Interim Report: Mapping the Supply of and Demand for Professional Development Relating to Academic Policy Engagement (June 2026)

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Introduction

This interim report presents findings from a review of the supply of and demand for professional development relating to academic-policy engagement across the UK research ecosystem. Commissioned through the Research England-funded Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) and situated within its 'People' area of work, this report aims to inform UPEN's short- and long-term strategic priorities and contribute to a 2026 State of the Nation assessment.

The report highlights a strong and growing appetite for professional development relating to academic-policy engagement, alongside a fragmented and uneven landscape of provision. The findings point to a clear opportunity for UPEN to play a system-shaping role, adding value through coordination, convening, and clarification rather than by duplicating existing training activity. The considerations set out in this report emerge as priorities for UPEN's future role and strategic focus.

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Executive Summary

1. Supporting ‘third-space’ and hybrid policy engagement roles

Knowledge mobilisers working on public policy and other hybrid professionals repeatedly emerge as an underserved group. Their roles straddle academic, professional, and policy domains, yet existing professional development is often designed for academics or discipline-based career pathways. UPEN is well placed to act as an umbrella organisation for this community, helping to define the profession, raise visibility, and articulate shared skills and expectations, while recognising the diversity of institutional contexts and role designs.

2. UPEN’s role as a convenor rather than a primary training provider

The current ecosystem already includes a wide range of providers delivering workshops, coaching, fellowships, and networks (see Table A mapping supply). However, provision is highly fragmented and lacks shared framing or progression. The evidence suggests that UPEN’s comparative advantage lies not in becoming another competing provider, but in acting as a neutral convenor, broker, and amplifier - connecting people, promoting best practice on what works, and improving coherence across the system. This includes helping members navigate what already exists and encouraging collaboration rather than competition.

3. Shifting from volume of provision to quality and impact

Much current professional development relies on short, one-off interventions, despite evidence showing that these have limited long-term effects. Few providers explicitly draw on evidence of 'what works' in professional learning. A key consideration is the opportunity for UPEN to champion evidence-informed approaches, focusing on mechanisms that drive behaviour change - such as coaching, mentoring, peer learning, and experiential practice - rather than on delivery formats alone. This could include synthesising and widely disseminating existing evidence in accessible ways (see ‘what works’ report) and embedding learning principles into UPEN-supported activity and funding criteria (e.g. Innovation Fund).

4. Addressing gaps across career stages and audiences

Policy engagement training provision is currently skewed towards early-career researchers, leaving clear gaps for:

- Mid-career practitioners, who want progression beyond introductory training but face time, workload, and budget constraints;
- Senior leaders, who require highly bespoke, peer-based and longitudinal development focused on strategy, influence, and institutional change;
- Policy professionals, for whom there is limited support to understand how academic research operates and how to engage effectively with universities.

UPEN should consider how its activities and messaging can better reflect this diversity of audiences and skill levels, emphasising competence and role needs rather than formal seniority.

5. Strengthening cross-institutional networking and peer learning

Across the evidence gathered for this report, networking and peer exchange are consistently valued as the most impactful forms of professional development, particularly in response to isolation and siloed working. UPEN is already active in this space but should continue to scale and sustain peer-to-peer mechanisms - such as communities of practice, mentoring, pairing and case-study sharing - while reinforcing its role as a trusted, neutral space that enables collaboration even in a competitive funding environment.

6. Taking a bold, enabling approach to EDI

Although there is strong recognition of structural barriers affecting under-represented groups, targeted interventions remain rare. The evidence cautions against generic 'diversity training' and instead points toward structured access mechanisms - such as mentoring, pairing, fellowships, and flexible delivery models - as more effective. UPEN's role may be to encourage and support a holistic approach to equity, diversity and inclusion in knowledge mobilisation practice, grounded in evidence, rather than designing stand-alone EDI training. Further work may be needed to unpack how EDI is best addressed through UPEN capability building activity.

7. Exploring a flexible UPEN-led competency framework

There is broad but cautious support for UPEN developing a light-touch competency framework to help define the field, support career development, and provide shared language across sectors. The evidence suggests that such a framework should be:

1. Permissive rather than prescriptive,

2. Simple, modular, and adaptable, and
3. Designed as a reflective tool for individuals and organisations to support role and career development rather than a compliance mechanism.

This work should complement existing frameworks (e.g. ARMA, KEUK, Civil Service) and be clearly positioned as developmental support rather than professional regulation.

8. Planning for sustainability and long-term legacy

Finally, interviewees stress the importance of clarity about UPEN's long-term purpose beyond the initial Research England funding. Strategic choices made now - around coordination, evidence use, networking infrastructure, and professional identity - should be guided by a clear view of the legacy UPEN seeks to leave in shaping a coherent, collaborative, and sustainable ecosystem for academic–policy engagement.

Report Background

The aim of this interim report is to inform UPEN on future ways ahead for professional development of staff working in research-policy engagement. It provides an initial mapping of existing supply of professional development (e.g. training, coaching), demand for development activity, and implications for UPEN. Based on a survey, interviews, and desk-based research (see Annex A: methodology), it is part of the 'People' strand of work for the Research England-funded UPEN project. The project seeks to develop a national understanding of the capacity and capability for academic-policy engagement at individual and institutional level and help this emerging profession to move to the next level of maturity. The People area of work within UPEN involves four core activities, the first three of which this report relates to:

A) **A comprehensive mapping of capabilities and competencies** across a wide array of knowledge mobilisation and 'third space' professionals, recognising the increased fluidity between academic and associated activities. This will consider career pathways, skills, training needs, and the ways in which the knowledge brokerage ecosystem interfaces with academic support requirements and structures. This activity aims to provide a clear path forward for UPEN through (i) informing support at specific career stages, including a renewed focus on leadership; and (ii) improving understanding of activities that can be supported through an enhanced UPEN offer.

B) **Curation of a UPEN professional development programme** to better support and recognise knowledge mobilisers across the research ecosystem, in line with the CAPE recommendation that 'better systems and structures are needed to support engagement … especially earlier in academic careers … professional services need improved career trajectories'. This will include scoping accredited professional development programmes and leadership offers for knowledge mobilisers, (for example, core/advanced/practitioner); expanding UPEN's existing mentorship scheme; and a pairing programme at different career stages (building on a CAPE/Go-Science pilot). This will focus on how to effectively build a holistic training suite that aligns with the requirements of policy partners.

