

A short guide to producing research to support the work of UK Parliament

This guide aims to help researchers produce research that is useful for the UK Parliament. It provides insights that researchers can draw upon across the span of a research project; from the early stages when proposing a project, through to the final stages of disseminating findings.

Overview

This guide covers:

1. what the UK Parliament does
2. how the UK Parliament uses research
3. what the UK Parliament is interested in
4. how your research could feed into the UK Parliament
5. what makes research useful to the UK Parliament
6. tips on producing research that is useful to the UK Parliament
7. where to find further information`

What does the UK Parliament do?

The functions of the UK Parliament are to represent the people, scrutinise the Government, debate important issues and pass legislation.

How does the UK Parliament use research?

There are several kinds of research users in Parliament: Members of Parliament in the House of Commons and Lords (parliamentarians), staff employed by parliamentarians, and parliamentary staff. Research is used in various ways in Parliament, including:

- in the work of select committees and Public Bill Committees (in informing inquiry topics, Terms of Reference, choice of witnesses and committee recommendations)
- to propose and participate in debates
- to draft or scrutinise proposed legislation and inform amendments
- in the work of All-Party Parliamentary Groups
- to table questions to Government or Early Day Motions
- to support constituents
- to prepare for meetings and public speeches, and other contributions in the chamber
- to inform changes in processes, services or attitudes

What research is the UK Parliament interested in?

Parliamentarians, their staff and parliamentary staff are generally interested in research that is relevant to current issues on the parliamentary agenda, or the current work of Government. In addition, MPs are interested in research related to issues that affect their constituents.

There are various ways to find out what Parliament is interested in. These include by consulting:

- the current work of select committees, Public Bill Committees, POST, the Libraries and All-Party Parliamentary groups
- Hansard: a searchable, verbatim report of what is said in Parliament, for example in debates and speeches
- the calendar of scheduled business
- Early Day Motions: formal motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons, which allow MPs to draw attention to an event or cause and which other MPs support by signing
- Private Members' bills
- petitions
- Prime Minister's Questions
- The Queen's Speech

Parliament may also be interested in research conclusions that do not map directly onto parliamentary business or the Government's current agenda, if the researcher feels the findings reveal a need for policy change or action.

How could your research feed into the UK Parliament?

There are different knowledge exchange mechanisms by which you could feed your research into Parliament:

Engage with parliamentary offices

- respond to a call to submit evidence to a select committee inquiry
- respond to an invite to give oral evidence to a committee hearing
- proactively suggest topics for committee inquiries, POST or Library briefings
- respond to a call to contribute expertise to a Library or POST briefing note, or to peer review it
- respond to an invite to participate in horizon scanning
- share insights as a specialist adviser to a committee
- share insights as a parliamentary academic fellow

Engage with Members

- proactively or responsively contribute insights to the work of APPGs
- proactively suggest – or responsively contribute to drafting – Members' parliamentary questions
- reactively provide information or a briefing for a Member or their staff, including supporting them to draft or scrutinise legislation

Engage with parliamentary offices and/or Members

- proactively provide a policy briefing (or similar text such as a blog) to parliamentary staff, Members or their staff
- respond to an invite to speak at a briefing or an event
- be open to parliamentary staff, Members, or Members' staff seeking out research, research expertise or experts

Engage with third parties feeding research into Parliament

Third parties such as charities, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, professional associations, learned societies, lobby organisations, and members of the public feed research into Parliament – work with them on this activity

Engage with the Knowledge Exchange Unit in Parliament

Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) works to support the exchange of information and expertise between researchers and the UK Parliament in a variety of ways. It provides training, resources and advice to support researcher engagement, connects researchers with individuals and teams in Parliament, coordinates a fellowships programme for researchers, and promotes opportunities to engage with Parliament. The KEU provides further support and guidance around engaging with Parliament on its research impact hub: www.parliament.uk/research-impact and through Twitter: @UKParl_Research, and you can get in touch with the team on: keu@parliament.uk.

What makes research useful to the UK Parliament?

Generally, people in UK Parliament use pre-existing research, as opposed to conducting new primary research. So their focus is on interpretation, analysis and synthesis. They are interested in different kinds of research, from across research disciplines, that use diverse methodologies.

Evidence syntheses are particularly useful to Parliament, as they enable the research user to quickly gain a good understanding of consensus and disagreement in an area of evidence. Parliament is therefore particularly keen to receive and encourage the production of relevant evidence syntheses. For producers of research syntheses, we recommend following the [Royal Society/Academy of Medical Sciences "Principles for good evidence synthesis for policy"](#).

Whilst evidence syntheses can be especially helpful for Parliament, people in Parliament are also interested in findings from individual research projects.

To be most useful to Parliament, research should be:

- relevant and timely; where relevant addressing the issue in hand or responding to the question posed in a timely manner
- credible; from a well-known or trusted source, and/or produced with credible or appropriate methods
- independently produced and/or transparent about amounts and sources of funding or support
- presented clearly and concisely, in an accessible manner

Tips on producing research that is useful to the UK Parliament

It's never too early to start considering how your research findings might be of interest and use to UK Parliament.

When planning a research project, it might help to ask the following questions (using the information above to help you):

- Why might the findings of this research be of interest or use to Parliament?
- Which people or offices might be interested in the findings of this research?
- How might people or offices in Parliament engage with or use the findings of this research?
- What would you want to achieve through engaging Parliament with the findings from this research project?
- What are the knowledge exchange mechanisms you could use to help you achieve what you want to through engaging Parliament with your research findings?
- What impact do your answers to the above questions have on the way you develop your research project proposal?

You could get in contact with any individual or office in Parliament that you think might be interested in your research project findings and ask if that's the case, or if there's anything in particular that they would find useful.

When conducting your research project, there are various things you can do to prepare for when you are ready to disseminate your findings to Parliament:

- Monitor the business of Parliament and Government, so you know what the current policy priorities are, and where activity and opportunities in that area might be heading.
- Develop relationships with the people and offices in Parliament that you identified might be interested in your research when you were planning the project. By building those relationships early on, you can ensure that the people and offices know about your research, can engage with you in the interim, and will be prepared for when you share your research findings.
- Return to the questions you asked when planning the project. As you progress through the project, your answers to those questions might change, and that might have implications on both the way your project progresses or the plans you put in place for dissemination of findings.

When you are getting ready to disseminate your research findings, return to some of the questions you asked when planning the research project, using the information in this guide, and ask yourself:

- Why would the findings of this research be of interest or use to Parliament?
- What do you want to achieve through engaging with Parliament?
- Which people or offices might be interested in the findings of this research, and what are the knowledge exchange mechanisms you can use to help you achieve what you want to through your engagement with Parliament?

The answers to these questions will help you determine what action to take next.

When reaching out to someone in Parliament to present your research findings (for example, as an evidence submission to a committee inquiry, a policy brief, in an oral briefing, or in another way), don't just present your findings, but consider what the implications are, making policy recommendations where they follow from the research. If you are responding to a select committee inquiry, make sure your response directly answers the questions raised in the Terms of Reference.

Consider that you are likely to be engaging with a time-poor, interested, non-expert audience. So make your communications clear, concise and accessible, front-loading recommendations and key findings, avoiding jargon and politicised language, and using graphics and images where helpful.

Further reading:

[Knowledge Exchange and UK Legislatures](#)

[Research Impact and UK Legislatures](#)