



UK Parliament  
POST

# PARLIAMENTARY ACADEMIC FELLOWSHIP SCHEME PILOT

A review of the scheme,  
its impacts, and recommendations  
for future schemes

September 2019





UK Research  
and Innovation



The Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme Pilot was coordinated by POST's Social Science Section. The second round will be coordinated by POST's Knowledge Exchange Unit. Both are supported by a grant from the ESRC to UCL's Department of Science Technology Engineering and Public Policy.

The second round of Fellowships will be announced in Winter 2019/2020. For more information see "[Research Impact at the UK Parliament: Academic Fellowships](#)" or contact Dr Sarah Foxen, Knowledge Exchange Manager, POST, UK Parliament: [foxens@parliament.uk](mailto:foxens@parliament.uk)

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## Executive summary

In November 2016, POST (UK Parliament) launched a pilot parliamentary fellowship scheme to allow academics at any career stage post-PhD to work on specific projects in UK Parliament. The scheme involved a directed call and open call for projects. Twenty-nine academics from 18 universities participated in the scheme.

### Fellowship projects

Fellows undertook a variety of projects, including: providing advice and support to a committee; scrutinising a specific area of government policy; contributing to or providing briefing material or advice; studying aspects of parliamentary processes or perceptions of processes; helping to improve processes or develop staff capacity; generating data to facilitate effective scrutiny; or writing specific papers for parliamentary teams. Projects could initially last up to one year, with the possibility to extend to a maximum of two years. Time commitments for fellowships varied, as did working patterns; some fellows were based in Westminster for large parts of their fellowships, others worked mainly remotely. Some worked part-time on their fellowships, others worked more or less full-time.

### Impacts of the scheme

Although it is felt to be too early to comment fully on the impacts of fellowships, various early effects were identified. For Parliament, policy and policy-making, these include:

- Filling gaps in expertise
- Informing parliamentary scrutiny
- Growing academic networks
- Gaining new perspectives and reflection on practice
- Gaining new skills
- Improving knowledge exchange

Impacts on fellows and the wider academic community include:

- Increasing knowledge of Parliament
- Building networks

- Status
- Shaping a research agenda
- Publications
- Impact on teaching

### Lessons for the future

The evaluation of the pilot fellowship scheme indicates that consideration should be given to various aspects of the scheme to ensure improved delivery, satisfaction and impact:

- Publicity and awareness raising
- Funding streams
- The application process
- Support at the beginning of the fellowship
- Support during the fellowship
- Clarity on roles and expectations of academic fellows and Parliament
- Understanding the value and impact of fellowships
- Tracking impact

A second round of fellowships will be announced in winter 2019/20.

## Overview of the scheme

POST (UK Parliament) launched a pilot parliamentary fellowship scheme in November 2016 to enable academics (from any career stage, post-PhD and any discipline) to work on specific projects in UK Parliament.

The scheme was set up to increase and strengthen the interactions between parliamentary and academic communities, with the aim of creating mutual benefit for both communities. Specific objectives of the scheme were to:

- promote knowledge and public understanding of Parliament
- support parliamentary offices to expand their engagement with academic stakeholders to enrich and promote their work
- provide Parliament with resources to support its work and allow it to benefit from research, including in ways that may not have been previously considered
- enable projects to be undertaken that would not have otherwise been possible due to capacity or resources constraints
- create an alumni network of fellows that can feed into Parliament's outreach and engagement work.

Placements were enabled by support from Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs), strategic funds provided to universities by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to support knowledge exchange and the impact of research.

The scheme involved two phases:

- 1) A directed call, which gave academics the opportunity to apply to work on one of six projects proposed by parliamentary offices.
- 2) An open call, which enabled academics to propose a project of their choosing with relevance to UK Parliament.

Because of the funding stream used in this pilot programme, eligibility of institutions was restricted to just 39 universities. Applications came from 27 universities, or 69% of eligible institutions.

Twenty-nine academics from 18 universities participated in the scheme. Twenty-four of the fellows were supported by ESRC IAAs, four by EPSRC IAAs, and one was jointly supported by both ESRC and EPSRC IAAs.

Data in this report are drawn from surveys, semi-structured interviews and feedback sessions conducted in the autumn of 2018 with applicants to the scheme, successful applicants ('academic fellows'), parliamentary staff and university funders.

## Background of the fellows

Overall, there were 71 applications to the scheme. 29 fellowships were awarded, giving a success rate of a 41%. Applicants came from universities in England, Scotland and Wales, and fellows accepted on the scheme were from universities based in England and Scotland, with the largest proportion from the North East of England. There was no predetermined number of fellowships, nor any quotas for funding stream, institution, disciplinary or demographic background; rather fellowships were awarded based on the relevance of, and internal interest in, the proposed project, as well as capacity.

Female applicants made up 49% of applications and males 51%, whilst 48% of academic fellows identified as female and 52% as male<sup>1</sup>.

Sixty-nine percent of all applicants, and 76% of academic fellows, identified as coming from a White ethnic background. 19% of applicants identified as from a BAME background, as did 11% of academic fellows<sup>2</sup>.

