



**UK Parliament**  
POST

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**Celebrating two years of the  
Knowledge Exchange Unit  
in UK Parliament: our  
achievements, learnings  
and next steps**

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[parliament.uk/research-impact](https://parliament.uk/research-impact)



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## Thanks

Our work and successes in the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) over the past two years have been possible thanks to the collaboration and support of numerous stakeholders.

We would like to thank UK Parliament, the Economic and Social Research Council and University College London's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy for their ongoing collaborative support and investment in the KEU.

We would also like to thank our network of knowledge mobilisers and the Universities Policy Engagement Network for their collaboration: amplifying our messages, sharing parliamentary opportunities, and supporting researchers to engage.

Finally, we would like to thank all the researchers who have engaged with the KEU and UK Parliament more widely over the past two years, finding the time in already packed schedules to support democracy through feeding their insights and expertise into the work of UK Parliament.



## Executive summary

In September 2018, POST formed the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) as part of the “POST at 30: bridging research and policy” strategy. Our unit was created to support, enhance and diversify the exchange of information and expertise between UK Parliament and the research community. The KEU is part of a wider collaborative project between POST, the Economic and Social Research Council and University College London’s Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy.

### Our work comprises:

- **Connecting** the parliamentary and research communities
- **Enhancing** researchers’ understanding of UK Parliament and its use of research
- **Enabling**, increasing and diversifying engagement from the research community
- **Supporting** parliamentary engagement with the research community
- **Contributing** to developments in the wider research-policy ecosystem
- **Sharing** learnings around knowledge exchange
- **Monitoring** and evaluating our work

Since our creation, we have:



**ENGAGED** with over 100 universities across the UK and increased the diversity of universities which engage with Parliament.



**DELIVERED** a training programme in how to engage with UK Parliament to over 1000 researchers from across the UK, with over 94% of trainees saying they would take action as a result.



**GROWN** a network of over 250 knowledge mobilisers across the UK, through whom we have the potential to reach up to 84% of UK academics.



**DEVELOPED** and started delivery of a series of initiatives to diversify the body of researchers engaging with UK Parliament, in terms of demographic, research and institutional background.



**DEVELOPED** a suite of webpages and resources to support researchers to engage with UK Parliament, which have had over 76,000 unique page views.



**CREATED** a Twitter account to centralise all opportunities for researchers, which has over 13,000 followers and makes approximately 300,000 impressions every month.



**BROUGHT** onboard 13 academics fellows to conduct projects across UK Parliament proposed by teams in Parliament.



**PUT OUT** an open call inviting academics to propose their own projects to conduct in Parliament, to which we received over 70 applications.



**WORKED** to ensure impact on UK Parliament is formally recognised in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework exercise, and engaged with Research England around the ongoing development of the Knowledge Exchange Framework.



**COLLABORATED** and shared learnings with universities, research networks and organisations, academic publishers, UK Research and Innovation, funders, learned societies, professional associations, the Universities Policy Engagement Network, devolved legislatures, UK Government departments and other public institutions.



**SPOKEN** at a variety of national and international conferences, and published or contributed to a number of blogs.



**SHARED** insights around knowledge exchange with more than 10 international or multinational legislatures or organisations.



**QUICKLY** mobilised over 5000 researchers to support UK Parliament in its work responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This report looks back at our evolution and achievements since the creation of the KEU two years ago, and lays out our priorities and plans for the future.



