



PolicyWISE

Report 2024–2025

August 2025



PolicyWISE



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Foreword

This year, PolicyWISE has strengthened its unique role as a cross-nation policy research and knowledge exchange initiative. Thanks to the generous support of Dangoor Education, we've expanded our reach, deepened our impact, and continued building the foundations for a more connected, evidence-informed policymaking landscape across the UK and Ireland.

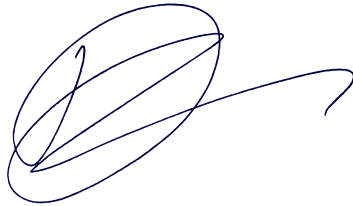
We are guided by **two clear strategic goals**:

- Our **delivery goal** is to ensure that **comparative research and analysis is recognised as improving public policymaking** across the UK and Ireland.
- Our **growth goal** is for **PolicyWISE, in partnership with The Open University, to be recognised as the UK's Centre of Expertise** for comparative policy research, analysis, and knowledge exchange.

Together, these goals reflect our ambition to not only support better policy today — but to shape how it is developed, understood, and shared for years to come.

Thanks to the tremendous efforts of the PolicyWISE team over the last 12 months, we are informing and improving policymaking through our unique cross-nation policy cluster model, direct training of civil servants, and comparative research projects. We are increasingly recognised as the experts for cross-nation and comparative policy work through successful research funding applications, knowledge exchange and training commissions, and strategic partnerships with leading academic and policy institutions.

We have built the foundations to grow and deliver over the coming period, where the need for comparative and cross-nation policy learning and analysis will be even greater.



Dewi Knight
Director



I'm really pleased to support the work of PolicyWISE as a key initiative within The Open University.

Having already delivered **high-impact outputs, forged strategic partnerships, and built capacity** across the UK and Ireland; the next phase will focus on delivering timely, high-quality insights, expanding strategic partnerships, and becoming the leading voice in cross-nation policy research collaboration with the aim to be internationally recognised as the gold standard for comparative policy expertise.

The Open University must continue to **draw strength from our UK-wide reach and impact, shaping local and national agendas**, and I hope to see PolicyWISE continue to build its track record of success in doing just that.

A stylized blue ink signature of Professor David Phoenix.

Professor David Phoenix
Vice-Chancellor



PolicyWISE Achievements 2024–2025

Throughout 2024–25, PolicyWISE has delivered high-impact, insight-led activity across all four UK nations and Ireland – connecting research, policy, and practice.

Our trusted partnerships, inclusive learning approach, and accessible outputs continue to support better-informed, more collaborative policymaking, whilst building the research community's comparative policy research capacity and capability.

We hope that the highlights below demonstrate the impact made by the PolicyWISE team this year, which we are pleased to share have gone far beyond what we originally set out to achieve.



This government will facilitate closer collaboration and sharing of best practice, reflecting many of the key points from your (PolicyWISE) recent findings on inter-governmental relations.

Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP

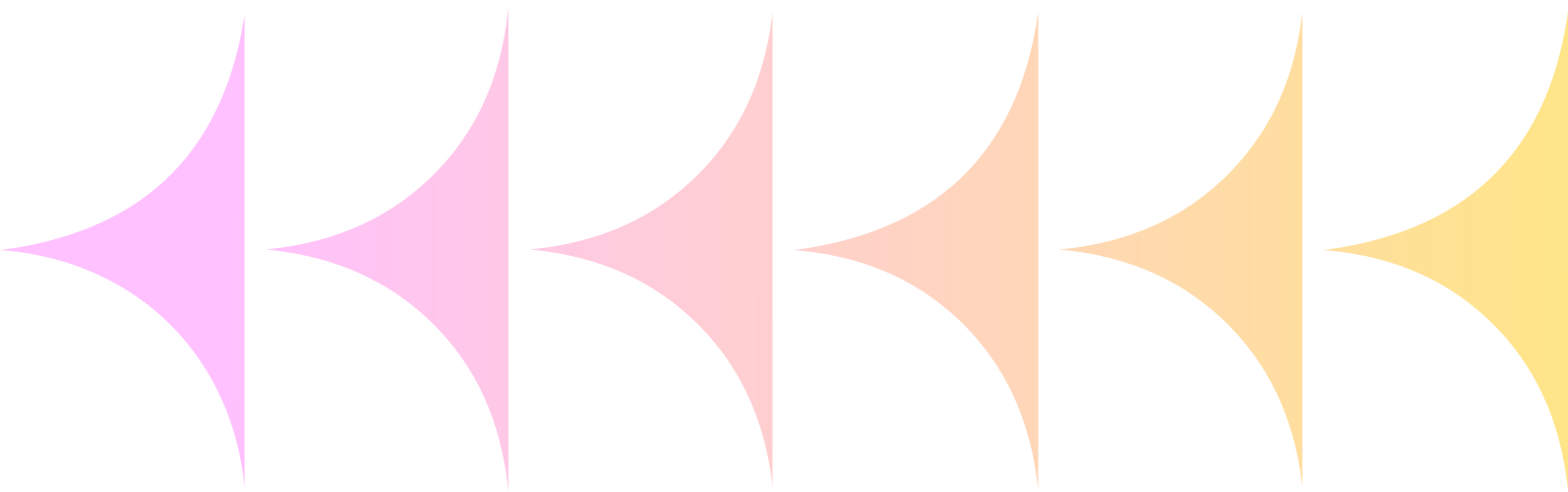
Former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster & Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, UK Government



It's been great to see PolicyWISE's evolution and growth over the last year. It continues to prioritise research and analysis which addresses the structural and practical barriers to cross-government policy learning and knowledge.

The work on intergovernmental relations and the Council of the Nations and Regions in particular offered not only an assessment of the existing challenges but sought to help our governments work better together on issues of shared interest.

