



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Newsletter December 2020

Jason Lowther, LARIA Council Member

Research to Help Rebuild After Covid-19

Last month Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK Government, met (virtually) with over 100 researchers and policy officers to discuss the output of a six-month programme looking at some of the fundamental challenges to our society, economy and ways of living. Commissioned by the Government Office for Science, the Rebuilding a Resilient Britain programme aims to help government with medium- and long-term challenges relating to the challenges of Covid-19, captured under nine themes including “vulnerable communities”, “supporting services”, and “local and national growth”.

The overall programme was led by Annette Boaz and Kathryn Oliver, two experienced social scientists whose work focusses on the use of evidence. In their recent [LSE article](#), they explain the background to the programme and how plans were upturned in March with the introduction of Lockdown in the UK.

I was particularly involved in the “supporting services” theme, convening the work around local government. It is an exciting initiative to be involved with, not just because of its scope and pace, but also because of the range of people engaged: researchers and academics, government policy and analysis officers, and funders. What I found particularly interesting was how different Government departments and different academic disciplines were often looking at very similar issues but framing them from distinct perspectives and using diverse language to describe them. This highlights the need to develop shared definitions of issues and ways to address these – considering “problem-based issues” in the round.

As well as summarising the existing research evidence around each of the identified themes, the work identified several “gaps” in the extant evidence base and opportunities for new research, policy/research dialogue, and knowledge exchange.

Within the Local Government theme, we recognised that LG’s role proved critical in the first stage of the pandemic, for example in supporting vulnerable and shielded people, enabling voluntary community groups, freeing up 30,000 hospital beds, housing over 5,000 homeless people, and sustaining essential services such as public health, waste collection, safeguarding and crematoria. This role is likely to increase in future stages of the pandemic, with more responsibility for local surveillance testing and tracing, implementing local lockdowns, economic development, contributing to a sustainable social care system, and supporting further community mutual aid.

There is already a good evidence base showing how local government is playing vital roles in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. We identified four main themes: empowering local communities, delivering and supporting services, devolution and localisation, and funding. For each issue we considered the key policy and practice implications of existing evidence, the evidence gaps and the ways in which gaps might be filled.

Around empowering local communities, for example, evidence showed that LAs responded quickly to the pandemic, and well-functioning local systems emerged to tackle the immediate crises in many parts of the UK. Areas adopted a range of strategies in partnership with local

communities. But informal community responses can lack coordination, resources, reach and accountability; and some groups face barriers to involvement. Further evidence is required on what works in strengthening community support networks, empowering different types of communities, and co-producing public services. Councils also need to understand better how staff, councillors and the institutions themselves can change to empower communities.

There has already been some important learning from this work, such as recognising the treasure trove of useful knowledge contained in existing evidence and expertise. We need to get much better at using evidence from, for example, the evaluation of past policy initiatives. The programme is helping to strengthen relationships across government, including some new and more diverse voices, and will be useful as government departments revisit their Areas of Research Interest post-Covid. The thematic reports are due to be published in coming weeks.

I will be exploring the findings for other areas of interest to Local Government in future articles here and on the [Inlogov blog](#).

Jason Lowther (LARIA Council member)
Director, Institute for Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham.

LARIA in 2021 – events and membership fees

Thank you for your continued support to LARIA. The feedback from our 2020 webinar series has been very positive. We will run more webinars in 2021 and we'll be in touch about those soon. As we have done this year, we will continue to make our webinars free to attend for all our individual full members and corporate members in 2021.

But, like many other organisation, 2020 has been a difficult year for LARIA. A significant proportion of our income is from our events and our well-attended annual conference. Recognising the pressures on the public sector and the proportion of our members who are self-funders, we have tried to keep membership fees as low as possible, with only modest increases over the last ten years.

In order to support LARIA, so we can continue to support you, our members, we need to increase membership fees for 2021. You can find the new fees [here](#).

In addition to continuing to provide our core offer to members including the newsletter, access to the knowledge hub and annual awards, this increase in fees will bring additional benefits including a wider range of online materials and more opportunities for virtual conferences and networking events.

