

Academic Advisers in Local and Regional Authorities: CAPE Insights Report



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Acronyms and terms

Academic Adviser – a person working within a policy organisation whilst simultaneously remaining employed (wholly or partly) by and embedded in their university. We use this term to describe university researchers and research services staff in ‘CSA-equivalent’ or other advisory roles with local and regional authorities.

CAPE – Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement.

CSA – Chief Scientific Adviser.

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

GCSA – Government Chief Scientific Adviser.

GO-Science – Government Office for Science.

LRAAA network – Local and Regional Authority Academic Adviser network – the name we have used to describe a network designed to explore the nature and value of multiple CSA-type roles for local and regional authorities.

Policy Fellowships – A policy fellowship supports mobility between academic and policy organisations by providing opportunities for researchers and/or policy professionals to spend time in policy organisations or universities respectively.

Policy Host – A member of a policy organisation who hosts/works directly with the Academic Adviser but is not their primary employer.



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Foreword

The benefits of academic advice to government are clearly established, not least through the network of Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs). But this advice is only useful if it is framed in the relevant context and presented in a way that relates directly to the challenges that the government faces. Giving advice to government requires mutual understanding and an awareness of the practical constraints that are relevant to the decisions that need to be made. Just as the CSAs already support central government through a dedicated infrastructure, CAPE and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) co-convened the Local and Regional Authority Academic Adviser (LRAAA) network to shed light on the current ways for academics to support local and regional government.

The LRAAA network has provided an opportunity to share knowledge, common challenges, and best practice across a variety of academic advisory and knowledge brokerage roles. These roles represent a relatively recent development in local and regional government, devoid of an established model, with each individual role operating uniquely. There is an important opportunity to learn from the ongoing development and continual evolution of such roles and to understand their role within the overall evidence and policy ecosystem. This includes recognising the persistent challenges local and regional government may face in accessing academic evidence and expertise. Critical insight as well as ongoing questions around their future are captured in this the report.

Within the DLUHC, the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and the CSA's Office work to ensure that the department's decisions are informed by robust, joined-up evidence. This involves offering scientific advice, fostering external engagement and strengthening internal capability. As a department, our work covers investing in local areas to drive growth and create jobs, delivering the homes our country needs, supporting our community and faith groups, and overseeing local government, planning and building safety. From October 2019 to December 2022, Alan Penn was the CSA, and I (Richard Prager) joined in March 2023. Alan and I have chaired the LRAAA network meetings between September 2022 and July 2023 and have seen the similarities and differences among a diverse variety of collaborations across the country. We have been encouraged by the positive spirit of experimentation and enquiry that has pervaded the work and the thoughtful discussions and conclusions that have arisen from it. This report is an interesting and constructive contribution to the rich academic policy engagement landscape in the UK. I warmly welcome it and thank all the participants in the network for work that they contributed.

Professor Richard Prager
Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA)
Department for Levelling Up, Housing
and Communities (DLUHC) and LRAAA
network Chair, December 2023

Executive summary

The cross-institutional Local/Regional Authority Academic Adviser (LRAAA) network was co-convened by the Chief Scientific Advisor's (CSA) Office of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and CAPE.

It forms part of CAPE's exploration of academic policy engagement structures, systems and processes for the benefit of sharing lessons of what works and what doesn't.¹

The LRAAA network explored the nature and value of 'Chief Scientific Adviser-type' (CSA) roles for local and regional authorities, addressing questions including:

- How do Academic Adviser roles work in different places?²
- What value do these roles have and to whom?
- What are the benefits of collaboration between Academic Adviser roles?
- How could a coordinated network maximise their full potential?

This report brings together the findings and reflections from the LRAAA network meetings, a survey of members, discussions between DLUHC and the CAPE team, and conversations with individual members, alongside a number of case studies exploring different Academic Adviser models from across the country.

It is clear from the LRAAA network that embedding 'Academic Adviser' roles within local and regional authorities can help to build sustained capacity and capability in the policy system and improve the use of research. CAPE suggests that current processes and structures for academic policy engagement at local and regional level will need to evolve significantly to support greater interchange between universities and local and regional authorities. Universities, local and regional authorities, and research funders all have a role to play in helping to evolve the current system and deliver more value from existing roles and initiatives.

A first step is to sustain a network of Academic Advisers and their policy colleagues to help build enabling infrastructure that can support a sustainable culture of academic policy engagement to deliver societal benefit locally, regionally, and nationally.

¹ See [CAPE theory of Change](#) for further information on our aims, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

² For heuristic reasons we refer to Academic Advisers throughout this report. However, we recognise this term collapses several roles into one when in fact those in these positions may be employed on a range of university contracts e.g., academic, research, and professional services.