Senior Civil Servant, Scotland

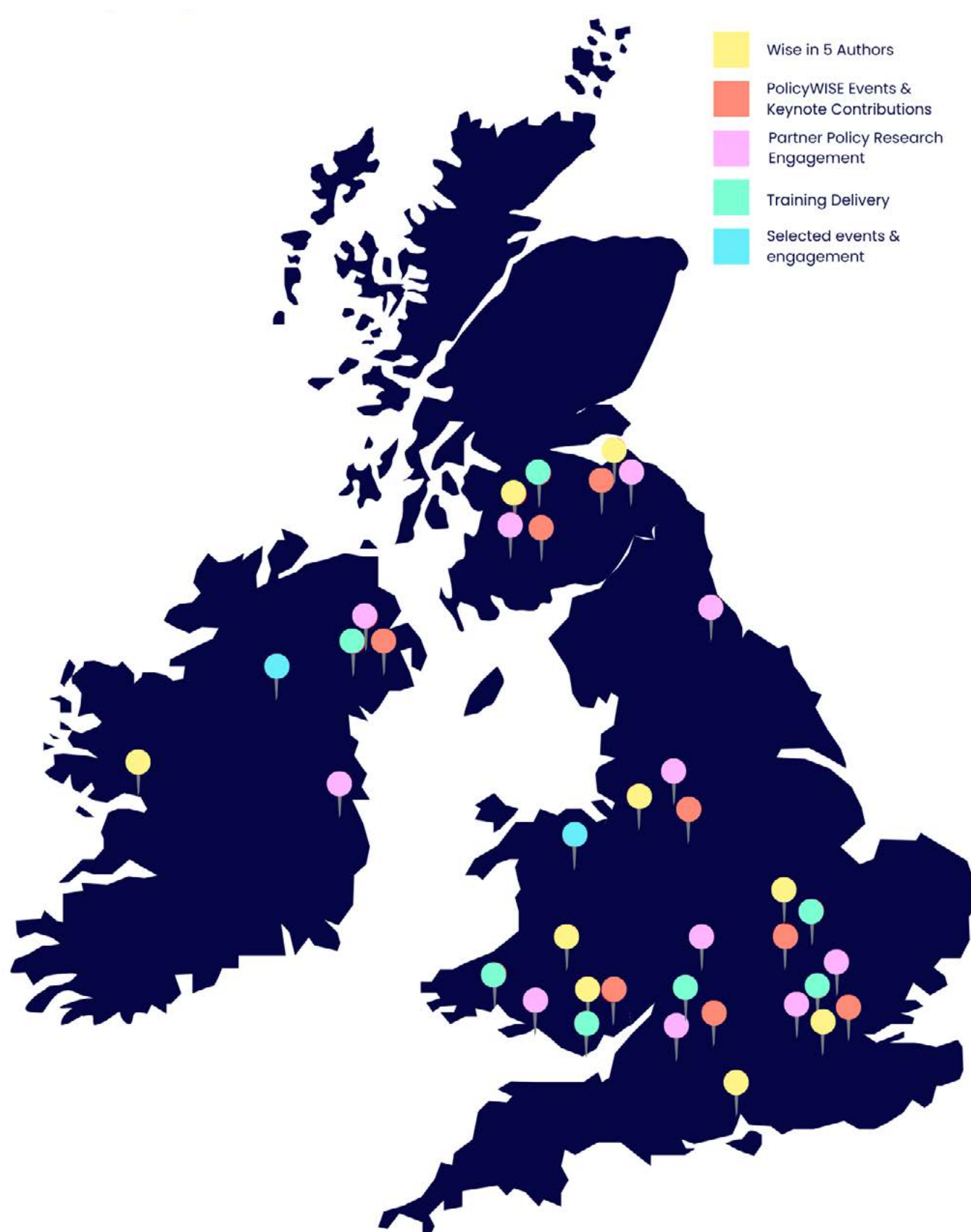


At a Glance

- **10 'Wise in 5' briefings published** (or updated and republished), mapping government policy and practice across topics including language education for refugees and migrants, housing decarbonisation, and voting age. Briefings have been referenced in national blogs, our work mentioned in news [articles](#) and hosted on global platforms like UNESCO.
- **678 participants trained** across 22 PolicyWISE sessions – from PhD students to senior civil servants – building skills in evidence use and policy engagement and strengthening the collaboration between policy and research.
- **Generated tens of thousands of pounds in income** in 2024/25, through a mix of sponsorship, commissioned training, and advisory services.
- **Strategic partnerships** established with UKRI's [Future Leaders Fellows Development Network](#), the [Heywood Fellowship \(University of Oxford & UK Cabinet Office\)](#), and the [Bennett Institute for Public Policy](#). The research is influencing operational reviews and governments' consideration of the Council of Nations and Regions (and inter-governmental structures more broadly).
- **Cross-nation comparative analysis on Active Travel** delivered in collaboration with Cardiff University – the *Cross-Nation Active Travel Report* (August 2025) adds unique four-nations insight and will be disseminated in autumn 2025 and is a direct output of our unique cross-nation policy cluster programme.
- **Expanded thematic reach** into priority areas such as decarbonisation, AI, and democratic engagement – anticipating and aligning with current policy challenges and broadening relevance.
- **Landmark report on intergovernmental relations**, *A More Collaborative Way of Governing? Why the UK's Council of the Nations and Regions Matters* – co-authored by Dr Alex Walker, Prof Michael Kenny, and Dewi Knight. Produced jointly by PolicyWISE and the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, it offers the first major examination of the UK Government's flagship intergovernmental initiative and is directly influencing government practice and planning.
- **Successful major research bids:**
 1. [RAI UK Responsible AI](#) (OU led), supporting public understanding and ethical use of AI in the legal sector.
 2. [ESRC Research Capability hub](#) (Oct 2025), a transformative five-year initiative to scale and personalise research skills development across the UK, as the national hub for social science skills training and capacity building.
- **Featured contributor to key national platforms:**
 1. Published on [UNESCO's](#) official website via a WISE in 5 by an OU PhD student.
 2. Listed in the [CAPE report](#) as a core resource for knowledge mobilisers.
 3. Referenced in *Informed Scotland* for contributions to learning and skills.
 4. [Times Higher Education](#) on cross-nation policy and politics.
 5. BBC News & Online on issues such as [misogyny in schools](#) and higher education funding.
- **High-level engagement with UK governance structures**, including delivering sessions to both UK Parliament and Senedd Cymru clerks/researchers and delivery of [Devolution Learning Week](#) (UK-wide civil service) sessions.
- **Thought leadership amplified through events and media**, including keynote and panel contributions across the UK and an article in *The Conversation* on multilingual integration.
- **Recognition and credibility:** Shortlisted for the 'Outstanding Knowledge Exchange' category at the OU's Research Excellence Awards 2024 – a testament to the strategic value of our approach.
- **Consistent external engagement:** Publication of a monthly PolicyWISE newsletter '[The Bridge](#)', providing a regular platform to showcase not only our work, but also to elevate OU researchers and wider insights from across the policy–research landscape.

