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The literature dedicated to integrating research and policy is awash with watery metaphors, ranging from 'floating' pure research 'downstream' for policy application (Pielke, 2007), 'bridging' gaps between research cultures (Cairney *et. al.*, 2016) to leaping from disciplinary 'waters' to 'ponds' of policy (Walker, 2016). What this literature shares is a focus on the challenges of research engagement, relevance and impact. The potential solutions to these challenges are equally varied, including translation of academic work for non-academic audiences (Flinders, 2013a), attending to cultural or institutional barriers (van der Arend, 2014), and building stronger relationships between both communities (Oliver *et. al.*, 2014a, 2014b). In this paper, we examine the conditions for equitable research co-production between the different epistemic communities of university researchers and academics, on the one hand, and parliamentary officers, on the other hand.

This contribution is timely because, in recent decades, debates around the contribution of evidence-based policy have evolved into an emphasis on research engagement. This has been demonstrated by the rise of assessment schemes, such as the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), that intend to incentivise academics to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their work on policy, society or the economy (Oliver *et. al.*, 2014b; Flinders, 2013b). As a result, academics have placed increased focus on the contribution of their research for policy-makers and practitioners. This includes a growing focus on parliamentary impact. Evidence from within the social sciences, for example, revealed that 20% of social science impact case studies outlined substantive engagement with the UK Parliament, over 40% of statements mentioned parliamentary impact and 87% of higher education institutions mentioned Parliament in at least one of their submissions (Kenny, 2015). This interest has also resulted in the creation of new infrastructure to support researchers, with many UK academic institutions and learned societies now offering training on parliamentary engagement for academics, as well as evidence use as part of study modules for parliamentary officers. What such activities suggest is that universities and academics believe that there may be a 'recipe' for successful parliamentary engagement. However, what is lacking is a body of empirical work on the views of practitioners about the ingredients for any such success (van der Arend, 2014; Oliver *et. al.*, 2014a, 2014b).

This paper contributes to this debate by identifying and understanding the kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing on which parliamentary staff rely. Our starting point is

that knowledge or expertise is not the sole purview of academic researchers and that, as currently performed, academic engagements with parliaments frequently lack what is necessary to exert parliamentary impact. In particular, we focus on the UK Parliament, using this case to provide important insights for other parliaments and legislatures, especially in countries with shared traditions of Westminster (Rhodes *et. al.*, 2009). In exploring the relationship between politics and academia we must make clear that we do not believe every academic should necessarily engage with parliamentary institutions (nor that engagement is problem-free (Flinders *et. al.*, 2016)). Far from advocating for all academics to engage with policy practitioners, we are interested in considering how academics who want to engage can maximise the value and impact of their research. In order to do so, our argument unfolds in four parts. First, we offer a brief orientation to the existing literature around the impact of academic research in Parliament to note the relative absence of practitioner perspectives. Second, we outline our approach, namely a workshop with eight parliamentary officers in Westminster. Third, we present the findings of this analysis, with particular focus on the knowledge requirements for different sites and situations in Parliament. Fourth and finally, we discuss possible responses by academics and make the case for different levels of engagement between researchers and Parliament, especially through an enhanced view of co-production and co-design.

1. Existing literature

The recognition of a role for knowledge and expertise in policy-making is not new (Parsons, 1995). However, the growth of state functions in the twentieth century, and particularly the civil service, has fuelled increased interest in this relationship (e.g. Laswell, 1956). A key development was the evidence-based policy movement, which, with reference to the UK, emerged under the Labour government elected in 1997 (Ingold and Monaghan, 2016). This approach was attractive to politicians because it was perceived to filter out the influence of interest groups, protect policy directions from competing ideologies, offer legitimacy through being 'rational' and provide a tangible core around which to build coalitions of support (McConnell, 2010). Amongst the advantages identified by policy practitioners was the capacity to target research questions to specific policy problems, to focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of policy programmes, to identify and address risk, and to encourage best practice policy

processes (Althaus *et. al.*, 2012). Given these perceived benefits, the influence of evidence-based policy thinking has been significant, though not without critics (Botterill and Hindmoor, 2012; Dolowitz, 1998; Levendai and Stubbs, 2007).