Key insights

- ▶ **Academic Advisers embedded with local and regional authorities are a relatively recent initiative in the wider academic policy ecosystem.** Their overarching purpose is to strengthen the interface and enable greater mobility between research and policy. Some roles provide dedicated research capability or specific expertise, whilst others act as more general knowledge brokers.
- ▶ **Academic Adviser roles have generated a range of benefits,** including strengthening partnerships within regions, enhancing policy capacity, problem solving, generating research impacts, and supporting wider culture change.
- ▶ **There is considerable variation in roles and models of engagement.** This allows Academic Adviser roles to be optimised for specific contexts, but presents challenges for establishing new positions and for scaling. The absence of established practice means that current initiatives may be precarious.
- ▶ **There are currently significant limitations to the model,** which include roles being developed in isolation, leading to high transaction costs for individuals; insufficient reward and recognition; and little opportunity for shared learning.
- ▶ **Establishing Academic Adviser roles entails a number of practical considerations,** including defining relevant skills and experience, often against a backdrop where there is a misalignment with traditional academic career paths. Challenges also arise due to the absence of a dedicated funding model, varying logistical and working arrangements, and limited awareness of the roles and their value.
- ▶ **There is no one-size-fits-all approach,** and roles and arrangements need to be developed in accordance with local context and needs. Flexible approaches to funding, workload allocation models, or university salary support should be a key part of the conversation for embedding roles.
- ▶ **There is strong appetite for further collaboration,** including multilateral learning to improve practice; enhancing awareness of roles across the research-policy ecosystem; creating more sustainable structures for engagement that enhance inclusivity and diversity; shared activity to address common challenges; and strengthening the use of science advice and research expertise in local and regional government.



Context: creating a porous academic policy interface

The importance of integrating research evidence into policymaking is well established.^{3,4} The need for a porous system that fosters the exchange of knowledge, people, and ideas across sectors is increasingly recognised as important for achieving evidence-informed policy.⁵

Chief Scientific Advisers and the CSA network

One effective model facilitating this porosity involves Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs) in UK government departments, where individuals are appointed from outside government roles for a fixed term of four years, often on a part-time secondment (enabling them to retain their professional role).^{6,7} CSAs play a vital role in ensuring that departmental policies are grounded in the best available science and engineering advice. The CSA network serves as a platform for sharing good practices and addressing cross-departmental issues, with regular meetings chaired by the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) and underpinned by central secretariat support provided by the Government Office for Science (GO-Science).⁸

Policy Fellowships

Policy Fellowships represent a more recent mechanism to enable mobility and access to research expertise. As a previous CAPE report explains, this is because Policy Fellowships support professional development through staff exchange activity, enabling individuals to immerse themselves in a new organisations to gain new perspectives and relevant insights. It facilitates innovative career pathways, fostering collaborations, relationships, and mutual understanding and trust.⁹

In reality, Policy Fellowships encompass multiple models and arrangements, organised by funders, academies and learned societies, national policy organisations (typically national government departments and The UK Parliament) and universities. Recent efforts by government, such as the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) Expert Exchange scheme, and funders, such as UKRI's Policy Fellowships, demonstrate attempts to standardise and scale mobility.^{10,11} Likewise, the Cabinet Office Secondments Playbook aims to reduce transaction costs.

³ For an overview of the history of UK science policy, see Flanagan et al., [Lessons from the History of UK Science Policy](#), The British Academy, 2019.

⁴ For an overview of the importance of using research evidence to inform policy-making, see Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, [The What Works Network – Five Years On](#), Gov.Uk, 2018.

⁵ For the R&D system, see NCUB's Mobility Task Force Report, [Pathways to Success](#), NCUB, 2023.

⁶ Gov.UK, [Chief Scientific Advisers](#).

⁷ For a detailed report on science advice and the role of government CSAs, see Hopkins et al., [Science Advice in the UK](#), Foundation for Science and Technology & Transforming Evidence. DOI: 10.53289/GUTW3567, 2021.

⁸ The Government Office for Science, [Chief Scientific Advisers and their officials: an introduction](#), 2020, p.14.

⁹ N. Buckley et al., [Hosting Policy Fellows](#), CAPE, 2022.

¹⁰ See DSIT Expert Exchange scheme, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/best-and-brightest-from-uk-science-engineering-and-tech-to-join-dsit-under-new-expert-exchange>.

¹¹ See UKRI News, <https://www.ukri.org/news/44-policy-fellows-to-work-in-government-and-what-works-network/>.

The development of the Local/Regional Authority Academic Advisers network

During his time as Government Chief Scientific Adviser GCSA, Patrick Vallance stated that cities needed their own Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs), prompting a discussion between CAPE and the then DLUHC CSA on how to strengthen academic policy engagement at the level of local and regional government. CAPE organised an early panel event of current and previous CSAs, who shared their perspectives alongside reflections on the attributes required for CSA roles in local and regional contexts.¹² There was a clear sense of the potential value of a coordinated local advisory function with an acknowledgment of some of the critical variables, including: where Academic Advisers are situated within local and regional policy systems; what role they play between academic and policy institutions; the types of evidence and scientific advice functions they provide; and how the needs of the local/regional authority, the Academic Adviser and their universities (e.g., geography, size and shape and policy engagement strategies) shape such roles and, more broadly, this mechanism of academic policy engagement.

As part of the ongoing development and evolution of advisory roles alongside a keenness to reduce siloed working practices, CAPE and the DLUHC CSA's office convened the Local and Regional Authority Academic Advisor (LRAAA) network, chaired by the DLUHC CSA¹³. The network consisted of Academic Advisers and their policy hosts across England, bringing together those funded by CAPE and a wider network, all with the shared aim of advancing academic policy engagement. The creation of the LRAAA network had 4 key purposes:

- to share experiences and learning across different roles and contexts;
- to explore the persistent challenges local and regional government may face in accessing academic evidence and expertise;
- to understand how disparate Academic Adviser roles were situated in the overall public policy and government ecosystem and build greater understanding of such roles;
- to understand the benefits of such roles for local and regional government.

¹² CAPE. [Science Advice from National to Local](#), CAPE, 2021.

¹³ Over the course of the project the DLUHC CSA changed from Professor Alan Penn (UCL) to Professor Richard Prager (Cambridge), but continuity of involvement has been maintained.