Key Milestones and Activities

Mapping PolicyWISE Engagement and Impact 2024/25



2024/25 in numbers

2

Cross-Nation
Policy Clusters

10

Wise in 5s
published

468

External training
participants

210

OU
researchers
& staff
trained

5

Double-badged
OSCs

£5.5m

ESRC funding
to OU for few
national Research
Capability Hub
(PolicyWISE a
project co-lead)

1

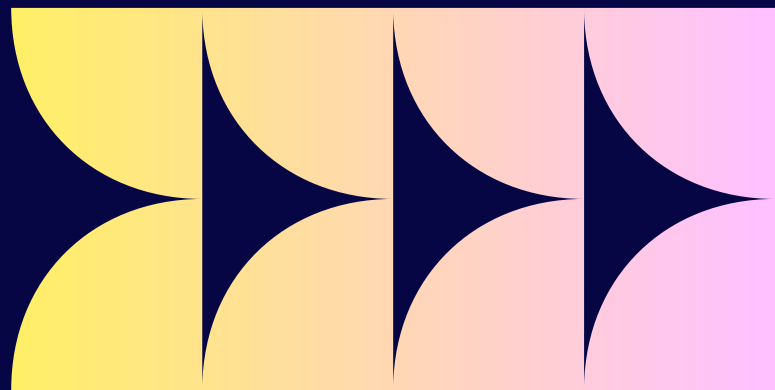
UKRI Research-
Policy Toolkit
authored


6

Direct briefing
sessions for
government
officials across
UK on new IGR
research

90

High-level
attendees at
policy learning
roundtables
across four
nations





PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: Period Poverty

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

This briefing was published September 2023. It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

PolicyWISE creates neutral and constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge. We support and nurture a common culture of developing and sharing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.



PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: Language Education for Refugees and Migrants in the UK and Ireland

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

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Bennett Institute for Public Policy
Cambridge

PolicyWISE
The Open University

A More Collaborative Way of Governing?
Why the UK's Council of the Nations and Regions Matters

Executive Summary Report
Alex Walker, Michael Kenny and Dewi Knight



PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: Geodiversity and Geodiversity Charters

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

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PolicyWISE
The Open University

Cross-nation Policy Learning and Research Series: England Roundtable Full Report



PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: Tourist tax

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PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: AI Literacy

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PolicyWISE
The Open University

Wise in 5: Voting Age

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

This briefing was published in April 2025. It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

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PolicyWISE
The Open University

Cross-nation Policy Learning and Research Series: Northern Ireland Roundtable Full Report

Comparative Knowledge Sharing

'Wise in 5' Series



 PolicyWISE

 **Wise in 5: Housing First**

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

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 PolicyWISE

 **Wise in 5: Palliative and end of life care**

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

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Over the last 12 months, the team have delivered concise, accessible briefings on policy priorities including Housing First, Palliative Care, ESOL for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Geodiversity, and Voting Age Reform. These briefings have been actively shared across UK governments and parliaments, with an endorsement from Senedd Cymru. This programme is led by Catherine May, Senior Manager for External Affairs and Communications.

The format is gaining strong traction within the academic community, with a growing number of Open University researchers (and from other institutions) engaging with the series. Reflecting this impact, Professor Erica Borgstrom, Professor of Medical Anthropology, The Open University, commented:



Working with PolicyWISE on understanding the palliative and end of life care policy landscape across the four nations has been crucial in enabling our research group to contribute to policy consultations and inform debates in adjacent fields, like assisted dying legislation. This collaboration has enabled the OU to be recognised as a stronger voice in this field, leveraging our research expertise to a greater effect than what we've managed to do before.



In recognition of the value and reach of this workstream, PolicyWISE now receives payment for writing and promoting Wise in 5 briefings, supporting the sustainability of this model. A dedicated author handbook has been developed to encourage wider academic participation and maintain quality and consistency across the series.

Roundtables & Reports

The team have completed a series of comparative four-nation roundtables, two were carried out last year and two this year, with final reporting and dissemination scheduled for autumn 2025. These events, led by Catherine May, Senior Manager for External Affairs and Communications, continue to foster trust, deepen intergovernmental understanding, and shape the content and tone of our upcoming comparative outputs.

A standout event was the Belfast Roundtable, which was cited by participants as a model for progressing complex, sensitive policy issues. Key themes included:

- The relevance of Northern Ireland's context – particularly the legacy of the Troubles – for future policy design
- The value of civil service devolution literacy across the UK
- Lessons for regional governance in England based on devolved experience elsewhere.



An excellent example of progressing difficult policy conversations.

Belfast roundtable Attendee



PolicyWISE reports



Strategic Projects and Partnerships

PolicyWISE's strategic projects are led by Dewi Knight, Director, and focus on building policy capability through research, improving governance understanding, and increasing the practical impact of research across the UK and Ireland. These high-profile partnerships demonstrate PolicyWISE's unique value in connecting academic research with real-world policymaking. Examples of these partnerships include:

UKRI Future Leaders Fellows Development Network:

PolicyWISE was commissioned to design and deliver UK-wide training and the policy engagement toolkit for this programme. The network supports the development of “*world class research & innovation leaders in academia and business.*” The policy toolkit is one of the essential resources that all fellows are expected to access as a condition of their funding. There are 597 current Future Leaders Fellows. The team's work is enhancing the policy literacy, comparative research capability and impact readiness of the next generation of research leaders.

