

Bridging the gap between research and parliament: An examination of parliamentary mechanisms for engaging with academic research

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May 2024

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Executive Summary

Background

Parliaments are central to the parliamentary system of government, where the executive branch (the Government) is constitutionally answerable to the parliament. Their role includes scrutinising and deliberating Government decision making and policy and passing legislation. To fulfil these roles, parliamentarians need access to research and other forms of evidence such as testimonials from experts and interested parties and lived experience of constituents. This is where parliamentary research services (PRS) come in. Commonly situated in a permanent parliamentary administration characterised by impartiality and independence, these services play a crucial role in enabling parliaments to access and harness research.

Despite their key role in enabling the use of research evidence, PRS have been overlooked in debates over evidence-based policy making or evidence informed policy and practice (EIPP). The literature that we do have on the relationship between parliaments and research evidence can be broadly divided into two types. The first focuses on exploring and evaluating how research evidence is represented and used within parliamentary processes such as select committees or parliamentary debates. The second focuses specifically on the work of PRS with most of this literature focusing on individual services such as the now disbanded US Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, the US Congressional Research Service, and the UK's Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. This literature is heavily skewed towards the global north meaning that relatively little is known about the nature, role, and common challenges of PRS.

Our project sought to address these gaps by identifying, mapping and analysing parliamentary research services across the world.

Methods

Our inquiry was divided into three phases.

- Phase 1 – identifying and mapping distinct PRS using online sources including the Inter Parliamentary Union website (<https://www.ipu.org/>) and the websites of national-level parliaments.
- Phase 2 – gathering documents and further information about the structure and types of work being undertaken by PRS across the landscape. We focused on PRS situated in Commonwealth member states (<https://thecommonwealth.org/>).
- Phase 3 – interviews with PRS leaders focusing on how and why the PRS had developed, their core activities and outputs, processes for accessing, building and maintaining relationships with academia and how they assess their own impact. We also aimed to build a clearer picture of the common challenges faced by PRS.

The landscape and role of PRS

At the end of phase 1 we had identified 180 services that appeared to support parliamentary research use across 115 countries. These did not all look the same. Using the information gathered during phase 2 we developed a 3-tier typology to categorise the original 180 services.

- Tier 1 (n=80) had two or more of the following characteristics:
 - Access to detailed research databases
 - Strong links with the academic community (sometimes internationally)
 - Research synthesis services
 - Academic research training and/or research qualifications for workforce
 - Workforce familiarity with a range of different methodological approaches to research
- Tier 2 (n=51) were more closely aligned with policy questions, providing policy analysis and/or reference services with limited focus on or access to academic research
- Tier 3 (n=49) was reserved for services that it was impossible to assess due to lack of information, had been inactive for at least 5 years or were not focused on the needs of a particular parliament.

Data from phases 2 and 3 show that PRS within and across our tiered system vary in size and scope. Broadly speaking the larger and more advanced versions conduct in-depth research and analysis on a wide range of topics of specific concern to the jurisdiction in which they are located. This research is usually reactive or responsive to the needs and questions of parliamentarians but can also involve horizon scanning and pro-active development of research on the problems of the future.

Outputs produced by PRS provided often take the form of policy briefs or memos, which provide neat synopsis of pressing and often complex problems. These will often be scenario based enabling parliamentarians to understand the impact and implications of policy options. In other scenarios the research service will provide legislative drafting support helping law makers' proposals become legally sound. A central tenet of most parliamentary research services is that they are expected to be non-partisan and the custodians of unbiased information supplied to members when required regardless of political persuasion or affiliation. This can often be on a one-to-one basis or through the committee structures of parliaments.

Common challenges faced by PRS

Interviews with the leaders of Tier 1 PRS revealed several common challenges that they face. We focus on the four main ones.

Linking With Academia – linking with academia is a key function of parliamentary research services and most do this in ways that enable the exchange of both explicit, scientific knowledge (e.g. use of published research, formal presentations) and tacit, skills-based knowledge (e.g. employing staff with academic expertise). Knowledge exchange between the two communities is hampered by paywalls, cultural differences, and the small and relatively homogenous group of academics that services tend to engage with. Many services address these challenges by using university affiliations to access publications, training

academics to engage with parliaments, and seeking academic input and expertise from those with diverse backgrounds.

Striving for Impartiality – Impartiality tends to be presented as a relatively unproblematic aspect of PRS work. Impartiality is a core feature of how Parliamentary Research Services work. It differentiates PRS from other suppliers of research and evidence and acts as a boundary to protect and uphold their legitimacy in a parliamentary context. Impartiality appears to be implicitly understood by those working within parliament, who align it with professional judgement but clearly distinguish it from advice and opinion. Those outside parliament – particularly academics – do not necessarily share this understanding. PRS who take a proactive as well as reactive approach to providing research services are wary of the effects this might have on their (real or perceived) ability to maintain impartiality. Whilst engaging in reflexive practice may help practitioners to navigate some of these challenges, interviewees did not discuss this in any great depth.

Workforce Capacity – is a significant issue that affected all of the PRS in our sample. Challenges are related to managing demand, the variability of skills, a lack of resources, role development and organisational change. For PRS, there are tensions between meeting parliamentarians demands for research services and maintaining the quality of those services. Individual researchers, whether generalists or specialists, face career development challenges due to the way that PRS are configured and resourced. Despite these challenges, many PRS are growing and becoming more visible and valued, partly due to their ability to identify and mobilise powerful supporters for their work.

Evaluating Impact – A defining feature of many PRS is that there is little time or space to think about their own impact and little sense of how this could be done even if resources permitted. This means that it is difficult for services to work out what kind of work is most valued and effective and to direct their efforts accordingly. Evaluating the impact of PRS is extremely challenging whilst being highly desirable. PRS lack the time or space to develop evaluation frameworks and mechanisms meaning that they mainly use proxy satisfaction measures such as demand to demonstrate their value. External evaluations are few and far between and there do not currently appear to be any common approaches to capturing and measuring the impact of PRS on parliamentary practice.

