



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

STEaPP
Applied in Focus. Global in Reach.

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

Social science research in Parliament

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Bicameral institution of Parliament that supports and advances the use of research evidence in Parliament. Core activities include:

- **Briefings.** 4-page briefings (POSTnotes). Literature review and interviews.
- **Supports select committees & libraries.** Contacts, advice, bespoke briefings, training, secondments, other support.
- **Connects researchers and Parliament.** Events, fellowship schemes (PhD students and academic fellowship scheme)
- **Capacity building.** Providing training about using research and research methods.

POST's sections

Biological
sciences
and health



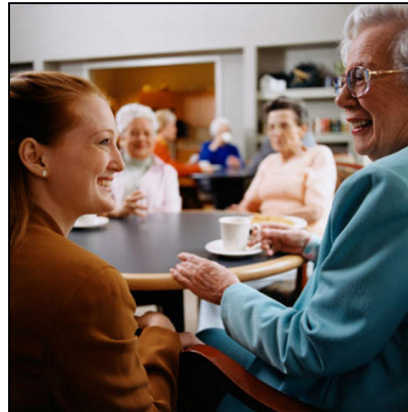
Physical
sciences
and IT



Energy and
environment



Social
sciences



What do we know about how research is used in Parliament?



How do people understand research?

- Evidence = legalistic term taken to refer to testimony.
- Research = usually library style digestions of secondary sources
- Most people didn't distinguish between different methods of research and it wasn't clear that they understood terms such as 'systematic reviews'
- MPs and Peers said they wanted more support to appraise contradictory research

Who uses research in the UK Parliament?

MPs	Peers	Party Political
MPs' researchers	Peers' researchers	Party Political
House of Commons Select Committees	House of Lords Select Committees	Official
House of Commons Library	House of Lords Library	Official
Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)		Official
All Party Parliamentary Groups		Interest Group
Political Party Research Units		Party Political

Job role shapes research use

People in parliament engage with research differently and to different extents depending on their role.

- Party political *versus* impartial
(Parliamentarian, MPs' staff Vs parliamentary staff)
- Consensus seeking *versus* party political *versus* advocate
(Select committee member Vs Bill committee member Vs constituent representative)
- Recommendations *versus* balance *versus* evidence review
(Select committee Vs libraries Vs POST)

What is research used for

- **Supporting effective scrutiny.** Holding Government to account, testing suitability of policy or legislation.
- **Providing background knowledge.** Setting out context or explaining complicated issues.
- **Informing opinions.** Forming opinions or challenging existing ones.
- **Substantiating pre-existing views.** Policy-based evidence.
- **Providing balance.** Presenting both sides of an issue.
- **Provide credibility and enhance public image.**
- **Scoring political points against opponents.**

How research feeds in

Parliamentary processes

- Evidence submissions
- Staff briefings
- Specialist advisers
- Informal seminars
- Commissioned work

Routes

- Mailing lists/ RSS feeds
- Google
- Unsolicited contact
- Media/ Social media
- Events & networking
- Constituents
- Fellowships

Extent that research feeds in

- Academic research not feeding as much as research from not-for-profit organisations.
- Of those academics that do feed into Parliament, particular institutions and demographics contribute more frequently.
- Even when submitted, academic research is often not timely, addressing the right questions or communicated in the right way.

Factors shaping research use

- Perceived credibility of the source
- Time
- Controversial or unfamiliar topics
- Some parliamentary processes and procedures
- Variable skills in finding and assessing research amongst MPs, Peers and staff.
- Parliamentary culture e.g. reliance on individual experts rather than bodies of evidence.
- Availability and accessibility of research

Preferences for Presentation of Research



Contact

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