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# The Research-Policy Interface

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agus Gnóthaí Óige**  
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# Policy makers and researchers

- There are tensions between research and policy specialists
- It helps to get these out in the open so that both groups of experts can work together more effectively
- Warning - Differences are exaggerated in the following!





# Role of research in the policy landscape

(adapted from Lunn and Ruane, 2013)

## Policy-maker role ...

Goals identified

Identify the challenge /goal

Balancing the alternatives in broader policy context

Policy Options

## Researcher role ...

Identify challenge & scale – what, how many, who, why, how long?

Assess likely effectiveness, efficiency, side-effects

Institutional arrangements  
(in both research and policy domains)

Management of the institutions

Effectiveness of institutional arrangements

Specific policy instruments, Evaluation designs



# Mutual misperception

(adapted from Lunn and Ruane, 2013)

- Policymaker view of researchers:
  - Too abstract, disengaged, ignorant of political realities, not understanding how institutions work, arrogant, more concerned with publishing papers than helping to develop policy
- Researcher view of policymakers:
  - Unreceptive to relevant research, ignorant of key findings and concepts, anti-intellectual, over-concerned with managing politics, focus on ‘easy wins’.
- ‘Evidence-Informed policy’ is a more accurate description of what is possible than ‘evidence-based policy’.



# Tensions at the level of identifying the problem/goal

## Researchers

Motivation: to understand

Focus:

- Narrow focus by training
- Outcomes and processes

Excited by new 'problems'  
-detached

Emphasis: Scientific and technical  
– understanding mechanisms,  
estimating with precision.

## Policy-makers

Motivation: to 'fix'

Focus:

Broad focus by training  
Inputs and interventions

Daunted by new 'problems'  
- accountable

Emphasis: Pragmatic aspects of  
the problem – costs (both human  
and financial); timeliness.



# Tensions at the level of choosing policy options

## Researchers

Often less familiar with policy options previously considered

## Policy-makers

Immersed in policy debate

Naïve enthusiasm about what is done elsewhere  
(‘Look at Sweden!’)

Often sceptical of what can be learned from other countries  
(‘We are not Sweden’)

Emphasise policies understood within the discipline (e.g. engineering vs. monetary vs. educational solutions)

Emphasise policies within the remit of the department (existing services)



# Tensions arising from institutional arrangements

## Researchers

Research institutions value 'pure' research

Researchers who understand 'the problem' are not the researchers who understand the institutions

'Political considerations' – publishing, quality of research, getting on in the discipline

## Policy-makers

Political institutions value short-term results

Need to balance institutional constraints/opportunities and policy goals

'Political considerations' – getting re-elected; getting on in the department; tangible results

# How to work together? Four models

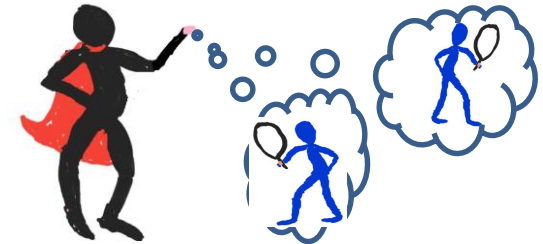
**1. Policy agency & researchers operate separately**