Collaboration with the Bennett Institute for Public Policy (Cambridge University):

This collaboration produced joint research into the evolving role of intergovernmental structures under the new UK government. This includes private briefings with the UK Cabinet Office and senior officials from the governments in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The work has already been cited in other significant research, ‘The State of Intergovernmental Relations in England’ and this year's Bingham Lecture at Balliol College, University of Oxford. The research is influencing operational reviews and governments' consideration of the Council of Nations and Regions (and inter-governmental structures more broadly).

Heywood Fellowship (Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford):

The 2024–25 Heywood Fellowship sets out to examine how governments come to a national view of what really matters over longer time horizons, and how the mechanisms and capabilities of the state can be marshalled in the ‘practice’ of long-term national strategy. PolicyWISE is leading work on Place, Devolution, and Multi-level Governance as part of this project. The project will culminate in the publication of research papers and toolkits for practitioners – directly influencing government practice (the Heywood Fellow is a Senior Civil Servant).



It has been a collaborator—evidence-driven and committed to finding the right answers rather than promoting a particular agenda or point of view. We could not have partnered with any other think tank and got the same quality of outputs.

Senior Civil Servant, UK



ESRC Research Capability Hub (launching October 2025):

The Open University has won the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) contract to host this national hub in a highly competitive process. PolicyWISE is a project co-lead on this ambitious programme, which aims to enhance the research and engagement skills of social scientists through scalable, co-created, and personalised training.

On behalf of the University, PolicyWISE secured the policy partnership consortium, drawing on their trusted relationships and proven four-nations engagement model. Thanks to this unique positioning, the Hub will bring together UCL, Swansea University, Queen's University Belfast, and the University of Gothenburg, as well as key national networks including the UKRI Future Leaders Fellows Development Network, SoLAR, and the Social Partnership Networks.

Led by The Open University's Institute of Education Technology and supported by PolicyWISE's convening expertise and training delivery experience, the Hub will combine technological innovation with comparative, multi-jurisdiction engagement to deliver inclusive and impactful capacity-building across the UK and beyond.



It's been fantastic to work with PolicyWISE as a core partner in our successful bid to host the ESRC's UK-wide Research Capability Hub, worth £4.8m.

PolicyWISE brings unique expertise and experience of four-nations working, policy & partner engagement, and research capability training. This will be vital to the implementation of The OU and ESRC's new vision for skills development, across the UK, to support social scientists at all stages of their careers. Working with us at the Institute of Educational Technology and our pan-UK and international partners, PolicyWISE will help deliver this transformative initiative over the next five years, reaching thousands of social scientists.

They are a huge asset to the Hub, to the OU, and to the wider policy research development community.

Professor Bart Rientes

Director of the Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University



Responsible AI Project:

PolicyWISE supported a successful bid led by OU academics Dr Francine Ryan (Senior Lecturer in Law) and Dr Liz Hardie (Director of the Scholarship Centre for Innovation in Online Learning) to Responsible AI to improve public and professional understanding of AI in legal settings. Outputs will include:

1. Public education resources
2. Ethical integration guidance for small and medium-sized law firms
3. Open educational materials to support responsible AI use in legal education and practice

To further enhance reach and accessibility, PolicyWISE has also published a dedicated WISE in 5 briefing on Responsible AI in Legal Contexts, helping to distil insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners across the UK.

ESRC Research Leaders Network:

This Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) network was a UK-wide programme for mid and senior research leaders to develop leadership capacity and capability. PolicyWISE was commissioned as the theme lead for 'Policy Impact and Knowledge Exchange', hosting and delivering insight and training sessions. This included Dewi's popular session, "Confessions of a (former) Special Adviser", which gave research leaders an insider perspective on the realities of policy advising and decision-making.

Cross-Nation Policy Clusters

Developed by Dr Eira Jepson, PolicyWISE Research Associate, PolicyWISE convenes and supports cross-jurisdictional clusters to tackle shared policy challenges through structured collaboration. Each cluster brings together officials, researchers, and stakeholders from across nations and administrations to exchange knowledge, build trust, and shape evidence-informed policy.

This collaborative cluster model was designed and tested by PolicyWISE and is unique to this team. It provides a structured, comparative space for dialogue that supports both short-term learning and long-term positive impact.

Ending Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) Cluster:

We've been working behind the scenes to help convene and facilitate policy learning between officials from across the five jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland on this important societal challenge. We are working towards more public facing outputs soon, strengthening cross-border responses and coordination on this issue.

Active Travel Cluster:

Following consultation with officials from the different governments, an Active Travel Cluster was convened in 2024. As part of this process, participants co-developed policy research questions to help identify shared priorities and challenges. This led to a mapping exercise of the data and indicators currently used to monitor Active Travel across administrations. The subsequent report (in partnership with Cardiff University) offers detailed insight into policy and practice and will be published and widely disseminated in autumn 2025. A supporting WISE in 5 briefing has also been developed to provide a clear, accessible summary for policymakers and practitioners.



Dewi delivering the keynote address at the AHEP annual UK conference in Glasgow

Training and Capacity Building

Strengthening the skills and confidence of individuals and organisations to engage with policy – and appreciate differences and divergences across nations – is central to PolicyWISE’s mission. Over the past year, the team have delivered a diverse programme of training for external and OU audiences – from postgraduate researchers to senior civil servants – focused on navigating the complexities of policy development across the UK and Ireland.

Whether supporting academic-policy interface or deepening understanding of four-nations governance, our workshops are consistently cited as timely, practical, and impactful.

Open University Training Highlights

Training for the OU research community has directly led to Wise in 5 publications, support for policy publications, and engagement with external research bids.

During the year, 12 sessions were delivered with 210 attendees in total. Key themes included:

- Mapping the Policy Landscape
- Writing for Policymakers
- Comparative Research and Engagement Strategies

Participant feedback



A rich set of training and presentations. It’s been so helpful.



