POST Research Study: The work and impact of POST

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The findings presented in this report are based on three main strands:
- A review of 13 previous studies examining the work of POST.
- Data on awareness and use of POST obtained from a survey and interviews with 157 people across parliament, including MPs and Peers,[1] their staff, and parliamentary staff in both Houses.
- Data on POST's impact since 2015 based on download data information held by POST and citations of POST's work in the media, in academia and in parliamentary debate.

The study sought to obtain the views of different groups within parliament and therefore a considered approach to sampling was taken. Research questions were generated based on a literature review. The study populations in the survey were then stratified according to characteristics judged to be relevant to these questions, with samples subsequently drawn at random. However, the number of people spoken to as part of this study is not statistically significant (due mainly to challenges in recruitment with low response rates) and some groups of users, particularly Peers and staff employed directly by them, being underrepresented in the sample. Consequently, the survey findings presented in this report cannot be taken to be representative of the groups of which respondents are part of. As such, the findings are indicative and we invite reflections on the data contained in the report and how we can strengthen available data and measures in the future.

1.3 Summary of findings
There are three main findings from the study. Each of these is outlined below, followed by a summary of findings from previous studies. A range of methodologies were previously used in the literature and not all of them were clear about the approaches that they employed. As a consequence, the studies vary in quality and methodological robustness.

1.3.1 POST's work and how it is used
This study
Most (107) of the MPs, MPs' staff and parliamentary staff surveyed reported frequently consulting a range of different external sources to identify relevant research. Commonly cited sources included specific individuals or organisations, government departments and the media. Respondents also reported using internal services to source research, most commonly the Libraries in both Houses. Different groups of users reported differing levels of use of the various POST products. MPs reported using mainly hardcopy POSTnotes and parliamentary staff reported speaking to POST staff most frequently.

The number of outputs produced by POST (including POSTnotes and POSTbriefs) has increased an apparent six-fold between 2005 and 2017 from 28 to 182 outputs. Within this, the number of briefing papers published (POSTnotes, POSTbriefs, POSTboxes) has increased steadily and has averaged 30 per year since 2011.

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[1] The term 'Peer' is used as a shorthand to refer to all eligible members of the House of Lords, including Bishops. Not all members of the House of Lords are eligible to take part in the work of the House. Some are ineligible because they are a member of the judiciary; some are taking a leave of absence; some have retired. The number of eligible Peers changes over time, but was 798 on 11 December 2017 (House of Lords Library, 2017).

Much of the increase in outputs is due to a recorded increase in the amount of work that POST has done for other teams in parliament. Although this has always been a feature of POST's work, it has not been captured in previous evaluations of POST. POST's support to other parliamentary teams increased threefold in 2014 (from 19 pieces of work in 2013 to 61 in 2014), which doubled again in 2016 (from 61 in 2014 to 122 in 2016). POST implemented more robust mechanisms for recording outputs in 2014, and this may account for some of the increase. Other factors that are likely to be implicated in this rise include:

- an increase in the number of fellows POST has hosted anually since 2005.
- changes in the type of outputs produced, such as a reduction in the production of long reports, which were time-intensive to produce, from 2004.
- the introduction of the ESRC-UCL supported Social Science Section in 2013, which increased the capacity of POST from six to eight advisers.
- the collocation project from 2015, which physically located POST advisers with Commons select committee and library staff, which has led to increased demands for POST's services from other parliamentary staff.

Of the work done by POST since 2005, 36% was focused on producing POSTnotes and 40% has been for other teams across parliament. Of the work for other teams, 60% was directed towards the Commons, 34% to the Lords and nearly 6% was parliament-wide. The majority of POST's support for other teams in parliament was to select committee staff (just over 80%): 57% to Commons select committees and 40% to Lords select committees, with the remaining 3% for other types of committees, such as joint committees.

The main type of support provided to other teams since 2010 has been advice, including on possible inquiry topics, potential issues to focus on within specific topics, commenting on draft briefing papers, and suggesting questions for committee witnesses. This comprised around 40% of the support provided to committees by POST staff. Other types of support included producing bespoke briefings and suggestions on relevant research evidence and/or researchers, organising and/or delivering training, and seconding fellowship students (24 students placed within the Commons and the Lords).

POST is also able to contribute to published briefings compiled by the libraries by, for example, providing context and/or relevant background material. Since 2010, POSTnotes have been included in 91 debate packs (67 in the Commons and 24 in the Lords). Analysis showed that potentially more debate packs could have included POSTnotes, because they were available at the time that the debate pack was produced. POST's lack of a clear policy on updating POSTnotes may have made it difficult for library staff compiling debate packs to determine if the briefing was sufficiently up to date to be included. The process for POST to contribute briefings to library debate packs has recently been clarified, and it is now clearer and easier for POST advisers to add links to their briefings for debate packs that are being prepared. In addition, POST can also often suggest external research material to be included.

Existing studies
Seven of the 13 studies examined the work of POST. Key themes from these studies include:
- POST is one of many internal and external sources consulted by MPs and Peers when looking for information and research (Parliamentary and Scientific Committee 2012).
- MPs and Peers reported different levels of use of POST and its services from just under 70% who said that they had referred to a POSTnote more than once in the last 12 months (POST 2010) to a few new[2] Peers (3 or fewer) that said they used POSTnotes (hard copy or electronic versions), briefings to select committees and seminars more than once or once in the last year (Padilla & Hobbs 2013).

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[2] Appointed to the House of Lords within the previous three years.

Two studies examined different aspects of POST's work, such as its horizon scanning work and its connection to the business undertaken in parliament. These studies emphasise POST's role in identifying long-term strategic issues and the need to be attuned to the work of requirements of other offices in parliament.

1.3.2 Awareness of POST in parliament and communication about POST
This study
Three-quarters of the study participants (118 of 157) were aware of POST. There were differences between groups however, with all 64 parliamentary staff surveyed aware of POST, falling to 16 of the 20 MPs' staff, 12 (of 16) Peers and 26 (of 36) MPs. Most participants were aware of, and had used, key POST services (POSTnotes, long reports, briefings to select committees, seminars and speaking to POST staff) in the previous 12 months. The most well-known services were POSTnotes, followed by speaking to POST staff. The least well-known services were briefings for select committees and seminars. The most common ways that respondents had become aware of POST was through colleagues, followed by their induction upon starting in parliament.

Although, overall, there was a high level of awareness about POST, this study revealed that some people were unsure of what POST does and are unclear about its role, 11 of the 157 participants (around 7%) were not aware that POST's remit included social science. Findings from this study suggest that a key factor in improving the awareness of POST is building understanding about POST's role and remit. This requires more effective communication about what it does and what services it can offer to different groups across parliament, as well as collaboration with other teams.

Participants suggested a number of different activities that POST could undertake to raise awareness in different groups.
- Better communication about how MPs, Peers and staff can interact with POST and the services it can offer to them, for example through a one-page leaflet outlining what POST does and how it can help.
- Targeted communication to those with relevant interests, for example allowing people to sign up to the mailing list to receive news about particular topics.
- More proactive engagement with MPs, Peers and staff on topics where POST has particular expertise for example at the start of select committee inquiries.
- Clearer indexing so that MPs, Peers and staff can quickly see what briefings POST has published on particular topics.
- Closer collaboration with bodies such as the libraries and political party research units that also provide information to MPs and Peers.

Previous studies
Four studies asked MPs, Peers, MPs' staff and/or parliamentary staff explicitly about their awareness of POST and its services. Different levels of awareness of POST were reported. Care should be taken when interpreting these figures as each study used a different approach, based on different sample sizes and sampling methods. Consequently, the figures are not comparable (see Annex A).
- Padilla and Hobbs found that 33% of 24 new Peers were aware of POST.
- A 2012 House of Commons commissioned survey reported that 66% of (90) MPs, 66% of (148) Westminster MPs' staff and 20% of (87) constituency-based MPs' staff were aware of POST.
- A 2010 survey commissioned by the House of Commons reported that 60% of (66) MPs were aware of POST.
- A 2009 evaluation from POST found that 85% of (28) MPs and 95% of (23) Peers were aware of POST.

In recommending ways to improve the awareness of POST, three studies looked at how POST communicates its services and suggestions were:

- improving the POST website to remove older POSTnotes or flag where they have been updated;
- timing POST publications to coincide with big events or other happenings to generate more publicity;
- clarifying how POST may support the work of Peers and targeting POST's work more effectively to meet the needs of particular Peers (please note this was from a study looking only at new Peers).

1.3.3 The impact of POST
This study
The presentation of POST's briefings and its reputation were singled out for positive feedback by participants in this study. In discussing preferences for how research information is presented, many participants highlighted features that are characteristic of POST briefings, such as short concise briefings with a summary or overview. Participants said that they valued POST's briefings because they provided links to further research and contacts, a finding also noted by the 2009 evaluation of POST. Some participants also noted that they used POST briefings because they explained unfamiliar or complex and technical issues clearly. However five participants (mainly parliamentary staff) raised concerns that the timeframes within which POST operated were out of step with parliamentary work more generally, a finding echoed by four previous studies.

This study is unique among existing studies in developing proxy indicators to assess the impact of POST, using download data and citations in the media, academic material and parliamentary debate. Citations in external sources are important because research suggests that MPs, Peers and MPs' staff draw upon a wide range of external and internal sources when seeking information.**Error! Bookmark not defined.** Increasing references to POST's work in other sources may increase the chances that it is picked up by MPs, Peers and staff. This study showed:

- Downloads – the number of downloads varied between 2015 and 2017 according to the parliamentary timetable (for example fewer downloads during recess periods) and changes to the way that such data were collected.
- Media - the number of references to POST in the media increased by 25% between 2015 and 2017 (from 52 to 65). POSTnotes are the most commonly cited POST output in the media.
- Academia - since 2014, when POST started tracking citations in academic material, it has been cited 279 times. Citations increased by 16% between 2015 and 2016. Just over half of these (55%) were citations in academic journal articles, followed by books (51%) and independent reports (31%). Most citations (83%) were to POSTnotes.
- parliamentary debate - since 2015, there have been 13 references to POST by MPs and Peers in parliamentary debates across a wide range of subject areas, such as energy, education, health and climate change. This relatively low figures suggests either that MPs or Peers do not explicitly acknowledge all sources of information, or that POST may be used as a way to find links to original data and literature sources.

A number of different methods are in place to solicit feedback on POST, both in general and regarding specific briefings. The collection and analysis of feedback across parliament has been highlighted as an area for improvement in the recent Director-General report in the House of Commons. In line with other offices across parliament, POST has tended to monitor and evaluate its services in an ad hoc fashion and will benefit from the more systematic approach it has started to take.

This study and the wider study examining the use of research across parliament has helped POST to develop a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These will allow more systematic monitoring and assessment of outputs and impact. The KPIs will also help POST to decide how best to balance supply- and demand-led work in the future and to suggest new, or adapted, forms of support to meet customer needs. Performance against KPIs will be reported at each POST Board meeting and to senior management in both Houses. POST would also benefit from ensuring that its approach to evaluation is coordinated with that of the Evaluation team in Research and Information.

Existing studies
Existing studies report a high level of satisfaction with POST's work with around two-thirds of MPs and MPs' staff reporting that they were completely or very satisfied in both the 2012 and 2010 surveys commissioned by the House of Commons. Different scales were used in the 2009 POST survey and this reports satisfaction levels of over 80% of MPs and MPs' staff. Such findings are echoed in the 2000 report from the House of Commons Information Committee which found that POST had a high reputation across parliament and that its briefings were 'commendable'.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is the UK Parliament's in-house source of independent, balanced and accessible analysis of public policy issues related to science and technology. Its aim is to inform parliamentary debate, and to keep parliamentarians informed about emerging and current science and technology issues and their policy implications. Originally set up to support the use of research evidence from the natural sciences, since 2013 POST has also had a focus on social science. This ensures that POST has access to a wider set of research and can advise across the full spectrum of public policy issues.