Understanding Academic Adviser roles

What are Local/Regional Authority Academic Advisers?

The LRAAA network comprised **researchers and research professionals spending time outside of their university-based role and drawing on their expertise to support policy engagement within a local/regional authority**. Academic Adviser positions involved a local/regional authority working with an Academic Adviser from a single university, either on a particular topic or on a process that could inform local public policy making. They were held on both a part-time and full-time basis, from a period of six months to several years, with or without external funding (from a Research Council, for example).

There is considerable variety in local/regional authority Academic Advisers roles, with no dominant model. They are often supported through secondment, fellowship, or other placement mechanisms.



What is the structure and function of Academic Adviser roles?

Each Academic Adviser was formally recognised by their local/regional authority. Formal recognition consisted of being given a title in addition to their academic job title, an email address and a clear way to present this part of their working role. Titles ranged from Scientific Adviser, Chief Scientific Adviser, Chief Policy Fellow and Policy Fellow. This differs from more ad-hoc, short-term engagement between academia and local and regional authorities whereby an affiliation is granted, but it is likely to be informal and provide limited access to the organisation's systems.

Academic Advisers were situated differently within local and regional policy organisational structures. Some worked directly with the political side of local and regional authorities (councillors and their offices), while others worked with politically independent local government officials.

Academic Adviser functions are variable. Roles varied between being policy-demand led, academic-led, or a hybrid of the two. Specific themes or topics underpinned some roles (e.g., climate change/net zero), while others were 'topic agnostic' and responded to a range of policy needs, often on a methodological basis. Some conducted primary research within their Academic Adviser role, such as exploring sustainable academic policy knowledge mobilisation structures, whereas others synthesised and presented the state of the evidence for policy priorities.



Examples from the network

Southampton City Council Chief Scientific Adviser (University of Southampton)

One of the earliest Academic Adviser roles (that this network is aware of) was formed at Southampton City Council in 2013. The role of '**City CSA**' was created in response to the Council wanting a mechanism which could enable them to draw effectively on advice for key policy areas such as engineering, the environment, and public health.

Since 2013, an academic from Southampton University has been working in this role for **half a day per week**, based **in an office at the Council**. Key features of the role are to mobilise knowledge across different Council committees and to meet with the Council leader and local MPs on a monthly basis to feed in advice and evidence on key policy areas.

The impact of this CSA role includes supporting the Council to make better use of data, literature, and emerging research to build a 5-pillar strategy on climate change and green growth, which helped the council achieve funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Essex County Council Chief Scientific Adviser (University of Essex)

The role of CSA at Essex County Council has existed since 2015. The post has been held by three academics (all with expertise in data science and analytics) to date and is underpinned by a **formal collaboration agreement** between the University of Essex and Essex County Council.

This position is **intentionally non-political** and most of the collaboration is with the local government officers rather than Councillors. In practice, the current CSA has focussed on supporting relationships between researchers and policymakers to build capacity and capability for the effective use of data and artificial intelligence in tackling local challenges.

The formal agreement between University and Council has allowed use of each other's office spaces and facilities – for example council staff have been given access to university library resources, while academics have been given access to Council resources to support their work. Other collaborative work has included jointly writing grants for funding bids, helping to better align research questions and policy needs.

What is the value of Academic Adviser roles?

“On a macro-level my work into knowledge brokerage can shape changes at the university and the Greater London Authority (GLA), London Councils and London Boroughs to pave the way for better ways of future working.” – Sarah Jasim, Academic Adviser

“[Academic Adviser] input and expertise has brought significant value to the Council. It has improved our policies and approaches, ensuring best value for residents. It has strengthened ties with the University.” – Rose Dickinson, Policy Host

A variety of ways articulate and demonstrate the ‘value’ of the role. **Academic Advisers bring many valuable skills**, including their ability to build and sustain networks, work across different sectors, and respond adaptively to current issues. **They are particularly sought for their expertise** in assessing evidence to contribute to policy recommendations or to evaluate strategies. This sometimes sits outside of their own area of expertise. In some cases, the unique policy challenges require particular skills or capabilities. For example, the Academic Adviser role in Essex County Council specifically requires the data science capabilities of the academic involved.

Table 1 (pg. 12) summarises the activities that arise from embedding Academic Advisers, ranging from commissioning outputs such as reports or briefings to developing models to improve evidence systems. The sharing of resources and workspaces can strengthen relationships between institutions (**stronger partnerships**), while co-design of projects can boost capabilities in policy implementation (**increased efficacy**). Technical barriers, such as enabling Academic Advisers to access data, can be overcome to enable policy-relevant research (**problem solving**). Shorter-term, tangible outputs can also help to build the confidence and buy-in from wider local and regional authority teams or provide case studies for the value of policy impact in universities (**research impact**).

The LRAAA network has also identified longer-term legacies (**culture change**), whereby the identification and strengthening of sustainable structures for knowledge mobilisation helps not only to address immediate policy challenges, but also supports ongoing local and regional academic policy engagement. These broader outcomes – strengthened relationships, improved ways of working and broader culture change – point to the value generated for individuals (the Academic Adviser and the policy host) and for institutions (the universities, the local/regional authority, and funders) and local/regional places, as evidenced by the case-study (pg. 19) ‘A knowledge brokerage pilot in the Greater London Authority’.