This was a highlight of the event and prompted me and indeed many others in attendance to think about how their work could fit with PolicyWISE’s activities. Future training from PolicyWISE, for both academics and PGRs, would be very welcome.



Thank you for an excellent talk. It was ‘top draw’.



External Training Highlights

Across the year, 468 external attendees received training from PolicyWISE, from senior civil servants to PhD students, with sessions delivered by PolicyWISE for UKRI, Senedd Cymru, UK Government departments and Northern Irish research professionals.

Focus areas included:

- Four Nations Structures & Devolution
- Relationship between policymaking and evidence
- The language of policy and governance – comparative analysis

Key training moments:

The following examples highlight the high-impact, collaborative training that PolicyWISE is now able to deliver, which equips participants with the expertise, confidence, and connections to navigate complex four-nations governance and address cross-UK policy challenges effectively.

Arts and Humanities Research Council

Arts and Humanities Research Council SWWDTP (South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership) which is a collaborative programme that supports postgraduate research and training.

- Training on four-nations governance and comparative research for 40 AHRC-funded PhD students, coordinated by the University of Bristol.

Senior Civil Servant Training

- 25 senior officials participated in a commissioned bespoke session (organised by the UK Cabinet Office).
- Focused on supporting senior civil service leaders to move from being 'devolution-aware' to being 'devolution-able'.
- Attendees from seven Whitehall departments, plus Scottish Government.
- Action-learning session on tackling VAWG through sharing knowledge.
- Designed to build confidence in navigating intergovernmental structures, leading teams and departments to co-operate, and policy engagement pathways.

Devolution Learning Week

- 176 attendees from across the UK civil service.
- Only time the OU has been commissioned to participate.
- PolicyWISE delivered two sessions – one on practical research-policy engagement strategies and mapping tools, and one as part of a panel examining best 'four nations' practice in external organisations (alongside senior BBC and British Council executives).

Participant Feedback



Thanks so much for today's session – it was brilliant. It has been great working with you.

Senior Civil Servant Training Attendee, Cabinet Office



The session by PolicyWISE was particularly helpful for breaking down the steps to engagement and the mind-mapping tool.

AHRC SWWDTP Attendee, PhD Student



Everyone enjoyed your session and learnt so much. It's so helpful to learn about government policymaking, and PolicyWISE's work, the briefings are so relevant and informative for our work.

Civil Servant Training Attendee, Sened Cymru



Commercial Training Development

To expand the reach and sustainability of the work of PolicyWISE, the team have taken a major step into the commercial learning space with the development of their first online training offer for launch in autumn 2025: *Understanding the UK and Ireland Policy Landscape*.

This initiative has been led by Carla Williams, PolicyWISE Senior Business Manager, and marks a key milestone in broadening access to high-quality, four-nations policy education for researchers, professionals, and organisations across the UK and beyond.

This interactive, self-paced course will provide a structured, accessible introduction to policymaking across the five jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland. The course will be hosted on OpenLearn Create and participants will be charged a fee to access it.

Participants will gain:

- A clear understanding of the differences between **governments and parliaments**
- Practical knowledge of **how policy is developed** and how **devolution works** in practice
- Tools for **effective engagement** with policymakers across jurisdictions
- Guidance on **avoiding common missteps** in language and institutional framing

Course Features:

- **Mode:** Online and self-paced with interactive elements
- **Duration:** 60–90 minutes
- **Assessment:** Quizzes, mapping exercises, applied case studies
- **Certification:** Digital badge awarded upon completion

The development and provision of this training will support both capacity building and financial sustainability, offering a scalable way to extend the PolicyWISE model to new audiences.



Dr Eira Jepson delivering training

Events and Public Engagement

PolicyWISE has continued to strengthen its profile as a trusted convener and thought leader across the UK and Ireland. Through a programme of national roundtables, strategic conference contributions, and high-profile webinars, the team have created spaces for meaningful dialogue between senior policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, fostering meaningful dialogue on some of the most complex challenges they face.

Cross Nation Roundtable Series

This year, we have delivered a four-nations roundtable series, with in-person events held in Manchester, Belfast, Edinburgh, and Cardiff. These events brought together senior civil servants, policymakers, academics, and civil service leaders from across the nations to examine cross-cutting challenges and explore opportunities for better collaboration. The speakers included:

- **Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS**, former Welsh First Minister and current Finance Secretary
- **John Wrathmell**, Group Director, Strategy, Research and Economy, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- **Ally McAlpine**, Chief Statistician, Scottish Government

The events resulted in the following outputs and impact:

- Four individual roundtable reports have been published.
- A full evaluation of the roundtable series will be published on our website in autumn 2025.
- Early feedback has been highly positive, with participants describing the events as a valuable platform for open dialogue.



Cross Nation Roundtable Series

Keynotes and Webinars

Through new research, building public understanding and policy development, PolicyWISE hosted and co-hosted a series of high-profile webinars and masterclasses during the year, aimed at making the policy system more accessible to researchers and practitioners, while providing insight into the inner workings of governance.

PolicyWISE Webinar: Council of the Nations Report Launch

The webinar was attended by 96 participants from across policy, academia and civil service and was held to launch the report 'A More Collaborative Form of Governance', featuring Prof Michael Kenny, Dr Alex Walker and Dewi Knight, which focused on the evolving role of the Council of the Nations and Regions.

Future Leaders Fellows Development Network – Masterclass Series

Delivered in partnership with this UKRI programme, this series (chaired by PolicyWISE) offers early-career researchers direct insight from policy leaders, highlighting PolicyWISE's cross-nation links and expertise. PolicyWISE have already been commissioned for another year, following the completion of the remaining two masterclasses.

- **Dewi Knight & Dr Eira Jepson**
PolicyWISE

How to map your policy research territory across the UK and building comparative and cross-nation research capability.

- **Prof Tom Crick MBE**
Chief Scientific Adviser, DCMS

Spoke on the responsibilities of a government CSA, his personal journey between research and policy, and how to navigate policymaking environments.