That said, research has never monopolised practice to the extent that policies are *based* on evidence, and so, most recently, we have seen the expansion of notions such as 'evidence-informed' policy (Moat and Lavis, 2013), 'evidence-inspired' policy (Duncan, 2005) and 'evidence translation' (Ingold and Monaghan, 2016). Much of this literature echoes the notion that there is a 'perennial' evidence gap (Davies *et. al.*, 2009) between academia and policy-making, and significant effort has been dedicated to identifying barriers to bridging this gap (Cvitanovic *et. al.*, 2015; Chairney *et. al.*, 2015; Oliver *et. al.*, 2014a, 2014b). Broadly speaking, the literature on this topic falls into the categories of translation, systemic change or co-production (see Table 1). The first of these encourages academic producers or 'boundary organisations' (Pohl *et. al.*, 2010) to adopt strategies that make research more accessible to practitioner users (Flinders, 2013a). The second identifies the institutional constraints (van der Arend, 2014) that can pull producers and users in opposite directions despite their best intentions (Martin *et. al.*, 2011). A third approach blurs the distinction between producer and user (Pohl *et. al.*, 2010) to produce knowledge that is of value to both (Ramirez, 1999; see also Buick *et. al.*, 2016).

[Table 1 here]

This body of literature is important to help us understand possible strategies that academics may employ to influence practitioners with their research. However, we note that, overwhelmingly, academic studies in evidence-based policy have been written by and for academics, with little involvement of policy-makers (Oliver *et. al.*, 2014b). Neither has this research consistently included the views of practitioners within its design or implementation (Campbell *et. al.*, 2009). This has resulted in a lack of knowledge around the priorities and activities of policy actors, which could offer insight into how 'evidence' is conceptualised, the potential roles it may play in policy and how it fits alongside other policy drivers (Oliver *et. al.*, 2014b).

The focus on Parliament adopted in this paper is novel in the wider literature. Most existing studies have examined executive contexts, such as working with civil servants and ministerial departments (e.g. Chairney *et. al.*, 2015; van der Arend, 2014). Some

argue that a focus on Parliament is of marginal concern as it is perceived as 'either peripheral or totally irrelevant' and 'might as well not exist' (King and Crewe, 2013, p.361). In contrast, we argue that Parliament remains an important site for policy influence. This judgement is based on numerous studies that reveal Parliament's policy influence (Russell and Cowley, 2016), specifically in scrutinising legislation (e.g. Thompson, 2015a, 2015b) and examining government policy through select committee inquiry (e.g. Benton and Russell, 2013; Hindmoor *et. al.*, 2009). However, few scholars have focused on how academic research plays a role in parliamentary settings. The literature also lacks perspectives from practitioners, specifically parliamentary staff that interact with academic research. This warrants a corrective, with which this paper is concerned. We focus on the UK Parliament as a case study for wider insights for other parliaments and legislatures, especially in countries with shared traditions of Westminster (Rhodes *et. al.*, 2009). Axiomatically, there are differences between the UK Parliament and the legislatures of Australia, Canada and New Zealand (amongst others) in terms of size, scope and resourcing. Nonetheless, there remain shared underlying structures, principles and conventions that allow us to make wider inferences for legislative settings. We suggest, therefore, that the following analysis will be interesting to scholars and practitioners in both Westminster-style and other parliaments.

2. Method

The aim of this research project was to work with experienced parliamentary officers from three distinct areas to identify different types of knowledge and ways of knowing within Parliament. Three representatives from the House of Commons Library, a Commons select committee and the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) were invited to help design a workshop on parliamentary co-production in the Palace of Westminster. These three representatives were recruited through existing networks with the University of Sheffield (namely research project, training and parliamentary studies links with the authors). Each was interviewed by a member of the research team around their experience and perspectives on the relationship between evidence, Parliament and policy. The notes from these interviews were used to design a schedule for the workshop, which was then distributed to the three representatives for review in relation to content and structure. As a result of this feedback, significant

changes were made to the order, emphasis and phrasing of the workshop (e.g. to make the workshop less 'academic' and more accessible to future participants). This led to a refined focus on how parliamentary staff engage with academic research.

