



Hui Rangahau Tahī



B R C S S  
n e t w o r k

# **Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences (BRCSS)**

## **The Social Sciences and Policy-Research Use**

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# Executive Summary

## Background

This study seeks to understand the use of social science research in policy making in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Three case studies of policy development were undertaken: the 2004 Working for Families (WFF) legislation; the 2007/2008 budget allocations for insulating homes; and immigration policy. The research builds on an extensive international literature on the research-to-policy process as it attempts to understand, from the perspectives of researcher, policy advisors and politicians, how social science research informs, and could better inform policy development in New Zealand. The study takes as starting points that research is one among many competing forms of knowledge and influence, that policy making is a ‘messy’, non linear process and that research ‘use’ in policy-making is not straightforward.

There are many different models of policy development. In interpreting the case study findings the project draws on several models including the ‘stages’ model, the policy stream model, the ‘advocacy coalition framework’ and the ‘argumentative-discursive’ model. With regard to research use, a broad distinction is made between the conceptual use of research - where research changes the way an idea is considered or understood, and instrumental use - where research has more of a direct, linear influence over decision-making. In addition to this broad distinction, the study makes reference to the more detailed typology of types of research use provided by Weiss (1979).

Thirty one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with policy advisors, politicians and social science researchers involved in the development of policy in one or other of the case study areas. The report provides a brief review of the research-to-policy literature, participants’ observations on social science research use that cut across policy areas and the case studies. Each case study comprises a brief summary of relevant policy documents and an analysis and synthesis of interview data.

## Working for Families

The 2004 Working for Families (WFF) benefit reform package is a key policy initiative which aims to eliminate child poverty by improving the incomes of low-to-middle income families with dependent children.

- The WFF policy initiative was ‘research informed’. Academic research conducted during the 1990s was widely regarded as playing a pivotal role in getting ‘poverty’ onto the policy agenda. Seminal research identified included the New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project (NZPMP), research on the impacts of the neo-liberal reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s and the development of the Living Standards Measure by government officials. In particular, the NZPMP developed a credible, robust and internationally

- comparable poverty measure that provided evidence that households with children were the largest group below the poverty line.
- Longitudinal research linking childhood socio-economic disadvantage to poorer outcomes in adulthood, analyses highlighting a widening gap between rich and poor and increasing socio-economic hardship, and international research showing New Zealand's poor position and performance on poverty compared to other countries, were also influential in creating a climate for policy change.
  - Policy responses were not immediate – the dominant political view through much of the 1990's was that poverty did not exist. Researchers adopted 'contentious' and 'paradigm-challenging' stances. The cumulative research evidence, a MSD taskforce set up 1998/1999 to examine the effects of social exclusion, lobbying and advocacy from many groups, media reports, accounts from frontline MSD workers and a changing political climate culminated in June 2002, with a government commitment to eliminate child poverty.
  - Once on the policy agenda, a range of knowledge sources informed the development of WFF: including existing poverty research, international comparisons on key indicators and review of administrative data to model policy impacts.
  - More interactive use of research and a more consensual relationship between research and policy makers occurred at the later stages of development through informal and formal research-policy collaborations (e.g. within the Strategic Policy Reference Group) and through 'cross fertilisation' between the Poverty Measure research and MSD's Living Standards research.
  - Participants described the strategic and political use of research to support the final decision to position WFF as a package of incentives to get people into work and to thus exclude beneficiary families from the benefits of tax credits. One of the leading advocacy groups (Child Poverty Action Group) and their supporters became excluded from the policy-making process at this stage. Participants described political ideology and expediency driving the decision and research, evidencing employment as the most sustainable pathway out of poverty, used by the government to justify the decision. Some researchers described their work continuing in a contentious or moral critic role through critiquing what was seen as subsequent flaws in the WFF policy.

## **Insulation**

In 2007 and 2008, the Government announced budget allocations to insulate state houses.

- Participants saw the policy built upon two streams of research evidence – that the average temperature of New Zealand homes was low by international standards and that cold houses, attributable to poor insulation, were causally related to high rates of seasonal mortality and other health problems. The Housing, Insulation and Health study initiated in 2000 examined the relationship between housing temperature and health outcomes and affirmed the conceptual links between energy efficiency, insulation and health.
- Over time, dissemination of the research and increasing media coverage developed awareness about the relationship between cold houses and health and re-shaped the way the issue was framed – from a discourse around energy-

efficient homes and cost savings from improved insulation to an emphasis on the health benefits and the need for ‘demand’ side rather than ‘supply’ side solutions.

- The Housing, Insulation and Health study was widely credited as providing the scientific evidence base required to argue the Government’s case for funding the insulation policy – instrumental use. Government sponsorship of the research was seen to have enhanced uptake. New Zealand specific evidence also enabled comparative analysis of international data on home temperatures, seasonal mortality and asthma rates - reinforcing the extent of the problem and the urgent need to address it.
- Momentum built through the alignment of energy and health issues plus concerns and readiness to act over climate change and renewed political commitment in 2000 to developing energy efficiency building standards.
- Use of the research was encouraged by the efforts and commitment of the researchers to ‘push’ the research evidence to policy makers and in the ‘pull’ of decision makers who sought the necessary evidence base to support the policy.
- Consensual, contentious and paradigm challenging relationships between research and policy making were all evidenced. While the Housing, Insulation and Health study was a collaborative effort with Government and interactive use clearly identified, the researchers described framing the research around issues of social justice and reducing health inequalities and as having an explicit agenda to assist community groups to access resources to improve the health of their homes.

## **Immigration**

A 1986 review of immigration policy led to the establishment of educational, business, professional, age and asset criteria as the main determinants of applicant suitability. Policy refinements since this time have sought to advance the economic and social goals of immigration policy, particularly those related to labour market needs, economic growth and family and humanitarian obligations.

- An increasingly complex and challenging immigration policy environment has increased the importance and amount of immigration research being undertaken and the level of collaboration between researchers and policy-makers. While many examples of conceptual use were identified, research is increasingly being used to signal new immigration policy issues, to inform policy responses and to evaluate policy effectiveness.
- Research had played a significant role in recent settlement policy - through identifying policy failures, informing new ways of framing settlement problems and solutions, identifying settlement needs, informing service responses and evaluating service effectiveness.
- The convergence of political, problem and policy factors, combined with research, provided significant momentum to the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy. Research provided understanding of the policy problem and how temporary migration could provide the solution. Research shaped core objectives, including the policy’s role in Pacific regional development and in achieving positive labour market outcomes in source and receiving countries.

- Conceptual use was evident through research advancing understanding of the trans-national movement of migrants. This led to the reframing of immigration within a context of ‘transitional circularity’ and the relatively rapid policy developments which have sought to position New Zealand more favourably within this context.
- A programme of research examining the economic impacts of immigration provided many examples of political use. In showing largely positive impacts, this research has played a key role in addressing public and political myths around immigration, in shaping immigration discourse and in supporting current policy directions.

## **Enablers and barriers to research use**

- Personal relationship and formal and informal networks between researchers and policy makers were considered key enablers of research use. “Two-way” conversations were seen to facilitate mutual understanding, alignment of research and policy interests and ultimately, research use.
- User ‘push’ enablers identified included the need for researchers to translate and apply their findings appropriately within the policy context, face to face and interactive methods of dissemination, and the use of simple, accessible language when communicating findings. Research informed advocacy and lobbying, including media advocacy, was shown to be particularly important in politically contested environment, such as that within which WFF developed.
- User ‘pull’ enablers identified included research that was relevant, appropriate, meaningful and timely for decision-makers. Research specifically commissioned for policy purposes was considered as particularly likely to be used.
- A lack of understanding and engagement between researchers and policy makers was identified as a common barrier to use. It was generally observed that researchers and policy makers often occupied different ‘worlds’ shaped by different interests and imperatives. Policy makers were described as typically seeking ‘blueprints for action’ – clear, uncontested ‘evidence’ to support decision making and to solve problems, much in the manner of instrumental use. Social science research was described as typically providing contentious, ‘contestable’ or ‘ambiguous’ findings and generating new insights and understanding, more in the manner of conceptual use. Policy makers often saw researchers failing to present research findings in a way that was relevant, appropriate, accessible and utilisable to policy needs and more interested in fulfilling academic interests. Researchers often saw policy makers lacking the skills and capacity to fully understand research and how it could meet their needs.
- Strategies suggested by participants to increase research use included: increasing the level of on-going interaction and exchange between researchers and policy makers; mentoring researchers to increase their skills in applying research findings to policy contexts; and, developing processes to ensure that research issues, trends and perspectives inform early policy thinking and that policy issues, interests and concerns inform research agendas.
- Achieving a balance between policy driven research and independent, researcher initiated research, not necessarily immediately related to current policy issues

was considered important in ensuring balanced and responsive policy development.

## Discussion

- The research findings largely support the existing literature on the use of social science research in policy-making. The prominence of politicians' role in policy-making and the tightness and influence of (Wellington-based) networks of researchers, policy advisers and politicians, were given stronger emphasis than in many international studies.
- Policy making was shown as a complex, evolving and contextualised process that can occur over many years. Research was confirmed as one of many policy influences and research use a much broader term than that suggested by instrumental use. Participants provided different accounts of the role and use of research within policy making reflecting their distinct positions within the policy making process and the duration and depth of involvement.
- All case studies showed some alignment with the 'policy stream' model of policy development: the opportunity and agenda for policy change was enhanced when research evidence aligned with other policy influences. In all case studies, research evidence existed for some time before it was 'used'; typically when shifts in the political and policy context resulted in research findings gaining currency, value and acceptability.
- Evidence of different uses of different types of research at different 'stages' in the policy-making process aligned with the 'stages model' of policy development. Conceptual use was particularly evident in early agenda setting stages - research shaped ways of framing and understanding issues and getting issues onto the policy agenda. Researchers and research were more likely to be in a contentious or paradigm challenging relationship with policy development at this stage. At latter stages and reflective of instrumental use, research informed policy development, refinement, implementation, evaluation and further development. Consensual relationships between researchers and policy makers were evident at this latter stage as were interactive and problem solving models of use.
- Working for Families appears to have been a highly politicised policy process involving many different 'coalitions'. Reflective of the 'advocacy coalition' framework model, different policy options and groups had varying levels of influence during the policies development. In the manner of the 'argumentative discursive' model, the argument that reducing reliance on benefits through employment was the best way to address child poverty 'won out' over the argument that addressing child poverty required concentrating resources on the poorest children. Both policy development models were also evident in the agenda setting stage of the insulation policy-groups of 'actors' vied for their version of 'reality' to be accepted and the use of research and policy decisions were dependent upon which version of 'reality' were in ascendancy.
- Immigration and insulation policy seemed less 'contested' than WFF and political influences less obvious in both areas. In both cases, a convergence of research, policy and political factors supported collaboration between researchers and policy-makers and some consensus on policy direction. This

was particularly evident within immigration where collaboration, dialogue and trust between researchers and policy makers were key enablers of use. The political and strategic use of research was particularly obvious in WFF and reflected the more contested environment.

- Calls to increase the level of engagement between researchers and policy makers reflects the ‘two communities thesis’ and the belief that the non-use of research primarily results from a lack of communication and understanding between researchers and policy makers - enhancing communication and understanding is therefore seen as the best solution for bridging the research-policy gap. Strategies suggested by participants to enhance use reflected ‘interactive strategies’, described in the literature as those focused on improving the links, engagement and collaboration between researchers and policy makers.
- Whether interactive strategies alone are sufficient to enhance use requires further consideration. Nutley et al. (2007) suggest the need for interventions which work within the complex, contested and political research/policy nexus, which recognise the range of relationships between research and policy and which acknowledge organisational context.

# 1. Introduction

“Although the influence of research...may sometimes be inferred, it can be far from easy to see *how* such influence occurs” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.2).

Social scientists produce knowledge about the impact of social phenomena on economic, social, cultural and environmental issues and policy advisors and politicians seek information and evidence about a problem, about what works (and what influences what works) to inform policy. Social science research can – and does – feed into policy development, but the process is neither predictable nor straight forward (Nutley et al., 2007).

A big expansion in the social sciences occurred after World War Two in response to an increased appetite for social knowledge. Communication channels opened between social science researchers and government policy makers in the belief that solutions to social problems could be engineered. However disillusionment set in during the 1970s and 1980s about the ability of research to provide answers to complex social problems (Featherman and Vinovskis, 2001). While policy required specific solutions, in the academy social science was becoming more and more specialised and less oriented to problem-solving. This brought into question the idea of government use of social science research for policy formulation. However research still filtered through ‘think tanks’ which were not driven by the same academic motivations and could be very influential in their use of research (Anderson, 2003).

A shift again in the 1990s led to renewed attempts to use research to solve social problems such as poverty. However this cyclic return, which followed a period of emphasis on efficiency, had a different focus. Gone was the idealism of the 1960s. Now the concern was with effectiveness, and hence with ‘what works’ within the complex interplay of public/private and market forces in the political/policy-making arena (Anderson, 2003). In the UK, Prime Minister Tony Blair launched a range of ‘third way’ social programmes under an evidence-based policy banner (Nutley et al., 2007). In New Zealand too, government ministers talked of the need for ‘evidence-based policy’.

While the extent to which many government policies are ‘evidence based’ is arguable, they are at least ‘evidence informed’, say Nutley et al. (2007), with research and evaluation important components of government decision-making. However research evidence is not always clear or consistent (Boaz and Pawson, 2005, Zussman, 2003) – and nor is it always clear what amounts to ‘evidence’. Evidence is a value-laden and subjective term, and what constitutes ‘evidence’ in the political/policy advisor arena can be loose and contested. Certain research evidence (produced with academic rigour), may be used to support a particular policy initiative; but so too may ‘evidence’ from a range of other knowledge sources such as general information and statistics, expert views, cultural knowledge and personal experience. A raft of influences on any policy decision – including party ideology, personal interest and experience, expert views, media interest, public perception and political expediency – need to be acknowledged.

Research is thus one among many competing forms of knowledge and influence. For the purposes of this study research is defined as “any investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge based on planned and systematic enquiry” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.21). It can include ideas, data, modelling and forecasts. In the current study the focus is on social science research, which can be defined as “research aimed at understanding the social world, as well as the interactions between this world and public policy” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.20).

What constitutes research ‘use’ in policy-making is also not straightforward. Rarely is it linear and instrumental; rather it is usually messy and more often conceptual. The eventual use of research may take years, and by the time the policy comes to light it may be difficult to recognise the original contribution a specific study made (Buxton and Hanney, 1996).

There is perhaps an assumption on the part of researchers that if decision-makers have good research evidence, they will use it. But as Weiss (1979) and Fafard (2008) note, the powerful are not obliged to listen and often do so only when it suits them. Policy decisions frequently appear to be based on “the vagaries of public opinion, electoral considerations, personal preference and crisis management” (Fafard, 2008, p.7).

The literature shows that ‘evidence’ for research use in policy, like the policy-making process itself, is messy and contested. This study does not seek to be definitive, but rather, through in-depth interviews with some of the major research-to-policy players (researchers, policy advisors and politicians) in three policy areas, to present their different perspectives of this ‘messy’ research-policy process. A case study approach has been adopted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the research-policy interface in Aotearoa/New Zealand and investigate ways to increase the contribution of social science research in policy-making. Three very different case studies – each areas of policy where there was known social science research input – were chosen to add breadth as well as depth to current knowledge of the process: research-policy links which fed into the 2004 Working for Families legislation, the on-going interaction between researchers and policy advisors in the immigration arena and the 2007/2008 budget allocations for insulating houses. The researcher participants were working in universities or other research settings outside of government; policy advisors included policy managers and analysts within government departments; while the politicians had ministerial responsibilities in the three policy areas under investigation. Previous studies have focussed on the perspectives of researchers and policy advisors, either separately or in combination; this study allows the political imperatives of the policy process to emerge more clearly by including relevant politicians as research participants. Do the findings of this study differ from previous studies about research use by policy-makers? How do they fit with policy-making models? What do the participants see as barriers to the transfer of research knowledge? And how could the contribution of social science research be increased so that government policies might be better ‘research evidence informed’?

## Background

“Social science does contribute to policy and practice but the link is neither consensual, graceful, nor self-evident” (Rein, 1976, p.272).

While research clearly has a role in government policy-making, a review of the literature shows it is only one amongst many inputs (Davis and Howden-Chapman, 1996, Fafard, 2008, Hanney et al., 2003, Nutley et al., 2003, 2007, Zussman, 2003) and that policy-making is far from “a matter of taking action on the basis of the best available empirical evidence” (Fafard, 2008, p.2). Nor are the links between research and policy usually ‘consensual, graceful or self-evident’.

Research use is context-specific. It must be timely and relevant – and what is timely and relevant varies at different stages in the policy-making process. The shift in the literature from the term ‘evidence-based’ to ‘evidence-informed’ policy acknowledges other influences on policy and that any research transfer happens in a particular context. It “allows for the real world possibility that decision-makers can and will only tackle some issues and not others at any point in time and will take into account the values and value conflicts that are often very real in making broad policy decisions” (Fafard, 2008, p.8).

Research rarely provides definitive answers. Instead, while interacting with each other, research and policy also interact with the broader social context and the prevailing discourses and systems of thought within which they exist (Nutley et al., 2007). They can also be seen as interacting in quite different ways, depending on the ‘lens’ through which the policy-making process is viewed (Gabbay et al., 2003, Levitt, 2003).

## Models of research to policy

There are many models for explaining the research-policy interface. While none of them appears to offer a complete explanation, together those identified below provide a useful framework for examining different aspects and examples of the research-policy interface in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The most simplistic research-to-policy models are instrumental and linear: a problem is identified, evidence is produced, this knowledge is transferred or ‘brokered’ to the policy sector and policy formulation follows (Fafard, 2008, Hanney et al., 2003, Nutley et al., 2007, World Health Organization, 2004). Here the emphasis is on “getting the research results into the hands of policy and decision-makers, and effective use of a myriad of techniques of knowledge transfer, exchange and brokering” (Fafard, 2008, p.5). However this ‘naming a problem, proposing options and choosing a solution’ model is a very limited representation of a process which in reality is complex and messy. It takes no account of the exigencies of the policy-making process.