- **Hannah Johnson**
Chief Technical Advisor, Global Partners Governance & INTER PARES (Sept 2025)

Will share insights from parliamentary research and public engagement in both UK and international contexts.

- **Susan Murray**
Director, David Hume Institute (Oct 2025)

Will speak on the role of think tanks, how they use academic research, and what it means for policy development and delivery.



A screengrab from the
PolicyWISE Webinar: Council of
the Nations Report Launch

Conferences and Strategic Engagements

PolicyWISE contributed to several high-profile national forums, further strengthening its visibility and positioning as a bridge between academia and policy:

NESTA PolicyLive! (London)

Dewi is leading a session – with invited partners from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy and the Heywood Fellowship – on “*Resetting intergovernmental relations: what could this mean for cross-nation learning?*”. This is an opportunity to share the lessons from our cross-nation roundtable series, clusters and inter-governmental relations research. This [conference](#) is a major landmark in the UK public policy calendar – other sessions are led by (e.g.) the IFS, Nicola Sturgeon, Gus O'Donnell, and the Resolution Foundation.

Association of Higher Education Professionals annual conference (Glasgow)

Dewi was the keynote speaker at this [conference](#), on the theme of “*25 years of devolution, a more diverse and sustainable higher education sector?*”. Speaking to an audience of around 400, he highlighted that it's often English policy which diverges and is different, rather than the devolved nations.

UK Association for Public Administration Conference (Belfast)

The annual [academic conference](#) of the UK Association for Public Administration. This year's theme is the ‘Future of Public Administration’ and PolicyWISE will be leading a session on inter-governmental working and innovation in cross-nation co-operation.

Higher Education Policy Institute Report on ‘Evolution of Devolution’

Dewi authored the Wales essay in this report that marked 25 years of ‘how higher education policy as diverged across the four nations of the UK’.

Northern Ireland Research Professionals Network (Belfast)

Dewi delivered a presentation on policy impact and innovation, and the role for comparative research in devolved policymaking – as well as taking part in a panel discussion.

Festival of Higher Education (London)

Dewi chaired a panel discussion at the UK's biggest higher education policy conference, bringing together speakers from the four nations to discuss shared and different challenges post-UK general election.

US-UK Fulbright Forum (Cardiff)

Dewi presented, and took part in a panel discussion, on UK policy and politics for this year's cohort of US Fulbright Scholars studying and teaching in the UK.

Media Contributions

In addition to the blogs and articles already mentioned, we have contributed to TV, radio and online coverage of topical issues. These are often in response to Wise in 5s, newsletter topics or our [Comparative Angle](#) blog. Dewi contributed to BBC items/programmes on misogyny in schools, higher education funding and student mobility.



Team and Talent Development

The work of PolicyWISE is delivered by a skilled, mission-driven team committed to supporting inclusive, comparative, and evidence-informed policymaking. In 2024–25, the team continued to invest in talent development at all levels – from early-career professionals through to senior leadership – while fostering a team culture that values learning, contribution, and long-term impact.

New Internship Programme

This year marked the successful launch of the PolicyWISE Internship Programme, following a period of design, piloting, and refinement. The initiative reflects our commitment to building a diverse pipeline of future research and policy experts across the nations.

- Six internship placements were awarded to students and early-career professionals.
- Interns contributed to live projects, comparative briefings, and stakeholder engagement.
- Participants gained core skills in writing for different audiences, policy analysis, and four-nations engagement.

This programme is now a model for early-career development and is planned to expand in future years.



My internship at PolicyWISE was a brilliant experience. I was trusted with a key project: creating a commercialisation strategy. This meant I could apply my skills in research I had gathered from my recent law degree at the Open University to something with a real purpose. It was great to be involved in everything from analysing the market to designing branding mock-ups and helping update the 'WISE in 5s'. With the help and support of the PolicyWISE team I truly felt that my work was useful and contributed to the team's mission. More than just learning critical skills for my future, this internship has been a fantastic insight into the policy world.

Rhydian Davies

PolicyWISE Intern, April–June 2025



My time with PolicyWISE was invaluable for both my personal development and employability in the fast-moving world of policy. I quickly gained a strong understanding of how governments, parliaments, and policymaking work across the UK and Ireland – knowledge which allowed me to speak confidently in job interviews about current policy issues and institutional structures.

Thanks to the incredible support and varied expertise of the PolicyWISE team, I now feel more confident in my current workplace to present complex information to expert, non-expert and policy audiences.

Lucy Adams

PolicyWISE Intern, September 2024 – January 2025



Lucy, Eira and Catherine at the VAWG workshop



Staffing Updates

Dewi Knight, Director – as well as leading the team and our strategy, has focused on securing and deepening **key partnerships and opportunities** which embed PolicyWISE into cross-nation policymaking and grow our position as comparative research and analysis experts.

Dr Sagun Shrestha joined in July 2025 as a **Project-Focused Research Associate**, bringing expertise in education technology and comparative research. Dr Shrestha is leading development of our **forthcoming Nuffield Foundation bid** with a focus on AI in Education, working alongside Co-Investigator **Professor Jacqueline Baxter**.

Catherine May, Senior External Affairs and Communications Manager, continues to lead on external affairs and communications activity, including the **Wise in 5 programme, four-nations roundtable series, and webinars**. She also launched our new blog, *The Comparative Angle*, and is studying for a **specialist diploma in public affairs**.

