As public representatives in Dáil Éireann and the Houses of the Oireachtas there is an onus on politicians and policymakers to ensure that government policy, which can have far reaching implications for the people of Ireland, is made through informed, data driven analysis and debate. I am delighted to invite Sense about Science and Science Foundation Ireland to bring real life stories to the Houses of the Oireachtas, to shine a light on the importance of evidence based policy making during Science Week 2018.

John Halligan, TD
Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Education and Skills with special responsibility for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development

Science Foundation Ireland invests in world leading research in Ireland. As an agency, we are passionate about ensuring that research, funded by the public, provides societal benefit to the people of Ireland – be that through medical breakthroughs or generating data to support government policy making. I am very enthusiastic about this partnership with Sense about Science which provides us with an opportunity to highlight the importance of evidence based policy making and the impact that publicly funded research can have.

Professor Mark Ferguson
Director General, Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government of Ireland
On 14th November 2018 people from all over Ireland are coming to the Oireachtas to tell politicians and officials why evidence matters. Among them a farmer, a craft brewer, a parent, a chef and a beekeeper. Coming from all over Ireland to Dublin, they will explain to their representatives in the Dáil how they use evidence and why they expect people in authority to do so.

There are many others who would have come in their place. People contact our organisation all the time with questions about the use of evidence on subjects as diverse as air pollution, childcare, the safety of military personnel and cause-of-death investigations. They want to make good choices and understand what policies will achieve. They aren’t looking for a sound bite or a quick fix.

As the idea of a ‘post-truth’ public rumbled through public life last year, people started asking what it meant and whether politicians might start ignoring public values of truthfulness and accountability. They asked what they should do and what we at Sense about Science were doing. We are challenging this caricature that the public is uninterested in the soundness of policy. In the following pages you can read some of what they have to say. They have different opinions, they don’t agree on what evidence to prioritise and others would no doubt disagree with them. But in uniting over its importance to understanding, accountability and scrutiny, we hope they’ll inspire decision-makers to strive for better in public life.

Síle Lane

Head of international campaigns and policy
Sense about Science
The people and organisations in the following pages have an amazing range of stories to tell about why evidence matters to them.

But collectively they tell policymakers that:

- Evidence must be central to formulating policy;
- Ministers must use evidence to explain their reasoning;
- The Dáil must at all times seek and scrutinise reasoning behind policies.
Why evidence matters to us: the stories heard in the Oireachtas and messages we received...

Alannah Murray
Accessibility advocate, Virginia, Co Cavan

Why is evidence important to me?

Because without it there is no basis for policies that work and make a difference. Without policies, there are no methods of change.

Without change, we cannot achieve equality for all people. For example, as a wheelchair user, sandwich boards on the footpaths are obstacles to me for just getting around the city.

Me, and people like me, have lived experiences and evidence of how policy changes can make the streets more accessible.

Policy changes supported by evidence is the difference between being able to go down the street without fear of bumping into sandwich boards and not.

Evidence is the basis of our fight for our rights as disabled people.

Evidence is our voices enacting change for the disabled people that will come after us.

Evidence is independence.
Evidence is equality.
Evidence is essential.

Barry Sheridan
CEO, Irish Men’s Sheds Association

Men are often slow to talk about their emotions and reluctant to ask for help. Men’s Sheds help combat these negative and unhealthy attitudes, in ways that have clear benefits for members’ health and wellbeing. Dr. Lucia Carragher’s 2013 paper on Men’s Sheds in Ireland found that many members had experienced significant loss in their life, separation from their partner or children, or faced a financial crisis. Nearly a quarter indicated they had experienced depression in the past 5 years.

Men’s Sheds provide men with a safe environment to develop friendships, and connect with their communities, ultimately boosting their mental and physical wellbeing. Members come from all ages, backgrounds and walks of life – all looking to do something meaningful in their spare time.

