Universities
Policy
Engagement
Network

Areas of Research Interest

Summary Paper

February 2023

Public Policy Southampton (PPS)
Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN)

Authors: Laura Bea (Specialist EDI Officer, PPS; Network Manager, UPEN),
Nicky Buckley, UPEN Vice-Chair, CSaP Associate Director

Contents

Description	3
Terminology	3
Introduction	4
Origins of ARIs	4
Governmental, Parliamentary and Other ARIs	5
Departmental Areas of Research Interest: Themes, Engagement, and Contact	6
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) 2022	7
Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFRA) 2021	8
Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) 2023	9
Ministry of Defence (MoD) 2018	10
Department for Education (DfE) 2018	10
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2018	11
Cabinet Office 2019	12
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 2019	13
Department for Transport (DfT) 2021	14
Home Office 2019	15
Department for International Trade (DIT) 2020	16
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 2020	17
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) 2020	18
Ministry of Justice (MoJ) 2020	19
Ways that Areas of Research Interest have been used	20
Cross-cutting work across ARIs	20
Inspiring other bodies to launch ARIs	21
Evaluating Areas of Research Interest, and Development Possibilities	22
Analysis and Knowledge Exchange	22
Academic and Research Funder Engagement	24
Conclusion and Recommendations	25
Appendix: Summary of Methods of Contact	26
References	27

This paper outlines a summary of themes found in departmental Areas of Research Interests in the UK Government, as well as opportunities for academic-policy engagement.

TERMINOLOGY

ARI: Areas of Research Interest

MoJ: Ministry of Justice

MoD: Ministry of Defence

DfT: Department for Transport

DfE: Department for Education

DIT: Department for International Trade

FCO: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

DWP: Department for Work and Pensions

DHSC: Department for Health and Social Care

DCMS: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

BEIS: Department for Business and Industrial Strategy

DEFRA: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DLUHC: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

MHCLG: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Multidisciplinar[it]y: Multidisciplinarity in this context refers to the practice of multiple separate disciplines and research areas being used to inform policy. It differs from interdisciplinarity when...

Interdisciplinar[it]y: Research areas and disciplines come together to produce additional and/or separate research/evidence, created from a combined effort of disciplines.

Introduction

ORIGINS OF ARIs

The 2015 Nurse Review of Research Councils reported on aspects of the relationship between research and policymaking, and concluded that there was a need 'across the full range of Government Departments for a more strategic approach in relation to their departmental R&D programmes' including 'maintaining 'statements of need', in terms of the most important research questions confronting the Departments. This idea of statements of need for research questions became work on Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) and was taken up by the Government Chief Scientific Officer (GCSA), the Government Office for Science (GOS), the network of Chief Scientific Advisers in departments and their offices, along with scientific, analyst, policy and delivery teams in departments.

ARIs have been published to create a mechanism connecting academics and decision makers, providing some transparency, direction, and a more extensive platform for researchers to explore contributions they might make to supporting evidence-informed policy. ARIs (as well as departmental research and innovation strategies where they are published) also provide detail about departmental research systems, data publication policies, and opportunities to engage and collaborate.

GOVERNMENTAL, PARLIAMENTARY AND OTHER ARIs

Since the 2015 review, departmental ARIs were published from 2017 onwards and most core Government departments have compiled and published their ARI documents (not HM Treasury). A number of non-ministerial departments and agencies have published ARIs too, including the Health and Safety Executive, the National Archives and the Food Standards Agency. The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology published 20 Covid-related ARIs for Parliament in 2020, followed by four ARIs being issued by parliamentary Select Committees (see page 21). The current advice from Government Office for Science is for ARIs to be refreshed annually if possible. At the time of writing, twelve departments had refreshed their ARIs since original publication. GOS's guidance on how to set out an ARI document includes the recommendation to 'consult academics on the framing of ARIs in the context of current research'.

The ARIs are published on a collection page on the Government website, as well as appearing on departmental web pages. As well as being a source of information for the external research community, they also enable knowledge exchange and sharing of research and development between departments.

This document focuses on the central Government ARIs published on the collection page brought together by the Government Office for Science, but academics are encouraged to consult parliamentary ARIs and those published by other bodies too.