The workshop included eight participants that were recruited by the three representatives using their networks. The priorities for selection were deep experience of Parliament, the use of evidence in their parliamentary work and willingness to discuss research impact. In response, four members of select committees (two from the Commons and two from the Lords), three members of Parliament's libraries (two from the Commons and one from the Lords) and one from POST (see Table 2) agreed to participate. A five-hour workshop was held in June 2016 which consisted of two whole group sessions (to discuss key themes and insights), as well as two sessions of three small groups. The first small group mixed members from the three areas of Parliament (to explore common and contrasting views from each), while the second grouped them in similar areas (to identify specific priorities and issues).

Data was collected in the form of photographs of group materials and researcher notes and audio records of discussion. This was supplemented through interviews with participants from each of the three sites in Parliament and documentary research. Analysis of data was conducted through transcription and thematic coding. Due to the workshop producing eight transcripts of approximately ten hours' duration, coding was conducted initially through digital word count to identify key themes and then manual review of transcripts by all three authors. Quotes and anecdotes were selected according to prevalence of key theme or links to concepts identified in the literature review. The resultant findings were circulated to workshop participants for verification and refined through further engagement by email.

[Table 2 here]

3. Findings

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the responses from our research participants confirmed much that has already been identified in the literature around challenges for research translation in parliamentary settings. For example: some participants noted the need to

apply academic research to practical contexts (confirming research from Stringer and Dougill (2013)); others noted the need to make academic writing accessible by stripping down language and reducing jargon (Cairney *et. al.*, 2016); and yet others noted that politicians remain wedded to *ad hoc* links to experts and people they trust (Lomas and Brown, 2009). While these are important insights, our analysis focused more directly on the perspectives of practitioners and how they use evidence and academic knowledge, rather than how research is 'translated' by academics.

It is useful to begin by exploring parliamentary staff's perception of the gap between academia and Parliament. Our participants cited a number of reasons for this gap. There was a frustration with academics who are perceived to 'do' impact as an after-thought of their research rather than engaging with Parliament in a substantive way:

> The temptation for them just to crudely repurpose something they've done elsewhere, which can be interesting, but often doesn't address, you know, in a totally salient or digestive way the questions that the committee's asking (HL committee clerk 01).

A clerk also described situations in which:

> the academic is determined to present what it is that they have studied and the Member is just sitting there, thinking, "it's wonderful that you've done something, but I don't see the relevance" (HC committee clerk 02).

As a result, the demonstrable impact of that evidence submission is marginal:

> [A researcher says] "I've influenced the committee recommendation", that's huge… "My submission just got published", fine, but it's not the same thing. There's a huge difference in usability, and much of what we get ends up being parked in that, "Well, we accept it, publish it, make sure we footnote it somewhere", but it doesn't become part of the argument (HL committee clerk 01).

These thoughts were echoed by a member of staff from the libraries who explained that most of academic research is 'too tightly focused on … very abstruse points which aren't practical use' (HC Librarian 02). Additionally, others pointed out:

> But to tell me that there's some real interesting research with emerging findings around [policy area] doesn't actually help me very much because it's too much at that boundary between what is known and what is unknown. … It hasn't become, some of it has, but not all of it is part of the consensus of accepted, received wisdom. … we're looking for some of the safer stuff. It's nice to know what's going on, but I think research is often a little bit too much … not yet factual enough (HC committee clerk 02).

And finally: 'the data we use is really ... the stuff that's matured sufficiently to become consensual (HC Librarian 02). Although other interactions were praised, there was a routine perception that academic engagement efforts and parliamentary requirements were often different. Whilst such outcomes may be attributed to the instrumental actions of scholars who are incentivised to 'engage' with policy-makers, it also suggests a poor understanding amongst scholars of how Parliament works and the knowledge requirements of parliamentary actors.

> [Sometimes] you're just getting the academics in because it's what we always do, and you sometimes find Members totally uninterested in what's said... "you can use all this in the report, but we're not going to listen to it". So there is a danger because people think that coming in for a hearing is going to help them (HL committee clerk 01).
>
> I don't think it's always clear to people what hats Members or clerks or ministers might be wearing in any particular time (HC committee clerk 02).

This point is critical as, whilst a wealth of scholarship has addressed the topic of engagement (see above), few studies specify the knowledge requirements of legislative arenas. Our workshop demonstrated that POST, the libraries and committees each work in slightly different ways, for different reasons and using different forms of knowledge. In other words, Parliament is *not* a homogenous organisation with which academics can engage. We suggest that understanding these differences (see Table 3) is vital for effective parliamentary impact, and each deserves specific attention.