Once again we would like to thank you for your involvement in our network; your contributions, as our members, are the reason for our success and what motivates us to continue to develop LARIA. We hope to see you again in 2021 – be it in person or online.

LARIA Webinar Series

LARIA Webinar Series 2020 Recordings and Presentations

After a successful nine weeks of webinars, the autumn webinar series has now come to a close. We had a fantastic line-up of speakers sharing their work and it was a great way to be able to bring our members together.

If you missed any of the live webinars, we are pleased to confirm that all presentations and recordings are available in the members area for you to watch.

[Members Area](#)

We will organise more webinars in 2021. It would be great to know what you would like to see covered, for example on themes or topics, or to support your professional development. Please email your ideas to admin@laria.org.uk.

With special thanks to our key sponsor and media partner

Key Sponsor



Media Partner



Data Cymru update

As is the case with much of the rest of the public sector, we continue to work remotely whilst supporting local government and other partners navigate their way through these times. We have reacted to new demands for data and information, and new ways of working, to provide this support.

Dashboards

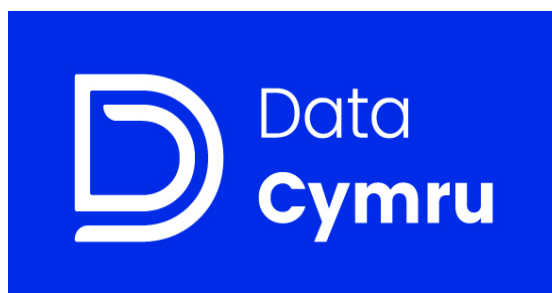
Our online suite of COVID-19 related disseminations continues to grow! We have added an '[Economy dashboard](#)' that shows the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wales. Our other dashboards include COVID-19 incidence rates at a national, local authority and MSOA level and mortality in Wales.

You can access the full range of dashboards from our [website](#).

COVID-19 animation

In addition, we have also introduced an [animated visualisation](#), using PowerBi, which shows how the rate of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population has changed over time in Wales since the beginning of March.

We'd be interested to hear from colleagues who have also started to use Power BI animation to disseminate information and data. Please get in touch at enquiries@data.cymru



Place-based data workshop

With the cancellation of the LARIA Summer Conference, many of the workshops moved online

as part of the Autumn Webinar Series. This included our offering on the importance of well-being data at a local level, delivered in partnership with the [Centre for Thriving Places](#). The session looked at the Thriving Places Index and Thriving Places Wales, two tools which measure the prevalence of conditions that promote well-being within communities, with a focus on well-being rather than financial indicators.

The session also highlighted the difference between the English and Welsh tools in terms of data availability and government focus.

A video of the session (and all the other webinars in the series) is available to LARIA members on the LARIA website in the [members' area](#).

Health Statistics User Group – Recent Actions and Current Plans

1) Covid-19 data transparency and accountability

Evidence was submitted jointly by the Faculty of Public Health and HSUG to the PACAC inquiry into Covid-19 data transparency and accountability. This response has been posted on the HSUG web page within [StatsUserNet](#).

2) Response to National Data Strategy policy paper published on 9 September 2020

HSUG did not submit a separate response to the policy paper, but [replied](#) to say they fully supported the response that was submitted by Paul Allin on behalf of the Statistics User Forum.

3) Test, Trace and Protect

Test, Trace and Protect webinar on 28th January 2021, organised jointly by HSUG and RSS Official Statistics Section – see separate flyer for further information

4) ONS Health Index Consultation

[ONS Health Index Consultation](#) launched on 3 December and live until 3 March 2021

RSS Official Statistics Section is planning to hold a webinar on this – probably in the first week of February 2021, although the date has not yet been finalised. It is understood that the Health Foundation is also planning to organise an event on this topic, and so it will be important to ensure that the two events are complementary.

A response to this consultation will be submitted jointly by the Faculty of Public Health and HSUG – drawing on the discussions at the webinar, and also on other web based discussions, and comments received.

5) Data Strategy for Health and Social Care

In their response to the consultation on the National Data Strategy, HSUG noted that the consultation papers mentioned that a Data Strategy for Health and Social Care is in development. HSUG flagged up their interest in this, and said that they looked forward to responding to this when it is available; including making an input during the development stages if this would be helpful. HSUG would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other groups in responding to this.

