



Research Findings: Academic Engagement by the Scottish Parliament

Part of a wider report, *Evaluating Academic Engagement with UK Legislatures*

Dr Marc Geddes (University of Edinburgh)

Dr Danielle Beswick (University of Birmingham)

June 2020

1. Background and structure

This report presents key findings from a review of the academic engagement activities undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. The research was undertaken by Dr Marc Geddes (University of Edinburgh) and Dr Danielle Beswick (University of Birmingham) between June 2019 and February 2020. This briefing note is part of a wider project on knowledge exchange (KE)¹ between academics and the four UK legislatures, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The main report, *Evaluating Academic Engagement with UK Legislatures*, focused on interpretations of knowledge exchange across the UK's four legislatures, the range of activities undertaken by each legislature, the incentives and benefits of KE, and the key facilitators and barriers to a healthy knowledge exchange environment applicable to all legislatures.

This report focuses specifically on the Scottish Parliament and proceeds as follows:

- Section 2 explains the data-collection process for this report;
- Section 3 examines individual KE activities;
- Section 4 identifies overall strengths and weaknesses of KE activities; and,
- Section 5 gives a summary of key conclusions and recommendations.

We find that the Scottish Parliament has an extensive and valued programme of activities, which engages with a range of universities. The variety of activities ensures that KE can take place in lots of different ways, adding value to existing Scottish Parliament work rather than duplicating it or replacing it. This report indicates that some improvements for individual KE initiatives are possible, as well as some cross-cutting issues that the Scottish Parliament may wish to address. In particular, we recommend that the Scottish Parliament:

- Allocates further resources to KE *if* initiatives are to be deepened and expanding, as most officials are now at capacity;
- Undertakes regular reviews of KE activities to ensure clarity around the purpose and benefits of KE (both internally and externally);
- Considers adopting changes to the fellowship recruitment processes;

¹ For this report, we define knowledge exchange as a two-way process which brings together academic staff (including researchers, KE brokers and professional services staff), Members and officials to exchange their ideas and expertise for the benefit of legislative and research activities. For a full discussion, see *Evaluating Academic Engagement with UK Legislatures*, especially Section 2 (What is Knowledge Exchange?).



- Considers introducing alumni networks for fellows/interns, perhaps with other legislatures and research councils, to facilitate network-building;
- Liaises with other legislatures and the research councils about possible improvements to the induction processes for UKRI Policy Interns;
- Considers ways of extending KE opportunities to other postgraduate students; and,
- Considers extending the diversity of academics engaging with the legislature, which will require working directly with HEIs.

We explain these recommendations in the substantive sections of the report and also in the concluding section of the report. Importantly, many of these are to enhance the already extensive support available for KE, and need to be considered alongside recommendations in the main report.

As noted, this report supplements the overarching report, which explains how activities at Holyrood compare to those of other UK legislatures, the wider benefits for engagement between universities and legislatures, and facilitators/barriers to KE (which are therefore not covered in this report).

2. Data collection

Between June and September 2019, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a range of stakeholders, either face-to-face in Edinburgh via telephone/Skype (see Table 1, below). Participants were selected based on key responsibilities they held for KE and/or recommendations from the Scottish Parliament. To ensure anonymity, all participants are given a random number interview number (different to the ones in the main report).

Table 1. Interviewees for the Scottish Parliament

Interviewee	Number
Scottish Parliament officials (includes research services and clerks)	9
Engaged academics	4
Knowledge exchange professionals	4
Total	17

In addition to interviews, we received a number of internal and public documents about the Scottish Parliament's engagement programmes with academics and universities (see Appendix A of main report).

Data for this project is not comprehensive. For example, while interviews ranged across Scottish Parliament activities, some specific areas were not covered in detail (e.g. the SPICe Framework Agreement was only briefly mentioned with two officials) and findings rely on a small sample in general. Due to the timing of data-gathering, MSPs were not available to be interviewed. In sum, this means there are some limitations to the generalisability of the findings and conclusions should be treated with caution.