POST is staffed by a team consisting of a Director, eight advisers and two administrative staff. It is supported by around 25 short term doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships funded by external organisations, such as research councils and learned societies, annually. POST's objectives, outputs and future work programme are overseen by a Board of 14 parliamentarians, (10 from the Commons and four from the Lords) and four representatives from the research community. Officials from both Houses also attend Board meetings.

2.2 Aim

This report presents findings from a study that aimed to understand how research feeds into existing parliamentary processes (Kenny et al., 2017). It looks at the role of POST in shaping the use of research in parliament, and presents the views of participating MPs, Peers[3] and staff about how it can better support and facilitate the use of research across parliament.

2.3 Methods

A qualitative approach was used, which included:

- **A literature review** with two main aims. Firstly, to identify the factors that shape the use of research in decision-making in general. And secondly, to look at the use of research in parliament and POST's role in facilitating this.
- **A survey and semi-structured interviews** with MPs, Peers and staff. These were designed to give an overview of how research is used across parliament and were piloted with four parliamentary staff.
- **Four in-depth qualitative case studies** covering scrutiny (two select committees) and legislation (two pieces of legislation) as examined in the public bill committee stage (Commons) and the grand committee stage (Lords). This included participant observation, document analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews with MPs, Peers and parliamentary staff in both Houses.

In total, 157 people from across parliament participated in the study, as shown in Table 1.

Because of the nature of the research questions, the study was not designed to be statistically representative. Rather, the aim was to generate in-depth insights as to how POST is perceived by different groups across parliament and identify some of the key factors shaping the use of POST's services in parliament and how this might be improved. It is important to note that the findings cannot be readily generalised to the wider populations from which the samples were taken.

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[3] The term 'Peer' is used as a shorthand to refer to all eligible members of the House of Lords, including Bishops. Not all members of the House of Lords are eligible to take part in the work of the House. Some are ineligible because they are a member of the judiciary; some are taking a leave of absence; some have retired. The number of eligible Peers changes over time, but was 798 on 11 December 2017 (House of Lords Library, 2017).

In terms of the detailed design of the survey and follow-up interviews, the following points should also be noted.

- Where possible, the study populations were stratified according to characteristics judged to be relevant to the research questions based on the literature review, with samples subsequently drawn at random from these.
- It was not possible to stratify MPs' staff or to generate a random sample as no central information is held on the total population of this group.
- It was not possible to survey Peers because changes in leadership in the House of Lords meant that the necessary permissions for this study could not be sought at the time the study was being designed. This is a significant shortcoming of the study.
- It was also not possible to include perspectives from staff employed directly by Peers because Peers are not provided with a budget to employ staff.

The above points mean that, even though it was possible to include perspectives from parliamentary staff based in the House of Lords in the survey and follow-up interviews, the overall sample for these studies is biased towards the House of Commons. This must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Table 1: Number of people that participated in the study

	MPs	Peers	MPs' staff	Parliamentary staff			Total
				House of Commons staff	House of Lords staff	Staff who completed survey anonymously	
Survey and interviews[4]	24	0	35	27[5]	16[6]	23	125
In depth case-study interviews	12	16	0	4	0	-	32
Total	36	16	35	31	16	23	157

For the case studies, all MPs, Peers, and parliamentary staff involved were asked to take part in a qualitative interview. Finally, it is also important to note participants' responses may have been influenced by the fact that they were asked to participate in a study about the use of research in parliament by a researcher based in POST, which may have influenced how participants understood the study and led to positive bias about research and its role within parliament.

2.4 Previous studies examining POST

13 previous studies examing POST and its work were identified. There is a variation in methodologies and sample sizes and selection across these studies. Consequently the studies are of varying quality and methodological robustness (see Annex A for further information).

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[4] This includes participants who conducted the survey online and those who completed it face-to-face facilitated by an interviewer

[5] Three members of House of Commons staff opted to complete the survey face-to-face facilitated by an interviewer.

[6] Six members of House of Lords staff opted to complete the survey face-to-face facilitated by an interviewer.

Three studies had methodological weaknesses, so care was taken when interpreting the findings from these studies (see Annex A for details). Overall, four key themes were identified from these 13 studies that are of relevance to this report, and these are summarised in the following sections.

2.4.1 Awareness of POST amongst MPs, Peers and staff
Six studies examined awareness of POST and its services amongst MPs and Peers and/or their staff. Seven studies did not.

Of the six studies that looked at awareness, three are reports published by the House of Commons that present findings from surveys and/or interviews with MPs and their staff in the Commons (FDS International, 2009, FDS International, 2010, SPA Future Thinking, 2012). The purpose of these studies was to:
- provide useable feedback on the range and quality of services provided to MPs and their staff in the House of Commons
- identify areas where the quality of services fall short of acceptable standards
- identify where there are good standards.

Questions explicitly asking about awareness of POST were included in two of these three studies. MPs and MPs' staff were asked to rate (on a scale) their satisfaction with '*POST's POSTnotes, seminars, etc. on science and technology issues*' as one of a number of services offered by the Library and POST. Participants were able to select a 'don't use' option in answering this question. Although the 2009 survey reports findings about the awareness of POST, participants were not explicitly asked about this and so these findings are not included here.[7]
- In 2012, 30% of the 90 MPs that answered this question said they did not use POST's services. Among MPs staff, 80% of the 87 staff based in constituencies that answered the questions said that they did not use POST's services, and "at least one-third" of the 148 staff based in Westminster that answered the question did not use POST's services. This suggests that two-thirds of the MPs, two-thirds of the Westminster MPs' staff and 20% of the constituency-based MPs' staff surveyed were aware of POST and used its services. Figures are not provided on the proportion of MPs and MPs' staff that said they did not use the library's enquiries service or its briefing papers.
- The 2010 survey reported that 38% of 66 MPs that answered the question said that they didn't use POST's services. 196 MPs' staff answered this question. The report does not indicate how many of this number were constituency- or Westminster-based. No information is provided in the report as to the number or percentage of MPs' staff that said they did not use POST's services. Instead it states "among Members' staff, most of those who don't use these two services (POST and the physical Library) are constituency-based. Even among staff based in Westminster, half of those responding to the survey say they do not use POST's POSTnotes, seminars, etc. and/or the Library reading rooms." No figures are provided on the proportion of MPs and MPs' staff that said they did not use the library's enquiries service or its briefing papers.

Three other studies examine awareness of POST.

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[7] In 2012, participants were invited to discuss those areas of most importance to them, or those where they had strong praise or criticism, and were not asked to discuss every service. They were offered a list of services to inspect and suggested that they pick out services they want to comment on (good or bad). The list included 'Information and research services (Library and Research, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, Public Information and Outreach, Education Service, Visitor Services. Most respondents referred to the library, with other services generally not put forward by MPs and MPs' staff. The 2009 survey includes two quotes from MPs' staff. However, it is not clear whether all participants were asked explicitly about whether they were aware of POST or whether this was mentioned by free choice by these participants.

- Padilla and Hobbs (2013) surveyed 24 new Peers who entered the House of Lords after the last General Election in 2010.[8] The survey included an explicit question asking whether the respondent had heard of POST before being contacted for an interview. Eight Peers said they had heard of POST, half of whom reported a superficial awareness. 16 Peers said they had not heard of POST before being contacted.
- The 2009 evaluation interviewed 28 MPs and 23 Peers and also included an explicit question about whether the respondent had heard of POST before being contacted for an interview. 85% of MPs and 95% of Peers said that they had 'definitely' heard of POST before being contacted (POST, 2010).
- Lawrence et al. (2016) report quotes from six MPs discussing their awareness of POST (Lawrence et al., 2016). Five of the six had heard of POST with four describing its work to the interviewee. There are methodological issues with this study and it did not include a sampling frame.

It is unclear what level of awareness of POST should be considered acceptable or desirable across different groups. There are no data from the existing studies on awareness of the Libraries, and even it it were available, it would raise questions about comparability given the differences in size, coverage and type of services offered.

Related to the issue of awareness, three studies looked at how POST communicates its services; 10 studies did not look at this. Of the three that did, two recommended that POST's website should be improved (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, 2005; House of Commons Information Committee, 2000). The 2005 audit of POST recommended that older POSTnotes be removed from the list on its website or that they were flagged as out of date and/or where they had been updated more recently. This study also suggested that POST time publication of POSTnotes to coincide with big events or other vehicles that could get them added publicity (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, 2005). The third study (Padilla and Hobbs, 2013), reported findings from interviews with 24 new Peers stating that:

- The majority (12–16) of new Peers thought that in order to increase its engagement with the wider Peers' community, POST needed to have a fuller understanding of its audience, particularly in terms of the competing demands on their time. A crucial aspect of this was the need for POST to 'pitch' its events and written material more effectively to engage the attention of more Peers and to establish a reputation as being relevant to their work.
- More than half (e.g. 12–16) of new Peers were unaware of the existence of POST and expressed frustration at their lack of knowledge about an in-house service which exists to assist their work. When asked if there was anything further POST could do to assist them, the typical answer was that it should ensure that Peers were aware of its presence and used it.
- There was a strong feeling amongst a third (e.g. 8–11) of participants that POST needed to make clearer its remit and the broader relevance of the topic area being covered (i.e. the social and public policy aspects) in their briefings and seminars. POST also needs to promote the message that its services were 'open to non-geeks', in order to maximise uptake and engagement and to establish a reputation in the Upper House.
- Less than a third (e.g. 4–7) participants highlighted that the lack of immediate relevance was exacerbated through the use of the acronym 'POST' and that the term 'science and technology' could be intimidating to Peers who were not specialists in science and technology (Padilla and Hobbs, 2013).

2.4.2 The work of POST
Seven studies examined the work of POST and highlighted a number of challenges. The remaining six studies did not.

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[8] Peers appointed to the House of Lords within the previous three years.

- One study reporting findings from a survey of a group of self-selecting 12 MPs and 55 Peers[9] recommended that POST offer MPs and Peers access to expert briefings on science, engineering and technology issues at short notice (Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, 2012).
- The 2007 value for money study contains no information about methods or the sample on which it is based and is therefore questionable methodologically. This report suggests that POST takes a strategic decision regarding the allocation of available resources, particularly about the balance between planned supply-led work, in effect the production of POSTnotes, and ad hoc demand-led work. This was thought to have the perceived benefit of "improved planning, ensuring that POST has the capacity to react to support requests" (House of Commons, 2007).
- The 2005 audit of POST recommended it to encourage more MPs and Peers to propose topics (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, 2005).
- One study reports findings from open-ended interviews with 56 MPs. Here MPs were able to speak freely about issues. The study reports that two MPs highlighted the longer timescales involved in POST's work, which can be challenging for the demands of the parliamentary timetable (Lawrence et al., 2016).

Four of these seven studies discuss POST's role in identifying long-term strategic issues and upcoming science and technology topics based on the legislative agenda, as well as key Government priorities and commitments. Two studies are select committee reports based on written and oral evidence.
- In 2007, the Commons Public Administration Committee published its report into the role of Government in strategic planning and the relationship between the centre of Government and individual departments in this process. The Committee acknowledged POST's expertise in futures research and recommended that it form the basis for a dedicated "futures forum" where parliamentarians could "work with external bodies to inform themselves and stimulate debate". The Committee stated that such a forum could "build on the excellent work conducted by [POST] in providing information and a forum for debate in parliament on scientific issues" and recommended that POST be "strengthened" to "enhance its work" in this field.
- In 2014, the Commons Science and Technology Committee reported on its inquiry into horizon scanning undertaken by government departments. It stated that it was vital that Government horizon scanning informs, and is informed by, the horizon scanning conducted on behalf of parliament. Drawing on the 2007 report from the Commons Public Administration Committee, the Committee stated that POST could be "one possible conduit for this flow of information" and recommended that representatives from POST act as observers on all relevant communities of interest included within the new horizon scanning programme (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2014).

