

UKRI Policy Fellowship (Jan 2024- June 2025, 18 months)

Host: Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)

Topic: Evaluating Innovation Policy

Prof Ana Manzano, University of Leeds, UK

Context: Northern Ireland Government



Economic
and Social
Research Council



ESRC Policy Fellowships 2023: Opportunity Description

Fellowship Title: Department for the Economy - Evaluating Innovation Policy Research Fellowship

Host Department: Department for the Economy, NICS <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>

Host Team: Analytical Services Division.

Summary: Opportunity to work with the Department for the Economy to drive a step change in approach to the evaluation of the Department's 10x Innovation Policy, creating an evidence base to understand the true impact of innovative, inclusive and green growth and to aid future decision-making.

Fellowship Theme: Data and Evaluation. *Please see the full call text 'What We Are Looking For' for a detailed summary of the research themes targeted in this call.*

Policy topic: Evaluation of innovation policy to drive innovation led, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Relevant academic disciplines: Behavioural Economics, Data and Evaluation, Impact Evaluation, Statistical Research and Methodology for Impact Evaluation, Measurement of Innovation Policy.

Relevant research career stage: Early and/or Mid-Career Professionals.

Agreed to co-produce a Monitoring & Evaluation Strategy for the DfE

Stage 1: Problem Definition

- 2 workshops
- 20 staff consulted

Stage 2: Involvement workshops

- Phase 1: 3 theories of change workshops (33 staff)
- Phase 2: Vision & objectives 2 workshops (33 staff)

Stage 3: Consensus

- Online Delphi
- 2 rounds (23+22)

Overall consultation process



QUANTITATIVE: MORE **THAN 100 PEOPLE**
CONSULTED



QUALITATIVE: IN-DEPTH OPPORTUNITY TO
CONTRIBUTE VERBALLY AND IN WRITING,
IN PERSON AND ANONYMOUSLY.

Some tangible and semi-tangible outputs for all of us

Academic: Possible REF Impact case study, important evidence for my promotion from associate professor to full professor, ongoing involvement with DfE after the fellowship finished.

Writing a commentary for the DfE Bulletin

FOCUS: Enhancing Economic Policy Impact through Monitoring and Evaluation

Dr Ana Manzano, Analytical Services Division

This Focus Piece examines the role & importance of the monitoring & evaluation processes in the public sector and how the Department for the Economy's (DfE) approach to improving existing processes can enhance the impact from economic policy.

Why are Monitoring and Evaluation so important?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) allows policymakers, programme managers and other stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of public policies, programmes and interventions. It enables accountability, evidence-based decision-making, learning and improvement, transparency, communication, and effective resource allocation. By investing in M&E, public sector organisations can ensure that their programmes and policies are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

M&E are essential to the effective delivery of the DfE vision set out by the Economy Minister Conor Murphy. This vision includes four key priorities: creating good jobs; promoting regional balance; raising productivity; and reducing carbon emissions. In this context, M&E is a complex process as DfE has a wide remit, including responsibility for wider economic policy (energy, tourism and telecoms), a range of employment and skills programmes, oversight and funding of the further and higher education sectors and various aspects of employment law.

What are Monitoring and Evaluation?

Good evaluations rely on good monitoring but although monitoring and evaluation are related, they serve distinct purposes and involve different processes.

First ever M&E
strategy for
DfE and for
any NI
government
Department



DEPARTMENT FOR THE ECONOMY MONITORING AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

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Presenting at
the NI
Economist
Profession
conference

DEVELOPING A DEPARTMENTAL MONITORING & EVALUATION STRATEGY

NICS Economist Profession Conference

28 March 2025



Co-Presenting at
the International
Social Policy
Annual
Conference(York)
with DfE analysts



Department for the

Economy

An Roinn

Geilleagair

www.economy-ni.gov.uk

The Role of Co-Production in Evidence-Based Policy: Insights from a Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

Manzano, A., Dickson, W., Watton, D.

SPA 3rd July 2025



Creating a globally competitive economy that works for everyone

Co-produced
Evaluation Training
Materials for the
Department: 5
videos, training
needs analysis,
staff learning map.



TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS

Prof Ana Manzano
University of Leeds

Key Learnings

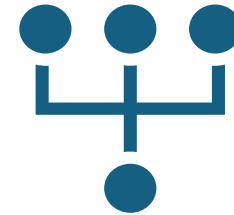


Time and Space

Value of the Inception Phase, enabled building trust, clarifying expectations, and shaping a realistic scope.

Early-stage flexibility supported better understanding of mutual of aims (individualised approach), context and more relevant outputs.

Dedicated DfE staff to support and guide the academic.



Flexibility and Adaptability in Real-Time Policy Contexts

Importance of co-designing outputs that can endure policy and politics changes.

Full-time stage (60+40 negotiated with my department) helped with flexibility, facilitating workshops and attending departmental meetings (face-to-face and online) in Belfast.

UKRI Fellowship Opportunities and Challenges

- Placement in a devolved administration was huge **opportunity for host and me. Once in a life-time** opportunity for me
- **Challenges:**
 - Timing misalignment: Delays outside your control (security clearance, departmental clearance for strategies, political cycles (0 to 3 ministers for the economy in 18 months), civil service staff turn around.
 - Getting to know the host department
 - Navigating role identity: Academic vs civil servant, 2 laptops, email addresses, desk space, accessing the building, travel
 - Capacity constraints: Competing priorities even in my full-time stage, keeping momentum when fellowship ends.