

## Embedding Knowledge Exchange Within Irish Universities- International Shifts Towards A Hybrid Academic?

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### Abstract

The recent literature is comprehensive in outlining how higher education internationally is immersed in operational and cultural change with fiscal challenges placing immense focus on competition. This paper is primarily focused on the knowledge exchange policy/practice nexus in Ireland. The term knowledge exchange is adopted while recognizing the evident overlap with many other related concepts such as knowledge transfer, university community engagement, integrative applied research, and engaged scholarship. This paper provides an overview of recent international shifts on responding and supporting a more coordinated approach to knowledge exchange initiatives as a response for universities to provide for greater social accountability. This paper will reflect on the new demands on Irish universities and argues for the need for more attention and support to be given on the collaborative capacity of researchers and support staff in order to embed knowledge exchange fully.

**Keywords:** Irish Higher Education, National Policy, Knowledge Exchange

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## Introduction

Universities have long marketed themselves, and justified public funding for their activities, on the grounds that they serve the public good (Collini, 2012). Having a civic mission, based upon their role as advocates and guardians of civic responsibilities, dates back to at least 1200 AD with the advent of earliest European universities such as Bologna, Paris, and Oxford (Cuthill, 2012; Brown & Muirhead, 2001). More recently, since the 1980s, there has been renewed focus on the civic role of universities, or increasingly referred to as the 'third mission', for Higher Education Institutions. This civic mission is now being debated in forums across the world as universities are evolving under increasing pressure to clearly demonstrate their societal benefits. Some commentators argue that universities' societal roles are increasingly defined by the so-called 'grand challenges' of the twenty-first century (Barber, et al., 2013; Brewer, 2013; Collini, 2012; McIlrath et al., 2012; Pinheiro et al., 2012; Barnett, 2011; Loh, 2010; Schuetze, 2010; Lund Declaration, 2009), while others suggest that publicly funded research needs to contribute more to public policy advice (European Commission, 2012; McIlrath *et al.*, 2012; Abreu *et al.*, 2009; Goddard, 2009; UNESCO, 2005). This context, where universities are expected to 'give back the community' is evidenced through two key activities. First, through scholarly interaction with industry focusing on the creation of intellectual property; and second, more diverse forms of scholarly engagement, involving public, private and community sector stakeholders, which contributes to economic and social development (Kajner, 2013; Brewer, 2013; Gallagher, 2013; King, 2013; Breznitz et al., 2012; Philpott, et al., 2011; Barnett, 2011; Kelly & McNicoll, 2011; Goddard, 2009; Musselin, 2007; Scott, 2006; Etzkowitz, 2001). The term 'Knowledge Exchange' is adopted to summarise these activities while recognising the evident overlap with many other related concepts (*e.g.* Cuthill 2011:22 identifies 48 interrelated terms). This paper provides an overview of recent international shifts on responding and supporting a more coordinated approach to knowledge exchange initiatives as a response for universities to provide for greater social accountability. The paper will reflect on the new demands on Irish universities and argues for the need for more attention and support to be given on the collaborative capacity of researchers and support staff in order to embed

knowledge exchange fully.

### **Redefining Universities**

The University is in crisis, almost everywhere. In the broadest terms, the university's position as simultaneously inside and outside society-as both a participant in and an observer of society -has been eroded. With the exception of a few hold-outs the ivory tower has gone. We can no longer hold a position of splendid isolation. We can think of an era that has disappeared as the 'Golden Age of the University', but in reality it was a fool's paradise that simply could not last. Today, the academy has no option but to engage with the wider society; the question is how, and on whose terms? (Burawoy, 2013: 27).