Conclusion

Our inquiry has moved beyond the current literature on research use in parliaments and the role of parliamentary research services. Our global focus has expanded the narrow, geographical boundaries of previous work to provide a more inclusive picture of research use by legislatures and challenge previous framings of research provision. Our mapping has shown that many parliaments across the world have large-scale and advanced infrastructure for accessing and harnessing research evidence. This is not restricted to the advanced democracies of the global north where the knowledge economy is commonplace but is also a prominent feature of parliaments in the global south. Robust, high-quality outputs and materials produced by highly skilled and qualified staff guided by a strong commitment to impartiality are a hallmark of most services, particularly those within Commonwealth parliaments. Whilst challenges remain, the landscape of parliamentary services appears to be strong and, in many cases, growing.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the parliamentary research services staff who participated in our project and hope that our work will be of use to you. A very special note of thanks goes to the UK's Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology who provided us with the opportunity and support to undertake this research. We extend our deepest gratitude to the UK Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit – especially Sarah Foxen – who acted as a constant cheerleader and gave so much time and effort to the work. It was a joy to work with you all.

1. Introduction

This report focuses on the global landscape of parliamentary research services with a particular focus on those that seek to bring academic research into parliamentary processes. It is based on research and knowledge exchange activities conducted as part of a Joint Parliamentary Academic Fellowship hosted by the UK's Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) between September 2021 and December 2023. The aims of the fellowship were to:

- Explore and map the mechanisms parliaments across the world use to access and source research evidence.
- Understand how these parliamentary research mechanisms are structured, how they function and their relationship to the academic community.
- Facilitate connections between different mechanisms and the wider research community.

In this report we offer an overview of the global landscape of parliamentary research services (PRS). As well as providing a map of these services (or at least as many as we were able to identify), we also provide an overview of their functions, common challenges they face in accomplishing their work and how some services have sought to overcome these. We hope that it can act as a source of information and inspiration for parliamentary research services and support their efforts to develop and strengthen their work.

1.1 Situating the research

Our fellowship sits alongside emerging academic and policy research on the relationship between research and parliaments and seeks to broaden discussions beyond the framing of PRS as legislative science advice¹. We have situated our research in the field of Evidence Informed Policy and Practice (EIPP) and drawn on the body of literature that has emerged over the last two to three decades on how evidence use is accomplished and supported in policy and practice. Landmark texts include Davies and colleagues *What Works?*², the subsequent follow up *Using Evidence*³ and the latest iteration *What Works Now*⁴. We have also been influenced by work undertaken in the last 10 years that has revealed some of the

¹ The project was originally framed by POST using the terminology of 'Legislative Science Advice'. This framing was altered for two reasons: 1) many stakeholders working in parliamentary research services and associated networks were unfamiliar with this terminology and did not see it as applicable to their work; 2) our own academic backgrounds are in Evidence Informed Policy and Practice and we identified parliamentary research services as part of this landscape.

² Davies, H. T., & Nutley, S. M. (Eds.). (2000). *What works?: Evidence-based policy and practice in public services*. Policy Press.

³ Nutley, S. M., Walter, I., & Davies, H. T. (2007). *Using evidence. How research can inform public services.*, Policy Press

⁴ Boaz, A., & Davies, H. (Eds.). (2019). *What works now?: evidence-informed policy and practice*. Policy Press.

tensions surrounding the ideal of evidence-based policy. These include Cairney's *The Politics of Evidence-Based Policy Making*⁵ and Parkhurst's *The Politics of Evidence*⁶.

As a field of research and practice EIPP has been underpinned by the accepted wisdom that social and public policy formulation should be shaped by credible (scientific) research evidence⁷ ⁸. Such evidence can be the result of any systematic and transparent data gathering and analysis in any setting⁴ but is more often understood to be produced by academics working in universities. At the same time, 'policy' is usually understood to reside in local, regional and national government and their agencies. The role of parliaments in examining, debating and challenging government policy and formulating legislation tends to be overlooked. Together this results in the relatively scarce representation of parliaments as sites of evidence production and use within the field of EIPP.

1.2 Parliaments and research: what do we know?

The roles, functions and structures of modern parliaments are underpinned by one of two types of administrative architecture⁹. On the one hand is the *staffing model* which is decentralised and comprises employees who are answerable to individual parliamentarians or specific political groups. The staffing model tends to include a large number of personnel with limited permanence. It is usually found in Presidential legislatures such as the US Congress. On the other hand, there is the *bureaucratic model*. This entails the presence of a centralized administrative apparatus staffed by permanent parliamentary officials. They tend to be smaller in size, oriented towards efficiency and effectiveness and are the most common model worldwide.

Published in 2023, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's indicators for democratic parliaments state that parliaments should be supported by a 'capable and independent parliamentary administration that is independent of the executive, free from political influence in its day-to-day operation, and provides support to all MPs impartially' (see <https://www.parliamentaryindicators.org>). One of the mandated duties of such parliamentary administrations is the provision of 'impartial professional support, research, library and information services'.

Parliamentary research services are the administrative 'home' of such services, but how they are structured, function and fulfil their roles is varied. The challenge of trying to find consistency among PRS was neatly illustrated by a joint 2015¹⁰ report from the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) and International Federation of Libraries Association (IFLA). This stated that:

⁵ Cairney, P. (2016). *The politics of evidence-based policy making*. Springer.

⁶ Parkhurst, J. (2017). *The politics of evidence: from evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence* (p. 182). Taylor & Francis.

⁷ Mulgan, G. (2005). Government, knowledge and the business of policy making: the potential and limits of evidence-based policy. *Evidence & Policy*, 1(2), 215-226

⁸ Gluckman, P. (2014). Policy: The art of science advice to government. *Nature*, 507(7491), 163-165.

⁹ Christiansen, T., Griglio, E., & Lupo, N. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations*. Taylor & Francis.

¹⁰ IPU, (2015). Guidelines for parliamentary research services.

... the capacity for parliamentary research varies greatly in parliaments around the world. At one end of the spectrum, nations with a long history of democratic forms of government frequently offer comprehensive services. They built their parliamentary research services over many decades. At the other end, many emerging democracies aspire to establish the beginnings of such a function within their parliament but struggle to identify the path forward, often due to lack of resources and/or challenges in establishing or strengthening democratic institutions...

Literature on the relationship between parliaments and research evidence can be broadly divided into two types. The first focuses on exploring and evaluating how research evidence is represented and used within parliamentary processes. This body of literature includes Geddes' ethnographic work on how evidence is understood and used within UK Parliament select committees and how academics engage with parliamentarians¹¹, Syväterä and colleagues¹² examination of references to research advice in parliamentary debate in Australia, Finland, Kenya and the UK, and Ouimet et al's systematic review¹³ of evidence use in legislatures.

