Devolved and Place-Based Academic-Policy Engagement:
The Landscape

Academic-policy engagement and the future of devolution: A living collection of devolved and regional initiatives

Version 1

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Context

The UPEN Devolved and Regional Sub-Committee delivered a conference in July 2024, hosted by Leeds Beckett University.

Panellists for session 1 of this conference provided short summaries & learnings of their devolved or regional academic policy engagement initiative.

The conference and this report provided an important opportunity to collate and reflect on key learnings from across the UK's devolved academic policy engagement ecosystem through the UPEN Devolved and Regional Subcommittee. By taking a snapshot of the current devolved and place-based policy engagement landscape, it seeks to **encourage UPEN members, higher education funders and devolved policymakers to take forward discussions** about how universities can best support joined-up, multi-level policymaking and enhanced devolution across the UK.

The seven devolved national and regional initiatives **represent an agile evolving academic devolved policy engagement landscape that is responsive and adaptive to changes in political and policy priorities across the UK.** This is important as it speaks to the need to **recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach to devolution and devolved academic policy engagement is unlikely to emerge.** It also demonstrates the ongoing need for universities to connect and collaborate across the nations and regions of the UK as national and regional policymaking institutions evolve and mature to identify common challenges that require UK-wide attention.

The structure and format of existing devolved national and regional initiatives vary, **reflecting the diversity of the places they reside, and the value proposition determined through engagement with their different multi-level governmental arrangements.** What is common across is that a blended model of policy engagement activities enables universities to react and deliver in a proactive, sustainable, and adaptable manner in different parts of the UK.

Whilst these initiatives are at varying stages of their journeys – some having only just recently been set up, and others who have been established for over a decade – there is a need to **continue to learn** from the experience of these models (and others) against their key outcomes over a longer period. **This will help us – funders, universities, policy and the wider public - understand the value of these different approaches and will help us to capture the long-term impacts** of such regional and devolved infrastructure which supports collaboration between university researchers and local policy makers.

Contents

We welcome contributions from the wider UPEN community to feature their regional or devolved initiatives, and for this to be used as a living document.

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City Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI)

How would you define your 'model' or approach to academic policy engagement in your devolved context?

City-REDI was established as a university investment to bridge the gap with local policy stakeholders in Oct 2015 – influenced by Andy Street (GBSLEP), Sarah Middleton (Black Country Consortium) and Martin Reeves (Coventry City Council) and Adam Tickell (UoB Provost).

City-REDI sits within the University of Birmingham and is designed to enhance the capacity for research and community engagement in the West Midlands and help other places and universities through sharing best practice, developing research into place and civic impact. It aims to facilitate effective collaboration between researchers and policymakers, thereby enhancing regional economic growth through evidence-based policy development. City-REDI's model leverages interdisciplinary research, mixed methods and strong partnerships with regional stakeholders to address complex economic challenges.

The team applies a systemic approach to identifying and conceptualising the inter-dependencies within and between regional economies by providing new opportunities for understanding, conceptualising, modelling and comparing economic activity and business trends at the city-region level.

We use our academic understanding of city-regions to develop policy which informs and influences regional and national economic growth policies. Leveraging this expertise, City-REDI aims to facilitate easy access for policymakers to university research, while supporting researchers in engaging effectively with local policy partners. The institute undertakes a portfolio approach to projects through its team of researchers and policy and data analysts, who work with specific regional policy partners to collaborative on academic-policy engagement initiatives.

Who is involved and what roles do they play?

The City-REDI team consists of 32 members of staff, made up of six experienced regional strategy, and economic development academics, 12 research fellows, five policy and data analysts and six members of professional support staff, equating to 28 full-time team members (FTE). All members of the team are on permanent contracts, with the expectation that the institute is self-funding via research funding and commissioned work.

The City-REDI Advisory Board is made up of representatives from other regional universities, national government organisations (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Science Innovation and Technology), West Midlands Combined Authority, local councils, Midlands Engine Observatory, Midlands Innovation and local businesses.

What example would you use to demonstrate the success of this model?

City-REDI repaid the initial University of Birmingham seed funding of £4.3m and have so far won funding of £13.8m into City-REDI and £19.4m across all partners. Key wins include £4.3m from Research England Regional Development Fund for the West Midlands Regional Development Institute (WMREDI) which enabled us to work directly with regional partners. This helped us to work flexibly with partners, providing match funding for research that met regional needs, invest in partnership building, secondments of staff into regional partners, funding other research across the regional university network, and provide longer term investment in the research, evaluation and intelligence needs of the new combined authority and partners. In 2023 we were awarded £3.6 million the UKRI funding to deliver the national flagship project the Local Policy Innovation Partnership (LPIP) Strategic Co-ordinating Hub 2023, which has enabled us to scale up the local success to help others nationally, providing advice, guidance and research knowledge on partnership development and delivery. The programme of work will be centred on activities with the local LPIP partners and what can be scaled nationally. City-REDI has also won funding for over 100 additional projects across local, regional, national and international partners since 2015.
City-REDI has worked locally with partners and policy makers within the West Midlands on:

- Regional Strategy Evidence base and economic monitor.
- Regional Innovation and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems – innovation prospectus.
- Megatrends public/policy/business attitudes towards specific trends.
- All our Money and Stan's Café – dramatic performance to help the public understand local authority budgets.

and nationally and internationally on:

- Economic impact of universities through National Civic Impact Accelerator where we lead the economic impact strand of work.
- Business case guidance.
- Best practice in place-based partnership.
- Innovating in public policy.
- Sector deep dives – e.g. Professional & Business Services, Creative Industries, Manufacturing, Space.
- International cases studies on research intermediaries and place development.