## Introduction

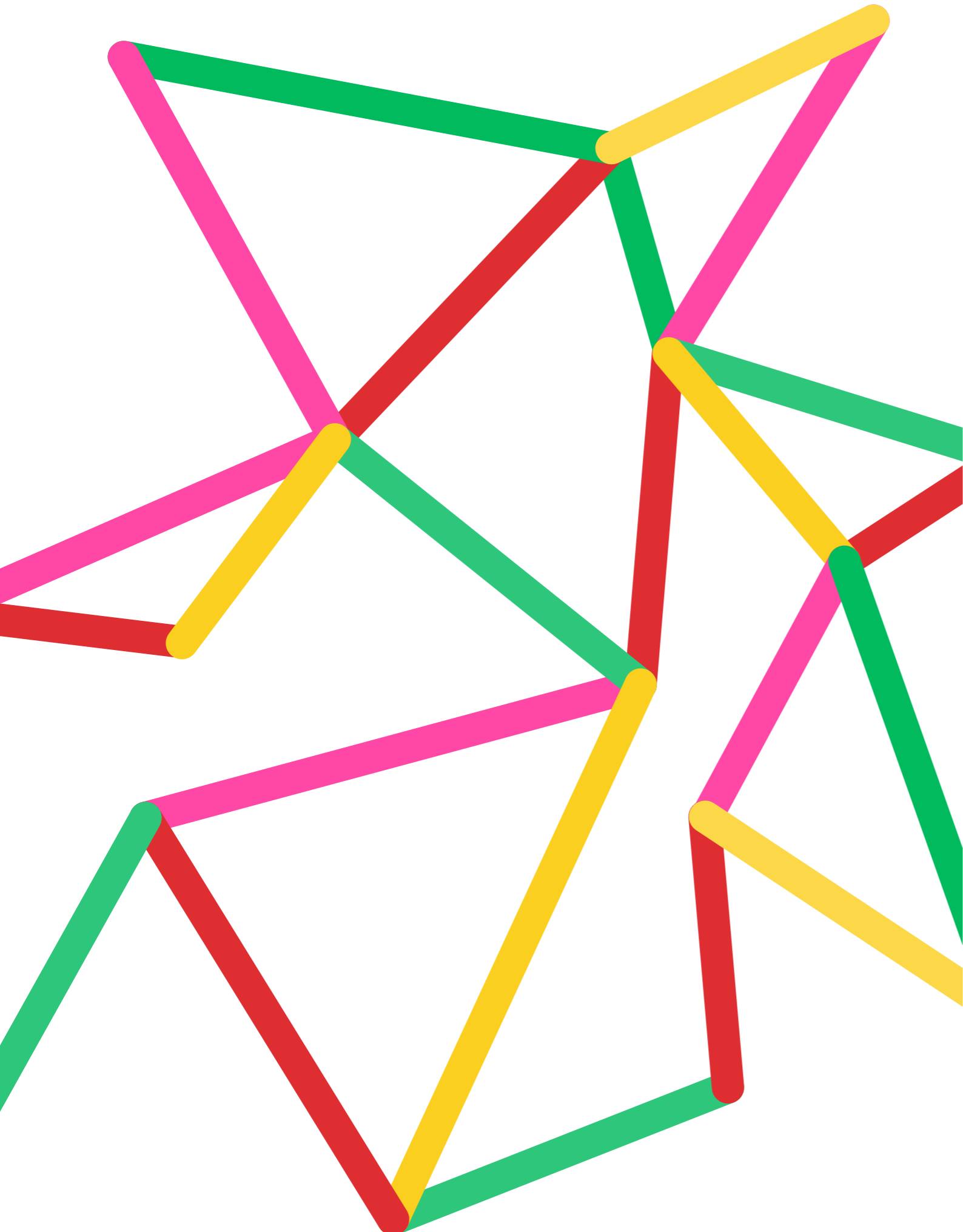
Since the creation in September 2018 of POST's Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU), we have succeeded in establishing ourselves both within UK Parliament and externally as the central conduit and facilitator of knowledge exchange (KE) between UK Parliament and the research community.

We have had great successes in supporting and enhancing KE and are making tangible progress in diversifying the body of researchers who engage with Parliament.

We have also achieved impact on national research and KE policies, and have played a central role in changing the place and perception of parliamentary and policy engagement in the higher education sector, as well as the attitudes towards, and use of, research and academic expertise in UK Parliament.

As the first known parliamentary unit of its kind, we have established ourselves nationally and internationally as a pioneering example of effective practice in KE between researchers and policy organisations. We draw on good practice in KE from the social sciences whilst simultaneously feeding our learnings back into the academic debate and literature. Beyond the academy, we have informed and inspired a number of national and international bodies.

This report looks back at our evolution and achievements since the creation of the KEU two years ago, and lays out our priorities and plans for the future.



## The background and founding aims of the Knowledge Exchange Unit

In September 2018, POST formed the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) as part of the "POST at 30: bridging research and policy" strategy. The KEU was created to support, enhance and diversify the exchange of information and expertise between UK Parliament and the research community.

The KEU evolved as a focused unit from a wider ongoing collaboration between POST, University College London's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STeAPP), and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC); incorporating the previous Universities Programme from the bicameral Participation team. This collaboration began in 2013 with the creation of POST's Social Science Section and sought to increase the use of research – in particular social science research – in UK Parliament, as well as to enhance engagement with researchers.

Informed by research conducted in 2017 as part of this collaboration around [the role of research in UK Parliament](#) and [researchers' barriers to engaging with Parliament](#), the creation of the KEU was the next natural step in the collaborative endeavour to increase the use of research in Parliament. Focusing KE capacity and expertise in POST, the KEU set out to become the central body facilitating and strengthening KE between Parliament and the research community.

We, the KEU, have always had at our heart the desire and drive to increase the diversity of researchers engaging with UK Parliament, and to support and enable underrepresented groups of researchers to be heard here; be they underrepresented because of their demographic background, institutional or research background, or career stage. This focus has always underpinned our decisions, activities and priorities.

Alongside our core aim to enable KE between UK Parliament and the research community, we have had ambitious aims to play a leading role in enhancing the place and perception of policy engagement through legislatures in the higher education and policy sectors, both nationally and internationally.

We are a small team and, whilst situated within POST, we collaborate with colleagues across UK Parliament to enhance and diversify KE, inform changes in core practice, and ensure that more of the best available research evidence feeds into the work of Parliament.

# The evolution of the KEU's work programme

Over the past two years, the scope and reach of our work in the KEU has evolved and increased considerably. The collaborative style of our work means that priorities, activities and changes to our priorities are always in consultation with, or responsive to, the research and parliamentary communities that we support. Today our work programme comprises:

## → Connecting the parliamentary and research communities

Connecting members of the research community from across all disciplines; be they researchers, knowledge mobilisers or research centres, with the relevant offices or people in UK Parliament – at the request of both internal and external individuals.

## → Enhancing researchers' understanding of UK Parliament and its use of research

Enhancing understanding in the research community about the role of research in parliamentary processes and the specific contributions that every discipline can make; supporting engagement and building skills across a diverse group of researchers through training, advice, web resources and social media.

