

How can researchers support Parliament in its scrutiny of the UK's response to COVID-19?



The COVID-19 pandemic and the conditions of uncertainty that surround it have led to an unprecedented demand for knowledge from Parliament and policymakers. In this post, [Sarah Foxen](#), [Naomi Saint](#), and [Laura Webb](#) outline how researchers can engage and contribute to Parliament's response and its wider impacts.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen a notable increase in researchers keen to support Parliament in its work around the COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts. We've had researchers coming to the Knowledge Exchange Unit (KEU) in Parliament not only with research insights that they wish to share with the relevant people in Parliament, but also with questions around making sure they shape research proposals for projects related to the outbreak and impacts so that the findings are useful to Parliament.

We are really pleased that so many are keen to engage with Parliament through their research around COVID-19 and its impacts. So, to support researchers to do this effectively, we have created a short guide to 'Producing research to support the work of UK Parliament' and set up an up-to-date webpage on our research impact hub, detailing ways for [researchers to engage with Parliament around COVID-19 as a researcher](#).

Key pathways to engagement with Parliament around COVID-19

There are various ways to support the work of Parliament through research at this time. The first is by signing up to Parliament's [COVID-19 Outbreak Expert Database](#). We created this database to enable Parliament to rapidly access experts and their insights. Anyone with expertise in the virus or the many and diverse impacts of the outbreak is welcome to sign up. Members have already responded to a survey on what they perceive as the key short-, medium- and long-term issues: colleagues in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology ([POST](#)) are analysing these to support the work of POST, committees and Libraries. We will be continuing to engage with the research community through this network in the coming months.

A second key way to contribute to Parliament's scrutiny of Government's decisions around the outbreak is by submitting evidence to relevant select committee inquiries. There are a number of committees seeking insights around a range of topics including the delivery of core NHS and care services during the pandemic, the impact on education and children's services, and the human rights implications of the Government's response to COVID-19. An up-to-date list of relevant inquiries can be found on our [COVID-19 researcher engagement webpage](#), and all live inquiries (not just those relating to COVID-19) [can be found on this page](#).

A third way to support the work of Parliament is through engaging with individual Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. Now that Parliament has reconvened with hybrid proceedings in the Commons and virtual proceedings in the Lords, there are opportunities to support its work through reaching out to and briefing individual Members. A number of activities in the Chambers, including Members posing questions to the Government, engaging in debates, and scrutinising draft legislation, provide opportunities for researcher engagement. Researchers could consider which Members of Parliament (for example their local MP, members of the shadow Cabinet, or those with particular policy interests) may be interested in their research insights and get in touch sharing their key points and offering to brief them. Further details can be found on our [COVID-19 researcher engagement webpage](#).

It is likely that we will be feeling the impacts of COVID-19 for some time, and new ways to engage with Parliament around these impacts may arise over the coming weeks and months. These will also be listed on our [COVID-19 researcher engagement webpage](#).

So how do you make sure the research you produce is of use to Parliament?

What kinds of research?

Syntheses of evidence are very useful to Parliament, as they enable a rapid acquisition of a good understanding of an evidence base, including where consensus and disagreement lie. So Parliament is particularly keen to receive relevant evidence syntheses, and, for those producing them, recommends following the Royal Society /Academy of Medical Sciences "[Principles for good evidence synthesis for policy](#)". Indeed, we invite anyone who has conducted evidence syntheses relating to COVID-19 or its impacts to [share them with us in the KEU](#) so that we can pass them on to the relevant teams.

Beyond evidence syntheses, Parliament is also interested in research insights from individual projects, as well as individuals' expertise. To be most useful, research should be timely and relevant, mapping onto Parliament or Government's priorities, and presented clearly and concisely, in an accessible manner. The research should be produced by a trusted or well-known source and/or with appropriate methods; and it should be independently produced and/or transparent around amounts and sources of funding.

Even in the early stages of planning a project, researchers might like to consider its potential relevance to Parliament, thinking about the people or offices that might be interested and the ways they might engage with them, as well as what they might want to achieve through their engagement. Answers to these questions may help shape the research proposal.

When conducting a project, it may be helpful for researchers to monitor the business of Parliament and Government, to have a good idea of what their interests and activities are, and where opportunities might arise. It's also a good time to start forging relationships with people and offices in Parliament that may be receptive to research insights, or to build on those developed in the early stages of research. And, of course, periodic reflection on the progress of the research project, and how it may be of interest or use to Parliament, may lead to consideration of if it is worth shifting focus or pursuing an unexplored avenue.

Finally, when tying up a research project and preparing to share findings, there are several questions to ask, including why the findings would be of interest to Parliament, and why even engage with Parliament: what do you want to achieve? Consideration of this, along with the knowledge exchange mechanisms available, should generate some concrete ideas around next steps. It is also worth remembering that Members of Parliament, their staff, and parliamentary staff may be seen, on the whole, as an interested, time-poor non-expert audience, so communications should be concise and clear, avoiding jargon, and placing key findings and recommendations up front.

Note: the above was [first published](#) on the LSE Impact blog. Further information is available [here](#) and [here](#). The Knowledge Exchange Unit tweets at [@UKParl_Research](#). Featured image credit: by [Alex Holyoake](#) on [Unsplash](#).

About the Authors



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Naomi Saint is a Knowledge Exchange Manager in Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit. Her activities include coordinating Parliament's training for researchers; both around the UK and virtually, and leading on initiatives to diversify the voices heard at Parliament from the research community.



Laura Webb is a Knowledge Exchange Manager in Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit. Within the Unit, Laura's activities include coordinating a fellowship scheme which both brings academics into Parliament to conduct projects designed by offices across the institution, and enables academics to conduct projects of their own design within Parliament.