C) **Building capacity among under-represented groups**. Building on the 2021 UPEN report which highlighted the need to 'collect institutional findings and encourage deeper consideration of equity, diversity, and inclusion in academic-policy

engagement,' we will assess inequalities in opportunity, resource, capacity, and capability, career stage, factoring in geographic, institutional, academic discipline, and career stage variations. We will construct targeted interventions (e.g. offering UPEN fellowships) and make recommendations on effective support

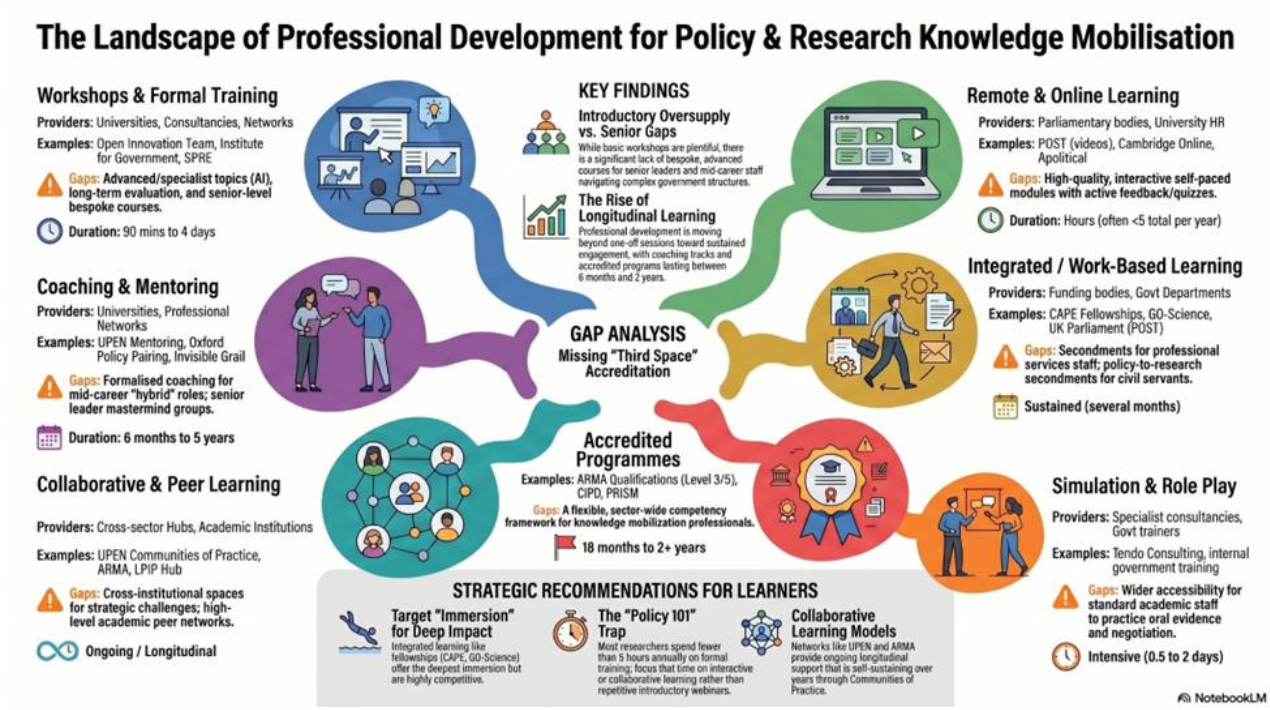
D) **Development of a policy engagement readiness index (PERI).** This work will identify suitable indicators to help us understand, better describe, and ultimately shape the development of academic-policy engagement structures. This work will provide a clearer understanding of how institutions form policy engagement functions; considering institutional embedding, capacity, ambition, and responsiveness to demand - from policy makers and funders. This work will be shaped via a systematic review of UPEN member institutions, alongside international examples. We will further refine the index through targeted workshops and pilot projects, with a representative set of HE providers.

Ultimately, this interim report will help serve as means for engagement and discussion on short- and longer-term priorities, inform ideas for UPEN Innovation funding, and provide a foundational step towards a more developed set of ideas to be published later in 2026.

Mapping Supply: Types of Professional Development Provided

There is a wide variety of professional development currently on offer for knowledge mobilisers, academics, and professional services staff. By ‘knowledge mobilisers’, in the UPEN context we are talking about the people who have a role in facilitating knowledge transfer, translating evidence, developing relationships and networks and exploring collaborative opportunities to better connect research and policy. Due to the large and diverse nature of this field, a selection of professional development offerings is set out in Table A and the AI-generated Figure 1 visual below. The mapping is based on our interviews, survey, and desk-based research.

Figure 1: AI-generated version of landscape of provision:



Demand for Professional Development

There were five priority areas of demand for professional development expressed through the survey and interviews. The focus here was on the expressed demand for the knowledge mobilisers themselves - their needs, rather than the needs of people they work for (e.g. academics seeking training in policy engagement). However, in practice, these boundaries can be blurred: people engaging with UPEN and this study could be academics or policymakers seeking to improve their knowledge or recently taking on leadership roles.

Demand 1 - Professional development support for impact and evaluation

Key message: *the top priority for many knowledge mobilisers was supporting capabilities and methods for evidencing policy impact*

When asked to identify their top three priorities for training and development over the next 12 months, the number one choice among survey respondents was 'measuring and demonstrating policy impact' (selected by 28 respondents). This includes demand for REF/KEF-related content, such as developing impact case studies. Training providers confirmed this high demand in interviews. Interviewee 12 (University), for instance, noted that in their own internal surveys, the question of 'how I can better monitor, evaluate, and learn for my policy engagement' was among the most popular requests they received. Similarly, Interviewee 26 (Consulting) observed that developing 'evaluation and monitoring frameworks is something that we are increasingly sort of being asked to come in and support'.

The reason for this interest was twofold; firstly, the strong financial incentives to ‘prove’ impact such as through metrics and use of ResearchFish, Overton, and other impact measuring tools. Secondly, the methodological difficulty of attributing impact to research. Interviewees noted that monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) for policy engagement was highly sought after because academics often struggle with the fact that attributing policy impact is difficult to capture and rigorously evidence.

Demand 2 - Partnerships, networking, and peer-to-peer learning

Key message: *there was a strong appetite for connecting with others as an end in itself and growing relationship-building skills, and real-world experiential learning, rather than abstract knowledge*

'Building and managing partnerships' was the second highest priority identified in the survey. The survey overview concluded that relationship-building with policymakers was the

most requested skill overall. Furthermore, there was a strong demand for more opportunities for networking, peer learning, and peer-to-peer support, particularly for emerging and senior leaders.

Similarly, interviewees consistently highlighted networking as the core value-add of professional development. Not just learning but also connecting with others. The reason for this high interest appears to be driven by the practical realities and challenges of working in policy engagement: you cannot succeed without contacts and strong relationship-building skills. Theoretical knowledge of policy could be useless if you did not know who to talk to:

> “You might have all the theory and knowledge and everything in place. You might produce some great policy briefs and stuff, but if you don’t have the actual contacts to get through to the people who need to read them, it’s really difficult and it’s difficult to build those from scratch.”
>
> (Interviewee 28; University)

In addition, people wanted experiential learning to apply the nuanced understanding of policy processes. Learning needed to be applied in a real-world setting. Furthermore, interviewees stressed the need for overcoming isolation. Many knowledge mobilisers operated in very small teams or as isolated individuals within large universities, driving a strong desire to learn from peers facing the same struggles.