A ‘stages model’ has been proposed as a useful heuristic device (Burton, 2006) for investigating the research to policy interface. Although criticised for still suggesting a systematic linear process of policy-making and research use, it introduces the idea

that how and what research is used depends on the ‘stage’ of the policy process (Glasziou and Haynes, 2005, Landry et al., 2001). And this can be a long process: “Rarely is government policy the result of a single decision – the inherent complexity and contestability of policy means that taking action will require many decisions, perhaps over several weeks, months or even years” (Fafard, 2008, p.12). The number and names of ‘stages’ vary from model to model (Glasziou and Haynes, 2005, Landry et al., 2001, Nutley et al., 2007). In this report reference will be made to the ‘stages’ identified in the model formulated by Howlett and Ramesh (2003) (as cited in Fafard, 2008): agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation.

A government’s agenda is set within a complex ‘push and pull’ of forces including election promises, policy priorities, ministry advice, pressure from foreign governments and the personal priorities of individual ministers. Policy options are then formulated and decisions made. The critical point is the “complexity of the process by which policy and program choices are identified and evaluated, and which are included and excluded from final consideration by those with the power to make binding decisions on what is to be done” (Fafard, 2008). Fafard notes research evidence is sometimes used not to guide decision-making but rather to justify it, resulting in “decision-informed evidence” (Fafard, 2008, p.11).

Variations of the above models are those most commonly used to explore policy-making processes and research use. A brief mention will be made of three further models, the policy stream process (Kingdom 1984, cited in Nutley et al., 2007), the ‘advocacy coalition framework’ and the ‘argumentative-discursive’ model (Fafard, 2008). The policy stream model proposes that policy making involves three separate streams (problem, policy, political) and that the agenda for change is strongest when these come together; problems come to the attention of policy makers, potential solutions emerge and these collectively enter the political stream. In the advocacy coalition framework, research influences policy through use by advocacy groups and coalitions. (Here it is explicit that the research/researcher may lose ‘neutrality’ by association with an advocacy group.) In the ‘argumentative-discursive’ model, any concept of neutral research or researchers is challenged.

The advocacy coalition framework model sees the policy process driven by coalitions of policy advocates, journalists, public servants, individual politicians and researchers. (Researchers become members of advocacy coalitions by active choice, or their research is appropriated and used by coalition members “to maintain their position and defend it against challenges from other advocacy coalitions” (Fafard, 2008, p.14). These ‘subsystems’ and their relative influence are seen as governed by relatively stable sets of norms, rules and institutions, including basic socio-cultural values, a given distribution of resources and constitutional structures. The waxing and waning of particular coalitions determines changes in policy (and by inference, the use of the research which informs those policies).

The advocacy coalition model not only challenges the concept of “objective policy researchers uncovering universal truths, revealing these to policy-makers and seeing them incorporated in the process of making policy” (Burton, 2006, p.186), but it emphasises that understanding the roles of power and competition for power are

crucial in explaining the use (or not) of research. And like the ‘argumentative and discursive’ model outlined below, it sees policy-making as driven by competing and multiple accounts of the nature of policy problems and the range of possible solutions.

In the argumentative-discursive model of policy-making, there is a “struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality” (Hajer, 1997, p.344). While the earlier models see evidence and analysis as largely outside the policy-making model (with at least some possibility of relatively neutral research), the constructivist approach of the argumentative-discursive model denies the possibility that anyone contributing evidence to policy-making can be a neutral third party (Fafard, 2008). In keeping with its constructivist roots, evidence is seen as a social construction. From this standpoint, researchers, like policy advisors and politicians, are inextricably part of the process, their perspectives heavily conditioned by who they are and their position in the policy-making process. The research-to-policy process in the argumentative-discursive model is thus one of recognising and sifting through the many ‘truths’. “Rather than produce what amounts to highly contextualized, propositional knowledge (as is found in an ACF [Advocacy Coalition Framework] approach), policy analysis becomes an exercise in analyzing what participants in the policy process or those who would be effected by or interested in the policy decisions themselves have to say about the policy in question” (Fafard, 2008, p.18).

This research explores the social science research-to-policy interface within the context of the different frameworks outlined above.

## **Use of research**

“The use of research is a subtle and complex process, difficult to trace and resulting in equally subtle and complex outcomes” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.33).

Any attempt to assess the use of research will depend on the definition of ‘use’ and the question is often not whether research was used, but how it was used. Did it have a direct influence on the design of the policy? Was research seen as ‘evidence’ and used to provide support for a particular policy or proposal? Did it influence ways of thinking about a social issue? And how was research used alongside other sources of knowledge?

Previous studies vary in usefulness because of loose definitions around the term ‘use’ (Nutley et al., 2007, p.67). ‘Use’ by policy advisors and politicians can include a broad range of applications from the more conceptual to the more instrumental: from a policy advisor reading a research report as part of preparing a general background briefing or including research findings as part of policy options,(even if it is rejected), through to research having a direct input into policy.

A distinction is often made between conceptual (changes ways of thinking about an issue) and instrumental (direct input into policy) use of research. Rather than ‘privilege’ the instrumental use of research over conceptual use, Nutley et al. (2007) emphasise the importance of this conceptual role for the democratic wellbeing of a

society: “Research can have an important role to play in actually *shaping values* and it should not therefore be relegated to a purely technical role of helping decide between competing options that seek to operationalise fixed and pre-existing values” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.11). Conceptual ‘use’ stimulates dialogue and reflection. It can reshape tacit as well as explicit knowledge, and feeds into public and policy discourses. In examining research ‘use’ in the three case study policy areas, this study includes multiple meanings of term ‘use’.

The literature shows research is more likely to be used conceptually. In this sense it can raise awareness of issues and inform government agenda-setting (cf the stages model); it can provide alternative discourses (cf the advocacy coalition framework or argumentative-discursive models) and provide options for action at the policy-implementation stage. While there are examples of instrumental use following the evidence-to-policy model, studies in the US and UK indicate conceptual use is more common than the instrumental use of research in policy overall (Nutley et al., 2007). In one systematic review of research use by health policymakers, 40 percent reported some form of instrumental use and 60 percent conceptual use (Innvaer et al., 2002). There is often lack of evidence to use. And, as noted above, research and other evidence is at times used selectively to reinforce existing policy positions – a case of ‘decision-informed evidence’ rather than evidence-informed policy ((Fafard, 2008, p.11).

There are many ways of conceptualising research use, including fixed typologies and more fluid process models. Weiss (1979) posits a typology of seven different models of research use:

The knowledge-driven model – instrumental: applied research drives policy development.

The problem-solving model – instrumental: active search for knowledge where policy goals are already in place.

The interactive model – more conceptual: iterative and collaborative as policy-makers actively search for knowledge from a range of sources, including researchers.

The political model – strategic: political stances are longstanding and fixed and research is used to support them – or undermine opposition.

The tactical model – strategic: research is done for tactical reasons (the findings are irrelevant).

The enlightenment model – conceptual: research gradually influences policy through diverse and indirect routes such as interest groups and the mass media. This can ultimately lead to fundamental shifts in prevailing paradigms, shaping ways both problems and their solutions are framed.

Research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society – conceptual: iterative interaction between policy, research and the wider social context; ‘blue skies’ research which may re-conceptualise issues, shaping ways of thinking by policy makers and the wider society.

This research refers to Weiss’ model as a useful starting point to categorise different types of research use. However it is recognising that ‘use’ is a fluid process. Different types of research use will interact, overlap and build on each other; and they will be actively interpreted and negotiated within the context of that use. Just as

policy-making is a long and involved process, the use of research too is “a fluid and dynamic process rather than a single event” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.58).

## **What shapes the use of research?**

The nature of the research, the personal characteristics of the policy-makers and researchers, the links between the research and its users and the context for use have been identified as four key factors influencing the use of research in policy (Nutley et al., 2007).

In terms of the nature of the research, it must be seen to be of high quality (Gano et al., 2007) (which is open to interpretation) and, most importantly, be timely and relevant. There is often a mismatch between the time-specific needs of policy-makers and lengthy research processes (Selby Smith and Selby Smith, 2002).

Policy-makers also prefer clear, uncontested findings. This poses difficulties as social science research “tends not to simplify problems but reveal new complexities” (Nutley et al., 2007, p.70). Here again is a potential mismatch between the needs of the policy-makers for firm recommendations for action and researchers, who often stress the uncertainty of their findings and multiple possible readings. Ellwood (2003) writes of the “contrasting cultures of policy makers and scholars [which] create inevitable divisions”, with academics seeing politicians and policy-makers as ‘oversimplifiers’ and politicians regarding academics as ‘complexifiers’ (Ellwood, 2003, p.6).

Research which has the backing of a highly credible organisation is also more likely to be picked up; so is research which has been commissioned and has specific local relevance (Selby Smith and Selby Smith, 2002). Many studies stress that presentation is also key. The language used must be accessible and appropriate. Having a good “story” is also important. Court and Young (2003) note researchers need to provide narratives that are powerful enough to destabilise existing discourses through which policy is enacted. Resistance to policy change can be strong. As academic Paul Krugman comments in an article by Naparstek (2008), on policy-making: “Most things stay the way they are unless there’s very strong pressure to change” (p 32).

The personal characteristics of researchers and policy advisors and their participation (or non participation) in informal and formal networks strongly influence the likelihood of research use. Contact between researchers and policy-makers (preferably face-to-face) is seen as pivotal. Say Nutley et al. (2007, p.65) “...what emerges from studies in the field is that, above all, personal contacts are the most important source of information about research.”

Nutley et al. (2007) broadly categorise the different research stances taken by researchers as consensual, contentious and paradigm-challenging. With the consensual approach (the crux of the evidence-based policy agenda) there is broad agreement between researchers and policymakers about ‘problems’ and how they should be addressed. Researchers taking a contentious approach act as ‘moral critics’ of public policy through academic journals and the media, while those with a paradigm challenging approach challenge established frameworks and ways of

thinking. Research and researchers are likely to be considered more or less 'useful' depending on their perceived stance, at varying stages in the policy process. The impact of a research 'stance' in research use is considered in this study.

## 2. The Study

The BRCSS Network, a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) funded programme, was set up in 2004 with the aim of promoting and developing research activity and capability within the social sciences. Surveying the social science workforce to build an understanding of its activities and capability was a component of the Network's contract with TEC. Three investigations were planned. The first, the National Survey of Social Scientists 2006 provided baseline information about social scientists employed within the New Zealand University sector (Witten et al., 2006). In the second investigation, lead investigators and emerging researchers working on forty five multi-year social science research programmes were asked about research capability building practices occurring within their programmes (Witten et al., 2007). The third study takes an in-depth look at the relationship between social science research and policy formation and the enablers and barriers to research use. Politicians and policy advisors, as the central players in policy formation, were interviewed as well as social science researchers. The study was undertaken for the BRCSS Network by the Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation.

### Methodology

The research used a case-study approach to investigate the research-to-policy process. Three policy areas were identified: Working for Families policy, Household energy efficiency and insulation, and Immigration policy. The case studies were different in character: Working for families related to policy development that led to the passing of specific legislation; the Household energy efficiency and insulation case study tracked the various ways research had contributed to funding policy in this area; and the immigration case study looked more broadly at the place of research in immigration policy development over the past decade.

An environmental scan of ministerial briefing papers, other policy documents, books and articles relevant to the three case-study areas was carried out. The team identified social scientists and policy advisors currently or previously involved in the case study areas. They were invited to participate and also asked to suggest other policy advisors and researchers who were active in the development of the relevant policy. Snowball sampling followed from these initial leads with policy advisors suggesting researchers and vice versa. In each case study area one or two politicians who had been closely associated with the policy field in recent years were also approached.

A number of participants had moved between policy and research roles and in and out of various government ministries and policy arenas. These individuals contributed data on their experience and observations of the research-to-policy process more generally as well as relating to specific case study. In this study their role in the policy area under examination determined whether they were identified as a researcher or a policy advisor.

Thirty one participants were interviewed, three politicians, 14 researchers and 14 policy advisors. The interviews took place between March and June 2008. Four

interviews were conducted face to face, but all others were telephone interviews. The duration of interviews ranged from 30 to 80 minutes. Interviews were based on a semi structured interview schedule that covered: experiences of research use; influences on research use; research and policy factors that impede and facilitate research use; push and pull factors; nature of relationships between research and policy, role of advocacy and knowledge brokers; experience of collaborative partnerships.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

## **Analysis**

Thematic analyses of interview data were conducted independently for the three case studies (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This form of analysis generates what Patton (1990) has termed ‘thick description’ of data: rich, diverse, detailed accounts, often built around verbatim data excerpts. Transcripts were read multiple times by one or more of the research team and a preliminary coding frame was negotiated by the team members. Interview transcripts were imported into QSR’s Nvivo qualitative software package and coded. Working analyses were produced by close reading of the data and consideration of the commonalities and variations in the coded materials. These were adjusted by the authors until the emerging themes were a stable and accurate reflection of the data. Case study accounts were generated drawing out the distinctions and commonalities in the perspectives of the researchers, policy advisors and, where relevant, politicians. Data that were not case-study specific but related to experiences of the research-policy interface more generally were then independently analysed.

### 3. Findings

The study findings are presented in four sections. The first section covers generic issues from interviews with researchers, policy advisors and politicians on research use (including definitions of use, types of use and differences of research purpose), other influences on policy formulation and factors seen to inhibit or facilitate research use. This is followed by sections reporting findings specific to the case studies: Working for Families, Household energy efficiency and insulation, and Immigration policy<sup>1</sup>. The case studies are introduced with a brief summary of the relevant policy history and context. Only key research papers are mentioned in the introductions to the case studies. While an extensive range of research informed policy in each of the case study areas, it is not the task of this study to attempt to list them all. Data pertaining to research purpose and use, non-research influences on policy formation and enablers and barriers to research use, from researcher, policy advisors and decision-making perspectives are then analysed.

#### 3.1 Understanding the research-policy interface: generic findings

##### Introduction

“There is no direct relationship between the policy and research but there is a fabulous network of interfaces.” (researcher)

Linear models of the research-to-policy process (where a problem is named, research comes up with solutions and policy is implemented) posit a direct, instrumental relationship between research and policy. Analysis of participant interviews is consistent with literature findings that the research-to-policy process is anything but linear; that it is in fact complex and messy, with research indeed filtering through ‘a fabulous network of interfaces’. The participant interviews also support literature findings that research use is more likely to be conceptual than instrumental – with conceptual use more likely during the agenda-setting stages of the policy process and instrumental use more likely during later stages.

Nutley et al. (2007) note that the drive for policy can come from ‘producer push’ (where research raises issues to be addressed), or ‘user pull’ (where political parties, Ministers or policy advisors set the agenda). Researchers and policy advisors alike suggested the policy initiation process was often a mix of ‘producer push’ and ‘user pull’, along with other influences. Because of the complex nature of the research-policy interface (and different individual perspectives<sup>2</sup>) it was often difficult to know where initiating ideas came from – party ideology, constituent concern, an overseas

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<sup>1</sup> The Working for Families and Insulation case studies were conducted by Penelope Carroll and the Immigration case study primarily by Michael Blewden.

<sup>2</sup> There was a tendency amongst researchers, policy advisors and politicians to emphasize their own particular influence.

initiative, ministry advice or academic research. This in turn made it difficult to determine the extent to which policy initiatives were the result of producer-push or user-pull.

In terms of the user-pull model, policy advisors noted the pivotal role of government ministers in initiating policy investigation within the relevant government department. A minister might request advice,

“...simply because they’re hearing things or seeing things that give them cause for concern; or they see an opportunity to do better and very often there will not be an evidence base behind that.” (policy advisor)

Most policy advisors spoke of in-house research being a major policy driver.

Sometimes, where academic research was identified as a primary driver for policy (producer push), it was seen in terms of ‘an idea whose time has come’:

“In general you have to wait...to catch that tide, rather than thinking because you’ve come up with some great piece of research that everyone’s going to see the light and suddenly do it.” (researcher)

Whatever the relative influences of research at the agenda-setting stage of the policy process, participants spoke of it playing less of a role at the policy formulation stage, which was seen to be primarily a matter of weighing up different options and trading off different objectives:

“Research informs what the trade-offs are going to be, but it cannot give you the trade-offs – that is a political decision.” (policy advisor)

### **Defining terms: research/information/evidence**

Policy advisors and researchers often had different perspectives on what was worthwhile ‘research’ or ‘evidence’, and indeed, what constituted research or evidence. As Nutley et al. (2007) note, policy advisors want clear uncontested ‘evidence’ to support policy proposals, while social science research is more often contentious, producing ‘contestable’ or ‘ambiguous’ findings.

Researchers generally saw research in terms of a systematic production of knowledge to generate insights and understanding. One researcher summed it up as:

“sustained intentional critical reflection and building of knowledge about something within a formal setting.” (researcher)

Policy advisors tended to see research in terms of problem solving,

“bringing together information to help address a problem or to identify an issue which requires further attention.” (policy advisor)

These differences in perspective extended to the use of the word ‘evidence’. While researchers used the term in a rigorous academic sense they noted policy advisors often used the words ‘evidence’ and ‘information’ interchangeably:

“in fact they might use evidence more than they would use the term information; whereas I use the term information because I want to make it constantly clear that I don’t think there is any ‘evidence’ in that really rigorous evidential kind of sense.” (researcher)

Several researchers also noted that politicians would say ‘research has shown’, to lend credence to a policy proposal when the ‘research’ may have been a quick survey rather than rigorous research.

In spite of differences in perceptions of ‘research’ and ‘evidence’, participants from both sides of the researcher-policy advisor ‘cultural divide’ noted the importance of research for ‘evidence informed’ policy and the need to bridge the cultural divide to increase research use.

The following findings from interviews with researchers, policy advisors and politicians illustrate different aspects of the research-policy interface in Aotearoa/New Zealand and suggest ways the use of social science research by the policy sector can be increased in the interests of what Fafard (2008) calls ‘healthy public policy’.

## **Use of research**

Research was seen to be used in a variety of ways, including identifying an issue, working out how it could be conceptualised, providing data or support for a particular political position, problem-solving, or evaluating policy.

While ideas on what constituted ‘worthwhile’ research varied, researchers, policy advisors and politicians all spoke of the need for both conceptual and instrumental research for good public policy. One policy advisor defined instrumental research as “relevant short term for immediate pick up” and conceptual research as “a good wise body of information that a democracy ought to have access to” – and which could be useful in the future.

Many participants noted conceptual use was more likely in the early stages of policy formulation, raising political awareness and providing an evidence base for putting an issue on the policy agenda, with instrumental research use (and evaluation<sup>3</sup>) more likely at the policy implementation stage.