For decades, our model of society and of masculinity has proven detrimental to men’s mental health, and their willingness to seek help. The Men’s Sheds movement is a powerful tool, building on evidence to help empower men to once again contribute to their communities.
Mona O’Donoghue Concannon
Farmer, Dunmore, Co Galway, West Women in Farming

I am here to talk to you about the role of women in modern agriculture and how evidence is letting us down.

The most recent evidence we have shows that women account for 11% of the farm workforce. Do you think this is correct? It’s not. It’s a lot more than that. I work fulltime on the farm, but I actually do not exist when it comes to farming statistics. Women like me are not being recorded or recognised as labour units.

A recent study in the Irish Farmers Journal stated we are 30 years behind in recognising women in agriculture. The government does have policies relating to women in farming. I ask all politicians and people in power to consider the impact of the under representation of women in agriculture statistics on these policies in the future.

Aine Mulloy
Co-founder, tech start-up GirlCrew

GirlCrew is a social network for women founded in 2014, and we launched the app in 2017.

Evidence from a recent report from the Mental Health Foundation in the UK found 18-34 year olds to be the most lonely group. Loneliness impacts physical and mental health. Feelings of social integration increase productivity and employee retention in the workplace – which is ultimately good for society. And that’s what we as a community focused network offer to corporate partners.

Evidence matters to us because generating strategies or making decisions without evidence means that campaigns are set up to fail. You can’t set goals, monitor targets or determine what is a success without including evidence at the starting point. With no benchmark to work from - time, and money, is wasted. Businesses make decisions based on evidence. We want policymakers to do the same.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. Anytime something is suggested, there should always be evidence to back it up.

— Stephen Hanlon
Public relations officer, Wicklow town, Co Wicklow

Lawmakers are entrusted to carry out due diligence for every decision they make. Transparent evidence is the foundation of such due diligence and should be an expected part of the legislative process.

— Sorcha Cullen
Planning associate, Ballinteer, Dublin 16

Evidence is important to me because politicians shouldn’t be making policies that impact my life and other citizens’ lives based on a whim - it should be based on what science says, what data and stats say, and also what the experiences of their constituents say.

— Alison McIntyre
Financial advisor, Blackrock, Co Dublin
Ken Norton
Beekeeper, Killucan, Co Westmeath

During the 60’s and 70’s Ireland was known as The Land of Milk and Honey throughout the world. In 2018 we still produce milk but not as much honey. Over the years much of our uplands and hedgerows have disappeared and we very seldom see a wildflower meadow any more.

These changes have seen a reduction in the amount of wildlife, birds and bees, at a time when we should be ensuring greater protection for them.

As Ireland prides itself as a green island with wild tourism and green agriculture, we should have more protection for nature in our country.

At a time when wildlife need all the help they can get, would it not be time to sit together and review the evidence and discuss solutions to minimise the conflict with nature.

Evidence matters to me because wildlife matters.

In the era of ‘Fake News’ it’s important that we take what we read online & information that we gain from our peers through word of mouth with a pinch of salt. Evidence is important to me in both my personal and professional life as it allows me to make clear fact based decisions that may impact my friends, family, colleagues & customers.

—
David Hollywood
Software consultant, Rathcoole, Co Dublin

Evidence is important to me because if you make an argument or state an opinion, you need to back it up with evidence. Without evidence to back it up, you’ll have no credibility with your readers or listeners. In today’s world with social media allowing almost anyone to state their opinions, we need good evidence to back things up so we’re not easily swayed by our prejudices or by mass hysteria.

—
Jim Healy
Parent, Inchicore, Dublin 8

Evidence based policy making is vital. I don’t want politicians who stand up in the Oireachtas talking about how they “feel” that this is a good decision or that they “think” this is a good way to go.

—
Michaela Parker
Social care leader, Co Galway

In Newbridge, we have a housing crisis but evidence shows that the town’s infrastructure will not support any more new houses. We cannot build until we improve the roads and sewage systems. Had we not had this evidence we could have run into massive issues very quickly.

