



Research findings: Knowledge Exchange between the UK Parliament and Universities

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1. Background and structure

This report presents key insights from a review of the Knowledge Exchange¹ activities between the UK Parliament and universities. The research was undertaken by Dr Danielle Beswick (University of Birmingham) and Dr Marc Geddes (University of Edinburgh) between June and December 2019. This study was part of a wider project on knowledge exchange between academics and the four UK legislatures, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Many of the findings discussed here echo those contained in our cross-legislature report, published in Spring 2020.² There are however some significant differences between the four legislatures, including in terms of their portfolios of KE activities, the staff time they are able to devote to KE, and how they fund these activities.

The UK Parliament has significant resources for Knowledge Exchange relative to the devolved legislatures, as well as a much longer history of engaging with universities. It has a number of organisations that support Members, principally the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), in which the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) is situated, and the House of Commons and House of Lords libraries. They serve 650 MPs in the House of Commons and approximately 800 Members of the House of Lords. One of our interviewees suggested the key strength of POST is that it has dedicated officials tasked with supporting KE and connecting Parliament with researchers. Unlike some of their peers working in the devolved administrations, who may also for example be tasked with responding to Member constituency based inquiries, getting research into parliament is the core 'day job' of POST staff, particularly those in the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) (UK Parliament official 1). Since 2013, POST has also had social science expertise and increased knowledge exchange capacity through staff seconded from UCL's department of Science Technology Engineering and Public Policy (STeAPP) as part of a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Our interviewees suggested that this unique funding arrangement may provide a greater degree of independence to pursue KE than would be possible if it were funded solely by Parliament (UK Parliament official 1), although Parliament does also

¹ Knowledge exchange in this context describes the processes through which academic research and expertise are brought into the work of legislatures, and also the ways in which legislatures seek to inform the work of academic researchers. Knowledge exchange is a precursor to, but distinct from, academic research having an impact on legislatures and their scrutiny activities.

² The final report from the wider cross-legislature project, can be found online here: http://www.pol.ed.ac.uk/research/grants_and_projects/current_projects/evaluating_academic_engagement_with_uk_legislatures



increasingly fund posts within the social sciences section. The ESRC is also familiar to many academics, which may encourage them to engage with POST, and the requirement for POST to demonstrate the impact of their work strengthens their incentives to engage with universities compared to devolved counterparts.

The range of KE activities POST has supported in recent years is extensive. POST produces a flagship series of 'POSTnotes', briefings developed through interviews with academics and other stakeholders which summarise the state of the art on topical issues. It also carries out horizon-scanning to identify areas for future research. POST supports fellowship programmes for doctoral research students and academics, and organises research briefings open to Members and their staff and to Parliament officials. It also runs a programme of training for academic researchers, 'Parliament for Researchers', designed to enhance researchers' knowledge and skills to improve both the quantity and the quality of academic exchange with Parliament.³ POST also dedicates staff time and resources to support research on KE, including this project, and to share experiences with other legislatures in the UK and internationally. Finally, it has sought to co-ordinate cross-legislature briefings notes and consultation responses in order to inform development of the Research Excellence Framework and Knowledge Exchange Framework, both of which significantly influence how and why universities and their researchers engage in KE with legislatures.⁴

Structure

The report proceeds in five sections. Section 2 provides a summary of the data collected for the review. Section 3 presents legislature officials' perspectives on current KE activities, including the perceived value of these interactions, and whether and how the effectiveness of these activities could be measured. Section 4 draws on interviews with university officials, which in this report refers to professional services staff employed by universities that have a specific focus on KE within their role, and engaged academics (academic fellows, former PhD interns and attendees at academic training events). These interviews are used to summarise incentives for academics and universities to engage with legislatures, as well as their perspectives on barriers to improving KE activities and suggestions for improvement. Section 5 summarises the recommendations for evaluating and improving KE which emerge from the data taken as a whole.

³ The cross-legislature report in note 2 contains a full list of KE activities, correct as at December 2019 (pp.32-34).

⁴ See for example: UK Parliament. (2018) Research Impact and Legislatures, available at: https://www.parliament.uk/documents/Research%20Impact%20in%20Legislatures_FINAL%202.pdf ; UK Parliament (2020) Knowledge Exchange and Legislatures, available at: [https://www.parliament.uk/documents/post/Final_KE%20and%20Legislatures_WEB%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/post/Final_KE%20and%20Legislatures_WEB%20(2).pdf)



2. Data collection

Between June and September 2019, we conducted semi structured interviews at the UK Parliament both in person and via telephone with a range of stakeholders involved in KE between universities and the UK Parliament. All interviewees received a project information sheet and copy of a consent form in advance, with consent recorded in writing or orally during the interview. Participation was voluntary, and those interviewed were informed of their right to withdraw without any negative personal consequences.

Table 1 below shows the breakdown of interviewees.

Table 1:

Interviewee category	Number
UK Parliament officials	7
Engaged academics	7
University officials	2
Others	2

Alongside the interview data, we received the following documents from the UK Parliament:

- a. Evaluation of Academic Fellowships (including raw data and analysis) from November 2018, as well as survey data from PhD fellows
- b. Immediate and six-month-on survey data and qualitative feedback from training sessions, both formal and informal covering 2016-19 period
- c. Online data analytics, including website traffic and Twitter data (2018-19)
- d. Published and unpublished evaluations of UK Parliament and POST outreach activities, by academics and officials, including from events and training workshops
- e. Board papers from POST (2017-19) covering activities of fellows and suggested impact of POSTnotes; additionally, internal evaluations of POST
- f. Data submitted by POST to ResearchFish on the activities and potential impacts of the social sciences section and the Knowledge Exchange Unit.
- g. Data on location and frequency of outreach events, as well as data on the gender of fellows and on the universities involved in the programme

3. Legislature officials' perspectives on KE with universities

The value of academic research for legislatures

Academic researchers are characterised by UK Parliament officials as one element within a wider knowledge landscape that officials, Members and their staff engage with. Academic research sits alongside perspectives from others, including individuals with lived experience of a policy issue, service providers, third sector organisations and professional bodies. All were mentioned as important in helping officials and Members achieve a holistic and well-informed view of any given policy issue. Nevertheless, officials identified particular reasons for engaging with academics compared to other types of stakeholder, and each of these were echoed by at least two of our academic and university interviewees. The rationales for engaging with academic researchers and with academic research were often linked by our interviewees, but it is possible to separate them out. This reflects the fact that there are ways that officials can – and do – access academic knowledge without engaging directly with the researcher who produced it. For example, Library officials may read and summarise open source academic research to produce a response to a Member query and present this to them, with an academic unaware of the fact their work has been used. However, if a Member is keen to develop a more in depth understanding of the topic, the same official might ask an academic to speak with them directly. Similarly, committee Specialists may incorporate open source academic research into a briefing for Members, or may advise a Chair to meet with an academic informally, or to invite them to give oral evidence, where more depth or detail is required. Recognising a degree of overlap, the rationales for engagement emerging from our interviews can be summarised as follows:

Rationale for engaging with academic researchers	Rationale for engaging with research produced by academics
<i>Distilling information:</i> Able to communicate key academic debates and evidence on a topic, getting officials and Members 'up to speed' on complex areas quickly	<i>Objectivity:</i> Perceived to be less agenda-driven than research produced by others, such as service providers or industry bodies, or information presented by personally affected or invested individuals/groups
<i>Specialist knowledge:</i> Able to offer skills and technical or in-depth knowledge on an issue which is not available 'in-house'	<i>Robustness:</i> Perceived to be methodologically robust due to sector requirements for peer review
<i>Relative freedom:</i> Perceived to be more independent, and able to critically engage with government policy than, for example,	<i>Ethical:</i> Perceived to be ethically sound due to institution/funder requirements for



service providers who may rely on government funding <i>Networks:</i> Provides access to wider network of academic and non-academic contacts (e.g. research partners and participants). <i>Future contact:</i> Builds trust allowing future interaction to, for example, sense-check aspects of an inquiry or potential witness list <i>Shaping future research:</i> Officials can use their knowledge of the legislature to help academics shape research agendas relevant to policy and scrutiny challenges <i>Education:</i> Raising academics' familiarity with legislature processes and opportunities to feed in research.	ethical review and peer review <i>Accessibility:</i> Research may be published and in the public domain.
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Officials clearly see engagement with academics as both valuable and necessary. One told us that it 'strengthens the work we do, and particularly the support we provide to other bits of Parliament' (UK Parliament official 1). The breadth and depth of subjects on which up to date knowledge may be required by Members, sometimes at very short notice, could not be comprehensively covered by legislature officials. There is an ongoing need for expert knowledge to support officials to summarise existing research, identify gaps and avenues for inquiry, and to highlight implications for scrutiny and legislation. There was a broad consensus that even without direct contact with academics, officials would continue to draw on publicly available research to inform their work. Nevertheless officials often stated that engaging with academics helps them to provide a better service. Even where it is feasible for them to review and summarise the research evidence on a policy issue, in a timely fashion and alongside other responsibilities, having an outside source – specifically an academic – brings benefits. While acknowledging that all researchers bring their own biases and subjectivities into their engagements with Parliament, interviewees tended to emphasise the perceived relative neutrality (UK Parliament official 4) of academics. This was particularly mentioned when comparing academics to representatives from third sector and private sector organisations whose input may be constrained by a need to maintain good relationships with Government.



Bringing in academics that are perceived as being primarily driven by evidence, while recognising that no source is completely neutral, alongside those from organisations with specific positions to promote, can help to reassure Members that they are receiving a good balance of information on which to base effective scrutiny (UK Parliament officials 4 and 6). It was also clear that, for particularly technical and complex subjects, having officials spend the time needed to develop sufficient expertise to brief Members was considered an inefficient use of resources (UK Parliament official 5). Leveraging in external expertise from academics can thus help officials provide support based on both broader and deeper knowledge than is available in-house, enhancing the knowledge services provided by Parliament officials.

What is KE?

Having established that engaging with academics and academic research is considered valuable and worthwhile, we moved on to focus more specifically on Knowledge Exchange. Most officials defined this as being two-way, ideally enhancing the knowledge of both academics and legislatures, and saw KE as a set of processes or interactions. These themes are captured well in quotes from three interviewees:

‘(KE is) anything that is enabling...Parliament staff and Members to engage more with research and anything to do with equipping the research community to engage more with Parliament.’ (UK Parliament official 1)

‘(KE is) people knowing each other and structures being in place such that information and research can get to the right places’ (UK Parliament official 2)

‘(KE is when) academics know how they can feed their research into Parliament...and giving us...an idea of how the academic research process works [in terms of] timeframes, approaches to dissemination, barriers they face...[it’s about] getting a better working relationship with academics generally’ (UK Parliament official 5).

KE was often linked with specific activities that seek to bring academic researchers into Parliament to support its work directly, including PhD internships and academic fellowships, breakfast briefings and ad hoc seminars, evidence submissions to committees, academics providing informal briefings to Members, and academics taking positions as committee specialist advisors. Interviewees also saw KE as taking place through the training and support provided by officials, which focuses on improving academic awareness of opportunities to engage and ways to maximise effectiveness of such engagement. They particularly highlighted the Parliament for Researchers training events as a good example of this work.



Almost all of the officials we interviewed saw the potential for impact, on the work of Parliament and the lives of people, as the main driver for spending time and public funds on KE. As one put it, 'the reason we're doing KE is because we want the world to be a better place...evidence informed policy...requires evidence going into the policy making process and [to facilitate that] requires KE.' (UK Parliament official 3). Another said simply that 'the reason for doing the KE is to have impact' (UK Parliament official 2). The two were generally regarded as intertwined. This reflected an underlying assumption that facilitating more KE, would, through increasing two way flow of knowledge, increase the chances of relevant research reaching policymakers at an appropriate moment. Improving the presentation of that research for a policy audience was seen as increasing the likelihood of take-up of that research, increasing the opportunity for impact. As two officials put it: 'you've got to do KE if you want if you want to stand a chance of having impact' (UK Parliament official 3); and 'if we are doing an increased amount of KE its going to help academics have a better impact' (UK Parliament official 5). However, although these assumptions are implicit in much of the design, delivery and evaluation of KE activities, some felt there was as yet no clear articulation of the 'theory of change' which drives KE activity by the UK Parliament (UK Parliament officials 1 and 3). This partly reflects uncertainty as to what makes some KE activities more effective than others, and indeed what effectiveness means in this context.

What makes KE 'effective'?

Officials tended to define effectiveness in two main ways. For some, effective KE was activity which led to a **change in actions** undertaken by Members based on interaction with and research evidence from academics. For others, effective KE was activity which led to an **increase in the quality and availability** of academic research evidence to Parliament. One interviewee described this as:

[the] dream world, ideal scenario, [in which] a wider range of institutions are working with Parliament and a wider range of academics are working with Parliament ...and maybe implicit is that there is a greater diversity of people working with Parliament as well...the research being used is the best available and it's not been sourced in a rushed way or from the usual suspects (UK Parliament official 2).

The first distinct aim expressed in this quote is to create the best opportunities for scrutiny and legislative outputs to be improved by engaging with academic research. The second aim expressed is to increase and diversify the inputs to this process. Below we briefly summarise the comments and suggestions of officials on achieving these two aims in turn.