**2. Policy agency commissions research.**



**3. Policy agency employs researchers.**



**4. Policy-maker/ researcher partnership.**





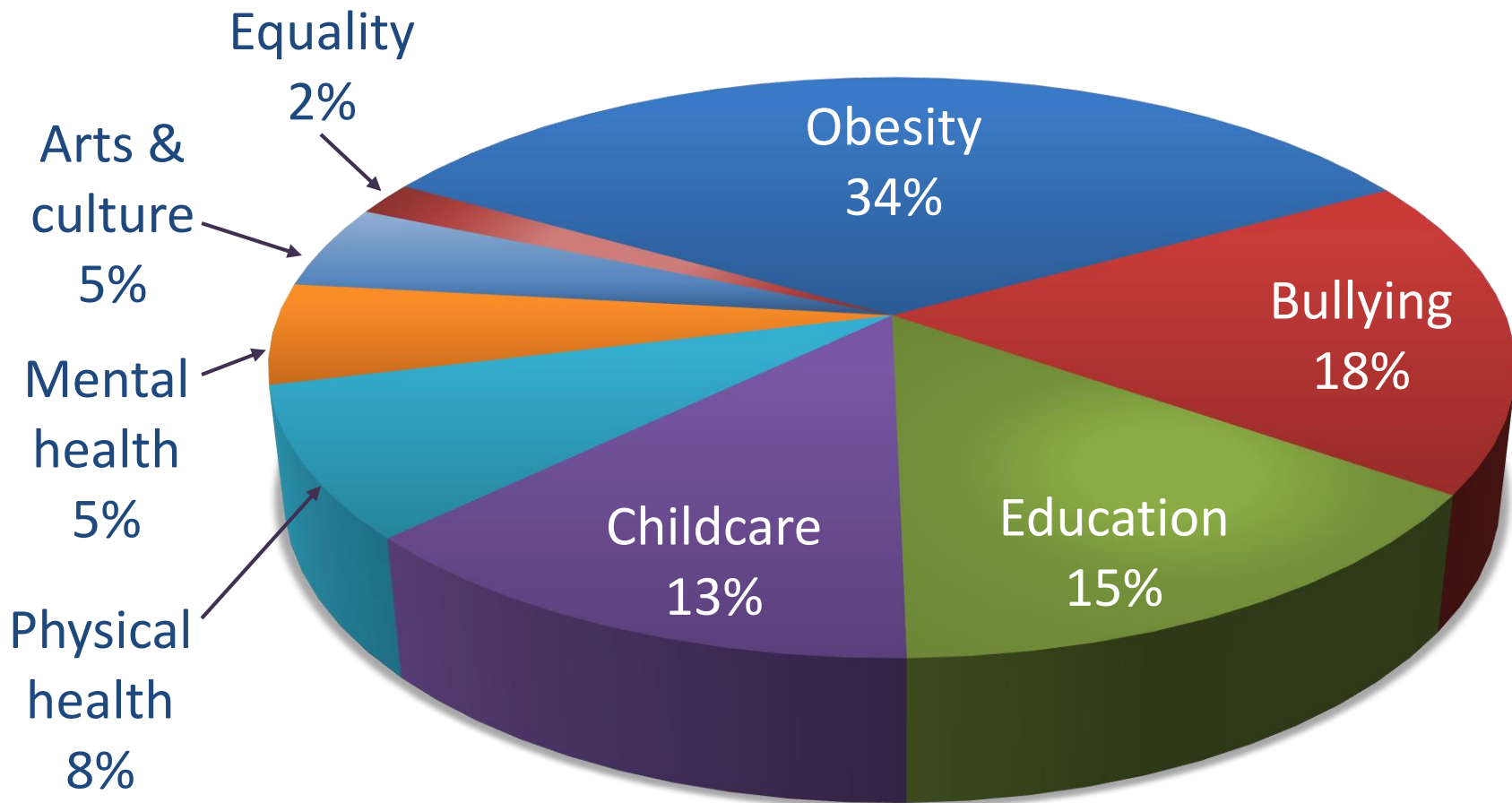


# Current uses of Growing Up in Ireland Data

- Research outputs for the DCYA: research reports and key findings as well as technical reports and literature reviews
- Commissioned research (for NDA, NCCA, Arts Council)
- As part of research programmes (HRB)
- Journal articles – promoting Growing Up in Ireland within disciplines such as sociology, psychology, education, economics, public health – unclear to what extent accessed by policy-makers
- Within government departments/State agencies: usage unclear
- In public policy debates (see following slide)



# *Growing up in Ireland* in Dáil debates – over 100 times since 2007





# Better Outcomes Brighter Futures and Growing Up in Ireland

Active & healthy – physical & mental well-being

**Physical health** long-term conditions **measured BMI** diet & exercise **Emotional & behavioural devel.** **Depression** Play/arts/culture/sports

Achieving potential in all areas of learning & development

**ECCE** Cognitive devel. **School experiences** Home learning **Interaction w' Teachers** **SEN** Parental involvement **Expectations** **Further Ed. & Training**

Safe & protected from harm

**Family relationships** **Childcare** Parent monitoring/control **bullying** neighbourhood safety **internet & screen time**

Economic security & opportunity

Economic circumstances **Work & family** **Inequalities:** gender, national origin ethnicity, family type, **disability/SEN**, religion, age, class

Connected, respected & contributing to their world

**Friendship** Activities with Friends **Work & family** Volunteering **Anti-social behav.** **Discrimination**



Thank you for your attention!

Comments and questions welcome.