Departmental Areas of Research Interest

THEMES, ENGAGEMENT, AND CONTACT

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) (2022)

SUMMARY AND THEMES

Research interests focus centrally on the UK-wide Levelling Up agenda, alongside themes of safe housing provision, strengthening local governance and collaboration between national government, and community integration. These themes are combined with the aim of achieving these outputs in line with net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and encourage researchers to consider this also. The department outlines 11 themes to focus on, and welcomes research allied to these themes, which include COVID-19 recovery and future resilience, housing, planning, homelessness and rough sleeping, Net Zero, building safety, devolution, electoral registration and voting, community integration and cross-cutting research methodologies .

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

DLUHC encourages current research aligned to the key themes outlined above, emphasising the supplying of evidence from all parts of the UK and across devolved and local governments. DLUHC wish to use the ARI to 'stimulate future collaboration' between academics and themselves and intend for the ARI to be used to streamline future research proposals with their research objectives. One of the 11 themes relates to 'cross-cutting' methodologies used by academics connected to the other 10 themes, which have potential applications to the work of DLUHC. For each theme, an objective is given followed by a set of questions for further exploration in the current and future works of academics. The importance of data collection is noted, including from organisations such as What Works Centres. The department states that it is 'keen to hear from individuals or organisations if you have underway or are planning projects that are of direct relevance to our policy agendas.'

There is also a list of ways in which academics currently engage with DLUHC, including seminar sessions to deliver research findings, and potential ways for future engagement, such as secondments.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Lesley.Smith@levellingup.gov.uk
Senior Principal Research Officer

psChiefScientificAdviser@levellingup.gov.uk
Head of the Chief Scientific Adviser's office

FIND OUT MORE

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFRA) 2021

SUMMARY AND THEMES

This ARI is published by the DEFRA Group. The Defra group includes the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its agencies and public bodies. The document structure includes a section which discusses research interests in each of the five "Outcome Systems" that Defra uses internally. This section is preceded by sections that consider research needs in areas that cut across Defra's portfolio, such as climate and land-use, and a section about important research tools and approaches.

Defra Group System is structured around five outcome systems:

- natural environment and rural
- floods and water
- food farming and biosecurity
- marine and fisheries
- environmental quality

There are eight Public Sector Research Establishments in the Defra Group. Seven of these are Defra arm's length bodies. Fera is a Joint Venture between Defra and Capita PLC.

- Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)
- Centre of Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Fera Science Limited (Fera)
- Forest Research (FR)
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Natural England (NE)
- Royal Botanical Gardens Kew (RBG Kew)
- Other scientific arm's length bodies in the Defra group are:
- Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)

DEFRA's research interests highlight an increased emphasis on mitigating climate change and using cost effective environmental strategies to balance economic and sustainability interests. 'One Health' is a central theme in this ARI, indicating a need for further interdisciplinary research linking other major themes of human, animal and environmental health as a system. This ARI has a section dedicated to research approaches, with data science, systems approaches and social sciences included as being of particular interest.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (2021) has a clear statement of need, in that it recognises research 'will help Defra realise the goals set out in important government strategies', and 'actively seeks connections with relevant external research'. The ways in which they identify they engage with researchers include staff attending academic conferences, inviting academic contributions to advisory bodies, internships, studentship and secondment programmes, and commissioning research teams.

CONTACT INFORMATION

evidence.forum@defra.gsi.gov.uk
research.interests@defra.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) 2023

SUMMARY

The DHSC's ARI were updated in Jan 2023. Overall, the ARI have a strong emphasis on prevention of diseases and improving patient outcomes by strengthening the efficacy of the NHS workforce.

The need for research covering a widespread range of sciences ranging from 'fundamental, translational, clinical, epidemiological, public health, social and economic research' are highlighted and the update includes three key ARI of strategic policy importance namely:

- early action to prevent poor health outcomes (ARI1)
- reduction of compound pressures on the NHS and social care (ARI2)
- shaping and supporting the health and social care workforce of the future (ARI3)

Three cross cutting themes defined in the next section aim to deliver research and innovation which reduces health disparities and improves health and economic outcomes, promotes economic growth and accelerates the adoption of innovation in the healthcare system. Priority research objectives and topics are listed for each ARI in the full document.

The ARI explicitly state an interest in outcomes related to -'Public and patients:

- improved access to and experience of health services
- improved physical health and mental health
- improved quality of life and ability to work
- reduced mortality
- reduced health disparities

Services: Improvements might include increased efficiency and reduced burden and costs across all parts of the care system from public health to GPs, ambulances, surgery and social care.'

