

## PSA 2025 Annual Conference

### Roundtable Proposal

(supported by the Local Politics and Governance Specialist Group)

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#### **Fixes for government? Assessing the role of the academy in shaping policy through the case of English subnational governance**

Recasting the institutions and policy framework of English subnational governance, including devolution of central powers to ‘metro mayors’ and combined authorities, has generated a vast quantity of policy prescription from academia in the early 2020s. In the current context, the new Labour government has emphasised the need to strengthen subnational powers and capacity across policy areas within its agenda – suggesting that there’s a space for inputs from research. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence that academic work has influenced government thinking in this area, before or after the 2024 general election.

Academics are incentivised to pursue critical, conceptual research, which, however, can lead to policy-unfriendly outcomes. Engagement with policy-makers may require producing more practical recommendations, based on scholars’ research outputs and accumulated knowledge, but cognisant of the political and administrative obstacles that policy-makers face. Conversely, policy-makers may struggle – due to endogenous or exogenous constraints – to engage openly with researchers, or may perceive that scholarly work cannot provide accessible lessons for the policy dilemmas they face. This has important practical implications: it might lead to a ‘waste of academic knowledge’, while also contributing to lack of imagination amongst policy makers.

The aim of this roundtable is to assess this puzzle, exploring what academics could do to optimise how subnational governance research ‘lands’ amongst policy-makers, considering both the demand and supply sides of this relationship. Drawing on insights from a panel of experts, we will discuss:

- policy-makers’ (limited) academic contacts, perceptions regarding academics’ capacities, and perceived risks of open engagement;
- civil service understanding of the (actual and potential) role of local authorities, located amongst historical narratives and national policy priorities – and how this influences how policy recommendations in this space land within central government;
- politicians’ priorities arising from the pressures of government, the need for visible outcomes, the influence of stakeholder / media management concerns;

- Academics facing career demands inimical to *actual* policy impact;
- Tensions between conceptual work – often critical of policy – and the capacity to provide micro-level solutions to policy conundrums at speed and cognisant of political pressures and practical hurdles implicit in the ‘governing machinery’.

**Roundtable speakers:**

- Dr Louise Reardon, Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), University of Birmingham [l.h.reardon@bham.ac.uk](mailto:l.h.reardon@bham.ac.uk)
- Professor Patrick Diamond, School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London [p.diamond@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:p.diamond@qmul.ac.uk)
- Professor Rebecca Riley, City-REDI and Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub, University of Birmingham [r.l.riley@bham.ac.uk](mailto:r.l.riley@bham.ac.uk)
- Professor Peter Murphy, Centre for Economics, Policy and Public Management at Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University [peter.murphy@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:peter.murphy@ntu.ac.uk)