The other two studies highlighted the value of POST working with other organisations in doing horizon scanning activities:
- The 2013 study into science and technology induction in the House of Lords, recommended that POST work with other internal parliamentary bodies, such as the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, the Commons and the Lords science and technology committees, and key external bodies, to host an annual event which would act as a forward looking overview of key upcoming science and technology topics based

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[9] The participants in this study were self-selecting because the survey was sent by email to all members of both Houses with 1 week to reply. The results of the survey showed that seven MPs and 22 Peers identified themselves as having a scientific background, meaning that both samples were skewed towards having a larger fraction of parliamentarians with a science, engineering or technology background than is typical of either house (Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, 2012).

on the legislative agenda, as well as key Government priorities and commitments (Padilla and Hobbs, 2013).

- The 2005 audit of POST recommended that POST formalised the way it does horizon scanning and learn from existing practice elsewhere. It suggested that POST staff attend external horizon-scanning activities (e.g. the current 'Tomorrow Project' consultation with the Department for Transport) and strengthen its dialogue with the Horizon Scanning Unit at the then Department for Trade and Industry (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, 2005).

Related to this is the connection between the work of POST and the business undertaken in parliament. Nine studies do not mention this issue. Of the four studies that do, one did not ask participants a question about this and reports one quote from a single participant to make its point. It is not possible to determine from the study whether this was the only participant that mentioned this issue or the only one that was reported. Because of this, this study is not included in the analysis below (FDS International, 2010).

The three remaining studies report findings use different methodologies.
- One is a select committee report with findings from 17 written evidence submissions and three oral evidence witnesses. Picking up on a theme identified in a previous report of the possibility of overlap between POST and the work of the Commons library, the Committee recommended that POST become "even more attuned to the needs of individual departmental select committees" and do more work for select committees. Particularly to reach out to "those committees which do not see POST as a natural source of relevant expertise" (House of Commons Information Committee 2000).
- The second is a report of a 12 month audit of POST's operations by external academics. This audit included auditing three areas of POST's processes, attending a staff meeting and a Board meeting and conducting six case studies on the production process for five POSTnotes at different stages of development covering different thematic areas. This report recommended that POST improve its tracking of the issues that concern MPs and Peers (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, 2005).
- The third is a study undertaken by the House of Commons on the value for money of POST. No information could be identified about the methods used in this study and only its recommendations were available. This study recommends that a senior POST official should be allocated responsibility for liaising with select committees and that POST should establish a programme of specific and planned briefings to the science and technology committees of both Houses. The report states that "while the main purpose would be to explain emerging issues and expected future work, these briefings would also be useful in terms of increasing awareness amongst select committee members".

2.4.3 The use of POST's services
Four studies looked at the use of POST by MPs, Peers and staff. Nine studies did not examine this.
- The Parliamentary and Scientific Committee (2012) invited respondents to indicate how likely they were (on a scale of 1–5, 5 high) to use each of a number of possible sources for scientific, engineering and technology information. It reports that parliamentarians get their information from a wide range of sources. The internet and the libraries of the two Houses were the two sources that MPs and Peers in the sample were most likely to use. After those there is little difference between POST publications, select committee documents and unspecified external sources.
- The 2009 evaluation of POST reports that POSTnotes are used in different ways, usually to 'kick start' research into an issue. Over 50% of Peers and 40% of MPs said they would use it at the beginning of their research process as a point of entry into the field and to garner background knowledge. Cumulatively, over 70% of parliamentarians would refer to a POSTnote at some point in their research. They would also follow up

references given in a POSTnote. The report also shows that POST was regularly consulted, with over 70% of MPs and Peers stating they would use POST. When asked what POST services they had used in the last year, most parliamentarians said they had referred to the POSTnotes more than once. 30% of MPs and 42% of Peers had used POST briefings to select committees. While they had heard of other services like the website, seminars and podcasts, few said they had used them, often stating that they were too busy to attend seminars and weren't technically proficient enough to navigate the website and download podcasts. This latter reason applied to Peers in particular, who were more comfortable using hard copy (POST, 2010).

- Padilla and Hobbs report that one new Peer said they consulted POST frequently when seeking information on a science-based issue, four new Peers said that they did so occasionally and 17 said they never did this. 23 new Peers answered a question about the frequency with which they have consulted different POST services in the last year. More than two-thirds (17 or more) of the participants were unaware of the five POST services listed in the survey. A few participants (three or fewer participants) reported using POSTnotes (hard copy or electronic versions) or briefings to select committees and seminars more than once or once in the last year (Padilla and Hobbs, 2013).
- Lawrence et al. (2016) report quotes from four MPs discussing their use of POST (Lawrence et al., 2016).

2.4.4 Satisfaction with POST services
Seven studies examined satisfaction with POST's services, six studies did not. Of these seven studies, three did not ask participants about their satisfaction with POST explicitly and so are excluded from the analysis below (the excluded studies are: House of Commons Administration Committee, 2014, Lawrence et al., 2016, POST, 2010).

Three surveys commissioned by the House of Commons to provide feedback on the range and quality of services provided to MPs and their staff are included in this sample. These surveys asked participants explicitly about their satisfaction with POST, asking them to rate this on a scale.

- satisfaction with POST's services. 64% of MPs and 68% of MPs' staff were completely or very satisfied; 33% of MPs and 30% of MPs' staff said they were satisfied; and 4% of MPs and 2% of MPs' staff were slightly dissatisfied or dissatisfied.
- MPs' staff were extremely or very satisfied; 13% of MPs and 18% of MPs' staff were fairly satisfied; with 4% of MPs and 1% of MPs' staff either not very or not at all satisfied.

In 2000, the House of Commons Information Committee undertook an inquiry into the future of POST with the remit to examine how POST has operated to date, whether it should be established on a permanent basis with parliamentary funding and if so, how its role might develop in the future. As part of this inquiry, the Committee received 17 pieces of written evidence including submissions from the POST Board, the Commons library and the chairs of 13 select committees and two individual MPs. The Committee also heard from three witnesses: the chair and vice chair of POST and its then Director. The report found that POST generally has a high reputation across the parliamentary estate and notes that the standard of POST's publications was "commendable" (House of Commons Information Committee, 2000).

2.5 Focus and structure of this report
The report is divided into five further sections. Section three examines the work of POST since 2005, including the number and type of outputs.

Sections four and five present findings from the survey and interviews conducted as part of this study. Section four examines the awareness of POST amongst MPs and Peers, MPs' staff, and parliamentary staff. Section five outlines how POST is used within parliament.

Section six outlines the impact of POST using citations of POST and its work as a proxy indicator. Citations in three formats are presented: media, academic work and parliamentary debate.

3. The work of POST since 2005

This section includes information about the outputs produced by POST. It is divided into three sub-sections:

- The number of outputs produced by POST 2005–2017
- The type of work done by POST for other parliamentary sections 2010–2017
- The inclusion of POSTnotes, POSTboxes and POSTbriefs in debate packs produced by the Commons and Lords libraries 2005–2017.

3.1 Number of POST outputs 2005–2017

POST's work focuses on five main outputs:

- Four-page summaries of public policy issues based on reviews of the research literature and interviews with stakeholders from across academia, industry, government and the third sector; they are peer reviewed by external experts (POSTnotes).
- Responsive policy briefings based on mini-literature reviews and peer review since 2013 (POSTbriefs)[10]
- Longer briefings (40 to 100 pages) at the request of the POST Board or parliamentary select committees
- Events, including private meetings open to invited guests only, and public seminars
- Work done for other parliamentary teams, including briefings for committees.

Figure 1 shows the total number of these five outputs since 2005.[11] The dashed line indicates the point from which data about POST's outputs was routinely, or systematically, collected. Before this date (2014), data are less reliable.

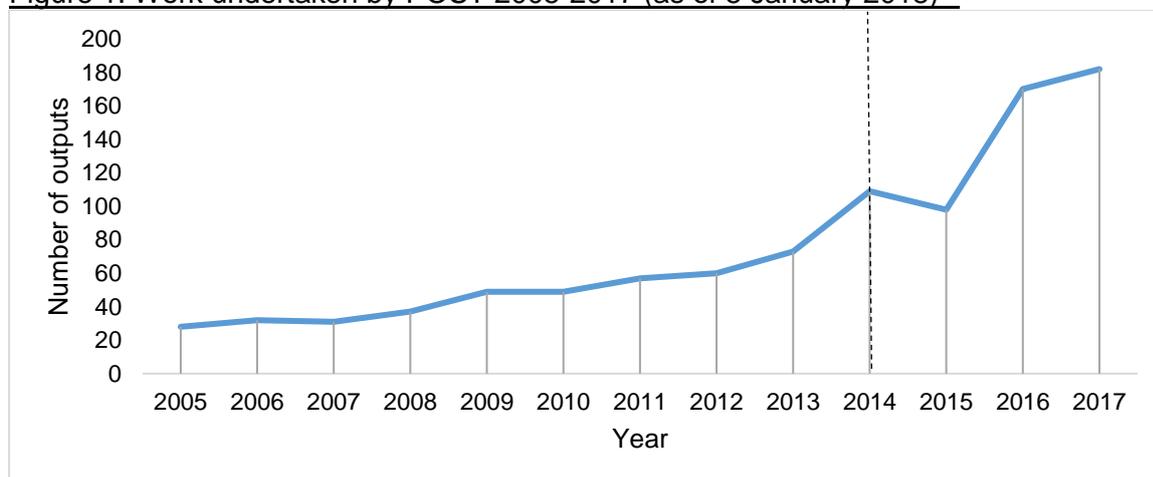Figure 1: Work undertaken by POST 2005-2017 (as of 5 January 2018)[12]

Figure 1 shows an overall increase in outputs (with a few fluctuations) between 2005 and 2017, particularly in more recent years.

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[10] Between 2013 and 2014 these briefings were called POSTboxes. From 2014 they have been called POSTbriefs.

[11] POSTnotes, events, longer reports and work for other parliamentary teams were undertaken before 2005 (POSTnotes, events and work for other parliamentary teams since 1989, longer reports since 2000).

[12] These data have been collected by the author and are taken from information on the POST website, information saved onto a shared drive or provided by POST advisers on request.

Figure 2 breaks this down to show the variation in the different types of outputs produced by POST. The dashed line indicates the point from which data were routinely, or systematically, collected. Data are less reliable before this date.

Figure 2: Work done by POST by type 2005-2017 (as of 5 January 2018)[13]
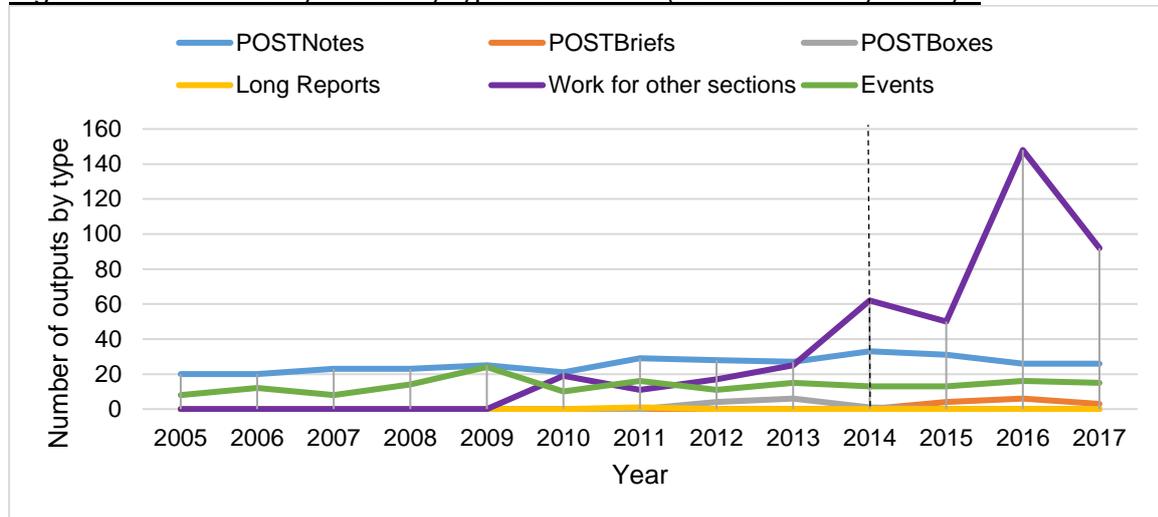
The trend in the overall number of outputs masks differences between the various types produced by POST, as Figure 2 shows:

- From 2011, POST increased the number of POSTnotes it produced by eight (in 2010 it produced 21 and in 2011 it produced 29). Since 2011, the number of POSTnotes has stayed broadly similar (a variance of four outputs between 2011 and 2017).
- The number of outputs increased in 2010 when data on POST's work with other parliamentary teams started to be recorded routinely. The biggest increase in work for other teams happened after 2013 (between 2013 and 2014 there was an increase of 40 pieces of work for other teams).
- An increase in outputs also happened in 2012, with the introduction of more responsive briefings (initially POSTboxes and then POSTbriefs).

