



Summary of discussions

This document summarises the discussion from a workshop co-organised by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre on 7 May 2025.

The workshop brought together 27 key experts who actively shape Finland's science-for-policy ecosystem through their professional roles and institutional positions. Participants work in diverse organisations, including ministries, universities, research institutions, foundations, knowledge broker organisations, and science panels.

The structure of this document follows the group discussion format, which was based on the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' discussion paper and its findings.

The main findings of the discussion paper are:

- Knowledge brokering remains underutilised, yet it could significantly reshape the science-for-policy landscape.
- The research community's approach to influencing policymaking must become more proactive, collaborative, and phenomenon-based
- Large-scale structural changes in the science-policy interface are overdue.

In this summary, we aimed to combine input from different groups.

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1. Mobilising structural changes

General observations

The connection between democracy and evidence-informed policymaking is critically important, particularly at a time of growing science scepticism.

The Finnish science-for-policy ecosystem is fragmented and operates without clear coordination, which can result in inefficiencies in how scientific knowledge informs decision-making. Additionally, knowledge communication often rests on informal channels and individual relationships rather than robust, long-term institutional structures that can withstand government changes.

What should be done?

Political decision-makers need to be meaningfully involved in these strategic discussions on the future of the science-for-policy ecosystem. However, some long-term activities (across parliamentary terms) can be implemented without their direct involvement.

The system requires dedicated coordination, potentially by an interface-level actor rather than a governmental figure, to facilitate and oversee its functioning.

Additional mechanisms are needed to transcend government changes and offer strategic foresight capabilities to anticipate knowledge needs to 2040 and beyond. Indeed, better anticipation of policy processes and knowledge needs is essential, requiring improved foresight capabilities and communication channels between research and policy communities.

Emphasis should be placed on building systematically on lessons learned and scaling successful approaches. Finland has conducted numerous pilots but frequently fails to scale them.

Both knowledge users and producers need to reform. Ministries must develop better competencies in commissioning research and interpreting different types of evidence, whilst the scientific community needs clearer pathways for engaging with policy processes.

Beyond structures and roles, profound shifts are needed in adjusting how researchers and policymakers value science-policy interactions, addressing deeply ingrained mindsets and practices. For example, science should be integrated into earlier phases of political agenda-setting, including party manifestos and government programmes.

Suggested activities:

- Create a roadmap for the Finnish science-for-policy ecosystem that clarifies roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms.
- Design a "Do you want to be a minister?" course for new parliamentarians about evidence-informed decision-making.
- Develop the "Committee 2.0" model for cross-party, cross-electoral collaboration between political parties, researchers and other stakeholders.
- Create a forum or a platform where researchers can see political process timelines in advance.
- Establish clear contact points inside organisations (universities, ministries) that connect people with the right researcher or civil servant.
- Implement mechanisms to ensure knowledge brokering processes continue through government transitions.
- Embed science-for-policy approaches in ministerial strategy guidelines.

2. Knowledge brokering capacities and capabilities

General observations

Knowledge brokers play an essential role in facilitating science-policy collaboration and connecting people. Many models for brokering already exist. However, the people in knowledge brokering roles, whether in research or policy organisations, are dispersed, and their roles are not always clearly defined. In some instances, knowledge brokering cuts across the whole organisation, with directors, managers, professors, and researchers participating in various forms.

Overall, knowledge exchange largely relies on motivated individuals with personal interests rather than systematic approaches or dedicated professional roles. This ad hoc arrangement creates significant vulnerability, as connections often depend on informal networks and personal relationships rather than institutional structures.

Without robust knowledge brokering capacity, valuable knowledge may fail to reach policymakers at the right time, whilst policymakers' research needs remain uncommunicated to researchers who could address them.

What should be done?

Knowledge brokering must evolve from an informal activity to a recognised professional function with dedicated resources and institutional support. Organisations should identify, recognise, and connect individuals who already perform knowledge brokering roles, even if these functions are dispersed across different positions. For example, universities and research organisations should create viable career paths that recognise knowledge brokering skills and impact activities.