## → Enabling, increasing and diversifying engagement from the research community

Enabling and increasing opportunities for researchers; ensuring a more diverse group of academics engage by building connections and collaborating with university and research networks, delivering the Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme, running events, and putting in place innovative KE mechanisms.

## → Supporting parliamentary engagement with the research community

Supporting staff across UK Parliament to engage with a diverse range of researchers through rapid, responsive mobilisation of the research community and provision of relevant contacts and information; increasing the visibility of research and supporting diverse engagement; helping foster positive attitudes towards critical consumption of research; and supporting adaptation of parliamentary processes to improve use of research evidence.

## → Contributing to developments in the wider research-policy ecosystem

Contributing to developments in the wider research-policy ecosystem through building relationships; collaborating and sharing insights with universities, research councils, funders, learned societies, the [Universities Policy Engagement Network](#), devolved legislatures and other public institutions. Specifically contributing to discussions around prioritising, incentivising and recognising policy engagement, as well as around national level frameworks such as the [Research Excellence Framework](#) and [Knowledge Exchange Framework](#).

## → Sharing learnings around knowledge exchange

Sharing learnings around effective practice in KE between policy and research, locally, nationally and internationally. Also, contributing to conversations around how to track and measure KE and research impact on UK Parliament and policy.

## → Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating our work to establish effectiveness of activities and inform priorities, decisions and actions.



## The work of the KEU:

September 2018 – September 2020

Since our creation in September 2018, we have achieved a huge amount, particularly as a small team. The following pages illustrate some key achievements and impacts in different areas of our work.

## Enhancing understanding to increase engagement

In the survey we conducted in 2017, we found that the two greatest barriers academics face when engaging with UK Parliament are lack of knowledge or guidance on how to engage, and a lack of confidence to do so. We therefore set out to reduce those barriers through several activities, including a suite of training events, and development of a web and social media presence.

### Training

Between December 2018 and February 2020, we ran 14 day-long training events in all regions of the UK, reaching nearly 500 academics.<sup>1</sup> At each event, titled 'Parliament for Researchers', we trained between 30–40 researchers or knowledge mobilisers in how UK Parliament uses research and how to engage with Parliament. At each session, we brought along staff from across both Houses so researchers could hear directly from parliamentary staff who use research in their work, with both parties benefitting from building connections during the training.

189 attendees provided feedback on the training. Of those, 78% rated it as excellent, and 21% as good, with over 99% stating that they would recommend it to a friend.

Of those who provided feedback, 98% said they would undertake at least one action as a result of the training, such as engaging with a select committee, Library or POST. 56/59 (95%) who responded to a survey six months later said that they had undertaken at least one action; the most popular being to pass on information to others.

From April 2020 onwards, we shifted to online training as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April and June 2020, we ran one pilot and five webinars, training 469 researchers and

knowledge mobilisers in how to engage with UK Parliament, 435 of whom signed up to two sessions designed specifically to inform researchers on how to engage in response to COVID-19 and its impacts.

173 people provided feedback on the five webinars, of which 96% rated them as excellent or good. 98% said they would recommend it to a friend and 94% said they intended to take action as a result of the training.

In our first two years we also ran, or participated in, 36 externally-organised training events across all four nations of the UK, in collaboration with universities, learned societies, professional associations, research networks and organisations, and academic publishers.

In the summer of 2020, we opened registration for our autumn training programme, for the first time ever proposing a suite of eight webinars tailored for different audiences: PhD students, Early Career Researchers and knowledge mobilisers; with different focuses on select committee engagement, on writing and targeting research to a parliamentary audience, and a general webinar on parliamentary engagement for researchers. Over 2000 researchers and knowledge mobilisers have signed up to this webinar series.

## Web resources and social media

Over the past two years we have expanded our web presence, developing a suite of webpages and resources to support researcher engagement with UK Parliament.

[www.parliament.uk/research-impact](http://www.parliament.uk/research-impact) provides researchers and knowledge mobilisers with comprehensive guidance on the who, what, where, when, why and how of parliamentary engagement and has, since the creation of the KEU, had over 76,000 unique page views.

We have produced [several downloadable resources](#), including:

- A one-page guide to research impact and UK Parliament
- A four-page briefing on Research Impact and Legislatures, in collaboration with the devolved legislatures
- A four-page briefing on Knowledge Exchange and Legislatures, in collaboration with the devolved legislatures
- A short guide to producing research to support the work of UK Parliament

We have also created a central KEU email address: [keu@parliament.uk](mailto:keu@parliament.uk), meaning that, whilst we are happy for people to get in contact with us individually, there is also a more general access route too.