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The document clearly states priority cross cutting methodologies adding that interdisciplinary engagement in research disciplines is encouraged, particularly in the fields of systems thinking, data science, economics of health, behavioural science, implementation science and evidence synthesis. The ARI mention that the 'DHSC funds a substantial amount of research directly through the National Institute for Heath and Care Research (NIHR), which invests over £1 billion a year to improve the health and wealth of the nation' and that they will maintain support as discussed in the NIHR document on Best Research for *Best Health: The Next Chapter.*

CONTACT

No contact listed

FIND OUT MORE

Ministry of Defence (MoD) 2018

SUMMARY AND THEMES

Priorities for the Ministry of Defence in this ARI are set out as

- understanding changing physical and social operating environments and the effect of new technologies, through horizon scanning, a greater comprehension of social sciences and enhanced sensing capabilities;
- harnessing advances in information, big data and autonomy;
- enhancing military capabilities through technology, including power management, exploitation of the electromagnetic spectrum and advanced materials;
- reducing the long term costs of military capability, including platforms, space based capabilities and training;
- maximising the potential of people working in defence; and having the right technical skills for the future.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Ministry of Defence gives a contact email address for academics wishing to get in touch about the ARIs or the MoD's science and technology strategy. It also provides a separate contact email address (below) for submitting research proposals.

CONTACT

Feedback: dst-strategysecretariat@mod.uk
Research Proposals: accelerator@dstl.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Department for Education (DfE) 2018

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The Department for Education organises its ARI under the headings of

- Early Years
- Schools
- Further and higher education
- Children's social care
- Cross-cutting

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Department for Education states that it commissions research projects and policy evaluations directly through contracts, as well as operating an Associate Pool, a group of independent academics and researchers it can commission to provide services. The department explains that it follows the Government Social Research Publication Protocol, and indicates how it publishes its data. The ARI has a section regarding accessing individualised data through an external request form, and in this section the department states it is looking at how more efficient ways of data sharing with academics can be made possible.

CONTACT

Ari.reply@education.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2018

SUMMARY AND THEMES

This ARI begins with four strategic research themes that are designed to bring together the high level, cross cutting research areas that are relevant to multiple policy areas. These are:

- Digital
- Connectivity and Productivity
- Enabling People to Thrive
- Place

Then there is a section with research needs from individual policy teams, grouped under the following headings:

- Internet Safety, Cyber Security and Data Protection
- Telecoms and Broadband Delivery
- Digital and Technology
- Society and Community Engagement
- Broadcasting, Media, Creative Industries,
- Gambling and Lotteries
- Culture, Heritage, Tourism, Sport

At the time of writing, DCMS are refreshing their ARIs with a plan to publish in 2023.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport intends that the ARI can be used as a starting point for future collaboration with academics. It also signposts researchers to the Arms Length Bodies for potential research collaboration.

CONTACT

csa@culture.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Cabinet Office 2019

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The Cabinet Office operates at the centre of government leading to its involvement in a broad and diverse portfolio, as reflected in its ARIs, which have been grouped into the following themes:

- Public services
- Civil Service
- Digital innovation
- Electoral registration and electoral systems
- UK governance and devolution
- Measuring and responding to security threats faced by the UK
- Adapting to a changing security environment
- The role of multilateral institutions in maintaining the security of the UK
- Knowledge and information management
- Delivery of major government projects

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Cabinet Office states that it commissions research from external organisations when necessary and also values links to research organisations which drive policy innovation across government, drawing on behavioural insights and horizon scanning in particular. The publication of Areas of Research Interest forms part of the Cabinet Office's strategy to strengthen and deepen academic relationships.

This ARI refers to the Policy Lab (since moved from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Education) and the Open Innovation Team, which are bringing new policy tools and techniques to the UK Government and are also founded on strong academic partnerships.

This 2019 ARI document reports that the 2018 ARI from the Cabinet Office resulted in new connections between academics and policy makers being made, and workshops exposing policy makers and analysts to the latest research in areas such as trust and digital government. Organisations and academics are invited to actively consider the latest research interests of the Cabinet Office when developing research programmes.

CONTACT

co_aris@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 2019

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The research questions in this ARI are grouped under headings corresponding to departmental objectives: Employment and progression; Disability and health; Security in later life; Children and families; and Service delivery.

