PolicyWISE

Annual Impact Report 2025-26

November 2026

The Open University

PolicyWISE

A year of connection and influence

In a year shaped by elections, political change, and wider geopolitical turbulence, PolicyWISE continued to make the case for comparative research and cross-nation working.

We convened policymakers, translated evidence into practical insight, strengthened skills, and created spaces where policymakers and researchers could learn from one another across the UK and Ireland.

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this report and to recognise the continued progress of PolicyWISE as an important initiative within The Open University. Its work reflects the University's distinctive ability to connect people, ideas and evidence across the UK and Ireland, supporting better understanding of shared policy challenges and creating practical opportunities for learning between nations.

This year's report demonstrates the strength of that contribution. PolicyWISE has delivered timely and high-quality outputs, developed valued partnerships, and built capability in comparative policy research and knowledge exchange. As the initiative moves into its next phase, there is a significant opportunity to deepen this impact: extending its reach, strengthening strategic collaborations, and further establishing PolicyWISE as a leading source of cross-nation policy insight and expertise.

The Open University's UK-wide reach is one of our greatest strengths, and PolicyWISE shows how that reach can be used to shape debate, inform decision-making and support positive change at local and national levels. I look forward to seeing PolicyWISE continue to grow its influence and build on the strong track record of success set out in these pages.



Professor David Phoenix
Vice Chancellor

Overview

Our work is ultimately about turning cross-nation learning and working into better policymaking.

Over the last year we have achieved this through original research, comparative analysis, training, briefing sessions, and our communications work. And we do this right across our nations, policy and research communities, parliaments, and beyond.

This report captures some of the activity, projects and impact that have contributed to that ambition over the past twelve months, reflecting the breadth of our work across the UK and Ireland.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of Dangoor Education, and we look ahead with confidence to the next period, particularly the new focus on comparative mental health policy.



Dewi Knight
Director

Our purpose is simple: to advance better policymaking through cross-nation research, collaboration and knowledge exchange.

RESEARCH, ENGAGEMENT, AND POLICY IMPACT

Turning comparative evidence into practical value

Trust sits at the heart of our work. Over the past year, senior officials, parliamentary bodies, researchers and partners have drawn on PolicyWISE to explore shared challenges, compare approaches and strengthen policy practice.



The end of series report from our cross-nation roundtables

Five jurisdictions working together

We continued to convene the five-jurisdiction forum on ending violence against women and girls, bringing officials together to develop shared priorities, a joint ministerial statement and a longer-term research proposal.

Cross-nation learning is also becoming more visible in government strategy. The UK Government's **Freedom from Violence and Abuse** strategy recognised learning from the devolved governments and committed to sharing practice across administrations. This represents an important cultural change in cross-nation working. Ministers also highlighted the value of the five-jurisdiction

Evidence that informs policy

Our comparative **Active Travel report**, produced with Cardiff University colleagues, mapped data and indicators across administrations to help officials strengthen analysis. We also delivered briefings on public attitudes, devolution and intergovernmental relations for civil servants across several governments, including the UK Cabinet Office and the UK Government Department of Health and Social Care. This included sessions which presented our **pre-election polling** on comparative policy issues in Wales and Scotland, and sessions on our recommendations for intergovernmental relations (IGR) policy and practice.

We were commissioned to provide proposals on devolution, policy learning and the future of intergovernmental relations which aimed to support the new Prime Minister's policy priorities. We've already seen some of this work (alongside that of others) reflected in the Prime Minister's commitment to collaboration and cross-jurisdictional working, and we **continue to engage** on these matters.