[Table 3 here]

3.1. Select committees

Select committees regularly engage with academic material through oral and written evidence that is submitted to them as part of committee inquiries. Committees are usually made up of 9-15 members who reflect the party balance of the respective House. They undertake inquiries to examine, scrutinise and report on government policy, as well as consider topics beyond the government's agenda (with the support of a small secretariat). The topics of committee inquiries are determined by committee members and inquiries usually proceed by issuing a call for evidence to which any individual can respond. Committees utilise written and oral evidence to inform a final report that is

published by Parliament. These are key channels for academic engagement but scholars can also play an informal role in setting the scope of an inquiry and advising committees as specialist advisers.

In the context of select committees, evidence has a specific meaning:

> **HC committee clerk 02:** What we mean by evidence and what everyone else means by evidence aren't the same thing …
> **HC Librarian 01:** Evidence is a term of art here, isn't it?
> **HC committee clerk 03:** When we say evidence, what we mean is testimony. … Someone's told us something … somebody's written a letter, it says, "I was waiting over an hour, I've seen my GP earlier this morning" – we would call that evidence.

Here, evidence can therefore come from individuals with different levels of expertise, suggesting that the position of academics is not privileged. In handling these diverse submissions, committees utilise evidence in a distinctive way. One committee clerk described how:

> When we're dealing with briefing for an evidence session … You're looking to explore all the different sides of a particular argument and so you're looking for what's the stuff that's on the "for" case, what's the stuff that's on the "against" case. And trying to balance it out. By the time you get to the report … you've had enough discussions to know what it is that you want to say. (HC committee clerk 02).

The final report is, therefore, a crucial element for committees, especially because reports have specific recommendations with which committees attempt to influence government:

> When you're drafting a report, an inquiry report, it's all about the recommendations. Almost nobody reads the other stuff. What the Members are most interested in is coming up with something that they can recommend. An action or a statement or something that will require some kind of response and that will look good in the media, that will grab some kind of media attention. (HC Librarian 01).

These insights reveal that academic research is therefore only one source of 'evidence' considered by committees and features alongside the work of think tanks, government reports and public submissions.

3.2. Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

In contrast to committees, POST exists to provide 'balanced and accessible overviews of research from across the biological, physical and social sciences, engineering and technology', who 'place the findings of this research in a policy context for Parliamentary use' (see www.parliament.uk/post). POST is composed of parliamentary staff who work across both Houses of Parliament to provide advice on research evidence (in various forms) relating to public policy issues of relevance to MPs and peers. POST engages with academic work in a different way to committees and libraries in that it looks for the latest research in order to provide authoritative reviews and proactively searches for and uses academic research. Additionally, POST staff will interview relevant stakeholders (approximately 15-20 per POSTnote) and asks interviewees to peer review POSTnotes. One research participant noted the distinctiveness of this approach:

> POST is a bit [different] in that we will look for systematic reviews specifically. So, go and consult organisations that produce systematic reviews that may not be published in journals, you know, that tend to just be published on their websites and what-not (POST staff 01).

This contrasts to Parliament's libraries and committees, who would not actively seek those types of reviews (one librarian, for example, said that they 'pop up as a subset of academic research' (HC Librarian 01)). POST keeps 'a database of people that we've spoken to for research in previous POSTnotes. So we will go back to them on future topics' and actively cultivate academic networks (POST staff 01). This indicates a far deeper engagement with academic work, as highlighted in the following discussion:

> **Researcher:** How much do you … use the internet to identify the existence of an academic paper or a report that then leads you to kind of email the individual that's authored it and go, "Can I have a copy?", does that ever happen?
> **HC Librarian 02:** Rarely.
> **HC Librarian 01:** No.
> **HC Librarian 02:** I mean, we don't go very much down that path-
> **HC Librarian 01:** There's not usually time.
> **HC Librarian 02:** Yeah. We use Google scholar occasionally or log-in to journals for that, but not usually, you're not often taking it further.
> **HC committee clerk 01:**[1] You would do in POST. … It's more likely in POST if it's more academic work. You are more interested in some of the hard-edged and science things being done and has been done, then you've … because Members haven't the interest themselves and that pushes the main focus there, whereas this is a different edge to it, to the usual Library report that you have to … that you're writing.