While research use can be broadly defined in terms of a conceptual-instrumental dichotomy, Weiss’ (1979) typology of research use also allows a teasing out of ‘interactive’, ‘strategic’ and ‘political’ dimensions.

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<sup>3</sup> Several policy advisors spoke of the policy role of on-going evaluation, particularly at the implementation stage.

In terms of interactive use, policy advisors and researchers alike spoke of research and policy ‘cross fertilisation’ leading to research and ideas from different sectors building on each other; and of interaction between internal and external research in the policy process, including research exchanges with advocacy groups:

“We quite like to be in a position where we can say, ‘well we’ve got a whole lot of facts and information and we’re happy to make that available to you’... and they’ve given us information and we’ve helped them shape it up into something that’s a bit more robust statistically and we’ve both benefited from that.” (policy advisor)

In terms of strategic and political use, participants gave examples such as research commissioned to support pre-determined policies; research used to support particular policies in ways not intended by the researcher; and politicians only interested in research that supported their particular platform (and the flow-on effect of this in terms of research use).

“I think politicians are by and large interested in research if it’s something that will tell them what they want to hear in relation to a particular platform that they’re standing on at the time...A policy analyst is looking a little bit wider<sup>4</sup> than that but still very much looking for information that might concur with what the politician wants.” (researcher)

### **Differences of research purpose**

The literature suggests that academic researchers, policy advisors and politicians tend to have different research agendas: that policy advisors and politicians, driven by policy considerations, want blueprints for action, while academics are more interested in conceptual research (and furthering their academic careers). Most researchers however also spoke of being policy oriented, even though they acknowledged a general dichotomy:

“Decision makers are a lot more instrumental and I guess the academics are a lot more conceptual...[that] would be the simplest way of describing it.” (researcher)

Policy advisors talked of the ‘real world’ versus the more leisurely ‘academic world’; and of the rigour and detail of academic research being of little use for policy-making when it lacked specific policy options (which they considered it all too often did):

“What are the logical consequences of these findings? That’s the part that I think is often missing.” (policy advisor)

One policy advisor differentiated between ‘straight academics’ and ‘consultants’, seeing the latter, because they were engaged with the users of their information, as providing more relevant solution-focussed research. However all of the researcher

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<sup>4</sup> Widely enough so that if there were ‘no trains coming into the platform’ the politician wanted to stand on, the policy analyst could say ‘don’t stand on that platform’...(researcher)

participants spoke of their commitment to policy change and directing their research towards that, while at the same time stressing the need for ‘academic’ research which was not tied to political and current policy imperatives (as did the policy advisors and politicians):

“There is and must always be a place for research that is apparently irrelevant and that is going to take a long time before it bears fruit...you can’t drive a generation of knowledge by an agenda of current relevance, let alone political expediency.” (researcher)

While accepting the value of ‘blue skies’ research, policy advisors tended to however emphasise the over-riding importance of policy-relevant research. Said one:

“At the end of the day, if the research does not drive policy change, it’s a waste of time. I’m not really interested in adding to the sum of human knowledge...I’m interested in driving real policy change that affects real New Zealanders and improves their lives and the lives of their children.” (policy advisor)

Conversely academic research was often seen as driven by career considerations rather than policy change. Researchers were also criticised for not meeting policy requirements when commissioned to do research, instead using funding to further their own research interests:

“They tend to just grab the subject matter and tag it on to whatever they are actually doing research on anyway. And then they present their little pet research theme in an attempt to package it to meet what the government was talking about, but it doesn’t work...” (policy advisor)

Criticisms were equally levelled at some policy advisors for commissioning research with unclear goals– and for showing lack of interest in research they themselves had commissioned. One researcher insisted on departmental engagement during the research process:

“I usually set it up in a way that enforces that engagement because the reality is that a lot of policy people don’t want to engage with the various pieces of work that they’ve commissioned.” (researcher)

Problems were also seen to arise because of funding imperatives. Said one researcher:

“Academics are often looking for commissioned research to do because that’s the only way they can ...actually get to write papers...so often they will put their hand up to do commissioned research without... really being cognizant of what that involves them in, in terms of the policy process stuff... but we don’t talk about that very much at all because it’s sort of a little bit grubby.” (researcher)

Nutley et al. (2007) have suggested researchers’ relationships with policy-makers, and the research they choose to do, depends on the research ‘stance’ researchers adopt (consensual, contentious or paradigm challenging). One or two researcher

participants saw themselves primarily as ‘contentious’ or ‘paradigm-changing’, while others saw themselves firmly in the ‘consensual’ box, working within existing paradigms and in collaboration with policy advisors to achieve good ‘evidence informed’ outcomes. (One such researcher called him/herself a ‘pracademic’ – someone who was ‘half bureaucrat’ and ‘half academic’ and moved between the two roles.) Many saw themselves taking a combination of all three stances, depending on the stage of policy development – for instance contentious or paradigm-challenging as they strove to shift a particular discourse; and then, that achieved, working ‘consensually’ with policy advisors to formulate and implement policy change.

### **Sources of influence on policy**

Research is only one of many influences on the policy-making process – and academic research just one of several sources of research. Participants spoke of other research input, the overwhelming impact of politics (everything about the research-policy interface was political, said one researcher, either with a small ‘p’ or a large ‘P’), government ministries, advocacy groups and the media. These various influences became intertwined during the policy-making process. One policy advisor described this as an integral part of ‘the role of civil society’, with research filtering through a variety of mechanisms to inform policy. The process was messy and interactive, involving many players, including (apart from researchers and policy advisors), constituents, advocacy groups, government ministries and politicians. Maharey<sup>5</sup> spoke of feeling in the centre of a mass of forces:

“There’ll just be things crashing through the door all the time, saying ‘pick me, pick me’, ‘you’ve got to pay for me now’, ‘you didn’t know I was here, but I’m an issue...” (Maharey)

Advocacy groups became intermediaries in the research-to-policy process when they used academic research to push a policy, and several researchers talked of feeding their research through NGOs, advocacy groups and the media as a way of increasing their influence on policy. Research conducted by advocacy groups was also picked up by other researchers, the media and government departments. Some researchers reported cross-overs in researcher/advocacy roles:

“I’ve been engaged in research, but I suppose I consider my role to be primarily one of advocacy and so people like me, our job is to generate demand and so that’s how I see it.” (researcher)

Research conducted within government ministries and elsewhere (advocacy groups, NGOs, overseas organisations) both built on and competed with academic research. Several policy advisors spoke of the importance of international links, ‘keeping an eye’ on what comes out of the OECD and how New Zealand compared internationally. One researcher noted the attention politicians paid to OECD reports, for instance,

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<sup>5</sup> Hon Steve Maharey was the Minister of Social Development as the Working for Families policy was developed

“because that’s about our political standing and so there’s quite a lot of referencing to OECD research in [policy documents]. I mean ironically, often there’s more referencing to OECD research than there is necessarily to New Zealand research.” (researcher)

According to several policy advisors, while sometimes there could be competing evidence, the problem was more likely to be a lack of evidence on which to base a policy decision. If research was available there was a good chance it would be used, although not always: Maharey spoke of other imperatives often taking precedence, because politicians faced policy pressure from many different influences:

“[We] are at the middle of all the pressures – ideology, advocacy groups, media saying this, money, Treasury officials, whatever...” (Maharey)

All participants spoke of the importance of both formal (including reference groups and seminars) and informal networks in influencing policy decisions. Some concerns were raised about possible over-reliance on particular research sources limiting research options.<sup>6</sup> However, as one researcher noted, policy advisors and politicians needed advisers they could depend on:

“...they want a limited number of reliable people – reliable in terms of all the meanings of the word reliable – so the information they provide is reliable but they are also reliably discreet.” (researcher)

Research was seen as often taking ‘second place’ to party ideology, with policy advisors constrained by their Ministers and the politics of the day. They spoke of tailoring what research went through to their Minister in line with what they knew their Minister’s position to be – and there being more chance of research use if an issue was not too political.

All participants commented on the overwhelming influence on policy of the Prime Minister, relevant government Ministers and Treasury. Not only did Treasury need to be convinced about a certain policy, but once a policy proposal was accepted, that proposal then had to compete for funding in each Budget round. Said Maharey:

“Michael [Cullen] is crucial to anything you do in this Government, partly because he’s got a brain the size of a planet, but also because he controls the money.”

Aside from Treasury ‘holding the purse strings’, Government ministers were seen as the effective deciders of policy: if a Minister did not want to do something, he would just say ‘no’, irrespective of research findings or policy advisor recommendations.

“I’ve been in front of Ministers and said ‘well Minister you asked for some information on that, here it is’...and they’ll say ‘that’s interesting, just before this meeting I had a group of people from the community, or from Grey Power, or from academia, or from overseas or what have you, and they told me this’...you’ve given me three options, you recommend the third one, but

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<sup>6</sup> Several participants noted that the small size of Aotearoa/New Zealand facilitated informal and formal researcher-policy advisor relationships

on balance, given the discussions I've had and the information I've got from other people, I think I prefer the first one'." (policy advisor)

Ministers in turn were influenced by electorate clinics and constituent opinion which could outweigh advice from their departments:

"They're not really attuned to what their policy analysts are saying in the same kind of way, because they don't get elected by policy analysts, they get elected by the constituents." (policy advisor)

All participants saw the need to be attuned to public opinion, for politicians to make decisions to get re-elected as a reality of politics that often determined policy initiatives.

"People moan about the politicians but they have a particular job to do and they have to be responsive to a public demand. If there's no public demand, generally speaking, they don't act. I mean sometimes they do out of conscience or whatever, but mostly that's supposed to be their role, as an advocate." (researcher)

The media was identified as playing a key role. Politicians who 'want to get re-elected' were sensitised to issues raised in the media, and some researchers (and all advocacy groups) used the media to publicise research findings to increase the likelihood of government action. Several researchers spoke of the usefulness of getting the media on-side.

One policy advisor spoke of departmental fears that issues would end up on the front page of *The Dominion*:

"Because when things get on the front page of *The Dominion*, then there's accountability because it embarrasses the Ministers. If the Ministers are embarrassed, then the CEO's of the policy analysts are embarrassed, and you get the whole kind of internal smacking procedure happening." (policy advisor)

Another policy advisor commented on the power of the media not just in terms of promoting issues, but also promoting particular academics to prominence:

"[Academics] who make themselves available, who have learned how to speak in relatively short sound bites and who have an engaging media presence...they get used as favourites and then they become part of the prevailing national discourse." (policy advisor)

### **Barriers and enablers of research use**

The literature has highlighted 'timeliness' and relevance of research, good engagement between researchers and policy-makers and appropriate dissemination as key factors facilitating the use of academic research in policy formulation. Findings

from participant interviews reiterated the importance of these factors, particularly timeliness and relevance:

“It’s whether the research is not only timely but relevant, whether it’s accessible to the policy elite, the officials, or in some cases to Ministers; whether the political settings or the political philosophy is receptive to it and...how do-able the thing being discussed is and what sort of costs or regulatory inputs goes with it.” (Hodgson<sup>7</sup>)

Whether or not an issue was part of the governing party’s political agenda was vital.

“The current political environment is a huge part of what policy gets made, what questions get asked.” (researcher)

Research and policy were seen to largely operate in different time-frames, which also affected the relevance of research.

“Longitudinal stuff is of limited value in Government when you’re on a three year election cycle. I don’t want to know how the policy was performing two years ago. I want to know how it is performing today – at the moment.” (policy advisor)

Different time-frames, differing concepts of ‘research’ and perceptions of a lack of understanding about policy in academic research, were all given as examples of a ‘cultural divide’ inhibiting research use. Each side of the divide levelled criticisms at the other: academics ‘did not understand policy’, thought they ‘knew everything’ and ‘talked down’ to policy advisors; policy advisors ‘lacked the capacity to deal with research’.

“I would be looking for much more dialogue and thinking together rather than imagining that policy generates all the problems and research generates all the answers.” (policy advisor)

“In their heart of hearts most sociologists believe most people involved in policy are sort of prostituting themselves...that policy is dirty work.” (researcher)

“I deal with quite a few Government agencies [and]...they just generally have no idea about how research works or even what research would be useful for their purposes.” (researcher)

While policy advisors criticised researchers for not thinking in policy terms, a researcher who had worked in the policy sector suggested policy advisors did not necessarily want research put in policy terms because it could potentially place them in a difficult position if they did not agree with the policy implications:

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<sup>7</sup> Hon Pete Hodgson was the Minister of Research Science and Technology and Minister of Health at different stages as Insulation budgetary allocations were debated.

“If you say the policy implications of such and such are a, b and c, what does the policy-maker do? Particularly if they disagree with that ...” (researcher)

Both sides of the cultural divide saw each other as using ‘a different language’. (A researcher spoke of conversations between academics and policy advisors being like ‘two conversations in two different languages’ while a policy advisor said asking questions of an academic felt almost like ‘speaking a foreign language.’)

Another policy advisor noted the ‘cultural divide’ led to misunderstanding and tensions on both sides:

“If you just commissioned a project and let someone go away and do it, you’d be frustrated by the lack of policy focus. If you did collaboration through the course of the project, at some point the academics would feel that their kind of academic freedom was being proscribed by the demands of the policy interest....So that’s a kind of cultural difference between the two, as well as a language difference.” (policy advisor)

Participants generally spoke of the need for researchers to engage more with the policy community to facilitate research use. Engagement throughout the research process was seen as a way of giving policy-makers a ‘stake’ in research findings and increasing research use.

“If [researchers think] all they have to do is their research and put it out there and something will happen, then they’ll be sorely disappointed...You’re always going to get much more of a reception if along the way you say, ‘look I’m interested in this issue, what do you think? What have you seen on it?’” (researcher)

While all participants saw the ‘cultural divide’ between researchers and policy advisors as a major barrier to research use, one researcher suggested a ‘cultural divide’ amongst social scientists (with in-fighting over research paradigms and methodologies in funding and policy arenas) also inhibited research use.

All participants emphasised the need for research to be ‘packaged’ for its audience and accessible, with executive summaries important for time-strapped policy analysts. It was noted that many researchers did not seem to understand this. Said Maharey:

“It’s almost like talking Swahili to most academics to say you can’t...write a paper for your discipline and then hope that people in general are going to notice or even want to read it.”

However it was felt the onus should not be only on researchers to engage; policy advisors too needed to make more effort. One academic researcher who previously worked in a government ministry said his email queries to other departments had always been answered promptly and telephone calls returned; but not now he is trying to engage from his position within an academic institution. High turn-over of ministry staff was seen to exacerbate the problem.

All participants emphasized the importance of good personal relationships for facilitating research use – and some also stressed the value in not being too close:

“There is a danger of when you get too close to people in those positions within the Ministry or within the Government that you become captured within the tent.” (researcher)

The following sections explore the issues raised in the generic findings above within the context of three specific case studies.

## 3.2 Case Study: Working for Families

### Introduction

Numerous international studies have shown poorer living conditions in childhood are linked to poorer outcomes in adulthood (Blaxter, 2004, Galobardes et al., 1998, Wadsworth, 1997). Here in Aotearoa/New Zealand findings from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development study and the Christchurch Health and Development study have also confirmed adults who are socio-economically disadvantaged as children have poorer health and other outcomes as adults (Melchior et al., 2007, Poulton et al., 2002). Such findings have fed into and fuelled social policy debates internationally and led to a number of international initiatives in the past decade aimed at eliminating child poverty (Nutley et al., 2007). Working for Families has been a New Zealand initiative to reduce child poverty (Perry, 2004).

While it is clear from the literature that research can and does inform policy (Fafard, 2008, Nutley et al., 2007), the specific ways in which it does so are anything but clear. Examining how research on child poverty fuelled debate and informed the complex policy formulation process which ended in Working for Families in 2004 provides insights into the research-policy interface. At different stages of the process, social science research fed into government agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making and policy implementation, and lead to further research both inside and outside academia. Research continues to shape on-going debate.<sup>8</sup>

The Hon Steve Maharey, Minister for Social Development through the formulation of Working for Families, says he often uses Working for Families as an example of research informing policy. It was “heavily influenced by a climate of research,” he says, although “it wasn’t one-to-one informed by it.”

One researcher summed up the difficulty of identifying the exact links research-to-policy links:

“If you could sit down with all of the people who wrote the drafts – I mean it went on for what, four years the writing of it perhaps, maybe even five, so it could have involved, I don’t know, 20 people; could have involved 100 people, given staff turnover and shifting it from one bit of the organisation to

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<sup>8</sup> The Child Poverty Action Group has taken a case to the Human Rights Review Tribunal against the Government on the grounds that Working for Families discriminates against the children of beneficiaries – New Zealand’s poorest children (Human Rights Commission, 2008)

another, and some of it being drafted by people in Treasury and some of it being drafted by people in MSD – and say ‘well can you tell us what you read or what you studied or what you looked at, you know what information came across your desk?’; and they were able to list all of that and then ...[you asked] ‘and how did that influence your decisions?’ they would say, ‘oh well it was really useful for me to realise that X proportion of the population blah, blah, blah’ and ‘yes, that’s directly, you can see that in the policy document. But I also read this and this and this and although there’s no direct residue of that in the policy document, it really helped my thinking’” (researcher)

The literature shows that not only does research compete with a range of other inputs into policy but that there can also be competing research perspectives (Fafard, 2008, Nutley et al., 2007). This can be clearly seen with Working for Families, where different inputs (including differing research perspectives), fed in at various stages of the policy process.

The following findings from interviews with five researchers, five policy advisors and one decision-maker (the then-Minister for Social Development, Steve Maharey)<sup>9</sup> involved in different aspects of the research-policy interface of Working for Families illustrate ways in which social science research first built a climate for social and political change and then informed government policy.

### **Policy context**

The Taxation (Working for Families) Act was passed on June 3, 2004. The legislative purpose of the Act was to amend the Income Tax Act 2004, the Child Support Act 1991, the Housing Restructuring Act 1992, the Privacy Act 1993, and the Tax Administration Act 1994.