The factors which officials felt made academic research more likely to influence the thinking and potentially the actions of a Member are perhaps unsurprising. Timing and salience were considered crucial. One official told us that interaction with academic research 'is far more impactful when it's intended to support a particular decision' (UK Parliament official 1). While acknowledging that academics may have particular skill in identifying issues that are under the radar (UK Parliament official 4), or emerging on the horizon (UK Parliament official 5), officials felt that being able to provide research expertise at a critical moment, when an issue was on the agenda of a committee, or 'bubbling up' in the media and constituent inquiries to the MPs (UK Parliament official 6), made it much more likely that research would be 'picked up' and have the potential to influence action. Confidentiality was also considered to be important. One official felt that transparency in Parliament was very important, but that at an early stage, when Members are thinking through an issue, being in private gives them space to learn and to 'ask questions, without fear of looking like they don't know what they are talking about' (UK Parliament official 1). The guarantee of a 'safe space' to learn and ask questions was also believed to improve Member attendance and engagement at events where academics presented and discussed the relevance of their research for the work of Parliament (UK Parliament official 4).

Finally, the framing of the academic research, to be as clear and as relevant as possible for the needs of the legislature, was considered crucial to its uptake. The training provided by the KEU through the Parliament for Researchers programme is one of the main ways that Parliament seeks to improve the quality of engagement, and has been refined over recent years in response to participant feedback. Holding training at regional level, for cross-university groups of academics, and charging a small fee to cover costs, were all seen as measures which have increased attendance and encouraged academics to attach greater value to the training (UK Parliament officials 1, 3 and 4). Extended workshops provide practical guidance on framing research and entry points for engaging with Parliament, as well as opportunities to develop and try out a research pitch to legislature officials. While many officials we interviewed felt the training, along with online guidance, played a valuable role in making academic research more readily usable by officials and Members, there was no suggestion that the efficacy of training on Member uptake of research should be measured. This largely reflected the challenge of measuring quality of academic engagement and attributing this to their having participated in training. Instead, some officials suggested that the aims of training could be more clearly defined in terms of increasing motivation to engage (UK Parliament official 1). This will be discussed further below.



The academic fellowships were one specific activity where effectiveness was discussed, in terms of both impact on the actions and attitudes of Members engaging in specific committee inquiries or areas of work, and also on working practices within the legislature. The success of the pilot scheme was described as mixed. Officials expressed a desire to better understand ‘what works well in matching fellows and hosts’ with one noting ‘it seems to have worked much more effectively when [a fellow has] gone to a Select Committee with an acknowledged body of skills that the committee wants to make use of’ (UK Parliament official 1). Again this suggests that success often depended on Parliament identifying a gap for academic research to fill. Despite some notable successes among the pilot cohort of fellowships, several officials also ‘struggled to get the level of work they expected’ and found that fellows were not very ‘responsive on email’ (UK Parliament official 3). For this reason, officials also saw success as correlating with ‘good working relationships [and] clear communication’ (UK Parliament official 3). As fellows are employed by their institutions, rather than by Parliament, some officials also found it difficult to know how to handle poor communication or lack of delivery from fellows.

On the academic side, the evaluation of the pilot scheme found that fellows were sometimes unsure of what was expected of them by their Parliament hosts, and what they should expect from their hosts as part of the fellowship. Reflecting on this feedback, one Parliament official suggested holding informal contract meetings between the fellow and the host at the start of the fellowship, producing a simple template to outline intended outputs and outcomes and identify training needs (UK Parliament official 3). These contract meetings were subsequently introduced in December 2019. It may be unrealistic to expect fellows to know what they don’t know, making identifying training needs on the basis of a single contract meeting difficult. Nevertheless, by combining this with other elements of the application process, such as submission of a policy note on their previous research or their proposed project, hosts could better assess the preparedness of potential fellows and what support may be needed to maximise the chances of their delivering agreed outputs.

Alongside these suggestions on how officials could maximise the chances of existing KE activities having an impact on scrutiny and legislation, the second theme – how to widen the pool of contributors - was a key concern for our interviewees. This issue speaks to the underlying values and principles which shape KE activities. It presents a different challenge than the previous focus on how to package academic research to deliver it effectively ‘on demand’, when officials have pre-identified a need. It is clear from the interviews that officials aim to make KE with Parliament more accessible and desirable



to a wider range of academic researchers at different institutions and career stages, and from a wide range of backgrounds. The existing suite of activities has evolved to reflect this desire, as we will see below, but at the time of this research there was limited data available to show whether it was achieving its ambitions.⁵

Officials are very conscious of the reliance on ‘usual suspects’. These are individuals who are willing and able to engage with Parliament and deliver research in ways which best suit officials and Members, often at short notice. There is also a tendency to reach out to people who have engaged with Parliament before. They suggested that this can sometimes be at odds with the aim of accessing the best expertise on a topic. For example, one official suggested that Members will often request briefings or evidence from academics based on having met them previously, or seen them present to a different committee or other policy audience. This happens, they suggested, even in cases where the individual may not have expertise on the specific issue under consideration (UK Parliament official 4). The same official saw challenging this reliance on known contacts as part of their role, saying: ‘there are already these networks that are quite hard to break into, and our job is to cast the net as widely as possible’ (UK Parliament official 4). This is however a challenge given tight timeframes for input into pre-defined scrutiny timetables. Another official told us ‘we kind of need for someone to respond quite quickly and know why we’re asking them without having to do quite a lot of that work of explaining what we do and why we work in the way we work’ (UK Parliament official 6). The training of academics, in order to raise their awareness of how Parliament uses research and when and how to effectively engage is therefore crucial. Schemes like the fellowships, as well as formal roles like that of Committee Advisor, can also help to widen the range of perspectives and evidence reaching policymakers. There are however accessibility barriers that exist within some KE activities which need to be addressed.

The first significant challenge is funding. Academic fellowships – a flagship KE activity for the UK Parliament – tend to be taken up by those with university funding, with most successful applicants coming from institutions which have an Impact Accelerator Account (IAA). They are also open to those who can independently find funds from

⁵ In the period since data was collected for this report, there has been some encouraging evidence of improvement in the diversity of institutions that engage with Knowledge Exchange opportunities. Drawing on a survey of academic members that joined an expert database in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Foxen and Saint found a much greater proportion of respondents were employed by non-Russell group Universities and from institutions outside London than had been reflected in previous research of this kind. See Saint, N and S Foxen, (2020) ‘Strength in diversity: Changing the shape of expert engagement with the UK Parliament’ 16 July 2020. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/07/13/strength-in-diversity-changing-the-shape-of-expert-engagement-with-the-uk-parliament/> accessed 26/11/2020.



other research organisations or funders, such as charities, professional associations or learned societies, though we did not find cases of such alternative funding among the fellows interviewed. While other universities may find ways to support applicants, for instance using internal funding sources and existing sabbatical programmes, access to funding for applicants whose university does not have an IAA was identified as a significant barrier. This was highlighted by our interviewees and is also raised in the internal POST evaluation of the academic fellowship scheme.⁶ In contrast, while the legislatures in Scotland and Wales also rely heavily on universities to fund fellows, including through IAAs, they allocate their own funding where institutions are unable or unwilling to support costs. If the UK Parliament were also willing to fund individual projects it is perhaps likely that these would be tied to specific knowledge gaps identified by Parliament, rather than more ‘blue skies’ projects determined by researchers. For example, the committee office budget for primary research has been used in recent years to commission the Climate Assembly UK, and for small pieces of inquiry-linked research requested by committees.