Advanced and Predictive Analytics Network for Local Government (APAN)

The Local Government Association is forming a new and informative Advanced and Predictive Analytics Network (APAN) for local government practitioners, data analysts and other invited experts.

Responding to the increasing use of advanced analytics within public sector organisations, the network aims to act as an interactive space for shared learning, support and increased transparency. This network brings together resources for practical help as well as opportunities for discussion about the benefits, risks and opportunities of using advanced and predictive analytics in local government.

Although this network is being set up separately by the LGA, the intention is to work very closely with LARIA and its wider membership as we start to develop priorities and focus. Once we have secured a local government membership presence there will be wider outreach to determine interest and support, this includes the possibility of some joint events with LARIA. We would be delighted to have officers join who can be members of both!



Membership of the network is free and open to any local government officials – especially data practitioners. If you work in local government and are involved or interested in this area, then we invite you to join us. You can find out more and join as a member by visiting the [APAN online site](#).

QA Research

We all need to change our behaviour if we are to meet crucial climate change targets. But that's easier said than done. Nick How, Research Director at Qa Research has been researching people's attitudes – here are his takeaways.

[Three challenges to persuading people to reduce their carbon footprint – and three potential solutions](#) – Qa Research



R E S E A R C H

Cambridge Econometrics

Microdata case study: Changing retirement patterns in the UK

In the second article for Cambridge Econometric's microdata blog series, Economist Matthew Haynes explores the benefits of using microdata using the Annual Population Survey (APS) as a case study on changing retirement patterns in the UK. Through this case study, Matthew identifies the strengths of microdata sets such as the APS in developing more targeted and impactful policy intervention.



[Microdata case study: Changing retirement patterns in the UK](#)

LGA Analysis and Research Bulletin

The Local Government Association (LGA) Analysis and Research Bulletin is a comprehensive monthly publication which keeps you informed about key issues and developments in research impacting on local government.

The bulletin brings together the work of the LGA and also features relevant publications from the wider research community.

The November edition features recent research from the LGA including a report on children missing education. Updates from LG Inform and LG Inform Plus and details of work using Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) to support the flow of public health and social care data are also featured.



For more information and to sign up to the research bulletin please go to the [LGA website](#).

ADR UK stakeholder survey 2020/21

Are you involved in managing access to public sector administrative data? Or are you involved in research and analysis that could use this data, or making policy and practice decisions that could be informed by it?

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then ADR UK ([Administrative Data Research UK](#)) would like to hear from you about your attitudes to, and experiences of, enabling access to such data for research.

In this survey, we are primarily interested in the views of those in UK Government departments, executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies. However, we are also interested to hear from those in local authorities, devolved government, and the third sector.

ADR UK is a partnership working directly with government (UK and devolved) to transform the way researchers access the UK's wealth of public sector data, to enable better informed policy decisions that improve people's lives. ADR UK is funded by the [Economic & Social Research Council](#) (ESRC), part of [UK Research & Innovation](#) (UKRI).

This survey will ask you a maximum of 10 multiple choice questions, and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. It is open until 17 January 2021.

The survey will not ask you to give any personally identifiable information, unless you request to be emailed to arrange a follow-up meeting, in which case your details will be used by the ADR UK Strategic Hub team for this purpose only, and not shared with any third parties.

The results will be used to inform the development of ADR UK's programmes and engagement with government and other public bodies, and may be published in the ADR UK annual report and/or on the [ADR UK website](#).

For any enquiries regarding this survey, please contact edward.morrow@ukri.org.

You can access the survey here: [ADR UK stakeholder survey 2020/21](#)

Online Events, Webinars and Training

SOOTHE

Three [SOOTHE Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Webinars](#) are being held in December. These are free to access and are the culmination of a project to create an electronic Quilt from images of mental health and wellness made by people with intellectual disability

Register [here](#) for the final webinar and to view the previous 2 webinars.