Eighty-nine percent of all applicants, and 86% of academic fellows, considered that they did not have a disability. 11% of applicants and 14% of academic fellows did not provide disability data<sup>3</sup>.

Thirty-eight percent of all applicants, and 47% of academic fellows, reported having dependents. 47% of applicants and 45% academic fellows reported having no dependents.

Career level and number of academic fellows (and numbers of unsuccessful applicants) were:

- Research or teaching associate or fellow, lecturer, senior lecturer, senior research or teaching fellow 23 (18)
- Reader or professor 5 (8)
- Impact officer or similar 1(1)

The spread of career gradings demonstrates an interest in the scheme from across the career spectrum, and indicates that it is an engagement opportunity that is suitable for a wide range of researchers, from those who have recently completed their PhD to those who are established in their career.

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<sup>1</sup> According to [2016/17 figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency](#), in the UK 46% of academic staff are female and 54% are male.

<sup>2</sup> According to 2016/17 figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, in the UK 78% of academic staff in the UK are from a White

ethnic background, compared to 15% who identify as BAME.

<sup>3</sup> According to 2016/17 figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, in the UK, 96% of academics report no known disability, whilst 4% are known to have a disability.

## Fellowship projects

### Nature of projects

Projects proposed by Parliament in the directed call varied from broad activities, such as providing advice and support to a Committee, to narrow activities, such as scrutinising a specific area of government policy.

Projects proposed by academics also varied, as did the level of co-development of the project (or proposal) with parliamentary staff. Projects included adding value to the usual work of parliamentary teams, such as contributing to or providing briefing material or advice.

Projects outside of business as usual included: studying aspects of parliamentary processes, or perceptions of processes; helping to improve processes or develop staff capacity; generating data to facilitate effective scrutiny; or writing specific papers for parliamentary teams.

### Timing of projects

#### Time commitment for academic fellows

Projects could initially last up to one year, with flexibility according to the project or capacity. There was a desire to extend certain projects beyond their agreed end date and, where this was possible, they could be extended to a maximum of two years. Time commitments for fellowships varied. The lowest level of time engagement reported (for an ongoing fellowship) was 10 days, and the highest over 100 days. Work patterns also varied. Certain academics dedicated 2–3 days a week to the fellowship, others just one day over a prolonged period, and others worked in short periods of intense activity. Working patterns varied as a function of the nature of the project, as well as the academics' availability.

Reports from parliamentary staff indicated that the time commitment from academic fellows varied over time; many spent more time on it in the initial stages. A couple of staff highlighted that academic fellows had been flexible with time commitments, making themselves available out of usual working

hours, or beyond the initially agreed period. Academic fellows' presence in Westminster varied; some were based in Westminster for phases of the research, whilst others worked largely remotely. Some staff reported that it had been helpful having the fellow based in Westminster, and that they felt like another member of staff. Some indicated that remote working had been a challenge, because it made it hard to make sure the fellow was on track with their project. Others reported, however, that remote working was not an issue where the fellow was self-sufficient, and regular contact via email or phone was a helpful way to mitigate limitations of remote working.

#### Time commitment for parliamentary staff

Time commitment given by parliamentary staff to supervising and working with fellows varied. Some parliamentary staff reported that academic fellows had been self-sufficient. Others reported that, while day-to-day contact was minimal, they had been required to comment on drafts of papers and briefings, where feedback requirements may have differed from the usual input given to internal staff who are familiar with writing for parliamentary audiences. A few staff reported that the fellowship had been very time consuming; particularly in the early stages. One example was that a member of staff had to spend time collating data for the fellow to use in the project, and another had to provide input into the development of a survey. Another reported that they had to rewrite a briefing by the academic because it was not written in the appropriate style.

## Impacts of the scheme

Most involved in the scheme felt it was too early to comment on the outcomes and impacts of fellowships. Many felt that the scheme offered a variety of potential impacts – on the individual, university or Parliament – but these were dependent on project findings.



Academic fellows identified potential impacts which go beyond those they felt could be acknowledged as impacts in the Research Excellence Framework, for example, 'soft' impacts such as on attitudes and approaches to engagement, teaching, understanding of Parliament and how it works, and building networks.

Academic fellows and parliamentary staff also reported that sometimes serendipitous opportunities arose during fellowships. For example, introductions to other staff led to fellows being able to contribute to activities in departments outside of their own host department. Through raising awareness of the presence of fellows in Parliament, some were also able to build capacity in unexpected places. This broader knowledge of the presence of fellows in Parliament allowed for the fellows to be subsequently commissioned by another team to do a different piece of work.

## Impacts on Parliament, policy and policy-making

### Filling gaps in expertise

A number of parliamentary staff identified benefits of bringing in academics familiar with parliamentary topics. In certain areas, their expertise was seen to fill gaps in parliamentary knowledge, or to give insights at a level the team would not normally have. Certain fellows also used their networks to publicise inquiries and reach different audiences.

### Informing parliamentary scrutiny

One of the objectives of the scheme was to provide Parliament with resources to support its work and allow it to benefit from research, including in ways that may not have been previously considered. Several academic fellows contributed directly to parliamentary scrutiny, by feeding into or drafting briefings for Committees, conducting literature reviews, suggesting witnesses or experts for inquiries, giving evidence or co-writing library briefs. A parliamentary host commented that the fellow's input had given more direction to the inquiry, and that this had been valuable.

