated in other policy bodies. In particular, placement fellowships appear to have great potential to promote partnership working at a reasonable resource cost, and it should be possible to build on our findings based on a relatively small sample to promote the benefits of such programmes more widely. In particular it is important to emphasise the benefits to all parties, including the scope to generate robust research findings at low cost, that can be translated into policy recommendations on the one hand, and 'academic' outputs on the other.

9. Appendices – research instruments

Note: at the time of the fieldwork the organisation was known as the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

9.1 WAG social scientist interview topic guide

1. **Respondent details** *(if have got details from focus group can skip to more detailed question on nature of research carried out during qualifications and support of ESRC)*
 - a. Job role and main responsibilities
 - b. Position in organisation – department, analytical/policy etc.
 - c. Working relationship with social scientists (within and outside WAG)
 - d. Background and qualifications *(e.g. does respondent have social science research degree and/or experience of working as social scientist?)*
 - e. Details of research carried out during studies.
 - f. Views of support provided by the ESRC.

2. **Employment pathway**
 - a. Story of how came to work for WAG – *including extent to which post-graduate training helped with recruitment process, initial expectations of how research training would be used in their work.*
 - b. Further education/training experiences since completing post-graduate research
 - c. Experiences working for WAG to date (e.g. policy areas worked in, types of task performed, relationship with the policy process)

3. **Contribution of social scientists working within WAG**
 - a. What is the contribution of social scientists to the work of WAG *[Elaborate if possible – research skills, subject-specific knowledge, analytical ability, communication skills etc.]*
 - b. Probe for specific examples of where they have had an impact on policy or practice – *What was the process through which this occurred? Did their training play a critical role? Over what timescale? Who was involved in the process (social scientists and others)? To what extent did the impact permeate within and beyond departments?*

4. **Barriers to impact**
 - a. What are the main factors (if any) that prevent social scientists impacting significantly on policy-making and practice within WAG? *[Probe – relevant of social science research, skills/competence of social scientists, understanding or appreciation among policy-makers, institutional structure/culture etc.]*
 - b. Reflections on where their social science training has not been used effectively and/or they have not had the influence on policy that they might have had.
 - c. How might these barriers be overcome most effectively?

5. **Facilitating greater impact**
 - a. What changes might help to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from the knowledge and skills of social scientists working in WAG?
 - b. Are there any changes in the training of research students that might facilitate greater impact on policy and practice?

6. Impact of external social scientists

- a. Please describe briefly any interaction that you have with social scientists working outside WAG (*e.g. academic researchers, independent researchers, think tank or third sector personnel, consultants etc.*)?
- b. Has their training had any influence on the way in which they work with external social scientists?
- c. In what ways do you think that external social scientists impact on policy and practice? Can you give any examples?
- d. What are the main barriers to the generation of impact though working with external social scientists?
- e. What changes would facilitate greater impact by external social scientists?

7. Closing questions

- a. Are there any issues that we have not covered that would be helpful in understanding how internal and external social scientists impact on WAG policy and practice?

9.2 WAG social scientist focus group agenda

Introduction

Briefly explain purpose of the research. Explain that want the participants to think about the issues in the round – not just about their qualifications, but also about wider use of individuals with social science PG research qualifications, and wider use of social scientists/science in WAG.

Social scientists and WAG

Resources: Flipchart

Task: ‘Pop-quiz session’. A selection of respondents are asked to state in what ways WAG uses social scientists – as staff, external consultants, academic research, etc. Quick question to get the focus group going.

Contribution of social scientists (general)

Resources: Flipchart

Task: Whole room discussion.

- What do you think the contribution of those with, or working towards, social science post-graduate qualifications make to the activities of WAG?
- What part of the work of social scientists makes the greatest contribution to WAG activities? Is it research skills, subject-specific knowledge, analytical ability, communication skills, etc?
- Can you give major examples of where social scientists working for WAG have led to a policy or practice change in the organisation?