This link is reinforced further by the fact that POST regularly has academic fellows and interns in their office (see www.parliament.uk/postfellowships).

3.3. Parliamentary libraries

The libraries of the House of Commons and Lords produce research briefings in a similar manner to POST, but with a slightly different purpose. These libraries exist to provide impartial information and research services for MPs, peers, and their staff in support of their parliamentary duties, including the production of research briefings. While this role sounds similar to that of POST, the libraries exist to provide, what one librarian noted as, 'both sides of the argument in an unbiased, you could say neutral point of view' (HC Librarian 01). Put another way:

> You might want to give an account of two sides of an argument or a debate and you might use specific pieces of evidence that could go in favour of either side of the debate. You're not ... the way you write it, you're not taking sides, you're not saying, "this evidence shows that side A is right and side B is wrong" (HC Librarian 02).

These quotes reveal that academic research is used, alongside other sources, to set out the parameters of contemporary debate. This could mean that the perceived 'accuracy' becomes a secondary concern to more political dynamics:

> When we're putting together our briefings, ... we need both sides of the argument... it does mean that you don't really look at so much sometimes the evidence and how it's been put together, you're just going to, I know, the source that will be supporting this and I know a source that will be criticising this. And you have to kind of leave it for the elected politicians, in the case of the Commons, to kind of make that judgement as to, you know, from these sources which one, you know, do I trust and which one backs up my argument (HL Librarian 01).

This means that academic research is frequently used by library staff, but its use (and its value relative to other sources) is often determined on the basis of securing balance.

This discussion reveals that Parliament is by no means homogenous in the way it uses knowledge or engages with academics. For instance, committees seek to evaluate the evidence before them in order to present 'political' balance and come to a unanimous report (with clear policy recommendations), while the libraries seek to balance 'evidence'. By contrast, POST is more likely to evaluate scientific evidence before it to provide authoritative 'scientific' consensus. These insights suggest that academics wishing to have 'impact' face a significant challenge as Parliament does not have uniform requirements for academic knowledge, nor does it have a single pathway for

engagement. Indeed, it shows that whilst in some cases it is possible for academics to overtly pursue impact by submitting evidence to a committee inquiry, in other cases impact can be entirely accidental. Such divergences paint a complex picture of the relationship between academia and Parliament and can make it unclear how academics are able to achieve impact. In recognising this dilemma, it is notable that our workshop also identified common knowledge requirements across different parts of Parliament, to which we now turn.

3.4. Common desires for academic engagement with Parliament

Though staff use research in different ways, they arguably have some common knowledge requirements through their joint user group: parliamentarians. MPs and peers look to parliamentary staff in each arena to provide impartial, accurate and reliable knowledge on topics through reports, notes and briefings. One committee representative described how 'the Member is looking for you to be is just that little bit of guarantor of quality', meaning staff have to perform a 'quality control' role (HC committee clerk 01). In this context, parliamentary staff are united by a need for high-quality research. Academic work was seen to offer a useful source of such data, but particularly so when it exhibited certain characteristics. Our workshop identified four: timeliness, clarity, accessibility and preferred type.

First, timeliness. One member of staff noted:

> The work that we do is driven by the political world, the policy agenda. It's essentially reactive. There isn't an imperative in Parliament to find out about the latest research in any given area and investigate it. The imperative is to investigate the title of a committee inquiry or the imperative is to produce a briefing about a particular area of our policy portfolio (HC Librarian 02).

What came through in our workshop is that research needs to be timely for Parliament. For parliamentary staff, it is not in their immediate interest to know about research where potential findings will be announced in a year's time, but within a week's time. The pace of the political world is much faster than the academic world, and this is something that researchers need to understand if they want to engage with Parliament, especially if they wish to influence an immediate inquiry or debate.