Leaving aside the funding issue, the flexibility built into the academic fellowship scheme, which sees holders engaging with their host team in Parliament for different lengths of time and in different combinations of remote and in-house working, does make it more accessible. As one official noted, ‘that flexibility is something that’s valuable and should be protected’ (UK Parliament official 4). This is, however, an option that has not routinely been made available to applicants for the PhD internship.

Within the Parliament for Researchers programme of training events, there have been specific efforts to target groups who are believed to be under-represented in KE between universities and Parliament. An event for women researchers was held in 2019 (UK Parliament official 2), followed by focused events for BAME researchers and researchers with disabilities in Summer 2020. These targeted events, held in Parliament, can be a powerful way of reaching groups who would perhaps otherwise be less likely to engage and breaking down a perceived barrier around the accessibility of Parliament. Bringing in individuals with these characteristics who have engaged with Parliament can also provide a visible affirmation that Parliament is open to all and is not content to rely on an established closed network of usual suspects. We will return to barriers to widening the pool of academics engaging with Parliament in the following section, presenting insights from interviews with academics. Before doing so, bearing in mind officials’ views on the value and aims of KE, we will summarise officials’

⁶ Internal POST evaluation of Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme, p.22



suggestions on how the effectiveness of KE might be evidenced and measured and who should be responsible for this.

How can – and should - effectiveness be measured?

To summarise, effectiveness of KE activities was described in two main ways. First, activities were considered effective if they led to a demonstrable impact, where a clear thread could be drawn between a specific piece or body of academic research and an outcome, such as a committee recommendation, or change in legislation or practice in a specific policy area. The second theme in the interviews described effective KE as that which increased the amount and quality of academic research being brought into Parliament, with a particular focus on ensuring these opportunities are accessible to the widest possible range of researchers.

Focusing on the first of these, officials acknowledged that identifying the impact of research brought into Parliament is important for understanding the value and effectiveness of their KE work. Nevertheless, they tended to describe the specific tracing and evidencing of whether KE had led to demonstrable impact as primarily something that academics and universities are best placed to do on a case by case basis. The volume of academic research entering Parliament, through both formal KE activities and many informal routes such as direct contact between researchers and Members, means that comprehensive tracing of possible impacts by parliamentary officials would require huge resources. Most suggested that academics are best placed to compile their own records of their exchanges with officials and Members, and that they have incentives to do so (e.g.: UK Parliament official 5). They identified a range of places where direct evidence of engagement could be found, including academics being cited in Library briefing papers, POSTnotes, committee reports and Hansard reporting of comments made by Members in Parliament (UK Parliament official 5; UK Parliament official 6; UK Parliament official 2). This approach basically amounts to counting inputs; the emails, phone calls, written or oral evidence submissions and other communication of research by academics to officials and Members. As one official put it, '[w]e're talking about engagement as a kind of indicator or proxy for impact' (UK Parliament official 3). Another saw both promise and pitfalls in this, in that it would provide a simple, low cost and somewhat comparable metric of engagement, but cautioned that quantity may not correlate with impact: 'you'd get a simple number out of that but you wouldn't get the depth of understanding' (UK Parliament official 6).



Other officials suggested that academics, supported by specialist policy engagement staff at their university, could also go ‘a bit deeper.’ This would include looking for how ideas and language from their research may have been used, even where the individual researcher is not directly cited by name (UK Parliament official 2). However, as we will see later, academics and university officials felt that without being directly cited it was difficult to prove their contribution to funders and employers, or develop a convincing narrative about the impact of that contribution. Recognising this, some officials were willing in principle to provide acknowledgement of the fact an academic contributed and potentially to produce a short written note on the influence of their contribution. Others however cautioned that providing testimonials can be difficult, particularly when multiple academic sources had made the same point, making individual attribution difficult, or where research led a committee not to pursue a particular line of inquiry (UK Parliament official 2). A committee official noted that committees do not routinely acknowledge academic specialist advisors in their published reports, and suggested that testimonial letters were often more general and vague about influence than academic researchers might like (UK Parliament official 4).

Parliament officials also acknowledged that they faced similar challenges in evidencing the impact of their work to support academics and universities. Academics who have undergone training occasionally contact KE officials to report that they have submitted evidence to an inquiry, applied for a specialist advisor role, or contacted their MP about their research. KE officials collect these communications, but lack the time or a robust methodology for tracing how this intervention was informed by the training they delivered, and whether or not that research has an impact on the work of the legislature.

The challenge of understanding what makes different KE activities more or less likely to make a measurable impact on scrutiny, and of finding ways to measure effectiveness in terms of impact, clearly affects both legislatures and universities. Understanding the relative chances of different types of KE leading to a specific impact, on scrutiny, policy and people’s lives, would require significant resources. While this could reveal useful insights into what works, it might also produce a large range of subtly different pathways for impact with features in common, but which rely on many specificities that are difficult to quantify and reproduce.. Given the range of influences our interviewees identified on whether and how research travels within scrutiny processes, it is also far from certain that the results of such an investigation would be generalizable. Where specific impacts can be identified, these might provide useful illustrations of what is possible. One official described this as ‘cherry picking, which has its value in showing the potential pathways but it’s not representative...’ (UK Parliament official 3).



Measuring KE outcomes in a robust way, to allow inferences to be made about KE pathways that are relatively more or less likely to lead to demonstrable impact, also faces other challenges. It would be difficult to account for other factors which might influence academic engagement and research uptake, that are not easily captured by a simple model of cause and effect. Research is only one input into the work of legislatures. Academics can seek to influence, but ultimately cannot control, whether officials and Members are receptive to their research. Ideological differences may mean that researchers and Members disagree about the relevance and/or the policy implications of the same piece of research. The work of legislatures can also be significantly impacted by unforeseen challenges, which see legislative agendas and scrutiny work, as well as the membership and very existence of committees disrupted. In recent years this includes three general elections in four years, the significant burden of additional legislative work generated by the UK decision to leave the EU, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is also no simple path from research informing scrutiny to a real world change in government policy. The recurring example that officials suggested of research informing scrutiny and policy was on micro-plastics (UK Parliament official 7; UK Parliament official 3). Academics who sought to push this up the legislative agenda pursued multiple engagements with Parliament and governments over many years. This suggests that the time horizon for impact is as much dictated by whether there is a space – of Member interest, and public concern/demand – for research to fit into as it is by the quality of the research or the real-world impact of the ‘problem’. These additional factors – mostly outside of the influence of academics – mean that measuring effectiveness of KE activities by measuring their impacts is difficult and costly. It is in some ways a perfect storm for the creation of metrics, with no clear timescale for impact, no agreed set of indicators of impact and no existing data capture process which could be co-opted to support the exercise.