The second type of literature focuses specifically on the work of PRS. The majority provide fine-grained descriptions of individual services such as the ill-fated US Congressional Office of Technology Assessment that was disbanded in 1995¹⁴, the US Congressional Research Service^{15 16}, and the UK's Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology¹⁷. To date, the literature has focused on PRS which are almost exclusively from western and high-income countries. Ultimately there has been relatively little comparative research meaning that it can be difficult to understand or describe what a parliamentary research service is and does¹⁸.

Recent attempts to define PRS come from an emerging body of literature around Legislative Science Advice.¹⁹ Scholars in this tradition make the distinction between services that

¹¹ Geddes, M. (2021). The webs of belief around 'evidence' in legislatures: The case of select committees in the UK House of Commons *Public Administration*, 99, 40-54.

¹² Syväterä, J., Rautalin, M., & Magyari, A. K. (2023). From where do legislators draw scientific knowledge? Organizations as scientific authorities in four countries' parliamentary debates. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 74(2), 222-240.

¹³ Ouimet, M., Beaumier, M., Cloutier, A., Côté, A., Montigny, É., Gélneau, F., ... & Ratté, S. (2023). Use of research evidence in legislatures: a systematic review. *Evidence & Policy*, 1-18.

¹⁴ Wood, F. B. (1997). Lessons in technology assessment: Methodology and management at OTA. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 54(2-3), 145-162.

¹⁵ Relyea, H.C. (2012). Across the hill: The congressional research service and providing research for congress - Considering the future. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29, 424-428

¹⁶ Blair, P. D. (2021). Toward more effective science and technology advice for congress: The historical roots and pathways forward. *Annals of Science and Technology Policy*, 5(2), 91-246.

¹⁷ Norton, M. (1997). The UK Parliamentary Office of Science and technology and its interaction with the OTA. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 54(2-3), 215-231.

¹⁸ Acosta, M., Nestore, M., Jarquín-Solís, M. E., & Doubleday, R. (2022). A typology of advisory bodies in legislatures and research perspectives. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 1-26.

¹⁹ Akerlof, K., Tyler, C., Foxen, S. E., Heath, E., Gual Soler, M., Allegra, A., ... & Yarime, M. (2019). A collaboratively derived international research agenda on legislative science advice. *Palgrave Communications*, 5(1).

proactively provide scientific and technical advice to legislatures and those that are more reactive. Such scholars tend to characterise the latter as lacking the capacity to produce in-depth, long-range advice and to impartially distil and summarise complex information. Categorising reactive services in this way has led to suggestions that 90% of legislatures lack effective mechanisms for harnessing scientific research¹⁷. Other authors have thought more broadly about science advice in legislatures, including Acosta and colleagues¹⁶ who have developed a 12-category typology to capture the variation between services and provide insights into their contextual background, mandate, structure, and advice processes. We return to this later in this report.

1.3 Methodology and data

Our inquiry was divided into three phases. In phase 1 we focused on identifying and mapping distinct parliamentary research services with a particular focus on those that pull academic research into parliamentary processes. Phase 2 involved gathering documents and further information from a sample of identified PRS. In phase 3 we conducted interviews with PRS leaders. Ethics approval was granted by the School of Management ethics committee at the University of St Andrews. Figure 1 provides an overview of our data collection process and below it we describe each phase in more detail.

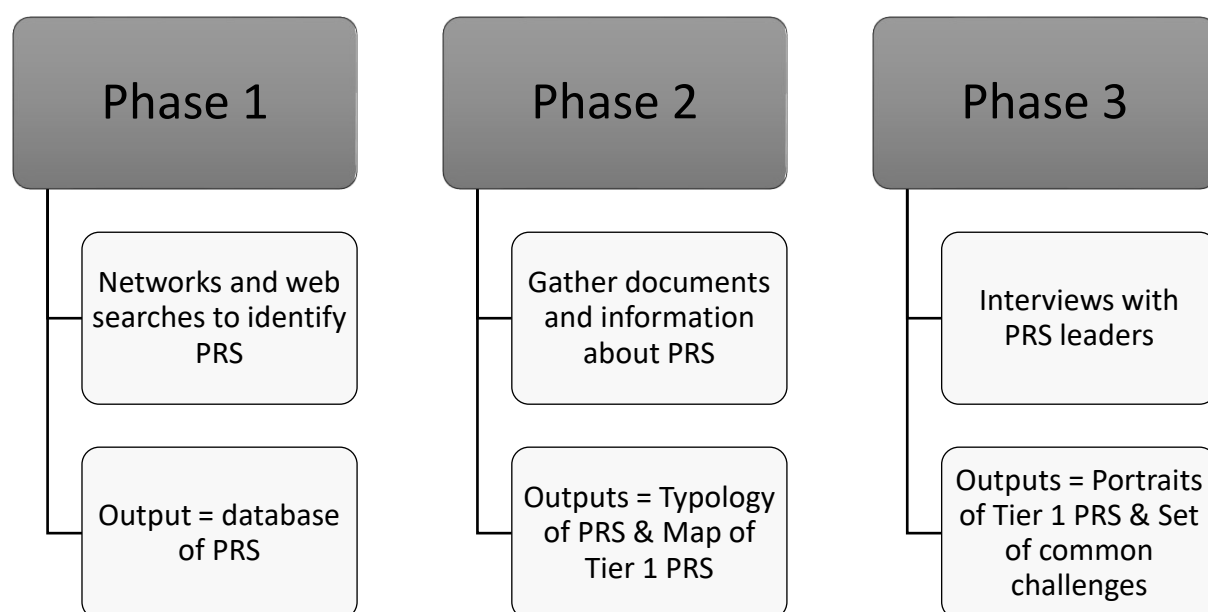


Figure 1: Data collection and outputs

1.3.1 Phase one: identifying and mapping PRS

We began by inviting POST's network of PRS practitioners and academics to populate an online map with mechanisms for connecting parliaments with academic research. We also invited contributions through various parliamentary and professional networks (e.g. European Parliamentary Technology Assessment Network, Commonwealth Parliamentary

Association, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). The map was open for contributions for two months (November – December 2021).