Table 1: Examples activities from the network and the value of Academic Adviser roles

Example activities	The value is ...	Who benefits?
<p>Sharing data, workspaces, and resources. This can be reinforced by a formal agreement.</p>	<p>Stronger partnerships Strengthened ties between universities and local/regional authorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local/regional authority • University
<p>Co-designing demonstrator projects around a key theme like decarbonisation.</p>	<p>Increased efficacy Improved approaches to policymaking (formulation, implementation, evaluation etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Host • Local/regional authority • Local/regional places
<p>Accessing local/regional authority data essential for a research output and its societal impact.</p>	<p>Problem-solving Reductions in barriers to research-based policymaking (such as data access/linkage).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Host • Local/regional authority • Academic Adviser • Local/regional places • University
<p>Developing a model for sustained engagement with the research community.</p>	<p>Culture change Increased understanding between university and policy of how to work better together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University • Local/regional Authority • Policy Host • Academic Adviser • Funders
<p>Co-production of outputs such as case studies, publications and joint funding applications.</p>	<p>Research Impact System improvements enabling university research to directly work with, and impact, on policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University • Local/regional Authority • Academic Adviser • Local/regional places • Funders

Case–study: Connecting expertise across the West Yorkshire region

Y-PERN (Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network) evolved out of a pilot project in West Yorkshire.

Funded through CAPE, a Chief Policy Fellow was created to help embed and connect academic expertise from the region’s seven universities across West Yorkshire, local authorities and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The model explored whether an academic could enhance opportunities to engage by championing inclusive knowledge mobilisation and brokerage opportunities across the region. The Chief Policy Fellow was embedded within Policy Engagement and Research Network (PERN), an existing academic network established to support economic recovery post-Covid. PERN adopted a holistic approach to economic policy, drawing on expertise and ensuring representation from diverse perspectives.

Key work which emerged from the CAPE PERN Chief Policy Fellow model included: nowcasting and forecasting West Yorkshire’s economy, safety of women and girls commission, and working class voices in economic policy.^{14,15,16}

Working with Yorkshire Universities, the Yorkshire representative body for the 12 universities in the region, and Yorkshire & Humber Councils, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, a bid was made to the Research England Development Fund to expand the PERN model across the whole of Yorkshire & the Humber by creating Y-PERN.

The new Y-PERN network-driven model supports a Chief Policy Fellow working alongside ten local policy fellows to enhance collaboration and capacity across 15 local authorities, two combined authorities and 12 universities to support the development of inclusive and holistic, place-based economic policies. The goal is to support a step-change in how academics and policy makers collaborate across the region. It is funded until September 2025.

Lessons and insights from the PERN Chief Policy Fellow shaped the approach and priorities of the Y-PERN project and Y-PERN Chief Policy Fellow. This included the need to recognise and support work at the sub-regional scale, identify priorities for collaboration at a regional Yorkshire and Humber scale, and embed training and capacity building for academia and policymakers. Evaluation is the final strand which underpins both the viability and sustainability of the Y-PERN model.

Building on the first year of engagement with CAPE, the new Y-PERN West Yorkshire Policy Fellow has focused on supporting West Yorkshire Combined Authority officers to identify specific opportunities where support from academics can: add value, fill existing knowledge gaps, and stimulate discussion to inform local prioritisation. This is now being embedded into shaping a programme of knowledge exchange and research aligned to current policy development and includes awareness raising across universities and policymakers of opportunities to engage. A key example includes academics from across the region providing input to the development of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority’s Economic Strategy.

¹⁴ Brown, et al., [A fair, just and long-lasting recovery for all: Forecasting and nowcasting in West Yorkshire](#), Yorkshire Universities, 2021.

¹⁵ Whittle, R, [Tender Opportunity: Safety of Women and Girls](#), Yorkshire Universities, 2021.

¹⁶ Waqas, M and Khawar, M, [Insight into ‘working class voices’ in economic policy – Report 2](#), Yorkshire Universities, 2022.

Limitations of the current approach

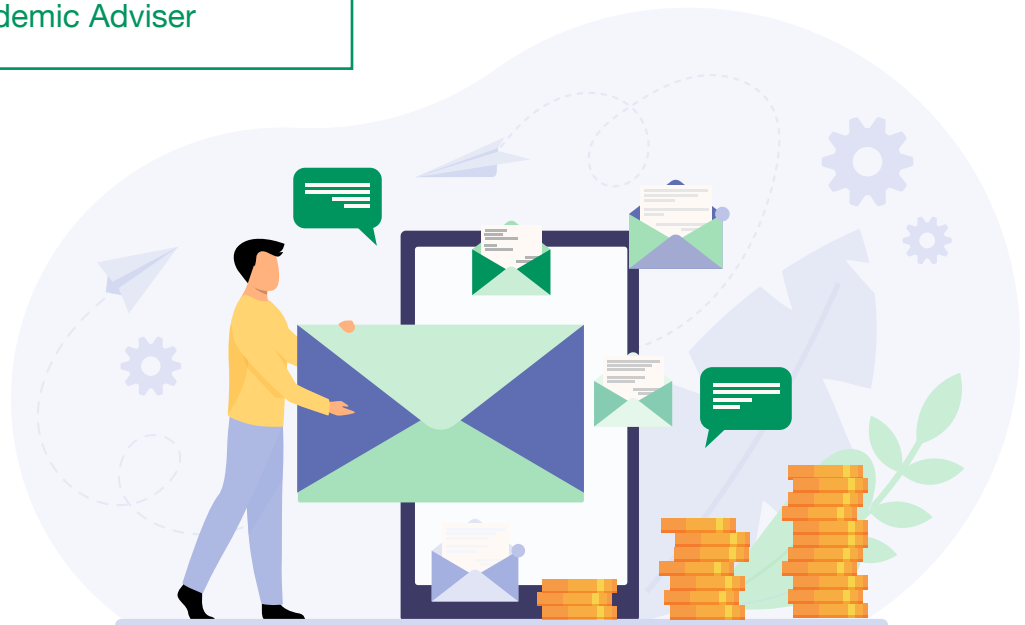
The LRAAA network discussions surfaced a range of recurring limitations, alongside potential improvements which could be made to the current approaches. These limitations do not necessarily apply equally across all roles or organisations, but learning from them will nonetheless be a critical step to sustaining and scaling Academic Adviser roles and strengthening a broader culture of science advice within local and regional government.