PolicyWISE research on shared policy interests and better intergovernmental working informed planning across the UK's administrations. Our Director gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, with PolicyWISE evidence cited in its **inquiry** and **legacy** report. Our work was also cited extensively in the Senedd Research handbook for parliamentarians, **What next? Key issues for the Seventh Senedd.**



Colleagues from the five governments at the Ending VAWG workshop in Liverpool

Building the next generation of resources

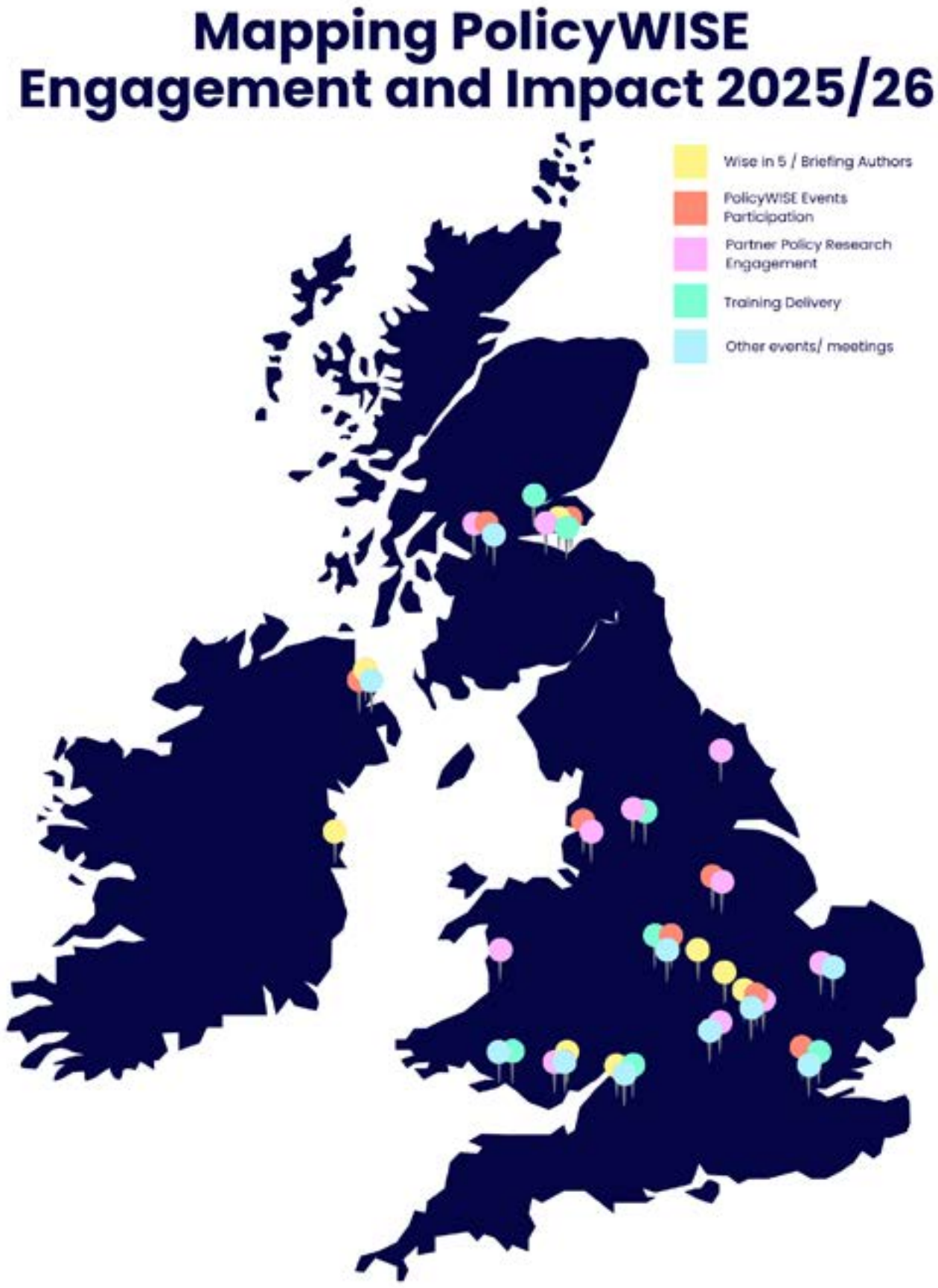
Alongside the Institute for Government, we are developing a "rapid policymaking" resource that brings a comparative and cross-nation perspective to the pressures facing civil servants. Policymaking is now a rapid response discipline, and we are committed to making the case for comparative analysis, collaborative governance, and cross-administration learning.