Second, clarity is key. Participants called for evidence that was 'clearly written' (HC Librarian 02), had 'clear methods' (POST 01) and was transparent about sources (HC Librarian 01). There was a uniform desire for data that were 'robust and useful and clear' (HC committee clerk 01). When presented orally (via committees) there was also recognition that personal attributes mattered: 'because if it's someone sitting there who is glib, persuasive, authoritative, they take that on board much better than a dusty old man, mumbling arcane symbols and stuff that they just go *pfffff*' (HC committee clerk 01). Indeed, participants noted that a 'good performer' will be re-recruited wherever possible because they are rarely found (HC Librarian 02, email communication).

In addition, despite differences in the precise forms of engagement required, participants all agreed on the need for academics to explain research rationale clearly. Reflecting the potential for cultural differences to act as a barrier to research, one participant explained the need for academics to give 'context to the research. It's why you did the research and why you think it's important because that might give us a bit of a clue of why it's important to us' (HC committee clerk 01).

Third, and related to clarity, is accessibility. This requires academic understanding of the different ways in which Parliament works and a willingness to engage with formal and informal processes in often curtailed timeframes. Whilst implicit within much discussion, at key moments participants referred to the value of academics with whom common understanding was shared. In particular, participants noted the effectiveness of academic blog posts in translating academic research. As one library representative noted: 'blogs have been an absolute god-send. They have revolutionised my working life' (HC Librarian 01). Their import derives from the capacity to show the pertinence of research for contemporary debates and to identify academics able to 'translate' their research in an accessible and – to return to the first point – timely way. It is also a way by which parliamentary staff can access research behind pay walls, as staff do not have access to the majority of academic journals (HC Librarian 02, email communication). This suggests that actors within Parliament have very specific desires for academic work, wishing it to be visible, accessible, rigorous, cogent, well delivered, pertinent and policy relevant.

Turning to a fourth point raised in our workshop, it was notable that staff, reflecting MPs requirements, also identified specific types of research as desirable. Often academic

engagements are seen to offer abstract and niche knowledge that do not connect to parliamentary debates. One participant described how:

> Academic work can be quite … focused on one very small little area of it, so, you might find, for example, there's kind of an academic piece of work on unemployment rates in Newcastle among people aged below 30 or something like that. And while that's really useful to feed into the kind of bigger source of information, it's not something that we, you know, it doesn't really feed into, directly, the debate title if you know what I mean (HL Librarian 01).

This suggests the need for engagements that are tailored to or conscious of policy questions and parliamentary requirements. Our workshop identified two preferred types of data by parliamentary officers, namely (a) statistics and (b) narratives.

Parliamentary staff raised the importance of statistics at various occasions:

> **HC Librarian 01:** But another aspect of this, interesting that the statistics – they [MPs] love statistics-
> **HC committee clerk 01:** They love a good number.
> **HC Librarian 01:** Yes [*laughter*]. Give them a number and they're happy because it's something that they can kind of just come out with and of course that has its strengths and weaknesses … but … it means that they can be, that can override a lot of word-based research if they just got something with some numbers on it.
> **HC committee clerk 02:** I think it also goes to the heart of their desire for credibility. I think that they feel that they're quite credible if they're able to give a specific number for something. It's a bit like Dragon's Den, you don't get anywhere unless you know the figures, and can demonstrate, you know, because Members can feel a little bit the same as if they're on a, they're being interviewed on radio or whatever, they want to look like they've mastered whatever it is that they-
> **HC Librarian 01:** It looks more, verifiable or factual, you know.

Irrespective of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using quantitative data, there was uniform recognition that statistics were sought by MPs but often not provided by academic research, instead being offered by think tanks and research institutes.

A second, and alternative, route for academic engagement is through narrative accounts. One participant reflected that:

> Members have a lot of individual experience, [its the] nature of their jobs. So if all their constituency casework is telling them something about the state of social housing in their constituency and every time they go campaigning on the doorstep they're told the same thing about the state of social housing in their constituency, it's very difficult then for them then to take in... research that shows it's not true... we all know intellectually the

large-scale study is probably right, but getting people to internalise that is really difficult (HC committee clerk 03).

Recognising this challenge, participants indicated the value of academic research that blended micro and macro level insights by offering generalised, accurate findings whilst also presenting data in a compelling way using personal accounts, narratives and case studies that are likely to speak to MPs' interests. Indeed, this is one of the reasons given for oral evidence sessions by committees:

> That's why we give them oral evidence with people coming in. Give them that personal experience from a person. Not something written down on a piece of paper that's got some numbers that completely contradict what they "know" to be true (HC committee clerk 01).