—
Linda Hayden
Branch chair, Newbridge, Co Kildare

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—
Jim Healy
Parent, Inchicore, Dublin 8
As a postdoctoral researcher, I am in the privileged position of being able to examine the textual contents of medieval Irish manuscripts in an attempt to unlock their secrets.

Ireland boasts the most extensive and diverse literature in medieval Europe written in the vernacular language, covering a broad range of genres. This literature and indeed the manuscripts bear witness to our past. These written sources, for instance, represent important materialistic evidence because they reveal the conditions in which the scribes worked, the methods they used and the intellectual environment in which the documents were produced.

Evidence matters to me because it allows me to scientifically examine the language and texts preserved in literary, historical, legal and technical Irish language manuscripts, thereby contributing to an accurate and informed understanding of Ireland’s language, history, society and intellectual culture. Policymakers could do well to take into account the evidence from the past to help shape a better future.

Mar scoláire, bionn sé de phrihbléid agam téacsanna ó láimhscríbhinní meánaoiseacha Gaeilge a scrúdú agus iarracht a dhéanamh na rúin a chaomhnaíonn siad a nochtradh.

Is in Éirinn a faightear an litríocht is leithne seánra agus is ilghnéithí ábhar san Eoraip le linn na meánaoise atá scríthe i dtéanga nach Laidin i. Tugann an litríocht agus na láimhscríbhinní fianaise lenár stair. Is iad na foinsí scríthe seo a thuagann fianaise thábhachtach díuinn ar an ríocht inar oibrigh na scriobhaite, ar na teicnici a d’úsáid siad agus ar an gcomhthéacs intleachtúil inar tiomsaíodh na cáipéisí seo.

Tá tábhacht ar leith ag an bhfianaise im chuid oibre fhéin mar go ligeann sé dom grinnstaidéar eolaíoch a dhéanamh ar an dtéanga agus ar na téacsanna a faightear na láimhscríbhinní litríocha, staire, dí agus teicniúla seo. Agus is mar sin a chuirtear le tuiscint chrúinn agus foghlamhtha ar theanga, staire, sochaí agus cultúr intleachtúil na hÉireann. Ba mhaith agus ba thairfeach do lucht déanta na bpolasaithe dá gcuirfidh fianaise ón stair san áireamh ar mhaithte le todhcháis níos fearr a mhunlu.

Evidence based on observations is essential in developing a coherent scientific model, for example for high-precision local weather forecasts, maps, paths and rights of way, which are of such value to ramblers.

—

Mark Bailey
Rambler, Co Tyrone

Evidence is vital to us as a society so that we may come to informed, rational decisions about policies that affect us in our daily lives. Without evidence, it is impossible for us to come to any sort of reasonable conclusion in the decision-making process.

—

Cormac Smith
Actor, Effin, Co Limerick

As a nurse, my working ethos is structured on evidence based practice. As a citizen of Ireland, I expect the same standards from my government.

—

Julie Maher
Nurse, Strokestown, Roscommon
Without evidence, important milestones that impact our future are just a whole lot of uncertainty! I don’t want future decisions based on conjecture, they need to be backed up with the truth.

—— Laura Brereton
Intern, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14

As a research scientist, all my findings are backed up with evidence. In my opinion, politicians should maximise the use of scientific evidence when forming policy, instead of relying purely on emotions, beliefs, and habits.

—— Brian Ó Loinsigh
PhD student, Drogheda, Co Meath

Evidence matters when basic treatments are not available, which results in a domino effect on the health of individuals. Evidence matters, patients matter, people with invisible conditions matter.

—— Helen Sheahan
Fibromyalgia and chronic pain patient, Cork

As a doctor I was taught to use an “evidence based practice” approach, making decisions based on what research has found to be most effective. Ireland is a country which is proud of its strength in education and research, it makes sense that we would expect no less from our representatives.

—— Rona Hunt
Doctor, Kilcormac, Co Offaly

In a world with so many competing narratives and where every story appears to have multiple versions, evidence has never been more important. Truth is paramount for journalists, and it shouldn’t be subjective. Cold, hard evidence is not open to opinion.