As a partner in the **UK in the World and European Values Surveys**, we have been working with the project leads at King's College, London to shape the surveys for cross-nation sensitvities and impact and will work with them and the four governments to use the evidence for policy development once the results are available in 2026/27.

We have secured a £10,000 Knowledge Transfer Voucher (KTV) award to deliver an analytical and knowledge exchange programme on enterprise education in partnership with Ultra Education.

Throughout the year, we also developed research proposals on AI in education, school leadership, violence prevention and enterprise education, building new partnerships and a stronger platform for future collaboration.




Mapping PolicyWISE Engagement and Impact 2025/26
Wise in 5 / Briefing Authors
PolicyWISE Events Participation
Partner Policy Research Engagement
Training Delivery
Other events/ meetings

SKILLS, CAPACITY, AND A STRONGER PUBLIC VOICE

Building confidence to work across boundaries and borders

Comparative policymaking depends on people having the skills, confidence and networks to work across institutional and national boundaries. Training and knowledge exchange therefore remain central to our model, while also generating income and opening the door to new research partnerships.

Developing people and practice

PolicyWISE is a lead partner in the successful Open University bid to host the national UK hub for social science training and development, part of an ESRC contract worth more than £5 million to the University over five years.

Our first OpenLearn Create course, Understanding and Engaging with Governments and Parliaments of the UK, will launch in autumn 2026, with institutional interest already secured.

Over 200 civil servants, from across the UK, attended our session during Devolution Learning Week – the learning and development programme hosted by the UK Cabinet Office.

Our partnership with UKRI's Future Leaders Fellowships Development Network expanded through policy masterclasses, strategic input and an online toolkit.

Training for clients including Carnegie UK, Smart Thinking, Research Council doctoral programmes and UPEN reached new audiences and strengthened our network.

Within The Open University, we established a PolicyWISE Community of Practice for researchers interested in comparative policy. We also hosted eight short-term and two longer-term placements, giving early-career researchers practical experience of briefings, events, training, literature reviews and our WISE in 5 series.



Dewi and Heywood Fellowship colleagues



Catherine delivering a training session for Carnegie UK in Edinburgh

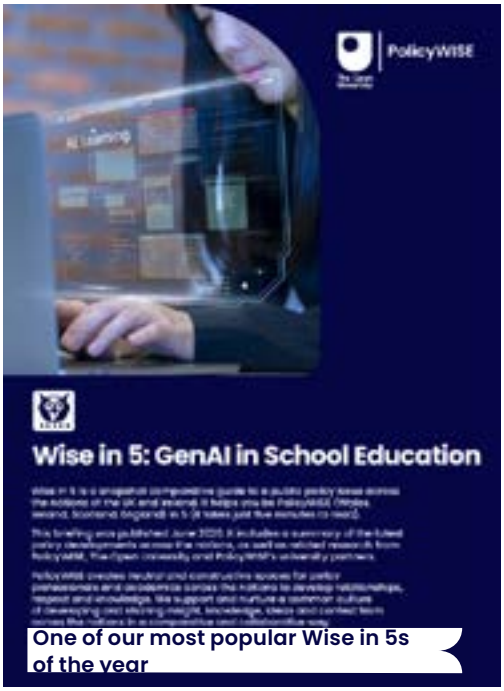
Making comparative insight visible

We continued to build a distinctive public voice across policy publications, parliamentary research services, broadcast media and our own channels. Civil Service World has published two pieces by Catherine May in their quarterly magazine on why the UK nations still struggle to learn from one another. The Round Table published Dewi Knight's **research article** on lessons for the UK from collaborative governance in Canada and Australia.