In comparison, measuring the other indicator of effectiveness – increased quantity and quality of academic research inputs into legislatures, is much easier and, in some cases data is already being collected. The number and range of opportunities to learn about the routes to getting research into Parliament, and about how to present that research in a format that makes it easy for Members and officials to use, can be recorded and counted. This includes places offered on training courses, physical or virtual, presentations at academic research and professional conferences and blog posts. An indication of the uptake of these opportunities can also be collated, with improvement targets based on an increase in the absolute numbers or changes in who is accessing



these opportunities. Parliament and the KEU already collect and analyse data on webpage visits and social media interactions, while KEU collect data on number and demographic characteristics of training participants and academic fellows. Where groups are believed to be under-represented, or to face particular barriers to participating, this has prompted development of tailored KE opportunities. This includes dedicated sessions of Parliament for Researchers aimed at women researchers and BAME researchers.

Evaluations of these activities, as currently done via feedback surveys and 6 monthly follow up with training participants, can help to develop an understanding of what works and where barriers to participation or gaps in provision exist. Similarly, collecting demographic data on training participants, those making submissions to committees, and those taking specialist advisor roles, would help officials to identify under-represented groups, explore barriers to their engagement and tailor their KE work with universities accordingly. Indicators of effective KE could then include increased numbers of participants where numbers are not fixed, for example in written evidence submissions or engagement with online resources. Where there are practical constraints on the number of opportunities, as is the case with PhD interns, academic fellows and specialist advisor roles, success could be indicated by increasing proportions of places taken up by those from harder to reach groups, defined by gender, disability, career stage, ethnicity, university type or other characteristic. These indicators would show Parliament's commitment to building a supportive and inclusive environment for KE with universities, and a focus on both quantity and quality of submissions.

The focus on inputs, on bringing in a higher volume of appropriately packaged research from a wider range of academics also allows measurement to focus on the part of the process where officials and universities have most control. One official gave the example of academics submitting evidence to select committees, arguing that:

'if the committee doesn't follow up its own work with government and push for change then I don't see that the academics should be held to account for that, because that's Parliament not doing its job very well...[I]f they [academics] engage in an engaging way that people understand them that should be sufficient...and then the next bit is up to us' (UK Parliament official 1).

This focus on inputs also chimed with the perspective of another official, that KE is about facilitating the flow of knowledge into Parliament and the use of that knowledge to improve scrutiny and policy (UK Parliament official 2). Academics have significant control over whether and how often they engage, and over the packaging of that



research to help it travel most effectively, but they cannot control ultimate uptake by Members and officials, or by other policymakers. Concentrating on the flow of research into Parliament would therefore include measuring and seeking to increase volume and quality, and the accessibility of the opportunities, rather than seeking to measure the impacts of specific pathways and pieces of research. It would also recognise the value of the connections made in the margins of formal events, such as conversations between Members and academics during breaks in a seminar, or after a formal evidence session. (UK Parliament official 3).

It is also useful here to highlight a point made by both officials and academics, that having greater contact between researchers and Parliament can help to break down barriers to engagement, including the perception that Parliament is only interested in research from senior scholars from elite universities. Those who participate from institutions and groups that have tended to be underrepresented can be powerful ambassadors for KE with Parliament within their institutions and wider networks. One official recognised this, saying ‘The impact that we are having on your awareness is going to have a potentially massive knock on effect, like a ripple effect, for the rest of your career and on other people but that is not recognised as much as perhaps...writing a briefing that shapes a ToR [Terms of Reference] for a committee inquiry, which might not go anywhere and yet one of those is easier to report than the other’ (UK Parliament official 3).

Officials gave us examples of PhD interns and academic fellows acting as ambassadors for parliamentary engagement and KE. Some officials have provided them with resources to give talks at their institutions, and even participated in conference/workshop panels with them to discuss the schemes (UK Parliament official 5; UK Parliament official 3). This opportunity to reach wider communities of researchers could be formally integrated into KE activities. For example, an exit interview or form used to capture initial feedback from interns and fellows could ask whether they would consider holding such an event and offer resources, such as a short slide deck, to facilitate this. Another option would be to give former fellows and interns a small number of personalised invitations to engage with Parliament that they could share with colleagues. Officials told us that they regularly meet people working for NGOs or with the civil service who had previously undertaken a POST internship, with one stressing that ‘one of the biggest impacts of POST is actually in terms of people’ (UK Parliament official 7).



To summarise, the report has so far presented the views of officials on the value of KE with universities, how effective KE is understood, and how it could be measured. Based on this, we have suggested that the connection between KE and impact on scrutiny and people's lives is complex. While process tracing could be used to reverse engineer high profile examples of research influencing policy, to demonstrate the possibilities of particular pathways, these would not be representative. Measuring KE effectiveness with legislatures by looking at outcomes does not lend itself to simple metrics. There is however merit to measuring inputs. Some data is already being collected by Parliament on the number of academic researchers engaging with specific KE pathways and their characteristics. There is, though, a challenge here for officials. Although they can invest resources in designing and delivering KE opportunities to be as inclusive as possible, the uptake of these will depend significantly on who the opportunity is relevant for, and how these opportunities are framed, valued and enabled by researchers and universities. In the following section we explore the insights from interviews with academics and university officials. In thinking about how to ensure KE opportunities are accessible and attractive to researchers and universities, it is useful to reflect on their experiences and their suggestions for improvements.

4. Academic and university officials' perspectives on KE with the UK Parliament

Benefits of KE with legislatures

The benefits of KE between legislatures and academic researchers do not only flow in one direction. When discussing the incentives which underpin these exchanges, our university-based interviewees identified a range of ways that academics and universities may gain from the interaction. Some of these are shaped by the specific form of engagement. For example, a fellowship may provide greater opportunity to build academics' knowledge of the nuances of research-informed scrutiny than co-authoring a blog post. Noting these differences, the general themes emerging from the interviews are summarised below:

Benefits to the academic	Benefits to the university
Development of skills in writing for legislature audiences, including Members and officials	Opportunity to demonstrate engagement with non-academic stakeholders (particularly relevant in the context of the Knowledge Exchange Framework)
Greater appreciation of how research informs scrutiny in the UK Parliament	
Opportunity to use their own research to inform and improve Parliament scrutiny	Opportunity to demonstrate impact of research on non-academic stakeholders (particularly relevant in context of the Research Excellence Framework)



Opportunity to develop connections with Members and their staff Development of professional networks with Parliament officials, potentially outlasting the initial activity Development of professional networks with wider stakeholders (e.g. civil society, government) Opportunity to experience a different work culture and context (primarily highlighted by academic fellows and PhD interns) Potential to use the experience to inform teaching and raise students' awareness of the work of Parliament and the role of research. Potential for career boost, including promotion, based on prestige of engagement	Improved in-house expertise and experience on legislature engagement, potentially informing staff development training and teaching. Prestige of being seen as a civic minded and engaged institution.
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University officials and academics saw the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and a more general expectation that universities should demonstrate the benefits of their research to wider society, as key drivers of engagement with legislatures. This is reflected in the investment that universities have made in supporting academics to engage with Parliament. Such support includes allocating academic staff time for legislature engagement in workload models, funding teaching replacement and direct costs, such as travel or training workshop fees, employing professional support staff to facilitate exchange, and providing training for these staff on engaging with legislatures. This investment, however, comes with an expectation that university staff and academics will be able to demonstrate the value of the interaction, both to the legislature and the university. We will return to this later.