The literature review on 'what works' (see What Works in Professional Development? report) supports this demand, noting that structured communities of practice, action learning sets, and peer review act as a 'critical friend' model that successfully reduces isolation and fosters collective problem-solving.

Demand 3 - Advanced/specialist topics

Key message: *rather than basic '101' courses on policy, there was demand for advanced training in areas like AI*

There was a significant interest in professional development for advanced and specialist topics, particularly regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital methods. Across both the survey and the interviews, professionals expressed an urgent need to understand how emerging technologies will reshape the sector. In the survey, when asked what would improve the effectiveness of current training, 'more advanced or specialist topics (e.g. support on using AI for policy engagement)' was a top choice, selected by 51 respondents. In interviews, training providers confirmed this demand.

The interviewees indicated this interest is driven by a mix of anticipation for increased efficiency, the anxiety of falling behind, and new managerial challenges. Because the technology is so new, professionals feel a pressing need to simply understand what is coming next. However, there was an interest in moving beyond basic prompts. There is a need to teach professionals how to use AI for complex sector-specific tasks, rather than just treating tools like it like a search engine. One interviewee warned that some current training simply teaches people to use tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Microsoft's Copilot to answer questions, whereas knowledge mobilisers need to understand how to effectively use AI to broker between the complex worlds of policy and research.

Demand 4 – Strategy and leadership

Key message: *a significant interest in doing more to support senior leaders, such as those running policy units in universities*

There was a small but significant level of interest in professional development for leadership for mid-to-senior professionals. 19 respondents to the survey prioritised 'leading policy engagement initiatives' and 14 selected 'project management and governance'. There could be two aspects of this demand for leadership requirements: firstly, leading policy projects or sector initiatives and, secondly, running policy centres. The interest in leadership and strategy training might be driven by professionals moving beyond ad-hoc projects and suddenly finding themselves needing to shift institutional cultures or manage without formal

power. Professionals wanted to move away from isolated tasks, and plan and work more strategically. A desire to learn:

> "How to look at things a bit more, more strategically, more holistically, so not just... by consultation or by project, but by sort of trying to build up a policy engagement strategy for instance, on a more institutional level."
>
> (Interviewee 28; University)

Several interviewees felt that most training was aimed at early-career researchers, leaving a gap for those further up the ladder. Interviewee 18 (University) noted that when they took on a role at director level, they had to rely on their own initiative to contact other senior leaders informally, arguing there is a gap for 'more senior leaders as they're moving into... those roles, but also the challenges of being, you know, being hybrid as well'. Interestingly, the sources suggested that standard classroom-style leadership training is not what these professionals want. The greatest value was the opportunity to share with others and network. This could involve providers shifting toward residential networking formats and peer-to-peer mentoring groups to build trust and shared experience among cohorts of leaders (see also demand two on partnering, networking and peer learning).

Demand 5 – Formats for learning that are tailored and flexible

Key message: *knowledge mobilisers want training and development to be tailored to their level of experience needs, not a generic offer, with strong flexibility in how it is delivered*

There was substantial interest in tailored and flexible learning formats across both the survey and interviews. Professionals are increasingly seeking development opportunities that fit into their busy lives and specific career stages rather than relying on standard, one-off classroom sessions. When survey participants were asked what would improve the effectiveness of current training and development opportunities, 'greater flexibility in delivery (e.g. online options, modular learning)' was highly demanded, selected by 38 out of 70 respondents. The same number of respondents (38) also selected 'opportunities tailored to different career stages'. The survey presentation ultimately highlighted that 'career-stage

tailored pathways' and 'flexible delivery' were among the areas of strongest demand in the sector.

Many professionals simply cannot attend rigid, in-person courses. Interviewee 17 (Professional body) noted that 'with a lot more people working from home, a lot of people having more mixed work patterns, you know, childcare responsibilities. Not everyone can come in person'. More on-demand, self-paced, and asynchronous training is sought after. Furthermore, university budgets are tightening, making travel and external courses harder to justify. Demand may be shifting toward affordable and flexible in-house options because 'universities can't afford for people to come on these courses as they would have done before'. There is also a need for Career-Stage Specificity: Generic training is failing those who are advancing in their roles. It is easier 'to provide basic training for early career people... But it became a bit trickier once you went through career stages' (Interviewee 5, University). Courses may need to split into early career, early to mid and then director level to help participants figure out if a course is right for them.

One important point of clarification was regarding the role of UPEN. UPEN should generally be responsible for infrastructure and support (e.g. shared tools, evidence, networks) rather than direct delivery, aside from where there are opportunities to work at scale or in partnership that individual providers may struggle to deliver. Others would be involved in the provision of this tailored professional development, such as consultancies, or in-house training provision in universities and other organisations.

Matrix of supply and demand

To synthesise and compare supply of provision with the reported demand elicited from the survey, interviews, and desk-research, a matrix (Table B) was drafted, setting out delivery mechanisms, examples, providers, and explicitly highlighting the gaps in provision, and mapping them against the evidence of 'what works'.

Implications for UPEN

Based on the survey, interviews, literature review, and our own judgement, there are six 'gaps' and implications for UPEN set out below. It should be noted, however, that some are interrelated - e.g. the recommendation to do more on collaboration and networking suffuses many of the suggestions below.

Gap 1 - Tailored, practical support for 'third space' hybrid roles

Key message: most training is aimed at researchers - not knowledge mobilisers - and more needs to be done to recognise, support, and tailor provision for this group, and provide real-world practical (rather than theoretical) skills

The interviews indicated a significant lack of targeted professional development for those working in hybrid or professional services roles, such as knowledge brokers and policy impact managers. The view was that engagement professionals can get neglected in any development opportunities because the existing provision is geared towards academics. For staff in 'hybrid roles', they often 'slip right between the cracks' (Interviewee 21; University). Consequently, people in these roles are 'kind of learning on the job' (Interviewee 20; Consultancy). For those working to support policy impact, 'I don't think the resources are necessarily there' (Interviewee 19; Consultancy).

This gap for knowledge mobilisers was reflected in the UPEN survey: 62% of respondents completed less than five hours of formal training in the past year - 27% of those completed no training at all. Those new to research policy engagement are not necessarily undertaking more training in the space than more experienced professionals - suggesting that they are 'learning on the job'. However, this finding could also reflect people's definitions of professional development. Whilst professional service staff may not be doing formal training, they may be doing informal learning via attending UPEN events, networking, reading blogs and other measures they hadn't factored in when responding to the survey.

Part of the problem was the perception of an absence of a centralised home or framework: 'where is the home for the assembled resources on, you know, for the professional development of knowledge mobilisers?' (Interviewee 7; University). A competency framework (see Gap 6 below) might be beneficial to give new entrants 'a sense of … what is it that I need to know and how do I go about acquiring that knowledge?' (Interviewee 23; Consultancy). Furthermore, a framework could make it 'easier to produce professional

development tools... if there is a very clear sense across the board that these are the kinds of skills that everyone is looking for' (Interviewee 24; Think Tank).