In November 2018, we launched our Twitter account, [@UKParl\\_Research](https://twitter.com/UKParl_Research), to centralise all opportunities for researchers to feed their research and expertise into UK Parliament, and to provide an informal channel for interaction between us and the research community. Keen to address the perception of UK Parliament being a faceless

OVER  
**13,000** We have garnered over  
13,000 Twitter followers

OVER  
**76,000** Our webpages have had  
over 76,000 unique page views

APPROX  
**300,000** Our Twitter account makes  
approximately 300,000  
impressions every month

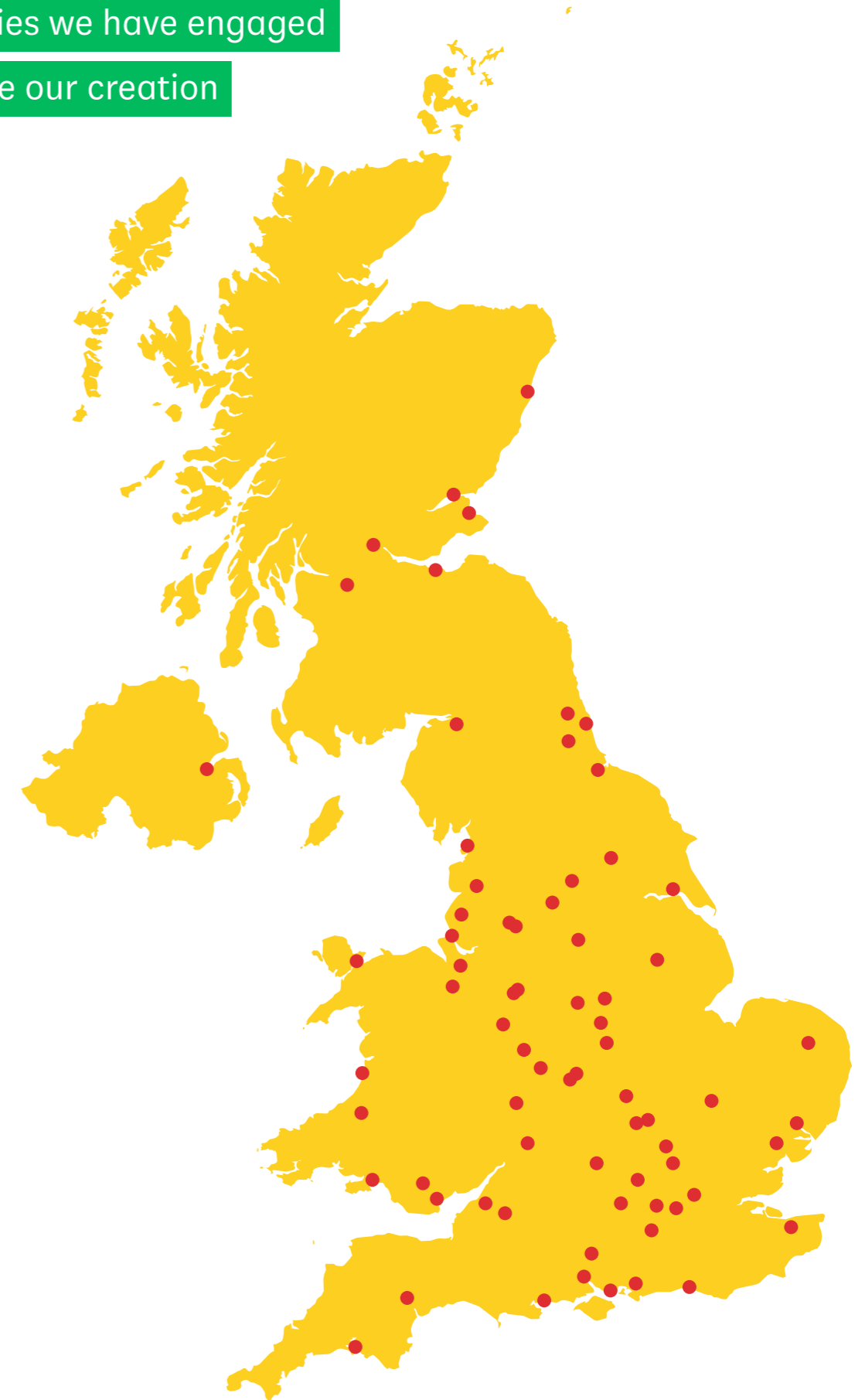
institution, we made the strategic decision to put a picture of ourselves in the profile picture, sign off our tweets, make frequent use of GIFs, and engage in a friendly conversational manner. Since our arrival on Twitter, we have garnered over 13,000 followers.

Between August 2019 and July 2020 our Twitter account made, on average, 297,750 impressions per month, peaking at 638,000 in March 2020, with the Twitter launch of our COVID-19 Outbreak Expert Database for UK Parliament. Our Twitter presence has extended the reach of publicity of parliamentary opportunities. For example, 11% and 14% of applicants to the directed and open call strands of our fellowship scheme found out about the scheme through Twitter, whilst the tweet launching our COVID-19 Outbreak Expert Database for UK Parliament was retweeted 1188 times.

Our use of social media continues to evolve. For example, in June 2020 we ran our first ever #KEUstionTime, interviewing one of POST's scientific advisers about their work and how they use research.

## Universities we have engaged

### with since our creation



## Building connections and developing

### KE mechanisms

The research that POST conducted in 2017 found that research evidence was only infrequently being submitted to committee inquiries and we found that many academics perceived UK Parliament as exclusive, or felt their personal or professional background was a barrier to engagement. We therefore set out to address this through building connections and developing KE mechanisms.

#### Building connections

Since the creation of the KEU, we have worked with teams across UK Parliament to support KE, including POST, select committees and Libraries in both the House of Commons and Lords, and the bicameral Participation team.