What are your key reflections/advice to UPEN members looking to develop local and regional policy engagement?

- Develop relationships on cognate topics of interest.
- Get involved in general operational meetings with partners on specific topics – e.g. social economy, innovation, employability.
- Co-creation of research and policy builds long terms links and can be responsive to partner needs.
- Provide support for regional bids for funding and case making to Government – this has drawn money into the region and led to REF Impact Case Studies.
- Offer a bridge between other academics and networks.
- Identify and bid for relevant funding to meet regional challenges and help partners fulfil research and evaluation needs.

CITY
REDI

Heseltine Institute for Public, Policy, Practice and Place

Context

The university's strategic framework, Liverpool 2031, outlines an ambitious vision and wide-ranging priorities, including a strategic pillar related to Place and Innovation. The vision for this pillar is to foster prosperity and wellbeing in the Liverpool City Region through research excellence, innovation, and partnerships with local and global impact. The Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place embodies this vision by connecting policymakers and practitioners to the best of the university's policy research and the full breadth of its local, national, and international networks.

The Heseltine Institute's approach

The Heseltine Institute is distinctively positioned at the nexus between research, policy, and practice and leverages a Liverpool City Region perspective to guide its work, acting as a channel for evidence-led policy interventions crucial to urban areas. Research and policy engagement revolves around place-making and three interconnected themes: the future of cities and city-regions, regional inequalities, and public service reform. We have four main purposes:

- **Lead**: Drive debates on urban challenges using critical research.
- **Convene**: Foster collaboration among various stakeholders.
- **Broker**: Connect academic research with urban policy actors.
- **Inform**: Provide research and evidence for policymaking.

Our approach to academic policy engagement is proactive with a focus on addressing policy challenges through expert knowledge and collaborative partnerships. This approach is rooted and practical – the regions, cities, and communities where people work and build their lives. We do not see issues in isolation but in real-life contexts where policies connect and impact. Our activities include:

- Producing evidence submissions for parliamentary inquiries, including in our role of academic partner for the Liverpool City Region All Party Parliamentary Group.
- Building research communities and networks to foster collaboration and policy impact, including convening the university's Sustainable and Resilient Cities research theme.
- Accelerating policy transfer through the Heseltine Institute Policy Briefing series.
- Delivering a portfolio of research and consultancy to address place-based policy challenges.

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Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place

- Offering policy impact training to equip researchers with the skills needed to translate foundational research into policy.
- Establishing strategic collaborations with civic partners including local authorities and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to serve as a critical friend and influence policy.
- Partnering with university research institutes for maximum impact on place to support impactful research and policymaking in various domains.
- Hosting an annual Heseltine Institute lecture with a high-profile public speaker addressing challenges and opportunities for Liverpool City Region.
- Publishing high-quality academic work and regularly contributing to academic conferences.
- Comment and analysis pieces for publications such as The Conversation and Municipal Journal.

Who is involved?

The Heseltine Institute is based in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences but has an institutional-wide remit to broker and facilitate research impact and advance the university's civic engagement agenda within the Liverpool City Region. We operate a co-director model of leadership and have a core team of seven which combines interdisciplinary expertise. We also have 12 Visiting Fellows who inform our work through their experience in academia, local and regional government and the third sector. To increase capacity, we are dependent on research grant or consultancy income. For example:

- Securing QR funding to co-fund a new policy analyst post with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which will strengthen academic-policy engagement at the city-region level. The post-holder will support and develop collaborative relationships to embed academic expertise and insights into the combined authority's evidence and policy work to inform further devolution.
- We are a co-partner in the Liverpool Health Determinants Research Centre which is funded by NIHR and hosted by Liverpool City Council. This five-year programme aims to boost research capacity and capability within local government to create a culture of evidence-informed decisions by the council and its partners to improve the determinants of health.

The Institute is convenor of a 'Liverpool City Region Engagement Co-ordination Network' which supports the delivery of Liverpool 2031. A key objective is to share information on current projects, external partner engagement, policy development and funding opportunities in Liverpool City Region. This group meets monthly and has representation from all faculties.

The Institute works closely with professional services colleagues in Research, Partnerships, and Innovation (RPI) to support place-based priorities. For example, RPI is assisting the university's involvement in the Liverpool City Region Investment Zone focused on health and life sciences research.

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Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place

Examples of successful academic-policy engagement

The Heseltine Institute collaborates closely with colleagues in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and other place-based partners such as Liverpool City Council, understanding their policy agendas and strategic priorities – where these come together and where they diverge. Examples of success include:

- A Manifesto for Liverpool City Region which offers an agenda-setting contribution from the University of Liverpool towards the election debate in 2024. The Manifesto combines nine short provocations from researchers, each addressing a key policy issue.