Finally, there was a gap in more hands-on, tacit knowledge for policy engagement, rather than purely theoretical understanding. In the survey, when asked which specific skills they wanted to develop, respondents heavily favoured relational and applied skills, such as 'building relationships with policymakers and stakeholders' (42 responses), 'facilitating conversations between researchers and policy professionals' (30 responses), and 'spotting opportunities to share research in policy spaces' (27 responses). However, it was not always clear whether this reflected knowledge mobilisers' own development needs, or challenges they observed among the academics they support. Among interviewees, there was a concern about the gap between understanding and practical application, with a 'deficit of people receiving policy training knowledge and then being able to put it into action' (Interviewee 4; University). Standard training on 'how does politics works?' was seen as insufficient for those already familiar with the system, with a stronger need for practical methodologies of influence. As one interviewee noted, rather than simply undertaking engagement activities and hoping 'something sticks', staff need to draw on more applied approaches, akin to those used in public affairs and lobbying contexts (Interviewee 5; University).

Implications for UPEN: UPEN can serve as the primary umbrella organisation for these professionals by curating a professional development programme dedicated to knowledge mobilisers. This might include establishing a corpus of literature, resources, and other useful guidance on professional development. In addition, a UPEN-led competency framework could help steer this range of materials (e.g. from basic 101 introduction for those new to the sector, to advanced material on leadership for more seasoned third space professionals). However, while there was cautious support for a competency framework, there were some reservations discussed below in Gap 6).

Gap 2 - Fostering a focus on evidence-informed professional development

Key message: there is a lack of engagement with evidence on what works in professional development within the sector. UPEN could play a role in advancing more use and production of relevant research.

Very few providers of professional development formally use evidence or literature on 'what works'. Instead, most rely on trial and error, internal policies, or prior teaching experience. Some did mention following particular models of learning, but these were rather vague and not necessarily grounded in empirical evidence on adult professional learning and development. One exception was an interviewee who followed Diana Laudrillard's six learning types pedagogical model. But, in general, participants did not follow evidence (Interviewee 22; University). Some communicated a vague sense of following evidence, or trying approaches to professional learning, but could not cite examples. For instance, one consultant explained their approach as 'experiential' rather than theoretical:

> "…it is based in a lot of trial and error and experience, being consistently really clear about all of our learning objectives… but, yes, perhaps [I] couldn't totally formalise it for you and say, look, I'm citing this book here"
>
> (Interviewee 20; Consultancy)

Some participants did, however, have a sense that one-off training sessions had little impact (as suggested by research on professional development).

Another consideration missing from interviews and the survey was reflective practice. Most participants did not convey an interest or capacity in stepping back and critically engaging with their practice via research literature on knowledge mobilisation. However, such reflection and critical examination of personal and team practice can lead to increased competency and is frequently used as a key part of CPD. This reflective practice might involve introspection informed by external research and evidence - such as academic books, research theories, journal articles, and UPEN resources.

Implications for UPEN: UPEN could publish and disseminate a short and readable briefing paper outlining some of the core lessons and principles on the growing body of evidence of what works in professional development. This could inform future funding bids (e.g. UPEN Innovation Fund) - including encouraging bidders to read and reference this evidence before submitting a proposal. Bids could either help support or challenge this evidence - or

fill evaluation and knowledge gaps. For instance, there is very little dedicated research on effective approaches to EDI professional development. Other suggestions include:

- **Adopting an evidence-based framework:** Rather than relying on didactic information delivery, if UPEN decides to curate or support (e.g. via a competency framework or accreditation) training programmes, it could be structured around a credible pedagogical framework. The 'IGTP' framework, for instance, is recommended in the wider professional learning sector, focusing on four core areas: building Insight, setting Goals, developing Techniques, and embedding Practice (see our 'what works' report);

- **Prioritising coaching and mentoring**: UPEN should make coaching and mentoring a priority vehicle for capability building, prioritising this over static toolkits or one-off training workshops. UPEN is already investing in supporting this work (e.g. via support of Dr Mark Bennister in the Mentorship Programme for 2026) and can consider building on this work;

- **Investing in more rigorous evaluation:** UPEN funding rounds (e.g. innovation funds) could support evaluations and formal learning on what works in professional development - particularly filling gaps in our knowledge such as on EDI

- **Implement longitudinal leadership development:** For senior knowledge mobilisers, UPEN should avoid short courses and instead design and support more lasting longitudinal programmes that incorporate experiential learning and 360-degree feedback.

- **Encouraging a 'flipped' blended learning model:** UPEN can encourage professionals at different career stages across the sector to use the empirically supported 'flipped classroom' approach. This means using online, asynchronous methods for teaching concepts and theory (declarative knowledge), while reserving valuable face-to-face or virtual synchronous time for practicing skills (procedural knowledge).

Gap 3 - Support more cross-institutional networking and collaborations

Key message: there was a strong demand for learning from others and building connections in other organisations.

Participants said that connecting with peers was arguably the most valuable form of professional development. Whilst training may be beneficial, learning directly from others was valued even more. There was a strong appetite for more cross-institutional learning and moving beyond isolated working, using UPEN to break down barriers. As one interviewee highlighted, the sector was blighted with 'siloing of policy units, the siloing of policy professionals, siloing of training and offerings' across the landscape' (Interviewee 13; University). One interviewee expressed isolation at the senior level, noting, 'I would like a national network of people like me' (Interviewee 1; University). Or it might involve networking with individuals from similar types of institutions, such as between post-92 universities.

Some participants thought that UPEN could be an important unifying force across the higher education sector. As one interviewee pointed out, there is a significant tension in that universities naturally find themselves 'competing for research funds … competing for visibility in terms of policy engagement' (Interviewee 26; Consultancy). However, UPEN could effectively mitigate this friction by fostering a culture of collaboration and reminding members that 'we're all in actually getting evidence-based research in front of policymakers' (Interviewee 26; Consultancy).

However, it was not clear from interviews how exactly UPEN could help broker between different interests in competitive funding bids (e.g. UKRI funding). One potential interviewee identified also refused to participate in this study as they felt UPEN was a direct competitor to their consultancy, not an independent honest broker. Convening broad coalitions may help: while local institutions often can see themselves as competitors, bringing professionals together across a wider geographic and institutional spectrum ensures they are 'less likely to have any of those immediate... competition issues' (Interviewee 17; Consultancy). The exact mechanisms for collaboration may not be obvious, but the important message was the interest in seeing UPEN's role grow as a neutral, cross-institutional platform, helping universities transition away from working in silos.