Outside of UK Parliament, we have engaged with over 100 universities across the UK, all three devolved legislatures, government departments and agencies, research councils and funders, learned societies, professional associations, research networks, organisations and institutes, think tanks and the third sector, as well as international organisations.

**We work closely with a growing network of over 250 knowledge mobilisers.**

#### Knowledge mobilisers' informal network

To increase our reach, over the past two years we have built close working relationships with over 250 knowledge mobilisers, including KE, impact and policy staff in universities, learned societies and research networks. We have built connections in 129 organisations, including 98 higher education institutions (HEIs). Through our connections with individual knowledge mobilisers in HEIs, we have the potential to reach 84% (182,075)<sup>2</sup> of academics, and this number is constantly growing.

We collaborate with our knowledge mobiliser network to raise awareness around engaging with UK Parliament, and widely promote opportunities to do so. Our exchanges with this network provide a key way for both communities to stay up to date with each other's changing contexts. These vary from individual interactions, to invites to the network to comment and feedback on our KE mechanisms, to virtual catch-ups, including a series of 'virtual teas' we held in the summer of 2020.

#### Rapid requests to the research community

Since January 2020, we have been piloting and evolving a rapid request mechanism with our knowledge mobiliser network to seek relevant experts at the request of committee and Library staff in both Houses. We have put out six requests, to which mobilisers from 66 institutions have responded, putting forward a total of 389 experts. Together we and the knowledge mobiliser network will continue evolving this mechanism to ensure maximal effectiveness.

OVER  
60

We have had responses from 66 institutions to our evolving rapid request mechanism

OVER  
100

We have engaged with over 100 universities since our creation

APPROX  
180,000

Through our knowledge mobilisers, we have the potential to reach over 180K researchers

**Since December 2019, we have brought onboard 13 academic fellows to conduct projects across UK Parliament.**

#### Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme

In December 2019, we launched our Parliamentary Academic Fellowship (PAF) Scheme, redeveloping a previous pilot scheme run by POST between 2016–2019. We launched with a directed call, publishing a number of projects identified by offices across Parliament and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (UK Branch). We received 45 applications from academics, and awarded 11 of them fellowships. From January 2020 onwards, the directed call became a rolling scheme, giving offices in Parliament the opportunity to seek an academic fellow at any point during the year. Since then, we have sought a further two academic fellows through this mechanism to support the Commons Library and a Commons select committee.

In June 2020, we launched the second strand of our PAF Scheme: the open call. We invited researchers to propose projects to conduct in the Commons and Lords Committee Offices, Libraries, POST, Education and Engagement (Participation), Heritage Collections Team (Parliamentary Art Collection), and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (UK Branch). We received 76 applications to work with 37 different teams across UK Parliament. Outcomes of applications to the scheme will be decided in late Autumn 2020, with academic fellows expected to start their projects from early 2021.

## Increasing diversity of engagement

We previously found that the voices of certain groups of academics are underrepresented in engagement activities with UK Parliament, including women; people from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background; academics with disabilities; and those working in non-Russell Group universities. So, in October 2019, we launched a specific stream of work to support engagement from a more diverse group of academics.

The first activity was a day-long event: “Women Researchers and UK Parliament”, attended by 90 participants from across the UK with an interest in supporting the community of women researchers to engage with UK Parliament. The participants heard from women researchers who have worked with Parliament about their experiences, learnt how to engage with Parliament as a researcher, contributed ideas on how parliamentary staff can support more women researchers to engage, and made new contacts with staff. Of the 39 attendees who provided feedback, 87% said it was excellent, 97% said they would recommend it to a friend, and 100% said they would take action as a result. Suggestions from attendees of this event are shaping the direction of our work with women researchers.

Our planned event in March 2020 for “BAME researchers and UK Parliament” had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and our plans for an event later in the year for “Researchers with disabilities and UK Parliament” had to be paused. However we have moved a substantive part of the former event online via a series of focus groups planned for Autumn 2020, to listen to the lived experiences of researchers from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background of engaging with UK Parliament; findings from these focus groups will shape our work with this underrepresented community.

We are delighted to have evidence that we are succeeding in enabling an increasingly diverse body of researchers to engage with UK Parliament. In March 2020, we sent an online survey from POST to all the experts signed up to our COVID-19 Outbreak Expert Database, regarding their concerns around the impact of the outbreak. Over 1100 experts responded to the survey. Of those experts, 1016 were affiliated with UK universities, including dual affiliations for a small number of respondents. Of those university affiliations, 51.4% were non-Russell Group and 48.6% were Russell Group.

Previous research conducted in 2013/14 showed that, of evidence provided to select committees, 75.6% of academic witnesses came from Russell Group universities.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the data are not directly comparable as they do not relate to select committee submissions, they do nevertheless show evidence of increased institutional diversity in researcher engagement with UK Parliament.

We continue to take forward our diversity work in various ways. These include reflective practice and development of activities drawing on equality analyses; collaboration with key partners such as the Universities Policy Engagement Network Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group; and continued delivery of consultation initiatives with a range of communities across the research sector, such as our online focus groups with the community of researchers from BAME backgrounds.

## Impacting on the wider research-policy ecosystem

We have known for a long time that lack of recognition or reward are barriers to engaging with UK Parliament or other policy institutions.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup> Therefore, one of our priorities has been to work with stakeholders across the wider research-policy ecosystem, including Higher Education institutions, public agencies and funding bodies, to help raise awareness and promote the place of parliamentary and policy engagement and impact.