## Growing confidence amongst Committee's Members

One staff member reported that working with such a recognised academic had raised the Committee's Members' confidence in the quality of outputs of the team.

## Growing academic networks

One of the objectives of the scheme was to support parliamentary offices to expand their engagement with academic stakeholders to enrich and promote their work. Several parliamentary staff highlighted greater awareness of, and access to, networks, and an increase in academic contacts as an outcome of the fellowships. Some had been invited by fellows to give talks at their institution, and that had given staff the useful chance to increase contacts.

## Gaining new perspectives and reflection on practice

One of the objectives of the scheme was to enable projects to be undertaken that would not have otherwise been possible due to capacity or resources constraints. Parliamentary staff identified that academic fellows' novel projects and external perspectives allowed for a different view on their work and ways of working, and enabled staff to say things they otherwise might not have been able to. This could lead to changes in behaviour which might not otherwise have happened. For example, one member of staff reported that their team was reflecting on how to evolve processes in light of the insights and work of their fellow.

## Gaining new skills and capacity building

One member of staff identified that they had learnt from the methods and approach used by academic fellows. Another indicated that their fellow had provided training for staff, therein raising capacity, whilst another fellow reported organising a special session on a specific topic for Members. Several fellows reported giving presentations on their projects to staff, or at events with Members present.

### Conducting new activities

One member of staff reported that, having collected data for their fellow, it had then inspired them to do other projects with the data.

### Improving knowledge exchange

Some considered fellowships a route to improve the quality, range and speed of Parliament's knowledge exchange.

## Impacts on fellows and wider academic community

### Increasing knowledge of Parliament amongst fellows and their networks

One of the objectives of the fellowship scheme was to promote knowledge and understanding of Parliament. Generally, academic fellows reported that the scheme had increased their understanding of Parliament, its use of research, and how to engage with it. They reported the fellowship had also had an impact on their skills in writing for public audiences.

Several academics highlighted how useful the experience had been in giving them a more thorough, realistic understanding into how Parliament works, which differed from preconceived ideas. It was also reported by some that they had since shared information with academic colleagues, or encouraged them to engage with Parliament

### Building networks

Academic fellows reported that undertaking a fellowship had provided them with access to stakeholders that they might not otherwise have been able to engage with, and indeed fellowships provided opportunities to grow and diversify networks.

### Status

Several academics highlighted that the status of being awarded a parliamentary academic fellowship carried weight on their CV and for career development prospects.

### Shaping a research agenda

Fellows reported that seeing Parliament from the inside had an impact on shaping their own research agenda.

### Publications

A couple of fellows reported having written and published journal articles based on their experience.

### Impact on teaching

A few academics highlighted the benefits of the scheme on their teaching, giving them a better insight into the complexity of Parliament, contrasting with external descriptions of how Parliament works.

## Case studies

### Dr Riza Batista-Navarro, Lecturer in Text Mining, School of Computer Science, University of Manchester

"As part of my Parliamentary Academic Fellowship, I have been working on a data science project focussed on using machine learning to analyse the textual content of enquiries submitted to the House of Commons Library via their Enquiries Service. I have been based in the Social and General Statistics (SGS) section of the Library, working closely with their Data Science Lead, Oliver Hawkins.

During the course of the fellowship, I have allocated 2.5 days a week for my project. This means splitting each week into two, where the earlier part is spent on my duties in the University of Manchester (e.g., contact hours in lectures and laboratories), PhD/MSc supervision and my other ongoing research projects. The latter part of the week I then dedicate to the fellowship project.

I have aimed to travel to Westminister once every two weeks, where I spend a day in SGS either to continue working on my machine learning experiments, or to hold meetings with Oliver and/or other people who serve as custodians of Parliamentary data (e.g., ontologies and taxonomies).

Sometimes, due to other work-related commitments (e.g., travel to conferences outside of the UK), I am unable to consistently visit fortnightly. In such cases, I compensate for the lost time by coming to Westminister for a longer visit (2–3 days) in the next possible opportunity.

The project that Oliver and I have been working on seeks to analyse enquiries data stored in the Enquiries Database of the House of Commons Library, in the way of identifying patterns (e.g., as to what triggers certain types of enquiries, and when) and supporting Library staff in responding to incoming enquiries. As the enquiries stored in the Enquiries Database are currently not labelled

according to any subject/topic taxonomy, it is currently not possible to categorise and search through them by topic. To help address this problem, I developed topic models in order to automatically categorise each enquiry according to the Current Awareness Taxonomy which contains 20 topics. The topic labels automatically assigned to the existing enquiries will become part of the new enquiries management platform that the content of the present Enquiries Database will be migrated to.

Although not in the original plan for the fellowship, I have committed to providing tutorials on Text Mining using R, where the hands-on/practical exercises will be making use of in-house Parliamentary data. Although Oliver is highly experienced in Data Science, he wants to learn more about text analysis and natural language processing, and thus we thought that my tutorials will be a very worthwhile knowledge exchange activity.