3. Knowledge exchange activities at the Scottish Parliament

The university/policy landscape in Scotland is distinctive in at least three ways. First, there are a number of KE broker organisations, such as the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE) and the Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII), which have built links to policy-makers. They help to facilitate KE, which is hard to find in other devolved areas of the UK, or at UK-level. Second, the size of the university sector in Scotland (comprising 19 HEIs) makes it feasible to allow for sector-wide collaboration (which is more difficult at UK-level with 128 HEIs). Third, as one interviewee explained: '[Scotland] is a nation of five million people with five world-class universities, and a few more playing in the league immediately below that. That's astonishing ... we tend to forget how extraordinary that is' (Interview 17). These are distinctive traits to the Scottish experience of knowledge exchange between universities and policy-makers.

Universities are seen as the 'natural partners' of the Scottish Parliament (Interview 9), which has sought to capitalise on the strengths of HEIs in Scotland through its Academic Engagement Strategy. It aims to 'enable Scottish Parliament staff to keep up-to-date with key policy issues and access relevant and timely evidence' through academic expertise in order to improve the service that officials provide to MSPs and their staff. This contributes towards the Parliament's strategic goal of 'undertaking rigorous scrutiny of the Scottish Government and accountable bodies'. The strategy was first developed in 2015 and received explicit support from the then-Clerk and Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament, Sir Paul Grice.

The Scottish Parliament has organised, or participates in, a range of academic-legislative programmes and activities. This includes: academic fellowships (both at PhD and post-PhD level); coordinates formal KE networks (e.g. Scottish Parliament Academic Network and Ask Academia); research framework agreements; training for academic and KE staff to engage with the legislature; and, multiple seminar series (e.g. SPICe Seminar Series, Brexit Breakfast Seminars) and one-off events with academics. For a full breakdown, and comparison with other UK legislatures, see Appendix B of *Evaluating Academic Engagement with Legislatures*. Activities are largely coordinated by officials in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). Specifically, one official has oversight of strategic management of KE as part of his wider role as Head of Research at SPICe. Another official manages the operational aspects of KE (on a part-time basis) and supports the coordination of individual programmes that are each led by one official alongside their other responsibilities. KE also takes place across committees, and directly between Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and academic staff (Interview 6).

3.1. Fellowship programme

Since 2017, the Scottish Parliament has organised an Academic Fellowship Scheme, allowing academics (normally with a PhD) to work on a project either through an open call (where academics submit topics) or a directed call (where SPICe or committees advertise topics).



Academics are hosted by SPICe, with whom the academic will also outline the parameters of the fellowship and the types of tasks the fellow will be asked to complete.

Fellowships often funded by Impact Acceleration Accounts from research councils. This allows academic staff to be relieved of their other responsibilities, such as teaching (Interview 12). Importantly, the Scottish Parliament can supplement funding from universities and research councils on a case-by-case basis (Interview 2). This is commendable because not all legislatures are able to do this.

3.1.1. Benefits

Feedback from our interviews across the UK suggests that fellowship programmes are highly valued by both academic staff and parliamentary officials. One fellow for the Scottish Parliament concluded that: 'I think it's an excellent initiative and I think there should be more initiatives like that' (Interview 13). It allows academics to present their research in front of MSPs and/or officials, which might otherwise not 'see the light of day' as one interviewee put it (Interview 2). Fellowships also allow academics to understand and learn how the Scottish Parliament works on a day-to-day basis. Most importantly, however, fellowships can lead to long-term benefits in building lasting relationships between universities and legislatures, with one fellow explaining that fellowships are rarely a 'self-contained activity' (Interview 12). Interviewees gave examples of how the partnership led to further opportunities, such as becoming a committee advisor, giving evidence to committees or co-publishing research briefings (Interview 12, Interview 13).

Fellowships are valued as much by officials as they are by academics. In building long-term relationships, as noted above, it means that fellows can support a range of parliamentary activities, such as helping to identify witnesses for committee work (Interview 12). Additionally, fellows conduct primary research, meaning they add different perspectives to the work of the Parliament, rather than doing work otherwise completed by officials (Interview 2). This means that fellows are able to add significantly to the capacity of the Scottish Parliament. That said, other staff have pointed out that a balance is needed because fellowships may prevent officials in SPICe from doing interesting or topical briefings (Interview 7). A longer term consequence of this be that the relevant expertise is not brought in-house.