A core part of our work includes convening and participating in discussions around impact and KE, and how both of these can be tracked, demonstrated, measured and evaluated.

### The Research Excellence Framework and parliamentary impact

In 2018, we began working collaboratively with Research England<sup>4</sup> feeding into the plans for the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. We hosted a meeting with Research England, panel chairs and colleagues from the devolved legislatures, and led on the production of a briefing for Research England, along with colleagues from the devolved legislatures, on ‘Research Impact and UK Legislatures’ (September 2018). Insights on what constitutes parliamentary impact and how it can be evidenced from this briefing were taken up directly by Research England and are now found in the Panel Criteria and Working Methods.<sup>5</sup>

Our work to support the recognition and reward of researchers through the REF exercise continues; during summer 2020, a number of parliamentary staff were keen to be nominated to Research England as impact assessors for the forthcoming REF exercise.

### The Knowledge Exchange Framework

In 2019, our collaboration with Research England diversified as we began to engage around the development of the Knowledge Exchange Framework. Since then, we have been working with colleagues from Research England and the devolved legislatures to advance understanding of KE principles and practice with legislatures and how these activities might be captured. We led on the production of a publicly available briefing, along with colleagues from the devolved legislatures, on ‘Knowledge Exchange and UK Legislatures’ (February 2020). Our work with Research England around the Knowledge Exchange Framework continues.

Our insights on what constitutes parliamentary impact and how it can be evidenced were taken up by Research England and feature in the guidance material for REF2021.

## Enhancing effectiveness and impact through collaboration, monitoring and evaluation

Beyond our collaboration with STEaPP and the ESRC, much of our success and impact is due to our close collaboration with a number of key partners, as well as monitoring and evaluation of our activities.

### Collaboration with UK Research and Innovation

We have established connections with UKRI and individual research councils as well as Research England (as detailed above). These connections play a key role in ensuring that UKRI-funded researchers are aware of opportunities to engage with UK Parliament and are able to do so. They also provide key means for both parties to learn from each other and identify ways to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of each other's activities, where there are overlaps in aims. This has enabled us to ensure policy relevance for urgent research work and we have been actively engaging with the ESRC around the COVID-19 emergency funding round. We have also been working with UKRI to develop the current call for the International Public Policy Observatory.

### Universities Policy Engagement Network

The Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) was created at about the same time as the KEU, and we have worked closely together since then, with the KEU hosting the inaugural UPEN meeting in the winter of 2018. UPEN is a partner on the collaborative POST-STEaPP-ESRC project. This close collaboration enables both partners to enhance their impact, and we frequently contribute at UPEN catch-ups, whilst UPEN systematically promotes and supports engagement opportunities with UK Parliament.

### Devolved Legislatures

We work closely with our counterparts in the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd Cymru and the Northern Ireland Assembly. As well as liaising frequently and sharing learnings around effective KE practice, we have collaborated on a number of projects, including the production of two cross-legislature briefings (see above) and input into a research project (see below). Close collaboration ensures we can learn from each other and use this to increase our effectiveness, as well as provide more coordinated support to researchers in the UK interested in engaging with legislatures.

### UK Government

Over the past two years, we have worked collaboratively with a number of UK Government departments to support each other's KE activities and share learnings around effective practice, working particularly closely in this way with the Open Innovation Team and the Government Office for Science.

### Exchanging Knowledge on Knowledge Exchange project

In 2019, we worked with colleagues in the devolved legislatures on a collaborative project with Dr Danielle Beswick (Birmingham) and Dr Marc Geddes (Edinburgh). Funded through the ESRC Impact Accelerator Award scheme, Beswick and Geddes conducted a study on the KE activities delivered by each of the four legislatures. Through interviews and analysis of documents made available by the legislatures, they produced the report '[Evaluating Academic Engagement with UK Legislatures: Exchanging Knowledge on Knowledge Exchange](#)'. Learnings from this project have informed our approach to the work we conduct, including the recommendation that legislatures keep a public record of their activities, to which we hope this report responds.

### Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement project

POST is a policy partner on the large Research England-funded project [Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement](#) (CAPE). This three-year project, launched in the summer of 2020, brings together five university partners and four policy partners and aims to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals across the higher education sector. The KEU Lead sits on the advisory board for the project, and the KEU is excited to be supporting it.

### The KEU's Digital KE project

In the spring of 2020, we began collaborating with Dr Sandra Messenger (Cranfield), who is conducting a Parliamentary Academic Fellowship with us around our digital KE activities. The project, which will run until spring 2021, aims to enhance and increase the effectiveness of our digital KE activities through a study of relevant literature, survey of the research community, analysis of our practices, piloting and adaptation of processes, and the production of a set of recommendations.

### The KEU's Monitoring and Evaluation work

We work reflectively, conducting continuous monitoring and evaluation on our activities, to ensure that our work is effective and impactful. This includes formal evaluation of our events, training and fellowships programmes, monitoring of web and social media analytics, and gathering informal feedback on agile and evolving processes, such as our 'rapid request' mechanism. We are also developing a Theory of Change to support our monitoring and evaluation work. The KEU routinely reports to the POST Board and ESRC and our outcomes are made available via Research Fish and through specific public reports.

