

Academic Fellows Program

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International best practice in knowledge mobilisation

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What is the issue?

There has been growing interest in the role of evidence in supporting more effective policy-making. The rise of populism across multiple countries has intensified the need to ensure robust evidence informs policy decisions. At the same time, increasingly complex socio-economic challenges – such as artificial intelligence and climate change – require decision-makers to access, assess, and balance high-quality evidence more carefully than ever. However, determining “what works” in knowledge mobilisation and evidence use is inherently context-dependent, leading to the emergence of diverse organisations, practices, and forms of expertise across different settings.

One notable development has been the rapid expansion of knowledge brokering organisations (KBOs), which operate at the interface between research and policy. This includes a growing number of policy engagement units within UK universities. Our research has explored what knowledge brokering entails and whether it is effective (MacKillop et al., 2020), why such organisations have emerged (MacKillop and Downe, 2023a), and the strategies and practices they employ to influence policy (MacKillop et al., 2023; Durrant et al., 2024; Havers et al., forthcoming). We have also begun to assess their impact (Vallance et al., 2025). In parallel, we have examined how policy actors define and value evidence, and the factors shaping these perceptions (MacKillop and Downe, 2023b; Piddington et al., 2024).

This body of work contributes empirical insight to a field often dominated by untested conceptual models, while also informing our own practice at the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP). This fellowship provides an opportunity to extend this work through international comparison, bringing together existing insights and exploring their relevance in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The project will facilitate two-way learning on how evidence is mobilised and used in policy-making, and how the impact of knowledge brokering can be understood and assessed.

There is strong and growing public sector interest in this agenda. Initiatives such as Wellcome’s investment in global infrastructure to support AI-enabled evidence synthesis highlight demand for more timely, accessible, and relevant evidence. In a context of increasing fiscal constraint, improving the use of evidence is essential to enhancing policy effectiveness and reducing waste in addressing complex societal challenges.

Why does this matter?

Improving how evidence and knowledge inform decision-making is crucial to delivering policies that effectively respond to societal and economic needs. Achieving this requires more than generating high-quality research – it demands a deeper understanding of how different domains interact: knowledge production (such as academic research), knowledge mobilisation and brokering, and policy and decision-making. These relationships are not always straightforward as they involve tensions, competing priorities, and power dynamics that shape how, and whose, evidence is ultimately used.

At WCPP, we actively bridge these domains, taking on a brokering role between the ‘two communities’ of researchers and policymakers (Caplan, 1979). We recognise that co-producing research questions with policy partners is one of the most effective ways to ensure that evidence is relevant, timely, and used in practice. Our approach also acknowledges that valuable evidence extends beyond academia, encompassing organisational and population data, professional knowledge, and lived experience evidence.

Through our close collaboration with a team of knowledge brokers in WCPP, we gain practical, day-to-day insight into what works in mobilising evidence for policy impact. Sharing these lessons with and learning from ANZSOG and wider partners is a central part of our fellowship, helping to strengthen collective capability to design and deliver better, evidence-informed policy.

The approach

Although knowledge mobilisation and brokering processes are often presented as conceptually straightforward, they can be challenging to implement in practice. This fellowship is designed to support evidence users, producers, and brokers across the field by sharing experiences of practice, identifying critical issues and skills, enhancing conceptual understanding of processes in different contexts and developing actionable approaches to knowledge mobilisation.

The fellowship will include two research-led workshops and a public lecture on the topic of knowledge mobilisation in the UK context. These will bring together key knowledge brokering organisations, government officials, and decision-making partners. The workshops will allow for facilitated group discussions to share experiences and insights on effective knowledge brokering and mobilisation. We will follow these up with interviews and face-to-face discussions with ANZSOG staff and partners. These engagements will be structured around five core questions:

- What do decision-makers need from evidence to inform their work effectively?
- Who are the key actors involved in knowledge mobilisation for decision-making?
- What are the mechanisms, strategies and practices employed in knowledge mobilisation?
- How do knowledge brokering organisations plan for, measure, and demonstrate their impact?
- What lessons can be drawn from different approaches to using evidence in policy and practice?

The first workshop will explore and compare evidence cultures in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK. It will examine how evidence is understood, accessed and used in decision-making, the systems, organisations, leadership capabilities and knowledge mobilisation skills that support this, and the similarities, differences and shared challenges across contexts.

The second workshop will take a more practical focus, exploring and sharing knowledge mobilisation practice and approaches to maximising impact. It will identify key features of effective knowledge mobilisation and impact capture, effective strategies, methods and techniques, common challenges, and lessons that can be adapted or transferred across different settings.

Impact into practice

The impact of the workshops, interviews and conversations convened during the fellowship will include:

- stronger networks in knowledge mobilisation in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK,
- shared learning from comparing evidence cultures and the contexts of evidence use,
- improved knowledge of existing structures, systems, organisations, and relationships involved in knowledge mobilisation,
- opportunities for decision-makers to share their needs and expectations of evidence producers and knowledge brokers,
- sharing of effective practice and challenges, and
- avenues for future collaboration.

Longer-term, the shared impact will be the development of stronger approaches to knowledge mobilisation through ongoing dialogue and collaborative research. The fellowship will establish the potential for long-lasting relationships through which WCPP, ANZSOG and our respective partners can build a programme of practice and research exchange (e.g., joint events and initiatives), develop shared research agendas and seek funding opportunities for collaborative research and publication focused on key issues, such as improving how the impact of knowledge mobilisation is measured.

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