3.1.2. Challenges and possible improvements

While participants suggested that fellowship programmes are effective to enhance KE, they raised the following issues:

- Expectations on academic staff. Some interviewees noted that academics are not always up to the standard of impartiality in the same way that officials are (Interview 9), while others noted that academics do not stick to deadlines or finish papers correctly (Interview 2). One interviewee noted that the Scottish Parliament should introduce measures to 'spot' these things earlier (Interview 2). In our main report, we



noted that these challenges are shared across other legislatures, too, and we recommend small changes to the recruitment process (see p.30 of the main report).

- Resources from the Scottish Parliament. Specifically:
 - In relation to the first point made above on timeliness, one academic fellow noted an occasional ‘bottleneck’ situation because parliamentary officials did not have the capacity to review his briefing notes in time. He suggested that, rather than one responsible individual, a team of staff could be responsible for fellows (Interview 12).
 - A related factor is the time needed to set up fellowships. There may be complexities around contracts and supervision (as noted above) or time needed before academic buy-out can take effect. This means that bigger and well resourced universities have been able to support fellows more than smaller institutions, and also meant that tight turnaround for a fellowship to start is not always feasible or appropriate (Interview 2).
 - One official noted that resources to support fellowships are reaching their limit, including dedicated support for writing fellowship contracts, management of the recruitment process, and supervision of individual fellows. Furthermore, time is not built into programmes for when the Parliament is particularly busy, or if things may be delayed or go wrong (Interview 2).

These three factors suggest that more resources and a lead-in time for fellowships should be introduced to ensure adequate capacity.

- Coordination between committees and SPICe. One official explained that committee clerks do not always engage enough with the call-out for fellowship topics, suggesting that this is because of the commitment required to supervise a fellow (Interview 7). However, another official also noted that appointed fellows are sometimes asked to work more closely with a committee when their time should be protected for the original fellowship project/purpose (Interview 2). This suggests that (i) closer coordination is needed between committees and SPICe on fellowship responsibilities through, for example, including committee staff in interview or shortlisting stages, and (ii) echoes the above point that further resources would enable better supervision across committees and SPICe.
- Limitations on evaluation. At present, the fellowship programme has limited systematic data for what works and what needs improvement. While this research project has sought to address this in part, a regular and standardised exit interview and/or feedback form at the end of a fellowship would allow officials and academics to identify strengths and weaknesses of the fellowship, identify engagement and impact, and support pathways for further engagement in the future, post-fellowship.
- Alumni network for Scottish Parliament fellows and/or UK-wide fellows. Finally, echoing our main report (and findings for the other legislatures), one fellow noted the possibility for an alumni network, which could enable academics to network and work together, as well as facilitate long-lasting relationships between officials and academics built up during a fellowship (Interview 13). This could be introduced for the Scottish Parliament, for fellows across the legislatures, or both, and may involve networking lunches or monthly coffees.



Overall, fellowships are seen as highly valuable and so the recommendations here supplement those of the main report to enhance and deepen this form of KE with universities.

3.2. Postgraduate internships

The Scottish Parliament supports PhD internships in the legislature through the UK Research and Innovation Policy Internship scheme, run across all legislatures.

3.2.1. Benefits

PhD students are valued in supporting the work of the Scottish Parliament by writing briefing notes and providing other support, especially in context of changing workloads for officials (Interview 1). One interviewee explained that it has been rare for PhD students not to complete a discrete piece of work that could be used by SPICe; in those cases, projects were either too ambitious or too closely related to a PhD student's area of expertise (Interview 1). This last lesson has been taken on board, as PhD students now do not work on areas associated with their research. One former student explained that this allowed him to improve his general research skills, benefiting both the Scottish Parliament and his university (Interview 10).

Former PhD students have highlighted the wider professional and career development opportunities for them as a result of this scheme (e.g. Interview 10, Interview 11). Interviewees explained that they wanted to learn more about 'the practical aspects' of the policy-making process (Interview 11), for example, and explore options about working for the Scottish Parliament after completion of their PhD (Interview 10). A testament to the strength of the programme is that some former internship participants now work for the Scottish Parliament.