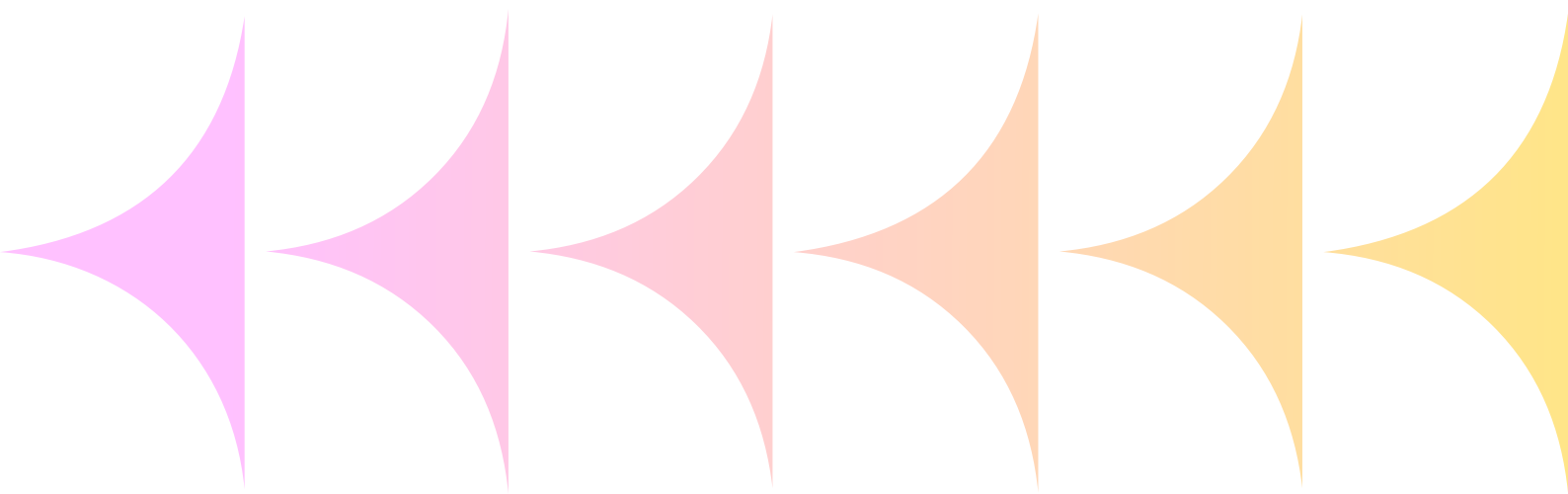
Carla Williams, Senior Business Manager, is leading on operations and commercialisation, including development of our **first online training course** set to launch in autumn 2025. She continues to progress her **Open Degree**, specialising in **politics and business administration**.

Lee Moore, Project Assistant, leads the production of our newsletter *The Bridge* and plays a key role in team coordination and operations. She is currently studying for her **OU Law Degree**.

Molly Butterworth, Communications Assistant, serves as the **creative lead** within the team, managing social media, the PolicyWISE website, and all design-related outputs. Her work continues to shape our digital presence and visual identity. She recently achieved a Merit in Sport and Exercise Psychology in Action at The Open University.

Dr Eira Jepson, Research Associate and author of our current Research Plan and designer of the cluster model, began maternity leave in May 2025. We thank Eira for her significant impact on our strategic direction.

Catherine Miller, Project Assistant, welcomed her baby earlier this year and has chosen not to return. We are grateful for her valuable contributions and wish her well in her next chapter.



Reflections and Learning

While 2024–25 was undoubtedly a year of strong progress, the team remain committed to learning from any areas where challenges emerged.

As a small, highly skilled team working in a growing area of demand, we operate at capacity, which makes it essential to continually review how we prioritise, resource, and deliver our work to sustain both quality and impact.

The success and increasing reputation of PolicyWISE has seen a dramatic increase in requests for PolicyWISE led content and sessions. We are approached, and commissioned, to deliver online and in-person sessions supporting organisations to think comparatively, deepen their understanding of UK and Irish policy and political structures, and identify cross-nation policy learning and co-operation opportunities.

Clients include the Learning & Work Institute, Nesta, the Fulbright Commission, UK Government Cabinet Office, and senior Police leaders (as well as our established relationships across governments and parliaments, and the research community).

This year, it became clear that the team's ability to match growing demand and ambition was being outpaced by the scale of opportunities ahead – signalling the need to expand our delivery capability. With additional resourcing, the team feel we have the expertise to quickly and significantly scale up public engagement work and gain even greater impact from products such as the Wise in 5 briefings and research reports through additional events and engagement. We are confident that such amplification could lead to additional funding which we can then use to expand programmes such as our cross-nation policy clusters.

The recognition (and funding) from the ESRC demonstrates the unique value and expertise of PolicyWISE in creating and connecting policy and research across the nations. However, the external funding environment remains highly competitive, as indicated by the failure at the final stage of the comparative citizenship education proposal to the Nuffield Foundation, despite the positive feedback.

While PolicyWISE is proud to work in partnership with several institutional partners including Cardiff University, The University of Edinburgh, University College London and Queen's University – particularly through our clusters, the successful ESRC hub bid, and roundtable programme, most engagement to date has been reactive rather than proactive. We have sought to be positive in expanding our relationships, rather than be potentially constrained by our four lead partners. A priority for next year, and beyond, will be to ensure existing relationships support our priorities, and that new relationships directly align with the strategic goals of PolicyWISE.

As such we have already identified key project partners in both Scotland and Ireland from the public policy community who share our agility and commitment to inform policymaking. These would benefit from our comparative and cross-nation expertise, whilst we will get added value from their contacts and knowledge in their respective nations. In all our work, we remain committed to being fully cross-nation and comparative.

The Year Ahead

As PolicyWISE enters its final year of this grant, the focus is firmly on sustainability, strategic growth, and influence.

The priorities below reflect the aims and activities of PolicyWISE for the year ahead and how this work will benefit the communities in which we work.

- **Grow commissioned training and consultancy**, responding to unmet demand across public, private and academic sectors – building skills and confidence amongst those shaping policy.
- **Advance development of policy clusters** on cross-nation themes – creating trusted, comparative spaces for decision-makers to collaborate and tackle shared problems.
- **Seek to expand delivery capacity**, allowing the team to say ‘yes’ to high-impact opportunities that in 2024–25 they have had to decline, due to resourcing constraints.
- **Increase research capability** to meet strategic demand and enhance policy-facing outputs – ensuring that evidence reaches the right hands at the right time, while also expanding the PolicyWISE programme of webinars and events to share insights more widely and create accessible spaces for discussion and learning.
- **Develop a dedicated comparative data analysis and visualisation function**, responding to a clear gap in policy infrastructure identified through our roundtable series, IGR research, and regular civil service engagement. This specialist function would enable PolicyWISE to produce accessible, visual comparative insights that no other UK think-tank currently delivers, addressing a widely recognised unmet need in policymaking.