—— Roisin Henderson
Journalist, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

Evidence is important to me as a science broadcaster because I want to educate and inspire people to love science as much as I do. Evidence underpins all in science, and I would be doing a disservice to the public if I didn’t ensure the information I was sharing with them was evidence based.

—— Emer Maguire
Broadcaster, Belfast, Co Antrim
Evidence is of utmost importance to me as a journalist, without evidence a story does not have credibility – it cannot be proven. Politicians need to use evidence in their policy and decision making, and need to showcase that evidence to their constituents, so we can place our trust (and votes) in them.

— Fiona Heavey
Journalist, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim

Evidence from medical professionals is an important building block in determining a child’s suitability to train with a stability dog. The fact-based assessments and evidence of progression of the condition the child has been diagnosed with, are used to plan for the future needs of the child, and the appropriate training to undertake.

— Kate Durrant
Dogs for the Disabled, Blarney, Co Cork

As a mother and a service user of Irish maternity services, evidence matters to me. I want my healthcare options to consist of evidence based care that adheres to international standards of best practice, rather than healthcare procedures that are performed simply because they might save time and are ‘the done thing’ in Ireland.

— Laura Ryan
Parent, Portlaoise, Co Laois

In my role as a cheesemaker producing high quality St Tola cheese, consistent, evidence based information is of extreme importance. Information provided or actions taken cannot be based solely on subjective feelings, gut instinct or common practices.

— Siobhán Ní Ghairbhith
Cheesemonger, Ennistymon, Co Clare

Without evidence detailing the needs of those we support through our food distribution network, we cannot access FEAD, the European agency responsibility for food distribution to those in most need. Without evidence we cannot stand up for the most vulnerable in our society.

— Grainne Byrne
St Fiacres Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Co Kerry

We are in the age where information, facts and figures are more easily accessed than ever before. Access them, substantiate your claims.

— Tony Sheridan
Social media and digital content officer, Monaghan town, Co Monaghan
Ann-Marie O’Reilly
Policy officer, Threshold

Threshold is a national housing charity providing advice, advocacy and tenancy protection for households experiencing housing problems. We mostly work with private renters who we help to stay in their tenancies in different ways.

We collect data from our on the ground services in Dublin, Cork and Galway and from calls to our national helpline. Our database of information shows a detailed, accurate and up to date picture of the housing needs of people and families.

This evidence informs how we develop our services; it also helps us support our policy asks to Government and it shows statutory funders the level and nature of our service provision which they are supporting. Evidence matters to us because it allows us to understand what works to prevent homelessness, and to get support to do more of that.

Pádraig O’Browne
Chairman, Old Irish Goat Society, Mulranny, Co Mayo

When feral goats began to wander through our village, Mulranny County Mayo, we observed some to be remarkably distinct from Swiss or other types. We wondered if they were Irish in origin.

Our research began by looking at historical references in literature and art.

We then retrieved DNA from museum specimens in Ireland and the UK.

Our partners at the European ADAPT MAP consortium mapped the data.

The results established that our Old Irish Goats are a rare heritage breed.

We initiated Irish Rare Breed Conferences which promote science based practices.

We have also discovered that there is no legislation or law to protect native Irish animal breeds.

We want government to use evidence like we did – and bring in this law.

Research in other countries shows that traffic speed reductions and access restrictions improves liveability, revitalises town centres and communities, and improves population health. People fear change and tend to believe their gut reaction that things will get worse, businesses will die, social contact will cease, etc. We need local authority public representatives to seek out and use evidence in their decision making to challenge such fears, rather than making decisions based on gut reactions and lobbying from vested interests.

— Elaine Mullan
Waterford Cycling Campaign, Co Waterford

Following evidence saves you from wasting your money – or the taxpayer’s. The rise and rise of Irish C-sections were in the news yesterday: evidence based decision-making could and should apply here too.

