SUMMARY

Towards the Wisest Societal Decisions in the World

– The Impact of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' Knowledge Brokering

This summary is based on the impact assessment of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' knowledge brokering work. The assessment was based on stakeholder interviews, participant surveys, and the Academy's own databases. The work was carried out by Tommi Kärkkäinen, doctoral researcher at Tampere University while working at the Academy.

The assessment focused on the impact goals that have guided the Academy's knowledge brokering work between 2022 and 2026:

1. Dialogue between researchers and decision-makers becomes more systematic, and functional tools are developed to support it
2. Effective models for compiling knowledge are developed and established, and are used to support decision-making and advance public debate
3. Awareness, appreciation and capabilities in knowledge brokering increase, and the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters positions itself as a frontrunner in knowledge brokering
4. Research increasingly benefits decision-makers in their work

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters has invested in knowledge brokering for eight years. The work began in 2019–2021 with the Sofi project, a development project on science advice funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and carried out by Finland's four academies of science. Building on the project's successes, the Academy made knowledge brokering an established part of its work. In 2022, the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation granted four years of funding for knowledge brokering as part of the Ilmiökartta ("Phenomenon Map") project. The impact assessment has focused specifically on these years 2022–2026.

Between 2022 and 2026, the Academy's knowledge brokering activities grew and developed. A key part of this development has been the strengthening of expertise

in knowledge brokering at the Academy. In 2022, three people worked in knowledge brokering and by 2026, the number had grown to nine. In total, 15 different knowledge brokers worked on the Ilmiökartta-project. In the assessment, the knowledge brokering activities and outputs have been divided into three areas: Science Sparring sessions, knowledge syntheses, and knowledge brokering capabilities (see Table 1).

The impacts of activities aimed at developing Science Sparring, knowledge syntheses, and knowledge brokering capabilities are wide-ranging. Majority of the impacts concerned officials' understanding of the phenomena addressed, researchers' perceptions of their own research topics, and both stakeholder groups' awareness of the benefits of knowledge brokering. Likewise, the networks among researchers, decision-makers, and knowledge brokers were strengthened broadly. The Academy has also advanced the development of permanent, functional structures for knowledge transfer.

Knowledge brokering activities and outputs have advanced all four impact goals, but there is also a mismatch between the impacts and the goals. For example, impacts on decision-making are focused in ministries' policy preparatory work, even though the stated goal refers to decision-making more broadly.

Table 1. Knowledge brokering activities and outputs in numbers

	2023	2024	2025	2026 (spring)	Total*
Science Sparrings	**2**	**3**	**6**	**2**	**14**
Researchers participated	9	41	30	15	92
Experts participated **	2	11	12	8	33
Public admnistration officials participated	8	17	23	4	50
Knowledge Syntheses	**6**	**5**	**6**	**6**	**23**
Researchers participated	83	45	34	31	184
Experts participated	2	5	3	4	14
Public admnistration commissioners	6	3	4	2	11
Knowledge brokering capacities	**5**	**6**	**11**	**2**	**24**
Course materials and tools	2	2	3	2	9
Discussion papers, blogs and ja other writings	1	2	6	0	9
Network of knowledge brokers' meetings	2	2	2	0	6
Network members participated	64	79	81	0	97

**The total column does not count repeat participation by the same researcher, expert, or officials. **"Expert" refers to professionals working in other public- and third-sector organizations.*

Goal 1: Dialogue between researchers and decision-makers becomes more systematic, and functional tools are developed to support it

Science Sparring has provided a confidential space for interaction between officials and researchers, and has helped develop ministries' evidence base. The information about successful experiences has spread in the public administration, and the number of sparring sessions has increased. Sparring has become a repeatable and functional method for knowledge transfer. Researchers, officials and knowledge brokers are more familiar with the sparring method and the benefits it offers, which supports the organising of sparring sessions in the future. The new contacts that sparring sessions create between participants help sustain long-lasting interaction between researchers and officials.

