LARIA Mini Newsletter October 2025

LARIA Updates

Update on LARIA Scotland – how we can enhance local evidence use?

LARIA Scotland, co-led by Nick Cassidy (Improvement Service), Erin Murray (Scottish Borders Council) and myself, Dave Blackbell (Scottish Policy & Research Exchange), has been busy this year exploring the question: *how can intermediary organisations and networks support enhanced evidence use in Scottish local policymaking?*

Our approach has been to explore this question in collaboration with other intermediary organisations and from the perspective of professionals on the 'front line' of producing, mobilising and using data and academic evidence. To do this, we've been working with Ian Dwyer from the Office of National Statistics Local Scotland, to run two networking and peer-learning workshops.

[The first was held on 11th June](#) and brought together ~110 people with ⅔ from the Scottish public sector and ⅓ from Scottish universities, with a panel of four experts from the public sector and academia. The second was a smaller, follow-on workshop on 20th August to make sense of the findings from the first, and brought together 13 of us who attended the initial workshop – mostly from Scottish councils.

Discussions across both events were rich and animating. We got a real sense from taking part – as well as from feedback and insights gathered – that events like these are energising, motivating and confidence building, that they play an important role in connecting people from across the sector to share learning and build solidarity, and that they capture important insights and implications about shared challenges and opportunities for action.

What did we learn about enhancing evidence use?

Well, much of the plenary discussion focused on a recognition that evidence and data don't speak for themselves – they need story-telling and clear narrative from practitioners able to hold and simplify the complexity of the challenges being addressed, and that often the value they provide is to enable the right follow-on questions to be asked. We also spent a lot of time discussing the importance of a clear and shared understanding of the desired outcomes that decisions seek to improve, aimed at improving the lives of real people (e.g. the personal outcomes approach). The systemic barriers to improving data quality and access was also a key theme, as was a concern for addressing bias often hidden within data and evidence, particularly when artificial intelligence is being used.

Based on the 233 insights captured from mentimeter during the first workshop (which provided us with digital 'sticky notes' of what people took away from breakout discussions), we undertook careful and AI-supported thematic analysis, and examined these in the follow-on workshop, which we hope to share the results of soon. As sneak peek, and in no particular order, the themes identified spoke to the importance of:

1. Strengthening collaboration, connection and trust
2. Combining different forms of evidence
3. Addressing bias
4. Mindful use of technology
5. Improving data quality, relevance and access
6. Politics, governance and how evidence is actually used by decision makers
7. Capacity building
8. Clarity on outcomes and impact
9. Using narratives that can communicate complexity
10. Community engagement

As next steps, we are working to identify and prioritise the implications of these insights for what intermediary organisations and networks can do to support improvements across these areas. An obvious takeaway is that events like these are important to keep running – which highlights the value of the LARIA network in being able to convene people with such important 'front line' expertise!

Dr Dave Blackbell
Co-Lead of LARIA Scotland and Co-Director of the Scottish Policy & Research Exchange

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

HSUG / RSS OSS webinar on healthcare productivity
Thursday 13 November 2025
12:00 to 13:30

The Health Statistics Users Group (HSUG) and the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) Official Statistics Section are organising a webinar to discuss the statistical approaches used for monitoring healthcare productivity.

For further information and to register for this online event, please see here.
There is a registration fee of £10 for non RSS Members.

Programme

Katherine Kent – Public Service Productivity Lead at ONS, will present on ONS work on healthcare productivity, drawing on the Review of Public Sector Productivity that was published on 13th March 2025.

Paul Healy – Deputy Director of Efficiency and Productivity Insight at NHS England, will discuss the methodology and estimates for their trust productivity growth statistic, as well as more broadly the plans and analysis on NHS productivity.

Ahmar Shah – University of Edinburgh, will present work and findings from the Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on elective care backlog trends, recovery efforts, and capacity needs to address backlogs in Scotland (2013–2023): a descriptive analysis and modelling study.
See here.

The presentations, a meeting report and a recording of the webinar will be posted on the Health and Care group on StatsUserNetwork, and also on the HSUG Community on AnalystX within the Future NHS platform.

People who are not able to attend on the day will be able to view, and comment on, this material.

For further details on how to access these platforms, please see the webinar registration information here.

Events are free and open to all:

Homeless applications: barriers to finding in-person help and the impact on hospitals

Thu 11 Dec 2025, 10 – 11am Book here

A reminder of the November events:

Harm reduction and belonging in the provision of homelessness services

Wed 12 Nov 2025 10 – 11am [Book here](#)

Upcoming webinar on Python, what is it, how to work with IT teams to use safely, and real examples of use in councils (including revenues and benefits).

31 October 2025 14:00-15:30
[More details and book here](#)

Upcoming webinar on data use in public health, how analytics is used to improve population health outcomes, and how councils are using R and Sql in public health.

20 November 2025 14:00-15:30
[More details and book here](#)

Upcoming webinar on accessible Power BI dashboards, how councils have made dashboards more inclusive, and how to collaborate on improving Power BI accessibility.

27 November 2025 10:00-11:00
[More details and book here](#)

Upcoming webinar on skills, recruitment, and retention in local government. How councils launched recruitment campaigns, capabilities frameworks, and retaining data talent.

11 December 2025 14:00-15:30
[More details and book here](#)

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 November.

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 20th November.