The main driving force behind the overall increase in POST's outputs since 2005 (as shown in Figure 1) appears to be that POST is doing more work for other parliamentary teams. It is worth highlighting that POST only began to record work for other teams in 2010, and to do so systematically since 2014, so some of the increase may be a result of previous work not being reflected in the data. However, other factors that are likely to explain much of the increase are:

- Increase in the number of fellowship schemes leading to more fellows being recruited to work on POSTnotes and other outputs, particularly from 2004/05.[14]
- A change in type of outputs, namely the reduction in the number of longer reports produced by POST after 2004, meaning advisors had more time to work on other outputs.

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[13] Data are not available for all years for all of the five areas of POST's work. In particular, POSTbriefs were introduced in 2015 following the decision to stop the production of POSTboxes in 2014. POSTboxes were only in operation 2012–2014. Data were not collected systematically for POST's work with other teams before 2010.

[14] For examples the following schemes: Institute of Physics since 2004, the Engineering and Physical Research Council (EPSRC) since 2005, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) since 2005, the Medical Research Council (MRC) since 2007, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) since 2008.

- The introduction of the Social Science Section, in partnership with University College London and the Economic and Social Research Council, in 2013, initially with one advisor, with a second employed from 2014. This increased the capacity of POST from six to eight advisers.
- Physical collocation of POST advisers with staff from the Commons library and select committees from 2015.
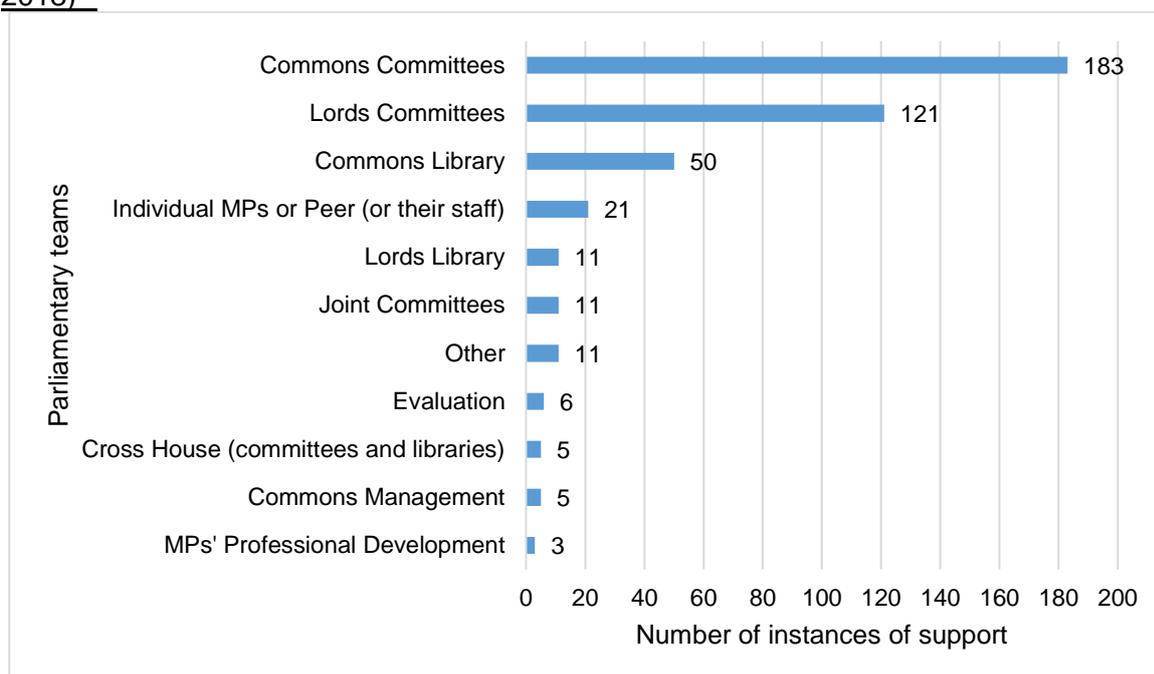
3.2 POST's work for other parliamentary teams 2010–2017
3.2.1 Data from POST on outputs

As Figure 2 shows, since 2013, POST has been doing more work with other parliamentary teams, both as an absolute number and also in comparison to its other areas of work. Data on POST's work could only be identified from 2010. Ad hoc data were available before this date, but it has been excluded from this analysis because it was incomplete. It should be noted that these data have only been collected systematically since 2014.

In total, POST has provided 385 different instances of support for other parliamentary teams since 2010. Figure 3 shows the amount of support provided to different teams since 2010. This shows that work for committees in both Houses encompasses a big part of POST's work for other teams (80%), with over half of this done for select committees in the Commons and the remaining 40% for select committees in the Lords.

POST's work with other teams can be categorised into six types (see Table 2).

Table 2: Types of work provided to other parliamentary teams since 2010[13]

Type of support	Examples of activities
Advice	- advice on the focus of inquiries (for instance draft scoping notes and calls for evidence) - drafting survey and interview questions - explanations of technical issues - peer reviewing draft briefings and reports - analysis of evidence submissions - suggestions and advice on potential inquiries - suggestions and links to relevant research - suggestions on lines of questioning/survey questions - advice on relevant software (e.g. survey tools, digital tools to identify impact of research) - acting as specialist adviser - advice on the work of other organisations based on POST networks (for example, POST has provided updates on activities of organisations such as GO-Science)
Briefing	- oral and written briefings on topics (these have been related to former/ongoing POSTnotes and on distinct topics, where there is an evidence base, as requested) - drafting reports or sections of reports - revising internal guidance documents

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[15] Data on POST's work for other parliamentary teams was not collected systematically before 2010. Data in Figures 3 and 4 and Table 2 was compiled by the author using data provided by POST advisers and information contained in POST Board Papers (Matters for Report) and previous data collected, but not maintained, by POST available on the POST shared drive.

	• drafting scoping notes for potential inquiries • summaries and analyses of evidence submissions
Training	• organising and/or delivering (either in part or in full) training courses on finding, appraising and using research evidence • discussing training needs of other teams
Seconded fellows	• placing PhD students recruited through the POST fellowship schemes with another parliamentary section • involving parliamentary teams in the assessment and selection processes
Provided contacts	• providing details of contacts for potential witnesses, specialist advisers and seminar participants, such as experts from academia, industry or government
Other support	• circulating calls for evidence to relevant stakeholders • conducting interviews/focus groups • chairing seminars • assisting with recruitment • facilitating meetings with external stakeholders (for example horizon scanning sessions with the research councils)

Figure 4 shows the number of pieces of these different types of work done by POST since 2010. This shows that much of the support provided by POST to other parliamentary teams is advice, which includes advice on possible inquiry topics, peer reviewing briefings and suggestions on relevant research evidence, for example.

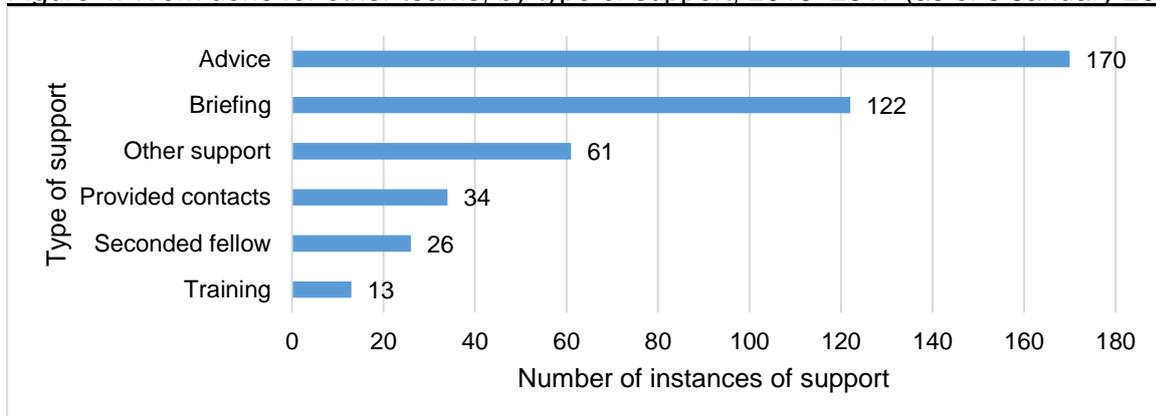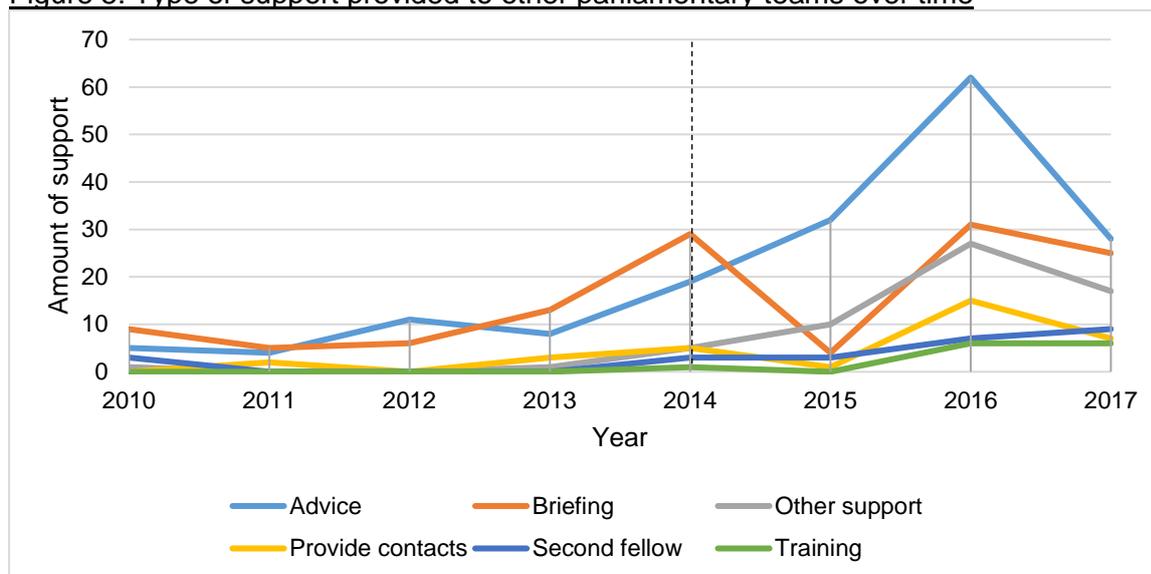Figure 4: Work done for other teams, by type of support, 2010–2017 (as of 5 January 2018)[15]

Figure 5 shows how the type of support provided to other parliamentary teams has changed over time. The dashed line indicates the point from which data on this was recorded systematically.

Figure 5: Type of support provided to other parliamentary teams over time

3.2.2. Input from interviews about POST's work for other teams

In interviews, 11 participants highlighted the importance of POST working closely with other providers of research and information within parliament, and emphasised the importance of collaboration and joined-up working with select committees, the libraries, staff employed by MPs and Peers and the research units of political parties. Of the six MPs and Peers that made this point, four were making a general point rather than talking about POST specifically as they had not heard of POST before. The remaining five participants were parliamentary staff.