Socially, the purpose was to work towards reducing poverty, and in particular child poverty, by improving incomes of low-to-middle income families with dependent children, in line with a stated vision of reducing child poverty in New Zealand (Perry, 2004). As one participant noted:

“a lot of the rhetoric around Working for Families was to do with addressing child poverty and the Prime Minister herself ...[says] it’s lifted X percent of children out of child poverty, etc. That was clearly part of their aim of it.” (researcher)

Evidence that childhood disadvantage (and particularly the effects of inadequate income) increased the chances of poor outcomes in adult life, coupled with research findings highlighting increasing hardship in New Zealand in the wake of the neo-liberal reforms and benefit cuts of the late 1980s and 1990s, helped build a climate for change. Journal articles and reports gave evidence of a widening gap between rich and poor and the stress low-income families in particular were under (for instance Crothers, 1997, Easton, 1995, Hassall, 1994, 1996, St John, 1991, Stephens, 1994, 1999, Waldegrave, 1998). Advocacy groups and social service agencies (such as

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<sup>9</sup> With Working for Families formulated over a number of years, there was some participant movement during that time between the research and policy sectors.

Child Poverty Action Group, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services and the Auckland Workers Unemployed Workers Rights Centre) were pressing for change. Investigative articles in the daily press (for instance *The Dominion*, *Evening Post* and the *New Zealand Herald*) and magazines (such as *Metro*, the *NZ Listener* and the *New Zealand Medical Journal*) began to appear.

An annotated bibliography of published research on poverty in New Zealand in the lead up to the formulation of Working for Families provides an overview of early relevant research and investigations (Elliott et al., 1999). Written by academics, researchers in NGOs and government departments and journalists, the journal articles, book chapters, theses and reports, newspaper and magazine articles collectively provided both qualitative and quantitative information about levels of poverty in New Zealand, causes and effects (particularly on families) and suggestions for alleviating these.

Government research also highlighted increasing levels of poverty. For instance *The Social Report 2001* showed that in 1997/1998 almost three in 10 children (29 percent) were living in poor families<sup>10</sup> – an increase of 13 percent from 1987/88 (Ministry of Social Development, 2002b) and statistics in the *New Zealand Living Standards 2004 Report* highlighted around 200,000 children living in hardship (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

References to research on poverty began to appear in government documents such as Post Election Briefing Papers in 1999 and 2002.

International research fed into the mix, highlighting long-term implications. As a Unicef report from 2000 stated, “many of the most serious problems facing today’s advanced industrialised nations have roots in the denial and deprivation that mark the childhoods of so many of their future citizens” (United Nations Children's Fund, 2000, p.3).

## **Policy development process**

Differing participant recollections of the specifics of the research-policy interface emerged from the interview data, including the extent to which the push for policy change was researcher, policy advisor or politician led, and the sequence of ‘events’ which culminated in Working for Families. Some participants placed more emphasis on the push for policy coming from researchers, others from MSD, and others from the Minister.

Several policy-makers acknowledged the importance of the academic poverty research, including the New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project, and dissemination (particularly lobbying by a specific researcher perceived to be ‘pretty close’ to the Prime Minister), and research and lobbying by the Child Poverty Action Group, as well as research from within the Ministry for Social Development (MSD). However, said one,

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<sup>10</sup> Defined as having less than 60 percent of the average income

“the impetus was absolutely (although I don’t think that MSD would agree with this)...coming from the Minister saying ‘we need to get to the bottom of the child poverty thing’.” (policy advisor)

Another policy advisor underscored the dominant role of MSD, saying the department ‘tried for two or three years’ before finally getting Working for Families up on the agenda. Researchers, in turn, tended to place more weight on the primary role of the academic research on poverty.

There was general consensus amongst participants however, that the academic poverty research of the 1990s played a pivotal role in getting the poverty issue on the Labour Party policy agenda and set the scene for subsequent research within the Ministry of Social Development and Treasury which eventually led to Working for Families. The New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project (NZPMP), in particular, developed a credible poverty measure for New Zealand that was robust and internationally comparable. As a result of their early findings, the poverty threshold in their research was set at 60 percent of equivalent, household, disposable income. Results were given before and after housing costs. This benchmark was subsequently adopted by the Ministry of Social Development in their annual Social Report. NZPMP provided the first research findings that demonstrated households with children were the largest group below the poverty line, estimating a third of households with children were poor.

The policy response was not immediate. Research findings following the development of NZPMP were highlighted in articles published from 1995 (Stephens et al., 1995, Waldegrave et al., 1996, 1997) but these had little policy impact at a time when the official line of the incumbent National Government was that poverty did not exist in New Zealand, said researchers and policy advisors. Poverty research continued and expanded within academia, political party research units (particularly the Labour Party) and within government departments, with calls for action from advocacy groups.

The academic research began to have ‘policy bite’ in 1998, when research, media attention, advocacy and political interest converged over the then-National Government’s intention to decrease superannuation, and a request from TV1 for the poverty measure to be used to estimate the impact showed that with the decrease many superannuitants would fall below the poverty line within five years. The issue was picked up by Helen Clark, then leader of the Opposition:

“[She] contacted me and said...could we take her research people through our findings because they were intending to develop policy that would address this area...Helen Clark then made that (reversing the superannuation cuts) one of the seven...pledges going into the election...and at that point after being exposed to the data, they saw the need to develop a focus on addressing child poverty.” (researcher)

The scope of the Living Standards taskforce originally set up 1998/1999 within MSD to look at the impact of decreased superannuation rates, broadened under the incoming Labour Government to look at living standards more generally. This then provided information for Working for Families policy formulation:

“Some of the findings out of that research we used to give us a reading on the sorts of things that would influence the decisions Ministers subsequently made on Working for Families.” (policy advisor)

Another participant traced “the original Working for Families stuff” back to work on the effects of social exclusion being done within MSD: The strategic team had

“set off on their own account to kind of find out all about social exclusion...and the various tax regimes that were being put in place in the UK and places in Europe in particular.” (policy advisor)

Thus there appears to have been pressure building for action from many sources – researchers, advocacy groups, the media, MSD and government Ministers – and in June 2002 the Government made a commitment to eliminate child poverty (Ministry of Social Development, 2002a). Said Maharey:

“...by about 2002 we were kind of getting into shape to do something about it because it was clear that we’d been arguing about it through the time when the National Party were in... it began to rise as an issue that had been there but not given number one priority... but yeah, about 2002 we ran it through Michael [Cullen] for that budget cycle and the answer was ‘no, didn’t have the money for this kind of thing’, so we wrote a whole range of scenarios after that from a relatively small package to a monumental package and got, not the absolute maximum package but got pretty close to it.” (Maharey)

A number of options were researched and considered in the policy formulation and implementation stages, with policies in the UK and Canada highlighted as particularly influential. Maharey spoke of fact-finding visits to both the UK and Canada, and policy advisors emphasized the important role of overseas research and models.

Participants underscored the role of ‘politics’: budget changes were made ‘quite independently’ of research, with options put forward by MSD for political reasons, said one policy advisor. ‘Political reasons’ also determined the emphasis on incentives for families to work and the exclusion of beneficiary families from the benefits of the tax credit portion of the Working for Families package, said some participants – even though academic research and MSD figures showed that the children of beneficiaries were the most disadvantaged:

“If you looked at the research and you were looking to reduce child poverty or end child poverty you would have gone down the route perhaps of ensuring that the kids in chronic and long term poverty got more of their needs met...But the political imperative...[meant] giving a whole heap of money to beneficiary parents wasn’t quite going to cut it really.” (researcher)

Maharey noted that Working for Families was designed as ‘an incentive to go to work, to come off the benefit’, to ‘go and make work pay’, because research showed employment was the best sustainable pathway out of poverty.<sup>11</sup>

The Working for Families (WFF) benefit reform package was the centrepiece of the 2004 budget and represented the Labour-led coalition Government’s stated commitment to eliminate child poverty (Perry, 2004).

## **Use of research**

The literature shows use of research in policy-making is more likely to be conceptual than instrumental, with conceptual use more likely during the agenda-setting stages of the policy process and instrumental use more likely during later stages (Fafard, 2008, Nutley et al., 2007). This is well illustrated in the case of Working for Families, where academic research led to growing awareness and concern and built an evidence base which, combined with advocacy and media interaction, put child poverty on the government agenda. While academic research continued to feed in during policy formulation and implementation, its influence was considered less important than during these early stages:

“There were policy people developing policy options and certainly they called on various pools of research but very little of the academic research – much more research that was being done by Treasury or research that was done with the administrative data on the numbers of beneficiaries and the cost implications.” (policy advisor)

Seminal academic research was seen to include the New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project and research on the impacts of the neo-liberal reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s. Important Ministry research cited included the development of the Living Standards Measure. Overseas research and models were also used extensively, with international child poverty comparisons seen as a major driver:

“We were not looking very good at all...there were comparative studies of how children were treated in different countries and New Zealand’s system was seen to be pretty mean. So that would be an example where research was clearly influencing policy.” (researcher)

Research identified poverty as a problem, raising awareness at a time when child poverty was not considered to exist in New Zealand. Participants saw the build up of research evidence producing a paradigm shift (with child poverty eventually accepted as a reality) and by the late 1990s providing an evidence base for policy:

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<sup>11</sup> This has continued to be an area of debate among researchers and policy makers. While some in the research community think the largest financial support should go to the poorest households, others are concerned with the unintended consequences of multi-generational unemployment and think work incentives enable a more sustainable route out of poverty. Both agree however, that benefit levels should lift households out of poverty.

“The poverty work...provided strong evidence to support the policy proposals ...around Working for Families. I’m not sure we would have got that up without that evidence base.” (policy advisor)

Several participants also highlighted the role of advocacy and the media in raising political awareness and producing the pressure for policy change:

“You can see report after report after report showing the correlation between low socio-economic status and poor health outcomes in children, but to the extent that the report is publicised, and that people get their hands dirty and go on the television and start raving about it and pushing it, then the climate of public opinion starts to shift and eventually comes the day where there’s enough reception to that kind of public pressure for the politicians to think ‘gosh maybe we should be doing something’.” (researcher)

Some researchers spoke of consciously using the media to get their research out into the public arena and to influence policy decisions.

Referring to the influence of research in Working for Families, Maharey noted the legislation was not ‘one on one research informed’, but that research fed into policy formulation in different ways over time:

“I think a lot of social scientists get disappointed. They do a bit of work and they say ‘so why hasn’t it happened?’ And I say to them ‘because it’s never going to happen because policy never works like that’. There are two ways you’ll influence it. One is you’ve got background data that’s available at a time when it’s needed, so people will say, ‘what do you know about poverty?’ and you’ll say, ‘I just happen to be doing a longitudinal study and I can tell you what happens to kids blah, blah, blah’ and suddenly your work’s feeding into policy; or you do real time research which means... running the research alongside the implementation and feeding the data back basically all the time so that you can make decisions to change what you’re doing.” (Maharey)

## **Types of research use**

Apart from an overall conceptual-instrumental difference, types of research use at different stages of agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making and policy implementation of Working for Families can be further categorised in terms of Weiss’ (1979) typology<sup>12</sup> of research use covering strategic, political and interactive, knowledge and enlightenment use along with conceptual and instrumental use. There were examples of each type of research use with Working for Families.

**Use at the conceptual level (including knowledge and enlightenment):** academic research through the 1990s fed into raising awareness, and defining poverty – and child poverty in particular – as a problem. It brought about a paradigm shift and put poverty on the policy agenda. Participants generally acknowledged the conceptual use of much of the 1990s academic poverty research. Several noted the decisive

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted there are often overlaps between the categories.

influence of books such as *The Decent Society* (Boston and Dalziel, 2002) and *Redesigning the Welfare State in New Zealand* (Boston et al., 1999), along with the development and use of the Poverty Measure and other poverty research. As one policy advisor put it:

“I think the academic community [was]...pretty vocal throughout the '90s”.  
(policy advisor)

**Strategic use:** participants highlighted various strategic and ‘political’ uses of research findings. These included strong public advocacy, using research which supported an ideological stance around getting people into work as the way to deal with child poverty, and political motivations for increasing the budget for Working for Families. In terms of public advocacy, several participants suggested this ‘shamed’ the government into action by highlighting research findings on poverty and New Zealand’s comparatively poor record on child poverty internationally. Many, including Maharey (“We decided that the logic we wanted to put into our reforms was making work pay”) commented on the government’s ‘making work pay’ ideological focus: a focus which arguably deprived some of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s poorest children from some of the benefits of the legislation, while at the same time the discourse remained one of eliminating child poverty. (One researcher commented that it ‘wouldn’t have cut it’ with voters to give more money to beneficiaries). The decision to increase the budget for Working for Families to include higher income families was also seen in terms of vote-catching:

“I think they wanted to be a bit more generous because they wanted it to go a bit further up into the income distribution, they wanted to target different groups of voters”. (researcher)

**Instrumental use:** while participants were forthcoming with examples of conceptual and strategic/political research use, they found it difficult to pin-point direct instrumental use of specific academic research in Working for Families. The complexity of the process, the various permutations Working for Families went through over a number of years, and the time lapse since its inception, were all given as reasons for this. A policy advisor spoke of the use of research findings in policy papers to the Minister, while a researcher suggested the poverty research, coupled with medical research showing the health effects of poverty, underpinned the free child care components of Working for Families.

**Interactive use:** in contrast to difficulties in coming up with examples of instrumental use, participants highlighted many examples of interactive research use stemming from strong informal and formal researcher-policy advisor relationships. Participants noted in particular ‘cross fertilisation’ between the Poverty Measure research and MSD’s Living Standards research and a ‘mutual meeting of minds’, with the Strategic Policy Reference Group set up by Maharey seen to provide a formal platform for this interaction.

## **Differences of research purpose**

The literature suggests academic researchers and policy advisors/politicians view research differently: that academics are focussed on careers and funding opportunities, and policy advisors/politicians on problem solving; and that while academics are often interested in conceptual research, the latter want blue-prints for action (Nutley et al., 2007). In fact, Working for Families is an example where researchers too were focussed on problem-solving. As one researcher said:

“I haven’t published as much as I otherwise would ...[but] I prefer to see an outcome in terms of assisting children than myself getting glory for producing yet another paper.” (researcher)

Nutley et al. (2007) propose researchers adopt different ‘stances’ (‘contentious’, ‘paradigm challenging’ and ‘consensual’) which influence the type of research they do. Research which fed into Working for Families provides examples of all three, with research participants generally seeing themselves operating from different stances at different stages. Two, for instance, saw their research which fed into Working for Families fitting in the ‘contentious’ and ‘paradigm-challenging’ categories in the ’90s, but moving into the ‘consensual’ from 2000 – once child poverty was firmly on the policy agenda. This consensual stance increased collaboration between researchers and policy advisors (cf the Strategic Policy Reference Group), and cross-fertilisation between academic and MSD research. One policy advisor spoke of a combination of academic research on poverty (particularly the NZPMP) and in-house research feeding into policy:

“We used that research and we did some of our own analysis of income statistics and what have you. We looked at research which we commissioned ourselves on Living Standards and that all fed into the Working for Families.” (policy advisor)

Some researchers continuing their contentious/moral critic stance (highlighting the ‘injustice’ of some of the provisions of the legislation which ‘discriminate’ against the poorest children) however rejected the term ‘moral critic’:

“I don’t particularly see myself as a moral critic. I guess that I just think that when you are privileged enough to do research and you are in a position to have some insights into what might make policy better, then you have some obligation to take that further.” (researcher)

## **Other sources of influence**

Academic research is just one of many influences on policy. Apart from over-riding political imperatives, it also ‘competes’ with other formal and informal information sources. (Research evidence may be lacking. One policy advisor, for instance, spoke of “seeing a problem” and “getting feedback about a growing income inadequacy problem for beneficiaries from my frontline staff”, but there being no available statistics reflecting this.)

Participants highlighted the roles played by politics (party ideology, electorate views, ministers' views), government ministries (especially MSD and Treasury), the Strategic Policy Reference Group and other formal and informal networks, advocacy groups and the media in informing the Working for Families package. These were seen to come together in various combinations at different stages of the policy process. Researchers and advocacy groups, for instance, used the media to create debate around child poverty and a push for action:

“Policy-making ...is very reliant on public noise and media engagement.”  
(researcher)

Many participants spoke of ‘political imperatives’ which shaped Working for Families, highlighting in particular the exclusion of beneficiaries from the ‘in work’ tax credit. This was seen as ‘politics at the end of the day’. So too was the exclusion of certain advocacy groups from the consultation process:

“I kind of feel that Child Poverty Action Group probably were kept a bit on the outer because the positions they took might have been seen as being a bit extreme.” (researcher)

(However several participants also noted the influence of the Child Poverty Action Group, which “drew upon the *Social Report* and the Living Standards data and provided a much stronger political lobby.” (researcher)

The political triumvirate of the Prime Minister (Helen Clark), the MSD Minister (Steve Maharey), and the Treasurer (Michael Cullen) was identified as pivotal. One researcher spoke of early conversations with Clark (then Leader of the Opposition), where she ‘made this absolute focus on addressing child poverty’, while others (including Maharey himself) spoke of the Minister’s hands-on role in Working for Families and the central role played by the Treasurer:

“We would never have got there if Michael hadn’t said, ‘a) I’m in’, b) I’m interested so I want to start playing with how we might do this and add value to what you’re doing’. And the end result is I think we got IRD, Treasury, MSD working really well together, people really enjoying what they were doing and having him involved was a turning point.” (Maharey)

Departmental ‘cultures’ (more ‘open’ or more ‘closed’) and the ‘culture’ of policy advisers within MSD, were also seen as important influences on research use. One participant spoke of some policy advisers,

“believing that they’ve already got a lot of the answers and...researchers are just really generally there to sort of help them crash on through.” (policy advisor)

Another reflected on the influence a particular individual ‘in the right place at the right time’ can have, using the example of the Living Standards research (acknowledged as critical in the development of Working for Families):

“The Living Standards [research] was absolutely the case of the bona fide academic researcher who just happened to be in the back corridors of MSD who said ‘hang on a minute, we can do something really interesting with this’ and you know, that thing about particular individuals is a huge part of the story I think...” (policy advisor)

The importance of informal networks was stressed by all participants. Said one policy advisor:

“They don’t replace the formal relationships but they are very important and you build them up over time and I mean in some ways I’m not sure, when I’m talking to...Jonathan Boston or Charles Waldegrave or one of a number of academics, I’m not sure whether I’m talking to them in the context of a formal relationship that we have with them or an informal one after a time.” (policy-advisor)

Maharey spoke of discussions with a wide range of local researchers and overseas contacts feeding into his thinking around Working for Families. He also acknowledged the influence of the media. The media holds governments accountable, he said:

“...they provided us with an environment that we were able to bounce off [and say] ‘there’s an important story here and we want to react to that’.” (Maharey)

### **Barriers and enablers of research use**

Participant responses confirmed literature findings that timeliness, relevance and being on the government agenda facilitated research use.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the ’90s, when dealing with child poverty was not part of the government agenda, there was thus, unsurprisingly, less use of poverty research than after child poverty became part of the Labour-Coalition Government agenda, (although policy advisors spoke of ongoing research within MSD despite the lack of political interest).