- Our Heseltine Institute Policy Briefings developed in collaboration with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority during the COIVD-19 pandemic, continue to offer innovative policy solutions and approaches to economic development and public service innovation challenges.

- The Institute produces briefing papers and reports for the Liverpool City Region All Party Parliamentary Group including a 'Build Back Better Inquiry' report to build consensus for greater investment in the city-region. We recently presented 'A Net Zero Manifesto for Liverpool City Region' at an event hosted in Westminster for parliamentarians and stakeholders.

- A portfolio of co-produced research with local public services and communities, such as the UKRI funded City Conversation in Clubmoor and evaluation of the Croxteth Good Help Hub.

Key reflections on local and regional policy engagement

- Our approach to policy engagement is shaped by local partners and remains responsive to shifting priorities. This requires on-going commitment to develop and nurture key relationships, together with close alignment of the Institute's work programme to the Combined Authority.
- By reaching across the whole university, we combine an inward and outward facing focus to ensure policy and research adds value and has impact, bringing the right people to the table.
- In developing co-produced research with local public services and communities we look for the 'sweet spots' to align partner need, discipline expertise and funding criteria.
- Our team has a skill set and creditability that resonates with both academics and policymakers.

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Insights North East

How would you define your 'model' or approach to academic policy engagement in your devolved context?

A policy-demand led approach where we have been working to develop close relationships with key officials in the combined authority as well as across the seven local authorities that make up the North East Deal. We are also working with health partners including the Integrated Care Board and have been interested in the cross-over on increased regional autonomy in both these spaces.

Insights North East's initial funding has been provided by Research England but in the context of devolution, we are now developing a business case for investment from the North East Combined Authority alongside the universities. Our original partnership was between Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, in the context of devolution this is now expanding to include Durham and Sunderland Universities.

Aside from these structural considerations, devolution is also shaping the policy challenges that we have been working on over the past year as officials have been preparing for the launch of the new Combined Authority. In the North East each of the seven local authorities have been designated a portfolio to lead.

How we will deliver

The transition is being led by the leaders of the seven local authorities. Dame Norma Redfearn, DBE, Elected Mayor of North Tyneside, chairs a steering group and each leader has an interim portfolio. There are a number of cross-cutting themes and strong collaboration across portfolios.

In May 2024 the people of the North East will elect a new Mayor who will work with portfolio leads to further develop areas of focus, in line with their election manifesto.

Cllr Graeme Miller
Leader Sunderland City Council
FINANCE & INVESTMENT

Cllr Tracey Dixon
Leader South Tyneside Council
EDUCATION, SKILLS & INCLUSION

Cllr Glen Sanderson
Leader Northumberland County Council
ENVIRONMENT, COASTAL AND RURAL

STRONG COLLABORATION ACROSS PORTFOLIOS WITH ENVIRONMENT, DIGITAL, PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITIES AS CROSS CUTTING AND FUNDAMENTAL TO ALL PORTFOLIOS

Cllr Nick Kemp
Leader Newcastle City Council
ECONOMY

Cllr Amanda Hopgood
Leader Durham County Council
CULTURE, CREATIVE, TOURISM & SPORT

Cllr Martin Gannon
Leader Gateshead Council
TRANSPORT

Mayor Norma Redfearn DBE
Mayor of North Tyneside
HOUSING & LAND

We have been scoping projects across many of these areas, helping policymakers to get ahead by scoping existing evidence and also considering where best practice may already reside across the region.

Current projects relating to emerging devolution priorities are on:

- Pathways to net zero
- The new radical prevention fund
- New models for local government finance
- Work with key sport foundations to consider the impact of their interventions
- A skills project on realising North East ambition

INSIGHTS
North East

Who is involved and what roles do they play?

This diagram sets our team roles as well as our broader engagement across the universities and with policy makers – represented on our Board and Policy Groups. Our governance and structures are currently being reviewed as part of the work to develop plans for our next phase.
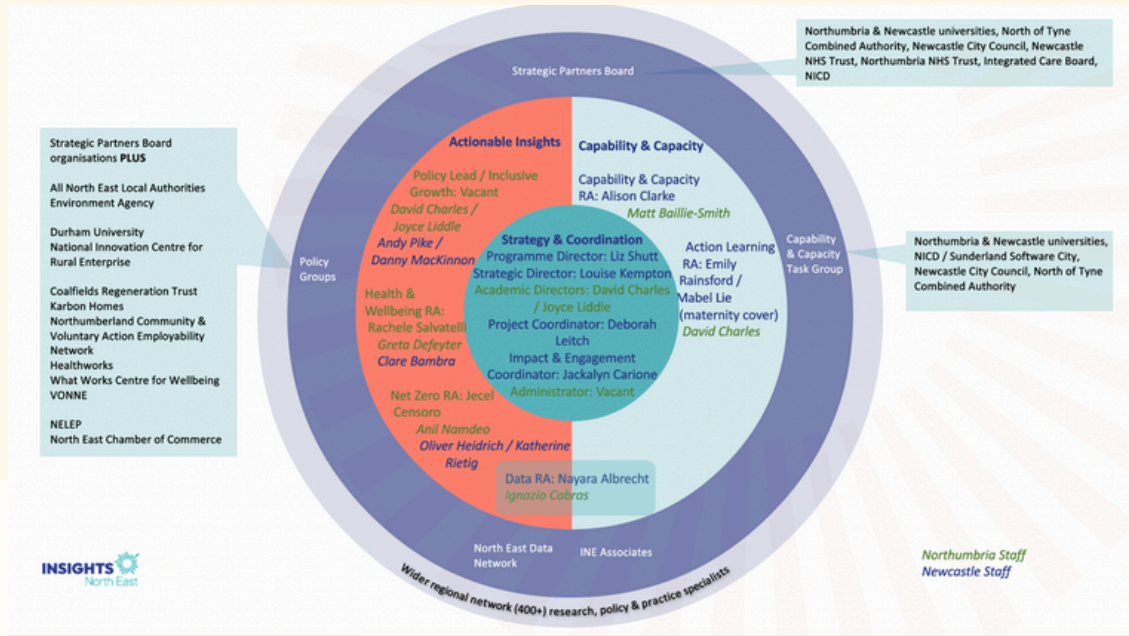
What example would you use to demonstrate the success of this model?