For academics, the opportunity –expressed by some as a responsibility - to make a real-world difference with their research was a key driver of engagement. Almost all academics we spoke to had never engaged with any UK legislature apart from the UK Parliament. Career progression was a motivation for some of those we interviewed, although few expected to be promoted on the back of this activity and some raised concerns that this work was under-valued by their universities. This was again often linked to the argument that impact of KE was not easy to trace or quantify.



In the sections that follow we present the findings of the interviews with university officials and academics. These are collected under three headings: the added value that academics and university officials believe they bring to legislatures through KE; their motivations for engaging in, supporting and promoting KE; and the concerns they raise about these activities, including barriers to KE.

Added value of academic KE with legislatures

When asked for their views on what added value academic researchers can bring to scrutiny, those researchers highlighted many of the same points as Parliament officials. Academic research was described by one former academic fellow as ‘slow thinking’, an in-depth counterpoint to the policy-focused on-demand knowledge that a think tank or lobby group might provide while hoping to influence Parliament in a particular direction (Engaged academic 1; University official 1). University research, in comparison to these other sources, was described as being objective, rigorous, and trustworthy, with the established systems for peer review providing a good guarantee of quality (Engaged academic 2; Engaged academic 3; University official 1).

Beyond this, they argued that public KE with universities helps Parliament to demonstrate to the public that scrutiny is evidence based (Engaged academic 4). Another researcher highlighted the potential for academics to act as a ‘node’, through which Parliament can reach wider range of stakeholders: ‘bringing their expertise to Parliament, but also linking Parliament to professional knowledge in communities and the wider public’ (Engaged academic 2). They felt that this could help shift the way that scrutiny themes and priorities are decided, by working through academics to engage communities and professionals in order to define ‘questions that matter’, and ‘find out what the real issues are’ (Engaged academic 2). Researchers also suggested that the academic fellowship scheme in particular helped to bring a wider range of academic and non-academic perspectives to Parliament, particularly by suggesting witnesses and advisors for committee inquiries (Engaged academic 1). This was echoed in the internal evaluation of the fellowship scheme undertaken by POST in 2018, where: “It was suggested that the purpose of the fellowships is less about producing research, and more about bringing understanding of Parliament, and academic research (in terms of contacts and access to expertise) to the different audiences. Fellowships [were] a route to improve the quality, range and speed of Parliament’s knowledge exchange work.”⁷

⁷ Internal POST evaluation of Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme, p.10



A key difference between Parliament officials and academics in their view of the added value of KE lay in the balance between what could be considered ‘problem solving’ KE and ‘problem setting’ KE. University researchers and staff tended to place greater emphasis than officials on the potential for academics to help identify issues which were under the radar of officials, and to shape the scrutiny agenda (Engaged academic 2; Engaged academic 1). They were, though, concerned that Parliament tends to reach out to academics to solve pre-defined problems, rather than to help frame or even co-produce scrutiny priorities and approaches (Engaged academic 4; University official 1). Other research professionals working with universities suggested that by engaging in KE, academics could help Parliament officials to better understand the culture and language of universities and the range of possibilities for collaboration and accessing funding to support this. They felt academics could also help Parliament to shape scrutiny in ways which might improve public awareness and engagement with Parliament (Engaged academic 1; Engaged academic 6).

Motivations and attractions of KE for academic researchers

University researchers and officials identified a range of reasons why they wished to engage in KE with legislatures. For some, the realisation that engaging in KE was possible and relatively straightforward, was a key attraction. One who had attended a ‘Parliament for Researchers’ training session described this as bringing ‘politics and Parliament within grasp’, continuing... ‘you feel like you’re a very small cog and you can’t get access to things, to people or projects within Parliament. And actually, if you know where to look, you can’ (Engaged academic 2). Another described the process of applying for an academic fellowship as not too onerous, particularly in comparison to applying for other fellowship opportunities or funding schemes (Engaged academic 1). This suggests that while we propose that some additional stages could be added in order to improve the fit between fellows and Parliamentary hosts, it will be important to avoid creating a process that is overly long and bureaucratic.

Most interviewees suggested that universities and their researchers have a responsibility to use their research, to improve policy and ultimately people’s lives through supporting evidence based scrutiny and policy (University official 1). They felt that research was ‘funded by the public purse’ and that as a result researchers ‘have a responsibility to ensure that they are useful outside of academia’ (Engaged academic 5). The possibility of having a ‘real-world impact’ was a key justification for their KE activity, with one researcher saying: ‘research does not end with publication in a



journal, it only ends when there is demonstrable impact and, when necessary, change' (Engaged academic 6). Another saw KE as the route to achieving change and having an impact. They saw KE as 'just the beginning', and impact as being 'about the benefits of a change having occurred –the cost of living goes down or, you know, lives saved' (Engaged academic 7). For one former academic fellow, the opportunity to have a smaller ongoing influence on the work of Parliament, through supporting a select committee, also allowed for more 'regular returns' on their input, rather than placing all hopes for influence in one flagship end of project report. For them, the opportunity to 'effectively [become] part of the team' was a key benefit of the interaction (Engaged academic 1). For these academics the possibility of supporting evidence based policymaking and scrutiny, whether linked to ongoing improvement in Parliament's use of evidence or to a specific impact on scrutiny and possibly also policy, is part of their identity and aims as researchers, not an optional add-on.

Linked to this, some were motivated to get involved by seeing what they regarded as poor quality evidence being used by Parliament in their area of research. Reflecting on their own skills and expertise, they felt a responsibility to ensure Parliament had a sense of the shortcomings in the research and evidence it was receiving, and – to their minds – a more robust and accurate evidence base to inform their work (Engaged academic 6; Engaged academic 1). Others felt that they had a responsibility not only to correct what they saw as flawed evidence, but to actively use their engagement with Parliament to bring a wider range of perspectives into scrutiny. This included connecting Members and officials with community activists and professionals (Engaged academic 2) and advising select committees on how they might go beyond their usual suspects when seeking evidence (Engaged academic 1).