3.2.2. Challenges and possible improvements

PhD students indicated three areas for improvement:

- One interviewee explained that, while SPICe reached out and provided information in advance of his internship, as well as led the induction process upon arrival, the research councils did not provide enough information about how the scheme would work in practice (Interview 10).
- There is no community or alumni network of PhD students that have undertaken internships at the Scottish Parliament, which one interviewee would have found beneficial. For example, he would have found this useful to set clear expectations about practical aspects of the scheme and allow each other to learn from each other's experiences (Interview 10). This could address the above concern about a lack of information about preparedness. The idea of an alumni network was also raised by interviewees at other parliaments and for other schemes.
- One interviewee explained that the focus for the PhD student on their briefing note meant that there were limited opportunities to undertake other tasks for the Scottish Parliament (Interview 11), which would have given a broader experience and also enabled further inclusion of the PhD student in parliamentary work.



- One participant noted that the PhD internship is limited to a very small group of people (Interview 10). Extending postgraduate opportunities could be achieved in multiple ways, such as working with universities on dissertation projects and/or considering the introduction of a structured programme/MSc, as existed in the past between the Northern Ireland Assembly and Queen's University Belfast, or similar partnerships that are being introduced between the UK Parliament and London universities.

Given the limited number of interviewees on internship programmes for this project, we recommend that the Scottish Parliament explores the above options further. Echoing our main report, we suggest that the Scottish Parliament (and other legislatures) gathers systematic data to review their KE activities, including for internship opportunities. Similarly, we echo from our main report that legislatures review terminology around 'internship'.

3.3. Seminars and research events

The Scottish Parliament hosts a range of events with stakeholders. For knowledge exchange with academic research, the Parliament has introduced a seminar series that was adapted from the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series or KESS) and focused on Brexit (Interview 3). This has now expanded and includes a variety of themes, some of which may tie in with other events or occasions. Unlike KESS, the Scottish Parliament seminars are normally restricted to internal staff and MSPs only. Additionally, some events are organised in conjunction with Scotland's Futures Forum (SFF).

3.3.1. Benefits

While only a small proportion of MSPs attend seminars (one official suggested 4-5 MSPs per seminar), the overall goal is to also bring academic researchers into conversation with SPICe officials, clerks and MSPs' researchers. On the whole, these have been evaluated positively, with one participant explaining that seminars under Chatham House rule and without media presence 'facilitates an open and honest discussion' (Interview 11). Another interviewee explained that the added value of seminars is that it 'provides another avenue for Members to gain knowledge and think about a concept which isn't just a piece of paper that's put in front of them' (Interview 3). The same interviewee gave an extended case study of how this works in practice, where a very complex, legal and technical issue was broken down to make it more accessible; subsequently, the speaker gave evidence to a parliamentary committee.

More generally, interviewees identified networking opportunities before, during and after events through wine receptions, at breakfast seminars or conferences as very important ways for officials and academics to establish and nurture links with one another – both hosted by the Scottish Parliament but also for events held at universities and which officials are able to attend (Interview 3, Interview 4). This echoes our main report, and we encourage further opportunities for academic staff and officials to be able to attend events at each other's institutions.

3.3.2. Challenges and possible improvements



On the whole, seminars and research events seem to be well-received. Two issues were raised, but they were based on limited interview data:

- First, at the moment the speakers are identified *ad hoc* and through informal networking, with Ask Academia (see below) occasionally being used (Interview 3). In our main report, we note the importance of diversity in KE, which also echoes the Commission on Parliamentary Reform's final report (2017, pp.33-4).
- Second, one official explained that the organisation of the seminars is 'on the side of our day job', which means that 'we have limited time and resources to organise them, so that limits the scope for us come up with really detailed plans or being able to seek external speakers' (Interview 3). The same interviewee also noted that the current way of organising seminars allows for flexibility.

Given the limited data on seminars taking place at Holyrood, it is difficult to make a conclusion about the benefits or drawbacks of devoting further resources to these events. For comparison, we note that the seminar series at the Northern Ireland Assembly is highly valued and seen as central for KE, therefore having considerable investment and is regularly reviewed (but therefore the Assembly cannot offer the same range of KE as the Scottish Parliament).