On reviewing these contributions, we realised that we needed to filter them to ensure the mechanisms had a clear remit to support a specific parliament and were led by the needs of that parliament. This was because a sizeable portion of those nominated were based in academic institutions and focused on ‘pushing’ research to different parts of the policy landscape. We also realised that we needed to identify further mechanisms using a more systematic approach since several that we were aware of were not represented on our map.

We used the Inter Parliamentary Union website (<https://www.ipu.org/>) to identify the name and website address and gather basic data on all national-level parliaments. Next, we visited the websites of each parliament and searched for references to ‘research’, ‘science’, ‘technology’ and ‘library’, taking these search terms from the titles of mechanisms we had discovered to that point. We used Google Translate for websites not in English. If we were unable to find a relevant research support mechanism for a particular parliament, we used a two-step process to identify anything that was referenced elsewhere in the public domain. First, we examined the membership of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA www.ifla.org) and websites of national libraries for links with the countries’ parliament. Second, we performed Google searches using the name of the parliament and key words like *research advice*, *science*, *technology*. We completed these searches by the end of January 2022. At this stage we shifted our language away from ‘mechanisms’ towards ‘parliamentary research services’ since this was the terminology most commonly in use across the mechanisms we identified.

1.3.2 Phase two: gathering information about PRS

In Phase 2 we aimed to gain a greater understanding of the structure and types of work being undertaken across the landscape. To do this we focused on gathering documents and further information from PRS situated in Commonwealth member states (<https://thecommonwealth.org/>). The Commonwealth spans 56 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific, and includes developed and developing nations with different parliamentary histories. Criteria for membership includes having had a historic constitutional association with an existing member, demonstrating a commitment to democracy and democratic processes, the rule of law and independence of the judiciary, good governance, and protection of human rights. Commonwealth countries are also bound together by norms such as the use of the English language as the medium of inter-Commonwealth communication and colonial legacies which have shaped parliamentary systems and traditions.

Our sample comprised 41 PRS across 35 countries. 6 PRS at the subnational level were included, since these had been identified by practitioners in our initial mapping exercise. We gathered information in two ways – by searching for online documents describing each PRS, and by directly emailing contacts from the PRS and/or the wider parliamentary secretariat to request the information outlined in table 1.

Table 1: Survey questions

1) What is the size of the research service? How many staff carry out the work and what backgrounds do they come from?
2) What research/scientific topics are covered and how are these selected?
3) What are the aims, mission or purpose of the research service?
4) What activities does the research service carry out? How is academic research identified, sourced and provided to parliament?
5) What sort of outputs does the research service produce?
6) What is the role of elected officials in the research service?
7) How is the work funded?
8) What are the governance mechanisms for the work?
9) Does the research service provide academic research to anyone outside parliament?
10) How does the research service link to the research community/universities?

1.3.3 Phase three: interviews with PRS leaders

In phase 3 of the inquiry, we focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of how and why PRS had developed, their core activities and outputs, processes for accessing, building and maintaining relationships with academia and how they assess their own impact. We also aimed to build a clearer picture of the common challenges faced by PRS. To do this we invited the leaders of all PRS that provided a response during phase 2 to participate in an in-depth interview. These were conducted online at a time suitable for the interviewee. We were able to interview 13 individuals from 12 PRS and analysed the interviews thematically.

2. A global map of parliamentary research services

At the end of the first phase of our inquiry, we had identified 180 PRS that appeared to support research use across 115 countries. During the second phase of our inquiry, we jointly reviewed all the submitted material, focusing particularly on the type of research that each PRS was accessing or providing to their parliament. It quickly became clear that some of the PRS did not readily fit into the landscape of EIPP – some provided relatively basic search and lending services and seemed not to access and provide ‘academic’ research (i.e. research produced through scientific, rigorous methods); others appeared to only provide policy analysis services (e.g. budget analysis, monitoring data) and/or reference services (sourcing descriptive and comparative data on policy areas). Using these insights and developing the work of Acosta and colleagues on parliamentary advisory bodies¹⁶, we developed a tiered typology that we could apply to our original database of 180 PRS (see Figure 2).

Tier 1 PRS align most closely with EIPP approaches and practices and have the capacity to access, appraise, analyse and distil academic research. These PRS have 2 or more of the following characteristics:

- Access to detailed research databases

- Strong links with the academic community (sometimes internationally).
- Research synthesis services.
- Academic research training and/or research qualifications for workforce.
- Workforce familiarity with a range of different methodological approaches to research.

Tier 2 PRS were those that were more closely aligned with policy questions, providing policy analysis and/or reference services with limited focus on or access to academic research. Tier 3 was reserved for PRS that it was impossible to assess due to lack of information, had been inactive for at least 5 years or were not focused on the needs of a particular parliament. Tier 3 also included mechanisms that were added to our initial mapping but were focused on 'pushing' research into parliament from outside.