“The effectiveness of the relationship needs buy in from both sides at different levels. It cannot be driven just by two people.” – Steve Leggett, Policy Host

“[H]aving spent time as an academic as well as a regional authority official, I would like to see the implications of [this] work reflected in debate about how academic incentive systems might best be adjusted so as to better support academic policy collaborations in future.” – Alan Harding, Academic Adviser

Individualised, high transaction costs

Currently there is no ‘one size fits all’ Academic Adviser model; rather, each adapts to the context of the organisation it comes from and operates in. This leads to considerable variation in arrangements and often means Academic Advisers are operating without awareness of one another (‘lone wolves’), without good governance or well-defined enabling infrastructure. High transaction costs associated with developing customised roles were evident and risk the focus remaining on establishing individual roles. Whilst there is growing investment in academic fellowships in public policy organisations, the absence of any defined policy fellowship scheme targeted at local and regional authorities may act as a significant barrier to uptake and is likely to mean a continuation of the current situation of one-off appointments.



Diminishing returns

Reward and recognition were identified as another key issue for the Academic Advisers in particular. The value of these roles for the individual academic, the local/regional authority, the university involved, in a range of different localities and contexts, is clear. For those closely involved there was a high degree of motivation to work at the interface between academia and policy. However, for some the lack of formalised agreements or 'neatly' communicative roles and policy outcomes made sustaining their existence and justifying the impact time-consuming and resource intensive.

Further considerations for equal opportunities were also discussed in relation to variability of funding arrangements in place. A lack of funding behind roles could be a significant barrier to participation - for example, for early career researchers, those on non-permanent contracts or universities with limited levels of knowledge exchange (KE) funding.

Limited opportunities to share learning

Academic Advisers and their policy hosts bring new approaches and insights to strengthening academic policy engagement. Academic Advisers have a diverse range of skills and the ability to address various challenges from filling capacity gaps, to introducing new skills and methodological approaches. Before the LRAAA network was established, no platform for communication between Academic Advisers and their policy hosts together existed. Communications between them relied on ad hoc awareness or serendipitous encounters. This not only hinders opportunities to improve existing practice but also limits the potential for collaboration on shared logistical barriers and policy challenges.

Given the current patchwork of Academic Adviser roles, there is no established network or existing practices for the communication of roles or platforms for sharing best practice and building visibility of activities and outcomes. This results in limited visibility of different roles, their particular nature and focus, the specific arrangements for the roles, and their outputs and impacts.



Practical considerations for creating and sustaining Academic Adviser roles in local and regional authorities

The LRAAA network explored a range of practical and logistical arrangements related to different Academic Adviser roles. These highlighted that, whilst there is little to suggest a standardised approach is desirable, there is a need for greater clarity, visibility and recognition of such roles.

1. Skills and experience required

- Academic career structures do not neatly translate across to policy roles; therefore the 'usual' language of recruitment doesn't readily apply.
- Roles work best when the skills need is clearly understood and articulated in language that all parties understand.
- Academic job titles are not necessarily indicators of levels of policy engagement experience; looking beyond the 'usual suspects' is required.

Academics bring many valuable skills to Academic Adviser roles and are particularly sought for their experience in assessing evidence to contribute to policy recommendations or to evaluate strategies. This may often be outside of their own area of expertise. In some cases, the unique challenges of individual local and regional authorities can mean that they require particular skills or experience for the role. For example, the Academic Adviser role in Essex County Council specifically requires the data science capabilities of the academic involved. There are however common skillsets required across all roles: the ability to build and sustain networks; work across different sectors; and respond adaptively to current issues.

Targeted recruitment for local and regional Academic Adviser roles can be challenging as there is a lack of comparability between roles in different sectors. Pay scales and job titles for research and research services staff at universities are most closely aligned with experience relating to research and teaching roles, rather than policy impact and/or the broader skill requirements of Academic Adviser roles. Hosts from local and regional authorities should be aware of this when 'recruiting'. It may also mean that Academic Adviser roles may need to sit outside of academic and policy structures, and that role development often has to 'start from scratch'.

2. Funding

- No set funding model is established or necessarily desirable, but Academic Adviser roles should not be seen as an 'add-on'.
- Universities should acknowledge the value of Academic Adviser roles and recognise them within academic careers. Consideration is needed of incentives and structures such as workload allocation models and reward and recognition structures.
- Funders should consider greater emphasis of local and regional government within their fellowship and mobility schemes.

The optimal funding model is likely to be dependent on the context of the role. In some circumstances where no external funding was in place to secure buy out of time, the Academic Adviser role was acknowledged in workload allocation models and time was covered by their university salary. However, in other cases there was an expectation that

this role was performed additionally to their workload. While some members of the network called for external funding (such as from UKRI) to be an essential component of these roles, others found the flexibility offered by positions funded as part of their university salary to be preferential.

