

# Insights into the Hunt Report's Research Recommendations: considering their influence on government research policy and the potential impact on educational research in the area of the Health Promoting School



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## Context for our presentation



- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in Ireland (January 2011) and what it may mean for educational research in Ireland during this time of transformation
- Strategy is a major review of all aspects of contemporary higher education in Ireland commissioned by previous government
- Specific focus today is the chapter on Research (Chapter 4, pp. 63-73) to provide some insights and discuss some potential impacts on educational research in particular:

# Insights into the Hunt Report's Research Recommendations

## Questions to guide our talk



Hunt Report's research recommendations critically relate to:

- Investment in Research & Development
  - Role of the researcher
  - Irish PhD education & training
  - Prioritisation of public research funding
  - Commercialisation of Intellectual Property (IP) for the economy
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- What the focus of educational research might be?
  - The way educational research in Higher Education will be carried out?
  - What will be the impact on educational researchers in Higher Education?
  - Implications for different types of HEIs in Irish system?

## **Our thesis**



**Hunt Report's Research Recommendations which will influence government policy may lead to a gap between government policy on research and educational research in higher education in practice.**

### What focus of research might be?



- Irish Government resources are currently limited due to recession and IMF bailout.  
EU funding may be the way to go.
- The recent prioritisation exercises indicated that some research areas are going to be selected over others, education is lower down the priorities, as less commercial.
- Government agenda may lean more towards multi-disciplinary research and problem-solving for them to provide VfM, but academics may wish to pursue their own interests in education research.

## Insights into the Hunt Report's Research Recommendations

### Consider the following:



- Core research funding allocation to HE, allows for research on any theme = preserves academic autonomy (DES - HEA)
- Research Council funding is thematised by government (NDP, 2007-2013)
- However, indirect costs are rarely covered e.g. computer and publication costs
- Charities and Foundations (non-government funded) are important to education research as well.
- Organisation of work and leave is just as important as funding

### How will research be carried out?



- Strategy recommends cross-sectoral collaboration should be rewarded across all research missions, disciplines and types of research for 'parity of esteem' purposes
- We suggest that collaboration in research is good between sectors to enhance research, knowledge and contribution to society
- Education has always been multidisciplinary in its approach
- However, at present, secondments not possible, so consultancy is only option

## Impacts on HE researchers?



- Strategy refers to clearer career paths and rewards for researcher
- Greater mobility between sectors e.g. HE & public sector
- We suggest this is good for impact on teaching in HE, especially training of student teachers
- However, development is in non-core funded and non-Exchequer funded posts which is not best for retention and capacity-building as high level work is underpaid in HE



### PhD training for researchers?



- Hunt Report recommends raising PhD training to international standards and doubling of numbers.
- This is essential for future research-capacity building, especially in the area of education.  
Example: new structured PhD in Education at MIC and other institutions.
- However, report does not indicate who will do supervision and where. Will specialist colleges of education be afforded same privilege as universities or will this take place in elite Centres of Excellence only?

## Impacts for different HEIs?



We are researching at a College of Education but:

- Will measures of performance lead to greater funding i.e. selectivity?
- Will large research universities receive more funds?
- What about good individual researchers and centres in Colleges of Education and Institutes of Technology/Technological Universities?

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In the context of research in the area of the Health Promoting School

**Example in practice**



**Themes that will be addressed**

To consider the Hunt Report in the context of higher education research we have chosen to focus on three themes

- Collaboration
- Multi-disciplinarity
- Change and problem-solving

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**Example in practice**



**Some background information**

An exploration of the development of a Network of Health Promoting Schools is the focus of the research project

- The Network was established in 2005 as a result of earlier research
- The Network consists of 'clusters' of schools with each school individually focussing on aspects of health and is overseen by a HPS Partnership comprising key stakeholders from both health and education arenas
- The research is only possible because of the existence of my post

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## Theme One

## COLLABORATION



### **Strengths and opportunities?**

- Real example of joined-up thinking  
both sectors fully involved in the Network  
recognition by partners that education is the key function of schools and that schools that place an emphasis on health can produce both academic and health benefits
- Lateral gains – for example part of HPS process is that schools self-evaluate their involvement in the network at regular intervals which develops their generic skills in self-assessment which the DES wants to encourage
- The project builds trust between partners

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## **COLLABORATION**



### **Potential challenges?**

- **Measuring impact**

Who will decide what is to be measured and how?

Change is slow – educational and health gains may not be realised until much later

- **Responsibility / accountability**

Who is creating the effective change

Who is going to get the credit (or blame?)

- **Competing demands on time**

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## Theme Two

## MULTI-DISCIPLINARITY



### **Strengths and opportunities?**

- Historically HE researchers have worked in multi-disciplinary ways to solve research problems
- In research on HPS a wide array of disciplines are drawn on  
This means that a holistic view of needs drives the process rather than one discipline's focus/goal taking precedence
- One of the main benefits to date has been the avoidance of duplication of work

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## **MULTI-DISCIPLINARITY**



### **Potential challenges?**

- Difficulties with different disciplinary languages
- Different approaches



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## Theme Three

## CHANGE / PROBLEM SOLVING



### Strengths and opportunities?

- The HPS research allows problems to be considered outside normal boundaries
- This research does not just focus on outcomes but also emphasises the process which can lead to structural changes

## PROBLEM SOLVING



### Potential challenges ?

- Senge (1990) addressing the fragmented way that we as a culture have been trained to solve problems states:  
*“From an early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable, but we pay a hidden, enormous price. We no longer see the consequences of our actions, we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole.”*
- Who will input / decide on the problems to prioritise?

# Concluding thoughts



Collaboration

**Linking with other sectors**

Public service  
Enterprise  
Applied research

= new knowledge creation ?

Hunt  
2011

**Higher Education**

single/multi-disciplinary  
soft vs hard  
pure vs applied  
quant vs qualitative

**Strategy's new research vision**

Prioritisation & selectivity of public funding  
Commercialisation of IP

Multi-disciplinarity

Change and problem solving