PolicyWISE expertise was also sought across broadcast and specialist media, including BBC News and Times Higher Education, on issues ranging from intergovernmental relations and higher education to young people's mental health.

Our work also appeared in **The Political Quarterly**, **Enlighten** and the **Institute of Welsh Affairs**, while the Scottish Parliament's **research service** and **Senedd Cymru** research services commissioned articles for audiences directly involved in scrutiny and law-making. PolicyWISE polling on intergovernmental relations reached wider audiences through **WalesOnline** and in the **Will Hayward** newsletter.

WISE in 5 remains a cornerstone of our knowledge exchange, offering concise briefings on issues including AI literacy, language education, housing and voting rights. The Bridge newsletter and Comparative Angle blog help keep comparative perspectives visible and accessible.



One of our most popular Wise in 5s of the year

37 Comparative Angle editions

70k+ LinkedIn impressions

445 blog subscribers

ADVOCACY, PARTNERSHIP, AND THE NEXT PHASE

Creating spaces for better policy conversations

External events give PolicyWISE the opportunity to test ideas, build relationships and make the case for policymaking that learns from evidence and experience across the UK and Ireland. During 2025–26, we contributed to conferences, parliamentary events, specialist workshops and public discussions across a wide range of policy issues.

Cross-nation events and engagements

At UK PolicyLive in London, we brought together colleagues from The Bennett School of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge and the Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford to explore collaborative governance and the importance of long-term thinking.

At the Scottish Parliament's 2026 **Festival of Politics**, Dewi Knight joined a panel on trust in public institutions. Dewi also presented PolicyWISE research at the UK Association for Public Administration conference, chaired a session on devolution and data at the Operational Research Society annual conference and spoke to the UK's Vice Chancellors on the topic of 'Britain in the 2030s' at Universities UK's annual conference.

We brought our cross-nation perspective to discussions at the Centre on Constitutional Change, sharing recommendations for stronger collaborative governance and insights from public polling on intergovernmental relations.


Dewi speaking at the UUK Conference

Catherine May represented PolicyWISE at the Celtic Academies Alliance, showing how researchers can move from being simply "devo-aware" to being genuinely "devo-able".

Our partnership with Enlighten also created a new series of comparative webinars around the 2026 elections, opening up conversations across different political and policy contexts. We plan to continue the series, including a potential event focused on Northern Ireland ahead of the 2027 Assembly election.

Our Westminster roundtable brought together senior representatives from government, diplomacy, academia, think tanks and regional government to consider cross-nation working beyond the May elections. Its findings informed our **Strength to Co-operate** report and subsequent engagement with senior officials across all administrations.


Our Westminster roundtable on cross-nation working

Looking Forward: 2027 and beyond

The next phase will move PolicyWISE from demonstrating the value of its model to deepening and extending its impact. We will continue to focus on comparative research, cross-nation learning and knowledge exchange, strengthening established work on violence against women and girls, intergovernmental relations and improved policymaking while responding to emerging priorities. By 2029, comparative research and cross-nation learning should be an increasingly established part of policymaking practice, with the aim of understanding where approaches differ, why, what works and what can be learned.

We will expand WISE in 5, develop the PolicyWISE Evidence Hub and comparative policy toolkit, strengthen policy clusters and roundtables, and grow our events, webinars and partnerships. Mental health and wellbeing will become an important area of development, including possible comparative research on poverty, mental health and educational attainment, a dedicated WISE in 5 series and exploration of a cross-nation Mental Health Policy Cluster.

Partnerships will remain central. We will deepen relationships across governments, parliaments, universities and the wider policy community, while creating more opportunities for researchers and policymakers to use comparative evidence with confidence.

PolicyWISE is an initiative of The Open University. Our work is made possible with the generous support of Dangoor Education.

PolicyWISE

The Open University

The Open University has been awarded over £2 million in funding from Dangoor Education to establish and run PolicyWISE. The funding has supported the launch of PolicyWISE in 2023 and our development since then, including a new round of funding in 2026.

DANGOOR EDUCATION