I would like to think that my fellowship work has made impact, firstly within the SGS section where I was based in, where I feel that research staff have had a better appreciation of what can be learned from data using text mining. Furthermore, we expect to be able to measure impact on Library staff in a few months, when the text mining results will have been integrated into the enquiries management platform, through which we can observe if there are any changes/improvements in the way that staff are managing enquiries.

The impact of the fellowship on me personally is two-fold. On the one hand, it enabled me to dedicate time to text mining research, which is otherwise quite challenging to find considering my other commitments and duties as a university lecturer. On the other hand, it provided an opportunity for me to engage with stakeholders (i.e., House of Commons Library staff who work with policy-makers on a day-to-day basis), and to develop my skills in knowledge transfer and capacity building.

I would highly recommend the fellowship to other academics, as it provides an invaluable opportunity to learn more about the House of Commons, to collaborate with staff who support the work of the UK's policy-makers, and to apply one's scientific expertise in a way that creates impact."

Oliver Hawkins, Data Science Lead,  
House of Commons Library and host to  
Dr Riza Batista-Navarro

"It has been a real pleasure to work with Riza; she has made a terrific contribution to our data science programme. As a computer scientist who specialises in natural language processing Riza has been helping us to model the topical content of the enquiries we receive from our customers. This helps us understand which topics are driving demand for our services and why. We are working with Riza to incorporate the modelled topics in our new enquiries system so that they can be used to perform topic-based searches, making it easier for our researchers to find useful information for customers. Riza is bright, capable and very easy to work with. We have learned a lot from our collaboration with her, which will leave a legacy we can take forward after her fellowship ends."

Dr Danielle Beswick, Senior Lecturer, International Development Department, University of Birmingham

"My project focused on how select committees can access a more diverse range of witnesses for their inquiries. I was based with the International Development Committee (IDC), but I also interviewed and engaged with Members of Parliament and with staff from across the committees' office, public engagement and POST.

The fellowship required me to develop in-depth knowledge of the world of evidence that can inform an inquiry, including formal/informal evidence, public/private evidence, visits and public engagement events. To identify ways for the committee to get beyond their 'usual suspects', I also needed to find out how committee staff and Members bring together, navigate and make sense of this world of evidence in an inquiry. This meant spending time in the committee office to see the process from the inside. To do this I commuted between Birmingham and London two days per week from May to December 2018 and one day per week from January to May 2019. This was challenging at times as I have a child of nursery age, but the committee were flexible with my hours. This allowed me to fit the commuting into my working week and to work from home/University on the fellowship when necessary.

I initially identified groups of stakeholders that were under-represented in oral evidence given to the IDC, then used interviews and a survey to identify barriers preventing these groups engaging with inquiries. I have since worked with the IDC to reach out to academic researchers and civil society, raising awareness of opportunities to engage, and to trial new approaches to taking evidence in inquiries, including allowing submission of short videos. Drawing on my research across committees, I also submitted two pieces of written evidence to the Liaison Committee's inquiry into the effectiveness and influence of select committees,

and my research was cited in the IDC's submission to that inquiry. Beyond the IDC, I have enjoyed helping to develop and deliver training for academics wishing to engage with parliament, at my home institution, which has supported me in the fellowship, Durham and Liverpool. Based on my experience within the committee system, I have been able to support colleagues who are trying to influence parliament with their research and I am now an 'impact mentor' at Birmingham University."

Fergus Reid, Clerk of the Commons International Development Committee and parliamentary host to Dr Danielle Beswick

"It was fantastic having Danielle work with us. She had a specific project that we worked up and agreed on examining the diversity and inclusivity of the Committee's evidence base. This work was aligned with overall select committee goals on D&I but the depth and focus that Danielle brought to this study - e.g. working through from who was invited to how their evidence was used in reports - was a step deeper than previous work. She also interviewed our usual and potential 'constituency' and came up with a number of proposals for thickening our engagement with the relevant policy community that represents a challenging but very worthwhile agenda going forward.

In addition, Danielle was able to contribute from a fresh perspective across a range of discussions at team level about what to do and how to do it. She also assisted in the joint IDC/AHRC international conference for development researchers from the Global South. At that event she supported our Chair, and another Member, when they were grilled on IDC's use of academic research in scrutiny by a 'select committee' of overseas and UK academics.

In brief, every select committee should get itself a POST Fellow! And any academic interested in how their research might best influence policy, and scrutiny of policy, should consider applying."

## Prof Gavin Phillipson, Professor of Law, University of Bristol

"My fellowship took place in the Parliament and Constitution Centre (PCC) of the House of Commons Library, which provides impartial advice and analysis to MPs.

While researching the role I quickly learned the most important lesson for anyone seeking to work in Parliament: all staff there take their duty of impartiality extremely seriously. This is not only a core professional obligation: it is key to the high esteem in which the Library's work is held in and outside Parliament.

This duty not only applies to all parliamentary work, but also to social media, e.g. Twitter: on anything to do with Brexit or politics I learned to confine myself to the facts and avoid any criticism of any politician or political line. To my surprise I gained over a thousand extra followers: in an area as dominated by fierce partisanship as Brexit, people seemed really to welcome sources of accurate information and impartial analysis.