However, organisations should consider that funding these roles would promote equal opportunities, particularly for early career researchers and those on non-permanent contracts. Furthermore, provision of external funding for these roles signals the value of engaging in policy impact work in university careers and in reward and incentive structures. It also recognises the importance of embedding such activity as a core part of academic and research roles, rather than a supplementary add-on.

3. Logistics of the role – contracts and working arrangements

- A single model should not be prescribed for all Academic Adviser roles. Models should be co-created between the university, Academic Adviser and Host with a focus on good governance.
- Shorter term, more informal arrangements may be appropriate to provide rapid access to expertise.
- Where longer term roles are required, contractual arrangements should be considered to help define terms and establish visibility.
- The need for data sharing and the likelihood of Intellectual Property (IP) should be discussed at an early stage, and revisited as and when necessary, with appropriate conditions put in place.

One key difference between Academic Advisers is the type of arrangement in place for their role. For some roles there was a formal contract agreement in place between the local/regional authority and university but for others, arrangements remained informal. Working arrangements and patterns varied significantly, from some spending large amounts of time within local/regional authorities' offices to others working remotely and joining meetings and activities based on need. Similarly, role duration was varied, with some Academic Advisers serving for long terms, and others in shorter 'fellowship' style arrangements. Defined, shorter term arrangements may be favourable to academics who require clarity of expectations or shorter commitments within their main role as an academic. However, some may find contracts with defined role durations to be restrictive and preventative to longer term goals within the local/regional authority.

Different arrangements work best for different local and regional authorities: there is no apparent 'best' model. However, transparent processes and good governance are important to set expectations, agree common goals and establish ways of working. In some cases, there will also be data sharing or formation of intellectual property involved.¹⁷ Therefore, it is important to establish shared understanding and to consider if legal arrangements need to be in place.

¹⁷ CAPE. [CAPE Policy Fellowships Contracts Guidance Note: Process & Key Issues](#), CAPE, 2021.

4. Raising awareness of the role

- Academic Advisers are appointed through a range of means, including formal schemes and through existing relationships.
- The visibility of Academic Advisers is low, both within organisations where they are hosted and with their main employer.
- There are limited opportunities to share knowledge of Academic Advisor roles and their benefits to both hosts and employing universities.

Academic Advisers have come to their positions in a range of ways: from established relationships which result in CSA-type roles, to formally applying through a defined and advertised route, such as through the CAPE scheme. In some instances, local and regional authorities have directly recruited for the position, for example in Oxford City Council's recruitment of a scientific adviser as part of its steps to tackle the climate emergency.

Once appointments are made, roles are publicised in a variety of ways and to variable degrees. Some appointments are publicised widely, announced through press releases and are therefore searchable online, while others are announced on institutional intranets and only searchable to those within those organisations.

Finding out who holds these roles and what they do is complex. DLUHC maintains a list of Academic Advisers in local and regional authorities, which is periodically updated, but this is reliant on information from local and regional authorities or universities. Advisers report limited awareness of their roles within their own institutions, as well as on occasion in host authorities.





Case–study: A knowledge brokerage pilot in the Greater London Authority

The London Research and Policy Partnership (LRaPP) was established in 2021 by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the University of London (UoL). Its aim is to bring together researchers and London government policymakers to address London’s strategic challenges. Two CAPE-funded Policy Fellows were embedded in 0.5FTE roles as Academic Advisers in the GLA as part of a 12-month pilot to develop LRaPP’s knowledge brokerage function.

The Policy Fellows conducted qualitative and evaluation research across both communities to understand prior experiences of academic policy exchange and knowledge brokerage mechanisms. Their research illuminated challenges for both communities, for example a reliance on personal networks, funding challenges, cultural differences, and lack of a shared language to aid ‘boundary crossing.’ The Policy Fellows identified a range of brokerage mechanisms used across both communities, and developed a conceptual partnership model to facilitate and humanise academic policy exchange and provide a growth trajectory for LRaPP.¹⁸ The Fellowship pilot was extended through additional funding from CAPE and the UoL to enable the Policy Fellows to test identified brokerage mechanisms.

These mechanisms have included a multi-stakeholder event adopting World Café principles, co-creation with local communities, and policy workshops to identify tractable challenges to be addressed through LRaPP’s programme proposal. These events engaged around two hundred people from academia, government, civil society, and the private sector and helped to strengthen LRaPP’s relationship with London government by addressing a shared and pressing policy priority, demonstrating responsiveness to policymakers’ insights, and providing opportunities to build on proposed projects and programmes. The Policy Fellows also supported the delivery of a successful bid to the first round of the UKRI Local Policy Innovation Partnership (LPIP) call.

Knowledge brokerage emerged as a critical infrastructure provided by the Policy Fellows. It enabled LRaPP to assume a leadership role in linking people across the ecosystem, fostering an exchange of actionable evidence and insights from a diverse range of sources into a coherent programme proposal. This collaborative effort bolstered confidence in the LPIP programme bid, as evidenced by the many letters of endorsement from policy organisations, universities and community groups, for example. Both interventions enabled LRaPP to validate its own proof of concept, facilitating progression along its partnership maturity model, and laying the foundations for future stages.

¹⁸ Krystallis, I and Jasim, S, Charting the path towards a long-term knowledge brokerage function: an ecosystems view. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 10, 760, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02294-6>, 2023.