There is also a section on cross-cutting research methods, where it is stated: 'The department wants to engage with experts to enhance our capability to use cutting-edge scientific, technical and analytical approaches, as well as established methodologies, to develop our evidence base in the areas outlined in this ARI. DWP recognises the insights that different disciplines and methods provide and the importance of using multi-faceted approaches to build a more complete understanding that can better inform decisions about policy and delivery.'

The department has established a Methods Advisory Group of external experts to support the Chief Scientific Adviser in providing cross-cutting, independent scientific advice to ministers and senior officials.

This section makes an explicit link with the internal research capabilities of the department 'including statisticians, social researchers, economists, operational researchers, behavioural scientists, psychologists and data scientists'. The department expresses its wish to understand the latest developments in the methods it uses from across these disciplines and to learn about any methods it is not using, which can help address research priorities'. The document states that 'this includes methods that can enhance our understanding of issues around inclusiveness, equality and diversity. For example, by enabling more granular understanding of our research priorities in terms of age, ethnicity, location, gender and disability.'

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Department for Work and Pensions reports that it has used ARIs since 2018 to engage with academics, noting their series of ARI workshops at many UK Universities, and states the intention to collaborate and engage further. While the ARI is 'not an invitation to tender for DWP funding for specific research projects', it is intended to 'help those that fund and conduct research to design research that will have a policy impact'.

CONTACT

evidence.strategyteam@dwp.gov.uk
Chief Scientific Adviser's Office

FIND OUT MORE

Department for Transport (DfT) 2021

SUMMARY AND THEMES

This ARI has research questions organised under three headings: Grow and level up the economy; Improve transport for the user and Reduce environmental impacts. It is published alongside DfT's Science Plan, which sets the vision for research, development, natural sciences, social and behavioural sciences, engineering and innovation in the Department.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

DfT states that it is 'keen to hear from the full diversity of disciplines and beyond traditional transport research and analysis providers. Recognition is given to the way in which '[i]nnovation in methodologies, processes and techniques often comes from adjacent and even completely unrelated fields to transport'. The department states that it is particularly keen to hear from multi-disciplinary groups as it appreciates 'the importance of cross-discipline working and the increasing interconnectedness of evidence needs'.

To engage researchers with ARIs, DfT plans a series of virtual engagement events across the UK with academic institutions and wider industry, innovation and transport sectors (with support from senior scientist and analyst communities in DfT). The department plans to reach out to 'both academic knowledge brokers and the academics themselves.' UPEN as well as Knowledge Transfer Networks (KTN) are mentioned to maximise reach for these events. They also plan engagement with funding bodies such as Innovate UK, UKRI and its research councils as well as learned societies. They also plan to disseminate the ARIs through the members of the Transport Research and Innovation Board (TRIB) who influence the R&D conducted by DfT's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and the wider transport R&D sector, and the DfT Science Advisory Council (SAC).

CONTACT

bridgetoresearch@dft.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Home Office 2019

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The Home Office structures its ARI around the following headings:

Public Safety

- Changing Landscape of Crime
- Modern Slavery
- Child Sexual Exploitation

Money laundering, alternative currencies and distributed ledger technologies

- Autonomous and unmanned systems
- Police and fire services
- Forensic science
- Extremism

Migration and Borders

- Supporting operations
- Identity
- Drivers and impacts of migration
- The legal labour market
- Refugees

Homeland Security

- The terrorist and serious and organised crime landscape
- Preventing terrorism and SOC
- Protection of infrastructure, transport, crowded and open places
- Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives (CBRNE) and firearms

Animal Experiments (as the Home Office is responsible for regulating animal experimentation and underlying policy)

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

As with other ARIs, this document has been prepared to help guide UKRI strategy and 'to suggest avenues of investigation to the wider research community'. The Home Office states the crucial role of science 'in its broadest possible interpretation' in the Home Office's priority areas. The document notes that 'some of the most difficult problems are intrinsically interdisciplinary, including those in the humanities and social sciences, as well as those in physical, biological and mathematical, computational and engineering sciences.' The contributions that could be made by data science, data analytics and behavioural sciences are particularly noted.

CONTACT

research@homeoffice.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Department for International Trade (DIT) 2020

SUMMARY AND THEMES

This document was published in 2020 as an update to a previous ARI published in 2018.