— Andrew Lloyd
Lecturer and farmer, Borris, Co Carlow
Sean McVeigh
Hurler and sports scientist, Co Donegal

I play hurling for Donegal GAA and work as a sports scientist for Vald Performance, a sports tech company.

I, and the GAA, care about helping our players and communities thrive.

For example, we recently noticed a rise of almost 400% in hip surgeries in players under 30 from 2007 to 2014. In GAA training fields nationwide increases in gym work, training load, and the introduction of "trendy" training methods have become the norm and this is clearly taking its toll.

We really need to take an evidence based approach, especially around training loads, to avoid over-worked players developing advanced injuries that may have ill effects on their life long term.

We want the GAA to be the best community organisation in the world. So we use evidence to find out how best to support our players and local communities. We would expect our politicians to do the same.

—

Alison Duggan
Student, St Colman’s Community College, Midleton, Co Cork

I am 16 years old and in another 16 years, it may be too late.

The evidence is not just important; IT IS CLEAR and STARK; we have global scale crises across a number of areas: our climate is in breakdown, our oceans and seas are over-exploited, and biodiversity is in the middle of a mass extinction.

However, the evidence also clearly illustrates that we can reverse these through our leadership, actions and policies. The time is now for policymakers to look at this evidence and take this seriously, to understand that appropriate land use and the associated benefits to our biodiversity can reverse our folly.

We need to be innovative in developing economic structures and markets that are based on long-term common good value, not on short-term price.

The evidence shows we need to act now.

—

Sarah O’Reardon
Parent, Wexford town, Co Wexford

As a parent, you use evidence to inform every decision you make, long before the birth of your child. And continue to do so as your child grows. From how you labour and birth, to even the type of products you use to clean your house. Factual scientific evidence is so important to parents, and should be to our policymakers.

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Sean McVeigh
Hurler and sports scientist, Co Donegal

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While no one can be expected to understand all of the technology that supports our daily lives, it is crucial that we appreciate that its development has been based on scientific discovery and evidence based enquiry. In the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium our aim is not just for our visitors to be enthralled and inspired by the tales of science they experience when they come, but also to leave thinking about the how and why behind that science.

—

Michael Burton
Astronomer, Co Armagh

Michael Burton
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While no one can be expected to understand all of the technology that supports our daily lives, it is crucial that we appreciate that its development has been based on scientific discovery and evidence based enquiry. In the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium our aim is not just for our visitors to be enthralled and inspired by the tales of science they experience when they come, but also to leave thinking about the how and why behind that science.
Jeanne Mahony
Co-founder, Hope Beer, Howth Junction, Dublin 5

The Craft Drinks Bill 2018 was signed into law in June of this year due to the hard work of the craft brewers and distillers of Ireland, led by Alan Kelly TD. The idea behind the legislation is to allow breweries to sell their product to visitors for consumption on site and to take away. Up until now, it has not been possible. This is akin to visiting a vineyard in France and not being able to buy wine!

We were seeing evidence that tourists visiting Ireland are looking for more “experiences” – the chance to meet real people at the heart of the Irish Food and Drink revolution.

We were so glad that policymakers acted on this evidence because the ability to sell our product at source will revolutionise our business, significantly improve the authentic tourist offering and drive local employment.

Dr Paul Corcoran
Chairperson, Dublin Cycling Campaign

I've been cycling to school, university and work for the last 25 years. In that time I have seen very little change in the way of safe cycling infrastructure in Dublin city and the greater Dublin area. The United Nations recommends 10% of the transport budget be spent on cycling - in Dublin it’s as low as 1-2%.

The government aims to have 10% of all journeys by 2020 by bicycle, currently it’s around 3%. There is so much evidence that cycling can address many current issues such as mental health, obesity, pollution and climate change.

The evidence is clear to me that we need to move towards more sustainable modes of transport such as cycling. Dublin will host a major cycling conference in June 2019 called Velo-City. Policymakers should ensure that they’ve acted on evidence to make Dublin more cycling-friendly for our visitors when they arrive.

