Scottish Parliament and Policy Engagement Briefing – Sept 2018

Background
The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) are civil servants that undertake research on behalf of the Parliament’s Committees and MSPs. MSPs can request information, often at short notice in response to or in support of Government legislation.

SPICe have established a series of knowledge exchange workshops with the Scottish Universities and Parliament Network (October 2014 – March 2018). This network is supported by The Scottish Parliament, Scotland’s Futures Forum, The Beltane Public Engagement Network and the Scottish Universities Insight Institute. It is abundantly clear that the Parliament wish to engage more with the HEI sector and the academic community. SPICe and MSPs value the evidence-based information in briefings and conversations and state that this interaction as crucial to the functions of the Parliament. MSPs and civil servants demonstrate their commitment to engaging with universities by undertaking continued professional development in liaising with academics.

One of the outcomes the KE network is the creation of the Ask-Academia mailing list to share enquires directly with KE professionals in Scottish HEIs. Jon Urch is currently the University’s contact person with SPICe, he fields enquiries to the Ask-Academia mailing list that SPICe are using to contact Scottish universities directly asking for expert input. Recent interactions with the Scottish Parliament via this route have focussed on the Education (Scotland) Bill, Scotland’s Tax Powers, and the integration of health and social care.

September is an important time of the year to engage with the Parliament. Committee clerks meet at the start of the month to discuss Parliamentary business for the next session. At that point, the Parliament website will list all upcoming committee work.

Benefits of Increasing Engagement with Scottish Parliament
Increasing both the quantity and quality of engagement with the Scottish Parliament will undoubtedly enhance our reputation amongst leading policymakers and the impact of our research. This was one of the outcomes to be addressed by the recent Brand Perception study undertaken on behalf of the University by Ipsos MORI (Jan – Mar 2016).

Focussing on REF2021, engagement with the Parliament provides excellent evidence of potential impact, if the advice/intervention can be linked to the final legislation. For academics who engage in the committee process there is a record of their involvement as each committee prepares a report and each oral evidence session is recorded and is publicly available. With regards to REF Impact Case studies, SPICe are acutely aware that academics require their contribution to be recorded and they are undertaking a review of all REF2014 Impact Case Studies that involved the Scottish Parliament. A working group has reviewed how academic contributions are recognised in Scotland, and crucially across all of the UK’s parliaments and devolved administrations, to ensure that academic engagement is recognised consistently for REF2021.

Our academics are already engaging with the Scottish Parliament in various ways (informally or formally, through the committee process or as expert advisors). Some have included this interaction as evidence of their research impact in highly rated REF2014 Impact Case Studies, providing evidence of demonstrable benefits links with increased engagement.

Additional Opportunities for Engagement
- [Scottish Parliament Information Centre website](#) - Includes webpage on Academic Engagement
• **Academic Fellowships** and **Student Internships** are offered by the Parliament
• Sign-up for the Parliament’s **Weekly e-bulletin**.
• List of current consultations

**Opportunities**
Following Brexit there will be a large number of pieces of secondary and subordinate legislation from the EU that needs to be scrutinised by the Holyrood and Westminster Parliaments. SPICe clerks and researchers will need additional support from experts in Scottish academia to highlight areas of potential concern in this process, which is likely to double the legislative work over the parliamentary term.

The increase in devolved tax and welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament in 2016, offers opportunities to have greater impact on policy making, especially in these key areas.

As the research leaders of the future, we should encourage our early career researchers to engage in this process. It is not uncommon that policy and legislation outcomes linked to research-based evidence can be achieved within the timeframe of a single parliament, providing early career researchers with opportunities to effectively contribute to REF.

This engagement also allows us to build relationships with MSPs, especially our constituency and regional representatives that sit on committees. New committees will start drawing up their work programmes in early August.

Esteem building with professional societies and NGOs can be an important non-direct route to Parliament, as these groups often have close working relationships with MSPs and Parliament.

Through the Scottish Universities and Parliament Network we can build stronger relationships with UK, Welsh and Northern Irish parliaments/assemblies.

* **Notes on the Legislative Process**
There is a clear distinction between the Scottish Parliament (all of the MSPs) and the ruling government. Bills are usually introduced by Ministers of the Government, and less frequently can also be introduced by any MSP or by an outside proposer. The bills are introduced to Parliament and a vote is taken on whether to proceed. If this is granted the bill proceed to the Committee stage where the bill is scrutinised and evidence is gathered in support of the bill or amendments.

There are currently 17 committees in the Scottish Parliament.

At the start of the committee’s scrutiny of legislation, a call for written evidence is often issued and any person, whatever their standing can submit their 'evidence'. The parliament has a different definition of what we might define academic evidence, they use the term to mean any submission of fact or opinion. Expert witnesses that may or may not have submitted written evidence can be called by the Committee's convened and members (MSPs). Oral evidence may also be invited based on an informal advice given to an MSP or on a committee member’s knowledge of an academic’s work.

The bill is then returned to the parliament, who vote on this and if passed the bill becomes an Act of Parliament.

What the Scottish Parliament cannot say in what manner a person’s evidence has had on the bill/act. With many submissions supporting the original bill or amendments, a clear case can be. However,
with supporting evidence (the draft bill, record of evidence and the passed Act of Parliament) academics can clearly demonstrate to a REF panel or other body the impact of their research.