I had some academic work of my own to do during the fellowship, so I worked flexibly between 3 and 4 days a week in the Library. I often do the school run for our kids so appreciated flexibility in the hours too (between 10 and 5, with extra hours when possible and as needed); I also worked sometimes from home.

My work was dominated by the 'meaningful vote' ('MV') on the Brexit deal and related constitutional issues like votes of confidence. Four highlights:

- Organising a roundtable 'Parliament's Procedural Options on Brexit' chaired by the Clerk of the House of Commons and held in his private dining room;
- Helping brief Hillary Benn MP on the meaningful vote procedure in a meeting;
- Co-writing the 'constitutional issues' section of the Library's key Briefing on the Withdrawal Agreement;

- Co-writing the Library's 'Insight' guide on 'no-confidence' motions for publication just before the momentous debate and vote on such a motion in December 2018, then helping update the full briefing.

Through my fellowship, aside from REF-style impact, I gained both enormously valuable insights into how Parliament and Government work in practice, and a range of wonderful contacts I've drawn on since for my continuing work in this area. I also got multiple opportunities to speak as a result of my role at prestigious events in and outside Parliament, including at Leiden University with representatives of the Dutch Government."

## Mark Sandford, Senior Research Analyst, House of Commons Library and host to Prof Gavin Phillipson

"Gavin spent three months, three days per week located with the Library's team during a critical period in the Brexit negotiations. His presence was hugely stimulating for the team. On many occasions he identified potential future directions in the negotiations and helped to anticipate political events, helping the Library to respond quickly to new developments. He also gave several presentations to the wider Library staff, which were thoroughly erudite and well-informed."

## Dr Gabriel Siles-Brügge, Associate Professor in Public Policy, University of Warwick

“My Fellowship has been focused on providing support and advice to the House of Commons International Trade Committee (ITC) as it scrutinises the work of the newly established Department for International Trade. As trade policy is a competence of the European Union, there has been a need to build up not just UK negotiating capacity but also Parliament’s scrutiny capacity following the EU referendum.

My Fellowship (running April 2017–July 2019) has involved spending around two days a week in Westminster with the Committee staff team (also attending weekly Committee meetings), travelling down from Birmingham and often spending a night or two in London to facilitate embedded working. This intense pattern of work was made possible by the very accommodating policy of the Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) at the University of Warwick (to which I am very grateful).

My day-to-day work has involved advising the Committee and its staff on possible inquiries; helping to prepare weekly written and oral briefings; assisting in the preparation of inquiry reports and advising on potential witnesses and written evidence. I have also provided advice to the staff and MPs of other Committees and Parliamentary bodies (such as the Libraries) and delivered training to new and existing ITC staff on trade policy issues.

The Fellowship has allowed me to introduce the Committee to issues and perspectives that might have been missed by some of the headlines. This includes insights based on my own research into EU trade and investment policy, for example, around the role of municipal governments in trade policy-making. I have also been able to bring my knowledge of Parliament back to my academic institution, giving a talk to academic colleagues on how to engage with Parliamentary Committees. The Fellowship has also significantly improved my knowledge of Parliament and British politics,

allowed me to develop relationships with key stakeholders in and outside of Parliament, helped me stay up-to-date with relevant policy issues and informed my on-going research into Brexit and trade policy.

POST Fellowships are a fantastic opportunity for academics to bring their subject expertise and specific research insights to Parliament and develop lasting relationships through long-term and in-depth engagement. It has been a tremendous honour to have worked with such a fantastic team at the ITC over the past two years. I will really miss catching the 6.55 train from Birmingham Moor Street to London Marylebone on a Wednesday morning!”

## Joanna Welham, Clerk International Trade Committee and host to Dr Gabriel Siles-Brügge

“It was fantastic having Gabe work with us, and he was a brilliant asset to our team. His expert advice on trade issues, which he shared with us in multiple ways – for example through reviewing Committee briefing documents, delivering training and contributing to the preparation of Committee reports – was absolutely invaluable.”

## Dr Michael Stock, Junior Research Fellow, University of Cambridge

In 2018, I undertook a Parliamentary Academic Fellowship looking at the UK Government's approach to evaluating natural hazard risks. I was mostly based within the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), but also associated with the Environment Audit Committee. Due to funding constraints, I had to complete the project within a three-month time period, which forced me to work on it full time, commuting to Westminster from Cambridge four or five days per week. Although tiring, this suited me as it provided an immersive experience of working in science policy, and I was strict about continuing my academic work in the evening, on weekends and during my commute.

The main objective of my project was to compile a comprehensive policy briefing document. This involved reviewing the relevant literature, interviewing key stakeholders, and writing up my findings in a way that was accessible to a non-academic audience. The big advantage of working in Parliament was that I could interview senior policy-makers and academics, who might otherwise have been difficult to access. Beyond my project, the Fellowship gave me the opportunity to attend events numerous events in Parliament, including debates, select committee inquiries and POST events. I also became interested in communicating uncertainty and obtained a place on a two-day workshop, discussing this problem with other academics, policy-makers and media specialists.