Contribution of social scientists (WAG staff)

Resources: Post-it notes, model diagrams, pens, 6 sheets of A3 for impact models.

Task: Each participant is given two post-it notes to write down examples of how they as social scientists have influenced the activities of WAG and then to stick these onto the appropriate sheet of A3. Notes to contain information about timescale, individuals involved, extent to which impact permeated through other departments, etc.

- Research (external, non-academic) --> policy impact
- Research (external, academic) --> policy impact
- Research (external, non-academic) --> practice impact
- Research (external, academic) --> practice impact
- Policy --> research --> change in practice
- Practice --> research (e.g. evaluation) --> change in practice

Once post-its have been put up, whole room discussion (for example, using show of hands) to see which route individuals think:

- Is most common way in which social scientists influence WAG activities?
- Is the most important way in which social scientists influence WAG activities?
- Which route has the greatest impact?
- Does this vary across departments?
- Is their impact in any way related to their background as a social scientist?

Barriers to impact

Resources: A3 sheets of paper, pens

Task: Break out into groups of 3/4 (4 groups total) for a discussion lasting approx 10 mins about the barriers to impact. Groups then to feedback with 4 key messages and one recommendation for how WAG could improve the impact of social scientists (in style of bullet points). Potential to ask some consensus building questions – overall, which barrier to people think is the most significant/common?

Ending

Summary of key points from the session.

Ask participants to fill in questionnaires r.e. qualifications/any further points.

9.3 WAG senior manager interview topic guide

1. Respondent details

- b. Job role and main responsibilities
- c. Position in organisation – department, analytical/policy etc.
- d. Working relationship with social scientists (within and outside WAG)
- e. Background and qualifications (*e.g. does respondent have social science research degree and/or experience of working as social scientist?*)

2. **Contribution of social scientists working within WAG**
 - f. Overview of the type of work done by social scientists working in WAG
 - g. Specific contribution of social scientists with - or working towards - research degree [*Elaborate if possible – research skills, subject-specific knowledge, analytical ability, communication skills, contacts/networks etc.*]
 - h. Probe for specific examples of impact of social scientists on policy or practice – *what was the process through which this occurred? Over what timescale? Who was involved in the process (social scientists and others)? To what extent did the impact permeate within and beyond departments?*
 - i. Probe for benefits to the organisation – *contribution to staff development, transfer of knowledge/skills, absorptive capacity, use of evidence; benefits to the organisation from **doctoral** level training compared with lower level qualifications (Masters or Bachelors degree;(value added by higher level knowledge/skills, extent to which these are required for the work being undertaken*

3. **(if relevant) Contribution of collaborative social scientist doctoral students working within WAG**
 - j. Overview of the type of work done by collaborative social scientists doctoral students working in WAG
 - k. Specific contribution of social scientists working towards research degree [*Elaborate if possible – research skills, subject-specific knowledge, analytical ability, communication skills, contacts/networks etc.*]
 - l. Probe for specific examples of impact of social scientists on policy or practice – *what was the process through which this occurred? Over what timescale? Who was involved in the process (social scientists and others)? To what extent did the impact permeate within and beyond departments?*
 - m. Probe for benefits of the collaborative studentship scheme to the organisation
 - n. Value added by doctoral level training compared with lower level qualifications (Masters or Bachelors degree)

4. **Barriers to impact**
 - o. What are the main factors (*if any*) that prevent social scientists impacting significantly on policy-making and practice within WAG? [*Probe – relevance of social science research, skills/competence of social scientists, understanding or appreciation among policy-makers, institutional structure/culture etc.*]
 - p. How might these barriers be overcome most effectively?

5. **Facilitating greater impact**
 - q. What changes might help to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from the knowledge and skills of social scientists working in WAG?
 - r. Are there any changes in the training of research students that might facilitate greater impact on policy and practice?

6. **Impact of external social scientists**
 - s. Please describe briefly any interaction that you have with social scientists working outside WAG (*e.g. academic researchers, independent researchers, think tank or third sector personnel, consultants etc.*)?