The demands on universities, for greater social accountability, have prompted a call for new kinds of universities - institutions who operate outside the ivory towers, and who are responsive to the needs of society and these grand challenges (Barber et al., 2013; Davis, 23/8/13). These 'new' universities have been variously described using terms such as 'open universities' (Miller & Sabapathy, 2013), the 'innovative university' (Christensen & Eyring, 2011), the new 'public university' (Burawoy, 2013) and Goddard's (2009) concept of a 'civic university', where he argues that all publicly-funded higher education institutions have a civic duty to engage with the wider society at local, national and international levels on issues of relevance. The literature around the universities' third mission and the increased focus on interactions, partnership, collaborations and engagement with external partners has become more visible (Kajner, 2013; Watson et. al. 2013; Jones, 2012; Breznitz *et. al.* 2012; Newcastle University, 2012; Schuetze, 2010, Altbach, 2006; Brennan et al., 2004). Overall, we are now seeing increasing emphasis on a shift from the academic as an 'expert producer of knowledge' to a much stronger focus on 'collaborative knowledge production processes' (Cuthill & Brown, 2010:129). In their seminal work Gibbons *et. al.* (1994) describe this shift as a move away from the more traditional model of segregated knowledge production, which they call *Mode 1*, to a new broader approach (*Mode 2*) where universities are identified as one stakeholder among many knowledge producers in a new, more fluid and interdependent approach (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Characteristics of Knowledge Production in Mode 1 and Mode 2

Mode 1	Mode 2
Disciplinary	Transdisciplinary
Hierarchical	Participatory
Pure or Applied	Applied
Linear	Reflexive
Quality is Academically Defined	Quality is both Academically Defined and Socially Accountable

*Source:* Gibbons *et al.* 1994

This collaborative approach to knowledge production, forwarded by Gibbons and associates, is supported through recent methodological discourse around ‘engaged scholarship’ (O’Shea, 2013; McInerney and Adshead, 2013; Cuthill, 2012; McIlrath et. al. 2012; Franklin, 2009; Boyer, 1996). Holland (2005:11) describes how engaged scholarship is increasingly being embraced by universities around the world, both ‘... as an expression of contemporary research methods and as a reinterpretation of the role of higher education in creating public good’. Rather than replacing traditional forms of scholarship, the concept of engaged scholarship should be seen as supporting new, more flexible approaches to intellectual inquiry - a methodology which supports the development of strong and genuine knowledge partnerships (O’Shea, 2013; McInerney and Adshead, 2013).

Universities are being pressed to develop and extend partnerships beyond a sole industry focus, with on-going calls for publicly funded research to contribute more to public policy (Brewer, 2013; McIlrath et al., 2012; Abreu et al., 2009), and social and economic development. This call has recently been most visibly evidenced in Europe, partly in response to impacts from economic recession. University College London (UCL) provides one such example. After redesigning their research strategy (UCL, 2011) Professor David Price, UCL’s Vice-Provost for Research, in an interview to the Times Higher Education, argued that research

intensive universities can justify their high levels of funding only if they address major challenges and by applying knowledge 'for the good of humanity' (Jump, 26/1/12). Accordingly, UCL has introduced four multi-disciplinary institutional-wide 'grand challenges' to facilitate public issues research. These are global health, sustainable cities, intercultural interaction and human well-being. Professor Price stressed that by addressing societal problems in this way, UCL was directing emphasis to development of 'useful knowledge' (Jump, 26/1/12).

### **Changing Role of Universities**

Numerous studies have focused on mapping this changing role of universities and their contribution to economic development and national innovation systems (Brewer, 2013; McKelvey & Holmen, 2009) including commercial relationships between universities and industry (Advisory Council on Intellectual Property, 2012; Etzkowitz, 2008, 2001). This has been particularly evident in the aftermath of the global financial crisis where governments have directed attention to universities and their potential to support recovery (Hughes & Mina, 2012; Dodgson & Staggs, 2012). However, as Deiacco et al. (2012) note, while a collaborative knowledge exchange role for universities has been increasingly emphasised, with the intention of supporting economic growth and social innovation, so too have pressures on them been raised. As Deiacco et al. (2012:523) outlines:

Universities are thus increasingly being pressed to act strategically in relation to external pressures and funding streams. In addition to the strategic imperatives of responding to national policy and global social challenges, new competitive regimes for national universities are also now related to the increasing globalisation of student flows, funding resources and faculty.

Higher education institutions have developed strategies relating to engagement, industry and community partnerships, research commercialisation, and international development have been developed in response to these challenges. Goddard (2009:4) stresses the importance of such strategies arguing that there:

... has to be an institution wide commitment, not confined to individual academics or projects. It has to embrace teaching as well as research, students as well as academics, and the full range of support services. All universities need to develop strategies to guide their engagement with wider society, to manage themselves accordingly and to work with external partners to gauge their success.

