



## Understanding the use of research in Parliament: Executive summary

### Background

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is Parliament's in-house source of scientific advice. In September 2013, POST established a new Social Science Section to improve Parliament's access to social science research. This section was set up in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council and with support from University College London. This research is being led by the Social Science Section.

### Aims and purpose

The aim of this study is to explore how research feeds into existing Parliamentary processes and to identify where it is of benefit to Members, Members' staff and Parliamentary staff. The purpose of this is to learn how POST might better support and facilitate the use of research across Parliament.

### Research questions and methods

The research will seek to answer four questions:

1. Where, when and how does research feed into Parliamentary processes currently?
2. What factors (processes, mechanisms and cultures) shape the use of research in Parliamentary processes?
3. How, and in which ways, does POST contribute to these processes and how is this contribution perceived by Parliamentarians?
4. How might POST contribute better to these processes in the future?

To answer these research questions, a mixed method approach will be used. This includes:

- A review of available literature to identify the existing knowledge base around the factors that shape the use of research, and specifically on the use of research in Parliaments.
- An overview of how research is used across both Houses of Parliament, including: a quantitative survey of Members, their staff and Parliamentary staff, qualitative interviews, and participant observation of core Parliamentary processes.
- In-depth qualitative case studies of Select Committees and legislative processes in both Houses of Parliament, including observation, document analysis and qualitative interviews.

### Outputs

There will be a number of different outputs targeted towards different internal and external audiences. These will include blogs, presentations and workshops; the development of training modules for academics on engaging with Parliament; and articles in peer-reviewed academic journals as well as a final report. Target audiences include:

- **POST:** To inform the future work of POST by examining how its resources might be best utilised to support and facilitate the use of research across Parliament.
- **MPs and Peers:** To assist MPs and Peers to understand the ways in which research can support their Parliamentary work.
- **Parliamentary staff and Members' staff:** To inform the work of those who prepare research for Parliamentary use about the ways in which Members engage with research.
- **External researchers (third sector and academic):** To build on the recent focus on "impact" in engaging with policy by informing researchers about how their work might most effectively feed into the main areas of Parliamentary work.