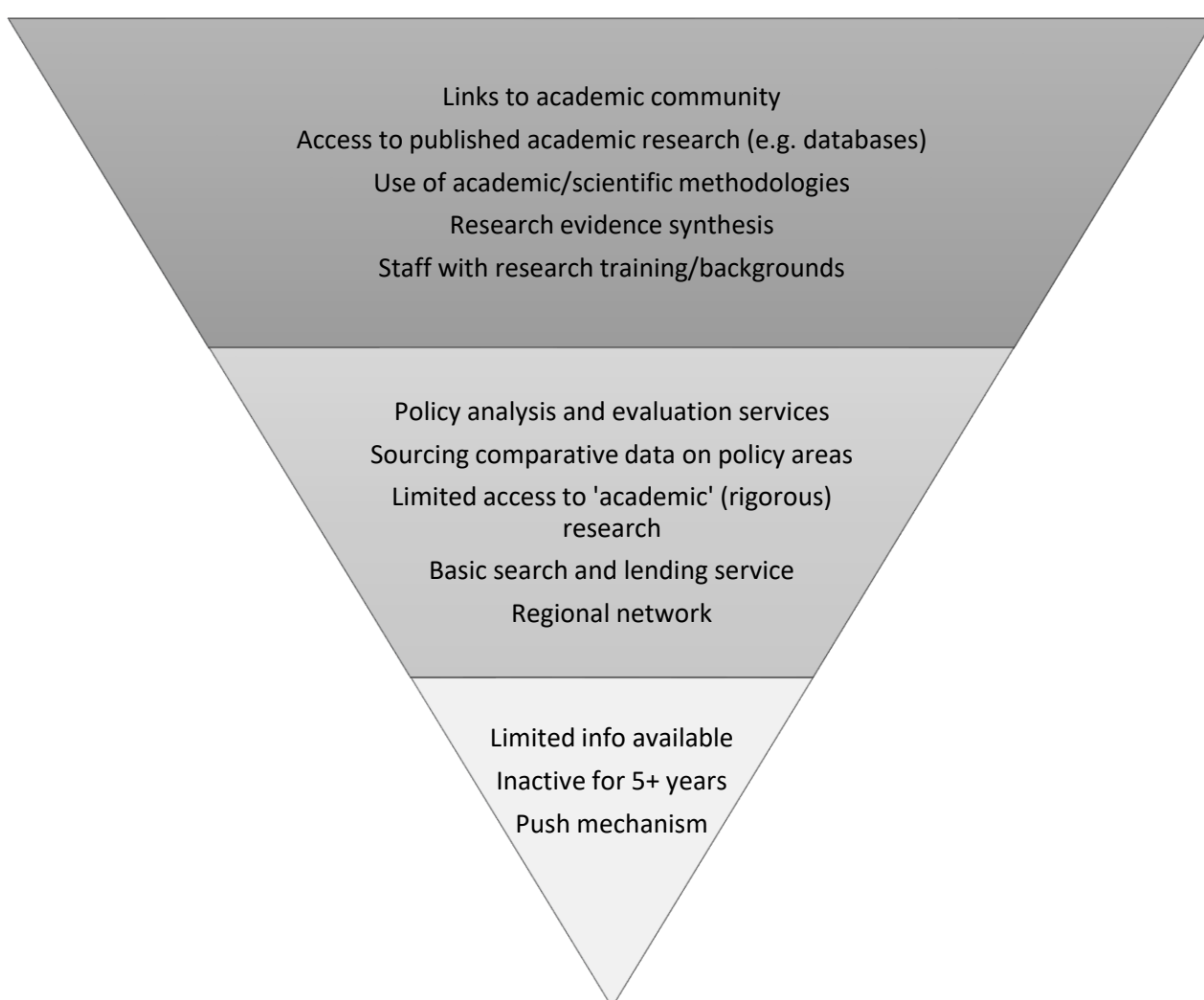


Figure 2: Typology of Parliamentary Research Services

Table 2 below shows the distribution of each type of PRS (see figure 2) across continents, political systems, types of legislature and variety of democracy (using Regimes of the World data published by the V-Dem Institute <https://www.v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/>). A complete list of the PRS we identified can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2: Count of PRS by type, continent and variety of democracy

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Type of PRS	80	51	49
Continent:			
Asia	16	15	4
Africa	12	9	10
Europe	35	15	14
Oceania	6	3	3
North America	7	3	12
South America	4	6	5
Variety of democracy:			
Liberal democracy	35	9	28
Electoral democracy	25	21	9
Electoral autocracy	16	13	10
Closed autocracy	3	3	2
Unavailable	1	5	

We identified 80 Tier 1 PRS across 71 different countries, representing approximately 36% of the legislatures listed by the IPU. These PRS existed well beyond the bounds of Northern European democracies and were instead found in different varieties of democracy across all parts of the world. We have represented these PRS on an interactive map (see figure 3 below)²⁰. This can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/4alpUWN>

Although the capacity to work with academic research evidence was less clear in Tier 2 PRS, these nonetheless played a role in supporting parliamentary use of research by collating, curating and summarising (as opposed to synthesising) academic research and/or producing evaluation and other forms of data about pertinent policy areas. This distinction is important as evidence synthesis involves combining information from multiple studies to draw broader conclusions and requires a distinct level of methodological training and consistency²¹. Tier 2 PRS were found in approximately 26% of IPU-listed legislatures, meaning that around two thirds of the worlds' legislatures have some mechanism for supporting the use of research evidence.

²⁰ Our interactive map continues to grow as we are alerted to further research services that meet our criteria. If you are aware of one that does not appear on the map, please contact the authors.

²¹ The Parliamentary Research Handbook produced by the UK's House of Commons Library in 2017 provides a helpful overview of the skills and techniques required for such synthesis. <https://bit.ly/49HlyZ1>



Figure 3: An interactive map of Tier 1 PRS. Access at <https://bit.ly/4alpUWN>

3. What do parliamentary research services look like?

Our data revealed a varied picture in terms of the size and scope of parliamentary research services. Broadly speaking the larger and more advanced versions conduct in-depth research and analysis on a wide range of topics of specific concern to the jurisdiction in which they are located. All services, whatever their size, aim to help parliamentarians make informed decisions when scrutinising Government policy or when responding to the needs of the committees to which they belong or to their constituents. Below we provide a brief overview of the main features of PRS before presenting a series of ‘pen portraits’ of specific services.

3.1 The features of PRS

The aims and purpose of PRS vary from place to place. That said, documentary evidence from phase 2 of our research revealed several overlapping aims. Overall, there was a pervading sense across the world, consistent with the ideals of evidence informed policy and practice, that members of parliament are expected to understand and be able to comment upon complex matters of policy. PRS play a key function in enabling this.

For some, the work is very much responsive and focuses on providing high quality information and knowledge to parliamentarians as and when it is requested. Such requests may arise from individual parliamentarians or through committee structures. However the request arises, the role of the PRS is to provide a product (e.g. a briefing paper) which is objective, timely and accurate.

Not all research services are limited to responsive requests. There is an anticipatory logic to some of the activity that takes place. PRS are often required, or choose, to engage in horizon scanning or foresight planning thus producing reports and briefings on subjects of potential rather than actual parliamentary interest.

Key outputs provided often take the form of policy briefs or memos, which provide neat synopsis of pressing and often complex problems. These will often be scenario based enabling parliamentarians to understand the impact and implications of policy options. Some PRS also provide legislative drafting support helping law makers' proposals become legally sound. A central tenet of most parliamentary research services is that they are expected to be non-partisan and the custodians of unbiased information supplied to members when required regardless of political persuasion or affiliation.