More broadly, we are keen to enhance understanding of effective KE and policy impact and are amongst those who are leading work in this area. We have contributed to a number of related conversations and convened several cross-stakeholder meetings on the topic.

**We work closely and collaborate with researchers to help us understand and improve our KE practices.**

## Sharing learnings around effective practice in KE

As reflective practitioners we frequently draw on insights around KE from the social sciences to inform our work. As pioneers piloting and advancing innovative KE activities, a key aspect of our work has also been sharing our learnings around what does and doesn't work in policy KE and impact. Through the POST-STEaPP-ESRC collaboration, we have shared our learnings in different modes, with different audiences to shape national and international understanding and practice.

We are a core part of UK Parliament and work with other parliamentary teams to enhance their KE capacities and activities and shape activities based on what we know about good and effective practice, ensuring that the best available research evidence feeds into parliamentary work.

We also seek to shape research-policy KE practice more widely. We frequently conduct KE activities with the devolved legislatures, UK Government departments, research councils, funders and learned societies, sharing our learnings and learning from them. Beyond the UK, we have also shared insights around effective KE activities with international and multinational legislatures and organisations including the Argentine, Colombian and Mexican Congresses; National Assembly of Québec; Australian Senate; Spanish 'Science in Parliament' (Ciencia en el Parlamento) initiative; European Cooperation in Science and Technology; International Network of Government Science Advice; Inter-Parliamentary Union; and United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

We have been invited to speak at several national and international conferences. KEU staff have presented on various aspects of KE and impact, including in the UK at the 2019 annual Praxis Auril conference and 2020 Westminster Higher Education Forum event on the future of the Knowledge Exchange Framework and Higher Education Innovation Fund. Internationally, we have presented at conferences of the Network for Advancing and Evaluating the Societal Impact of Science in Copenhagen and Berlin. As pioneers in the use of social media to enhance researcher-legislature KE, in February 2020, we organised a symposium in collaboration with STEaPP at the annual conference on the American Association for the Advancement of Science on social media and the transformation of science advice.

**Our insights have reached and inspired a global audience of researchers and practitioners in policy KE.**

We have written, or contributed to, blogs and web articles, collaborating with STEaPP to contribute to the grey and academic literature. These include:

Akerlof K, Tyler C, Foxen S, et al. (2019) A collaboratively derived international research agenda on legislative science advice. *Palgrave Communications* 5:109. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0318-6>

Foxen S and Tyler C (2018). Legislative science advice is a powerful tool, yet the majority of parliamentarians around the world don't have access to it. *LSE Impact Blog* 18 December 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2019/12/18/legislative-science-advice-is-a-powerful-tool-yet-the-majority-of-parliamentarians-around-the-world-dont-have-access-to-it/>

Saint N and Foxen S (2020). Strength in diversity – Changing the shape of expert engagement with the UK Parliament. *LSE Impact Blog* 13 July 2020. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/07/13/strength-in-diversity-changing-the-shape-of-expert-engagement-with-the-uk-parliament/>

Tyler C, Beswick D, Foxen S, Geddes M, Hobbs A and Rose D (2020). How universities can improve parliamentary engagement: a 12 point plan. *Transforming Evidence*. 1 June 2020. <https://transformure.wordpress.com/2020/06/01/how-universities-can-improve-parliamentary-engagement-a-12-point-plan/>

## Yes, this is a wordsearch – enjoy!

G R V O I I E R O  
 S E W C R E F E E  
 C S S O L S A I V  
 R E T L P H U N G  
 U A E L A S E C I  
 T R A A R H N L O  
 I C P B L F G U B  
 N H P O I L A S R  
 Y K E R A E G I D  
 M E V A M G E O I  
 P F I T E I M N V  
 L E D I N S E H E  
 K A E O T L N I R  
 G Y N N V A T M S  
 J A C E D T F P I  
 J W E S E I P A T  
 K F R R B O O C Y  
 E A I C A N S T G  
 U U N L T R T M P  
 D V E K E T Y U F

**WORDS:** KE, KEU, POST, ESRC, STEaPP, Parliament, research, evidence, engagement, collaboration, impact, diversity, inclusion, scrutiny, legislation, debate, REF, KEF

## Supporting UK Parliament's

## work around COVID-19

We have played a crucial role in rapidly mobilising research evidence and expertise to support UK Parliament's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

On 25 March, two days after lockdown was announced, we launched our COVID-19 Outbreak Expert Database. Using our established relationships and KE mechanisms to ensure Parliament had access to insights and understanding from a diverse group of researchers from across disciplines and the UK, we invited researchers to sign up to support offices across UK Parliament to respond rapidly to emerging policy issues. Within a week, our database had amassed over 4100 experts and, a couple of months later, we closed the call with over 5400 experts signed up.

We have worked closely with POST's Social Science Section to make the research insights from the experts signed up to the database available to UK Parliament. We facilitated the promotion of a POST survey on the impacts of COVID-19, to which over 1100 experts responded. [The publicly available insights from this survey](#), as well as individual experts have, to date, supported approximately 30 teams across UK Parliament. [Drawing on the insights gained from experts on the database, POST has generated Parliament's first ever Areas of Research Interest, which relate to COVID-19.](#)

To support researchers to respond to this unique situation, we ran two training webinars for COVID-19 outbreak experts, with 435 attending. We also created [a central webpage detailing all of the different ways researchers could support UK Parliament's work around COVID-19](#), including an up-to-date list of all relevant committee inquiries.