Nevertheless, there were some practical suggestions. It was felt that UPEN could do more to share learning. Interviewees proposed several practical ways UPEN could step in to fill this gap, including mentoring (already provided by UPEN), peer case studies sharing good practice, and more networking events. The most frequent suggestion was for UPEN to build a centralised, searchable directory. This was also desired by government stakeholders who stated, 'I really want to be able to point to UPEN website and say, here's 110 members that you can click on and figure out who in the university to talk to' (Interviewee 12; Government)

The survey data strongly reinforced this need for more networking resources and opportunities. Respondents specifically requested 'networking events, events to exchange ideas with policy makers'. When asked how they would prefer to develop their skills, a community of practice was the most popular choice, selected by 38 out of 70 respondents. Furthermore, the survey insights revealed a need for shared language and recognition mechanisms that translate across higher education, government, and the third sector.

Implications for UPEN: UPEN is already undertaking some of these activities (e.g. mentoring, Community of Practices, UPEN Connect, members on website) but should consider growing these opportunities and putting on a more permanent footing. In addition, UPEN could grow a more detailed, up-to-date and searchable directory of members, as well as curating more case studies of best and promising practice, to meet this appetite for more detailed practical lessons and benchmarks from others.

Gap 4 – 'It's not about seniority' - rethinking who actually needs policy engagement training

Key message: Professional development provision is dominated by relative policy engagement novices - but more needs to be done for mid-level policy knowledge mobilisers and senior leadership.

Our mapping showed that professional development for knowledge mobilisers, academics, and professional services staff is designed to cater to a wide spectrum of career stages, spanning from postgraduate students to retiring professors. However, the type of support and the pedagogical approaches varied significantly depending on the level of seniority and experience.

One significant insight was distinguishing between skill level vs. formal occupational status and chronological seniority. Several interviewees warn against strictly mapping professional development to traditional academic career stages. As one consultant argued, 'you might be a really senior professor, but you just don't know anything about policy engagement... It's not about seniority necessarily. It's about skills' (Interviewee; Consultancy). To address this, our desk-based review of providers pointed towards a shifting towards competency–oriented approach, rather than career stage. For example, KEUK splits courses into 'foundation, applied and manager and leadership' to help people self-identify their needs regardless of their academic rank; ARMA similarly divides their workshops across three career levels, covering operational management and leadership.

Whatever the career stage and skill levels, our data pointed to particular gaps in audience provision. A key lesson was moving beyond introductory foundational offers. A substantial proportion of current professional development is heavily targeted towards relative novices new to the field. There are a lot of introductory '101' courses such as on the basics of how policy works. This training and material can be provided in-house (e.g. introductory sessions by university staff and others). However, participants felt other more experienced audiences required more UPEN attention, set out below:

- **Senior leaders and established professors.** This is a challenging audience, however, as they can be time-poor and may not feel open to formal professional development. But senior leadership still represents a potential 'gap in the market' (Interviewee 9; Professional body), but a market that may require different types of provision, away from standard training towards one-to-one coaching, peer-to-peer mentoring, or strategic leadership development. One interviewee even mentioned not labelling this activity as development or training as it might put leaders off. In addition, it was reported that senior leaders might gain more value from connecting with other leaders who share similar strategic challenges via peer-to-peer networking.

- **Civil service and policymakers**. The sector's training is disproportionately aimed at encouraging researchers to engage with policy makers, not vice versa. There is a lack of reciprocal training to help policy professionals understand how academia functions. This was the view not just of those interviewed in universities, but also

those in policy bodies. As one government official noted, civil servants are often 'the least well equipped' to do academic engagement and there is a real gap in training for them (Interviewee 12; Government). This participant highlighted that many in government simply do not know how to interact with universities or that knowledge mobilisers even exist.

Implications for UPEN: The potential offer of UPEN across these three audiences are:

- *For mid-career practitioners:* UPEN could help signpost and clarify career pathways and signpost CPD requirements in this 'middle space' (Interviewee 5; University). This could involve case studies showing career trajectories of named individuals from across the UK. A university interviewee noted that UPEN needs to help define 'what does it look like in that middle space' because currently, there is 'not like a clear ladder because we're creating as we go along' (Interviewee 5; University). However, expectations need to be managed: UPEN does not have the direct power to create these career trajectories - that is for employing bodies and funders. But UPEN could show what careers are possible, provide support for individuals trying to figure out what their options are, and what skills they need to work on. In addition, some participants recommended more coaching to help mid-career staff adapt to individual goals, rather than formal training, and growing spaces for peer-to-peer networking

- *For senior leaders:* UPEN should not offer traditional instructional courses and focus on peer-led, development and targeted methods that respect their existing expertise and time constraints, including facilitating peer-to-peer networking, mentoring, and coaching where leaders can share best practices and build trust. Mentoring and coaching also needs to be bespoke to individual backgrounds (Martin, 2025). For instance, for leaders with an academic background, support should focus on supporting them on how to engage effectively and build trust with policymakers and practitioners; for leaders with a policy background, development should focus on strengthening their knowledge of the research process so they can build credibility with academic researchers. Development should also focus heavily on systemic leadership, supporting senior academics in how to leverage their established networks and 're-engineer' structures within their departments. Finally, UPEN must

carefully frame its messaging - perhaps rebranding offerings as a ‘research leaders forum' - to overcome the stigma that it is solely a network for professional services, ensuring high-flying academics feel these spaces are specifically designed for them.

- *For policymakers:* UPEN could expand its focus to provide targeted resources, explainers, and training designed explicitly for civil servants to help them navigate the timelines, pressures, and structures of university research. There may also be opportunities to explore providing training support, such as through the proposed forthcoming School for Government and Public Services, or working with the Evidence/Exchange programme or existing provision for UK Civil Service Policy Profession and other local and national policymakers - such as through POST, GO-Science, Policy Profession support unit in Cabinet Office, the Policy Campus or other bodies.

Gap 5 - EDI and targeted interventions for underrepresented groups

Key message: there is very little dedicated provision of professional development for under-represented groups. UPEN should consider targeted support and be EDI led when it comes to prioritising activity, filling evidence gaps and following evidence-informed approaches

While there was a recognised need to support under-represented groups, both the survey and the interviews revealed that explicit, targeted training for these groups was rare across the sector. Most training providers admitted that they do not design professional development specifically for under-represented demographics, often relying instead on broad inclusion criteria.

However, the participants highlighted a distinct demand for specialised support, uncovering specific barriers and revealing what types of interventions are actually effective. Some suggestions were given for creating targeted interventions and networks. In the research-policy space, there is 'quite a strong argument for specifically targeting people of colour or women' (Interviewee 20; Consulting). The primary value of this targeted approach may not necessarily be the training material itself, but rather 'giving people the space to be together and talk about issues that actually, if you were sat in a mixed group of people, other people might find them comfortable to even bring up' (Interviewee 20; Consulting).