Academy's challenge: Science Sparring often provides one-off science advice. Development work has not focused on supporting the policy-making process as a whole. To reduce this fragmentation, efforts could be invested in pilots where several sparring sessions are planned within the same process. The establishment of sparrings as part of ministries' information-gathering practices as routine should also be promoted.

Knowledge brokering challenge: the continuity of the developed operating models becomes dependent on a single organisation. Alongside supporting the evidence base, the development of these models is also driven by market logic leading to securing competitiveness and demand for one's own activities (MacKillop & Downe 2023; Kärkkäinen & Muhonen 2026). This challenge can be eased through sufficient collaboration between actors, allowing knowledge brokers to benefit more broadly from lessons learned and effective practices.

Goal 2: Effective models for compiling knowledge are developed and established, and are used to support decision-making and advance public debate

The production of knowledge syntheses has become a functional, systematic process that supports a multidisciplinary understanding of phenomena among various stakeholder groups. The process follows the same steps and it has proven to be an efficient tool for ministries. The outputs have been perceived as high-quality and have provided officials with useful knowledge packages. The syntheses have offered new perspectives and researchers for interviews for the media. Researchers involved in have later also used knowledge syntheses in their own work.

Academy's challenge: the knowledge synthesis process is not yet transparent. The method used to produce a synthesis, its intended use, and the limitations of its content should be made more explicit. This challenge relates to the broader establishment of the model, since those involved in knowledge brokering need the activity to appear legitimate and the knowledge produced to be reliable (Wagner et al. 2023). Gaps in this respect can also make the outputs harder to interpret and reduce the relevance of the publications.

Challenge in the operating-environment: knowledge brokering does not yet fit seamlessly into existing models or routines for acquiring information. For example, the Academy has mainly produced knowledge synthesis for a single ministry. Awareness of the model can be increased, but ultimately this is a matter of the need to develop organizational capacities for acquiring and making use of research knowledge (Wu, Ramesh & Howlett 2015; Husain, Bloom & Xiao 2021). Ministries have clear, established structures for commissioning new research, but not for compiling existing knowledge or working with knowledge brokers.

Goal 3: Awareness, appreciation, and capabilities in knowledge brokering increase, and the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters positions itself as a frontrunner in knowledge brokering

Capacities and the community **in knowledge brokering have grown stronger, and awareness of knowledge brokering has spread beyond researchers and officials to consulting firms, municipalities, and foundations.** Researchers, projects, and universities have benefited from the Academy's materials and events. In addition, knowledge brokers have found opportunities for peer learning. The Academy has established a strong position in supporting evidence-based decision-making, and international actors have shown interest in its work.

Academy's challenge: knowledge brokering is not widely known, and public advocacy for knowledge brokering remains limited. No investment has been made in building awareness of knowledge brokering among citizens, and there has been no systematic participation in relevant political debates. If the Academy's activities appear to be focused solely on its own knowledge brokering work, its image as a broadly beneficial organisation may erode. In other organisations where knowledge brokering is already understood and valued, that knowledge is often highly personalised, which increases the vulnerability of the operating environment (cf. Craft & Henderson 2023). That said, supporting these capabilities is not the Academy's responsibility alone.

Goal 4: Research increasingly benefits decision-makers in their work

Knowledge brokering has challenged, complemented, and validated the understanding of policy-makers. The knowledge conveyed has been used directly in policy preparation and in other work in the public administration. Knowledge synthesis and published summaries of sparring sessions have contributed to the accumulation of knowledge within ministries. Researchers from various fields and organizations have gained opportunities and channels to bring their expertise and science more broadly into policy-making.