The fact that we are being asked to develop a proposal for INE to operate as an arm-length body providing the new CA with evidence.

The range of projects above, that align with key emerging priorities.

What is your key reflection/advice to UPEN members looking to develop local and regional policy engagement?

It all starts with relationship building and a high degree of sensitivity is needed as regional governance structures change. We have been working with colleagues operating with a high degree of uncertainty as four organisations, including the North East LEP and North of Tyne Combined Authority, have been building towards combining into a new single organisation. We have had to operate flexibility as the region has moved through the process of devolution towards the election of the first North East Mayor on 2nd May.

The London Research and Policy Partnership (LRaPP)

Introduction

Geoff Mulgan, Professor of Collective Intelligence, Social Innovation, and Public Policy at University College London, identifies a significant challenge for major cities: effectively connecting their knowledge resources to solve urban problems[1]. Despite decades of 'smart city' initiatives, many cities struggle to leverage their collective knowledge assets efficiently. He proposes the concept of a "City Collaborative" to systematically organise and mobilise knowledge across the city's governance mesh, connecting the brainpower of cities to their needs and tasks. This mesh includes multiple tiers of government and horizontal entities like businesses and civil society. He identifies key components for an effective City Collaborative as including:

- Informal networks to build trust and relationships among city stakeholders;
- Formal cross-cutting working groups addressing live problems by bringing together members from various city institutions;
- Shared processes for commissioning research to tackle pressing issues with mechanisms for fast and slow responses;
- Living repositories of knowledge and evidence ensuring accessibility and utility;
- Collaboration platforms for idea sharing and coalition building among decision-makers;
- Linked data systems to interpret patterns and guide planning; and
- Crowd-sourcing systems to engage citizen creativity and problem-solving

Mulgan's early experiment with a London Collaborative aimed to foster joint problem-solving, connecting the city administration with academic research. Despite support from many leading organisations, the response from London government at the time was lukewarm. However, the London Research and Policy Partnership (LRaPP) emerges at a crucial time of regional, policy, and institutional change, driven in part by London's poor productivity growth, recovery from a global pandemic and increased pressure on public finances, and a commitment from London Mayor Sadiq Khan to demonstrate the benefits of a prosperous London to the regions of the UK, and to ensure that underserved areas of the capital can also benefit.

The success of partnership working in ways never seen across the city, during the COVID-19 recovery programme has created a blueprint on which Mayor Khan wishes to deliver his third term. This provides a unique opportunity for LRaPP to align with collaborative working through the London Partnership Board[1] and other city networks, adopting new policy paradigms such as the missions-orientated approach[2]. Taking these steps will mobilise a collective intelligence system to address the capital's most pressing strategic challenges. This paper makes the case that LRaPP is well positioned to be a new iteration of the London Collaborative, putting Mulgan's vision into practice. Through an evolving menu of responsive matchmaking products and services, LRaPP aims to transform academic-policy-practice, delivering at scale across London to support local, place-based economic growth initiatives.

Approach

Established in July 2021, LRaPP forges long-term, strategic alliances between London's universities and policymaking communities. Driven by Mayor Khan's commitment to bring citizens to the heart of policymaking, and the increasing movement of universities holding closer connections to their local neighbourhoods, LRaPP's approach diverges from a traditional think tank, or single-focus academic research centre model, to prioritise actions across various policy agendas that help policymakers reach decisions and deliver tangible outcomes. This way of working is based on trustful and enduring relationships between academia and London government, whilst promoting experimentation and innovation.

LRaPP's activities focus on collaborative, interdisciplinary demonstration projects (to test proof of concepts), research commissions, and joint initiatives. Our Policy Fellows, identified, through primary research, key requirements for long-term partnership building[3]: understanding London's policy priorities, creating a shared language, improving internal cohesion, and embedding knowledge brokerage within organisations. LRaPP's evolution aims to follow a three-stage transition framework developed by our Policy Fellows:

- Stage 1: Provision of basic matchmaking services and quick wins in response to policymakers' requests;
- Stage 2: Investment in structured programmes based on mutual policy priorities;
- Stage 3: Leveraging a broader regional ecosystem of multiple academic-policy-practice partnerships to deliver long-term regional impact.