Below we delve into some of the PRS we identified in more detail. We have selected these using a form of critical case sampling²². Critical cases are those that 'can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things'. These cases are designed to illustrate some of the similarities amongst the PRS without trying to overstate these. In other words, they share characteristics of our Tier 1 typology. We have, however, deliberately focused on cases outside the global north and have structured the cases using categories listed by Acosta and colleagues followed by some more detailed prose. For current purposes, we are less interested in the role of legislators as part of the research service and the appointment methodology. We have included an 'other' category to cover other key elements of information about the particular research service.

3.2 Pen Portraits of PRS

3.2.1 Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services

Category	Details
Name	Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services
Location	Islamabad
Political System	Electoral Autocracy
Type of legislature	Bicameral
Cameral Advice	National Assembly and Senate
Nature of Mandate	To provide non-partisan and expert analysis on a range of subjects, and to help the legislators in making informed policies about the national challenges.
Targeted Audience	Parliamentarians
Type of output(s)	Multiple
Nature of Advice (Link to Tier)	The department aims to provide non-partisan and expert analysis in the form of 'research briefs' for committees and motions. Since 2009, the Institute commenced the "Research on Request Services," which offers timely, accurate and objective non-partisan informational and research services to

²² Patton, M. Q. (2007). Sampling, qualitative (purposeful). *The Blackwell encyclopaedia of sociology*.

	the legislators across Pakistan. Whereas the deadline of such research varies from one day to 15 days, the research include prompt informational and research analysis done on 24 hours' notice for parliamentarians. PIPS' work covers a range of subjects including Disability Acts; Gender Based Violence; Period Poverty; International Treaties & Conventions and National Social Issues. Staff source research through civil society organisations, government ministries, parliamentary journals/briefs, published reports, international organisations and from the National Bureau of Statistics and other entities that collect data and information. The department engages with leading scholars and researchers based in reputable universities, think tanks and civil society organizations across the country. This network of specialists provides informed policy inputs such as in-depth background notes, research papers, briefs, legislative summaries, consultations and other services on the request of parliamentary committees as well as parliamentarians. To date the department has provided over 1,500 research-based articles, technical and thematic papers to individual Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and cross-party caucuses.
Workforce Composition	PIPS comprises 25 professionals/experts with academic degrees from reputed national and international universities in the field of Law, Strategic Studies and International Relations, Economics and Public Finance Management, Political Science, Biological Sciences, Library and Management Sciences. There are four main program areas each led by a Director General (DG). The DG has usually has more than two decades of experience of the field they lead. In addition, many of the experts in PIPS have served in academia (or have been Adjunct Faculty) in universities for many years before serving at PIPS.
Other	The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (www.pips.gov.pk) (PIPS) was created by an Act of Parliament in 2008. PIPS is Pakistan's exclusive seat of parliamentary learning.

3.2.2 The Parliamentary Research Service, National Assembly Parliament of Kenya

Category	Details
Name	The Parliamentary Research Service (PRS) at the Parliament of Kenya
Location	Nairobi, Kenya
Political System	Electoral Autocracy
Type of legislature	Bicameral
Cameral Advice	National Assembly and Senate

Nature of Mandate	PRS aims to responds to the research and evidence needs of MPs by aligning its research outputs to the legislative agenda of the two Houses. The PRS mandate is to provide research and policy analysis services to Members of the bicameral Parliament – National Assembly and the Senate; House Committees; House Leadership Offices; parliamentary delegations; and staff. As such, the purpose of its existence is to support the information needs of Members of Parliament (MPs) by providing non-partisan and balanced analysis that is adapted to their public policy needs.
Targeted Audience	Parliamentarians
Type of output(s)	Policy briefs and reports; preparing background notes, talking notes, discussions papers and position papers on any public policy topic of interest; analysing bills and upcoming legislative proposals; drafting committee reports, and preparing briefing notes for MPs to use during inquiries or site inspection visits. Outputs are shared through House Committee meetings; policy and legislative cafes; and emails to individual MPs and other interested parties.
Nature of Advice (Link to Tier)	The PRS activities involve provision of research and policy analysis services to MPs of the bicameral Parliament, House Committees; House Leadership Offices; parliamentary delegations; and staff. The range and scope of research services offered is broad and is aligned to the various public policy discourses and the needs of clients. PRS therefore responds to the research and evidence needs of the MPs by aligning its research outputs to the legislative agenda of the two Houses. Academic research is sourced through credible sources for instance peer reviewed journals; academic institutions; policy think tanks; other parliamentary research services like the UK, CRS, EPRS; and partner organizations supporting the work of parliament.
Workforce Composition	The PRS is staffed by 23 research and policy analysts with qualifications ranging from undergraduate degrees to PhDs across fields like social sciences, political science, environmental science, economics, and information and communications technology (ICT).
Other	PRS sits under the Parliamentary Joint Service (PJS) and provides a shared service for both Houses (Senate and National Assembly). The PRS analysts currently operate in Committees with different analysts serving various House committees of the two Houses. The majority of the research questions arise from the various public policy issues and hence questions being handled in Committees. However, other ways in which topics are selected include ongoing issues in the public domain.

3.2.3 Inter-Departmental Research Group in the Parliament of Ghana

Category	Details
Name	Inter-Departmental Research Group
Location	Accra, Ghana
Political System	Liberal Democracy
Type of legislature	Unicameral
Cameral Advice	Single Cameral
Nature of Mandate	The department engages in reactive research, responding to requests from committees, individual MPs, the office of the Speaker and other parliamentary leaders. Research staff are linked with subject matter committees relevant to their area of expertise. The department also undertakes proactive research relating to legislation passed by the House, policy and budget analysis. The department determines the kind of research it will undertake at the beginning of each year.
Targeted Audience	Parliamentarians
Type of output(s)	Outputs include budget briefs, policy briefs, committee briefs, conference papers, background papers and legislative briefs.
Nature of Advice (Link to Tier)	The Parliament of Ghana has a research department divided into 4 subject area units (social cultural, governance and security, environment, science and technology, and economics and finance).. This was in recognition of the disjointed nature of relationships and information services across the parliament. Academic research is identified and used by individual researchers in the department depending on their area of interest and the usefulness of the research to the work of parliament. The department makes a concerted effort to collaborate with academic researchers and is in the process of signing agreements with some selected research institutions to serve as reliable source of data and information.
Workforce Composition	The department is headed by a Director assisted by four deputies, each in charge of a unit. Over 27 staff are housed in the department with varied social science backgrounds including political sciences, economics, sociology, information management, agriculture, geography and mathematics. Three staff have PhDs, about ten have Master's degrees and the rest have Bachelor's degrees.
Other	In 2017 the Westminster Foundation for Democracy supported the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Research and Information group (IDRIG) to bring together staff working across Ghanaian parliamentary information services (library, Hansard, IT, research, committees).