Academy's challenge: knowledge brokers' subject-matter expertise is limited. As a result, understanding the issues relevant to a given phenomenon can at times be difficult. This can reduce the relevance of the outputs and the perceived reliability of the knowledge produced in the eyes of stakeholders (cf. Sarkki et al. 2014; Wagner et al. 2023). To address this challenge, sufficient time for a researcher comment round before publication should be reserved. AI, in turn, can help identify gaps or areas of emphasis in discussions during Science Sparring sessions. In addition, during sparring sessions, the role of brokers as facilitators should be emphasised and distinguished from that of other participants who serve as subject experts on topics.

Challenge in the operating environment: defining information needs is difficult for those commissioning the work. The challenge lies in identifying what questions research can answer, with what resources, and which knowledge is particularly relevant. Reconciling the interests of researchers and decision-makers can also be difficult (cf. Newman 2014). Competence in defining information needs can be enhanced, for example, with targeted training and simulations, or by exposing decision-makers to interaction with researchers (Kärkkäinen 2025).

Challenge in the operating environment: government administration operates almost exclusively in Finnish. At the same time, as this language constraint excludes significant research expertise from knowledge brokering, research organisations are investing in international staff recruitment, and there is a need in the administration to hear and learn from peer countries. This mismatch calls for pilot work and cultural change to add international competence.

Background factors supporting progress on the impact goals

Investing in dialogue and taking stakeholder needs into account

Knowledge brokering models have been developed together with stakeholders to bring concrete added value to decision-making. Science Sparring sessions are anchored in ongoing policy making processes, and the content of the syntheses is tailored to those commissioning them. Participation has been made easy by investing in guidance materials and smooth facilitation of the sessions. Prior studies support the view that needs-driven, iterative knowledge brokering is important for impact and strong legitimacy (Wagner et al. 2023). Interaction between researchers and decision-makers based on co-creation has been shown to be linked to the utilisation of knowledge and to the development of participants' competencies (Kothari et al. 2021; Kalliomäki, Ruoppila & Airaksinen 2021; Kärkkäinen 2025).

The expertise of knowledge brokers communicators and its development

The diverse expertise of knowledge brokers has created a solid foundation for development work and successful knowledge transfer. Knowledge brokers have taken responsibility for organising the whole process, which has lowered the threshold for ministries to commission sparring sessions and knowledge syntheses, and has supported the reputation of competent knowledge brokers (cf. Wagner, Sarkki & Dietz 2024). Knowledge brokers have also gained understanding and skills in organising and shaping processes efficiently to match ministries' needs and researchers' expertise. This observation echoes Obermeister's (2020) research on the importance of learning in knowledge brokering. The brokers' capacity to learn has been a precondition for the Academy's positioning itself as a frontrunner in knowledge brokering.

Leveraging and strengthening the Academy's role

The nature of the development work, the expertise of the knowledge brokers, and the Academy's status have together supported the success. The Academy has a good reputation among researchers and officials. A legitimate and credible standing has helped in developing knowledge brokering practices (cf. Lentsch 2010; Backman 2024; Wagner, Sarkki & Dietz 2024). The success has brought trust in the Academy as an expert organisation working on behalf of both science and evidence-based decision-making.

Clear models and a multidisciplinary approach

The development work has produced new types of knowledge brokering models serving different purposes, and from the perspectives of different disciplines. Giving these knowledge-brokering models clear conceptual forms has helped stakeholders understand the support knowledge brokering offers to decision-making. Multidisciplinarity, in turn, is central in supporting decision-making, since many contemporary phenomena are complex (e.g. van der Sluijs et al. 2008; Koivula et al. 2026). Systemic approaches and a multidisciplinary group of participants have been found to increase decision-makers' trust in the knowledge conveyed (Wagner et al. 2023). Also researchers considered multidisciplinary participation an important part of the principles of knowledge brokering, and it advanced researchers' learning about their own topic and new colleagues (cf. Olson & Pinto da Silva 2020; Mäkinen-Rostedt et al. 2023).

Full report and list of references:

Kärkkäinen, T. (2026). Kohti maailman viisaimpia yhteiskunnallisia päätöksiä – Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian tiedevälittämisen vaikutukset ja vaikuttavuus. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki.