



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Newsletter August 2023

LARIA Updates

Handle with care: democratising evidence use for more effective solutions

The promise of using evidence to improve policies and practices, and therefore societal outcomes, is alluring and enduring. And rightly so: the value and importance of using research, data and intelligence to make better decisions pretty much speaks for itself!

Pretty much, but not quite...

The history of 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' policy (and decision-making more generally) is long and nuanced. However, in the UK, much of this journey can be captured in the political slogan "what matters is what works", and lives on through the [What Works Network](#). The underlying principle is that good decision-making should be informed by the best available evidence. If evidence is not available, decision-makers should use high-quality methods to find out what works. Who could disagree with this?

If pushed into a yes/no choice, I would certainly not disagree. But I also don't think it's always particularly helpful. In fact, at times, I think it can be actively counterproductive. And I believe that 'the evidence' on evidence supports this view.

[For example, a recent study](#) surveyed nearly 2,000 research-policy engagement initiatives, across over 500 organisations worldwide. Their conclusion speaks volumes: "Overall, the picture is of a vast and increasing mass of rudderless activity, which is busy rather than effective... Harms are likely to include wasted time and resources, reduced goodwill and interaction, and increased inequalities in terms of participation in evidence production and use."

I've not encountered a single person who works in the space between evidence and decision-making who did not resonate with this message. And I don't think we're short of

ideas and evidence on what, how and why things could be improved. Just as with widespread critiques of the “what works” approach, the problem we face is not (simply) a lack of knowledge.

So what does the evidence on evidence use say? In broad brush terms, there are some very clear and mutually reinforcing messages, and these three capture a great deal:

1. Evidence use is never neutral

There are always value-laden and subjective choices that shape what evidence is made available, what counts as ‘best’ evidence, and exactly how evidence is used to inform decision-making. But these choices often remain concealed by the fig leaf of ‘objectivity’. Efforts to pursue neutrality are absolutely important, but can only get us so far. We also need transparency and accountability for how problems are framed, methods and data selected, and how this evidence is used. Public engagement has an important, yet consistently under-utilised, role to play here.

2. We need to integrate diverse forms of evidence

Focusing on just a few forms of evidence (often top-down and quantitative) will always give limited insights. We don’t just need to combine qualitative and quantitative data, and to draw on interdisciplinary research, we need better collaboration between academic, professional and community knowledges. And it’s this diversity that not only gives us a fuller picture, but can also help us more meaningfully navigate the ways in which values and choices shape problem framings, evidence choices and evidence use.

3. Collective learning should be our strategy

Despite the importance of attending to problem framings and diverse forms of knowledge, we can never really know what will happen when we start implementing action. Uncertainty can only ever be reduced by so much... By making collective learning our strategy, we can better navigate the inevitable, changes, surprises and unintended consequences that will emerge. But this requires flexibility and a loosening of commitments to short-term efficiencies and predetermined performance management indicators.

Taken together, these points make the case for a more democratic use of evidence, where trends towards more participatory visions of democracy can converge with efforts to strengthen the role of evidence in policy and practice.

This convergence is examined in [a 2023 study](#), which looked at evidence use and public engagement across local (Sheffield City Council), regional (Greater Manchester Combined

Authority) and national (Scotland) scales in the UK. They found that many conceive of 'data' (e.g. statistics tracked by internal analysts) and 'evidence' (external analysis) in primarily quantified terms, and a tendency to limit the authority of publics to advising and consulting on predefined issues. There was growing interest in deeper engagement with publics and evidence (e.g. via the role of lived experience), as well as in how to integrate diverse forms of knowledge. But a major barrier was uncertainty over how to use qualitative insights in settings that have institutionalised quantitative approaches to evidence.

A cross-cutting key to unlocking progress on this, I believe, is a greater – more careful and caring – attention to relationships, and the conditions that shape them. Because we can't navigate the messiness of (re)examining problem framings, integrating diverse forms of knowledge (including lived experience) and enabling learning and adaptation through action without a bedrock of mutual trust, understanding and ownership.

I don't expect these points will surprise many in the LARIA network. In fact, I have been part of many conversations where these points are discussed! But I am always left wondering: what individual, organisational and networked capacities do we need to support a shift towards more caring and democratic engagements with data and evidence? I'm honestly not sure – but I am convinced that the LARIA network has a crucial role to play.

Dr Dave Blackbell

Co-Director, Scottish Policy & Research Exchange

LARIA Research Impact Awards 2023

We are delighted to announce that the competition for this year's LARIA Research Impact Awards 2023 is now open. These awards aim to showcase the impact research and data analysis can make



at a local level, for example, in understanding the needs of local residents and businesses, or testing innovative activity. We welcome entries for one of five categories:

- A: Best use of local area research – sponsored by LGA
- B: Best use of data – sponsored by CACI
- C: Best use of data or research in a district council
- D: Most engaging communication of local area research or analysis
- E: New researcher/analyst of the year

For more information and to apply, please visit our [website](#).

LARIA One Day Event 2023: LIMITED PLACES AVAILABLE

Thursday 16 November

Local Government Association

18 Smith Square

Westminster

London

SW1P 3HZ

Making research + intelligence = inclusion + equality

How do we make our work as inclusive as possible, so that we can understand our diverse populations and their needs, and how do we best represent our findings to decision-makers?

Our societies are complex, and as local area researchers we need to produce intelligence that reflects that complexity and act as agents of change. We can be faced with barriers. Sometimes data don't exist, or not at the granular level required. There are ethical issues to consider. It can be capacity-intensive to be inclusive.

The pandemic has brought into focus more than ever the need to understand problems better and deeper, and to be more inclusive in our questioning. We have lessons to share on what works in conducting research and analysis, so we can best support our diverse and vulnerable groups and those at risk of disadvantage. This spans health and care, education and skills, housing and homelessness, crime and community safety, employment and economic activity, transport and environment, wellbeing and social capital, workforce and representativeness, communication and technology.

Our events aim to provide delegates with the ideas, tools, and techniques for delivering improved outcomes for the public, based on robust data, evidence, and research.

For more information and to register your place, please visit our [website](#).

News

M·E·L Research Welcomes Research Director & Research Manager as Strong Growth Continues



Birmingham, UK: July-23 - M·E·L Research is

delighted to announce the addition of two experienced research professionals to its team. This underscores the agency's continued commitment to providing high-quality research services, and M·E·L Research continues to strengthen its capabilities and expand its expertise in the field.

Ben Thatcher Joins as Qualitative Research Director

Ben Thatcher has taken on the role of Qualitative Research Director at M·E·L Research, bringing with him a wealth of experience spanning 18 years in social and market research. Ben's journey has encompassed work across various sectors, from academia to public service, charitable organisations to private enterprises.



Starting his career in social psychology at Cardiff University, Ben transitioned to government social research at the Office for National Statistics (ONS), where he oversaw national household surveys and helped to facilitate the transition of the Census to an online platform in 2021. During his tenure at ONS, Ben's passion for qualitative research flourished, as did a focus on amplifying the voices of marginalised populations.

Having held research and evaluation roles with national charities in the arts and sports domains, Ben's transition to research agencies in 2019 provided him with valuable insight into client expectations and needs. His expertise spans a range of qualitative approaches, including in-depth interviews, moderating focus groups both in-person and online, managing online communities, and conducting deliberative research and ethnography. Ben's focus on representing the views and experiences of underrepresented groups also aligns strongly with M·E·L Research's commitment to inclusive research practices.

Ben has developed a strong track record in sectors such as health and wellbeing, sports and physical activity, money and debt, arts and culture, older people's issues, utilities, and environment and climate change.

Gayle Higginson Joins As Research Manager

MEL Research is also thrilled to welcome Gayle Higginson as a Research Manager. With over two decades of experience, Gayle has established herself in delivering research that creates tangible impact, particularly within vulnerable and marginalised communities.



Gayle's proficiency extends to both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, allowing her to delve into the intricacies of human behaviour and opinions. She excels in designing research that yields meaningful quantitative data and is equally adept at uncovering rich qualitative insights, gathering diverse perspectives, and exploring complex topics.

Her experience in research on sensitive topics, including victims of serious crime, individuals with longer term health conditions, and those with diverse backgrounds, further strengthens MEL Research's capabilities.

MEL Research's Ongoing Commitment

These new appointments reflect MEL Research's ongoing dedication to enhancing its research capabilities across diverse sectors and audiences and to continue delivering valuable insights that drive positive change within communities and industries.

Speaking about the appointments, Karen Etheridge, Managing Director said:

“We are thrilled to welcome Ben and Gayle to our growing team and are excited about the experience they bring and the support they can provide to both our existing and new clients. Both Ben and Gayle bring expertise which further strengthens our offer in our core space, but also provide opportunities to support some of our growing work around the utilities, debt and physical activity spaces. We look forward their successes in the coming months.”

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

Title: Office for National Statistics public consultation on the future of population and migration statistics

In June, the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

launched a public consultation on proposals for a new approach to producing population and migration statistics.



Input from local authorities will be essential evidence for the National Statistician's recommendations on the future of population and migration statistics, and the census.

The ONS will be [hosting a webinar on Thursday 7 September](#) to provide more information about the consultation.

The consultation is easy to complete and is available in [English](#) and [Welsh](#). It closes on 26 October 2023 but local authorities are encouraged to respond as soon as possible.

LG Inform online training



[Introduction to LG Inform](#) provides an overview of LG

Inform, including a walkthrough of the public pages, using the headline and standard reports, how to find ready-made reports, and how to use the search function to find data; as well as a brief introduction to the pages for signed-in users.

- 7 September, 11.00am

[Report builder – building a report](#) takes you through the process of building and saving a report in LG Inform. A report can be made up of just one component, a text box, chart, map or table or several components.

- 22 August, 11.00am
- 15 September, 11.30am

If you are interested in attending any of the online training sessions please email lginform@local.gov.uk

Children and Young People's attitudes and experiences of vaccinations – turning evidence into practice



Wednesday 20th September 2023

1pm

Online

Vaccine uptake in the UK is dropping, and the system is failing to meet the WHO's 95% coverage target. Join this webinar from the Royal Society of Public Health with guest speakers to explore:

The impact of inequalities on access to vaccines and information about vaccinations
What challenges the public health workforce face in delivering vaccines
How the workforce – and others involved in vaccine delivery - can be supported to develop and deliver vaccines programmes

[Register now.](#)

NCRM Research Methods e-Festival



Members might be interested in the 2023 Research Methods e-Festival, which will be taking place between 7 and 9 November 2023. The online event, organised by National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), will be a celebration of research methods with an interdisciplinary focus.

Their packed programme includes 100 sessions, ranging from "what is" and "how to" talks, to more research-focused webinars, expert panels doing deep dives into particular topics and workshops where you can get a taster for a new skill. It's online, so no tricky travel arrangements or costly hotels are needed and, what's more, it's incredibly reasonably priced: a flat fee of £10, which will give attendees a choice of all the festival's 100 main sessions. In-depth workshops for £2.50 will be available later.

[Find out more here.](#)

But don't leave it too late, as registration closes on 15 September at the latest.

Three new King's College London HSCWRU

Homelessness webinars:

Addressing multiple exclusion homelessness in social work education

20 September 2023, 10 to 11:30am [Book here](#)

The logo for King's College London, featuring the text 'KING'S College LONDON' in white serif font on a red background. The word 'College' is in a smaller, italicized font. Below the text are two horizontal white lines.

Changing the system for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage

17 October 2023, 10 to 11am [Book here](#)

LAUNCH: Multiple exclusion homelessness: a Safeguarding Toolkit for practitioners

16 November 2023, 10 to 11am [Book here](#)

All are free to attend and open to all.

**UK Data Service introductory training series:
Autumn 2023**



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 2023 are listed below and you can also [browse our events pages](#) for a full list of what is available.

- [Data management basics: Introduction to data management and sharing](#), 21 September, 11.00 – 12.30
- [Data management basics: Ethical and legal issues in data sharing](#), 28 September, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Dissertation projects: Introduction to secondary analysis for qualitative and quantitative data](#), 5 October, 10.00 -11.30
- [Data in the spotlight: Large scale social surveys](#), 10 October, 10.00 – 11.30
- [How to anonymise qualitative and quantitative data](#), 19 October, 11.00 – 12.30
- [Depositing your data with ReShare](#), 26 October, 11.00 – 12.30
- [Introduction to copyright: Copyright and publishing](#), 2 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Introduction to copyright: Copyright and secondary data use](#), 9 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [How to become a computational social scientist](#), 21 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Getting started with secondary analysis](#), 22 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Introduction to the UK Data Service](#), 23 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [How to document quantitative and qualitative data](#), 28 November, 11.00 - 12.30
- [Finding and accessing data from the UK Data Service](#), 29 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Consent issues in data sharing](#), 30 November, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Data in the spotlight: Census and population studies](#), 5 December, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Data in the spotlight: Longitudinal data](#), 7 December, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Data in the spotlight: International time series databanks](#), 12 December, 10.00 – 11.30
- [Data in the spotlight: Qualitative and mixed methods data](#), 14 December, 10.00 – 11.30

Recordings of UK Data Service events are made available on [our YouTube channel](#) and, together with the slides, on [our past events pages](#) soon after the event has taken place.

**ASSESS: SPSS (SPSS IBM STATISTICS) USERS GROUP
ONE-DAY SPSS ON-LINE WORKSHOP TO BE LED BY ELIZABETH WIREDU:
CORRELATION AND REGRESSION IN IBM SPSS
WEDNESDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 2023**

ASSESS is an independent user group for SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics), a computer package for analysing and presenting data. It is run by users, for users and is completely independent of manufacturers of the software.

Since 1996 ASSESS have given a wide series of one and half-day workshops at venues around the country on many areas including SPSS syntax, SPSS macros, Survival analysis in SPSS and Analysis of categorical data in SPSS.

A one day on-line workshop is provisionally planned to be held led by Elizabeth Wiredu (Elizabeth Training Limited). Workshop topics and other details including a booking form are [available online](#).

The aim of this all-day on-line workshop is to give delegates with little or no computational experience a thorough and practical understanding of Correlation: Simple and Multiple Linear Regression, and Logistic Regression. You will be guided on how to generate Pearson's correlation coefficient, Spearman's rho, and Kendall's tau-b and explain the results.

This is an opportunity to acquire life skills from a tutor with 29 years of experience, who is an experienced teacher with graduate schools, postgraduate students, medical doctors and other health researchers in the practical use of computer software and statistics. Throughout the day, (fairly basic) interactive SPSS tasks will be used to explore the points being made.

[Elizabeth Wiredu](#) is an experienced medical statistician. She has served as an in-house medical statistician at University Hospitals of Aintree and trained doctors in Mersey Deanery on medical statistics. Elizabeth was a third-party trainer for IBM SPSS UK, delivering their public courses on Statistical Methods for Healthcare professionals.

The day will run from approximately 9-30am to 4-30pm with mid-morning, mid-afternoon and lunch breaks.

Further details will be sent out to delegates upon receipt of booking forms.

Return completed forms to Peter Watson, ASSESS, 15 Chaucer Road, Cambridge CB2 7EF by Tuesday 31st October 2023.

Telephone enquiries about bookings: (01223) 766166 x69479 or (01223) 769479 (direct line) (both numbers have an answerphone)

E-mail enquiries about bookings: peter.watson@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk (important: put 'ASSESS' in the Subject field)

Why not join the discussion at [LinkedIn](#) and on [Facebook](#).

Jobs

Staffordshire County Council: Research Lead

We are seeking three experienced data and insight professionals, who will design, lead and deliver high quality strategic insight projects, that will really make a difference to the lives of the people in Staffordshire.

Two of the roles are permanent and will be based in the Insight Team, and one role is temporary until October 2024, providing dedicated analytical capacity for Staffordshire's Centre for Data Analytics.

The successful candidates will be expected to analyse complex data, and most importantly, turn it into impactful insight, that informs the most senior levels of the county council and Staffordshire partnership.

We are interested in motivated and forward-thinking individuals who are up for the challenge of driving forward innovations in the use of data, as well as having excellent stakeholder management skills to help deliver our respective work programmes.

Requirements

Ideal candidates will have a proven background in the following:

- Excellent stakeholder management skills
- Strong analytical skills and knowledge of wide-ranging insight tools, methodologies and statistical techniques



- Knowledge and skills in the design and delivery of primary research, such as consultation and engagement activities
- Confidence in translating complex findings into insight and presenting this to a diverse audience, to tell an influential story, preferably including the use of relevant visualisation tools
- Keen interest in understanding and applying innovations in data and insight

Salary

£40,478-£44,539

Job type

Full Time

Closing date

4th September 2023

Work from

Office

Job address

Stafford Town Centre/Hybrid

Job application URL

<https://careers.staffordshire.gov.uk/jobs/job/Research-Lead/1047>

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 21st September](#).

Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?

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 21st September](#).

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