3.2.4 Research Service of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

Category	Details
Name	Research Service of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
Location	Suva, Fiji
Political System	Electoral Autocracy
Type of legislature	Unicameral
Cameral Advice	Single
Nature of Mandate	The unit offers a range of information materials and services on request
Targeted Audience	Parliamentarians
Type of output(s)	These include information briefs, research papers, speeches, annual report summaries, budget briefs and library services. Research papers produced by the unit are based on secondary research using information and statistics from credible sources. These research publications are peer reviewed within the Unit and then approved by Secretary-General to Parliament before being released to MPs.
Nature of Advice (Link to Tier)	The aim of the unit is to provide accurate, timely and quality research information to MPs to enable them to carry out their constitutional mandate of scrutiny, oversight, budgeting and representation. The unit provides quality research support and analysis to MPs, standing committees, executive management and the Department of Legislature. The unit also provides budget analysis assistance to other Pacific Island parliaments under the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project and secretariat support to the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Group.
Workforce Composition	The unit is relatively small, comprising three senior research officers and a senior librarian. The staff come from different backgrounds including finance, management and public administration, human resources and employment relations and information studies.
Other	The unit was established in 2016. It offers a range of information materials and services on request. The topics covered include but are not limited to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, economic development, finance, health, education, social services, natural resources, climate change and gender.

4. What common challenges do parliamentary research services face?

In phase 3 of our work (interviews), we wanted to know more about the day-to-day operations of PRS and identify some of their common challenges. In this section we focus on four types of challenge that were commonly discussed by our interviewees: linking with academia, striving for impartiality, workforce capacity and assessing impact.

4.1. Linking with academia

A core feature of Tier 1 PRS is their ability to access and harness academic research but the activities undertaken to achieve this goal are varied. Literature on the translation and use of research evidence suggests that different types of approach facilitate the exchange of different types of knowledge²³. Explicit, scientific knowledge (sometimes termed ‘episteme’), for instance, can be shared via publications, presentations and commissioned research outputs. Tacit, skills-based knowledge (which Polanyi refers to as knowing ‘more than we can tell’²⁴ and can be termed ‘techne’) is more likely to be shared through common experiences and side-by-side working. In table 3 below we list the activities PRS typically undertake and the types of knowledge that are exchanged.

Table 3: PRS activities by knowledge type

Activity	Knowledge exchanged
Identifying and accessing published academic research (e.g. via bibliographic databases)	Explicit, scientific knowledge (episteme)
Facilitating access to academic expertise (e.g. by identifying and maintaining databases of academic experts)	Explicit, scientific knowledge (episteme) Tacit, skills, know-how (techne)
Employing staff with academic training and expertise	Tacit, skills, know-how (techne)
Inviting and hosting presentations by academics	Explicit, scientific knowledge Networks of relationships
Commissioning academics to undertake research	Explicit, scientific knowledge

Our interviews revealed that activities to exchange both forms of knowledge were associated with a range of challenges and most PRS wanted to improve their connections to academia and academics. First, research publication and bibliographic database paywalls are a significant challenge for large and small PRS. University affiliations and contacts provide some PRS practitioners with an unofficial route to access these resources (i.e. by logging in with university credentials), but service-wide access is rare.

²³ Ward, V. (2017). Why, whose, what and how? A framework for knowledge mobilisers. *Evidence and Policy*, 13(3), 477-497

²⁴ Polanyi, M., & Sen, A. (2009). *The tacit dimension*. University of Chicago Press.

We have a challenge in terms of accessing academic databases because we don't have subscriptions. Most of the academic databases require you to subscribe and pay for them. So unless you do that at an individual level. I will have to mention that at least personally I can access academic research because I am a student at [x] University... So I'm able to access a lot of journal articles, the library so and it is easier for me at the moment. #AF07 (Africa PRS)

Second, cultural differences between the worlds of academia and parliaments often work as barriers to effective knowledge exchange. These differences relate to timescales, understanding the legislative context and understanding the role of evidence in that context. Cultural differences also extend to expectations around impartiality. Academics tend to be seen as advocates for their own research, being keen to offer recommendations and to have an 'impact' on the world outside academia. At the same time, academics are wary of being implicated in political agendas. Many PRS reported making significant efforts to support and train academics to engage with parliament to address these issues.

External academics are engaged in advocacy because that's part of their, you know, they want to make impact in their fields. And that's entirely legitimate. But we often need to give them quite a briefing about you need to pack your agenda, your policy recommendations and advocacies to one side, because that's not what we do. #006 (Oceania PRS)

Third, whilst employing staff with academic backgrounds gives PRS access to substantial research skills, experience and know-how, this can be a double-edged sword for patterns of relationships with external academics. For many services academic engagement is left to individual staff members who have their own tried and tested links and relationships. These links are usually related to their specialist research area and academic training (e.g. their PhD supervisor) potentially narrowing the pool of academic expertise that a PRS is able to access. This issue is exacerbated in smaller countries where there are often a limited number of universities and academic institutions. The priority for most PRS, however, is strong relationships with trusted academics.

We have reasonable personal contacts, I have contacts and I actually lectured at XXX University for 15 years as well as working at the library. So I've established contacts in in political science departments at least. And other researchers have similar linkages. So if we get a bit stuck, we would ask for them for the odd suggestion. #003 (Oceania PRS)

Finally, and relatedly, PRS and their staff tend to have a 'preferred' source of academic evidence and expertise. Relationships with large, prestigious universities and well-known, highly-cited academics tend to be prioritised. This potentially leads to a further lack of diversity in the types of academics that are able to engage with parliaments. Some PRS, especially those located in countries with indigenous populations and/or histories of racial oppression, consider issues of equity as part of their academic engagement strategies, but the lack of diversity within academic communities themselves is a challenge for those wanting to be more inclusive.