Several participants gave ‘timeliness’ as a reason for the use of social science research around poverty:

“It was time. There [were] obviously real problems emerging with the neglect.” (researcher)

Again in line with the literature, a ‘cultural divide’ between researchers and policy advisors was identified as a major barrier to research use. This was seen to be in part a function of different research roles:

“There’s pure academic research which is basically finding out new things and then there’s really policy research which is research directly operating and

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes there is no evidence. One policy-maker gives an example from 1991 when the government wanted to reduce the Domestic Purposes Benefit by \$50 a week: “We couldn’t say what the impact of that would be...it was an appalling state of affairs. At the very least we should know whether or not [a benefit]...is doing its job, which is keeping people out of poverty.”

approaching a particular issue which policy makers have to deal with and most academics are in the former and most policy research is the latter obviously.” (researcher)

While much of the academic research which fed into Working for Families was however ‘directly approaching a particular issue’, researchers and policy advisors alike were generally critical of a lack of policy consideration in much academic research. Noted one researcher:

“Ninety percent of the papers that I read...I’m absolutely bemused as to what the policy implications are and I think that’s been a serious deficiency in the way in which research has been conducted.” (researcher)

This ‘cultural divide’ was seen to have been in part overcome with Working for Families through active dissemination, researcher-policy advisor networks and the use of personal contacts.

“We were doing the research on our own but we were discussing what we were finding... we took organisations and other people through the process of getting our results.”(researcher)

One example given of active dissemination involved writing up poverty data results, presenting these at a departmental seminar, then going and seeing the Minister and taking him through the research results and an accompanying press release. This meant when the research results made front-page headlines, the Minister could respond.

Presentations at the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Conference were also seen as facilitating dissemination of poverty findings and the consideration of policy implications. However, most participants stressed the primary importance of engagement between key researchers and policy advisors/politicians for facilitating research use in terms of Working for Families. The small size of Wellington and its researcher/policy advisor/politician communities was seen to help this process:

“Wellington is very small...one individual can make a huge difference to the relationship between institutions.” (policy advisor)

“I think that we forget...just how small Wellington is. You know if you look at something like Working for Families, you could have got 10 people into the room and you would have had almost everyone who needed to be there from the entire country.” (researcher)

This was seen to have both positive and negative consequences: on the positive side it led to ease of research dissemination and research-policy engagement (for instance through the Strategic Policy Research Group) and a building of trust and respect; on the negative, it was seen as possibly leading to ‘research capture’:

“...so whatever the Government finally produces...you might feel obliged to support it even though if you weren’t inside the tent you’d be quite critical.” (researcher)

One researcher spoke of feeling ‘constrained’ by the collaborative relationship:

“We felt a little bit constrained I suppose in putting out research papers when you’re actually developing the policy to address the issues you’re going to raise.” (researcher)

Reliance on key researchers in the policy process was also seen both as a potential barrier or facilitator of research use – depending if the researcher in question was considered ‘key’. One researcher spoke of a ‘waxing and waning’ process:

“It sort of waxes and wanes a bit, you know, you can be part of an inner circle or not...I have sometimes been in that position and sometimes not.” (researcher)

However in spite of these concerns, all participants stressed the importance of good researcher-policy advisor relationships for facilitating research use. Some saw ‘departmental silos’ and lack of research capability through the 1990s as constraining this engagement. A policy advisor spoke of ‘busy people sort of missing the connections between things’; and difficulties in engagement arising from high staff turnover were noted.

### **3.3 Case Study: Household energy efficiency and insulation**

#### **Introduction**

Research shows that Aotearoa/New Zealand has amongst the highest asthma rates in the world (Cunningham, 2004) and high seasonal mortality (Isaacs and Donn, 1993). It also has amongst the coldest houses (Isaacs et al., 2004). The World Health Organisation recommends 18 deg C as the minimum indoor temperature, with considerable health issues below 16 deg C. A decade ago there was limited information on indoor winter temperatures in New Zealand homes, but available surveys suggested they were on average below 18 deg C (Isaacs, 1998).

From the early 1990s researchers began to suggest links between our cold houses, high seasonal mortality and other health problems (Isaacs and Donn, 1993). Subsequent monitoring of temperatures through the Household Energy End-use Project (HEEP) confirmed this – and that insulating houses made them on average 1.4 deg C warmer (Isaacs et al., 2004). A randomised control trial (Housing Insulation and Health) of more than 3000 homes beginning in 2000 established that house insulation increased occupants’ health and wellbeing in terms of self-reported health, fewer GP visits and fewer days off school or work, along with indoor temperatures (Howden Chapman et al., 2005, 2007). That there was a link between health and housing “made common sense a while ago”, said one policy advisor; what this research did was provide ‘evidence’ to support funding proposals for healthy housing initiatives.

Studies of the research-policy interface in the field of health show that, as in other areas, the main factors facilitating the use of health-related research are timely

relevance, personal contact between researchers and policy-makers, and ‘user-friendly’ research dissemination (Innvaer et al., 2002) and that research impacts are more likely to be indirect than direct (Elliott and Popay, 2008, Nutley et al., 2007). These findings are confirmed in the case of the Housing Insulation and Health study. Even where all the above criteria were met and findings acknowledged as ‘significant’ at Cabinet level and by the Prime Minister’s Office, researchers doubted a straight ‘causal’ pathway in terms of government decisions to fund insulation (Howden Chapman et al., 2008). Rather, researchers felt their influence on policy was indirect, and,

“...useful in making a case that other people have too.” (researcher)

The following findings from interviews with four researchers, three policy-makers and two decision-makers (Jeanette Fitzsimons, Government Spokesperson on Energy Efficiency and Conservation and Hon Pete Hodgson, Minister for Science, Research and Technology) involved in different aspects of the research-policy interface around household energy efficiency illustrate ways in which research shifted the discourse (from a focus on energy efficiency to health benefits), built a climate for social and political change, and provided evidence for Budget allocations for home insulation.

### **Policy context**

In May 2008 the Government announced it would spend \$53.4 million to insulate state houses in the following two years. The report in *The New Zealand Herald* (NZPA, May 16, 2008) announcing the Budget allocation cited research as showing insulation not only led to energy savings, but also to reported health improvements.

“Insulating the homes of low income people actually saves very little of energy [contra above]. The biggest reason is health and that is based on...well, I mean we’ve been doing it for years but the research that Philippa Howden-Chapman did has strengthened the knowledge we’ve always had anecdotally that the health benefits are significant.”(Fitzsimons)

Research on the possible beneficial health effects of retrofitting pre-1970s houses with insulation began in 2000.<sup>14</sup> A randomised control trial demonstrated health benefits from insulating homes and measured this effect. It introduced health outcomes into the energy efficiency arena, with mention of links between insulation/energy efficiency and health increasingly appearing in the media and in government publications (Howden Chapman et al., 2008).

While information from other research such as the 10 year longitudinal BRANZ<sup>15</sup>-funded HEEP<sup>16</sup> study showed how cold many New Zealand homes were – and how insulation could increase temperatures, this research provided evidence of health benefits and a convincing rationale for policy change.

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<sup>14</sup> It was carried out by researchers in the University of Otago’s He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme.

<sup>15</sup> Building Research Association of New Zealand

<sup>16</sup> Housing Energy End-use Project

“It was helpful to have the sort of comprehensive study that Philippa did because it made it easier to get money basically.” (Fitzsimons)

While anecdotally links between cold houses and health were “commonsense”, the Housing Insulation and Health study was widely acknowledged as providing a scientific evidence base. Preliminary results were presented at a seminar to government officials, researchers, advocates and others in early 2003 and officially to government and the media in mid 2003. They were also presented at the WHO Housing and Health Symposium in 2004 and in articles in the journal of *Social Science & Medicine* (Howden Chapman et al., 2005), the *BMJ* (Howden Chapman et al., 2007) and other academic publications.

Increasingly conceptual links between energy efficiency and insulation and health were being made and Government intervention programmes to deal with un-insulated housing were started or expanded. It is likely that use of the research by community organisations applying for insulation funding strengthened the effect of the research on the policy formation process. The Housing, Insulation and Health study appears to have been not only a driver of public policy on insulation, but also to have contributed to the general discourse around energy efficiency, housing and health, with health increasingly seen as part of the energy equation. These links received significant media coverage during the 2005 general election campaign. Whereas the Labour Government included energy efficiency in their energy policy, it was part of the Green Party’s health policy.

As had been noted, because of the complexity of the policy process, perspectives often vary on the chronology and relative importance of events, and the initial drivers of research and policy. This is true in terms of the research-policy interface around insulation and health – and whether it was primarily a case of government ‘pull’ or producer ‘push’. As with Working for Families, it would appear to have been a mix of both.

One policy advisor, commenting on the main drivers of research and policy in the area saw it primarily in terms of government pull:

“My gut instinct would say probably the majority is stuff which is directed from top down, from the politicians and/or officials asking for information on X, Y and Z. Basically, we’ve got, I think, a pretty good idea of where we want to go with this and we also have access to a lot of the accumulated research from overseas...[then] it’s a case of...some further research on New Zealand’s specific circumstances.” (policy advisor)

Said another policy advisor:

“Now of course we knew at the time that there were other co-benefits, one of which was health, an important co-benefit, but for a long time we didn’t have the numbers around that and we didn’t really know what the linkages between household temperature and dampness and those kind of things [were]... I think it was Pete Hodgson at the time, he actively pushed for this research. We definitely had suggested it and I don’t think it came from Pete Hodgson, from the blue, but he was quite adamant that he wanted this additional information...” (policy advisor)

Researchers spoke of initiating research in the area of insulation, of producer push:

“We thought it was a really important link in housing and it hadn’t really been spelled out before...and there’s been commissioned work around it, but initially we started it off.” (researcher)

Another spoke of following up overseas work on seasonal mortality out of ‘personal interest’. Although there was no immediate policy use of findings, these eventually fed into government policy:

“I had an idea that New Zealand homes were cold., just from personal experience. In fact monitoring temperatures showed that they were...It was very much, I read some material, thought it was a good idea and pushed it through. It was a case of personal interest which fitted with government interest or industry interest.” (researcher)

Hodgson spoke of gathering information and reading research on the topic when he was Science Opposition spokesperson – and of picking up the Energy portfolio when Labour came to power in 1999 (along with Science, Research and Technology). Already, as Opposition spokesperson, he said he had researched the “bleeding obvious”,

“which is[that] a pretty large number of New Zealand houses built before 1977 were in a state of some disarray in terms of insulation and their thermal envelope. And this would be, I had already identified, and again it isn’t difficult – you just need to read around, had identified, by international standards, very high admission rates of children with bronchitic conditions into hospital during winter.”

At the time, said Hodgson, New Zealand was preoccupied with the supply side of energy:

“I knew that the demand side mattered and we were ignoring [it] and so through the Research Unit or by talking, I just picked up like a magpie stuff that came around that concerned the demand side and that’s how I gathered that information.” (Hodgson)

Part of this ‘information’ was research by Isaacs on New Zealand’s high seasonal mortality.

“We do differ from, say, a much colder country such as Sweden, and that work was around and available and directly influenced me. Hence when we became the Government, Jeannette Fitzsimons and I put together legislation that set EECA<sup>17</sup> up... took it out of the Ministry of Commerce as it then was where it was languishing and put it in MFE<sup>18</sup>...and got started. And you know, the necessity to do that had been proven to me by research. But Philippa hadn't been very active by that stage so I was very keen that she be successful in a contract to undertake research and she was...”(Hodgson)

The Housing, Insulation and Health research was not only relevant to current Government priorities and the policy agenda, but contained clear messages for policy action, seen as a facilitator for research use (Innvaer et al., 2002, Nutley et al., 2007). The fact it was sponsored by government agencies probably also helped bridge the research-policy gap and facilitated use by increasing ‘ownership’ of the results (Howden Chapman et al., 2008).

### **Use of research**

Both conceptual and instrumental use of research can be seen feeding directly (to relevant government agencies, ministries, Hodgson and Fitzsimons) and indirectly (through community organisations and DHBs, for instance, applying for funding for retrofitting) into decisions around household energy efficiency policies and Budget allocations for insulating older houses. Research findings also filtered through articles in newspapers and magazines, interviews on the radio and television programmes. Over time this flow brought about conceptual changes, altering the policy focus on household energy efficiency from a ‘supply side’ to a ‘demand side’ approach, and shifting the discourse around energy-efficient homes from one primarily of cost savings to an emphasis on health benefits. Instrumentally, research findings provided evidence used directly by policy advisors and politicians in government policies such as the Insulation Standard (2000) and retrofitting of older state and other houses.

The research shifted the policy of EECA, which at the time was to reduce the energy consumption of households, because evaluations and monitoring of household temperatures through HEEP showed this was not a sensible policy position – that low income households were already not using enough energy to heat their homes to a ‘healthy’ temperature.

Policy advisors spoke of both Isaac's and Howden-Chapman's research on cold houses and the health effects sparking a lot of interest around the health issues. They also noted a range of information supplying evidence for both the adoption of an Insulation Standard for new homes and Budget allocations for retrofitting.

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<sup>17</sup> Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority

<sup>18</sup> MFE – Ministry for the Environment

“We’re using quite a wide variety of sources of information about the benefit streams in order to justify the funding of the kind of practical measures that we’re promoting around insulation.” (policy advisor)

Policy advisors spoke of drawing on existing research and then employing consultants to look at various policy options. They spoke of the importance of monitoring and evaluation going ‘hand-in-hand’ with other research.

Participants saw research by Isaacs and Howden-Chapman et al. feeding into energy policy both conceptually and instrumentally. While there was international research available,

“New Zealand’s housing climate and energy system are very different from other countries so you have to look at what is transferable and what isn’t and what actually needs to be done here. For example, the stuff we learned from the HEEP study, we couldn’t have learned from any overseas literature at all. The stuff we learned from Philippa’s work was consistent with overseas research but useful because it applied to New Zealand and we got specific New Zealand cases analysed.” (Fitzsimons)

Policy advisors spoke of building on overseas research from international agencies such as the World Health Organisation, the International Energy Agency and APEC, and commissioning research around energy efficiency and housing, particularly through BRANZ. There were also fact-finding visits to the UK and other countries. International comparisons were cited, particularly figures on ‘healthy’ home temperatures and the fact that NZ homes were cold by international standards; and that seasonal mortality and asthma rates were high compared to other developed countries. These different sources interacted with each other and together led to Budget allocation to retrofit houses.

### **Types of research use**

Again using Weiss’s (1979) typology of research use, this case study shows a variety of conceptual and instrumental types of research use flowed into decisions around Budget allocations for retrofitting.

**Use at the conceptual level (including knowledge and enlightenment):** academic research led to increased awareness about the health problems of cold houses. Early research highlighting New Zealand’s high winter mortality rate provided the basis for further research on indoor temperatures by BRANZ and EECA and the Housing, Insulation and Health study. The build up of evidence eventually produced a shift in the discourse, with a change in the Ministry approach from ‘supply side’ to ‘demand side’ thinking and an increasing number of references to health in relation to insulation.

**Strategic use:** this could be implied from the way insulation policy, an important platform for the Green Party, gained such traction in the Coalition Government.

**Instrumental use:** The Housing Insulation and Health study and the HEEP work in particular were widely acknowledged as providing a scientific evidence base for policy around insulation.

**Interactive use:** researchers worked closely with each other and policy makers, sharing and comparing research results and collaborating on research and dissemination. Some researchers also worked closely with community and advocacy groups. As one of the researchers noted, sharing research results and the research process with community organisations may have strengthened the impact of research on the policy process and funding.<sup>19</sup>

### **Differences of research purpose**

The literature shows researchers and policy advisors view research differently, with policy advisors focussed on ‘problem-solving’ and researchers on ‘finding out things’ (see previous case study). Some differences of research purpose were also apparent in this case study. For instance, while both policy advisors and researchers were generally focussed on ‘problem-solving’, according to one researcher,

“all of the research I have done has been to explore what is going on rather than...designed to find an answer to a problem.” (researcher)

Two other researchers however spoke of being policy and community focussed. Said one:

“Unless I have an opportunity in the public arena to engage, frankly I don’t bother. Not interested.” (researcher)

Both politicians saw the research as a means to an end, providing ‘evidence’ to back funding bids:

“So the research helps us justify to Treasury that insulating homes has sufficient benefits that it should go into the Budget process and they shouldn’t just knock it out to start with.” (Fitzsimons)

In terms of what research Government funded, Hodgson noted this was a mix between the ‘problem-solving’ and the ‘finding out’.

“If you look across my research, science and technology vote much of it is only indirectly relevant. However, there are some bits that are directly relevant and they form into two categories, in my head anyway. The first is research, which by happenstance becomes useful to a receptive government (note the word receptive); the second is research which the government has had some handle in purchasing directly because it wants to.” (Hodgson)

Nutley et al. (2007) suggest researchers may adopt different ‘stances’ which influence the types of research they do (and types of research use). As with the previous case

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<sup>19</sup> It was also seen as raising community awareness around health and housing, providing groups with expertise in research and ‘traction’ to apply for government funding.

study, researchers tended to see themselves as a mix of consensual, contentious or paradigm challenging. Consensual research stances go with collaborative research projects such as some of the insulation initiatives.<sup>20</sup> However this did not mean, said one of the researchers, that there were no elements of the contentious – or the paradigm challenging.

“There’s a consensus that we need evidence and research and the direction that we are going...[but] that doesn’t mean we can’t be critical of funders or critical of agencies.” (researcher)

Two of the researchers spoke of focussing attention on issues of social justice and reducing health inequalities, while working in collaboration with policy advisors. Their aim was to both inform government policy and help community groups take advantage of these policies (for instance in applying for subsidies for retrofitting).

### **Other sources of influence**

Academic research is just one of many influences on policy. Again, participants in this case study highlighted the roles played by politics (party ideology, electorate views, Ministers’ views), government ministries and NGOs and other formal and informal networks, community groups and the media in building the case for Government funding of insulation for houses. Over-riding political imperatives were stressed. Researchers, policy advisors and politicians also emphasised the role of personal experiences.