3.4. Formalised KE networks

The Scottish Parliament hosts 'Ask Academia', which is an email service (via JISCmail) to allow officials to contact academic communities with specific questions or requests. The mailing list is managed by SPICe, who review and then send requests directly to KE staff at universities. Additionally, the Parliament also hosts the Scottish Parliament Academia Network (SPAN), which consists of approximately 120 key KE officials and KE brokers from universities and who meet on a six-monthly basis to share information about knowledge exchange (Interview 6).

3.4.1. Benefits

One KE broker explained that Ask Academia 'has worked really well' and has been particularly useful to identify people to give evidence, advertise fellowships, and generally build awareness among universities about all the different opportunities that exist for engagement (Interview 16). For this interviewee, the usefulness comes from the immediacy in sending out requests and being able to respond quickly. Another interviewee similarly explained that the resource is 'quite powerful in that it is a good crowdsourcing, good but safe crowdsourcing tool' for officials in the Scottish Parliament (Interview 15). Meanwhile, SPAN is also important because it can 'help the Parliament to identify some of the most relevant research that's out there and also the individual people doing that research' (Interview 16). In the past, these events have been general, but most recently adopted more specific themes, which interviewees welcomed (Interview 6, Interview 15, Interview 16).

3.4.2. Challenges and possible improvements

While Ask Academia was widely praised in interviews, issues were also raised:



- One interviewee explained that ‘Ask Academia doesn’t work brilliantly at all’, in part because ‘it’s hardly ever used’ (Interview 17), which was echoed by another interviewee suggesting that it is ‘underused’, perhaps because officials are ‘not fully aware of what it is’ (Interview 15). One official explained that he did not use it because ‘I pretty much know who to go to’ (Interview 1).
- One participant noted that a request would get ‘as far as a knowledge exchange officer who will ... find somebody ... who’s already engaged with policy, otherwise they wouldn’t do it’ (Interview 17), suggesting that the mailing list reinforces links with those already interested in KE, rather than spotting and identifying new talent.
- Finally, KE brokers rarely receive feedback on Ask Academia requests, which would help with transparency and help users to know if (i) officials receive a response and (ii) if they do anything with the information, ultimately allowing users to judge if the mailing list makes a difference (Interview 16).

Some of the issues raised are difficult to resolve and may be overcome with other forms of KE with universities. However, to improve the mailing list, we recommend that the requests for the mailing list are more systematically tracked in order to close the feedback loop. This will also allow the mailing list’s overall benefits to be evaluated more clearly.

With respect to SPAN, interviewees noted more thematic structures to events would be a significant improvement because events were otherwise repetitive. This was being introduced at the time of data collection.

3.5. Committee work

Academic research is often important for ‘horizon scanning’ and ‘looking ahead’ in the parliamentary committees’ work programmes (Interview 4). The traditional way of doing this is as part of the evidence-gathering process for scrutiny of policy and legislation and by becoming a committee advisor. Some advisors have been identified following other KE activities, as noted above, and through bilateral relationships with officials as a result of networking, also discussed above. More recently some committees have innovated by bringing in a ‘panel of experts’ that can act as a ‘sounding board’ and to help set the direction of committee work programmes (Interview 4, Interview 10). One official explained that this helps to give a consistent base of good advice for committees (Interview 5), which another KE broker had also noted was important to help open up parliamentary processes (Interview 17). Both latter interviewees suggested that more should be done to allow academic researchers to contribute committees asking the right questions. However, interview data on how committees use and evaluate KE activities was limited for this report.

3.6. Summary

Overall, the activities suggest that the Scottish Parliament has a number of key strengths to support KE with universities, as well as ways to improve them. We summarise the benefits and possible improvements in Table 2 below, and return to them in the concluding section.