> I think recognising that the way that Members are often going to be preparing for things... whether it is [by] a researcher or [political party research units], [and] keying into those bodies I think is probably one of the most effective ways of making sure Members get access to the right research, because that is what you will rely on for a lot of the information that you get. So you want to make sure that the research is fed into there. It is fine and it is important to engage with Members, but also actually recognising that the ways to really get in when briefings are being written, those bodies are really important… So I think that might be the way to have the biggest impact on MPs using research, to do that for each of the different things, and then continue to recognise that an MP's time is very precious and sometimes getting to them through the researchers and so on might also be useful (interviewee 9, MP).

> I think within that process there is scope for POST to take part in this and to say, 'Okay, these are areas that we might want to write about or where we might want to get a PhD student in to do something; this is what we want to cover off.' I think it would be useful – if we had a bill on diabetes, for example, or an NHS bill – to link up much earlier so that somebody within POST is starting to prepare and they can say, 'Okay, you guys are writing a note on this; I will do a POST box,' or 'I can do the science on this.' If you need to draw together some stats from different areas, we can now do that better than we have ever been able to, but then for POST to say, 'Okay, we could do this dataset for you, we could do some analysis on this, we could write you up some text for it,' just to be a bit more pre-prepared and planned (interviewee 55, Lords Library staff).

> I think closer collaboration would help, whether that is reiterating to each other, 'Yes, we can contact each other,' or if we have written a Library Note on something then 'Yes, of course contact the author.' Just a mutual

understanding that that is the 'done' thing. I know we have done certain seminars together, and I think it can be give and take; when you have come and spoken to us it has been really useful. So maybe if you get people in to talk to POST, and you think they might be relevant to the library as well, if the library can be invited to that it would be useful. And vice versa, as well, because we hold seminars and training, we invite people from the committee office to come. As a starting point, I think things like that would help; then I think conversations can evolve from there. So more interaction with each other (interviewee 68, Lords Library staff).

What I would say is that there is an opportunity to better link up with the library specialists. I think that does happen – and I am thinking now as I speak – like for instance I did a blog and actually we got all of the key points done by the library specialist. That was good joined up working, but I am not sure how fluid that is; I think that was just because my committee team actually couldn't cope with doing it, and I didn't have enough knowledge so I needed an expert to help me on it. So I would say there is probably an opportunity to join up the library specialists more (interviewee 66, MP).

3.3 Inclusion of POST briefings in debate packs produced by parliamentary libraries since 2010

The libraries in both Houses produce debate briefing packs for almost all non-legislative debates scheduled to last 90 minutes or more, and often for 60 minute debates (but not for debates on Committee reports). One way that POST is able to contribute to the work of other teams is by providing published briefings to include in these debate packs.

Since 2010, POSTnotes have been included in 91 debate packs[16]: 67 in the Commons[17] and 24 in the Lords.[18] During the study, examples were identified where POSTnotes on relevant topics were available at the time at the time that the debate pack was produced but were not included in the debate pack for reasons that are not clear. Possible reason for non-inclusion might be:
- despite sharing a similar title, on closer inspection the subjects covered by the topic of the debate and by the POSTnote differed.
- library staff compiling the debate pack cannot easily identify whether a relevant POSTnote is up to date because POST does not have a clear policy on updating its notes, and it is unclear whether the evidence base has substantially changed since the note was published.

The process for POST to contribute briefings to library debate packs has recently been clarified and it is now clearer and easier for POST advisers to add links to their briefings for inclusion in debate packs. This may go some way to addressing the issue of identifying relevant work. In addition, POST's ability to contribute to debate packs is limited to the inclusion of its published briefings. This means that, currently, POST cannot provide links to further research that is relevant to the debate. Although there have been occasions when POST has suggested links to external published research and these have been included, this is unusual and is not standard. It should be noted that a review of Commons Library debate packs is currently underway and that POST is taking part.

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[16] Data on the number of POSTnotes included in debate packs produced by the Commons and Lords libraries was compiled manually by the author. This involved using keyword searches to identify instances where "POST" or "science" was used. Searches were undertaken in archived collections of library debate packs kept on parliamentary shared drive (for the Commons only) and using parliamentary search (used for both Commons and Lords libraries).
[17] In total, the Commons library produced 1,930 debate packs between January 2010 and 8 December 2016. POSTnotes were included in 67.
[18] In total, the Lords library produced 317 debate packs between January 2010 and 8 December 2016. POST contributed to 24.

4. Awareness of POST

This section presents findings from a survey and interviews with 157 MPs, Peers, MPs' staff and parliamentary staff. Participants were asked two questions relating to their awareness of POST:

1. Had you heard of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) before being contacted for an interview?
2. If so, how did you hear about POST/in what context?

118 of the 157 participants were aware of POST. As Figure 6 shows, awareness of POST varied by respondent type, with awareness highest amongst parliamentary staff; all 64 parliamentary staff spoken to said they were aware of POST before being contacted to take part in the study. 26 (of 36) MPs had heard of POST before being contacted as had 12 (of 16) Peers and 16 (of 20) MPs' staff.

Figure 6: Number of respondents that had heard of POST by group (N=136)
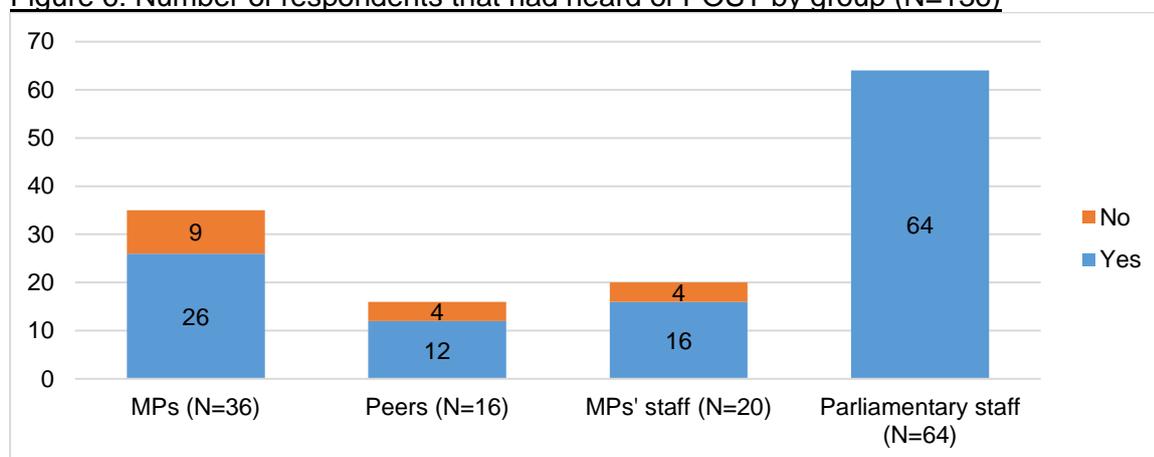
Survey respondents were also asked whether they were aware of and had used any of the following POST services in the previous 12 months to provide comparative data with previous evaluation:

- POSTnotes (hardcopy)
- POSTnotes (electronic copy)
- Longer reports
- Briefings to select committees
- Seminar
- Spoken with POST staff

This question was answered by 69 respondents (12 MPs, 15 MPs' staff and 42 parliamentary staff). Figure 7 shows the breakdown of whether respondents were aware of and had used each of these services. This shows that most respondents were aware of all these services, although the least well known services were briefings for select committees and seminars. The most used services were POSTnotes (with hardcopy and electronic formats being used equally), followed by speaking to POST staff. Ten or fewer had used longer reports, briefings to select committees or seminars. There were some differences between groups, with hardcopy POSTnotes used mainly by MPs, and speaking to POST staff reported most frequently by parliamentary staff.

30 respondents answered the question about how they became aware of POST:

- Nine people said they heard of POST through colleagues;
- Six people said that they had heard of POST through their induction upon starting work in parliament;
- Four people said that they had become aware of POST through their work on select committees;
- Four people said they were aware of POST from their previous role (before joining parliament);
- Three people said they had become aware of POST through the Royal Society pairing scheme;
- Two people said they had heard of POST through newsletters and other communications sent from POST and other offices within parliament;
- One person said they were aware of POST because they had seen POSTnotes around the parliamentary estate,
- One person said they were aware of POST because of previous contact with a former member of staff.

Interviews with participants who had heard of POST (n=118) highlighted challenges for POST in communicating and clarifying its role, including its focus on social science. Participants made a number of suggestions about possible ways to improve communication.

4.1 Clarity about POST's role

This point was highlighted by 24 people – 8 MPs, 5 Peers, 3 MPs' staff and 9 parliamentary staff. For example:

> I don't really feel I know a great deal about POST. I sort of know what its outputs are, but I don't really know a great deal about what it does. I come into contact at the occasional event but how do the staff in POST spend their day I have no idea (interviewee 39, Commons Library staff).

> I am aware of it, because I get things from time to time, and sometimes they look vaguely interesting, but partly we are just submerged underneath a wealth of stuff so things get squeezed out. I don't really understand how to interact with POST, if I am being honest. I may even have gone to the odd

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[19] 69 people were asked this question, but not all answered it. As such, not all of the bars add up to 69.

event, but in terms of what it can do, I don't know. 'What can POST do for you?' I don't know what the answer to that question is (interviewee 79, MP).

Of these, four respondents were unclear about the difference between POST and the libraries (1 MP, 1 Peer and 2 parliamentary staff).

I was aware there was a Library, I know the librarians, but I am not sure I understand exactly what you do in addition to the librarians – or are you the librarians? (interviewee 14, Peer).

There doesn't seem to be a clear delineation of responsibilities – or maybe there is, but it is not published. I am talking specifically about the research team in the library; that is science and environment, and then you have the same focus in POST, so there is an overlap of what your research interests are (interviewee 52, Commons Committee staff).

11 people said that they were unaware that POST covered social science as well as the "hard sciences" and highlighted its name as confusing in this regard (2 MPs, 3 Peers, 4 MPs' staff and 2 parliamentary staff).

I have noticed that they have got stuff in the Library, but I have never looked at it. I don't do science and technology. I didn't know it did anything other than science and technology so, even if I had thought about it, I would never have thought to ask POST about that [social science topic] (interviewee 4, Peer).

I think there is a perception that you just do science. It is really still difficult for us social scientists, which is what most of us are, to remember that POST also does social science (interviewee 71, Lords Committee staff).

I suppose, whether or not I am right, the fact that I associate it more with hard sciences, which is less relevant to the work I do, is a factor to consider. That is probably the same for the work that most people in my position do, who are probably more interested in economics, political science or sociology, those sort of disciplines which I think are covered less, or outside of the remit of POST to cover (interviewee 92, MP's staff).

4.2 Improving communication about POST

Participants were asked if they had any ideas over how POST might support better the use of research in their parliamentary work in the future. The 17 responses to this question all grouped around communication of POST's work. Most of these focused on the need for more effective general awareness raising. Other suggestions for raising awareness included circulating a one-page leaflet outlining what POST does and what services it offers (highlighted by four people), using internal parliamentary email distribution lists to send MPs, Peers and staff information about POST and what it is working on (highlighted by three people), producing a subject directory setting out key sources of research and information on particular topics (mentioned by two people). Improving POST's technological presence was also highlighted by two respondents to this study. Finally, one person suggested POST having a physical presence in the library, another person suggested offering MPs and Peers face-to-face contact, and one person said that providing a central point of information on POST is important.

I can't see anything other than a marketing function needing to be plugged into what you do. I would say it is always about awareness. It is like any product, isn't it? It is about awareness and then delivery. So making people aware of it… It is all about awareness (interviewee 11, Peer).

I think maybe some of that is down to me as an individual having a better understanding of what POST is there to do, because in terms of –

commissioning is too big a word – setting out to find out or collate information, I had no idea whether POST could do that for me [as a member of parliamentary staff]. Clearly I have a better understanding about what the library and POST are meant to do for Members but, as committee office staff, I don't know how far we could push requirements. I know that is a newer relationship but it was, again, unclear as to what I could ask for (interview 52, Commons Committee staff).