Webinar 1: The soothe [equilt](#) of mental health and wellbeing

4 December @ 10:00

- 1) Launches the SOOTHE eQuilt of Mental Health & Well-Being
- 2) Highlights creative and participative approaches to engage people with an intellectual disability in research;
- 3) Provides examples from across Europe on advancing greater inclusion; and
- 4) Identifies how people with intellectual disability relay their understandings of mental health and well-being.

Webinar 2: Enacting an inclusive mental health programme with People who have intellectual disabilities

10 December @ 10:00

Webinar 3: Learning about mental health and wellbeing from people With intellectual disabilities

18 December @ 10:00

UK Data Service

Coding Demonstrations: Social Network Analysis in Python

13 and 27 January 2021

Online, 14.00 - 15.00

Vast swathes of our social interactions and personal behaviours are now conducted online and/or captured digitally. Thus, computational methods for collecting, cleaning and analysing data are an increasingly important component of a social scientist's toolkit. Social Network Analysis (SNA) offers a rich and insightful methodological approach for uncovering and understanding social structures, relations and networks of association.



These free events, organised by the UK Data Service, introduce core SNA concepts and demonstrate some basic and advanced methods that can be customised to the needs of individual research projects.

The demonstrations address the following topics:

- Understanding and manipulating social network data – 13 January 2021
- Techniques and methods of analysis for social network data – 27 January 2021

Each code demo works through coding examples line-by-line, explaining the logical and programmatic aspects of the methods being demonstrated. During each session you will be able to run the code yourself in real time without any installation on your machine. Each demonstration uses the popular Python programming language and lasts for roughly 30 minutes, followed by up to 30 minutes for Q&A and other interaction.

[Book your place](#)

Data pre-processing training series

4 - 28 January 2021

Online, 13.00 - 14.00

Data pre-processing is a data mining technique that involves transforming raw data into an understandable format. With the increasing amount of data available for research and analysis, real-world data is often incomplete or inconsistent and thus not ready to be used directly. Multiple spreadsheets, missing values, typos, numbers shown as text, unnecessary columns... Data without adequate preparation will deliver poor or misleading findings. This is exemplified by the pithy data scientist phrase 'GIGO', which stands for 'Garbage In Garbage Out'.

These free events, organised by the UK Data Service, introduce data pre-processing and explain how to perform it as well as some of the issues people should be aware of. A data pre-processing workflow is covered, including steps on data integration, data cleaning, data reduction and data transformation. There will be two webinars then a coding demo session, for those who want a first-hand experience of putting the workflow into action via python.

[Book your place](#)

Health Statistics User Group

A date for your 2021 diary

Planned webinar: Statistical Methods for Covid-19: Test, Trace and Protect

28th January 2021 from 12:00 to 13:30

We would like to invite you to the third in a series of webinars on topics relating to Covid-19, organised jointly by the Health Statistics User Group (HSUG) and the RSS Official Statistics Section. It follows on from those held earlier in 2020 on mortality statistics and modelling. The focus will be on the statistical methods being used for Test, Trace and Protect, and it will involve sharing experiences and discussing approaches in the four nations of the UK.

Speakers will be sharing their learning and progress and there will be opportunities to ask questions as well as share your own thoughts.

Organisations identified so far as participating include Public Health Scotland, the Department for Health and Social Care (England) (covering the development of the weekly NHS Test and Trace statistics), and the Welsh Government. There will also be an overview by ONS on the Covid-19 Infection Survey.

Further details including registration arrangements will be available early in 2021. We look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

National Institute of Health Research

Pre-doctoral and Doctoral Research Fellowships for Local Authority and LA Commissioned Service Based Individuals (National Institute of Health Research, NIHR)

If you are interested in developing a research career, the NIHR is piloting [Pre-doctoral Fellowship](#) and [Doctoral fellowship](#) schemes. These aim to support individuals based in local authorities or local authority commissioned services to develop as health and/or social care researchers. The schemes will fund individuals of any profession to undertake Masters level academic training for Pre-Doctoral Fellowship or to obtain a PhD for the Doctoral Fellowship by research while developing their professional skills within their existing employment. If you are thinking of applying, you can get advice and support from the [NIHR Research Design Service](#).

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