The move beyond piecemeal or disparate activity to a more coordinated approach to knowledge exchange initiatives is a recurring theme within the literature. However, this is not solely the domain of higher education institutions, as a variety of local, national and international networks have sprung up to support the various emerging knowledge exchange processes, at both institutional and national levels (Butin et. al. 2012; Fried, 2012; Community-Campus Partnership for Health, 2012; Gore, 2012; GUNI, 2011; Hall, 2009). Governments and sub-national organization have also provided strong support to this agenda. For example, the European Commission promotes a 'modernisation agenda' for university reform defining the role of universities as to exploit the so-called 'knowledge triangle of research, education and innovation' (Lund Declaration, 2009; European Commission, 2007, 2006, 2004). Funding streams to support this agenda are emerging and the European Commission will soon launch *Horizon 2020*. This funding instrument (2014-2020), with an €80 billion budget, aims to deepen the relationship between science and society by favouring an "...informed engagement of citizens and civil society on research and innovation matters" (European Commission, 2012:4). Horizon 2020 will support good practice in public engagement by focusing on the need for (i) new tools and methods to foster public engagement at the work programme and individual level across all areas of Horizon 2020, and (ii) appropriate monitoring activities that can differentiate between the simple "transmission of results" approaches and those involving full engagement with the public at all stages of the programme cycle (European Commission, 2012:15-16;). Much academic focus (see Brewer, 2013) has been on reflecting and mapping the public value of the social sciences this value has been reinforced by Commissioner Quinn who has stressed how 'more essential' the humanities contribution of humanities and Social Sciences will be to the overall success and impact of Horizon 2020 (Geoghegan-Quinn, 7/5/13). The next section of this paper reflects on the changes occurring in Ireland.

## **An Irish Mission Shift towards Civic Engagement**

We urgently need a new model. Without it we are condemning ourselves to a race to the bottom. None of us want that as our legacy (Professor Brian MacCraith, 1/8/13)

Ireland is slowly emerging from a five part crisis that involved banking, fiscal, economic, social and reputational (NESC, 2013). As part of the rebuilding process higher education aligned with international shifts has been identified as a key part of the new focused 'smart economy' and academics have been given a '... stronger impetus to manage academic work and demonstrate productivity' (Adshead, 14/6/12). Significant policy has been developed linking the role of higher education (Gallagher, 2013). In 2004 the Irish government initiated an OECD review of higher education. The report in particular emphasized the role of higher education in the sciences and technological area and in developing a 'skilled work force for the economy'. Despite the government terms of reference requesting strategies for developing skills and research needs 'for economic and social development' no reference is made in the report on the role of higher education in developing civil, political, social or cultural institutions of society either locally or globally (Lynch et al., 2012: 19-20). Towards the tail end of the Celtic Tiger the Irish government established a commission to articulate a new higher education strategy which was launched in 2011 (known as the Hunt Report). The report has been adopted by the higher education authority<sup>[1]</sup> forming the framework for future development of higher education in Ireland. The Hunt report recognises that the Irish education is highly efficient and 'was ranked the highest of all countries in the international recruiter reviews of graduate employability and second highest of 28 countries in the international peer review of graduate quality' it goes on to argue that 'there is considerable potential for changing work practices to improve flexibility, efficiency and responsiveness to new needs (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 29).

The core focus of the Hunt report is on the role of higher education on rebuilding 'an innovative, knowledge-based economy' and having graduates who will be 'the productive engine of a vibrant and prosperous economy' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 1). This Munck et al., (2012:21) argues sees the 'overwhelming focus on marketization and knowledge transfer through the commercialisation of research. It is significant that while the report mentions the

word "enterprise" 40 times, the word "equality" receives only three mentions'. The Hunt report also places a third pillar of engagement as recognised university task (along with teaching and research) providing a broad definition that includes:

...engagement with business and industry with the civic life of the community, with public policy and practice, with artistic, cultural and sporting life and with other educational provider in the community, with public policy and practice, with artistic, cultural and sporting life and with other educational provider in the community and region, and it includes an increasing emphasis on international engagement (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 79).