Table 2. Summary of KE activities

Activity	Benefits	Challenges/improvements
Academic fellowship programme	Allows academics to present research to policy audiences Allows academics to learn about parliamentary processes Builds long-lasting partnerships between officials and academics Added value by contributing to the work of the Scottish Parliament	Expectations on academic staff could be clarified Resources available and time dedicated to support fellows Coordination between SPICe and committees Limited evaluation of fellows Introduction of alumni network(s) to facilitate long-lasting relationships
Internships and postgraduate opportunities	Additional capacity to the Scottish Parliament by providing bringing notes Professional and career development opportunities for PhD students	Induction process (from the side of research councils) No community; suggestion for alumni network(s) for interns Focus on briefing note meant less time available for wider work experience Desire for expansion of opportunities to more postgraduate students
Seminars and research events	Brings academic research directly in front of MSPs and officials Allows for research to be made more accessible to the Scottish Parliament Networking opportunities at events help to build relationships	Speakers are identified ad hoc and informal networking Organisation of seminars takes place in context of limited resources
Formalised KE networks (Ask Academia, SPAN)	Immediacy of Ask Academia to reach out to universities Good and safe crowdsourcing tool for the Scottish Parliament Further engagement opportunities for universities	Ask Academia is not used frequently Limited feedback on the effectiveness of Ask Academia SPAN events felt to be repetitive; thematic structures to be introduced



Committees	Academic research key for horizon scanning and looking ahead Academics can be a sounding board for ideas for committees	Committees could open up their agenda-setting/scope of inquiries
------------	--	--

4. Wider themes

In this section, we turn to wider themes. First, we summarise the overall perceived strengths of the Scottish Parliament, and then examine challenges around: (i) resources and ability to provide regular reviews; (ii) clarity of purpose and coordination among officials; (iii) the diversity of those involved in KE activities; and (iv) factors outside of the Parliament's control.

4.1. Overall perceived strengths

Throughout interviews for this project, participants highlighted multiple examples of good practice as well as overarching benefits of KE (see main report). With respect to the Scottish Parliament, interviewees were positive of the general approach and praised the commitment of the legislature. They highlighted:

- Flexibility. The Scottish Parliament has normally been very accommodating to academics. For example, academic fellows were able to work with officials in setting parameters for projects, identify work patterns, and so on (Interview 12, Interview 13).
- Openness. One KE broker believed that one of the core strengths of the Scottish Parliament is 'a genuine desire to try and engage with knowledge that's around because that helps them do a better job', which is part of a wider ethos as an open institution (Interview 14; echoed also in Interview 16).
- Learning from universities. It is clear that officials in the Scottish Parliament are keen to learn about the pressures of academic staff through SPAN as well as outward-facing secondments to research organisations (Interview 6, Interview 7).

The commitment from the Scottish Parliament can be testified with the sustained engagement of many academic researchers. As a result, the Scottish Parliament benefits from being able to bring expertise, skills and experience into the Parliament that would not ordinarily be in the legislature (Interview 7), and adds capacity to the work of SPICe and committees, especially in light of recently-increased devolved powers but also scrutinising what would normally be reserved matters (e.g. Brexit, trade, immigration), and doing so at short notice (Interview 9).

The overall cross-cutting benefits for the Scottish Parliament, and other legislatures, are covered in the main report (pp.15-8). While the wider themes of this project point to benefits across the Scottish Parliament, the data also suggests that there are wider challenges.

4.2. Resources and evaluation



One official noted that the budget for the Scottish Parliament's programme of activities compares well and that KE is well-resourced (Interview 9). Furthermore, officials also note that their specific KE tasks are built into their time allocation and workload (Interview 1). However, multiple officials also noted that this time allocation doesn't always work in practice. For example, one noted that 'my time on academic engagement isn't protected as much as I think it could be' (Interview 6), and could fall in the list of priorities. Another official explained that the resources for his KE responsibilities is 'probably sufficient for what it is' but 'if you were trying to make it more involved or in-depth then I think the answer's probably no' (Interview 2); finally, one official explained that 'there can be issues of just having time to prepare things properly, yeah' (Interview 3). These perspectives were echoed across the Parliament and mean that activities cannot expand (Interview 1, Interview 7), which is also noted by external interviewees (Interview 17).

