

The supply side:
Capacity building and the
creation of appropriate incentives

Judy Sebba
University of Sussex
j.c.sebba@sussex.ac.uk

What will be considered?

- What do we mean by capacity?
- Who are the suppliers of evidence/educational research?
- Some examples of effective practice
- Some weaknesses to be addressed
- Developing incentives for researchers

What do we mean by capacity?

- what is capacity? resources - human, material & intellectual
- capacity for what? - to develop & apply usable knowledge to improve the quality of policy/practice
- so on supply side, capacity of researcher to:
 - * locate existing, ongoing & about-to-be-funded research in identified area
 - * understand & respond to the process of generating evidence for policy/practice

Who supplies evidence: Where policy-makers look for evidence (in rank order)?

- Special advisers
- ‘Experts’
- Professional associations
- Think tanks/Opinion formers
- Lobbyists & pressure groups
- Media
- Constituents, consumers & users
- Academic research

(GSRU, 2007 *Analysis for Policy* London: HM Treasury in Davies, 2007)

What do we know about the evidence used by policy-makers?

Rigby (2005) *policy makers filter research through the value-laden lens of political discourse*. She noted that policy-makers in the US rely on 3 sources of information:

- commissions - practical only
- gurus - narrow
- think tanks - ideologically-driven

Some examples of effective practice

- research networks, capacity building initiatives, getting funders to invest in capacity building e.g. The Applied Education Research Scheme (AERS) was commissioned in 2003 with funding support from The Scottish Office for 5 years. The aims are:
 - to improve the infrastructure of ed res in HE
 - to enhance its capability to support the country's long term educational needs
 - to conduct research projects relevant to the national priorities in school education.The scheme has developed a programme of capacity building and research activity organised around four networks involving Scottish HEIs, practitioners and policy-makers.

Some more good examples

- OECD review identified research as too supplier-led - good examples draw on priorities of users/system
- increasing contact between researchers & policy-makers - policy-relevant questions, design for policy impact, without losing research integrity e.g. early years research (Sammons et al, 2006)
- training in combining methodologies so as to address both 'what works' and 'how it works' (James et al, 2006 Learning How to Learn)
- ensuring researchers write accessibly, clearly & concisely or get mediators to do so (e.g DCSF site)
- developing realistic expectations of research impact - not immediate, won't overrule politics - a politician that isn't there has limited influence on policy

Some weaknesses in the supply side

- over-reliance on existing research from own country - if we haven't done it....
- lack of expertise in some methods, in integrating methods & reporting quality
- lack of research expertise in specific fields
- discipline phobia - intellectual gain=funds lost
- in some countries, too many researchers, weak or inexperienced researchers (students), too old (as in Mexico)
- poorly funded, spread too thin
- project management skills weak
- research ethics having some negative impact

Developing incentives for researchers

- Peer recognition of 'impact' e.g. for journal publications, promotion, funding
- Quality standards for publication e.g. AERA
- Funders incentivise by funding time for dissemination, user engagement, etc
- Appraisal reviews research impact
- Research training opportunities move beyond 'courses' to work-shadowing, teams, networks
- Promotion criteria explicitly includes research impact

References

- Davies, P. (2007) Making a difference: Working with users to develop research for policy and practice. Paper presented to the AERA symposium, Chicago, April 2007
- James, M., Black, P., McCormick, R., Pedder, D. & Wiliam, D. (2006) Learning How to Learn, in Classrooms, Schools and Networks: aims, design and analysis, *Research papers in Education 2*, 101-118
- Rigby, E. (2005) Linking research and policy on Capitol Hill *Evidence and Policy 1*, 195-213
- Sammons, P. (2006) *Effective pre-school and primary education (EPPE 3-11) project: Influences on children's attainment and progress in key stage 2: cognitive outcomes in year 5*. Nottingham, DfES Publications