“If you want to know why I’m in favour of insulating houses, it’s because I’ve built two buildings – three actually, with different levels of insulation and the impact of the effects are absolutely obvious. I don’t need any more research to know that insulation works...I don’t read a lot of research papers...[they] tend not to be quite at the nitty-gritty level that you’re looking for in policy.” (Fitzsimons)

The influence officials’ have in synthesising research data for ministers is illustrated in the following excerpt from Fitzsimons:

“If I think something should go in the strategy, I’ll ask EECA officials to do some work on it and they’ll come back and say ‘well look, the evidence just doesn’t stack up for this’ or they’ll come back and say, ‘evidence is you should do it this way’.”

The ‘timeliness’ of research on home insulation was reinforced further by concern over climate change. That multiple policy imperatives could be met, increased the relevance of energy/health research:

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<sup>20</sup> One policy advisor spoke of ‘inter-sectoral collaboration’ involving WINZ, HNZC, Ministry of Health and Ministry for the Environment at the government level, BRANZ, EECA, university researchers and representatives of community groups: “If everybody’s participating, there’s a better understanding of what we all want to achieve.”

"There's obviously a broader umbrella in terms of energy sustainability...so there are multiple strands of policy imperative to actually do...[the] household energy efficiency improvements." (policy advisor)

Budget constraints were also highlighted as hugely influential, along with the fact that ultimately policy decisions are 'political':

"We've known for so long that insulation keeps people warmer, that the only issue remaining is can you persuade your colleagues to give you money to do it when they are going to want to do hip operations and smaller school classrooms and there is no research-based way of comparing those things." (Fitzsimons)

As in the previous case study, informal and formal networks were seen as important by all participants. The power of the media in influencing government decisions around insulation was also acknowledged, with some researchers actively seeking media exposure for their research findings.

### **Barriers and enablers of research use**

Again, many factors were seen to inhibit or facilitate the use of research, including the timeliness and relevance of research in terms of the current political climate and government agenda.

"Well politicians get elected to do certain things that are in their policy. I mean, if we get elected on a policy of speeding up the insulation of homes... then that's what we're going to set out to do when we get there." (Fitzsimons)

If the political climate was not ripe for certain policies, they did not happen. Policy advisors spoke of there being little government interest in energy efficiency in housing right through the '90s, and no interest in changing Standards in terms of the Building Code; but this changed with the coming to power of the Labour Government which put through in 2000 what the Ministry had recommended back in 1996:

"There seemed to be quite a deep-seated ideological rejection of the idea of having such Standards and requirements. I mean essentially it was seen to be inconsistent with a market-based approach." (policy advisor)

Apart from the question of timing, researchers spoke of the need to understand the kind of information required by policy advisors; and politicians noted research needed to be readily accessible:

"There's a big question about whether the research is accessible and relevant and very often it isn't; or it very often offers a clue or a piece in the jigsaw, but nothing more than that." (Hodgson)

"There's no process in Government where you do a rigorous analysis of what's out there in the academic literature. It's like we're all closer to the

practical realities than that and we can kind of see what needs doing.”  
(Fitzsimons)

Policy advisors spoke of the difficulties of translating ‘academic-speak’ and called for research proposals and findings to be presented in ‘plain English’. One commented that researchers were sometimes their own worst enemy in terms of research use:

“They start off by saying all the limitations of their project, which is very honest and worthy of them, but that immediately limits [the impact of] what they’re going to say.” (policy advisor)

Again as in other case studies, different research/policy time-frames were highlighted as a real barrier to research use by all participants – by researchers cognizant of the time needed for rigorous research and policy-makers and decision-makers wanting evidence ‘now’. Said Hodgson:

“I’ve spent a couple of years as Minister of Health and you end up driving it through a rear vision mirror because research takes too long to come to pass...I’m very critical of the length of time that research takes.” (Hodgson)

Participants generally spoke of the need for active dissemination over and above writing articles for academic journals<sup>21</sup> – speaking with the relevant Minister, with government officials, with community groups and the media about their findings and what researchers thought the implications were.

“There is increasing recognition that the health research process does not stop at the publication of a study’s results. Further dissemination is important as it can be an essential part of ensuring that the knowledge gained can influence the health of populations. This is especially true where the users of research are policy makers...”(researcher)

Another commented that it ‘helped to be energetic’:

“I do a large number of seminars and talks and promotions of the material that we produce.” (researcher).

Tenacity was seen as a necessary attribute by all players, given the long gestation period of home insulation funding policy. From a politician’s perspective the policy process required considerable negotiation:

“There’s a long process of negotiation with a strategy like that. There are many departments who’ve got to be got round the table and in the end you do as much as you can to convince other people.” (Fitzsimons)

Most participants spoke of the importance of good contacts between researchers and politicians and policy-makers in facilitating use.

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<sup>21</sup> Although academic journals, one researcher noted, may be “the only place you can get some baseline research into”, citing the example of seminal research on longitudinal health effects of deprivation from the longitudinal Dunedin and Christchurch health studies, which now have “profound effects’ on the policy environment.”

“I think Philippa’s work was recognised partly because she had very clear lines to Government and good lobbying skills and knew how to make the link between the research that she did and Government decision-making. And a lot of researchers haven’t got a clue about that...there’s just far too much research out there already for politicians to become aware of it all...” (Fitzsimons)

The small size of New Zealand and the research and policy communities was again seen to facilitate this:

“...there are sort of a dozen people who are really on the technical side so everybody sort of knows everybody really, so of course EECA and BRANZ knew what Otago Medical School was doing, so you find out these things.” (policy advisor)

One researcher noted ‘overlaps’ between personal, political networks and policy networks:

“That’s certainly quite a large part of life in Wellington. I mean I wonder what it would have been like if I’d been in Dunedin or something like that?” (researcher)

All participants highlighted the primary importance of these personal connections between researchers, policy advisors and politicians for increasing researcher-policy engagement and the use of research.

### **3.4 Case Study: Immigration policy**

Major immigration policy developments since 1986 are initially summarised<sup>22</sup> and then broad findings on the research policy interface within the immigration context presented. Four examples, drawn from recent immigration policy, are presented to detail mechanisms and processes of research use. Identified enablers and barriers to use are presented along with participants’ views on how the interface between policy and research could be strengthened within the immigration context.

#### **Introduction – policy context**

The major review of immigration policy in August 1986 was followed by the Immigration Act 1987. The amended policy moved away from nationality and ethnic origin as the main basis for determining the suitability of applicants to a focus on educational, business, professional, age and asset criteria (Beaglehole, 2007). In emphasising personal merit rather than national or ethnic origin, post-1986 immigration policy has given priority to addressing labour market skill deficits and the contribution that business migrants could make through bringing capital into the country. The economic and social goals of the policy were reflected in the

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<sup>22</sup> Note this is not intended to be a comprehensive review

establishment of three categories for selecting immigrants, the skills and business stream, the family stream and the humanitarian stream.

Amendments to the 1987 Act were undertaken in 1991 and 1995 (Beaglehole, 2007, Statistics New Zealand, 2004). A points system was introduced in 1991 to assist with selecting migrants with desired human capital attributes, and applicants were awarded points for employability, age, qualifications and settlement funds. From 1995 applicants were ranked and selected monthly to meet annual targets. The amendments favoured skilled, qualified and experienced working aged people and the points system led to greater number of immigrants from non-traditional source countries being admitted (Beaglehole, 2007). A Business Investor Category was also introduced to attract migrants who could increase capital investment in New Zealand and contribute to economic growth (Merwood, 2008). In 1995, the points system was applied to the Business Investor Category (Statistics New Zealand, 2004) and an immigration target established to provide some control over the number of immigrants entering the country. The points system in the General Skills Category was also refined with the introduction of a 'pass mark' under a new General Skills Category (Merwood, 2008). The pass mark was regularly adjusted according to quota targets (Beaglehole, 2007). In 1999, the Business Investor Category was replaced by a modified Investor category and new categories of Entrepreneur and Business Employees were introduced (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). The English language bond for secondary applicants was abolished under the General Skills Category and applicants were able to pre-purchase ESOL training (Beaglehole, 2007, Merwood, 2008, Statistics New Zealand, 2004).

Further amendments in 2002 and 2003 saw the standard of English required for the General Skills Category and some business categories increased to university entrance level (Merwood, 2008). In February 2004 the General Skills Category was replaced by a Skilled Migrant Category and the pass mark system replaced with a process whereby people qualifying above a level of points entered a selection pool, from which they were invited to apply for residence, with selection based on a range of factors (Beaglehole, 2007). In 2002, three new temporary work permit policies were also introduced, with these 'work to residence' policies designed to provide a direct pathway from skilled temporary worker to permanent resident (Merwood, 2008).

A range of further changes were introduced under the Skilled Migrant Category in 2004 and the Investor Category in 2005 (Merwood, 2008). The Investor Category was subsequently closed in 2007 and a new Active Investor Migrant Category introduced. Changes to the Family Category were also introduced with these relating to visitor visas and the sponsorship of partners and parents.

## **Use of research**

Participants commonly described immigration policy becoming more complex in recent times. Increasingly, policy was required to understand and respond to a range of system level dynamics, for example, the interface between immigration, labour market dynamics and economic development. Participants recognised that policy now existed within a competitive global context and that it could no longer be assumed that a steady flow of migrants would be readily attracted to New Zealand or

that immigration would lead to permanent settlement. Recent policy development identified by participants as reflective of these complexities included policy shifts focused on expediting settlement and enhancing settlement support (recognising positive settlement outcomes as a competitive advantage in the global market) and policy seeking to develop pathways from temporary to permanent residence (responding to trends to temporary settlement).

Participants saw increasing complexity in the policy environment leading to a corresponding increase in the need for evidence-informed policy. For example, the need to compete for immigrants was seen by policy advisors as having increased the importance of understanding the competitiveness and outcomes of policy within a global context. The dynamic nature of the wider policy environment had also increased the need to quickly understand changes in this context and subsequent policy implications. Reflecting these needs, participants generally reported an increase in immigration research activity and capacity over recent years, greater complexity in the research undertaken, a strengthened network of academic researchers active in immigration research and an increased need for collaboration and engagement between immigration researchers and policy makers. Typical of the drivers of this development, a researcher saw a recent series of government initiated reviews of immigration policy being undertaken in order that:

“...New Zealand remains really competitive as a country that needs migrants. We are in a major international competition now for skilled migrants.”  
(researcher)

A range of relationships between research, researchers and the policy making process were described by participants and are discussed in detail later. In general, participants described a growing level of collaboration between researchers and policy makers and a willingness to work together to enhance the relevance of research to policy and to finding publically and politically acceptable solutions to complex problems.

A policy advisor suggested that a higher level of consensus existed generally in immigration policy compared to areas such as social welfare. While acknowledging that fundamental policy debates existed (i.e. should we have immigration or not, who should be allowed into the country), this participant described a level of political and policy consensus about the policy focus on skills (rather than source country) and of the importance of immigration as an economic development tool. A level of policy consensus between policy makers and researchers was further reflected in the comments of another policy advisor:

“...I think...[we have now got] a reasonably balanced policy across the attraction and settlement continuum, that there hasn't been the need for researchers to kind of stand outside...They can actually engage and say, look I've found out these problems and bring it to our attention and we can do something with it.” (policy advisor)

This advisor described research being increasingly used to identify issues and problems at the start of the policy development process. This was compared to what was seen as the more traditional use of research to refine or develop existing policy

directions or using research to evaluate policy after its implementation. This same participant saw a more consensual relationship evidenced through “planned connections” between researchers and policy makers and that a “research policy conversation” was regularly occurring. This was compared to an earlier time when researchers were seen as more likely to operate outside the policy development process. Attention to aligning the research interests of academics to the policy concerns of government was also noted by several other advisors. Several researchers also described increasing levels of collaboration and alignment between research and policy interests. One researcher saw this expressed in the amount of independently funded academic research which was being undertaken in collaboration with policy makers:

“...it’s an intuitive relationship...[researcher is] doing her own research work independently through...[FRST]...but increasingly in association with people from these policy agencies.” (researcher)

### **Type of research use and influence**

The immigration case study provides evidence of research use spanning conceptual to instrumental use and this use having different degrees of influence throughout the policy making process. Over time, research is also shown to lead to new research activity, different types of use and different policy-research relationships. For example, one researcher described areas of their work initially influencing thinking around immigration and labour market dynamics, in particular the importance of demand side policy. Over time and in more instrumental fashion, this work was also described as having directly informed the development of demand side policy and programmes in labour market as well as in other policy areas.

Policy advisors described immigration research increasingly being used to inform an integrated, complex and broad policy framework; an observation suggesting a broad shift from conceptual to more instrumental, pragmatic use. The increasing use of immigration research to understand policy implementation, impacts and outcomes through internal and externally contracted evaluation activity was also discussed. Policy advisors also described research increasingly being used to inform the discourse around immigration. This included educating stakeholders about the complexity of the immigration policy environment and appeasing public or political anxiety about immigration by providing evidence of desirable policy outcomes. For example, one advisor described a recently released report<sup>23</sup> which showed immigration resulting in significant and positive economic impacts, as having had an important role in debunking myths that immigration resulted in a fiscal deficit or cost to the country.

Participants described many examples of conceptual use; where research was seen as having influenced the way immigration problems and solutions were framed and thought about by policy makers. Researchers and policy advisors both saw this type of use reflecting the contested and complex nature of policy making. Policy advisors

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<sup>23</sup> Slack, A., Wu, J. & Nana, G. (2007) *Fiscal Impacts of Immigration 2005/06*. Wellington, Department of Labour

recognised that some research may not initially be timely in regard to political, policy or funding cycles and therefore may not have an immediately observable impact on policy. Reflecting this, conceptual use was described by one advisor as helping to keep issues and new ideas “on the radar”. Another saw their frequent use of issues and findings drawn from research influencing the thinking of policy makers and thus having the potential to eventually influence policy decisions.

Two researchers recognised the conceptual use of their research through policy makers’ direct use of language, ideas and concepts drawn from their research. This use was observed some time after the completion of the research and both recognised that it would be difficult to pin point exactly how their work had been influential. One of these researchers observed:

“...It’s quite difficult to see necessarily a sort of linear progression from the research that we do to policy implementation or uptake. But we work very closely with Government agencies. We work hard at those relationships and do a lot of work there, so you know there’s quite immediate uptake, quite immediate connection with them and they use it as they see fit but they do use it.” (researcher)

The availability of appropriate research if and when there was political and policy readiness to refine or develop new policy was seen by policy advisors as enhancing the likelihood of policy development occurring. Research that remained visible, relevant, informative and accessible over time was valued highly. Several researchers also observed that research often failed to get policy traction if it did not align with current political and policy interests. Reflecting this, one felt that research advocating a greater focus on family reunification in immigration policy may now gain currency due to increasing political attention on the competitive advantage that family-friendly policy could provide in the Skilled Migrant Category. Another researcher, working in a different academic discipline from other immigration researchers, recognised that some of their research had provided findings and had raised issues in a way that was too “contentious” politically. This was considered a reason as to why their research had had limited use by policy makers:

“...So while I’m not saying anything that’s really contentious, I’m sort of saying it maybe in a different way than people are accustomed to thinking about it, that may sound a bit contentious. It’s not contentious because New Zealanders agree with it, but it may sound dangerous politically.” (researcher)

In general, this participant saw more linear, instrumental use of research as more likely from research directly commissioned by government for a specific policy purpose and from findings which were closely aligned to policy needs and expectations.

### **Examples of the research policy interface in immigration**

Four examples of the research policy interface in immigration are presented to provide more detailed description of the mechanisms and processes of research use within this context.

## Settlement Policy and Settlement Impacts

A number of participants discussed the role and use of research knowledge in shaping the development of recent settlement policy. Policy advisors and a researcher described the role that research<sup>24</sup> had played in revealing the failure of immigration policy to provide adequate settlement support to immigrants from non-traditional source countries. Research was described as having effectively demonstrated a failure to anticipate the types of settlement issues that would arise from accepting a greater number of immigrants from non-traditional source countries, for example, those relating to language, skills transfer, employment, cultural integration and social cohesion.

Reflective of conceptual use, participants recognised that research had shaped new ways of understanding settlement problems. For example, highlighting the employment barriers faced by new immigrants and how unemployment was a causal factor in the astronaut family phenomena<sup>25</sup>. Research was also described as having built understanding of the implications of settlement problems (e.g. loss of migrants, loss of competitive advantage) and of potential solutions (e.g. support services required).

Once settlement issues were on the policy agenda, research was described as having been used to understand settlement needs and to inform service development. A researcher and policy advisor both saw the cumulative body of settlement research built up over a period of time informing the development of the Settlement Support New Zealand project, an initiative providing 'one stop shop' type settlement services across New Zealand. A better understanding of policy impacts and outcomes was also attributed to various evaluations of settlement services<sup>26</sup>.

In another example of instrumental use, a researcher and policy advisor both described research<sup>27</sup> which had informed the inclusion of social cohesion indicators within a strategic policy framework designed to enhance the social integration of new

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<sup>24</sup> For example:

Ho, E., Cheung, E., Bedford, C., & Leung, P. (2000) *Settlement Assistance Needs of Recent Migrants. Report from Immigration Research Programme*. Wellington, New Zealand Immigration Service.  
New Zealand Immigration Service (2002). *Refugee Voices. Interim Report. A Journey towards Resettlement*. Wellington, Refugee Resettlement Research Programme, Department of Labour.  
Nash, M. & Trlin, A. (2006). *A Survey of Non-Governmental/Not for Profit Agencies and Organisations Providing Social Services to Immigrants and Refugees in New Zealand*, New Settlers Programme Occasional Publication No. 15. New Settlers Programme. Palmerston North, Massey University.  
Ho, E.S., Au, S., Bedford, C. and Cooper, J. (2002). *Mental Health Issues for Asians in New Zealand: A Literature Review*. Wellington, Mental Health Commission.

<sup>25</sup> i.e., the situation where migrants who, after taking up residence in New Zealand, spend periods of time back (usually) in the country of origin for the purpose of undertaking work or business, leaving their spouses and children in New Zealand (Department of Labour, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> For example:

New Zealand Immigration Service (2002). *The Evaluation of the Settlement Services Pilots. Immigration Research Programme*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

<sup>27</sup> Peace, R., Spoonley, P., Butcher, A., & O'Neill, D. (2005). *Immigration and Social Cohesion. Developing an indicator framework for measuring the impact of settlement policies in New Zealand*. Centre for Social Research and Evaluation. Ministry of Social Development, Wellington.

settlers. This research provided the methodological and technical tools necessary to both monitor the social cohesion impacts from immigration policy and to help evaluate initiatives which sought to strengthen social cohesion.