Having pioneered rapid mobilisation of the research community to support those involved in the scrutiny of Government actions and decisions around COVID-19, we shared our learnings and insights, and these informed the development of expert registers in both the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd as well as the UK Government. Our initiative also inspired the Australian Academy of Science to conduct a similar exercise.

**We quickly mobilised over 5000 researchers to support UK Parliament in its work responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.**

## LOOKING AHEAD:

## The Knowledge Exchange Unit's

## 2020–2021 strategy

We are very proud of what we have achieved in our first two years, which has been possible thanks to the close collaboration and support from key partners, knowledge mobilisers, numerous stakeholders and, of course, the research community.

We are excited too about the future of parliamentary and policy KE and impact, and determined to continue playing a leading role in increasing, enhancing and diversifying both.

Having spent two years evolving our scope and remit, we have now formalised this in our 2020–2021 strategy, along with our priorities for the next year.

### **Our vision is to see strengthened parliamentary democracy through the use of diverse research evidence in parliamentary activity**

Our vision is to see:

- researchers understand the core processes of UK Parliament and its use of research, and have the skills to deliver policy advice, with a more diverse range of academics (demographic, institutional and research background) engaging with Parliament;
- UK Parliament actively sourcing diverse research evidence to inform scrutiny, legislation and debate; and
- institutional priorities, processes and structures of UK HEIs, funders and UK Parliament aligned to enable and encourage the use of research for evidence-informed policy

such that there is an increased demand for – and supply of – timely, accessible, diverse research evidence from academia to UK Parliament, which Parliament draws on in scrutiny, legislation and debate, in turn leading to strengthened parliamentary democracy.

Beyond this, and as the first known unit of its kind, our vision is that, through sharing our learnings around best practice in KE more broadly in both the UK and internationally, increased use of diverse research evidence in democracies around the world leads to strengthened parliamentary democracy globally.

### **Our mission is to enable and enhance UK Parliament to collaborate with the research community, to maximise each other's impact**

We serve to facilitate the exchange of information and expertise between researchers and UK Parliament. Supporting individuals and teams across Parliament, we work with higher education and beyond to encourage, strengthen and diversify the exchange of knowledge between these communities, such that the best available research evidence may inform parliamentary scrutiny, legislation and debate.

## The Knowledge Exchange Unit's

### 2020–2021 priorities

#### Priority 1

Enhance the research community's understanding of ways to engage with UK Parliament so that the research community can engage more effectively.

#### Priority 2

Strengthen and evolve KE mechanisms between UK Parliament and the research community, so strengthened, diverse engagement can take place, including that Parliament can draw on the best available research evidence in its work around the COVID-19 outbreak.

#### Priority 3

Support the Higher Education sector to improve recognition and reward of parliamentary engagement and impact so that researchers and institutions are incentivised to engage with UK Parliament.

#### Priority 4

Contribute learnings and insights to the [Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement \(CAPE\) project](#), to inform decisions and priorities and support project activities. We share a number of objectives with the CAPE project, so collaboration will enhance the abilities of both the KEU and CAPE project to meet their wider objectives.

#### Priority 5

Share learnings around KE and ways of improving legislatures' use of research evidence to inform awareness and behaviours both nationally and internationally. Through doing this, other political institutions will be better able to conduct KE with the research community and draw on research evidence to increase their impact.

## Endnotes

- 1 The total number of academics registering was 496. Attendance numbers were not recorded as attendance was always close to 100%.
- 2 This figure is calculated from numbers of academic staff in Higher Education Institutions recorded by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in 2018/19 (see: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he>).
- 3 Geddes M (2018) Committee hearings of UK Parliament: who gives evidence and does this matter? Parliamentary Affairs 71:283–304. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsx026>
- 4 This public body is responsible for 'providing grant funding to English universities for research and knowledge exchange activities; developing and implementing the Research Excellence Framework in partnership with the UK Higher Education funding bodies; overseeing the sustainability of the Higher Education research base in England; managing the £900 million UK Research Partnership Investment Fund; and administering the Higher Education Inn-ovation Fund (HEIF)': <https://re.ukri.org/> '
- 5 REF panel criteria and working methods: [https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1084/ref-2019\\_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf](https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1084/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf)
- 6 Academics' perceptions of barriers to engaging with Parliament: <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/research-impact-at-the-uk-parliament/why-engage-with-parliament/supporting-researchers-to-engage/>
- 7 Mitton C, Adair CE, McKenzie E, et al. (2007) Knowledge transfer and exchange: review and synthesis of the literature. Milbank Quarterly 85(4):729–768. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0009.2007.00506.x>
- 8 Collie A, Zardo P, McKenzie, DM et al. (2016) Academic perspectives and experiences of knowledge translation: a qualitative study of public health researchers. Evidence & Policy 12:163–182. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426415X14292714863810>



You can find out more about the Knowledge Exchange Unit at:

[www.parliament.uk/research-impact](http://www.parliament.uk/research-impact).

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