Adding value through collaboration

“Sharing knowledge about the range of ways in which academics work in local and regional policy contexts through networks like the Local Regional Authority Academic Advisers Network exposed us to wider debates around research-policy exchange, and how knowledge brokerage works in practice, which helped to ground our thinking about how LRaPP could develop.”
– Michelle Reeves, Policy Host

The LRAAA network provided the first opportunity for local and regional Academic Advisers and their policy hosts to explore how scientific support and advice is provided in different local and regional contexts and identify shared learning and opportunities. Through the discussions, network members highlighted the value of sharing current work with others in similar positions.

At the same time, they acknowledged that a more established approach to local and regional academic-policy engagement would enhance diversity and inclusivity by opening participation beyond a few individuals who have the ability to work around systems and barriers.

LRAAA network members emphasised the value of an ongoing network to support shared learning and collaboration, including the provision of an informal online workspace; a formalised meetings structure; and the continuation of the LRAAA network with established governance arrangements and resourcing. In particular, key benefits of collaboration as a network were emphasised as:

1. Improving practice

- sharing examples of good practice.
- peer mentoring to improve individual ‘know-how’ and skills.
- sharing the benefits of the broader matching of mutual policy areas with research needs (and through a network approach).
- enhancing diversity and inclusivity by opening participation beyond a few individuals who have the ability to work around systems and barriers.

2. Strengthening use of science advice

- working together to ensure that scientific advice is appropriately communicated and effectively actioned, similar to the Government CSA network.
- generating improvements through the provision of evidence-based solutions, developed evidence systems and knowledge mobilisation infrastructure.
- tackling policy challenges which are shared across different locations by pooling diverse research capability reaping the benefits of aligned policy areas with diverse research capability beyond immediate geographies.

A network solution

To date, the LRAAA network has been supported by CAPE and the DLUHC CSA's Office, providing a network management function and chairing meetings. However, given that CAPE is a time-limited funded project, the longer-term sustainability of the network remains an open question. There is a clear appetite from network members to continue and grow the LRAAA network to help to build a more sustainable infrastructure and diverse approach for local and regional academic policy engagement at scale.

CAPE suggests that a dedicated network structure is required to maximise the potential value and enable collaboration in practice, including through a sequence of quarterly meetings (which we have found to be an effective balance of time commitment with the benefits of communicating and sharing). This requires further detailed consideration of outstanding questions around resourcing and governance, including where it should sit; who is responsible for its governance/arrangements; who pays for the network and any associated activities that could arise. Securing a host in the medium-term would support the network to transition to longer term external resource needed for active collaboration.

Based on LRAAA network discussions and insights, we propose the continuation of the network, adopting a model (see Figure 1, pg. 22) which would support collective action to address some of the limitations captured in this report and build collaboration across LRAAA roles.

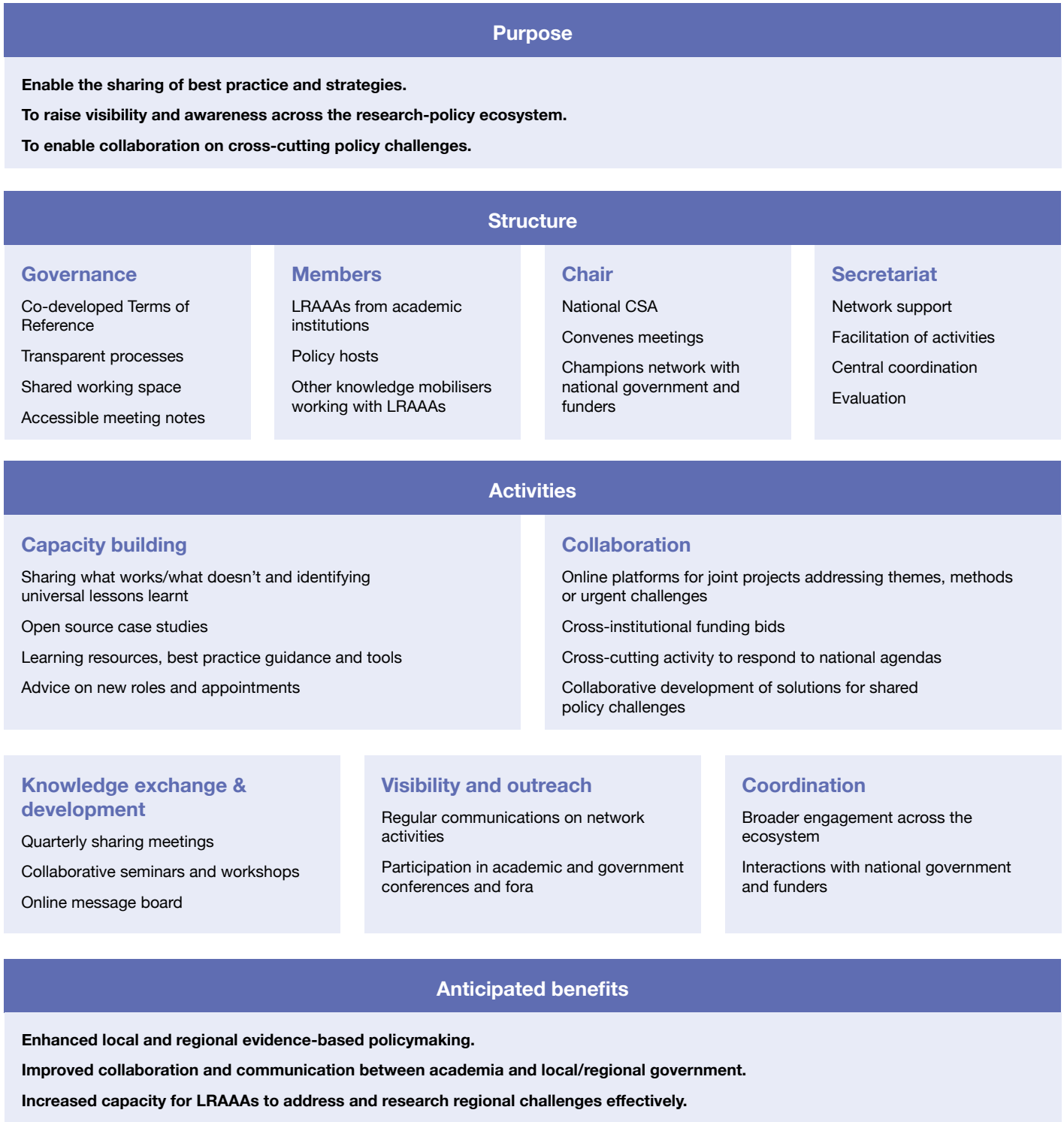
The primary focus would be to develop and share best practice; enable a range of collaborative activities between members; and support the visibility and engagement of the network and its members in the broader academic policy ecosystem. A continued network would also be able to engage with roles which have subsequently come to our attention – for example based in Durham County Council and Leeds City Council – and new initiatives such as the UKRI Strategic Coordination Hub for Local Policy Innovation Partnerships to further support join-up across the ecosystem.