Knowledge brokers need specific competencies, including understanding the research and policy worlds, curiosity, proactiveness, networking skills, and awareness of policy processes. These skills should be developed through targeted training programmes.

Organisations must provide more explicit mandates for knowledge brokering activities, supported by leadership commitment and adequate resourcing. This includes supporting organisational mobility (e.g., the Postdocs for Government programme). Existing platforms, including the Research.fi (tiedejatutkimus.fi), are not yet sufficient and need further development.

It was argued that significant changes in the science-for-policy ecosystem would not occur unless decision-making organisations adjust their processes and research institutions recruit knowledge brokers to allow certain professors to focus on impact instead of teaching.

Interestingly, groups disagreed on postdoctoral researchers' role in knowledge brokering. For some, postdoctoral researchers face significant pressures to focus on academic publications and thus cannot effectively serve as knowledge brokers without structural changes to academic incentives. For others, they act in key roles for knowledge brokering.

Suggested activities:

- Establish dedicated knowledge broker positions within organisations with clear job titles to improve visibility and connectivity.
- Leverage Finland's RDI (research, development and innovation) funding to strengthen knowledge broker roles and functions.
- Create fellowship programmes and exchange opportunities between research and policy organisations (e.g., "Postdocs for Government") to build an understanding of different organisational cultures.
- Develop training programmes on knowledge brokering for relevant personnel across organisations.
- Establish regular informal meetings between researchers and policymakers (e.g., "coffees to exchange ideas") to build relationships and understanding.
- Conduct organisation-wide discussions to map existing knowledge brokering capabilities and coordinate approaches.
- Adopt narrative CVs that recognise and value knowledge brokers' skills.
- Assign research teams specific tasks to provide scientific knowledge to civil servants and ensure sufficient time is allocated.
- Build and strengthen networks between relevant organisations to facilitate knowledge exchange.
- Develop mechanisms to integrate young researchers into science-policy dialogue and improve their understanding of its functions.
- Publish and regularly update a comprehensive list of all ongoing knowledge brokering activities.

3. Reforming the scientific community's approach to impact

General observations

Finland's current approach to scientific impact is often fragmented and reactive and lacks strategic coordination, which limits research's potential influence on societal challenges and policy development.

Science communication has not achieved its potential societal impact, with many researchers engaging in sporadic outreach activities rather than coordinated strategic efforts. This fragmented approach fails to translate complex scientific knowledge into accessible insights for policymakers and society.

The rigid distinction between basic and applied research creates artificial barriers to impact, while universities' incentive structures prioritise academic publications over societal engagement.

What should be done?

The scientific community must shift from sporadic, research-driven science communication towards strategic, phenomenon-based impact approaches aligned with societal needs. This requires reforming university career systems to recognise and reward diverse contributions beyond traditional academic metrics, including stakeholder collaboration, science communication, and policy engagement.

Both structural and cultural changes are required, and researchers' voices should be heard in shaping these transitions. The approach must also account for organisational diversity, recognising that smaller institutions may implement coherent visions more easily than larger universities.

Suggested activities:

- Create multidisciplinary networks within universities that meet systematically to comment on ongoing societal debates (if not already in place).
- Reform university career systems to recognise diverse contributions, including stakeholder collaboration, policy engagement and science communication skills.
- Develop more mission-oriented research funding programmes that bridge basic and applied research while maintaining academic excellence.
- Form phenomenon-based, multidisciplinary expert groups that can provide integrated insights when requested by policymakers.
- Establish dedicated structures to align research timelines with policy processes better and anticipate knowledge needs.
- Implement training programmes for researchers on effective science communication and policy engagement.
- Pilot new approaches to impact in smaller research organisations where implementing them may be more feasible.
- Engage researchers in dialogue about cultural changes needed to enhance impact, and ensure their perspectives inform institutional approaches.