Other benefits highlighted by academics who had engaged in KE included the expansion of their professional networks. Some had made contact with people outside their academic communities, including with civil society, MPs and their staff, civil servants and government officials, directly through the KE (Engaged academic 3). They saw these expanded networks as helping their future career, particularly through helping them to apply for large grants to fund future research (Engaged academic 7). Similarly, KE offered the opportunity to improve their communication skills, learning how to: 'format information most effectively' (Engaged academic 1); 'organise events' which engaged Members and officials; and to learn about the 'science-policy interface' (Engaged academic 3; Engaged academic 5).



Alongside these improved skills and professional development, academics identified other professional benefits. At least two universities had nominated their academics undertaking KE with Parliament for internal awards, acknowledging their work and raising the profile of the academic and their wider institution (University official 2; Engaged academic 1). Most had shared their experiences and the skills and insights they had learned with other academics at their institutions, including via training sessions, seminars and blog posts (Engaged academic 1; Engaged academic 3; Engaged academic 5). One told us: 'I've been encouraging people to do it ever since and quite a few have taken that advice' (Engaged academic 5). Some told us that their universities also explicitly recognised and valued KE activities within their criteria for promotion (University official 2), though this was not consistent (Engaged academic 7).

Challenges and concerns

Having identified a range of benefits and attractions of KE with Parliament, academics and university were asked to identify any concerns they had about KE with legislatures. Those raised primarily concerned: the one sided and 'problem solving' nature of many KE interactions; the accessibility of KE opportunities, including the degree and type of support and value placed on these activities by Parliament and universities; and acknowledgement of academics' inputs and their impacts.

As mentioned earlier, many of our interviewees felt that KE with legislatures was primarily a one-way flow of knowledge and ideas, with academics being expected to help plug knowledge gaps in relation to questions pre-defined by legislatures. One former POST fellow felt that a more equal exchange would see knowledge flowing back from Parliament to researchers, including 'guidance on priorities and strategies...funding...opportunities for collaboration...opportunities for co-creation, co-production' (Engaged academic 3). Another suggested that Parliament officials needed to help academics to shape their research questions in order to ensure that they were relevant to policy and scrutiny questions when the research is complete (Engaged academic 5; University official 1). Early career academics however were concerned that if Members and officials were seen to inform the development of their academic research projects and programmes, this could compromise the objectivity of the academic and the research in the eyes of their peers and their students (Engaged academic 4; Engaged academic 2). Another researcher expressed a concern that academics who engage with Parliament can, sometimes through misunderstanding the distinction between Parliament and government, also worry that they are being 'cherry-picked' to support a political agenda (Engaged academic 2).



In a related point, a former academic fellow suggested that although close relationships with officials helped academics develop a stronger sense of when and how research can support scrutiny, being 'too close' or for 'too long' can make them less of a 'critical friend' (Engaged academic 1). In a legislature environment which was described as very hierarchical and deferential to the wishes of Members, they expressed a concern that it is hard to 'speak truth to power' (Engaged academic 1), and to retain the added value of being an 'outsider'. The interviewee felt that academics working in this space, as fellows or special advisors, can become socialised into this context and become less likely to challenge existing practices and push for innovation (Engaged academic 1).

Academics also identified practical challenges and constraints, which affected their take up of KE opportunities and which they believed made these inaccessible to some researchers. A much cited challenge was referred to by one as the 'time barrier...every day is made of 24 hours, and engaging with Parliament is just another piece of work' (Engaged academic 4). The support provided by universities to create time for academics to undertake KE activities varied considerably. Academic fellows tend to have time to participate guaranteed by their institutions, but for some this was at the expense of study leave, and not all were able to use funding to buy out their teaching. Time and funding were particularly difficult for early career researchers who are just beginning to build their research profile and who may not have worked for sufficient time to 'earn' their sabbatical leave (Engaged academic 1; Engaged academic 2). One researcher, who was not an academic fellowship holder, described having to piece together funds for different elements of their engagement, with conference attendance paid for by their university, self-funding their travel to meet committee officials to develop the relationship, and Parliament reimbursing costs to travel and give evidence for an inquiry (Engaged academic 6). Another described having to balance their regular academic duties with KE as extremely challenging. They set out in stark terms what they felt was needed to engage in KE, describing a scenario that would be difficult if not impossible to replicate if a researcher had caring responsibilities:

Our success comes from being responsive; if an MP or Clerk needs information on something at 10 o' clock at night they know we will do that. We have to be reliable, responsive...we are typically up until midnight working on things. There have been many weekends where we have no life...having to drop everything at short notice because somebody needs this (Engaged academic 7).

While this may be a somewhat extreme example, tight time frames for engaging with Parliament requests did make it difficult for some of our other academic interviewees to respond to those requests (Engaged academics 1 and 5). Universities are also not always flexible in helping support this. In the case of the researcher quoted above, when a period of heavy marking commitments coincided with a critical window of time to support development of Parliament research, they described having to 'beg' for an



extension to marking deadlines, which was ultimately refused by their university (Engaged academic 7). As in this case, an academic may be the only, or one of only a handful, of experts who are well placed to support a particular area of Parliament's work. Where ongoing academic responsibilities compete for the same time, both universities and Parliament are likely to lose out unless accommodations can be made.

These challenges of accessing the resources – both time and financial – to engage with KE opportunities effectively and in a timely manner are particularly acute for certain groups of researchers. Those highlighted by our interviewees include researchers who are early career, working on precarious contracts, based outside of London, those with caring responsibilities, and those with disabilities. These factors all affect the direct and indirect costs in terms of time and money that a researcher will incur if they, for example, attend a Parliament seminar, give evidence to an inquiry or take up a PhD internship or academic fellowship. Academic fellowships have been funded primarily through the Impact Accelerator Accounts, which are not available at most UK universities, while PhD internships are mainly taken up those with UKRI funded scholarships, a group which is relatively well funded compared to their self-funding peers (Engaged academic 1; Engaged academic 2). One early career researcher told us they could not afford to apply for a PhD internship as the distance to travel to Westminster, combined with caring responsibilities, made even part-time working in London unfeasible (Engaged academic 2). Others suggested that a 'seniority bias' operates in KE with Parliament, whereby senior academics are more likely to have greater freedom, with lower teaching commitments and access to discretionary budgets or own funds to pay for travel to London to participate (University official 1; Engaged academic 1). One suggested that within Parliament 'there's a complete underestimation of how difficult that is...for people with teaching commitments, with caring responsibilities. If you really want to access a diverse and new and interesting set of voices, you have to [travel to where those people are]' (University official 1).