The topics in this ARI are grouped under the following headings:

- Covid-19, trade shocks and economic recovery
- Trade agreements
- Market access and non-tariff measures
- Trade remedies and trade disputes
- Trade, regions and the domestic economy
- Global prosperity, development and climate change
- Exports and export finance
- Sectors, supply chains and R&D
- Trade in services and digital trade
- Investment and trade facilitation
- Attitudes and perceptions towards trade and investment

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Department for International Trade uses the latest ARI publication to outline its interest both in 'developments in existing research programmes', indicating that it is interested in receiving information about existing research, while in other areas the document explains: 'we may wish to commission new research to build on the existing evidence base within the department.' The document is intended to 'stimulate discussion and further engagement with researchers in academia and industry'.

CONTACT

research@trade.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 2020

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) became the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in September 2020 when the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office merged with the Department for International Development. The 2020 FCO ARI updated the previous ARI for 2017-18 and was published before the departmental merger creating FCDO. The 2020 ARI focused on Covid-19 and includes themes on global health, and legal and historical dimensions relevant to pandemics; climate and biodiversity; emerging technology, research and science diplomacy; economics and trade; public opinion and the information environment; demographics and migration; geopolitics; international institutions; democracy, religion and ideologies; conflict, instability and terror.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The 2020 FCO ARI and the FCDO website provides a full list of relevant parts of FCDO for researchers, such as the Research Analysts cadre, the Economics Unit, FCDO Historians, the Open Source Unit and the Legal Directorate. The ARI document offers detail on how the department can respond to academics regarding information for REF impact case studies , outlining the challenges and stating that their input will in most cases be a simple, factual statement noting the nature of the researcher's interaction with and contribution to a departmental team. This section notes that sometimes contributions call for more 'bespoke treatment...that merits particular support and collaboration', such as Knowledge Exchange fellows, or research proposals which speak directly to departmental needs and ways of working.

CONTACT

fcdocorrespondance@fcdo.gov.uk
(research enquiries)

FIND OUT MORE

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) 2020

SUMMARY AND THEMES

Although published as an 'interim update', this is a comprehensive ARI document. BEIS sets out its interest both in 'encouraging new relevant research and in engaging in longer-term programmes of new research'. It is split into 3 sections, outlining departmental research requirements for over 6 months (Section B) and the longer-term research questions (Section C) BEIS seeks to address. It also highlights recent research publications (Section D) where the department has worked with the research community to answer those questions.

The ARI states that the department currently spends over £15m per year on external research; over 100 projects are normally commissioned in any given year.

The short-term research needs in section B are specified as a list of projects to be contracted and divided into the headings: Solving the Grand Challenges facing our society; Making the UK the best place to work and grow a business; and Leading the world in tackling climate change. The same headings are then used to group questions for longer-term research.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Academic inquiries about the ARI are invited at the email address below. The document also sets out a list of procurement routes for research to be commissioned by the department. BEIS states in this document that it plans for the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) Marketplace to be the main route for research procurement. There are also several other procurement routes used to commission research in BEIS, such as: Contract finder, Heat Networks and Electricity Generation Assets (HELGA), Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) and the Expert Advisory Call-Down Services (EACDS).

CONTACT

Research_RAF@beis.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Ministry of Justice (MoJ) 2020

SUMMARY AND THEMES

The MoJ evidence needs are grouped into the following themes, following the overall departmental objectives:

- Ensure access to justice in a way that best meets people's needs;
- Support a flourishing legal services sector
- Provide a transparent and efficient court system
- Ensure that prisons are decent, safe and productive places to live and work
- Protect the public from harm
- Reduce rates of reoffending and improve life chances

The department also notes that its ARIs 'are wide-ranging, evolving and cut across multiple domains'. A section of the ARI is therefore dedicated to 'the themes that transcend the substantive areas. These themes include equality and diversity, and disproportionality in outcome owing to a range of underlying factors and circumstances. The themes provide lenses through which the ARI questions can be viewed, enabling us to take cross-sectional approaches when addressing important issues.' The ARI also states the department's commitment to 'multi-disciplinary methodologies . . . required to improve the evidence base and it includes 'a section on methodological learning to encourage interest from a varied range of external experts'.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Ministry of Justice has created a data-linking programme, Data First, to provide better links between academics and justice data sets. Its specific aim is around 'facilitating justice system research', and specifies that the ARI document is intended to engage with academics and research organisations, rather than just call on them for evidence production. Alongside this, there is a dedicated section on how academics can collaborate and communicate, and an offer of support to researchers for funding bids, too. The avenues for engagement include:

- Research Fellowship funding calls
- Data First Project: datafirst@justice.gov.uk
- Advisory groups

CONTACT

researchsupport@justice.gov.uk
evidence_partnerships@justice.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Ways that Areas of Research Interest have been used

CROSS-CUTTING WORK ACROSS ARIS

In 2019 ESRC and GO Science recruited for 'ARI Fellowships'. Since December 2019 two fellows (an ARI Research Engagement Fellow and an ARI Policy Engagement Fellow) have been working across all departments, with intermediaries such as POST and the National Academies, and with researchers to improve the production and use of ARIs in support of a more effective science system. Part of this work has been practical, to identify and convene research expertise to address ARIs as well as 'enable dialogue with government departments to refine and develop the ARIs' (see the Evaluation section below). In 2020, the Fellows ran a large-scale knowledge mobilisation exercise to prioritise ARIs relating to Covid recovery in the medium to long term with the CSAs, and then to convene 9 task and finish groups on key themes. Funders, officials and researchers met to synthesise existing evidence, identify key messages, and specify evidence gaps. This work has influenced spending review bids, future funding calls by UKRI and other funders, and stimulated cross-government working across priority topics.

In addition, the Fellows support an internal network of ARI officials who produce these doucments, liaise with external stakeholder groups and networks to better support equitable and diverse access to knowledge exchange opportunities, and the role of ARIs within funders. As of Autumn 2022, they have also created a searchable database of ARIs to improve accessibility of ARIs for all potential users.

As social scientists, both fellows are well placed to conduct this practical work while drawing lessons out for the wider scholarly and practitioner communities.

INSPIRING OTHER BODIES TO LAUNCH ARIS

A number of non-Ministerial departments and public bodies have also produced ARI's, including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the National Archives, the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Metropolitan Police also published ARIs in 2019-20.

In October 2020, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) published 20 COVID-19 related ARIs for the UK Parliament, which were ranked in order of interest to the UK Parliament research and select committee staff. They focus on the impact of the pandemic, economic recovery and growth, surveillance and data collection, long term mental health impact, education, vaccine development and the NHS. Select committee staff were also surveyed to give a rating for how important research evidence in that the topic area was likely to be for future scrutiny.

Since the Parliamentary COVID-19 ARIs, two Policy Fellowships have been funded by the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) project, focused on working with Select Committees to create ARIs, disseminate and analyse responses to these. These have been published by the International Development Committee, the International Trade Committee (both House of Commons) and the Adult Social Care Committee (House of Lords). These ARIs ran as surveys which have since closed. The Women and Equalities Committee and Home Affairs Committee published a joint ARI on 'Violence against women and girls' to support their ongoing scrutiny in this area, which remains open into 2023. Researchers can use these ARIs to: add information about their research and contact details to the repository of research; add future research plans to the repository; suggest scrutiny questions and reference ARIs in funding or grant applications as evidence of parliamentary interest in a particular research topic.

The Welsh Senedd has also launched four Areas of Research Interest in September 2022: one on Health Literacy (from the Health and Social Care Committee) as well as ARIs on Behaviour change in response to the climate emergency; Modal shift and active travel and Sustainable communities (these from the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee)

Evaluating Areas of Research Interest, and Development Possibilities

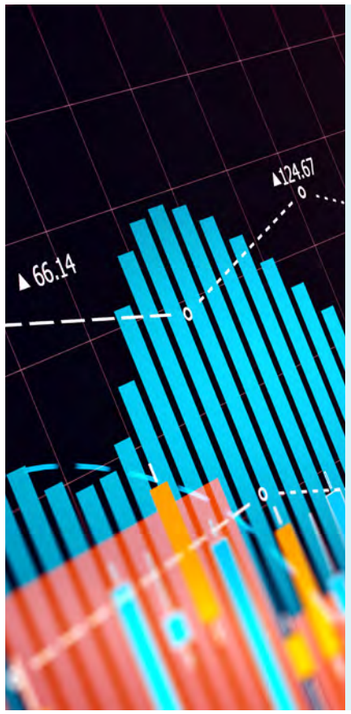
ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

There are three pieces listed on the front page for the Government department ARIs. They were produced by the ARI Fellows during the Covid-19 crisis in the UK and relate to work carried out involving policy makers and academics reviewing ARIs relevant to many aspects of the Covid crisis, synthesizing evidence and identifying gaps in knowledge.