But there were a number of barriers. Interviewees identified several structural barriers that exclude certain groups from standard professional development, such as caring responsibilities, part-time work, and family commitments. Also, the prevalence of short-term funding and 18-month contracts restricts a large cohort of under-represented early-career researchers from engaging in long-term lateral career development. Our research did, however, point to a few institutions and bodies that have begun implementing targeted professional development, in individual universities, professional bodies like ARMA.

***Implications for UPEN**:* The desk-based literature review warns against implementing generic 'diversity training' or 'unconscious bias training' to meet this demand, noting that such approaches can be ineffective or even backfire. Instead, the evidence suggests that professional development should provide structured pathways for engagement and target specific under-represented groups in ‘cohort-focused approach to training’ (Royal Society for Edinburgh, 2022, p22). For example, ethnic minority researchers often report lower involvement in policy engagement due to systemic barriers; however, when provided with structured mechanisms - like dedicated UPEN policy fellowships or pairing schemes - these researchers reported greater benefits and reduced concerns about engagement. More broadly, EDI should be considered not only in relation to representation, but approach to delivery, learning styles, development of ethical and responsible practice and inequalities in resource and capacity.

Gap 6 - A UPEN-led competency framework

Key message: there is very little dedicated provision of professional development for under-
Key message: Competency frameworks are rarely used in sector - and there was cautious support for a UPEN-led framework

The vast majority of professional development providers do not currently use an explicit competency or skills framework for knowledge mobilisation or academic-policy engagement. However, there were a few notable exceptions from providers who either have established frameworks or are currently building them (see Box A). Some also reported informally using others external structures to guide their work (e.g. CAPE/UPEN ‘hidden talents’ list of competencies). Some key considerations for UPEN are set out below to inform the development of a framework.

Box A: Providers with established or developing frameworks include[1]

ARMA: ARMA has a highly developed, formal competency framework. It is a long catch-all document that outlines the expected skills, knowledge, and behaviours for all research managers at different career levels. It is currently being refreshed.

KEUK: KEUK is currently building a digital skills framework for knowledge exchange professionals. It maps a wide range of skills including creativity, networking, leadership, and strategy - and has recently been updated to include ethics, integrity, artificial intelligence (AI), evaluation, and impact. The self-assessment tool asks users to map themselves against approximately 40 statements to generate a score and they can identify areas where they may need to improve.

European Commission Joint Research Committee: currently working on a competency framework for knowledge brokers working between science and policy (to complement their other frameworks for academics and policymakers). This may be launched as part of their manifesto for knowledge brokering due later in 2026

Individual university staff frameworks (e.g. LSE, Imperial College): For instance, Imperial is in the process of trying to develop a framework for these policy-research roles within the university, which is inspired by civil service policy competency frameworks.

There was general sense of cautious support among the interviewees and survey for UPEN developing a competency framework, though this support comes with significant caveats.

[1] *NB a wider mapping of relevant competency frameworks will be published in another UPEN report on competencies frameworks, due later in 2026*

The vast majority of interviewees (n=22 or 79% of interviewees) agreed a framework would be useful for defining the profession, but they strongly warned against making it too rigid or bureaucratic. The main arguments in support of an explicit framework were:

- **Defining and shaping the profession and career pathways:** Interviewees and survey respondents noted a lack of a clearly defined career for 'third space' professionals bridging academia and policy. A framework could help the sector imagine and encourage a formal policy-research knowledge mobilisation pathway, making these unique skills more visible and transferable to other roles. Whilst a framework was no guarantee of encouraging a career pathway, it could act as a communication tool to help raise the visibility of knowledge mobilisers and help universities understand what these roles entail. A framework would create 'a language that is understood at institutional level' which 'raises the visibility of knowledge mobilisers' (Interviewee 14; University). Respondents to the survey explicitly noted a 'need to bridge language and competencies across both policy and research worlds'.

- **Aiding recruitment and HR:** Job descriptions for policy engagement roles are often written by university staff who lack specific expertise in the field. A framework would provide an outline of core competencies to help universities match expected outcomes to appropriate grade levels and improve consistency in recruitment. As one respondent to the survey put it, a framework would provide 'various competency-based building blocks so that you could identify the most relevant competencies and assemble a JD [job description] which fits the type of work to be delivered'.

- **Guiding professional development:** According to interviews, it would provide a useful 'anchor' and clearly demonstrate 'what a good one looks like' (Interviewee 1; University) for new entrants. For training providers, establishing a shared standard across the sector would reduce the time and resources spent constantly redesigning and iterating bespoke courses. 26 survey respondents explicitly selected 'skills and competencies mapping' as one of the most valuable aspects of a professional development framework. Furthermore, a framework could help inform personal development conversations internally (e.g. for a staff member discussing their career with a manager) so people can see where there are gaps in skills and then the areas

they might want to work on. A framework would make it much easier to standardise learning and development offers and overcome the 'language barrier' (Interviewee 8; Charity) between NGOs, policymakers, and researchers so that training offers are universally understood and valued.

Competency framework: concerns and conditions for success

Both the survey and interviewees emphasised that to be successful, a framework must serve as a guide rather than a rigid set of rules. Conditions for success include:

1. Flexibility over an idealised template. The strongest condition for success is that the framework must avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. A survey respondent explicitly warned against rigidity, stating:

> "Rather than an idealised template it would be more useful to have various competency-based building blocks so that you could identify the most relevant competencies and assemble a job description which fits the type of work to be delivered."

Similarly, an interviewee (Interviewee 26; University) noted that roles will 'depend on the kind of policy maturity of the university' and explicitly 'caution[ed] against the... one-size-fits-all' approach because 'flexibility would be key'. The framework needed to be iterated and regularly updated to reflect new skill needs (e.g. AI).

2. Avoiding artificial boundaries and gatekeeping. A major concern was that a framework could inadvertently penalise professionals or create unequal barriers to entry across the sector. A consultancy Interviewee (17) warned that a framework could become a 'gatekeep[ing] exercise which goes beyond kind of quality assurance and becomes close groups,' potentially alienating those whose work 'goes beyond colors, outside the lines'. Interviewee 18 (University) noted that some factions in the sector argue strongly against frameworks entirely because 'It constrains things and it creates artificial boundaries'.

3. Keeping it simple. To succeed, the framework must not overcomplicate the already complex landscape of higher education and the civil service. The framework should be small and simple. It is 'better to start small... if you start with a small remit that you know, you can build upwards' (Interviewee 13; University). A Government interviewee (12) warned of framework fatigue, pointing out that the civil service already 'does not have just one, it has a million frameworks', making navigation highly complicated.

4. Institutional alignment and personal agency. For the framework to actually be used, it must align with real-world university metrics and empower individuals. One interviewee warned that UPEN must 'make sure that whatever UPEN is saying... that that is actually going to contribute to internal conversations in universities' (Interviewee 1; University). Some Interviewees suggested the framework will succeed if it is used as an empowering reflexive tool that lets people really feel like they have some agency over their professional development, rather than feeling like a top-down mandate. It needs to be empowering, not restricting.