Maybe you should have a desk in the Library where you have got a person there for a month or two to interact with people, 'Here I am, come and talk to me,' that sort of thing (interviewee 14, Peer).

…it [would be] a good idea if you have got somebody who is not just able to produce papers but is able to have a conversation like we are having now (interviewee 81, MP).

5. Sources of research and use of POST

107 MPs, MP's staff and parliamentary staff surveyed as part of this study answered a question about the sources they used to find research as part of their parliamentary work. Respondents were given a choice of 15 options (see below) and were able to select multiple options.

External sources	Internal sources
• Academic (journals and/or books and/or articles) • Community forums • Experts in the area • Government departments • International organisations • Media (newspapers, TV or radio) • Other MPs'/Peers' staff • Other people (colleagues/friends) • Professional associations and/or journals • Social media (blogs, LinkedIn Twitter, Facebook) • Specific individuals or organisations (participants asked to provide further information) • Trade press/associations	• Commons/Lords library • POST • Select committees

Figure 8 shows the most common external sources of information to find research.

Figure 8: External sources of information used to find research (by number). N=107
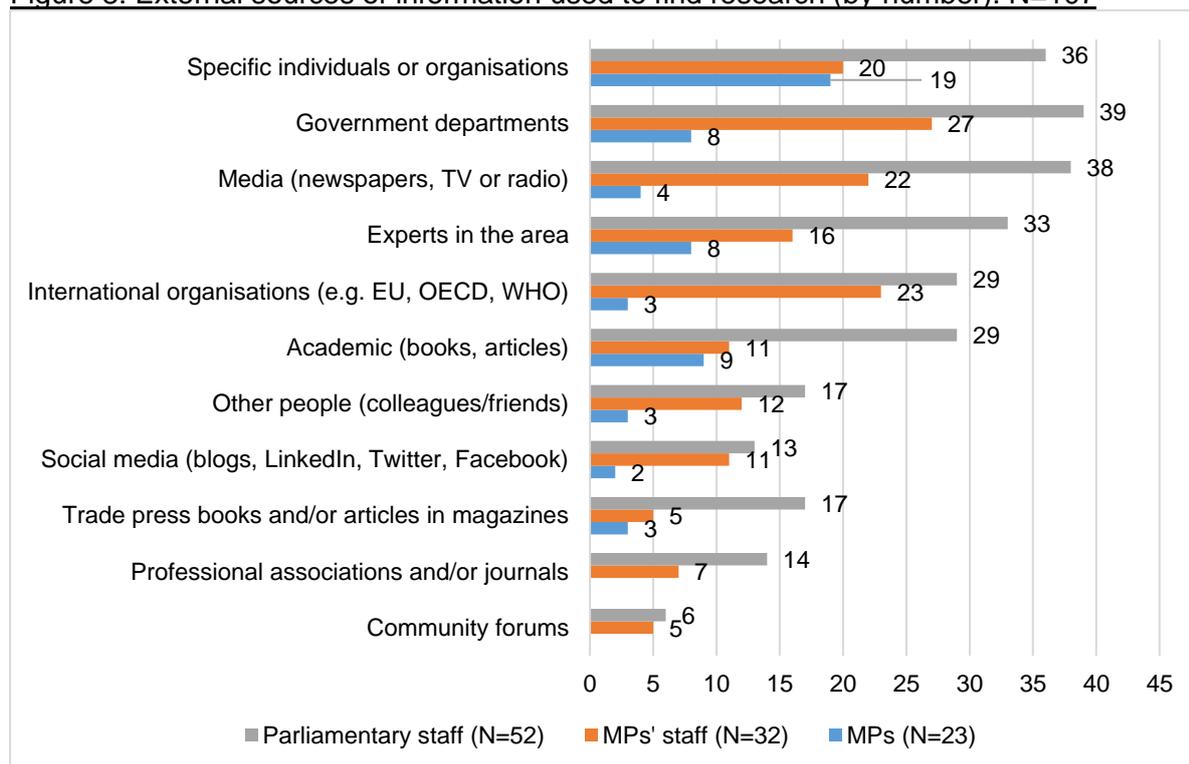
MPs, MPs' staff and parliamentary staff reported consulting frequently a number of different external sources to find research, most commonly specific individuals or organisations, government departments and the media. There were differences between groups however. For MPs, specific organisations, such as the Office for National Statistics and the National Audit Office, were the most frequently used, followed by academic books and articles, and government departments. For MPs' staff and parliamentary staff, government departments, the media, and specific individuals or organisations were the most widely used, with MPs' staff also reporting regular use of international organisations.

MPs, MPs' staff and parliamentary staff also reported using a number of internal sources to find research. Of these:
- the libraries in both Houses were selected by 71 respondents (18 MPs, 25 MPs' staff and 28 parliamentary staff);
- select committees were selected by 44 respondents (9 MPs, 12 MPs' staff and 23 parliamentary staff)
- staff employed by MPs and Peers were selected by 17 respondents (2 MPs, 13 MPs' staff and 2 parliamentary staff)
- POST was selected by 16 respondents (5 MPs, 4 MPs' staff and 7 parliamentary staff).

It is important to highlight that participants were not given a guiding definition of 'research' because part of the study was to understand how people interpreted the term. It is clear from the findings that there were multiple understandings of 'research' across parliament; however, the most predominant was in reference to the process of drafting briefing material, rather than to a particular type of information. For example:

> …being a researcher is about being a data gatherer... I do some analysis when I can, but what I am good at and what I enjoy doing is getting information into our sphere, and then there are a few of us that can go through it and decide what is useful and what is not (interviewee 77, MPs' staff).

In some ways I would think that [research] is what I do myself and that involves looking at information and providing some kind of synthesis of it. So you don't necessarily mean original research because, although it is counted as research, what we do in the Library Research Service is not necessarily original research. We don't go out in the field and do interviews or anything like that (interviewee 46, Commons Library staff).

5.1 Feedback on POST

Participants who had heard of POST before being contacted to take part in this study were asked to provide specific feedback on why they used POST. Ten or more participants said that they used POST's work because of its presentation and reputation; six people used it because it provided links to further research and contacts; five participants used it because of how it explained unfamiliar or complex and technical issues clearly. However five participants (mainly parliamentary staff) raised concerns that the timeframes within which POST operated were out of step with parliamentary work more generally. These themes are briefly outlined below.

5.1.1 Excellent presentation

52 people answered a question asking them if they had a preference for how research information is presented, for example, format, style or length (9 MPs, 12 MPs' staff and 31 parliamentary staff). Most of these participants emphasised a preference for short, concise briefings, ideally with an executive summary or abstract at the start that outlined key points. Figures 9 and 10 show a word cloud of the words most frequently used by participants to describe how they preferred research to be presented, and the words used by participants who had used POST to describe POST's work respectively. The larger the words, the more frequently they were used by participants. This demonstrates substantial overlap between desired characteristics for presenting research, and the POST format. Two respondents (1 MP and 1 parliamentary staff) highlighted the need for POST to make the most of technological developments in the way that it presents its work however.

Figure 9: Words used to describe preferences for how research presented (N=52)

Figure 10: Words used to describe presentation of POST briefings (N=15)

5.1.2 Good reputation
Ten participants highlighted POST's reputation as being impartial and trustworthy as a key reason why they used it.

> Organisations like the select committees and POST and the House of Commons Library have developed good reputations for being trustworthy sources, so it is almost like they peer review all the documentation that comes in, and their decisions on that documentation are then taken as fact (interviewee 64, MP).

> A key role for POST to play is in synthesising existing information and presenting the facts around key issues, which Members [can] then interpret. Bodies like POST and the Commons library are in a significant position to do this because they are seen as neutral and not to be working for a particular party. As such, information from them carries a certain weight in parliamentary debates (interviewee 21, MP).

> If it is a subject that you are looking for, they are really helpful; I have never heard anybody not say anything good about them. There will always be something you are doing that can be very useful and we have quoted them; a lot of it is information that is used by the various parties, even if they don't say that is where they got the information from. They are very useful and they are very knowledgeable, so you are inclined to listen and use it… I don't know anybody that hasn't used it in some way or other throughout their career (interviewee 8, MP).

> I have heard of POST and I have a very high regard for them. I have always known that their work, to my mind, is of a very high standard (interviewee 5, Peer).

> Since I have been in the House of Lords, since 1997, I have always found the research reports that are on display to be tremendously helpful. Indeed, you might not have seen this, but about two or three months ago I paid tribute to one particular report on which I was leading a debate on the floor of the House. So I am a great fan, not a critic… POST is designed to inform members of parliament, not persuade them. That is a big difference (interviewee 30, Peer).

5.1.3 Useful starting point for links to other research and contacts
Six participants highlighted that they found POST's work useful as a starting point to identify further research and contacts in the area.

> I'm not just saying this because I am talking to you, but… one of the first things I did was go through the references to that [POSTnote]. That is definitely really useful (interviewee 57, Lords Committee staff).

> I think that has been a major help because it is just getting somebody to give you some pointers and give you some contacts, just saying 'Here are the people in the area you can talk to in this instance.' So it is getting up and running, really, that is the real effort; you get about six weeks to go from knowing nothing to being able to sit in a room, which is sometimes full of world experts, and basically be a credible semi-expert on the issue (interviewee 76, Lords Committee staff).

Four participants (two MPs and two Peers) said that providing links to further information and references to additional research was incredibly useful:

> [It would be helpful to] list what it sees as good quality sources of data and research in particular fields. For example at the start of a major bill, like the one on Housing, I would have found this very useful (interviewee 50, MP).

I suppose it would be useful in terms of having a directory on a particular subject and it would be helpful if it was kept up to date, which is always an issue. That would be helpful, yes. So, a subject index, but also perhaps a geographic index as well (Wales and Scotland in particular) would be useful. If there was a section – I am just thinking aloud now – on up-to-date issues in Wales, for example the draft bill I spoke on earlier, it would be useful if a summary of all the up-to-date research papers and sources of information was easily available (interviewee 94, MP).

I have been to POST events and I receive POST briefings; I have requested hard copies of the briefings because I like to keep them on my shelves. They are really good; the fact that they are four-page briefings, tops, and the way that they are laid out with the graphics and the summary, they are really useful. They do not give you the answers, but they set out the parameters of the issue; so for me I find them remarkably helpful, including for speeches, just for me to then structure all of the issues that I want to follow up on, and then I will go somewhere else to get a bit more of a follow-up on it. I had some links into the academic world in particular fields from past experience, but what I found quite useful from POST is the references because then you can see which universities to go to, certainly on stuff around soil and agriculture, fuel and climate change, and I found them remarkably helpful. I don't tend to stay for the length of the briefing events because sometimes they are a bit too long, but I listen to the sessions and they are very good (interviewee 31, Peer).

5.1.4 Explains unfamiliar and technical issues in an accessible way
Five people discussed how they found POST's work useful because it explained unfamiliar or complex and technical issues in an accessible way.

POST plays an important role in bringing people up to speed quite quickly with things, that on first glance, they are very unfamiliar with (interviewee 28, Peer).

What is useful to a select committee is research that has come about from distilling a lot of stakeholder knowledge, and that is the sort of things that POST does as well, to an extent; you go out and speak to a lot of people (interviewee 37, Commons select committee staff).

5.1.5 Challenges in timeliness
Five participants, mainly parliamentary staff, highlighted the time taken to produce POSTnotes and raised concerns that the timeframes within which POST operated were out of step with parliamentary work more generally.

I feel that the timeframes with which POST works is out of step with the work of committees and the work of parliament more generally (interviewee 49, Peer).

…the type of research [POST] does and the amount of time it takes to produce a report doesn't at all complement the way that the library works, because we are always on a short deadline. For example, a three or four-page POSTnote might take three months, which is the standard period, I think; I know you go through all the external review but we will be writing a 30-page research paper in a week. So, if you think, 'gosh, it would be really good to have some first-person analysis of this particular technical area, it is exactly the sort of thing that POST would be good at,' you know that they wouldn't be able to do it in the time required. I think that is a problem (interviewee 42, Commons Library staff).