REBUILDING A RESILIENT BRITAIN SUMMARY REPORT, GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE, 2021

This report summarises the way in which working groups identified research and evidence gaps against Departmental Areas of Research Interest. The aim of this exercise was to 'prompt further collaboration' between government, academia and funders. The report notes that initial impacts are already being felt, especially in regard to relationship building across government and between government actors and researchers in a diverse way. This type of work around ARIs is also reported to create opportunities for both early career researchers and established researchers, with more avenues opening up for policy engagement, leading to further opportunities in investment, influence, expansion of knowledge bases and knowledge exchange.

Nine working groups considered expertise, resources and research gaps pertaining to relevant departmental ARIs. They did this through 'identifying a diverse range of existing or ongoing research', 'synthesiz[ing] evidence [to be] quickly brought to bear on the issues facing departments', and 'identify[ing] research gaps in need of future investment'. These resources are summarised in the appendices and the reports of each working group are published on the UPEN site.



REBUILDING A RESILIENT BRITAIN: EVIDENCE GAPS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES, GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE, 2021

This document reports from the Rebuilding a Resilient Britain working groups, asking them to recommend possible next steps based on unanswered ARIs, including proposed research projects and programmes. The document is organised in three sections:

Research Themes and Projects: Discussion within each working group identified knowledge gaps and ideas for potential future research projects, both responding to the ARIs and moving beyond them.

Knowledge Exchange opportunities: In this section areas are summarised where working groups identified a mature evidence base relevant to the ARIs, implying an opportunity for further dissemination and implementation projects to ensure that evidence is reaching decision-makers rather than new research.

Cross-departmental dialogue opportunities: Finally, groups indicated areas where there is limited evidence, but a strong policy pull which could be of interest to many departments. Here, opportunities are identified for cross-government discussion and working.

REBUILDING A RESILIENT BRITAIN: DATA AND EVALUATION AREAS OF RESEARCH INTEREST ACROSS GOVERNMENT, GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE 2021

This paper provides insight on how cross-cutting themes (of data sharing, linkages, ethics, and evaluation and replication) were identified by the researchers and officials involved in the Rebuilding a Resilient Britain programme.

A list of existing ARIs related to data and evaluation is provided. The Rebuilding a Resilient Britain Working Groups also present evidence gaps relevant to data and evaluation, alongside key messages around building better data and evaluation processes and systems

Data- and evaluation-relevant ARIs for which working groups found no evidence are listed, together with examples of new research gaps pertaining to data and evaluation and specific research activities which could be used to address the gaps.

Across the Rebuilding a Resilient Britain work, three cross-cutting themes around data and evaluation were identified, grouped under the following headings:

- Better data sharing through open platforms and integrated systems
- Ethical use of big data and emerging technologies (AI, Internet of Things, etc.)
- A stronger focus on evaluation and replication studies of policy interventions

Recommendations are made in each of these areas.

Academic and Research Funder Engagement

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and its nine councils have put funding and initiatives in place to support academic-policy engagement, including engagement with the ARIs. Publication of ARIs has enabled a number of strategic conversations between research funders and government departments about priority areas for research (Oliver et al 2022).

Many universities have responded by organising knowledge exchange activities regarding ARIs. It has been observed that multiple universities responding to departmental ARIs 'has the potential to create competition, duplication and wasted resource on all sides' (Oliver et al 2022). There may be an opportunity for UPEN to help universities work together effectively on engaging with ARIs, for the benefit of their researchers and the departments and organisations publishing ARIs.

UPEN's report on the governmental ARIs summarised support from knowledge brokers and academics for the increased level of transparency represented by ARIs, reporting that they have helped foster more and better networks and connections, and thus stronger research and policy relationships, improving the relationship between government departments and the academic community. UPEN recommends that it has a role to play in 'helping government interact with....the academic base', help 'translate government needs', help share case studies on effective ARI engagement, and help shape future ARIs, in particular on cross cutting themes. UPEN reports a good level of engagement from a variety of institutions with different ARIs. The Institute for Government also published a report in which the first ARIs are described as a 'positive step' but of 'mixed quality' with the analysis that the higher quality ARIs tended to be overseen by CSAs or Directors (Institute for Government 2018).

Government departments have not been required to report overall on the level of academic engagement with the ARIs. Some departments 'had resources dedicated to engagement around the ARIs' while others did not (Oliver et al 2022). The 'Rebuilding a Resilient Britain' work featured above did include summaries of how academic research was drawn upon in identifying both existing research and needs for future research relevant to ARIs.