My policy brief was published in early 2019, when it was made publicly available on the POST website and printed in hard copy for distribution to parliamentarians. Within Parliament, the brief aims to highlight potential policy issues and provide an evidence base to inform future inquiries, for example by select committees. More broadly, it elucidates the government's current approach to natural hazard risk assessment, which is an important

policy area with the significantly potential for increased academic engagement. On a personal level, the Fellowship gave me valuable experience in working with policy makers and a new perspective on my academic work, which will help to increase the impact of my future research. Far from the Fellowship reducing my academic output, the peer-reviewed policy brief is a great addition to my publication record, demonstrating a very different skill set and experience to my normal work. It was an amazing experience which I will never forget, and I would highly recommend other academics apply.

## Dr Jonathan Wentworth, Senior Environment Adviser, POST and host to Dr Michael Stock

"Mike was a great addition to the POST family who really made the most of his time here, he had a clear idea for the initial project but was then happy to take on board suggestions from the select committee staff with an interest in the area and to seek advice from me on how to develop the POSTbrief. He developed a good rapport with the stakeholders interviewed to inform the drafting of the brief and we have had positive feedback from key consultees, such as the Cabinet Office. Hopefully it will form the basis of a select committee inquiry and Mike is happy to be involved when this takes place."



## Factors enabling impact

### Engagement with pre-existing networks and contacts

Certain academics identified that much of their proposed work and potential for impacts was enabled because of their pre-existing informal networks. Conversely, they suggested that this might present challenges to those without established networks and when staff changed jobs.

### Alignments in timeframes

It was felt that alignments in fellows' projects and the agenda of parliamentary host offices could have had a positive effect on impact. However, in some cases the potential for impact was limited by mismatches in timing between the fellow starting and completing their project and the work programme of the host team.

### Degree of alignment with parliamentary business

It was noted by several members of staff that it was important that fellowship work should map onto the work of the host team, to ensure good use of resource and that the opportunity of having an academic fellow was maximised. However, it was acknowledged that ensuring this is a challenge due to the time between publicising opportunities and fellowships commencing and concluding.

### Level of involvement / co-production

Certain parliamentary staff felt that projects were likely to be more impactful if the host office played a greater role in co-developing and or co-producing the project. Over time the projects became more 'co-produced', with compromises and mutual learning by both parties. However, this may bring about tension, since academic fellows do not work for Parliament and are not doing work on behalf of Parliament.

### Proactivity of the academic

Several parliamentary staff highlighted the value of having proactive academic fellows, able to identify potential opportunities to contribute to the work of the host team, or that done by others across Parliament. This includes being open to participate in different activities. However, certain fellows said they were unclear whether this was a possibility and did not know about the other potential activities.

### Openness of the host team

It was identified that an openness of the parliamentary team to the academic doing certain types of work, or producing certain outputs, could have a positive effect on impact.

### Clarity over possible or desirable impact

It was felt that clarity over possible or desirable impact could have a positive effect on the likelihood of impact. Certain fellows reported uncertainty about the different types of impact possible in Parliament, which may have limited their impact. Furthermore, academic fellows, parliamentary staff and universities had differing expectations of what was possible or desirable.

### Clarity around how to feed fellowship research into Parliament and disseminate

Academic fellows reported that more clarity around how to feed research into Parliament and disseminate it more widely could have a positive effect on impact. They considered it better to 'piggyback' on other things going on in Parliament, rather than trying to set their own dissemination events, due to the busy and unpredictable nature of Parliament.

### Sustainability

Academic fellows indicated that consideration of how their work might be continued post-completion could have a positive effect on impact. They also indicated that maintenance of networks and knowledge built up whilst

undertaking the fellowship could be enabling factors too.

### Variety of impacts

Fellows reported that fellowships tend to promote diverse impacts. Rather than 'instrumental impacts', many of the impacts felt or observed were to changes in understanding, capacity, attitudes or approaches. All of these may come about from conversations, or alternatively they may be impacts occurring as a result of feeding into private briefings covered by confidentiality agreements. This means that it can be difficult for academics to measure and evidence the full impacts of their fellowships, particularly because these impacts are often not instrumental. It is likely that there will be more clarity around impacts with time, particularly as inquiries progress or parliamentary staff reflect with hindsight on the benefits of the fellowships.

They also reported concerns of the potential increased demand on parliamentary staff for testimonials for REF, coupled with an awareness that, during REF2014, testimonials were seen to be weak by certain REF panels. Research England's panel criteria and working methods for REF2021 lists 'testimonials from members, committees or officials, where available'<sup>4</sup> as one indicator of reach and significance, alongside various others; however, it does not provide details on the weighting given to different indicators.

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<sup>4</sup> [REF 2021 Panel Criteria and Working Methods](#), Annex A, pp. 83-85.

## Challenges identified around the scheme

Whilst many positive impacts of the scheme have been observed, and feedback was generally very positive, respondents also identified various challenges. We outline these here, so that organisations considering setting up a fellowship scheme are aware of the challenges we faced, and can put in place mechanisms to prevent, overcome or mitigate them.