- t. Probe on mechanism of interaction (commissioned research, advisory group/panel membership, ESRC placement fellowship²⁹, ad hoc advice etc)
- u. Specific contribution that external social scientists make to the organisation (*Probe on specialist knowledge, networks/contacts, independence etc*)
- v. In what ways do you think that external social scientists impact on policy and practice? Can you give any examples? (*Probe on impact process, type of interaction etc*)
- w. Relative importance of different types of interaction
- x. (*If relevant*) Specific benefits from ESRC placement fellowships
- y. What are the main barriers to the generation of impact though working with external social scientists?
- z. What changes would facilitate greater impact by external social scientists?

7. Closing questions

- aa. Are there any issues that we have not covered that would be helpful in understanding how internal and external social scientists impact on WAG policy and practice?
- bb. Can you suggest other people (within and outside WAG) who we might consult as part of this research?

9.4 Collaborative student topic guide

1. Respondent details

- cc. Current status – still completing, if finished, what doing now.
- dd. Background and qualifications (*e.g. does respondent have social science research degree and/or experience of working as social scientist?*)
- ee. Details about qualification – department, topic, nature of research

2. Contribution of social scientists working within WAG

- ff. Working relationship with WAG – *what has been the nature of the collaboration with WAG? Exposure to other social scientists working for WAG?*
- gg. What has been the impact of working with WAG on their research? [*improved skills, deepened knowledge, etc*]
- hh. Impact of their research on WAG policy/activities.
- ii. Through their work are they aware of any examples of where social scientists on the policies or practice of WAG – *what was the process through which this occurred? Over what timescale? Who was involved in the process (social scientists and others)? To what extent did the impact permeate within and beyond departments?*
- jj. Has doing a post-graduate research qualification prepared them to work for an organisation like WAG?

3. Barriers to impact

- kk. What are the main factors (if any) that prevent social scientists impacting significantly on policy-making and practice within WAG? [*Probe – relevant of*

²⁹ The Welsh Government has one current ESRC placement fellow who is looking at the social consequences of the eradication of bovine tuberculosis. An earlier placement fellow undertook a study of informal learning among 14-19 year olds.

social science research, skills/competence of social scientists, understanding or appreciation among policy-makers, institutional structure/culture etc.]

ll. How might these barriers be overcome most effectively?

4. Facilitating greater impact

- mm. What changes might help to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from the knowledge and skills of social scientists working in WAG?
- nn. Are there any changes in the training of research students that might facilitate greater impact on policy and practice?

5. Impact of external social scientists

- oo. Please describe briefly any interaction that you have with social scientists working outside WAG (*e.g. academic researchers, independent researchers, think tank or third sector personnel, consultants etc.*)?
- pp. In what ways do you think that external social scientists impact on policy and practice? Can you give any examples?
- qq. What are the main barriers to the generation of impact though working with external social scientists?
- rr. What changes would facilitate greater impact by external social scientists?

6. Closing questions

- ss. Are there any issues that we have not covered that would be helpful in understanding how internal and external social scientists impact on WAG policy and practice?

9.5 Collaborative student questionnaire

Questionnaire – Collaborative Students

1.1.1 In the table below, please provide details of your post graduate qualifications or any post graduate qualifications you are working towards:

Title of qualification	Subject (e.g. geography, economics)	Status (e.g. complete, working towards)	Date completed/ awarded	Level (e.g. PhD masters, etc).

1.1.2 If you are working towards a PhD, please use the space below to briefly explain the topic and nature of your research.

1.1.3 If you have completed/are working towards a masters-level qualification by research please briefly explain the topic of your research in the space provided below:

1.1.4 Please use the box provided below to provide a few brief details of your relationship with the Welsh Assembly Government (including information about the division you work with, etc).

1.1.5 In your view, what contribution do social scientists make to the activities of the Welsh Assembly Government?

- Communities
- Economies
- Skills
- Enterprise