6. Impact of POST

This study uses four sources of data as proxy indicators for POST's impact:

- POSTnote download data
- Citations in the media
- Citations in academic papers
- Citations in parliamentary debates

POST's work on monitoring its impact is at an early stage and data on these indicators were only routinely, or systematically, collected from 2015. As such, only data from 2015 to 2017 are presented in this section.

6.1 POSTnote Download data

As Section 3 outlines, POST produces a number of different outputs. Data on the number of downloads were only collected for one such output, POSTnotes, and only from 2015. The systems used to monitor and track POSTnote download figures from the parliamentary website changed between 2015 and 2016 and a number of technical issues mean that the 2016 data are incomplete. Consequently, comparison between different years is difficult and, care should be taken when interpreting the accuracy and reliability of this data.

Figure 11: POSTnote download figures 2015-2017
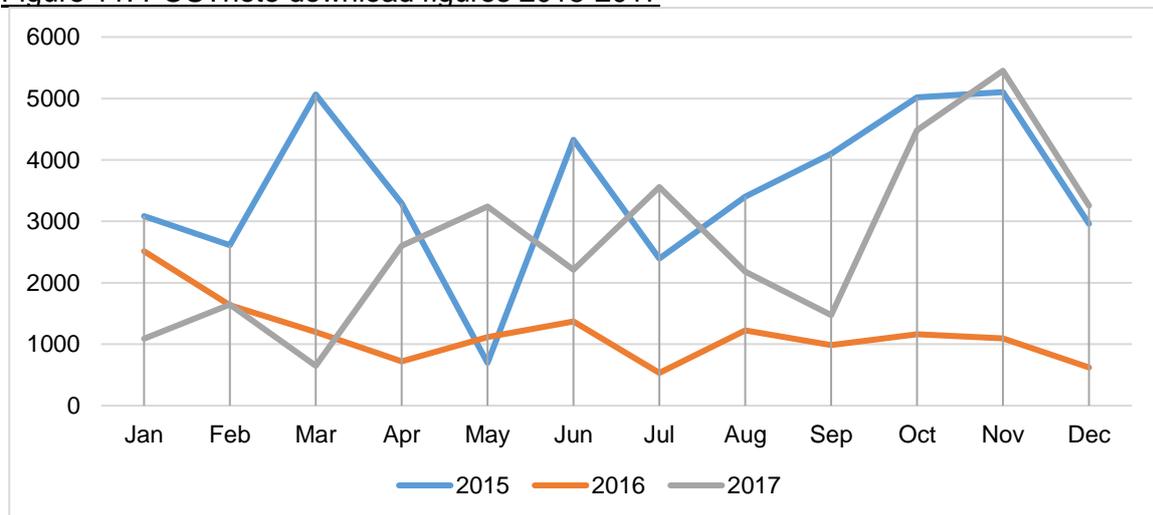
6.2 Media citations

186 references in media sources were identified between 2015-2017 using keyword searches in the programme Nexis News.[20] Figures 12 and 13 show the number of citations of POST annually since 2015 (Figure 12) and type of output (Figure 13). Figure 12 shows an overall increase in the number of media citations of POST since 2015. Figure 13 shows that over half of all media citations were to POSTnotes.

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[20] Keywords used were: "parliamentary office of science and technology" OR "parliamentary office for science and technology" OR "postnote"
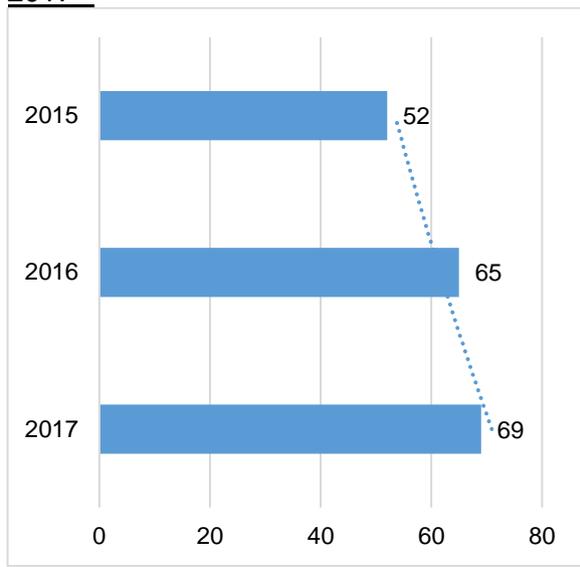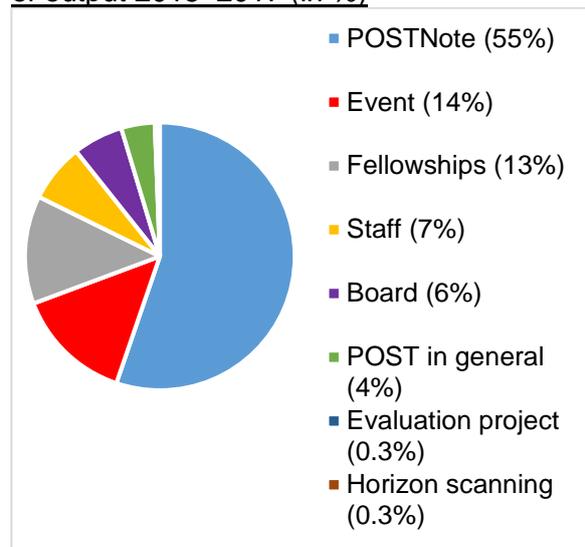
Figure 12: Media citations of POST 2015–2017[21]

Figure 13: Media citations of POST by type of output 2015–2017 (in %)

POSTNote (55%)
Event (14%)
Fellowships (13%)
Staff (7%)
Board (6%)
POST in general (4%)
Evaluation project (0.3%)
Horizon scanning (0.3%)

6.3 Academic citations

Citations in academic articles can be seen as a proxy for the quality and reputation of POST's work. Alerts set up in August 2014 using Google Scholar[22] and Zetoc[23] identified 337 citations to POST in academic work between 2015 and 2017. 54% of these (182) were citations in academic journal articles (see Figure 14).

Within these citations, the following aspects and outputs feature significantly:
- Over 90% of all references (166) were to publications produced by POST. Other references included to POST in general (11).
- 26 references were to two POSTnotes on Carbon Footprint of Electricity Generation (POSTnotes 268 and its update 383);

For comparison purposes, a similar search was undertaken in PubMed.[24] Two references were found since 2005. Both were legitimate references and had been picked up by Google Scholar. A Web of Science search[25] identified one result which was not a legitimate reference to POST.

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[21] Data until 8 December 2016

[22] Google Scholar uses web-crawling robots to collect documents from the web, filter out the results, and make them available via the Google Scholar interface. It uses a built in algorithm that makes a calculated guess at what it thinks is a scholarly source.

[23] Keywords used were: "parliamentary office of science and technology" OR "parliamentary office for science and technology" OR "postnote". Once alerts are set up, they track citations after this date.

[24] "parliamentary office of science" OR "postnote", The search terms "parliamentary office of science and technology" and "parliamentary office for science and technology" and "post" were removed because they caused errors with the search.

[25] AU = ("parliamentary office of science and technology" OR "parliamentary office for science and technology") OR TI = ("parliamentary office of science and technology" OR "parliamentary office for science and technology" OR "postnote") OR TS = ("parliamentary office of science and technology" OR "parliamentary office for science and technology" OR "postnote"). The term "post" was removed as it generated too many invalid results, for example where "post" was an author's surname.

Figure 14: Citations to POST by type of source 2015-2017
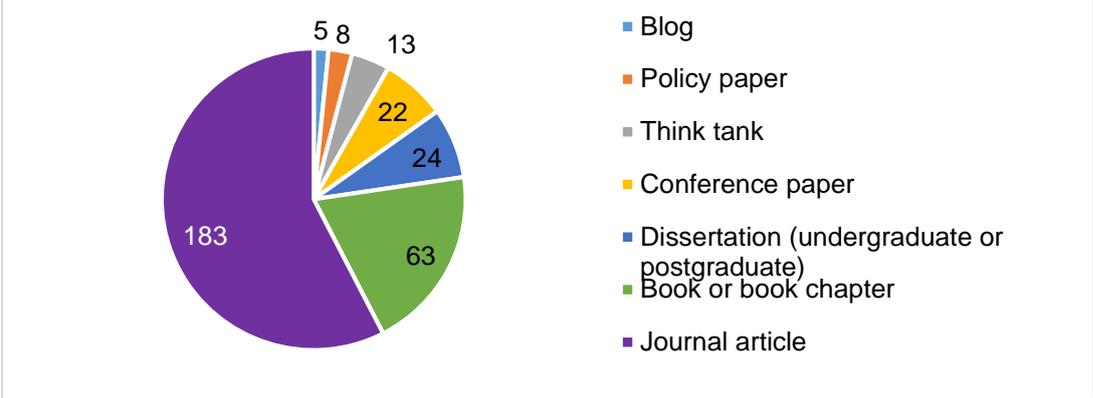
6.4 Parliamentary citations

13 references to POST by members of both Houses in parliamentary debates, written questions, answers and statements were identified using TheyWorkForYou[26] and parliamentary search since 2015. Eight references were made in the House of Lords and five in the House of Commons. POST was mentioned in a range of subject areas including air and water pollution, forensic science, teacher numbers, lifelong learning, nuclear power, and wind farms.

The relatively low number of references to POST may be due to:
- parliamentarians referring to POST's work without citing it explicitly;
- parliamentarians referring to the title of individual briefings rather than the office (only citations to the office were searched for);
- The source of the information may not always be apparent to parliamentarians, for example if they quote from a briefing put together by staff which does not include references.

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[26] TheyWorkForYou is run by mySociety, a not-for-profit social enterprise, based in the UK and working internationally. It enables searching of data and information from official parliamentary sources as far back as the 1930s. Parliamentary sources include: House of Commons debates back to the General Election of 1935; House of Commons written answers and written ministerial statements back to the General Election of June 2001; House of Commons Public Bill Committees from 2000–01 session; and House of Lords Hansard (except Grand Committees) back to around November 1999.

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ANNEX A: Previous studies of POST (in reverse chronological order)

13 previous studies examining POST and its work were identified. There is variation in methodologies and sample sizes and selection across these studies. Consequently the studies are of varying quality and methodological robustness.

Three studies had methodological weaknesses, so care was taken when interpreting the findings from these studies. Overall, four key themes were identified from these 13 studies that are of relevance to this report, and these are summarised in the following sections.

- Two studies did not include an explicit sampling strategy (for example, the number of participants and their characteristics, how participants will be selected) as part of the study design. As Wilmot notes, "a well-defined sampling strategy that utilises an unbiased and robust frame can provide unbiased and robust results" (Wilmot, 2009).
    - One of these studies issued a survey to all MPs and Peers, giving one week to respond, and then relied on those responses that were returned (Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, 2012).
    - The second study relied on responses gathered by 56 previously recruited 'local champions' - members of the public - who were willing to interview their local parliamentary representative (Lawrence et al., 2016).
- One study contained no information about methods used. The report makes reference to interviews but it is not clear how many participants were spoken to, the characteristics of these participants, or how they were selected (House of Commons, 2007).

1. The Evidence Information Service (EIS) as a new platform for supporting evidence-based policy: a consultation of UK parliamentarians

Aim: To understand parliamentarians' experiences of using evidence and to identify which features parliamentarians would find useful in the EIS.