The above responses demonstrate that whilst certain characteristics are desired and specific kinds of knowledge are valued across Parliament, there are many differences in how research is identified, used and viewed that make it difficult to prescribe a single 'recipe' for parliamentary impact. There are indications, however, that certain characteristics, forms and types of knowledge production are desirable, and hence, it appears that there are actions academics can take to enhance the likely impact of their work. What is clear is that any 'recipe' for successful academic engagement is far from simple and appears to be less of a scientific undertaking and more of an unpredictable, artistic activity in which outcomes can vary and impact is not guaranteed. This raises the question: how can academics engage better with parliaments?

4. Discussion

Overall, our findings mirror the tenor of existing debate on barriers that face both academics and policy practitioners, which stresses the need for academics to focus on translation, systemic change or co-production (see Table 1, above). In light of the findings from our workshop, we add to this debate in arguing that there are three avenues of parliamentary engagement which academics may choose: (a) to translate their research for policy-makers as effectively as possible; (b) to attempt to cultivate relationships and build trust with policy-makers; and/or (c) to co-produce research in partnership with parliamentary actors. We believe that the deepest form of engagement

– i.e. the third avenue, intensive co-production – will be most likely to increase the relevance and influence of academic research on parliamentary activities.

Before discussing the above further, it is worth noting the context within which academics are engaging. We assert the need to recognise the *political* dynamics of Parliament and the many different sources of knowledge that have value within this arena. Whilst academics often privilege the value of policy made on the basis of the latest evidence, MPs and peers are driven by other concerns – such as a desire to secure positive media coverage, to understand the scope of a contemporary debate or to appear an effective constituency MP. As one participant reflected, MPs often look at research differently to academics as they:

> Look at it the other way around. The evidence isn't there to form their view. They've got their view, whether it's their own individual view or the political view, and they're using a snapshot of the evidence or a figure from statistics just to give credibility to their view (HL Librarian 01).

These concerns promote the value of different types and forms of knowledge, and, before academics choose how to engage with Parliament, they need to consider the types of knowledge that Parliament uses, and the links between academic activities and parliamentary practices. It suggests the need to recognise that whilst academics may value cutting edge, boundary-pushing research that is often highly specialised, parliamentary actors often privilege consensual knowledge, generalised findings and policy relevant research. These different knowledge needs were regularly noted within the workshop.

Adding to this challenge is that parliamentary outsiders seeking influence may often be receiving mixed messages:

> They [MPs and peers] are bright, intelligent people who have had a life before. They've been to university, they've studied, they have the same intellectual curiosity that all of us do. And so I think we clerks and ministers and everybody, we're all in the same boat, we give off mixed messages because, actually, I'm intensely interested in the latest research, I find it fascinating, I want to know what's going on. I'm not going to use it, but I have curiosity (HC committee clerk 02).

With the above in mind, there are three ways that academics can engage with Parliament to increase the likelihood of making an impact with their research. First, they can learn how to better translate academic research to reflect the types and forms of knowledge

that different parliamentary actors prefer (Walker, 2016). The previous sub-section demonstrated that clarity and accessibility are valued and outputs such as blogs, systematic reviews and bespoke submissions are particularly prized. However, our workshop also demonstrated that, whilst there are some simple rules that can enhance an academics' 'translation' of their research, parliamentary staff particularly valued a second, deeper level of engagement achieved when academics built relationships with them. This response is widely cited in the existing literature (Cairney *et. al.*, 2016; Haynes *et. al.*, 2012; van der Arend, 2014; Weible *et. al.*, 2012). It has tangible benefits that were cited in our workshop. Participants stressed the value of building shared understanding, personal trust and relationships that can circumvent usual barriers around the accessibility of research. The value of being 'known' and trusted as a reliable academic source was significant and was seen to be highly correlated with parliamentary impact. Nonetheless, we argue that neither the effective translation of academic research nor the building of trust and positive relationships with practitioners in Parliament will often be enough for impacting parliamentary activities. Rather, our distinctive argument is for sustained engagement – a third and yet deeper level – through co-production.

