



Outline proposal for merger between SSRG and LARIA

The outline proposal was developed by a sub-groups of the EC, and agreed by the full Committee on 09/12/2015, before sending to Neil Wholey, the LARIA Chair and other LARIA officers. This proposal makes the formal suggestion of a merger, and identified further work that would be needed in order to pursue this idea. No irrevocable decisions about a merger have been made.

Introduction

This paper presents an outline proposal for a merger between SSRG and LARIA. As local authorities have restructured and changed to absorb the cuts in budgets which have been implemented since 2010, many staff with responsibility for research and evaluation have moved from adult and children' social care to corporate or central departments, while others have been made redundant. In addition, many Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CASSRs) have cut spending on attendance at events and membership. SSRG, in common with other organisations that support the use research and information in local authority settings, have not been immune from these structural changes. Our ability to host events for local authority staff and researchers has been reduced as councils have cut training and development budgets and/or travelling expenses. This has had a further impact on our ability to maintain membership levels. However, we are convinced that there is a continuing need to support social care researchers in children and adult services in local authorities, in the form of networking opportunities, online and in person as well as well targeted and publicised events. The overall aims of SSRG and LARIA are very similar, although SSRG focuses on a specific area of local authority responsibility. We think there could be significant advantages to both LARIA and SSRG in a merger of the two organisations.

Current benefits of SSRG membership

SSRG offers the following to its members:

- A Newsletter (in PDF form), published every two months, which contains SSRG news and digests of national policy developments and short reports of local initiatives.
- Fortnightly e-bulletin, containing a digest of relevant developments and links to SSRG events. A digest of the e-bulletin is sent to a list of non-members who have requested copies.
- Website, which gives news of events, activities and links to other relevant initiatives.
- A peer reviewed journal: Research Policy and Planning, published three times a year. The journal receives contributions from academics and encourages local authority staff and

early career researchers the opportunity to get their work published, often for the first time.

- Discounts for SSRG events.

Key topics

Over the past ten years or so, SSRG has focused on several key topics, including:

- Research Governance – SSRG played an important role in the development and implementation of Research Governance in social care. We have had a close working relationship with the DH, and coordinated a ‘Support Pack’ LINK for local government staff who had to implement local Research Governance policies and procedures. SSRG is also developing links with the Health Research Authority (HRA), which has assumed responsibility for this area of policy, under the Care Act 2014
- Local Research Capacity. In 2014, The PSSRU funded the SSRG to undertake a survey of social care research capacity within local authorities, which has been recently published (LINK).
- Promoting the use of research evidence in policy and practice in children’s and adults’ social care. SSRG has a long history in this area. We have promoted the use of research evidence through our events and publications and worked closely with a range of organisations involved – Research-in-Practice; Research-in-Practice-for-Adults and the Social Care Evidence in Practice project. In addition SSRG has contributed to the work of the NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR), which has a remit for increasing the impact of social care research.
- SSRG has historically played a key role in the development of performance management information requirements and analysis within social care. We prepared and published detailed guidance on the indicators that populated the Department of Health’s Performance Assessment Framework (PAF)

Many of these activities were run in collaboration with other organisations. In particular the SSCR has sponsored our Annual Workshops for the last five years and we have put on several joint events, as well as contributing to SSCR events.

SSRG events and publications (Research Policy and Practice and the SSRG Newsletter) have covered a range of themes within social care policy and practice, including:

- Personalisation
- Safeguarding (adults’ and children’s)
- Looked after Children
- Research ethics and governance
- Integration (particularly integration with health)
- The changes to children’s services (e.g. Children’s Trusts)
- Outcomes assessment (e.g. the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit)
- The roles of the third and independent sector in adults’ and children’s social care
- Funding of social care – and the impact of austerity

Case for merger

While SSRG has a track record of successfully collaborating with organisations that broadly share our aims and values, we think there is a case for a more integrated approach. LARIA is the obvious choice for increased integration or merger for four main reasons:

- Overlap of areas of interest such as housing, education and public health with social care
- Similarity in status as an independent membership organisation
- Move of social care researchers to corporate departments, which have a wider local authority remit, making a combined organisation potentially more attractive
- An emphasis on local area/authority research and evaluation

While it would be possible to consider various forms of strategic partnership, SSRG's Executive Committee (EC) believe that a merger could provide the maximum benefit to members of both organisations. A merger between SSRG and LARIA should maximise the potential impact of activity, and present opportunities for economies of scale, which would be in the best interests of both organisations and their members. Specifically we think a merger would benefit for each organisation in the following ways:

SSRG	LARIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunities for activities covering a wider range of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a social care presence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infrastructure to support current activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New group of members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to wider audiences`	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of SSRG publications to LARIA members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discounts to LARIA events for SSRG members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discounts to SSRG events for LARIA members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased involvement with researchers in different local authority departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive ongoing relationship with academia

Proposal for merger

The proposal is therefore that SSRG merge with LARIA. We would propose that a sub-group of the current EC continue as a formal working group within the new combined organisation, in order to continue social care focused activities. LARIA members, particularly representatives who have experience and knowledge of Housing and Public Health would also be represented on the Social Care Subgroup, although we envisage that the group would retain the SSRG name and identity. This group would continue the following activities, which would therefore become LARIA activities:

Activities

Publishing:

- A newsletter, broadly aimed at social care (current published every two months)
- Fortnightly E-bulletin
- Research Policy and Planning – academic journal, published three times a year

Events

- An annual social care focused event
- Other day events as topics present themselves
- Contributing to the planning and content of LARIA events

Networking and contributing to national policy developments

- Replacement for the Research Governance Framework, being developed by the HRA
- Performance management knowledge and information, possibly in collaboration with LARIA members)
- Evidence-Informed- Policy and Practice, for example through continuing SSRG membership of the SSCR Research-Impact Group
- Potential further work funded by the SSCR

The sustainability of these activities would be closely monitored and reviewed at the end of the first year after the merger

Membership

- SSRG Members to be offered LARIA membership for one year from the point of merger, after which they would need to join LARIA to continue receiving membership benefits of the new merged organisation
- LARIA members be offered access to member benefits of SSRG: event discounts; the journal, newsletter and e-bulletin from the point of merger

Finances

All the activities outlined in the previous section have direct and indirect resource implications (e.g. travel costs for members of the sub group). At the point of merger SSRG is likely to have sufficient resources to fund these activities for one year. We would propose that social care activities in future years would continue financially underwritten by LARIA, given financial sustainability.

Specific financial proposals for the merger:

- At the point of merger, all SSRG finances to be transferred to a new bank account formally owned by LARIA, but ring-fenced for SSRG future use. SSRG Treasurer to continue with responsibility for managing these finances, in conjunction with LARIA financial officers – this arrangement would be reviewed annually.
- Income from events and other activities be allocated to a social care ring-fenced budget within LARIA
- In the second and subsequent years of the merger a proportion of overall LARIA membership income be allocated to resource SSRG activities