Settlement policy and political support for such policy was described by one policy advisor as largely absent in the 1990s. Consistent with the policy stream model of policy development (Kingdon 1984, cited in Nutley et al., 2007), the rapid policy change was attributed to an alignment between the research evidence and a policy and political readiness to address settlement issues. Research had enhanced awareness and understanding of the problem, policy makers had a maturing appreciation of the policy context and there was political readiness to act, in part supported by a change of Government as well as obvious public indicators of the problem (e.g. immigrant doctors driving taxis). Another policy advisor described international events such as the London tube bombing and the Cronulla riots in Australia as drawing further attention to the relationship between immigration and social cohesion and increasing policy interest in what research was saying in regard to this.

### **Development of Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE)**

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy was announced in October 2006 and was introduced transitionally in 2007 to help meet the horticulture and viticulture industry labour shortages and need for ongoing supply of labour to fill seasonal shortages (Immigration New Zealand, 2007). The policy replaced the seasonal work permit pilot and enables employers to recruit overseas workers when there are no New Zealanders available to do the work. Employers first have to gain Recognised Employer Status (dependent on their employment and health and safety practices and evidence their workers will be protected) subsequent to which they are able to apply to recruit overseas workers through an Agreement to Recruit application (New Zealand Government, 2006). Once completed, workers offshore can lodge an application for a Recognised Seasonal Employer Work Visa which enables work for up to seven months. Applicants must meet health and character requirements and show evidence of arrangements to leave New Zealand at the end of their stay.

Under the policy, recruitment is possible from all Pacific Islands Forum nations; these including the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa and Vanuatu. Prioritising Pacific workers over other countries recognises New Zealand's special relationship with the Pacific and broad interest in a prosperous and stable Pacific; the policy intends to contribute to economic development and stability in the Pacific region (New Zealand Government, 2006). The policy also has provisions to ensure that New Zealand workers are not disadvantaged or displaced. Various responsibilities for employers are also established; these including contributing to travel costs, guaranteeing minimum hours of work, providing pastoral care and paying workers market rates (New Zealand Government, 2006).

In essence, the RSE scheme reflects an understanding of reciprocated impacts of immigration on source countries and that immigration policy should consider impacts on source countries. The policy also recognises and reflects the potential role of temporary labour schemes in contributing positively to the international aid and development obligations of the receiving country.

Participants recognised that immigration researchers had consistently advocated the need for immigration policy to understand the role of immigration in New Zealand's aid and development obligations in the Pacific, in particular its contribution to regional stability and constructive outcomes for source countries<sup>28</sup>. Policy advisors agreed that this advocacy had challenged and shaped policy makers' thinking about these issues and kept them on the policy agenda. This was particularly so in relationship to foreign policy concerns, the role of immigration as a development tool, and a focus on Melanesian nations (not of traditional interest to New Zealand). Tangible outcomes reported from this influence included the inclusion of some Melanesian countries as "kick start states" in the RSE scheme and the intent of the policy to have positive labour market benefits in both the source and receiving countries. A policy advisor reported that additional research commissioned by the Department of Labour was being undertaken to further understand the impact of immigration on source countries, households and families. The evaluation of the RSE was also described by policy advisors as having a particular focus on understanding the scheme's impacts and outcomes for source countries and as a development tool.

Two policy advisors recalled a particularly influential conference presentation<sup>29</sup> made in relation to the RSE policy; observations that were consistent with a researcher's own account of the influence these conference exchanges had had. An advisor commented:

"...[it shifted] my thinking a little and probably others to the focus on our neighbours...[the] large numbers of young, unemployed people, the foreign policy consequences of that, you know, failed states...it shifted a focus for me which was getting a return labour supply into thinking more concretely about what is the role of the Pacific in this and probably it had that impact for others. It was a very good conference...it was very powerful when I think about it."  
(policy-advisor)

Research<sup>30</sup> undertaken collaboratively by the Department of Labour with an independent research provider was also identified by the advisor above as having had a significant influence on the development of the RSE policy. The research provided in-depth understanding of the labour problems in the Hawkes Bay pip-fruit industry and had influenced the shifts in thinking required to advance innovative solutions to

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<sup>28</sup> For example:

Bedford, R. (2004) International migration, identity and development in Oceania: a synthesis of ideas. In Massey, D. & Taylor, J. (Eds.) *International Migration: Prospects and Policies* pp.230-256. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bedford, R. (2006) Trends in Pacific demography: push and pull factors for labour supply. In Plimmer, N. (Ed.) *The Future of the Pacific Labour Market* pp.45-52. Pacific Co-operation Foundation, Wellington.

Bedford, R. (2007) *Pasifika Mobility: Pathways, Circuits and the 21st Century*, Thought Leaders Dialogue, Auckland, 30-31 August. <http://ips.ac.nz/events/completed-activities/Pasifika%20project/Bedford%20mobility.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Pacific Co-operation Foundation conference on labour market issues in the Pacific, Wellington, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Hill, R., Capper, P. & Wilson, K. (2005) Experimenting with the Change Laboratory method to solve the problem of 'episodic labour' in the New Zealand horticultural sector. *First ISCAR Congress, Seville, 20-24 September*. International Society for Cultural and Activity Theory Research

the problem. In particular, the research showed that labour and the act of fruit picking needed to be recognised and managed as central to productivity and quality and thus, industry success. Therefore, rather than considering labour as a problematic cost, the research quite clearly showed the need for on-going investment and development of labour, the cost benefit from which would only be realised by securing a returning (i.e., season upon season) labour supply. The research also provided understanding of the likely impacts of the RSE on the local labour market and subsequently informed initiatives within the policy which are focused on ensuring positive impacts on the local labour market.

Participants described a convergence of political, problem and policy factors providing a momentum and focus to the development of the RSE. Political will, clear policy rationale, and research support were all considered enabling factors. One policy advisor commented:

“...So you can line all these things up and the more you line them up the more you see, oh there is a sweet spot in here that you can find where you can draw together benefits for NZ industry, benefits for the Pacific, kudos for the government, better control of border security because you are reducing or eliminating the use of illegal labour, better working conditions, increased productivity...” (policy advisor)

Participants described the RSE scheme evidencing a shift in aid policy back to Pacific nations. The diplomatic importance of the policy and its alignment with political promises to address Pacific labour mobility issues were also noted as key drivers to the relatively rapid development of the policy. Another influential factor identified by a policy advisor was the on-going labour shortages in the horticulture and viticulture industry, accentuated by falling unemployment and the drying up of traditional pools of casual labour. This participant also described how a 2004 media event, focused on the labour problems in the industry, had highlighted the potential of temporary immigration schemes as a solution to the then Immigration Minister. Policy advisors also reported influence and momentum from existing policy work on seasonal work initiatives, available local and international research evidence from other temporary worker initiatives and acceptance by the horticulture and viticulture industries of the need for seasonal labour strategies. As discussed, research conducted by the Department of Labour provided in-depth understanding of the systematic basis of the labour problems facing the industry and of the practical solutions required to address the problem.

### **Immigration Leading to Temporary Settlement Outcomes**

Four policy advisors and a researcher reported research<sup>31</sup> playing a significant role in advancing policy makers understanding of the trans-national movement of migrants and increasingly, temporary settlement outcomes. Reflecting conceptual use, in particular enlightenment (Weiss, 1979) and a paradigm challenging relationship (Nutley et al., 2007), the research informed new ways of thinking about immigration which in turn informed quite rapid shifts in policy designed to position New Zealand more favourably within the new context. This included increased attention to understanding and using temporary immigration as a pathway to permanent settlement and policy designed to expedite positive settlement outcomes. Also reported was a shift away from measuring policy success primarily by permanent settlement outcomes. Comments from a policy advisor and a researcher illustrated the influence of research on these policy shifts:

“...the traditional model of migration where people migrated permanently once and that was it, just doesn’t hold much salt any more. Quite honestly, it’s commonplace now, but only about four years ago most people had that view. So you know views have changed pretty rapidly in that space and it’s really, again the academics who are kind of starting to say, well there’s this whole circulation thing happening and kind of making us much more aware of that.”  
(policy advisor).

“...I can’t say there is a linear relationship but [the transition to resident’s policy] seems to be taking into some of the research findings that social scientists have put about the transient nature of peoples movement.”  
(researcher)

Another policy advisor saw research having shifted policy advisors and Ministers from seeing migration as an “end point” to understanding it in terms of “circular context”. This shift, reflective of conceptual use (Weiss, 1979), was in turn described as having influenced the review of the skilled migrant category, in particular thinking around how to build the concept of “transitional circularity” into the policy framework. Reflecting the cycle through which research informed policy shifts can in turn lead to further research and different types of research use, another policy advisor described a current project developing a framework for monitoring and understanding

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<sup>31</sup> For example:

Shorland, P. (2006). *People on the Move: A Study of Migrant Movement Patterns to and from New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

Ho, E.S. (2003). Reluctant exiles or roaming transnationals? The Hong Kong Chinese in New Zealand. In Ip, M. (Ed.) *Unfolding History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand*, pp.165-184. Auckland University Press, Auckland.

Ho, E.S. (2001) The challenge of recruiting and retaining international talent. *New Zealand Journal of Geography* 112, 18-22.

Spoonley, P. and Bedford, R.D. (2003) Blurring the boundaries: the impact of contemporary migration flows and transnational linkages on Aotearoa/New Zealand. In Iredale, R., Hawksley, C. and Castles, S. (Eds.) *Migration in the Asia Pacific: Population, Settlement and Citizenship Issues*. Edward Elgar, London.

Ho, E & Bedford, R. (2005) Asian Transnational Families and Communities in New Zealand : Changing Dynamics and Policy Challenges. Paper presented at the *International Workshop on Asian Transnational Families* , Singapore, 2-4 February.

the settlement stages immigrants go through so as to inform responsive and improved services at each stage.

The views of the policy advisors above were consistent with those of a researcher who described earlier research<sup>32</sup> as challenging existing understanding of patterns in Asian immigration, in particular the astronaut family phenomenon. This research showed the phenomenon not to be about ‘dumping’ children in New Zealand but rather a consequence of the settlement problems experienced by immigrants from non-traditional source countries under previous immigration policy. This and other research was also described as articulating the link between immigration unemployment and workplace discrimination, an outcome reflective of the moral critic role (Nutley et al., 2007). This researcher commented:

“...quite a lot of our research in those areas [was] trying to give the other side of the story to provide reasons why some of the Asians migrants might not be able to find work because of the unfavourable employment environment, that they cannot find work that is commensurable to their qualifications and so I think in some ways, this kind of research has helped to kind of change... [public opinion].” (researcher)

A policy advisor also discussed the value of a programme of cross cultural research conducted by Victoria University which had identified the level of discrimination faced by migrants when trying to enter the workforce. This research was described as adding to the evidence base needed to develop and implement policies aimed at addressing such discrimination.

Research on Asian immigration was also described by the researcher above as advancing understanding of trans-national mobility. Further research<sup>33</sup> also showed this to be broad phenomena involving a range of immigrant groups, not just Asian. Collectively this research was seen as having informed policy which aimed to expedite positive settlement outcomes as well as that seeking to develop the pathways between temporary to permanent residence. This latter theme was further examined through research<sup>34</sup> on the transition pathways of international students from temporary to permanent residence. This work, also discussed by a policy advisor, reflects a consensual research policy relationship and interactive models of research use, in this case, to inform further policy development.

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<sup>32</sup> For example:

Ho, E.S. (1995) Chinese or New Zealander? Differential paths of adaptation of Hong Kong Chinese adolescent immigrants in New Zealand. *New Zealand Population Review* 21(1&2), 27-49. Ho, E.S., Lidgard, J.M., Bedford, R.D. and Spoonley, P. (1997) East Asian migrants in New Zealand: adaptation and employment. In Trlin, A.D. and Spoonley, P. (Eds.) *New Zealand and International Migration, A Digest and Bibliography*, Number 3, pp.42-59. Department of Sociology, Massey University, Palmerston North..

<sup>33</sup> Shorland, P. (2006). *People on the Move: A Study of Migrant Movement Patterns to and from New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington

<sup>34</sup> Merwood, P. (2007). *International students: Studying and staying on in New Zealand*. Education New Zealand and Department of Labour, Wellington

## Understanding Impacts from Immigration

Participants provided a number of examples of the political use of research (Weiss, 1979). In these examples, research had provided an evidence base in support of existing or new policy and had helped shape the discourse around immigration. In this respect, a broad programme of research<sup>35</sup> providing understanding of the economic impacts of immigration was considered important by a number of participants. One researcher described this research as effectively addressing the myth that immigration caused unemployment, could negatively impact wage levels and could displace existing workers. The research was also described as having addressed myths around the employability of immigrants. For example, research<sup>36</sup> had showed very high levels of employer satisfaction with immigrant workers and positive employment outcomes for primary applicants. A policy advisor described such research as helping to debunk the myth that only immigrants with English-speaking backgrounds did well on employment indicators. Another advisor described research<sup>37</sup> which had evidenced positive economic impacts from the skilled migration policy as being very important in reassuring policy makers that the policy was “on the right track”. In a similar example, another advisor described research<sup>38</sup> which had examined the cost of providing health services to temporary immigrants relative to the value of these immigrants’ contribution to the economy. Contrary to expressed concern about a negative cost to value ratio, the research show that the economic contribution made far exceeded the service costs; thus providing important evidence in support of policies which encouraged temporary immigration.

## Barriers and enablers of research uptake

Participants saw engaged, personal relationships between researchers and policy makers as an important enabler of research use – in facilitating more interactive and thus more effective forms of knowledge dissemination. A researcher observed a willingness by researchers and policy makers to exchange policy related information and “to talk and listen to each other”. Another researcher described their commitment

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<sup>35</sup> For example:

Poot, J., & Cochrane, B. (2004). *Measuring the Economic Impact of Immigration: A Scoping Paper. Immigration Research Programme*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

Slack, A., Wu, J., & Nana, G. (2007). *Fiscal impacts of immigration 2005/06. Economic Impacts of Immigration Working Paper Series*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

Nana, G., Sanderson, K., & Goodchil, M. (2003). *The Fiscal Impact of Migrants*

*to New Zealand 2003*. Immigration Research Programme. Department of Labour, Wellington.

Sanderson, k., Nana, G., Norman, D., & Wu, J. (2008). *The economic impact of immigration on housing in New Zealand 1991 to 2016 at a glance*. Economic Impacts of Immigration Working Paper Series. Department of Labour and the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ), Wellington.

Stillman, S., & Maré, D. (2008). *Housing Markets and Migration: Evidence from New Zealand at a Glance*. Economic Impacts of Immigration Working Paper Series. Department of Labour, Wellington.

<sup>36</sup> For example:

New Zealand Immigration Service (2003). *Skilled Migrants: Labour Market Experiences*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

<sup>37</sup> For example:

Birrell, B., Hawthorne, L and Richardson, S. (2006) *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>38</sup> Boyd, S (2006). *The Use of Public Hospital Services by Non-residents in New Zealand*. Department of Labour, Wellington.

to having face-to-face meetings with government officials “at regular intervals”. Another saw the small size of New Zealand conducive to a high level of engagement between researchers and policy makers, this seen as enhancing the degree to which research knowledge could inform policy development.

A number of policy advisors reported a general willingness by immigration researchers to engage in a “two-way” conversation with policy makers. Both policy advisors and researchers saw this building mutual understanding and increasing the likelihood of research having value and utilisation within the policy context. Policy advisors saw such exchange enhancing researchers’ understanding of relevant policy concerns and priorities as well as their general understanding of the policy making environment. A researcher saw dialogue enabling researchers to bring to the attention of policy makers new issues and questions which may require further research and/or a policy response. A policy advisor generally described dialogue and engagement as helping to build mutual understanding between both researchers and policy makers:

“...it’s improved people’s shared understanding of some of the things, contentious issues being talked about...just socialising these concepts as they come through these interactions in itself is a huge thing in terms of changing people’s world views and paradigms, otherwise you can have a kind of policy take on certain things...[also] academic research ...has been shaped by the real needs of the policy-makers and decision-makers, so it’s a two-way influence...” (policy advisor)

One researcher’s relationship with policy makers had developed over many years. This researcher had made “a practice of going into the Department a lot to talk to people” and “getting to know the people”. Policy makers’ regard for the researcher’s credibility had been built through the longevity of the relationship, as had general levels of reciprocated trust and confidence within the relationship. This was reflected in the researcher’s position on advisory bodies, involvement in various strategic review processes and in recognition from immigration officials that the researcher’s accumulated knowledge and experience constituted an important part of institutional memory. In comparison, another researcher hypothesised their comparative lack of developed relationship and ‘history’ with policy makers a likely factor in the difficulties they had experienced in influencing the thinking and direction of policy makers through their research. That much of their research had not been directly funded by government nor derived more directly from policy related questions or concerns, was also seen as a factor in this.

Many participants considered research collaborations between policy makers and university researchers as an important enabler of research use. Identified benefits included the ability to pool skills and take advantage of complimentary skills, the avoidance of duplication or gaps in the research effort and increased likelihood that research would have relevance and value within the policy context. A policy advisor saw collaboration in the immigration field encouraged by the quality of the data repository held within government and that reciprocal data sharing data was in the interests of both researchers and policy makers; the latter observation shared by a number of researchers.

The current programme of research<sup>39</sup> on the economic impact of immigration was discussed by one policy advisor as an example of how research use had been enhanced through collaboration between researchers and policy makers. Through collaboration, researchers were described as having a good understanding of the intended end use of the research, with this seen as assisting them to shape and deliver the research to meet the end use need.

Another policy advisor saw collaborative, longitudinal research programmes having the potential to provide and build upon successive platforms of knowledge. This was seen as enhancing the likelihood of research use through enabling policy makers to build, over time, familiarity with the research context and findings and the application of the research within the policy environment. This advisor observed:

“...[longitudinal research programmes] become part of the broader institutional fabric of immigration knowledge and policy making....whereas if its more like here’s a research report and later on you might get another...but you’ve never actually given in the framework for which the works been done in, its actually much harder for [policy makers] a) to get the time to read it and b) then to be able to relate what that means to their work.” (policy advisor)

Policy advisors generally saw collaboration valuable in building researchers’ understanding of the policy environment, including key questions, priorities, future directions and constraints. The ability to provide research findings with relevance and ‘fit’ within this context was considered an important enabler of research use.

