



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Newsletter September 2022

LARIA Council

Jason Lowther, INLOGOV University of Birmingham

Pushing experts under a big red bus?

Politicians have a complex relationship with experts and the evidence the latter provide. Back in May 2020, I reflected in the [Municipal Journal](#) on how Michael Gove's [statement](#) in the Brexit campaign that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' had turned 180-degrees. With the arrival of Covid, the PM told his 9th March 2020 press [conference](#) 'we are doing everything we can to combat this outbreak, based on the very latest scientific and medical advice' and this line was consistently reiterated by other ministers. Thirty months on, Rishi Sunak (Chancellor in 2020) railed against the government's main Science Advisory Group for Emergencies expert group (SAGE) [saying](#) 'If you empower all these independent people, you're screwed'.

Sunak's argument, presented in an interview with the right-leaning Spectator magazine, seems to be that the SAGE experts failed to consider any non-health impacts of Covid control measures (particularly lockdowns) and refused to show politicians their workings. In the [article](#) he's quoted as saying 'I was like: "Summarise for me the key assumptions, on one page, with a bunch of sensitivities and rationale for each one", in the first year I could never get this'. This doesn't seem to match with the [published](#) SAGE 'consensus statement' on school closures issued in February 2020, which very clearly sets out its assumptions and explicitly

states:

As well as the large economic and educational costs of school closures, including increased levels of workforce absence in the health and care system and elsewhere, school closures could have adverse consequences:

- As infections appear to be more severe in older people, putting children in the care of their grandparents may result in a higher number of severe cases.
- Once schools are reopened, the number of cases may increase again, with the overall attack rate not being reduced.

(SPI-M-O: Consensus view on the impact of mass school closures on 2019 Novel Coronavirus, Feb 2020)

Later, when facing the December 2021 Omicron variant, Sunak is said to have used his own alumni and private sector analyses to challenge SAGE advice for further lockdowns with the PM and in cabinet. He argues that the scientific evidence failed to provide a balanced analysis of lockdown decisions, saying 'I would just have had a more grown-up conversation with the country'. Sunak also claimed that dissenting voices in SAGE discussions were edited out of the minutes, an assertion he supported by describing a Treasury official sitting in on the discussions and reporting disagreements and uncertainties back to him.

SAGE scientists see this differently. Former SAGE member Prof Ian Boyd from the University of St Andrews [commented](#): 'It is nonsense to suggest that Sage was insensitive to the issue of the long-term effects of lockdowns – a whole subgroup dedicated itself to trying to understand what this might look like. Sage was discussing the topic of excess deaths in detail in April 2020. Those who attended Sage meetings were acutely aware of the trade-offs associated with implementing specific actions, such as closing schools. To the extent that it was possible with the information available at the time, these deals were included within the uncertainty expressed in the advice provided to politicians. It is simply unacceptable to rewrite history, by blaming scientists, to save a political class that has systematically failed to respond to the messages that scientists have been providing to them for many, many years'.

There are valid reasons to criticise elements of the advice system the government put in place during the pandemic. The limitations of ‘a model in which a specialist committee produces consensus statements that spare policy makers any requirement to make choices on matters in which they have no competence’ have been demonstrated in [analysis](#) by Lawrence Freedman of the intelligence failings relating to the UK entry to war with Iraq as well as the Covid pandemic. His analysis recommends a model with more opportunities for policy makers to engage with the experts as both the advice and the policy is developed. The editor of the Lancet, Richard Horton, argued that expertise around public health and intensive medical care should have been in the SAGE discussions. I argued in the MJ piece that having practical knowledge from local councils and emergency planners could help avoid recommendations that prove impossible to implement effectively, since esteemed experts can still make recommendations which are impossible to implement in practice. But it’s simply wrong to suggest that SAGE ignored key evidence on non-health effects of Covid control measures or sought to silence dissenting views. If the trade-offs and assumptions were not considered by the Cabinet, the blame for that lies not with the scientists but with the politicians.

News

GeoPlace

Data cleansing and linking to improve electoral processes



Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council has integrated Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) from the council’s Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG)- into the council’s elections process – realising immediate benefits.

The use of the LLPG data meant that election staff did not need to create

addresses manually, which saved time and effort. All new properties appeared on the system before they were sold. The 'create once, use many' concept was put in place, and the team simply had to assign a polling district when properties went live.

As a result of these steps and the use of the LLPG in managing the elections process, accuracy rates are now the best they have ever been. In addition, turnaround times for issues have been reduced to as little as 24 hours, resulting in time savings for the council. The election staff can now spend more time on their day job instead of having to worry about inaccuracies of their data or the public contacting them with queries.

[Find out more](#)

LGA

LGA launches new performance management resources for local authorities



Delivering effective performance management is a key way in which local government can take responsibility for its own performance. It also helps the public and the Government to hold local service providers to account, ensuring they are responding to local needs and public money is being spent wisely. With this in mind, the Local Government Association has recently launched a set of performance management resources for councils including a guide for councillors, a guide for officers, and a series of performance management case studies.

[View the new online performance management resources from the LGA.](#)

Research Help – The Financial Cost of Funerals (University of Manchester)

The University of Manchester is conducting research into the [financial costs of](#)

[funerals.](#)

We would like to chat with local authority staff who have experience in providing support and advice on funeral costs to people on low incomes.

If you are happy to share your views and experiences we would like to chat with you.

It will be anonymous.

Thank you for your help.

Please call: K. Purdam 0161 275 4719 or 07790343185

Or email: funeralcosts@manchester.ac.uk

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

UK Data Service

Planning and designing research using the 2021 Census



27 September 2022, 10:00 - 13:00

Apply for a unique opportunity to work with others in planning your use of the 2021 census.

The UK Data Service is running the final in a series of three free workshops to help researchers. These are particularly aimed at participants from the voluntary and community, and public sector. Applicants are also welcomed from other sectors but priority will be given to those from the targeted sectors.

With the release of the 2021 Census this is an opportunity to plan your research with support from UKDS and your peer researchers. The workshop will be held online via Zoom. To apply please complete the details on the booking form. We will contact those who have been given a workshop place with the Zoom link.

[More information and applications](#)

UK Data Service's introductory training series: Autumn 2022

We provide access to a wide range of social science data for reuse. To help you get the most from our service, we run free introductory level online workshops every spring and autumn to introduce different aspects of the UK Data Service.

Our training series workshops in Autumn 2022 are listed below and you can also [browse our events pages](#) for a full list of what is available.

- [Dissertation projects: Introduction to secondary analysis for qualitative and quantitative data](#), 6 October, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Data in the spotlight: Large scale social surveys](#), 11 October, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Introduction to copyright: Copyright and publishing](#), 14 October, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Introduction to copyright: Copyright and secondary data use](#), 17 October, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [How to anonymise qualitative and quantitative data](#), 20 October, 11.00am – 12.30am
- [Data management basics: Introduction to data management and sharing](#), 27 October, 11.00am – 12.30am
- [Depositing your data with ReShare](#), 3 November, 11.00am – 12.30am
- [Introduction to the UK Data Service](#), 8 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Finding and accessing data from the UK Data Service](#), 10 November, 10.00am – 11.30am

- [Data management basics: Ethical and legal issues in data sharing](#), 14 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Getting started with secondary analysis](#), 15 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [How to become a computational social scientist](#), 22 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Consent issues in data sharing](#), 24 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Data in the spotlight: Census and population studies](#), 29 November, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Data in the spotlight: Longitudinal data](#), 1 December, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Data in the spotlight: International time series databanks](#), 6 December, 10.00am – 11.30am
- [Data in the spotlight: Qualitative and mixed methods data](#), 13 December, 10.00am – 11.30am

[#UKDSTraining](#)

**Health and Social Care Workforce
Research Unit**

NIHR | Policy Research Unit
in Health and Social
Care Workforce

Life story work with people with learning disabilities
6 October 2022, 2 – 3pm, online

The seminar is being led by presenters from the Social History of Learning Disability Research Group (SHLD) based at the Open University, including:

Ian Davies: Co-chair, SHLD

Dr Liz Tilley: Co-chair, SHLD

Professor Jan Walmsley: Founder, SHLD

Dr Sue Ledger, SHLD

Dr Noelle McCormack, SHLD

The seminar will:

- Explain life stories and their use with people with learning disabilities.

- Discuss the value of life story work, and its place in policy and practice contexts.
- Share examples of life story work including work with people with high support needs.
- Use film to listen to the views of people with learning disabilities and their families.
- Discuss the challenges of implementing life story work and possible ways forward.

The webinar draws on an article published in 2021 by the presenters in the British Journal of Learning Disabilities. The paper reviewed evidence for the use of life stories in learning disability research and practice, including Ian Davies's experience of putting together his own life story and sharing it with others.

If you have any questions please contact: emily.4.thomas@kcl.ac.uk

[Register](#)

Jobs

To submit a job advert to appear in the newsletter or on the LARIA website, please download and complete this [form](#) (Full Corporate and Corporate Members only). You can also post Job Vacancies on the Jobs Board in the LARIA [Members' Area](#).

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 20th October](#).

2 x Performance and Insight Manager

Location: Town Hall Extension, Lloyd Street,
Manchester, M60 2LA, Blended/Hybrid Working

Salary Range: Grade 10 £45,648 to £47,665 (Bar at £46,662) per annum



**MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL**

Working Hours: 35 per week

Contract Type: Permanent

Application Deadline: 30 September 2022

We are looking for two Performance & Insight Managers to work within the Performance, Research & Intelligence service (PRI) and Public Health Teams. One post will lead and manage a team supporting Children's Social Care, the other will lead work around health and income inequalities. These are exciting opportunities to shape and lead the work of these teams to support services and the Council to put data and evidence at the heart of decision making. These roles will work with the other managers in PRI and the Public Health Knowledge and Intelligence Team, to lead and manage a portfolio of work supporting MCC services and broader corporate priorities around data, systems and reporting requirements.

The collective functions of PRI and the Public Health Knowledge and intelligence Teams are "to ensure decision makers in Manchester have the evidence and intelligence they need to shape strategic and operational thinking and to demonstrate the impact those choices have on our priorities". So, in this role you'll be directly influencing decisions about Manchester through evidence and insight.

The type of activities you'll be involved are:

- Support the development of key strategic documents
- Ensure consistency of performance reporting
- Produce credible, relevant, responsive intelligence and evaluation
- Provide data and intelligence to support the development of business cases
- Consider data science methodologies
- Promote information as an asset and improve data in core systems
- Deliver statutory returns and consultations
- Support staff to develop and look after themselves

The role will require the ability to develop and maintain working relationships with key stakeholders and the ability to develop and deliver key projects to inform

decision making. This will require the ability to identify and bring together the required skills and resources to build a team and deliver the work.

For further information about the positions, and to apply, see the [Job Advert](#).

Derbyshire County Council



Senior Research & Intelligence Analyst

Location: County Hall, Matlock/Hybrid

Salary details: Grade 11 £33,489 - £36,788 per annum

Job term: Full Time

Appointment type: Permanent

Hours: 37 hours per week

Closing Date: 09 October 2022

An exciting opportunity has arisen within the Policy & Research Team for a dynamic and committed individual to support the council's research and information function as a Senior Research and Intelligence Analyst.

You will provide the Council with a robust evidence and analysis service across all levels and departments. You will deliver and contribute to projects, analyse, interpret, report and present information, and make recommendations to assist the Council to understand the communities it serves and how well it serves them, supporting effective decision making and strategy development.

What will I be doing:

Use a wide variety of national and local data sources to provide information and reports to support the Council's management of intelligence

Provide robust evidence, insight and recommendations to inform the Council's strategic decision making

Lead and support on a variety of research, policy and performance projects

Use a variety of software to perform a range of statistical analysis on topics such

as census, deprivation, economy, population and Council performance

Support and develop the Derbyshire Observatory website including dashboard creation

This list is not exhaustive, take a look at our comprehensive job profile for more detail (this role is known internally as Senior Policy & Research Officer).

For further information about the position, and to apply, see the [Job Advert](#).

Research & Intelligence Analyst

Location: County Hall, Matlock/Hybrid

Salary details: Grade 9 £26,204 - £28,1123 per annum

Job term: Full Time

Appointment type: Permanent

Hours: 37 hours per week:

Closing Date: 09 October 2022

An exciting opportunity has arisen within the Policy & Research Team for a dynamic and committed individual to support the council's research and information function as a Research and Intelligence Analyst.

You will provide the Council with a robust evidence and analysis service across all levels and departments. You will analyse, interpret, report and present information to assist the Council to understand the communities it serves and how well it serves them, supporting effective decision making and strategy development.

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Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?

Laria

Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

Your LARIA Corporate Membership entitles you to submit content to the monthly LARIA newsletter, if you have any research, events, job adverts, resources or news which you would us to include please send it to admin@laria.org.uk.

The next newsletter submission deadline is **Thursday 20th October**.

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