It would be important to maintain a strong link with national government and for this reason we suggest the network should be chaired by a Chief Scientific Adviser. It would also require dedicated resource for network management, which an organisation such as the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) would be well-placed to provide. Further exploration of sustainable funding would be needed, including exploring with research funders, universities, local and regional authorities, and private sector funders.

Ultimately, sustaining and developing the LRAAA network could help to further scale the Academic Adviser model across local and regional government. This would support local and regional policymaking capacity whilst also enabling stronger connections to national policy agendas and further embedding the use of evidence and scientific advice in policymaking at all levels across the country.



Figure 1: Local and Regional Academic Adviser network model



Appendices

About CAPE

CAPE (Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement), a knowledge exchange and research project funded by Research England, explores how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals across the higher education sector. CAPE is a partnership between UCL and the universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Northumbria and Nottingham, in collaboration with the Government Office for Science, the Parliamentary Office for Science & Technology, Nesta, and the Transforming Evidence Hub.

Particularly interested in exploring ‘what works’ for academic-policy engagement at a local and regional level, the CAPE project has actively supported a number of local and regional policy fellowship initiatives, with a primary focus on enhancing the understanding of their significance for policymaking institutions, universities, individuals, and the broader academic-policy engagement landscape.¹⁹ In the pursuit of deeper understanding of the models and systems needed to deliver fellowship schemes, CAPE has nurtured exploration into whether policy fellowships providing knowledge brokering capacity between the research community and the local and regional authority can enhance interactions, provide additionality to teams who previously may have struggled to access or engage with university produced research; and drive conditions to achieve local and regional evidence-informed policymaking agendas.

In doing so, CAPE has facilitated 24 fellowships and provided support to grow local and regional capability across a diverse range of activities, from addressing place-based policy challenges in Oldham to supporting digital skills in Nottingham, as detailed in case studies within the report.^{20,21}

About DLUHC

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities supports communities across the UK to thrive, making them great places to live and work. This includes enabling strong local leadership and increase transparency and accountability for the delivery of high quality local public services.

The DLUHC CSA advises ministers and senior officials to ensure that policy decisions are evidence-based and supported by the highest-quality scientific evidence and understanding. The CSA supports the science and engineering profession in the department, offers advice on specific initiatives, and works with other CSAs across government to enable work to be informed by appropriate data and scientific principles.

¹⁹ For examples of CAPE fellowships, see these case studies:

[Using diversity of thought in universities to be a more inclusive leader in policy](#)

[Six months at the heart of science in Government – reflections from a knowledge mobiliser](#)

[Developments in participative democracy: Reflections by Newham Council Policy Fellow Darren Sharpe](#)

[Strengthening academic policy engagement in West Yorkshire](#)

²⁰ CAPE, [Oldham Economic Review and Levelling Up](#), CAPE, 2022.

²¹ Koch, L. [Reflection: CAPE fellowship to support digital skills in Nottingham](#), CAPE, 2023.

About the LRAAA network members

The network encompassed Academic Advisers and local and regional authority staff from across the UK, as well as members of the CAPE team and the DLUHC CSA's office. Names of members are listed below within these categories. Please note that roles and employer details refer to positions held at the time of network membership and may have since changed.

Academic Advisers and local and regional authority partners

Alejandro Quiroz Flores

University of Essex

Richard Puleston

Essex County Council

AbuBakr Bahaj

University of Southampton

Steve Legget

Southampton City Council

Nick Eyre

University of Oxford

Rose Dickinson

Oxford City Council

Richard Whittle

University of Leeds

Jo Barham

Yorkshire & Humber Policy Engagement & Research Network

Sarah Jasim

LSE

Michelle Reeves

Greater London Authority

Ilias Krystallis

UCL

Ben Cook

Greater London Authority

Ben Rogers

University of London

CAPE members

Olivia Stevenson

Max Gillingham

Sarah Chaytor

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett

DLUHC members

Richard Prager (Chief Scientific Adviser)

Alan Penn (Previous Chief Scientific Adviser)

David Hughes

Izzy Sanders

Contact details

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