Unlocking potential, delivering Impact

LRaPP demonstrates many components of effective city collaboration. For instance, the LRaPP Forum unites research-active organisations across public, business, and civil society sectors to develop solutions for current challenges. LRaPP's successful award of Phase 1 UKRI Local Policy Innovation Partnership funding focused on a just transition to London's 2030 Net Zero target and engaged diverse stakeholders in working groups to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue to identify solutions for retrofit delivery, inclusive skills pipelines and supply chains, and resident involvement in retrofit plans[1]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LRaPP reached out to London's universities through a shared call for research on youth mentoring provision, informing the New Deal for Young People recovery mission[2]. Most recently, our roundtable with London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) convened different types of intelligence on social media and violence across practitioners, policymakers, and academics. This rich, multidisciplinary discussion highlighted the need for comprehensive, multi-agency interventions and educational efforts to protect young people from harms[3]. A follow-up event will engage stakeholders and young Londoners in co-designing complementary interventions.

Lessons learned

LRaPP's journey offers key lessons for regional academic-policy-practice engagement, emphasising the need for matchmaking mechanisms to be tailored to specific regional contexts, including taking account of inter-governmental dynamics in that region.

Mechanisms must also be agile and flexible to respond to a fast-moving and complex policy landscape. Equipping research and policy communities with skills for 'boundary crossing' is essential to navigate the hybrid space of long-term, regional academic-policy-practice engagement.

References

[1]Mulgan, G (2024), The City Collaborative – helping big cities to think and solve their problems (geoffmulgan.com)
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LONDON RESEARCH & POLICY PARTNERSHIP

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON   CAPE   LONDON COUNCILS   MAYOR OF LONDON   LONDON HIGHER   Civic University Network

Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE)

Organisational Set Up

The Scottish Policy & Research Exchange (SPRE) was founded in 2019 as a project within the Academy of Social Sciences, and transitioned to becoming an independent charity (SCIO) in 2022. As part of this transition, we recruited a new Board of Trustees, shifted to a Co-Director model of leadership and committed to a new direction of travel (in line with our charitable purpose).

We currently operate with a small budget (~£150k) funded through contributions from Scottish universities, Scottish Government, and the Academy of Social Sciences, as well as through being involved in research projects and consultancy work. This is sufficient to employ two Co-Directors, meet organisational costs and run various small projects. Our low-constraints funding and small size allows us to be nimble, adaptive and highly relational in how we work – and our charitable purpose enables us to take a long-term and holistic view on supporting the health of the Scottish research-policy ecosystem.

What we do

We support and challenge research, knowledge mobilisation and policy communities in Scotland, and across the UK, to improve how evidence and expertise shapes public policy.

We see a commitment to advancing equity as foundational to this, involving work to diversify and democratise different forms of knowledge – including academic expertise, lived / living experience, policy know-how and practice wisdom. Our main activities and stakeholders are **outlined in the table below**.

Example of success

"It was so refreshing to be in this kind of event… It felt brave… I learned a lot from other people" - Senior Analyst from Scottish Government speaking about a recent SPRE event.

SPRE

SCOTTISH POLICY & RESEARCH EXCHANGE

In 2023 the Scottish Government (Office of the Chief Social Researcher) leaned into deepening their relationship with SPRE. They made clear that SPRE was their "first port of call" for finding and connecting with academics across Scotland, committed to spending more time working with us to improve academic-policy engagement structures and practices, and agreed to promoting our services more widely across the Scottish Government. Since then, we have been working closely with a team of senior analysts to run a series of peer-to-peer learning and networking events that bring together academics, knowledge mobilisers, analysts and policymakers.

Some reflections on devolved policy engagement

SPRE has taken the shape and position it has because of the shape and position of the Scottish research-policy context. SPRE can be small because Scotland is relatively small.

SPRE can explicitly commit to an equity-focused approach because this chimes with the "Scottish approach" to policymaking (see page 20, here). And SPRE can work in support of the 'whole' Scottish research-policy ecosystem because there are so many other people, networks and organisations also working in the knowledge mobilisation space, and so can work highly collaboratively. But SPRE also evolved – over a number of years – in a particular way because of the values, beliefs and intentions of those who have shaped it.

So, our key reflection for those wishing to develop a similar initiative is to grow it organically, over time, in a way that plays to the strengths of your context, makes the underpinning values, beliefs and intentions explicit, and makes learning and improvement your strategy.