### Awareness and guidance on what projects could be proposed

Feedback indicated that not all parliamentary staff knew about the potential to propose a directed call. It was also suggested that, for both applicants and staff, clearer guidance on what kinds of projects could have been proposed would have been helpful, as well as on the sorts of potential impacts they may have or enable.

### Efficiency of the application process

It was reported that the application process was not as straightforward or streamlined as it could have been: multiple offices were involved in the application process, which comprised several stages.

### Funding

Fellows identified a great variety in levels of funding they had been awarded; some had not been given additional money, whilst others had been awarded more than £50,000. Indeed, POST was not heavily prescriptive in how much funding could be awarded, nor what should be funded. The things the funding was used for also varied (salary / teaching buy out, accommodation, travel and/or subsistence). Fellows and staff noted the inherent bias towards research-intensive universities through limiting the sources of funding to IAAs; indeed 23 of the 29 fellows came from Russell Group institutions.

### Clarity on roles

Both academic fellows and parliamentary staff reported lacking clarity around their respective roles. Academic fellows felt that their skills could be better utilised by Parliament, especially if parliamentary staff could be encouraged to think about the specific value that academics could provide. Academics also indicated feeling unclear about how much help to ask from their assigned mentors.

There was lack of clarity around the nature and level of supervision that parliamentary staff should provide to academics, as well as whether or not responsibility for IT accounts, laptops and access to software or shared sites lay with the host office or POST, and whether such things needed to be in place at the beginning of the fellowship.

### Clarity on expectations

Academic fellows and parliamentary staff were unclear about the expectations that each had for the fellowship. This related to the level of time they were expected to commit and what, if any, outputs they were meant to produce, as well as the timeframes for production and how such outputs would be used.

Parliamentary staff identified a tension between not paying academics as part of the fellowship, but then demanding outputs from them.

Some parliamentary staff identified issues around differences in writing style between academic fellows and Parliament, and that academic fellows did not adapt to writing for parliamentary audiences. In one case there was an issue with the perceived accuracy and quality of the academic fellow's writing, and some fellows were not comfortable with the co-writing and editorial review process common in Parliament.

### Confidentiality versus academic freedom

Fellows highlighted challenges around academic freedom and felt that more emphasis should be given to the separate role

that academics play in Parliament; they do not represent Parliament outside of their fellowship and are able to critique it. This is difficult because fellows have access to non-publicly available and confidential material by working in Parliament.

Some academics felt the Fellowship Agreement did not provide enough guidance on this. Fellows reported that getting clarity over the use of sensitive and confidential material was challenging, and much of this was based on trust, which raised questions about, and highlighted tensions over, integrity and academic freedom.

Fellows were unclear about procedures for disseminating their work and at what point the rules around confidentiality applied. Staff also raised this as an issue.

### Support at the start of and during the fellowship

Fellows identified that more support at the beginning and during the fellowship would have been helpful.

### Balancing fellowships and other commitments

Some academics highlighted the difficulties of balancing the requirements of their fellowships with other commitments relating to teaching and university work. Parliamentary staff also identified this as an issue, where the time commitments agreed with academics changed, meaning they did not deliver agreed outputs or meet deadlines.

### Navigating the parliamentary estate

Academics reported difficulties in navigating the physical space of Parliament. They were unsure about where they could go and no-one appeared to tell them where they were and were not permitted to go on the parliamentary estate.

### Practical issues

It was identified that practicalities, such as ensuring academics had a dedicated working space available to them and could also access

space to conduct interviews as part of their projects, were an issue in certain cases.

## Learnings for the future

All academic fellows who gave feedback on the pilot scheme said they would recommend it. Of the universities that supported both successful and unsuccessful applications and gave feedback, all 11 said they would recommend the fellowships and that their IAA would support the scheme in the future. The four IAAs that responded to the survey but had no academics apply, all said that their IAA would support the scheme in the future. All parliamentary staff spoken to said they would host another fellow and would like the scheme to continue.

Here we outline lessons we have learnt from the scheme. We will be drawing on these as we plan the next round of fellowships. We think it useful to share them publicly, to help inform other organisations considering developing fellowship programmes.

### Publicity and awareness raising

Ensure the scheme is widely publicised internally, and that staff are aware of the possibilities of the programme, including the potential for directed calls. Organise an event to do this, as well as using email and online channels and poster-boards.

Ensure the scheme is publicised externally, through a variety of channels. Make it clear that the scheme is open to all academics, regardless of whether they have previously engaged with Parliament, and regardless of their career stage (as long as post-PhD) or academic institution. Make it clear that there are options to do it part-time, and to work largely remotely. Provide clear links to online content on how Parliament uses research, for applicants to draw on when drafting their application.

Include fellows' and staff experiences of the previous scheme in internal and external publicity.

### Funding streams

Fellowships may be funded by IAAs, where institutions have them. Where there are not

IAA resources, fellows may draw on other pots of money within their institution; however, the source of the financial support must be made clear in the application, and confirmation that it can be used must be given by the person responsible for the money.