If academics have engaged with the ARIs in some way, for instance by contacting a relevant government department to make them aware of existing research, or if an academic has used an ARI to shape a research project, then researchers and knowledge exchange practitioners are best placed currently to record outputs and impacts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There has been a great deal of work by Government departments, Parliamentary select committees and other organisations on Areas of Research Interest in recent years. The volume and pace of work on Covid-related ARIs was significant. Since 2017, ARIs have given research funders and researchers new possibilities to engage with the evidence needs of the bodies publishing ARIs. There are academic researchers who have proactively engaged with ARIs and who have found them useful as an articulation of research needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Areas of Research Interest emerged from a review of Research Councils, so at their outset they were proposed as information that could be drawn upon by research funders and by academics when shaping research proposals, to take account of policy needs. There could be further investigation of ARI impacts on research funders. There is also scope to investigate with academic researchers the extent to which they are aware of ARIs, and if they have responded to them in any way. The scale and impact of policy - academic connections made through ARIs is unknown.
- The strategic use of ARIs is still developing. It should be further investigated whether there are opportunities to coordinate academic responses to ARIs, who might organise these and what form this would take.
- Although Government departments have in some cases refreshed their ARIs, there is only some limited information in refreshed ARIs about academic engagement with previous versions. UPEN would urge further reporting from Government, Parliamentary committees and other bodies behind ARIs with details of how publishing ARIs has contributed to meeting their research and evidence needs.

Appendix: Summary of Methods of Contact

General Contact: ARI.Comment@goscience.gov.uk

Department	Email/Webform Link
DEFRA	evidence.forum@defra.gsi.gov.uk research.interests@defra.gov.uk
DHSC	No contact listed
MoD	Feedback: dst-strategysecretariat@mod.uk Research Proposals: accelerator@dstl.gov.uk
DfE	Ari.reply@education.gov.uk
DCMS	csa@culture.gov.uk
DLUHC	LesleySmith@levellingup.gov.uk (Analysis Research and Coordination Unit)
CO	co_aris@cabinetoffice.gov.uk
DWP	evidence.strategyteam@dwp.gov.uk (Chief Scientific Advisers Office)
DfT	bridgetoresearch@dft.gov.uk
Home Office	research@homeoffice.gov.uk
DiT	research@trade.gov.uk
FCDO	fcdocorrespondance@fcdo.gov.uk (research enquiries)
BEIS	enquiries@beis.gov.uk Research_RAF@beis.gov.uk
MoJ	researchsupport@justice.gov.uk

References

Government Office for Science (2021)
Rebuilding a Resilient Britain: Summary of the work of the ARI Working Groups

Government Office for Science (2021)
Rebuilding a Resilient Britain: Evidence Gaps and Knowledge Exchange Opportunities

Government Office for Science (2021)
Rebuilding a Resilient Britain: Data and evaluation areas of research interest across government

Government Office for Science (2019)
Realising our ambition through science: A review of Government Science Capability

Government Office for Science (2022)
Writing and Using Areas of Research Interest

Institute for Government (2018)
How Government can work with Academia

Nurse, P. (2015)
Ensuring a successful research endeavour: A review of the UK Research Councils

Oliver, Boaz and Cuccato (2022)
Areas of Research Interest: Joining the dots between government and research at last?
F1000 Research

UPEN (n.d.)
Engaging with UK Government Areas of Research Interest: Learning and Insights from UPEN

WITH SPECIAL THANKS OF CONTRIBUTION TO

Lauren Martin, UPEN Membership Officer

Liana Poutney, Public Engagement and Digital Communications Officer, Public Policy | Southampton

Dr Chandni Maria Jacob, Specialist Policy Officer (Environment and Life Sciences)
Public Policy | Southampton

Gareth Giles, Head of Public Policy Southampton, Co-Chair of UPEN ARI Sub-Committee, UPEN Vice-Chair

ARI Sub-Committee, UPEN

Rob Davies, Head of Policy and Dialogue, CLOSER/UCL Social Research Institute

Professor Kathryn Oliver, Professor of Sociology and Public Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and ARI Fellow, Government Office for Science

WITH CREDIT TO

ARI Sub-Committee Chairs and contacts

Gareth Giles, University of Southampton

Lenny Rolles, University of Sussex

Design & Print Centre, University of Southampton

Public Policy|Southampton