While specific consequences of resources have been examined in the previous section, one overarching consequence for all activities is that it has not been possible to conduct regular and systematic reviews of various schemes, such as formal documentation/records, feedback forms, exit interviews, identifying needs of MSPs, etc. For some, this is important to ensure that there are better frameworks in place to evaluate KE (Interview 4), though others also note that this will increase the 'administrative burden' of activities (Interview 1). Based on our interviews across the four legislatures, undertaking regular reviews of activities can be useful to evaluate their effectiveness and ensure transparency regarding the work of legislatures. For the Scottish Parliament, it would allow for clearer evaluation of things like Ask Academia, allow for more planning regarding seminars, ensure consistent induction and oversight of fellowship/internship schemes, allow tracking of impact (where appropriate) and so on.

While the above points suggest more resources are needed, interviewees also noted caution with the expansion of KE activities. For one interviewee, some KE activities are unnecessarily formalising processes when knowledge exchange should simply focus on facilitating discussion (Interview 17). Indeed, another interviewee – an official from the Scottish Parliament – explained that KE activities are 'seeking to solve a problem that doesn't actually necessarily exist' because the interviewee is already part of the relevant networks of his own volition (Interview 1). This suggests that the direct and/or indirect benefits of different sets of activities needs to be clearly explained and adjudicated against possible resource-implications.

4.3. Clarity around purpose and coordination among officials

One of the issues in general for knowledge exchange and bringing expertise into the Parliament is to ensure that it adds value without duplicating the work of officials or taking ownership of things that are already being done by the Scottish Parliament (Interview 7, Interview 9). This echoes the main report's recommendation that legislatures need to be clear about their external and internal benefits of KE activities (p.18).

A related issue to the above is that multiple interviewees noted overlap between different staff in the Scottish Parliament regarding knowledge exchange. For example, the growth of the Committee Office's outreach activities (e.g. Committee Engagement Unit) mean that there was



overlap for different initiatives to engage with academic communities and stakeholders. Another example, given in the previous section, relates to fellows being asked to contribute to committee work when their agreements were specified to support SPICe. Interviewees were clear that there is no tension between different offices, but that coordination between them was needed. Some efforts have been made to do this through, for example, creating a steering group that includes different units/teams (Interview 5, Interview 6, Interview 7) (this took place during the data collection period, meaning interview data cannot evaluate its effectiveness). Other mechanisms could be introduced, such as reinforcing the inclusion of committee clerks in recruitment processes for fellows/interns.

4.4. Broadening reach of KE

The Scottish Parliament's founding objectives included commitments to diversity, equality and inclusion, which was also echoed in the Commission on Parliamentary Reform's final report. With respect to KE, interviewees explained that there are clear attempts to broaden networks, which is evidenced through the creation of Ask Academia, collaborating with SPAN, as well as contribution towards steering groups and advisory boards of other KE networks (e.g. SPRE). That said, some interviewees believed that KE activities are still focused too much on Scotland's central belt, when lessons can be learned from other places – whether it is across the breadth of Scotland, throughout the UK or other similar-sized European neighbours (Interview 1). One interviewee suggested that the Scottish Parliament (and policy-makers in general) should embrace more digital tools to reach a wider set of academics for their work, as well as facilitate working-from-home where appropriate (Interview 17).

A further issue regarding KE is the reliance of policy-makers on established scholars, rather than making efforts to include early-career academics (either PhD students or those within 3-5 years of their PhD; commonly referred to as ECAs/ECRs) (Interview 17). This is seen as a general problem for academic/policy engagement, but it was also echoed by one official who said that it presented a challenge for seminars hosted in the Scottish Parliament, for example (Interview 3). In the previous section, we noted that there could be further opportunities to involve postgraduate students in Scottish Parliament activities through, for example, dissertation projects and/or considering an MSc programme. Importantly, however, issues facing early-career academics is, to a degree, outside the control of the Scottish Parliament. Many ECAs do not see policy engagement as part of 'their space' (Interview 17), suggesting that there are wider issues at play, to which we now turn.

4.5. Factors outside the Parliament's control

This report focuses on how the Scottish Parliament facilitates knowledge exchange with universities. But, as we note in our main report, KE is a two-way process and the Scottish Parliament is only one partner to make KE successful. Indeed, the legislature faces the following barriers in working with universities:

- Each university across Scotland (and beyond) is organised differently, with their own institutional legacies. This means that it is difficult to create a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging with academic researchers (Interview 16, Interview 17).