***Implications for UPEN**:* UPEN should co-produce a light-touch competency framework to help define the field, support career development, and provide a shared language across sectors. This framework should be tested and socialised with UPEN members and follow the three principles of being:

1. Permissive rather than prescriptive;
2. Simple, modular, and adaptable;
3. Reflective tool for individuals and organisations - not a compliance mechanism.

If pursued, this framework should align with existing frameworks (e.g. ARMA, KEUK, Civil Service) and be clearly positioned as developmental support rather than professional regulation.

Conclusion

This interim report establishes an initial understanding of the professional development landscape in academic-policy engagement, highlighting gaps between the current supply of training and the sector's demand for advanced, practical, and tailored capability-building. It offers our own perspectives on this data - and suggestions for UPEN.

However, the findings of this study must be interpreted within the context of several methodological limitations. Primarily, the online survey yielded a relatively small sample size of 78 responses. Furthermore, this sample was heavily skewed, with 74% of respondents representing university staff. While this is representative of UPEN (a network made up heavily of higher education staff), it may underrepresent the unique professional development needs of knowledge mobilisers working in government, consultancies, What Works Centres, or charities. Additionally, the desk-based evidence review highlighted systemic limitations in the broader literature on 'what works' in professional development, including a lack of robust causal evidence, poor reporting standards, and a reliance on short-term snapshots rather than longitudinal evaluations.

Despite these limitations, this report provides an early insight into the sector, including practical implications for UPEN, a map of supply, insights on sector demand, and a matrix of supply and demand to guide immediate and future UPEN work. The next phase will involve engaging with members and stakeholders to explore some of the areas where further thinking is needed, such as on professional competencies frameworks and approaches to EDI while also progressing more concrete ideas through piloting and programme development.

As an interim report, we recognise that this analysis is not exhaustive and would welcome feedback on any gaps or areas requiring further consideration; please contact hello@upen.ac.uk to share your views.

Annex A: Methodology

This report employs a mixed-methods approach to map the supply and demand of professional development for academic-policy engagement, comprising a sector-wide survey, semi-structured interviews, and a desk-based review.

To understand the specific professional development needs, perceived gaps, and current training habits within the sector, an online survey was distributed to UPEN members and policy professionals. The survey yielded 78 full responses. The sampling naturally skewed toward university staff, who made up 74% of respondents (primarily representing professional services and academic departments). The remaining non-university sample included professionals from government, charities, consultancies, and policy advisory roles. Across both groups, respondents predominantly represented the mid-career stage, though senior-level input was more heavily concentrated among non-university participants.

To complement the quantitative survey data and explore both the supply and demand landscapes in depth, semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes were conducted via Microsoft Teams. The sampling strategy purposefully targeted a diverse cross-section of the ecosystem, encompassing 28 distinct interviewees. The sample included academic researchers, university partnership managers, professional association leaders, independent training consultants, and civil servants (see Table C below on sampling). This broad sampling ensured insights were captured across various career maturity levels, institutional contexts, and provider types.

A desk-based mapping exercise was conducted to assess the current UK supply of professional development, utilising targeted outreach and reviews of existing competency frameworks and accreditation pathways from relevant professional bodies. Additionally, an 'organic' review of recently published research syntheses was conducted to establish evidence-based principles of 'what works' in professional development. Rather than a rapid evidence assessment, this desk research provided a snapshot of current literature by synthesising systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and theoretical frameworks from parallel sectors, including education, healthcare, policing, and the civil service.

Table A: Map of supply of current UK provision of professional development for those working in policy and research knowledge mobilisation

Type of Professional Development	Types of Providers	Examples	Gaps or Already Supplied?	Duration / Time to Complete
1.**Workshops & Formal Training Courses** (e.g., short courses, masterclasses, lectures)	Universities, independent consultancies, government bodies, networks	Policy Insights/Open Innovation Team, Institute for Government, Tendo Consulting, SPRE, Overton	Supplied: Oversupply of 'Policy 101' introductory sessions and basic communication skills (e.g., writing policy briefs) for early-career researchers. Gaps: Advanced/specialist topics (e.g., using AI, navigating complex government structures), long-term evaluation methods, and bespoke courses tailored to mid-career and senior leaders.	**Highly variable:** ranging from standard 90-minute, half-day, or full-day sessions, up to 3 or 4 days for intensive training. Some are delivered iteratively, such as 3-hour workshops held once a month over a 7-month period.

2.**Coaching & Mentoring** (1-to-1 pairing, reverse mentoring, group coaching)	Universities, independent coaches, professional networks	Oxford University (policy pairing scheme), Walcott Communications, UPEN (mentoring scheme), Invisible Grail	Supplied: Ad-hoc mentoring and some university-led pairing schemes exist. Gaps: Formalised, longitudinal coaching tracks for mid-career staff navigating hybrid roles, and senior leader mastermind/peer-mentoring groups.	**Medium to long-term**: specific coaching programs are often structured over a 6-month period. Broader developmental engagements or institutional coaching support can last over multiple years (e.g., 4-5 years).
3.**Collaborative & Peer Learning** (Communities of Practice, Action Learning Sets, Peer Review)	Professional networks, academic institutions, cross-sector hubs	UPEN Communities of Practice, ARMA, LPIP Hub	Supplied: Growing community of practice networks across the sector. Gaps: Formalised cross-institutional spaces for knowledge mobilisers to share strategic, systemic challenges, and dedicated peer-networks for high-level academics.	**Ongoing/Longitudina**l: communities and networks are typically self-sustaining over years, with regular individual meetings or action learning sets lasting 30 to 90 minutes depending on the target audience's bandwidth.

4.**Remote & Online Learning** (e-learning modules, webinars, self-paced videos)	Parliamentary bodies, networks, university HR/training departments	POST (online videos), Cambridge Online, Apolitical	Supplied: Webinars and basic online modules are widely available. Gaps: High-quality, interactive self-paced learning that incorporates active mechanisms (like quizzes and feedback) tailored to specific career levels.	Self-paced/Hours: generally requires a few hours of total commitment. The majority of professionals report spending fewer than 5 hours total on formal training annually, indicating remote options are often short.
5.**Integrated / Work-Based Learning** (Fellowships, secondments, reflective casework)	Universities, government departments, funding bodies	CAPE (fellowships), GO-Science, UK Parliament (POST)	Supplied: Academic-to-policy fellowships and policy schools are available but highly competitive. Gaps: Secondments/fellowships for professional services staff (knowledge mobilisers) to gain direct policy experience; and policy-to-research secondments to upskill civil servants.	**Sustained term**: typically structured over several months, such as fellowships that involve deep immersion and long-term project work.