Methods: Interviews involving open-ended and more structured questions with 56 MPs (Labour 28, Conservatives 14, Liberal Democrats 12)

Sampling: Recruited 130 Local Champions (LCs) - members of the public who were willing to interview their local parliamentary representative – over 11 months (18th March 2014 to 16th February 2015). 56 LCs completed an interview with their parliamentarian and provided notes or audio recordings, which were then transcribed. The interviews used a semi-structured approach. This included specific, structured, questions the responses to which mapped directly on to characteristics of the EIS or services that might be provided in future. It also included more open-ended questions to gauge experience, the responses to which did not always map onto discussion of the EIS. The guidelines for the semi-structured interview covered three main themes relating to obtaining and interpreting research evidence:

- **Experience** - questions that covered how the parliamentarian had previously used evidence and advice in decision-making as provided by experts in science, medicine, social sciences and the humanities, and any limitations or problems they had encountered doing so.
- **Practicalities** - to discover the parliamentarians' views on several logistical aspects of the proposed EIS, for example how responses from the service should be presented.
- **Utility** – to ask parliamentarians what features of the EIS would be most important to ensure that it is seen as trustworthy, reliable and useful, and whether they would use such a service.

2. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2014) Government Horizon Scanning. Ninth report of session 2013–14. HC 703

Aim: Call for written evidence:

- How do government departments make use of horizon scanning?
- How effective is horizon scanning in government? Do Ministers and senior officials consider horizon scanning outputs appropriately?
- What changes could be made to improve existing horizon scanning activity? Will the recommendations made in Jon Day's review of cross-government horizon scanning capability address current shortcomings? What progress has been made implementing these?
- How effective is the Government at responding to policy or regulatory challenges presented by new technologies?

Methods: 19 pieces of written evidence and 17 oral evidence witnesses.

Sampling: Not applicable.

3. Benger J (2014) Report to the House of Commons Management Board on the findings of the pilot interview study with Members and their staff about House services

Aim: To collect detailed qualitative data on services provided by the House, as well as information on any perceived gaps in provision.

Methods: 91 Interviews with: 38 MPs; 27 Westminster-based MPs' staff; and 49 constituency-based MPs' staff. Six focus groups with 45 MPs' staff based in Westminster.

Sampling: Standard Interview template was developed for both MPs and MPs' staff to explore a number of key areas, including: the nature of their work; induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD); and House services and relationships with House staff.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and were conducted at a location that was convenient for the participant. Most interviews were conducted in pairs, with one interviewer taking the lead on questions and another serving as primary note-taker. In addition, focus groups were conducted with Members' staff in Westminster, because these allowed issues to be contested or negotiated through group interaction, and highlighted shared experiences and consensus in relation to a specific topic.

Participants were invited to discuss those areas of most importance to them, or those where they had strong praise or criticism, and were not asked to discuss every service. They were offered a list of services to inspect and suggested that they pick out services they want to comment on (good or bad). The study assumed that participants were satisfied with the services they chose not to discuss. The list included 'Information and research services' (Library and Research, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, Public Information and Outreach, Education Service, Visitor Services).

4. Padilla, A & Hobbs, A (2013) Science and Technology Related Induction Needs in the House of Lords

Aim: To analyse how members of the House of Lords perceive induction activities, especially those relating to S&T, and to identify the issues they consider to be of central relevance, in order to inform any future S&T induction provisions for newly appointed Peers.

Methods: The study consisted of two phases:
1. Meetings with House Authorities (including both the House of Lords and the House of Commons) and a review of literature available publicly and through parliamentary channels. The purpose of this was to review the current context of S&T information provision across both Houses, as well as induction processes more generally. This was used to ensure that

the subsequent empirical data collection would build on existing knowledge and evaluation activities, and be responsive to the needs of the different bodies involved in planning and delivering induction.

2. A semi-structured, interviewer-facilitated, survey with 24 Peers who entered the House of Lords after the last General Election in 2010. The purpose of this was to enable Members of the House of Lords to explore and narrate their own perceptions of induction processes and how they relate to their work, and specifically the role of S&T within this context. The survey encompassed closed questions, to enable some categorical data to be gained, and open-ended qualitative questions, which provide more opportunity for depth and complexity in conversation. The survey was developed to explore a number of key areas covering: general induction processes; science and technology needs; science and technology related induction; and the role of POST.

Sampling: A full list of all Peers entering the House of Lords after the 2010 General Election was provided by the House of Lords Library in May 2012, containing the names of 124 Peers. All 124 Peers were contacted and invited to take part in the study. Peers were initially approached via hard copy letter delivered to their internal parliamentary address, with a one-page project brief enclosed. All non-responders were followed up by email and telephone, until they had been approached three times in total.

5. **Parliamentary and Scientific Committee (2012) Science and Technology advice for parliamentarians**

Aim: To examine:
- The nature and availability of resources to support the work of parliament in areas for which science, engineering and technology (SET) considerations could be important.
- The use of existing resources by members: 'Official'[27] and 'Unofficial'[28] resources.
- To recommend any improvements that might be practicable.

Methods: Survey of 12 MPs and 55 Peers

Sampling: Short questionnaire (seven questions) sent by email to all members of both Houses. One week to reply. Questionnaire was piloted.

6. **SPA Future Thinking (2012) House of Commons Survey of Services 2012**
Aim: Four main aims:
- Provide usable feedback on the range and quality of services provided to Members and their staff so that actions to improve and develop services can be identified if necessary;
- Identify areas where the quality of services fall short of acceptable standards and where there are good standards;
- Assess how the perception of service delivery changes over time, both at the macro level of overall service, but also for specific elements of delivery;

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[27] 'Official' Resources: resources supported by parliament including Commons and Lords libraries, POST and Commons and Lords S&T committees.

[28] 'Unofficial' resources**:** APPGs particularly, the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee (P&S) which publishes a quarterly journal, *Science in parliament* and an occasional *Guide to Science in parliament and Government.* Other SET APPGs are: Agriculture and Food for Development, Animals in Medical Experimentation, Biodiversity, Cancer, Climate Change, Earth and Environmental Science, Energy, Engineering, Environment, Food and Health, Internet and Information Technology, Life Sciences, Medical Research, Nuclear Energy and Science and Technology in Agriculture, Space. Other unofficial sources: A number of organisations that have no formal connection to parliament hold regular meetings in the wider Westminster area to discuss the interface between SET and policy e.g. The Foundation for Science and Technology, The Westminster Forum, the learned societies, the Royal Society of Chemistry, Society of Biology, The Royal Society.

- Identify new areas where services may be of use to Members but are not currently provided, and assess the demand for these in relation to existing services.

Methods: Survey of 177 MPs (27% of total number) and 961 MPs' staff (36% of estimated total number).

Sampling: All MPs and 2,678 MPs' staff on the IPSA payroll were sent invitations to complete the survey.

7. FDS International (2010) Survey of Services 2010. Report for the House of Commons

Aim: Four main aims:
- Provide usable feedback on the range and quality of services provided to Members and their staff so that actions to improve and develop services can be identified if necessary;
- Identify areas where the quality of services fall short of acceptable standards and where there are good standards;
- Assess how the perception of service delivery changes over time, both at the macro level of overall service, but also for specific elements of delivery;
- Identify new areas where services may be of use to Members but are not currently provided, and assess the demand for these in relation to existing services.

Methods: Survey of 188 MPs (29% of total number) and 755 MPs' staff (28% of estimated total number).

Sampling: All MPs and 2,730 MPs' staff on the IPSA payroll were sent invitations to complete the survey by email or hard copy letter. In total, ten Members and five MPs' constituency based staff were interviewed by telephone. A focus group was attended by three MPs' staff. The sample interviewed was inclusive rather than representative – that is, selected so that each of the main political parties was represented. Not all participants answered all questions, therefore the number of responses to each question varies.

8. POST (2009) POST Evaluation Report 2009

Aim: To undertake a systematic evaluation of aspects of POST's work to ensure that its products continue to meet the needs of parliamentarians.

Methods: Interviews with 52 MPs and Peers.

Sampling: MPs and Lords were listed alphabetically and every seventh person on the list was approached for interview. This resulted in 88 randomly selected MPs and 105 Peers. Of this sample, 3 MPs and 14 Peers responded positively and agreed to be interviewed. The majority, 72 MPs and 89 Peers, did not respond, and 13 MPs and 2 Peers declined. The sample was then increased, by moving up or down the alphabetical list. In total, 271 MPs and 186 Peers were contacted, sometimes repeatedly by email and telephone, resulting in 28 interviews with MPs and 23 interviews with Peers, including three pilot interviews. Peers were checked against their activities in the House of Lords prior to being contacted. This ensured that they had been active in House debate over the last twelve months. The randomised method guaranteed a representative selection process. Any distortion in the interview sample is due to a multitude of factors which influence decisions on whether to respond (for example, level of interest in science). The final sample comprised 29 MPs and 23 Peers including 3 "pilot" interviews conducted at the start to test the questionnaire.

9. FDS International (2009) Survey of Services 2009. Prepared for House of Commons

Aim: Four main aims:

- To provide useable feedback on the range and quality of services provided to Members and their staff so that actions to improve and develop services can be identified if necessary;
- To identify areas where the quality of services fall short of acceptable standards and where there are good standards;
- To assess how the perception of service delivery changes over time, both at the macro level of overall service, but also for specific elements of service delivery;
- To identify new areas where services may be of use to Members but are not currently provided, and assessing the demand for these in relation to existing services.

Methods: Survey of 160 MPs (25% of total number) and 757 MPs' Staff (28% of estimated total number). Telephone interviews with 10 MPs and five MPs' constituency staff. Focus group with 7 MPs' staff.

Sampling: The sample included all MPs and their paid staff (i.e. staff on the payroll system). The sample of MPs' staff did not include volunteers and interns. The sample was broadly representative of the make-up of the House (in terms of party, role, age and length of service) and in line with make-up of a 2007 sample. A self-completion questionnaire and covering letter sent to 646 MPs and 2,681 MPs' staff. In total, ten MPs and five MPs' constituency based staff were interviewed in-depth by telephone. A focus group of seven MPs' staff was convened. The sample interviewed was inclusive rather than representative – that is, selected so that each of the main political parties were represented.
Not all participants answered all questions, therefore the number of responses to each question varies.

10. House of Commons Public Administration select committee (2007) Governing the Future. HC 123-I

Aim: To focus on the role of the Centre in strategic planning, the relationship between the Centre and individual departments in the strategic planning process, and the results of strategic work within government.

Methods: 14 pieces of written evidence and 12 witnesses

Sampling: Not applicable.

11. House of Commons (2007) Study of the Value for Money of POST

No information could be found about the aims, methods or sampling used in this study.

12. UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice (CEBP, 2005). Findings of a Review of Some Aspects of the Operations of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) Conducted by the UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and based at Queen Mary College, University of London

Aim: To hone the advice-giving processes of CEBPP to organisations concerned with providing a factual background to the policy-making process. The purpose of the collaboration was to identify any positive scope for improving the impact of POST's work.

Methods: 12 month audit of POST's operations. The areas covered in this process were:
- Work programme design and construction – looking at how topics for POSTnotes and other POST outputs are identified, framed, scoped and selected. Also included were the role and involvement of the Board.

- Work methodology – examining ways of working and performance, management, with a particular focus on interns/fellows/other temporary workers, their recruitment and selection, roles, supervision and overall performance.
- Communications – covering active external media and other communication and other external relations.

Members of the CEBPP team attended a staff meeting and a Board meeting. They examined the POST website and other public information that the Office provides.

The team also conducted six case studies – on the production process for five POSTnotes at different stages of development – those on: drug testing, data protection, ethics committees, plutonium and mobile phones – and on the production of one long (in fact the longest-ever) report – that on nuclear facilities and potential terrorism. This selection covered all the team-focused thematic areas at POST.

Sampling: Unclear how case studies selected.

13. House of Commons Information Committee (2000). The future of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. HC 65

Aim: Terms of reference:
- How POST has operated to date
- Whether POST should be established on a permanent basis with parliamentary funding and if so,
- How the role of POST might develop in the future.

Methods: Three witnesses: Chair, vice Chair of POST Board and Director of POST. 17 pieces of written evidence from the POST Board; House of Commons library; Chairmen of 13 select committees (including Science and Technology committees of both Houses); and 2 individual members.

Sampling: Not applicable.