- The Scottish Parliament is reliant on KE brokers at universities (but also through external organisations) to cascade key messages and opportunities to academics, and also persuade them to be involved with parliamentary work (Interview 16).
- Universities have diverse priorities when it comes to policy engagement, which means that legislatures are not always preferred partners (Interview 16); similarly, some universities may not reward KE activities as part of their staff workload.
- Some academic staff are better equipped to engage with policy-makers than others, either through training or because they have more interest in understanding underlying political dynamics at play in policy processes (Interview 17).

While the UK's legislatures make attempt to offer opportunities to engage with universities, it is also incumbent upon those institutions to capitalise on these offers by making themselves open and offering sufficient resources and training to engage with legislatures.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In this report, we have considered KE activities by the Scottish Parliament, their key benefits, challenges and possible improvements, and also identified cross-cutting issues. We make the following recommendations:

1. The Scottish Parliament should allocate further resources to knowledge exchange initiatives *if* they are to be deepened and expanded (this echoes recommendation 8 of the main report). This follows the earlier discussion that officials are at capacity and that it is not always possible for their time to be protected for KE. One option would be to introduce a full-time member of staff dedicated to managing KE operations, with other officials (as now) leading on specific programmes and strategic oversight remaining with the Head of Research, Enquiries and KE at SPICe.
2. The Scottish Parliament should undertake regular reviews of KE activities (this echoes recommendations 4 and 10 of the main report, and the Commission on Parliamentary Reform's final report). This follows the earlier discussion about being clear about the benefits both internally and externally about KE activities, and would allow the Parliament to evaluate each set of activities more clearly, potentially with cross-legislature comparisons being possible. This could include exit interviews at the end of fellowships/internships, feedback forms at seminars (this is done regularly for Northern Ireland Assembly's KESS programme), and closing the feedback loop for Ask Academia (amongst other things).
3. The Scottish Parliament should consider adopting changes to the recruitment process of fellows (see p.30 and recommendation 9 of the main report). This follows earlier points in Section 3 that suggests more involvement from the Committee Office would be beneficial, as would greater lead-in time built into fellowships to allow for delays or to resolve practical issues that may arise.
4. The Scottish Parliament should consider introducing an alumni network for fellows/interns. This follows earlier points in the report where fellows and interns identified a clear desire to share practices and ideas from each other. This could be done in collaboration with the other legislatures and/or with the research councils, or



only for Scottish fellows/interns, and may involve monthly networking lunches or coffee mornings.

5. The Scottish Parliament should liaise with the other legislatures and research councils about the induction for PhD students as part of the UKRI Policy Internship Scheme. Although the induction from the side of the Scottish Parliament did not raise any issues, PhD students noted that the information received from research councils was insufficient. This issue may be resolved in part through the creation of an alumni network for past and current interns (see above).
6. The Scottish Parliament should consider ways to extend KE opportunities to other postgraduate students. This follows the earlier discussion about ways to increase participation of more students. Above, it was suggested that MSc students could work with the Scottish Parliament for their dissertations or, more ambitiously, the Scottish Parliament could consider an MSc programme similar to that in Northern Ireland or to that offered by London-based universities for the UK Parliament.
7. The Scottish Parliament should consider ways to diversify the academic base of those that engage with the legislature (this echoes recommendation 10 of the main report). As noted in Section 4, there is a continued perception of reliance on certain parts of Scotland and on established scholars. One option would be to consider further training with universities and/or introducing more digital tools for engagement.

These recommendations add depth and/or supplement the 10 recommendations identified in the main report (summarised on p.5 of *Evaluating Academic Engagement*). We have also made recommendations to the other legislatures for their KE programmes that may be of interest to the Scottish Parliament. A reminder that all recommendations are based on a small data sample, and viability and desirability for some of these need to be examined more fully. The aim of all recommendations is to support legislatures in carrying out their core functions.

In closing, we would like to reiterate the impressive range and commitment of the Scottish Parliament to KE. While this conclusion has focused on suggestions for improvement, they must be placed in the wider context of an already highly engaging legislature that has sought to support KE with universities across Scotland, the UK and internationally. Given the wider policy context, as well as importance of the Parliament in legislative and policy scrutiny, we hope that this continues.