SPRE
SCOTTISH POLICY & RESEARCH EXCHANGE

	Examples of what's involved	Examples of who's involved
Relationship and network building	• Running the Brokerage Network • Connection calls • Catch-up calls • Peer-reviewing • Membership and leadership positions with various networks, committees, steering groups etc. • Collaborative projects • Attending various events	• The Brokerage: mainly academics, university professionals, and policy professionals • Scottish universities • Scottish Government • Scottish Parliament • Local Government umbrella organisations (e.g. Improvement Service) • Various other networks, centres, intermediary and third sector organisations across the UK – including
Creating and disseminating engagement opportunities	• Inquiries service (weekly emails and a searchable tool for finding all current inquiries from governments and parliaments across the UK) • Calls for experts • Various events for peer-to-peer learning and networking • Direct relationship brokering	• Our primary dissemination pathway is via our Brokerage Network • We work collaboratively with Scottish universities, Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, Local Government, intermediary organisations, third sector organisations / networks to create and disseminate opportunities
Developing and delivering learning events and resources	• Training, workshops and talks (bespoke, general and invited) • Convening and facilitating (series of) peer-to-peer learning events • Direct mentorship • Strategic advice • Developing and collating a broad range of resources, tools and literature	• Much of our capacity is currently oriented to supporting different academic policy engagement journeys via training, advice and resource provision • We collaborate with policy institutions and networks to convene and facilitate learning events • We provide direct advice to policy professionals seeking to (understand how to) connect with academics • We collaborate with community organisations and networks to support their policy engagement journeys
Developing and supporting innovations in knowledge mobilisation practice	• We are reshaping SPRE as an organisation so that is rooted in ethical, equitable and relational values and insights (e.g. see here) • We apply and support a commitment to advancing equity via: • Strength-based approaches • Reflective and reflexive practices • Attending to power, politics and positionality We adapt and apply critical insights and concepts to our own knowledge mobilisation practice e.g. inclusive rigour; care ethics; theory-based monitoring, evaluation and learning; 'What is the problem represented to be?'	• SPRE's Board of Trustees • The UPEN Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee • Community Knowledge Matters network • The REAL Supply research project • Learning with and from various other peers across knowledge intermediary organisations, academia, the third sector, government, parliament, local government etc.

Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP)

Our Model

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) is a demand-led evidence centre based at Cardiff University. We collaborate with leading research and policy experts to provide ministers, the civil service and public service leaders with independent and authoritative evidence and advice that helps them to improve policy decisions and outcomes that tackle the economic, social and environmental challenges facing Wales. The Centre also undertakes research to advance understanding of the role which evidence and evidence mobilisation can play in supporting better policy making, implementation and public service delivery.

We are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Welsh Government and the University, and we are a member of the UK's What Works Network. We are also collaborators in the International Public Policy Observatory and the PolicyWISE initiative (which promotes learning between policy makers in all four governments in the UK and in Ireland), and we co-lead a National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council.

We are a multi-disciplinary team which blends first-hand experience of having worked in and with academia, the civil service, private sector, health service, local government, voluntary organisations and community groups. This diverse range of backgrounds enables the Centre to work effectively with academic colleagues to maximise the impact of their research and with policy makers and practitioners to make best of evidence to tackle key public policy issues. We regularly engage with and are supported by both our Funders Group and Advisory Group.

What we do

Taking a demand-led approach means starting by working with national and local policy makers and public/third sector leaders to understand the challenges they face. Reflecting those challenges, we focus our work on three priorities for Wales, but remain responsive to emergent issues outside of these. Our three priorities are: Tackling Inequalities; Environment and Net Zero; and Community Wellbeing.

Wales Centre for Public Policy
**Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru**

We describe how we work as answering five questions:
1. What evidence do policy makers and public/third sector leaders need?
2. What does the evidence say?
3. How can we communicate the evidence?
4. How does evidence inform policy and practice?
5. How can we encourage the use of evidence?

In response we **identify** the evidence policy makers and public services need to address the challenges they face (now and in the future); we **convene** evidence and expertise from across the UK and beyond; we **communicate** and engage on evidence in a range of different ways; we **advance** understanding of how evidence informs government policy and public service delivery and use this understanding to improve our practice; and we **advocate** for the use of evidence to inform policy, implementation and public service delivery. Our Research Apprenticeship programme and PhD internships equip a new generation of researchers to undertake effective policy engagement. See Figure 1 below for an outline of what we do and how we work.