Strengthening Influence and Impact

The goal of PolicyWISE is not just to share knowledge – but to influence change. By deepening our reach and presence, we are ensuring that the tools of better policymaking are more accessible, inclusive, and usable. Across the next year PolicyWISE will:

- **Shape multi-level governance debates**, including through continued thought leadership on **intergovernmental relations** and preparedness for the **2026 elections and beyond**.
- **Deliver a new ‘Scotland and Wales’ webinar series**, supporting learning and policymaking across all administrations.
- **Contribute to The Open University’s refreshed politics curriculum**, embedding comparative insight and real-world policy content to the updated Understanding Politics: Ideas and Institutions in the Modern World module.
- **Partner on the World Values Survey UK project (2025–26)**, led by King’s College London – influencing topic design, comparative data analysis, and policymaker engagement across the four nations.

Academic and Professional Recognition

The growing recognition of PolicyWISE reflects not just the quality of the team's work, but the difference it is making in how research, evidence, and policy intersect. Examples of what we have planned for the year ahead include:

- **Hosting a PhD placement** as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Doctoral Training Partnership, supporting early-career researcher development.
- **Conferences:** Presenting our work on intergovernmental relations and cross-nation policy learning at:
 - **UK Association for Public Administration (UKAPA)**, Belfast
 - Nesta's **PolicyLIVE** in London – a flagship event in the UK policy calendar

Publications

Articles already accepted for autumn 2025:

- *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs and Policy Studies* – on UK intergovernmental relations and lessons from international federal systems.
- *Agenda* (Institute of Welsh Affairs) – on cross-administration relationships and the state of policy cooperation across the UK.

Sustainability

The PolicyWISE team remains committed to securing both internal and external funding to support specific projects and to ensure organisational sustainability, while continuing to value Dangoor Education as our core and principal supporter.

In the year ahead, we will focus on strengthening the PolicyWISE research pipeline, fostering deeper partnerships, and leading funded research collaborations. We will also actively pursue opportunities to expand commissioned work and to contribute to public policy debates across the UK and Ireland, responding to growing demand and further advancing the mission of WISE. Building on our strong track record of securing research and training income to date, we are confident in our ability to continue expanding PolicyWISE's reach and impact.



Conclusion

In 2024–25, PolicyWISE has delivered more influence, reach, and impact than ever – connecting research and policy across all nations of the UK and Ireland. From securing major research bids and delivering high-profile briefings, to training hundreds of policymakers and researchers, we have equipped people with the skills, insights, and relationships they need to navigate complex governance.

Our distinctive cross-nation approach is now recognised across the nations, shaping Cabinet Office thinking, informing parliamentary work, and supporting the next generation of research leaders. Demand for our expertise is rising fast, and our Wise in 5 series, policy clusters, and strategic partnerships are proving both influential and sustainable.

The year ahead will be about scale and focus: growing commissioned work, expanding our cluster programme, developing new comparative data tools, and ensuring our partnerships directly advance our mission. With strong foundations and trusted relationships in place, PolicyWISE is ready to build a lasting legacy – a more connected, informed, and collaborative policy landscape across the UK and Ireland.

We want to take this opportunity to warmly thank Dangoor Education for their invaluable support of PolicyWISE, which has helped us achieve – and clearly demonstrate – the significant impact our initiative is now making.



Cross Nation Active Travel Report

Dr Catherine Purcell, Dr Lisa Hurt, Dr Shruti Agarwal
August 2025



Wise in 5: Language Learning in Schools

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

This briefing was published in October 2024. It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

PolicyWISE creates neutral and constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge. We support and nurture a common culture of developing and sharing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.

A Fair and Equitable Transition?

Tenants' experiences of decarbonising social housing

May 2025



promoting equality in housing
hybu cyfaddoldeb ym maes tai



Wise in 5: Voting Age

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Experiences of Pain in Sexual & Reproductive Health Procedures

Policy Brief

Carrie Purcell
Mari Greenfield



Wise in 5: National Commissioners

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Take Five to Age Well

Policy Brief

From Age UK
Dr Lisa Boulton - Health & Care Policy Manager

From Age Cymru
Nadine Williams - Head of Policy and Projects
Dr Sarah Young - Policy and Campaigns Officer

From Age Scotland
Adam MacKinnon - Associate Director for Policy, Communications and External Affairs
Daisy McQuinn - Health and Housing Manager

From Age NI
Katie Turtle - Head of Policy and Engagement

From PolicyWISE
Katherine Kelly - Internal Affairs and Communications Manager
Shirley Jackson - Research Associate

From The Open University
Dr John Vennart - Take Five Policy's investigator
Rachel Miller - Take Five Engagement Lead



Wise in 5: Housing First

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Wise in 5: Teenage vaping

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 **PolicyWISE**

 **Wise in 5: Period Poverty**


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 **PolicyWISE**

 **Wise in 5: Language Education for Refugees and Migrants in the UK and Ireland**

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 **Bennett Institute for Public Policy Cambridge**


 **PolicyWISE**

A More Collaborative Way of Governing?
Why the UK's Council of the Nations and Regions Matters

Executive Summary Report
Alex Walker, Michael Kenny and Dewi Knight

 **PolicyWISE**

 **Wise in 5: Geodiversity and Geodiversity Charters**

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 **PolicyWISE**

Cross-nation Policy Learning and Research Series: England Roundtable Full Report




 **PolicyWISE**

 **Wise in 5: Tourist tax**

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 **Wise in 5: AI Literacy**

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 **PolicyWISE**

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 **PolicyWISE**

Cross-nation Policy Learning and Research Series: Northern Ireland Roundtable Full Report



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