Policy advisors saw researchers having a responsibility to understand and engage in the policy development process should they seek influence over policy. This included a duty to understand the factors shaping political and policy concerns and to identify how research findings potentially linked to available policy levers and opportunities. Demonstrating relevance and potential application within a broad policy context was also considered important. For example, a policy advisor felt that a current focus on settlement policy in part reflected the links the issue had to both social and economic policy development opportunities.

Reflecting the above, a lack of understanding and connection to policy was seen by policy advisors as common barrier to research use. Two advisors described difficulties using or applying findings that were too general or nebulous. For example, research which had identified high level needs for long-term attitude change was reported as having had minimal policy traction as the policy levers needed to achieve this were not available or considered feasible by policy makers. In another example, a longitudinal case study research project was considered to have had minimal impact because it had lacked a specific policy purpose, had provided fragmented findings over some time and had failed to build and focus knowledge in a way which gave direction to identifiable and achievable policy responses. The failure to engage meaningfully with policy was also considered by one policy advisor as an underlying reason why a substantial piece of immigration research had had limited

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<sup>39</sup> The Economic Impacts of Immigration (EII) is a three-year programme of targeted research within the Department of Labour, funded by the Cross Departmental Research Pool (CDRP) and managed by Workforce Research and Evaluation

impact on policy. Rather than showing relevance and application to available policy responses, the research findings were described as simply providing a “huge wish list” of questions which did not lead policy makers any closer to policy solutions. In another example, this same advisor described the findings from a series of qualitative research projects, which had focused on different settlement groups, as having been difficult to consolidate, integrate and apply to any substantive policy lever.

One policy advisor described research that directly advocated a specific policy response in risk of being sidelined by policy makers – as they were likely to see this reflecting a lack of understanding of the pragmatic nature of policy making and as suggesting bias in the research. Similarly, other advisors discussed the importance of managing risks through the balanced and constructive reporting of research findings; failure to account for the political nature of decision making was considered a key barrier to getting research used. One of these advisors observed:

“...I’ve seen researchers who produce a piece research that they think we should utilize...However...because they don’t understand how policies are made and the political environment within which we operate... the way they’ve presented the research has made it difficult for us to take it further.”  
(policy advisor)

The observations above were reflected in those of a researcher who hypothesised that their lack of experience in translating their research findings into the policy environment was a factor in a relatively low level of use of their research by policy makers. This participant recognised that much of their research was driven by what they considered to be important and while having policy relevance, was not primarily undertaken “because it is policy relevant”. This position was in part based on recognition that there were many influences over political decision making and that researchers were relatively powerless within this context. This researcher commented:

“...what I’m going to do with my research on a day to day basis, or you know, that’s not going to be primarily determined by policy implications, it’s going to be determined by burning questions I feel a need to answer. Then I’ll do what I can to translate it into policy, but I really do think I’d make myself crazy if I was doing it, if the driver was policy relevance. Because I’ve got no control over if it’s going to have any uptake for policy anyway.” (researcher)

Both researchers and policy advisors felt that increasing the level of exchange between the two groups would help enhance research use in policy making. While it was hoped that greater exchange would assist the alignment of research to policy concerns, the importance of researcher initiated research, not necessarily closely linked to current policy, was widely acknowledged. Policy advisors recognised that such research could raise and address research questions “not yet thought of” by policy makers, provide understanding of key issues and influencers within the global context and ensure that harder, more enduring questions, which could provide sustained value and utility over time, were addressed. It was recognised that a research programme driven too tightly off the political and policy agenda of the day risked an excessive focus on short term, change focused research. Reflecting these views, several researchers felt that university initiated research needed to understand

and be informed by the policy environment, rather than be driven by it. One of these researchers commented:

“...Academic research for me is scholarship which brings together a set of skills and an understanding and then is able to generate new understanding based on the gathering of empirical data. Its not policy driven but there is a policy dimension to it. There is research which I think is much more directly policy driven, which is very often not researcher driven but it is driven by the requirements of a particular Government agency or Ministerial interest really. The first is independent, the second is not.” (researcher)

This researcher suggested increasing the level of physical exchange, for example, through academics working in policy departments and visa versa, as a way to increase collaboration between researchers and policy makers. Another saw the potential for mentoring, where people experienced in the policy environment assisted researchers to develop the skills necessary for demonstrating and communicating the relevance of their research to policy.

A policy advisor suggested a more regular forum where immigration officials could communicate policy concerns and directions to researchers and researchers could present research based issues, trends and perspectives. Another advisor distinguished such a forum from an existing annual immigration conference in seeking a much deeper examination of how researchers could enrich policy development. Another advocated a forum that facilitated open conversations about the experiences and learning acquired within the research policy interface; this seen as providing a means to break knowledge out of “segmented spaces” and to more rapidly disseminate knowledge to stakeholders. Another felt that researchers needed to be constantly engaged with policy makers to get their research into the policy discourse; the responsibility of government to provide opportunities for this was recognised. This viewpoint was endorsed by a researcher who felt that to large extent, government controlled the amount of knowledge and insights provided to researchers. This participant felt government should consult more with researchers to communicate policy directions, needs and collaborative opportunities. Further to this, another researcher felt that policy makers should be more open and willing to engage in a much broader and innovative research policy interface. This participant commented:

“I think policy analysts need to be a little bit more daring and not quite so conservative and open their minds up to research that might be new and innovative and make them think about things that either they’ve never thought about, or they don’t want to think about. So I think it’s a two-way street.” (researcher)

Outcomes desired by participants from enhanced exchange included the increased alignment of research focus to policy needs, increased ability to integrate research knowledge at an earlier stage in policy making, greater use of research to initiate new policy directions and the development of a more extensive and robust evidence base shared more widely between researchers and policy makers.

Face to face methods of information exchange were commonly regarded by participants as having been particularly effective in facilitating research use. While

reports and journal articles were recognised as having a role, many stressed the value of processes which provided for a more interactive exchange between researchers and policy makers. This included face to face discussions, small seminar presentations and forums, and the contribution of researchers on advisory committees and working groups, as report or policy reviewers and in authoring discussion and other strategic documents.

The annual immigration end users conference held in New Zealand and the international “Metropolis” conference were widely regarded by participants as being effective in facilitating “cross fertilisation” and engagement across stakeholder groups. Both conferences were valued in encouraging an open research policy dialogue and in supporting the development of the personal networks necessary for collaboration. The “Metropolis” conference was considered particularly important in providing the opportunity to compare and reflect strategically on New Zealand immigration policy within the international context.

In general, more interactive forms of research policy exchange were valued in providing for timely and responsive knowledge transfer within a complex and rapidly changing policy environment. Such exchange would allow senior researchers in particular to contribute at a strategic level and it was speculated that such processes could hasten the interpretation and application of research knowledge.

## 4. Discussion

This research project provides insights into the social science research/government policy interface in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The findings from thirty-one in-depth interviews with researchers, government policy advisers and politicians across three policy fields (social welfare, immigration and energy), while obviously country/context specific, nevertheless also have implications for the understanding of the role of research in the government policy-making processes in Western democratic countries generally. While data largely confirm findings from previous studies, the inclusion of politicians in this study alongside researchers and policy advisers more clearly reflects the essentially political nature of the policy-making process, along with between-group similarities and differences in perception of the policy process. Similarly, following the research-to-policy process through case studies in three different policy areas, has allowed both a broader and deeper understanding of the policy process.

Analysis of the interviews clearly shows differing researcher/policy advisor/decision-maker perspectives, reflecting the demands of their different working environments, both in terms of the roles and responsibilities of their 'disciplines' and their day-to-day realities. This is not to deny within-group differences: researchers may or may not align their work to policy issues or adopt a more 'consensual' or 'contentious' stance; policy advisers may be more or less proactive in terms of policy; politicians may be more or less convinced of the value of research. There were also case study-specific differences, with immigration, for instance, perhaps lending itself to more sustained researcher-policy advisor collaboration than the more politically contested social welfare arena of Working for Families. But broadly speaking, researcher, policy advisor and politician 'lenses' produced different group perspectives on policy formulation and the role of research in the process across all three case studies and the generic findings.

Different 'lenses' also led to varied accounts of the chronology of events around policy formulation in specific contexts. This different positioning appeared to be in part a function of 'role' (researchers, policy advisers and politicians each tending to emphasise their relative importance as policy drivers), and in part a function of the point in time at which a participant entered the policy-making process. The policy-making process in each of the case studies had a long horizon (notwithstanding the exigencies of the three-yearly election cycle), and a whole range of influences fed into policy formulation over many years from the identification of a policy 'problem', its appearance on a policy agenda, and eventual policy implementation. The length of engagement of a participant in this process appeared to impact on their 'history' of events. (For example, the provenance of Working for Families dated from the late '80s and early '90s for some participants, whereas for others it was a decade later.)

Just as participant perspectives varied on the chronology and relative importance of events and the influence of research, they also differed as to what messages/forms of engagement were most important to facilitate research use. While again there were general 'role' specific (researcher/policy advisor/politician) suggestions, what works for individuals, what permeates through the background noise of 'things crashing through the door' as Maharey put it, can be very different. The researchers identified

as effective promoters of research use had been very tenacious advocates of policy change, engaging with politicians, policy advisors, NGO and community groups as well as the media to develop policy interest and uptake of their work.

Although the findings in this study are based on interviews with only thirty-one participants, they represent varied positions in the policy-making spectrum, and they shared diverse accounts on what influences the policy-making process, the impacts of research and factors which facilitate and inhibit the use of research. An added advantage of this sample was that many had worked in different 'roles' (for instance spending time in both policy and research) and across policy sectors, and across disciplines giving them inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral knowledge. This breadth of understanding of different aspects of the research-policy interface enabled them to present and reflect on competing perspectives.

Many of the 'generic' findings are consistent with international research findings and were reflected across the three case studies. Participants generally spoke of the difficulties of teasing out the influences of research on policy; policy advisors tended to be critical of researchers for not being sufficiently policy-focussed in their research or 'user-friendly' in the dissemination of their research findings; politicians and policy advisors emphasised the need for tighter research time-frames so that policy decisions could in fact be 'evidence-informed'; and both researchers and policy advisors spoke of the need for greater engagement, to break down the 'cultural divide' and facilitate the use of research.

The findings show the importance of user 'pull' in encouraging research use. Policy advisors frequently described policy relevance, appropriateness, meaningfulness and timeliness as key enablers of use and research specifically commissioned for policy purposes as most likely to be used. The influence of user 'pull' was further evidenced through acknowledgement that ideas and thinking 'outside' current political and policy frameworks was less likely to be used. However 'blue skies' and policy aligned research from the university sector were also recognised as important for good public policy. In each case study the findings of longer term research activity, for example the New Zealand Policy Measurement project and the Housing Energy End-use project, had been influential in creating the knowledge base and climate for policy change. In these examples research use was not immediate but followed a change in government and a more receptive policy environment.

A range of research use from the conceptual to more direct instrumental use was shown across the case studies (Weiss, 1979). Examples of political use were especially prominent in the Working for Families case study and the interactive model was particularly evident in the immigration case study. Consensual, contentious and paradigm challenging roles for research and researchers were also all described, (with the same researcher perhaps adopting different stances at various stages of the policy process, for example, contentious at the agenda setting stage yet consensual at policy implementation stages.) Contentious and paradigm challenging research approaches appeared to be particularly linked to conceptual use, with a consensual approach having stronger links with interactive and problem solving models.

While there were many similarities, there were also differences across the three case studies. For instance in the areas of immigration and insulation policy (at least during

the time period covered), political imperatives seem to have been less influential in terms of policy developments than was the case with Working for Families. In saying this we recognise that the limited number of informants, and our methodology for their recruitment, may have excluded voices that stand outside the ‘tent’.

Some policy areas appear to be more ‘contested’ than others. Ideological differences remain strong in the social policy arena, for instance. In terms of Working for Families, different research perspectives and prospective policy options for dealing with child poverty vied for ascendancy. There appeared to be a convergence of research evidence and political will which placed the issue of child poverty on the policy agenda; however this convergence did not appear to extend to policy formulation and implementation. Advocacy groups and some researchers lobbied strongly, using the media and personal political contacts to gain influence. Different options were mooted, and then discarded. In the end, other policy imperatives (making work pay) and political expediency (keeping voters on side) were seen to have impacted on the final form of Working for Families – and outcomes in terms of dealing with child poverty.

Conversely, the convergence of research and political thinking around immigration and insulation does appear to have extended to subsequent stages in the policy process, with the level of formalised and ‘institutionalised’ engagement between researchers and policy-makers leading to a collaborative approach to policy decision-making, implementation and evaluation. Researchers and policy-makers reported a high level of consensus on key issues and directions. In the field of insulation there appeared to be increasing consensus between researchers and policy-makers, particularly as the additional benefits relating to health and climate change were added to the debate.

There are many models for explaining the research-policy process. While none of them appears to offer a complete explanation, together those identified below provide a useful framework for examining different aspects and examples of the research-policy interface in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Policy development processes described within all three case studies were most closely aligned to policy development models which describe a more complex, staged and contextualised account of the process. The case studies identified multiple influences on decision making, with research evidence but one of many influences on policy. To various degrees all the case studies showed alignment with the policy stream model of policy development: the opportunity and agenda for policy change was enhanced when the research evidence aligned with other policy influences. In all case studies, research evidence existed for some time before it was ‘used’; typically when shifts in the political and policy context resulted in the information gaining currency, value and acceptability.

The ‘waxing and waning’ in influence of particular policy options, and of researchers and advocacy groups during the drawn-out policy-making processes can be viewed in terms of the ‘advocacy coalition framework model’, with the process ‘driven by competing and multiple accounts of policy problems and the range of possible solutions’. Working for Families appears to have been a highly politicised policy process with changing ‘coalitions’ of advocacy groups, policy advisors, researchers,

politicians and the media (with some researchers ‘aligned’ with advocacy groups either by choice, or because their research was used to give credibility and power to their advocacy.) Somewhere in the policy-making process the focus shifted to include ‘making work pay’ alongside child poverty. One of the leading advocacy groups (Child Poverty Action Group) and their supporters became excluded from the ‘institutionalised’ policy-making process. In Fafard’s words, the ‘waxing and waning of particular coalitions’ influenced and reflected the policy options chosen. Alternatively, the complexity of this long contested policy process could also be seen in terms of Fafard’s ‘argumentative discursive’ model, with one set of ‘actors’ (with their focus on ‘make work pay’ and reducing reliance on benefits along with dealing with child poverty) winning out in their ‘definition of reality’ over another set of actors who remained focussed on ending child poverty (and concentrating resources on the poorest children).

If the focus is more clearly on research use within the policy-making process, the Working for Families case study provides a useful illustration of the ‘stages model’ as different types of research were influential at different ‘stages’ of the process (Fafard, 2008). The Poverty Measurement Project and a range of other local research (internal and external) were seen to feed conceptually into the early stages of ‘issue naming’ and ‘agenda setting’. Comparative international research that showed New Zealand was not performing well helped to keep attention on the issue. At latter stages, overseas models and evaluations, income monitoring and ‘number crunching’ fed the policy formulation process conceptually and instrumentally; and more instrumental use was apparent during the ‘policy implementation’ stages.

The policy-making process in the insulation case study can also be seen in terms of several models. Although it was less politically contentious, with less overt advocacy and high profile media attention, ideological elements were still present in the insulation case study particularly at the agenda setting stage. This could also be seen in terms of the ‘advocacy coalition framework; or again, the ‘argumentative-discursive’ model, as groups of ‘actors’ vied for their version of ‘reality’ (for instance supply-side versus demand-side approaches to energy efficiency, a ‘hands-off’ market driven approach versus a ‘managing’ approach), with the use of research and policy decisions depending on which version of ‘reality’ was in ascendancy. There were also instances of instrumental research-to-policy use, in line with more simple linear models of the role of research in the policy-making process. A convergence of evidence bases substantiated arguments for action: health research evidence added power to energy-related research. Climate change concerns added further weight.

In general, the findings showed research use, influence and research policy relationships shifting and changing over time and through different stages of the policy development process. This reflects the conceptualisation of research use as a fluid, dynamic process and the need to see different types of use as parallel and overlapping processes, rather than single, discrete outcomes.

The immigration findings in particular reinforce that collaboration and two-way dialogue between researchers and policy makers can support knowledge transfer and use. The level of trust developed between some immigration researchers and decision makers was shown to be a key enabler of research use. Effective engagement between researchers and policy advisors increased understanding of each other’s

realities, built trust, helped to break down the ‘cultural divide’ (Nutley et al., 2007) and align the drivers, interests and concerns of both parties.

It is clear from the case studies that the intricacies of policy-making processes, which can occur over a number of years (and through electoral cycles), are many and changing. Governments (and personalities and ideologies) change; research funding produces new research (which may or may not be well aligned to policy needs); and circumstances outside the national political or research arenas – such as climate change – impact tangentially on the policy process. Reflecting the complexity of the situation, elements of many models of research use seem useful at various times or ‘stages’ of different policy-making processes.

## **Concluding comments**

The aim of this study has been to be indicative rather than definitive; to add insights to the already considerable body of research around government policy formulation and the role research evidence plays in this process. In particular the focus has been on the use (or otherwise) of social science research evidence in policy-making, and the factors which facilitate or impede this use. By its nature, social science research produces ‘contestable’ findings. This both adds to and mirrors the ‘messiness’ and essentially contestable nature of the policy-making process. Thus this study can be seen as another example of a process policy advisors and politicians complain about: researchers as ‘complexifiers’, underscoring the complexity of the myriad interactions within the research-to-policy process, rather than producing ‘simplified’ policy-relevant recommendations for a way forward to increase the use of research.

The ‘cultural divide’ between researchers and policy advisors has already been well articulated. The needs of the research and political sectors to produce and access research products on different time-frames are difficult to bridge; so are institutional constraints of academia, the bureaucracy and the political system, highlighted by all participants. While there is no benchmark against which to access the relative effectiveness of the research use evident in the three case studies there is no doubt that social science research was seen as an essential and valued part of the mix of influences that facilitated policy change in the three policy areas. The salience of Fafard’s comment that “decision-makers can and will only tackle some issues and not others at any point in time” (Fafard, 2008, p.8) was apparent in all three case studies. An alignment of interests accorded a timeliness that provided the opportunity for research use. In each case study a relevant body of research evidence, much of which had been amassed over years of sustained research activity, was available to inform the policy process.

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