6. **Accredited / Qualification-Based Programmes**	Professional associations, chartered institutes, universities	ARMA (Level 3/5 qualifications), CIPD, PRISM	Supplied: Frameworks exist for research management (ARMA) and public affairs. Gaps: A flexible, sector-wide competency framework and accreditation mechanism specifically designed for the third space of knowledge mobilisers and policy engagement professionals.	**Multi-year:** formal qualifications typically take 18 months to 2 years to complete, though some participants may stretch this out longer due to time constraints and workload.
7. **Simulation & Role Play** (e.g., mock Select Committees, negotiation exercises)	Specialist consultancies, government trainers	Tendo Consulting, internal government training	Supplied: Utilised in bespoke consultancy training and some high-level fellowship preparation. Gaps: Wider accessibility to simulation training for standard academic staff, particularly for specialised skills like negotiation and oral evidence delivery.	**Intensive short-term**: embedded within half-day, full-day, or up to 2-day workshops.

Table B: Matrix of Supply and Demand Matrix for Professional Development in Policy Engagement

Delivery mechanism	Demand (User needs & skills)	Supply (types of providers)	Indicative examples	Gaps between supply & demand	Mapping to 'What Works' evidence
1.Workshops, Masterclasses & Short Courses	**High demand for introductory knowledge** ('Policy 101'), writing policy briefs, communicating with non-academic audiences, and understanding how decisions are made.	Consultancies, government units, in-house university policy hubs.	**Consultancies:** Tendo Consulting, Forerunner. **Gov/Parliament:** Open Innovation Team, POST. **Universities:** Internal Policy Hubs.	**Oversupply of basic '101' training**, but a severe gap in **advanced/specialist topics** (e.g., using AI for policy engagement, measuring/evaluating impact). There is also a gap in training for policymakers on how to effectively engage with academia.	Efficient for instilling insight (knowledge transfer), but traditional, passive classroom instruction alone is ineffective for changing behaviour. Must include **active learning**, **modelling**, and **feedback** to successfully teach techniques.

2.Coaching & Mentoring (1-to-1 or Group)	**Personalised support** for navigating complex stakeholder relationships, career progression, and leadership development, especially for those transitioning into policy engagement roles.	Professional networks, independent coaches, specialist consultancies, internal university matching schemes.	**Consultancies:** Invisible Grail (leadership). **Independent:** Walcott Communications. **In-house/Networks:** UPEN mentoring scheme, Oxford academic-civil servant pairings.	There is a lack of coaching and mentoring specifically tailored for **professional services staff / knowledge mobilisers**, as existing schemes are heavily skewed toward researchers.	Consistently proven **highly effective** for skill application and behavioural change. Uses mechanisms like **goal setting**, **practical social support**, and **feedback**. Most effective when separated from formal sponsorship/performance management.
3.Collaborative & Peer-to-Peer Learning (Communities of Practice, Action Learning)	Overcoming professional isolation, sharing best practices, and learning the nuanced art of influence from peers who understand the unique culture of higher education and policy.	Professional networks, academic associations, cross-sector hubs.	**Networks:** UPEN Communities of Practice. **Professional bodies:** ARMA Special Interest Groups. **Hubs:** NCCPE Engage Academy, SPRE action learning sets.	**Lack of formalised cross-institutional spaces** and siloing of policy professionals. ECRs lack opportunities to network strategically with **senior policymakers** or directors, which peers with more capital easily access.	Highly effective for collective problem-solving and reflective practice. However, simply grouping people together is insufficient; success requires **shared values, a shared purpose, and specific structured mechanisms** (like evaluation protocols).

4.Remote, Online & Blended Learning (e-learning, webinars, videos)	Highly flexible, self-paced learning that accommodates heavy academic workloads, covering foundational topics or niche toolkits on demand.	Commercial tech platforms, professional associations, university intranet portals.	**Platforms:** Overton webinars. **Professional bodies:** ARMA online workshops. **Universities:** Internal intranet video snapshots.	Current offerings **lack interactive elements** and suffer from low engagement. High-quality, active self-paced learning (e.g., incorporating quizzes and live simulations) is under-supplied.	Remote learning can be effective, but non-interactive courses suffer from high attrition. Evidence strongly supports a **Blended Learning ('flipped') model**: completing online theory first, then reserving face-to-face time for interactive practice.
5.Integrated / Work-Based Learning (Fellowships, Secondments, Case-work)	**Deep immersion** into the policy ecosystem, building long-term strategic networks, and learning-by-doing in real government contexts.	Government departments, UKRI/funding bodies, university-led placement programs.	**Gov/Parliament:** Open Innovation Team Policy Schools, POST fellowships. **Funders:** UKRI policy fellowships.	Massive gap for **knowledge exchange professionals / professional services staff**, as almost all fellowships and secondments are exclusively designed for academic researchers.	The strongest method for **embedding practice**. Integrates learning into routine workflows via **context-specific repetition** and **sustained duration**, which are essential for long-term behavioural change.

6.Accredited / Qualification-Based Programmes	Demand for **clear career pathways**, professional legitimacy, visibility, and competency mapping to prove the value of 'third space' knowledge mobilisation roles.	Professional bodies, chartered institutes.	**Professional bodies:** ARMA (Level 3/5 Qualifications)**;** CIPR (Public Affairs).	There is **no universally adopted, dedicated competency framework or accreditation** specifically for academic-policy engagement professionals, leaving the sector relying on ad-hoc or adjacent frameworks.	Frameworks provide **models of effective practice** and structure personal development. However, overly rigid frameworks risk becoming outdated quickly and can create artificial gatekeeping barriers that restrict professional growth.

Table C: Sampling of choice of interviewees

Type	Provider Category	Description / Focus
A	Consultancy trainers	Consultancy-based provision focused on REF, impact, and targeted policy engagement training; often fee-based and highly applied.
B	Coaches / mentors	Individual or small-group coaching and mentoring, often relationship-based and career-focused
C1	In-house university-based PD	University-based policy academies or engines delivering structured training programmes (externally or internally) from PhD to professor level.
C2	Postgraduate education	Short courses aimed at professionals, formal postgraduate taught or research provision (e.g. Masters, practice-based PhDs) focused on policy engagement and knowledge mobilisation.
D	Professional development membership bodies	Broad professional development bodies providing relevant training (e.g. skills, EDI, career development), often cross-sector and membership-based.
E	Public affairs / communications providers	Training focused on public affairs skills and techniques such as lobbying, parliamentary processes, storytelling, and policy briefing writing.
F	Senior leadership development providers	Professional development and coaching focused on strategic leadership of policy, research, or knowledge mobilisation functions.
G	Government providers	Policy engagement training delivered by government or government-adjacent bodies, sometimes free or subsidised.

H	Independent non-profit / think tanks	PD provision from non-profit, membership, or policy research organisations close to government but outside formal government structures.
I	Research / policy networks	Thematic or regional networks convening researchers and policy actors; brokerage, events, fellowships, and shared learning.
J	Peer-to-peer learning providers	Communities of practice and shared learning, focused on peer exchange and collective capability-building.