Personal views, half truths, beliefs, and appeals to the heart can influence anyone in making a decision or having an opinion on an issue. But a robust evidence based approach helps me make an educated balanced assessment. Politicians in positions of influence and power, have a responsibility to be clear concise and accurate. Evidence based facts - regardless of the issue.

— Susan Brown
Financial services, Dublin 3

These days people inhale “news” that offers no proof and can’t be verified. We live in a society which follows news through Twitter and Facebook. Now more than ever we need an evidence based political system to safeguard democracy.

— M Gallagher
Customer service, Ashbourne, Co Meath

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Eunice Power  
Chef and caterer, Dungarvan, Co Waterford

I would like to open up the discussion about how we as Irish people have lost our way when it comes to food. According to the DCCAE, there is over one million tonnes of food wasted every year just in Ireland.

Ireland produces some of the best food in the world, but over the last 6 decades, local produce has been ignored and lost to ready-to-go food. The evidence shows that the rise of cheap, ready-to-go food has led to over-buying, obesity and increased food waste.

I ask policymakers to take this seriously, look at the evidence and find solutions. I believe as a society we need to re-learn respect for food, look at our local food chains, buy less but buy local, buy seasonal and learn to cook again at home.

Sharon Nolan  
Customer support worker & Bi+ Ireland coordinator, Galway City

I advocate for inclusivity. Evidence matters to me because it’s how we identify whether we’re fully supporting our communities.

It’s how we can uncover whether all our rights being catered for and who is being excluded in society.

It’s how we assess whether we as activists have made the right campaigning decisions and are making a difference.

Examining the evidence is essential for policymakers to uncover whether internal biases could be influencing their view, and it’s how to keep an impartial approach. Politics cannot be effective unless it is based on some form of evidence - otherwise, we risk being led by hearsay and gut feelings alone.

Evidence matters, it leads us to make informed decisions for the betterment of our society and our world.

When planning for future needs for Scouting we need to look down the road a number of years at the evidence from the National Census, from the numbers baptised and school enrolment. Without this evidence we cannot have a strategy for having adequate trained leaders.

— Tom Butler  
Scout leader, Ballincollig, Co Cork

Basing news and policy on concrete evidence and being transparent with this is necessary for people to make informed decisions.

— Maria Cross  
Civil servant, Ringsend, Dublin 4
Andrew Galvin
Poet and playwright, Co Donegal

For those, like myself, who view art as argument and confrontation that seeks to enact change or generate a discussion, there can be no doubt, even in this most subjective arena that objective evidence informs and strengthens that argument.

Perhaps it is the evidence of other artists and art itself as evidence that first draws us in this direction. The journalistic social analysis, the war documentarian, the political theorist. If as artists our role is to explore, elucidate, and illuminate the human experience then there is a natural and recursive resonance with the sciences here that we would be foolish to dismiss.

For it is the Arts that mine and communicate meaning and generate vision fuelled by this conversation between art and science; which is why I would ask our policymakers to acknowledge, value, and meaningfully foster our myriad collective artistic contributions.

Melíosa Bracken
Parent, Celbridge, Co Kildare

My daughter Niamh was 3 when she was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer with tumours in her left kidney and both lungs. Her dad and I took comfort from knowing her treatment was underpinned by a wealth of research and we were over the moon when she was declared cancer-free at age 5.

Unfortunately, we discovered Niamh’s heart had been damaged by her cancer treatment. At 15, Niamh needed a heart transplant. Late effects of cancer treatments in survivors of childhood cancer is a new and under-researched area, it was much more difficult for us to access information about her needs.

Niamh is ten months post-transplant now and doing well but she needs evidence to make informed decisions, doctors need it to optimize her treatment and policymakers need it to make decisions on funding and resource allocation. Evidence is essential so that survivors like Niamh can thrive as well as survive.

Rebeccah O’Donovan
Customer service representative, Tipperary town, Co Tipperary

I believe evidence is important because we all need something to base our opinions, arguments and morals on. The best way to do that is with evidence.