### Scope of projects

Both directed and open calls should be maintained. Calls may occur simultaneously. Open calls may go out on an annual basis, alongside directed calls. In addition, further directed calls will be advertised on a rolling basis, to better map onto parliamentary demand. Directed calls should provide details around expected timeframes, to ensure projects can be delivered to meet the needs of Parliament.

### Application process

The selection process should require applicants to submit a short piece of written work, to be reviewed as part of the selection process. Interviews should be included as a standard part of the process, and realistic deadlines and timescales should be set from the start and communicated clearly.

Applicants and their institutions should be given clear guidance on: the procedure for applying, scope of projects that can be proposed, possibilities for impact and ways to add value to Parliament, degree of co-production with Parliament that is likely or possible, and likelihood of getting a placement.

It should be made clear that those who wish to interview or survey Parliamentarians, Members' staff and or parliamentary staff must secure ethical approval from their own university and follow their own university's processes.

Expectations around requirements post-completion of the scheme should also be made clear: for example, requirements to report on impact, give feedback for evaluation, or mentor future fellows.

Prior to submitting applications, applicants should seek written approval of their application and confirmation of financial support from the office in their institution that would be financing them.

Parliamentary staff and host offices should be given: clear guidance on the administration and selection process of the scheme, as well as the possibilities for projects (including working patterns and duration), and direction on the degree to which they can or should shape project proposals.

When considering applications, parliamentary staff should take into consideration how the relevance of projects might fluctuate depending on timings for delivery.

Feedback should be given on unsuccessful applications.

## Support at the beginning of the fellowship

### *Facilities at start of scheme*

It should be ensured that mechanisms are in place so that when fellows arrive, IT accounts are ready, details on remote access shared, space made available, and security clearance are all set up. All administration responsibilities, beyond recruitment and advice on projects, should lie with the parliamentary host office.

### *Induction for fellows*

Induction sessions for fellows should be delivered periodically throughout the year; for example, in line with university terms. Fellows should ideally receive (and be required to attend) an induction before they start their fellowship, which provides a tour of Parliament and map detailing where they can go with their pass.

Fellows should be given details on how Parliament works, how research feeds in, which offices and staff use research, and details of the mechanisms they can potentially use to disseminate research or maximise the value of their fellowship.

Fellows should be encouraged to be proactive, make the most of their time in Parliament and seek out other ways to contribute added value to the work of Parliament, either within their host team or beyond it.

Fellows should be advised that dissemination of findings and outputs may be easier if 'piggy-backed' on things going on in Parliament, or if done in collaboration with parliamentary staff, since MPs and Peers already trust staff as reputable sources of information.

The induction should provide practical advice and support on writing for parliamentary audiences, as well as details of impartiality and confidentiality requirements.

The induction should also include information about provision for fellows in the context of the Cox report, and what support they have access to as fellows.

The session could involve former fellows who can share insights.

All of this information should also be made available in guide sheets, stored in a folder on SharePoint. Where fellows are not able to attend a face-to-face session prior to commencing the fellowship, they should be pointed towards these resources.

### *Information for parliamentary staff*

Prior to hosting a fellow, staff should receive written guidance on hosting. This should make clear their roles and responsibilities, detail the support available for their fellows, and suggest actions to take if issues arise.

## Support during the fellowship

Support during the fellowship should involve practical support, such as available work space. And it should be made clear to fellows who their host is.

Staff and fellows should have access to a shared online space, helping fellows to be more self-reliant, rather than depending on their supervisors.

### *Access to former fellows or mentorship*

Structured networking opportunities, for past and present fellows, could be organised, as these would help them to share experience, provide informal advice and guidance, and help to overcome 'assumed knowledge' amongst parliamentary staff. A network could also provide the potential for collaborations. Fellows could also be paired up with a former fellow to act as a mentor.

### Clarity on roles and expectations of academic fellows and Parliament

Clarity should be given to both academic fellows and parliamentary hosts around: the level of co-production in the fellows' projects; expected time commitment from the fellow; expected attendance in Westminster; agreed outputs, and ongoing deadlines for agreed outputs; and expected use and dissemination of outputs. The allocation of roles and responsibilities between the coordinating office, host office and academic fellow should be made clear.

### Understanding the value and impact of fellowships

It should be made clear at all stages of the fellowship that the value of fellowships goes far beyond that which is understood as 'REF-able impact' (as detailed above), and undue emphasis should not be given to the idea that fellowships are an instrument for generating this kind of impact. This will help manage expectations of all stakeholders and help ensure that fellows do not feel pressure to overclaim impact, nor that they try to push research into Parliament where the context is not right, nor claim impact where it has not taken place. It should be explained, alongside examples, that it is often 'soft' impacts or serendipity that lead to clear impacts (that are more in line with REF definitions).

### Tracking impact

A mechanism could be put in place for monitoring value and impact of fellowship activities across the course of the fellowship to help take an honest account of the experience and identify areas where there may be

potential for fellows to add more value or have more impact. This could be an ongoing reflective self-assessment document, to be discussed periodically with the parliamentary host. This could also be used to inform any testimonials required for REF.

Since fellowship impacts are often not immediate, fellows should be prepared to return information to Parliament periodically on impacts arising as a direct or indirect result of their fellowship.