The final group of challenges concerns academics being supported to evidence the KE activity that has taken place and, ideally, to show the influence or impact that flowed from this. Universities did not always demonstrate that they valued KE, with some academics feeling that it was unlikely to support their case for promotion (Engaged academic 7). Where academics did feel that their universities valued KE was where it could be linked to REF-defined impact, and supported by evidence. As one academic noted, this 'how much hold the REF has and how much it is determining where the universities' efforts go' (Engaged academic 6), with another saying that their university 'cares about REF, not KE' (Engaged academic 4). With universities failing to distinguish between KE and impact, or viewing KE primarily as a route to achieving future impact, there is significant pressure on some academics to evidence their KE activities. There is,



however, little consensus on what good practice would look like. Most academics and university officials we interviewed emphasised the importance of keeping a variety of evidence, ranging from copies of email communications and minutes of meetings to copies of reports or Hansard records where their research was cited (University official 2, Engaged academic 6; University official 1; Engaged academic 1). One described this as a 'catalogue of stuff' (Engaged academic 7). University officials aimed to impose some order on this by producing 'a timeline of involvement, keeping track of all the connection points, meetings, our responses, times they are asked to give evidence or provide information...', (University official 2) but within this some forms of evidence were considered more valuable than others.

Some academics hoped the length of time over which they had engaged with Parliament would 'speak for itself' (Engaged academic 1), while others were hoping to arrange testimonial letters from officials setting out the contribution and impact of their research (Engaged academic 1; Engaged academic 6). The challenge of evidencing impact was also highlighted in the POST internal review of the fellowship scheme:

Measuring and evidencing the impacts from fellowships is difficult, particularly for 'soft' impacts on changes to [legislature staff and Members'] understanding, attitudes or approaches, as well as those that rely on information from private committee papers which are covered by confidentiality requirements.⁸

The challenge for academics to know when and how their research was being used or having an influence was mentioned frequently. Illustrating this, one academic described hearing their seminar briefing being repeated almost word for word by a Member in the chamber, but the academic was not mentioned by name (Engaged academic 6). A university impact official highlighted the importance of being named: 'You would hope to be cited by name in anything that's out there...the more times you're quoted and cited and you know it looks like you are having much more of an impact' (University official 2). However, others suggested that KE with Parliament is comparatively much more difficult to know if your research is making a difference and to evidence impact, for example compared to engagement with the private sector. One told us it can be difficult to convince academics to invest time in building the skills, networks and relationships needed for KE, saying 'they feel it's going to be an awful lot of effort ...making those relationships...and they don't see the value' (University official 2). Another official suggested that influencing policy looks 'really diffuse', compared to the more direct routes to impact through engineering and medicine, working with business and industry (University official 1). A lack of acknowledgement when academics do engage

⁸ Internal POST evaluation of Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme, p.11



can also deter future efforts to work with Parliament. As the same university official suggested:

There's a frustration sometimes that you do your written submission to the select committee and you don't hear anything back for ages or even at all...people who don't normally do it, they might think, "well that's just a total waste of time" ... for a lot of academics this just looks like a sort of high overhead, low return activity sometimes' (University official 1).

Where academics did receive acknowledgement of their contributions and feedback on how to improve their engagement they expressed gratitude, as well as improved confidence to engage in the future and a sense that doing so was a good use of their time (Engaged academic 6).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The interviews clearly show that knowledge exchange is regarded as mutually beneficial by legislature officials, academic researchers and universities. For the legislature there are nevertheless costs, particularly in terms of officials' time, which mean that it is imperative to get the best possible value from these exchanges. The aim should be to develop an environment where KE can thrive, across the range of formalised activities and more ad hoc contacts between academics, officials and Members.

This drive to ensure that the widest possible range of academics can engage in KE provides incentive for officials, both to clarify internally and to advertise externally what the UK Parliament can do to make opportunities accessible and to help academics to evidence their engagement. This is not the same as evidencing impact or effectiveness of KE. As set out in the cross-legislature report, there are considerable challenges in measuring effectiveness of KE between legislatures and universities. The data specifically collected on the UK Parliament activities supports this conclusion. Beyond cherry-picking specific stand-out examples, we were not able to identify data that could be collected at low burden and provide robust evidence on relative effectiveness of different KE activities, or compare effectiveness of different instances of the same KE activity (e.g. fellowships, seminars or Specialist Advisor engagements). Based on the interviews and the discussion above, we make the following specific recommendations:



1. PhD internships should be made accessible to a wider pool of potential applicants. Making remote working possible, perhaps following a short face to face induction in Parliament, would make these opportunities more accessible particularly for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities and those living outside London.
2. Parliament should make creative use of existing research budgets, or allocate additional funding, both to reduce barriers that prevent academic researchers from participating in KE activities and to design opportunities which offer different kinds of engagement. The use of Commons Committees Office budgets to support the Citizens Climate Assembly and to commission discrete pieces of focused research provides precedent for this.
3. To improve the diversity of applicants and successful candidates for the PhD internships and academic fellowships, Parliament should provide funding for a small number of applicants each year who cannot secure alternative funding to cover the direct costs of engagement. Going further and ring-fencing engagement support funds for under-represented groups, including BAME applicants and those with disabilities, would also demonstrate commitment to engaging a diverse range of scholars at different career stages.
4. Parliament officials should work with academic researchers and university KE officials to develop a list of the ways in which KE can be acknowledged to researchers and circulate these to Parliament officials. This would help academics and universities to see what is reasonable to request and officials to see what is permissible.
5. On the academic fellowships in particular, and in the Parliament for Researchers training, academic interviewees suggested more could be done to explain how Parliament sees and uses evidence. This might include giving examples and case studies of past successes.
6. POST should communicate to officials the importance of naming academics who have engaged with Parliament in public documents where possible, including naming them orally in committee hearings and speeches in the Chamber, as well as citing their contribution directly in reports and briefings.
7. When training events are held at universities that have little history of engaging with Parliament, time should be included to brief KE officials on how to support academics in this work. This can build good will with the university hierarchy and create an environment where researchers may be more likely to see their KE work supported and valued by their employer.



8. To capitalise on existing networks, an exit interview or form used to capture feedback from interns and fellows could also ask whether they would consider holding an event about KE with Parliament at their institution. Officials could also offer resources, such as a short slide deck, to facilitate this wider dissemination of their experiences.
9. An exit interview or form could also be used to collect data from fellows and interns on their engagement with and contributions to the overall KE environment during their period of appointment. This might include seminars and events they organised or attended, witnesses and advisors they suggested for committee inquiries, or experts they proposed to review and contribute to Library briefings or POST notes.
10. Collecting demographic data on training participants, those making submissions to committees, and those taking specialist advisor roles, would help officials to identify under-represented groups, explore barriers to their engagement and tailor their KE work with universities accordingly. Indicators of effective KE could then include increased numbers of participants where numbers are not fixed, for example in written evidence submissions or engagement with online resources and social media channels. Where there are practical constraints on the number of opportunities, as is the case with PhD interns, academic fellows and specialist advisor roles, success could be indicated by increasing proportions of places taken up by those from harder to reach groups, defined by gender, disability, career stage, ethnicity, university type or other characteristic. These indicators would show Parliament's commitment to building a supportive and inclusive environment for KE with universities, and a focus on both quantity and quality of submissions.