Whilst the Hunt report does stress that engagement has had a long history it does also emphasise the need for coordination 'this needs to be developed more firmly as the core mission of higher education in Ireland' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 77). Established in 2006 Campus Engage[2] is a network for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish higher education. Their review on civic engagement activities found that 75% of respondents indicated that there was moderate to sustainable acknowledge of civic engagement however attempts to embed and recognize such activities within universities through promotion and other methods was not so clear (Lyons and McIlrath, 2011:7).

### **Conclusion: Towards the creation of the 'Hybrid Academic'**

The society we so dearly wish for will not take shape unless we acknowledge the need for an education of character and desires, the need to encourage and support critical reflection and a more holistic approach to knowledge. (President Michael D. Higgins, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013)

Internationally recent evidence points to dissatisfaction and frustration of knowledge workers within universities (Chubb, 6/2/13; Lynch et al., 2012; Australian Council of Learned Academies, 2012; Collini, 2012; Fredman et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2012; Professor X, 2011;). Lynch in particular (2010:63) argues how a new form of carelessness has manifested in higher education where 'academics at all levels expect and are expected to work unregulated and long hours; it is part of their apprenticeship'. In Ireland academics are suffering from

significant cutbacks with recent research finding that currently senior academics in Ireland work, on average, 50 hours per week, compared to an average of 48 hours across European countries whilst junior academics put in an average of 47 hours per week, compared to 42 hours for their European counterparts (McGuire, 1/10/13).

An increasing emphasis on collaborative knowledge exchange, including knowledge exchange focus on industry and community partnerships within Ireland and overseas, can be seen to underpin much of the proposed vision for Irish higher education. However, there are challenges to achieving this vision evidenced at the practice level within Irish universities through a lack of project management and collaboration skills, and the limited motivation of researchers to engage in collaborative knowledge exchange processes. Internationally efforts to resolve this have commenced. For example in Malaysia, a recent national policy initiative allocated significant funding to four major universities to develop stronger industry and community partnerships. Professor Kaur-Gill (Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships at the National University of Malaysia [UKM]), in outlining the UKM process of institutionalising such partnerships within the university, identifies critical initiatives implemented by UKM in responding to the national government agenda (2012:31):

1. Leadership at senior and middle management level;
2. Clarity of conceptualisation;
3. Institutionalisation;
4. Quality assurance;
5. Capacity building programmes;
6. Incorporating reward and recognition systems; and
7. Funding streams.

Closer to Ireland the United Kingdom have established funding streams supporting knowledge exchange in higher education. This funding was facilitated by the Beacons for Public Engagement who are charged with promoting, facilitating and embedding public engagement across universities (Watermeyer, 2011; PACE, 2010). A review study, with input from ~22,000 UK academics, found scholars from all disciplines were engaged in knowledge exchange

processes involving collaborations with a diverse range of partners (Abreu et. al. 2009). In supporting a broad knowledge exchange agenda, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), the Beacons for Public Engagement and the Research Councils UK developed the *Vitae Researcher Development Framework* (2011). This is an overarching framework which identifies the wide range of knowledge, behaviours and attributes of excellent 'engaged' scholars.

This paper has argued that there is an emerging consensus internationally of the important role of universities in contemporary society to provide useful knowledge and contribute to emerging societal problems. At the same time globally universities are being pressurised from being 'a centre of learning to being a business organisation with productivity targets...to transfer it's allegiance from an academic to the operational' (Doring, 2002: 140 citing McNair, 1997). Higher Education is at a crossroads in Ireland but it is slowly following international shifts in moving towards a more co-ordinated approach of mainstreaming knowledge exchange. For knowledge exchange to be meaningful and sustainable the complexities involved need to be reflected and captured not only in policy but in practice and within the processes of funding that rewards universities and researchers. Such changes have the potential to generate positive socio-economic benefits for the nation, while enabling Ireland's higher education institutions to remain relevant to the public.

[1] The Higher Education Authority is a statutory planning and policy development body for higher education and research in Ireland. Refer to: <http://www.hea.ie>

[2] Campus Engage-Refer to: [www.campusengage.ie/](http://www.campusengage.ie/)

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