Figure1: What we do and how we work
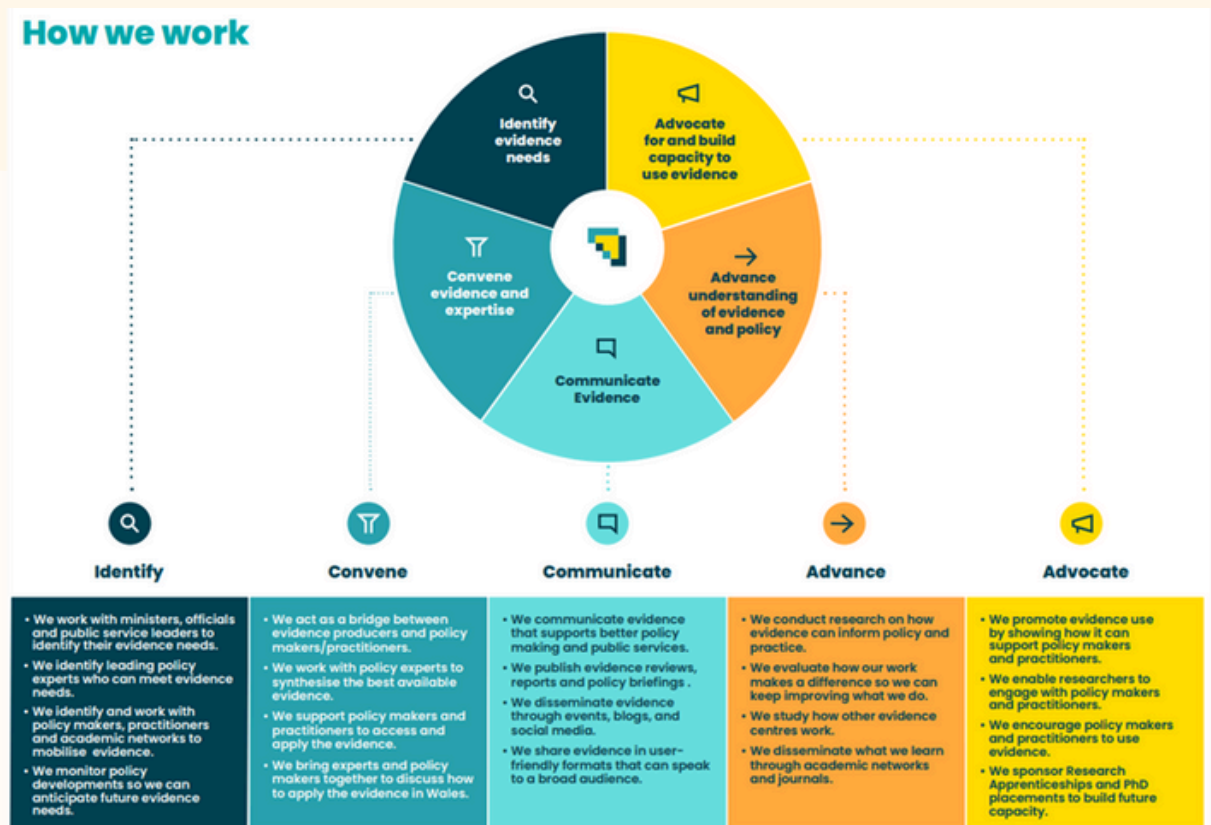
Examples of our success

We have recently published a report reflecting on the evolution and success of the Centre over the last 10 years since we were established. The Centre has won awards and recognition for its approach to mobilising evidence and its impact on policy in Wales. Some highlights include: our evidence reviews on race equality which directly informed Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan; our review of evidence on international poverty and social exclusion strategies, programmes and interventions, which informed Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy; our evidence-based framework for action on implementing just transitions, which influenced Welsh Government's approach set out in their Net Zero Wales: Carbon Budget 2.

In 2023 we were commissioned by Ministers to provide evidence to support the work of the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group and host its secretariate. Our independence and expertise has been praised for helping the group develop evidence-based action. Our research on the role of community-led action to enhance social participation influenced the design of Welsh Government's Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund and our review of evidence on volunteering and wellbeing and on effective multisectoral collaboration is informing the work of the Third Sector Partnership Council and local area partnership working.

Some Reflections on devolved Engagement

Collaboration is central to how we work. It is essential to work directly with policy makers and public service leaders to understand their priorities and the challenges they face, and work with them to design and deliver projects to help ensure the decisions they take are based on the best available evidence. However, evidence rarely speaks for itself. In our experience summarizing what research says is not enough. It is crucial to take into account a full range of perspectives by bringing research evidence and expertise into dialogue with professional and local knowledge to navigate the constraints and opportunities in specific contexts and establish what might work where.

Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

Yorkshire & the Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN)

How would you define your 'model' or approach to academic policy engagement in your devolved context?

Y-PERN takes a network and systems approach to supporting academic policy engagement in the Yorkshire & Humber. Comprised of the 12 universities and 18 local and combined authorities within the region, Y-PERN aims to make it easier for policy makers to access university research whilst at the same time, support researchers to engage with their local policy partners more systematically. We also provide demonstrator projects through our team of policy fellows, who are based across the Yorkshire universities working with specific regional policy partners to test and build academic policy engagement collaborations.

Y-PERN in its current format is a pilot – being funded for an initial three years by the Research England Development (RED) Fund. The UKRI funded Local Policy Innovation Partnership in Yorkshire (YPIP) builds off the Y-PERN model to provide enhanced capacity for research & community engagement. It brings researchers from every Yorkshire university together with policy, business and community stakeholders – prioritizing those from marginalised communities – to carry out innovative research addressing three key themes: inclusive growth, sustainable living and data analytics

Integral to this spirit of collaboration has been building off the work of Yorkshire Universities and Yorkshire & Humber Councils – the regional representative bodies for higher education and local government – over the years, and embodied in their memorandum of understanding (2021) to work more closely together on shared priorities and objectives.

Who is involved and what roles do they play?
The core funded Y-PERN team is comprised of academics. There is an academic lead at each university and there are 11 policy fellows across the universities who are on 1-3 year contracts collaborating with their local and regional policy partners. This approach enables an academic-led approach to academic policy engagement, driven by academic independence, yet responsive to local and regional government demand and need.