Many solutions to the evidence-policy 'gap' are currently underpinned by a pervasive (though often unacknowledged) assumption that scholars independently create knowledge that has greater epistemological value to policy makers than that produced by other sources. In this way, academic research is seen to be more valuable than ideological instincts or anecdotal evidence, making it desirable for academics to develop strategies able to overcome barriers to impact. This idea can even be found within the literature on co-production, wherein policy or practitioner partners are invited to join academic research teams, identify research topics or provide dissemination networks for research (Buick *et. al.*, 2016). Such activities have tended to focus on the benefits of such engagements for enhancing academic work and often do not recognise or produce different kinds of knowledge valued by practitioners (Cairney *et. al.*, 2016; Oliver *et. al.*, 2014b). We suggest that the most likely route to ensuring relevance and impact in Parliament is by *working with* staff within diverse parliamentary sites. Through ongoing engagement that is open to different ways of thinking and producing knowledge (Jones and Jones, 2016) academics can become attuned to the knowledge requirements of Parliament, ensuring they produce materials useful for parliamentary actors and academia alike. Of course, this is a two-way street, where legislators and parliamentary staff would benefit from more exposure to research priorities and literacy. It is at this

level that scholars can identify and reconcile different knowledge types, requirements and interests because academics and parliamentary practitioners engage with every part of research, such as the conception, design, implementation, analysis and knowledge production (Cvitanovic *et. al.*, 2015). Returning to the work of Buick *et. al.* (2016), we argue that while a spectrum of interactive co-productive activities might be helpful, in the parliamentary context, it is intensive co-productive partnerships that are vital. We reiterate our earlier point that not all research needs to be intensively co-produced, only that this provides a promising option for those who want to maximise the impact of their research.

However, we also warn, given that past literature on parliamentary co-production has lacked perspectives from practitioners and failed to recognise the different kinds of knowledge valued by practitioners, the nature of such intensive co-productive partnerships should not be assumed as obvious for academics and researchers. In our view, there is the potential for social science scholars to dismiss the value of intensive co-production because the failure to appreciate the distinction between 'lost in translation' and a 'lack of knowledge creation' results in a common misconception that repackaging is the same as co-production. These misunderstandings can clarify why relevant and reliable research, even when well translated, is not used by parliamentary researchers. They might also explain why presentations to parliamentary committees, even citations in parliamentary reports, can have little impact on action. A key message from this study is that while better translation and stronger relationships are important strategies (and may help meet current metrics of impact), their impact may remain peripheral unless they address the additional challenge of understanding different knowledge requirements in Parliament. Put another way, the challenge is not that the focus of political science is irrelevant or poorly related (Flinders, 2013a), rather it is not possible to translate knowledge that is not created. Our findings reveal that politicians and parliamentary officers value the rigour and reliability of academic research, but they also value other knowledge and ways of knowing (perhaps more) highly. We suggest that parliamentary engagement must involve co-design that enables academics to collect pertinent information The findings of our workshop suggest the potential of this approach and mixed methodologies to co-design studies that include systematic review, statistical, case study and narrative components that will not only be of value in parliamentary settings, but can contribute to translation into policy. We suggest that as

more points of knowledge connection are found it can contribute to a shift in co-productive focus from recipes and acts of translation to the art of co-design.

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have drawn on empirical data gathered through a collaborative workshop with senior Westminster staff to find that all participants value the rigour and reliability of work by academic researchers, but views diverge over the impact of this work on Parliament. In the previous section, it has become clear that academic engagement can happen in a variety of ways, but that co-production of research is the deepest and arguably most rewarding form of engagement (though not without problems: see Flinders *et. al.*, 2016). Co-production is important precisely because it allows researchers to understand the knowledge types used in Parliament as well as giving parliamentary actors an input into the direction of research projects. This is important because it allows researchers to produce research that directly supports the work of parliamentary actors, rather than trying to influence Parliament with research once it has been completed and may not be relevant. In short, we argue that the challenge for academics is not necessarily to translate their research better (though important), but rather that impacting parliamentary processes and activities requires different ways of knowing that may be little valued within academic epistemologies. Further, far from advocating for all academics to engage with policy practitioners, we have sought to show those academics who do seek to engage, how the perspectives of parliamentary practitioners can maximise the influence and impact of their research.

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[1] This clerk also had experience working for POST (summary of participants in Table 2).