Robert Hathaway
Customer consultant, Summerhill, Co Meath

The decisions made by those in government affect our lives on almost every level. When these decisions are based on political expediency, ordinary people inevitably pay the price. Anything other than evidenced-based decision-making treats the lives of Irish citizens as game pieces, and is a betrayal of the electorate’s trust.
Evidence is essential in promoting and protecting the human rights of parent carers, children and adults with disabilities/long-term health conditions, and helps us ensure the public services they receive are good quality.

— Orla Watt
Family advocacy coordinator, Parent Action CIC, Downpatrick, Co Down

Evidence is how I make my decisions, particularly when it comes to raising my children. We live in a time when we have research available at the tips of our fingers, and it’s reassuring to know when making decisions about my children’s healthcare that there is evidence to support it.

— Helen Guinane
Parent, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15

We have a tendency in Ireland to think locally and act individualistically – so many decisions like voting, jobs, elections, and local developments are based heavily on “who you know” or on local reputation. What we need right now is a focus on evidence - evidence of experience, knowledge, and expertise. Our lives, our local economy and our vital services depend on decisions being made based on evidence.

— Emma Langford
Folk musician, Limerick City

Evidence is important to allow consumers to make more informed choices about health claims made by processed food producers, like ‘high protein’, ‘added Vitamin D’ and ‘heart health’. I believe the food industry and the supplement industry need to be held accountable for spurious claims.

— Tony Deeney
Sports nutrition specialist, Co Derry

We utilise the evidence from the 2016 census to find out about the changing demographics in our area and program our arts centre accordingly.

— Paul Hayes
An Táin Arts Centre, Dundalk, Co Louth

When planning for the academic year, and subsequent years, evidence of the number of births is essential for us to ensure we have adequate places for the children we anticipate educating at our school.

— Fiona Giles
Principal, St Multose National School, Kinsale, Co Cork
Policy making is about finding ways to influence and organise society, so it is based on a combination of politics, values and pragmatism. Some claims about why a policy is being introduced cannot be tested with evidence and some can.

Of course we might use evidence to challenge the supremacy of opinions and values and that often happens: African health workers showed an ideological, abstentionist approach to AIDS transmission was less effective than pragmatic contraception provision. In a democracy, nothing – evidence or opinion - is beyond debate.

But while we can all agree that there are many factors in a decision, it’s useful to distinguish where we would expect supporting evidence, and where we wouldn’t. For example...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim 1</th>
<th>Claim 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Hosting the Olympics will be an exciting and prestigious thing for our</td>
<td>“Hosting the Olympics will encourage more people to take up sport and get</td>
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<td>city to do.”</td>
<td>more exercise, and there will be a net financial benefit from increased</td>
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<td></td>
<td>tourism and investment.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Marriage is the bedrock of our society and we should support and</td>
<td>“A married couple’s allowance will increase the number of children</td>
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<td>recognise that commitment through a married couples’ tax allowance.”</td>
<td>growing up in married households and reduce anti-social behaviour.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Supporting children from all backgrounds is a priority for this</td>
<td>“The lack of early years education for many children is diminishing their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government, so we need a national network of early years centres to</td>
<td>later prospects, so we need a network of centres to provide it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show that commitment.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“We don’t believe that what people do in their personal lives is our</td>
<td>“Cannabis has substantial health benefits and we should decriminalise it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>business. So we support decriminalisation of small amounts of cannabis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>for personal use.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“It is not fair that some rich people don’t play by the same rules as</td>
<td>“Non-doms should be taxed because it will bring more money to the</td>
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<tr>
<td>everyone else. ‘Non-doms’ should be taxed.”</td>
<td>Exchequer, even if some of them leave as a result.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This government is committed to devolving power to the regions because</td>
<td>“This government is committed to devolving power to the regions because it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone has a right to local democracy.”</td>
<td>will stimulate economic regeneration.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What we’re asking for: when is evidence expected?