A programme manager and a part-time communications officer are also funded to support the network. However, the network benefits greatly from the institutional knowledge exchange staff at each university – where they exist – to support the programme.

Y-PERN

Policy representation is embedded at the delivery level through project partners and through representation on the strategic advisory board. The Yorkshire Universities Executive Director is also Y-PERN Policy Director, providing direct policy connections to senior leaders in universities and beyond. Reflecting the importance of strengthening connections to existing and emergent national and regional institutions, a new policy engagement director for Y-PERN – the former Chair of the Yorkshire & Humber Councils Chief Executives' Group, and CEO of a City Council in the region – has also been appointed.

What example would you use to demonstrate the success of this model?

Inclusive approaches led by Y-PERN's policy fellows on economic development in the region, which include: Policy support for female entrepreneurship in YNY by working with FSB, local entrepreneurs and the mayoral transition team; work on local growth plans including embedding childcare as a key focus in West Yorkshire Combined Authority's economic strategy, which includes conducting systems and evidence review of childcare in West Yorkshire; Supporting those furthest from the labour market through collaboration with SYMCA's skill strategy – delivering an evidence review on skills, contributing evidence to the SYMCA growth plan, and supporting the combined authority on Good Work; trialling Poverty Truth Commissions in Hull and East Yorkshire with members of the community and council representatives as commissioners, and universities playing a supporting role.

Strategic academic policy engagement, including: Helping Yorkshire & Humber Councils understand international context and experience of devolution and decentralisation; bringing together Mayoral Combined Authorities at a region-wide level - currently interviewing senior leaders across Y&H to understand the requirements for further devolution, buy-in from Chief execs has been promising development; policy fellows embedded in Mayoral Transition Teams in York & North Yorkshire and Hull & East Yorkshire; increased number of requests from local and combined authorities in the region for help with system reviews (3 in West Yorkshire); seeking Y-PERN's help in navigating complexity of academic policy initiatives in the region.

Collaboration over competition; Y-PERN's 12 universities are operating very collaboratively, despite pressures in the system which also incentive competition.

YPIP: Being successfully awarded the LPIP project for Yorkshire allows meaningful capacity to support and be led by communities in the region.

What are your key reflections/advice to UPEN members looking to develop local and regional policy engagement?

1. When working across multiple geographies and places, utilise existing frameworks and infrastructure, such as the Yorkshire Universities and Yorkshire & Humber Councils, as this has been integral to Y-PERN.

2. Start small and don't assume a model will be replicable across sub-regions – Y-PERN started with a West Yorkshire model. We are exploring models/ways of working between universities and policy partners in the other three sub-regions of Yorkshire & the Humber, which all look different and reflect the make-up of their regions.

3. Don't just default to combined authority engagement – work with the local or combined authority with the relevant powers for your policy area.

4. Whilst Y-PERN primarily funds academic roles, professional services staff have also been vital in developing Y-PERN's model.

5. Without established systems and processes for academic policy engagement in local and combined authorities, the conditions for co-production aren't always there. It may take time to build those processes.

6. Universities can offer a quick win role in helping to navigate complexities of funding in the region, which can often feel disaggregated and disjointed – a network model.

Conclusion

Key reflections from the conference emphasised three areas for UPEN members to reflect on when seeking to work with their respective devolved authorities:

1. **Develop policy engagement models** and way of working through embeddedness and collaboration of parties involved, building off relationships to help navigate multi-level complexities and sensitivities and identify mutual strengths and points of interest.
2. **Ensure agility is recognised** in your policy engagement model, so that universities can adapt to changing political and policy priorities, short term needs, as well as ensuring equity is considered and built in throughout.
3. **Be humble** and recognise that expertise does not only lie in universities and policy organisations, but resides the private, public, and third sectors and within communities. Making sure this is factored into engagements will ensure a more systematic approach to place-based policy is considered.

The election of a new UK government confirms the continued commitment of Westminster and Whitehall to devolve and prioritise place-based approaches to policymaking. It is clear that a renewed focus on joined-up, multi-level government will be essential in delivering national policy 'missions' across an increasingly complex policymaking landscape. The recent announcement of a Council of the Nations and Regions, representing the heads of the devolved national and regional institutions, indicates that there is a growing consideration of the need to connect and cohere policymaking institutions across the UK to deliver more effective and efficient policy outcomes.

Universities working in partnership with each other to support academic policy engagement can provide added expertise, capacity, and resources to enhance evidenced policymaking and better outcomes for communities and citizens across the UK. It can also provide academic policy engagement support and expertise from across the UK for the new Council of the Nations and Regions.

UPEN's Devolved and Regional Sub-Committee will continue to support knowledge exchange and learnings from devolved academic policy engagement. For additional analysis of these regional models, we suggest reading CAPE's and the Welsh Centre for Public Policy reports.

To join the network or get in touch, email
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A living document

For UPEN members who would like to contribute their learnings on their regional or devolved initiative, please send your 2-3 page briefing notes addressing the four questions:

- How would you define your 'model' or approach to academic policy engagement in your devolved context?
- Who is involved and what roles do they play?
- What example would you use to demonstrate the success of this model?
- What are your key reflections/advice to UPEN members?