It's harder to get [a] Racial mix. You know we can, and we've had a really great one on indigenous knowledges and we had two indigenous speakers. We try to work

through what's the best way of tackling these, because it's not always easy. It's hard because at the same time it's the representation of the research sector is not always there. #O02 (Oceania PRS)

In summary, linking with academia is a key function of PRS and most do this in ways that enable the exchange of both tacit and explicit knowledge. Knowledge exchange between the two communities is hampered by paywalls, cultural differences, and the small and relatively homogenous group of academics that PRS tend to engage with. These challenges are addressed by using university affiliations to access publications, training academics to engage with parliaments, developing strong, trusted relationships with academics and seeking academic input and expertise from those with diverse backgrounds.

4.2. Striving for impartiality

For parliamentary officials across the world impartiality – the ability to set aside personal opinions to equally serve different political actors – is a fundamental part of their role. In the UK Parliament Select Committee staff see themselves as having to be ‘passionately impartial’ (Geddes, 2019) and such is the importance of impartiality that ministerial involvement in the appointment and departure of parliamentary officials has come under intense scrutiny in recent years (UK Parliament Constitution Committee, 2023). Unsurprisingly, then, this commitment to impartiality is also writ large in PRS.

That is one of the core values of our department is confidentiality, impartiality, independence, because we are actually a clearing house that is independent irrespective of whichever party, and we try to be very impartial. #AF07 (Africa PRS)

Impartiality tends to be presented as a straightforward and largely unquestioned aspect of PRS work. Our interviews, however, reveal several tensions surrounding the principle of impartiality in this context. During discussions of impartiality, interviewees used terms such as advice, professional judgement, and opinion in relation to their own work and that of other groups external to parliament. Interviewees distinguished between these, framing professional judgement as in keeping with impartiality but opinion and advice as outside this framework. Although it is not entirely clear how impartiality is operationalised, understood, and communicated within PRS, it nonetheless seems to function as an important boundary around their work.

I see a big role for us not in opinion, but in professional judgment about trying to set out some of those possible secondary effects so that clients can say, OK, this is a good idea, but we do need to bear in mind doing this could create a whopping big fraud risk. We don't have views about whether it's a good idea or not, but we can contribute usefully in that analysis of primary and secondary effects and risks. #O06 (Oceania PRS)

And that is supposed to be reflected in our products. We do not offer recommendations, but we provide options and back them up with the research information or evidence backing our position. But we give options, but we do not finally make the recommendations because that is not our space. Yeah, we leave it we leave that to the policymakers, yes. #AF07 (Africa PRS)

This boundary of impartiality is closely linked to the legitimacy of PRS as a service for all parliamentarians. Indeed, because Governments or ruling parties often have their own research advisory services, there is a sense that it is particularly important to support parliamentarians from opposition parties as well as cross-party functions such as committee work. It is recognised that operating in a context of high politization is challenging for PRS and requires them to navigate and consistently demonstrate their impartiality²⁵. This challenge was also recognised by our interviewees, with one describing their PRS as 'serially partisan' when providing a service to individual MPs (whose role is to represent their party as well as their constituents). Interest groups are another prevalent feature of the political landscape, and it can be difficult for parliamentarians to separate those that are providing impartial research evidence and those that are acting as advocates for particular views. In this context, PRS act as trusted brokers with a clear understanding of and commitment to impartiality.

There are so many opinions that parliamentarians get. But limited amount of people who you can trust to help cut through it. #O02 (Oceania PRS)

Although impartiality is a key part of PRS' work, this is often in tension with public (and academic) perceptions of how parliaments work and the separation of the legislative and executive functions. Interviewees told us how their service is often seen as an arm of government, leading some to view the work of PRS with scepticism. Academics can also have a misplaced belief in their own impartiality (see 4.1 above re. being implicated in political agendas), resulting in PRS having to make considerable investment in educating them about impartiality in a parliamentary context.

[The public] don't know how the Parliament works and about the three arms of the state. So that we are the legislative and the executive. The government comes under the executive and you have the judiciary. So people generally think we're government... #O07 (Oceania PRS)

Whilst much of the work undertaken by PRS is done at the behest of parliamentarians and committees, there is also an anticipatory logic to much of the activity undertaken by Tier 1 PRS. These services are often required to engage in horizon scanning or foresight planning, producing reports and briefings on subjects of potential rather than actual parliamentary interest. This aspect of their work presented additional challenges to impartiality and our interviewees were concerned about the potential for proactive approaches to breach the impartiality boundary by setting agendas for discussion.

To sort of forecast proactively, think about what they might need to know in the future.... We do need to be a little careful about [that]... So when I'm, if we're publishing something... it's not uncommon for me to ask the author. Why are you wanting to publish this like why? Why should a Parliamentarian care? ..You having a bee in your bonnet about a particular issue is not a good reason for us to publish on it, because it's not our job to set agendas. #O06 (Oceania PRS)

²⁵ Christiansen, T., Griglio, E., & Lupo, N. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations*. Taylor & Francis.

It is generally accepted that total objectivity is impossible in research terms²⁶ and the possibility of research synthesis representing the worldview of its producer is also widely recognised²⁷. This raises questions about whether and how true impartiality (or objectivity) can be achieved by PRS. It is not clear how the principle of impartiality is applied to the research, review and synthesis methods used by PRS and whether reflexive approaches are used.

In summary, impartiality is a core feature of how Parliamentary Research Services work. It differentiates PRS from other suppliers of research and evidence and acts as a boundary to protect and uphold their legitimacy in a parliamentary context. Impartiality appears to be implicitly understood by those working within parliament, who align it with professional judgement but clearly distinguish it from advice and opinion. Those outside parliament – particularly academics – do not necessarily share this understanding. PRS who take a proactive as well as reactive approach to providing research services are wary of the effects this might have on their (real or perceived) ability to maintain impartiality. Whilst engaging in reflexive practice may help practitioners to navigate some of these challenges, interviewees did not discuss this in any great depth.

4.3 Workforce Capacity

Workforce capacity is a significant issue that affects all the PRS we interviewed in one way or another. Challenges are related to managing demand, the variability of skills, a lack of resources, role development and organisational change. We deal with each of these below.

Large PRS in relatively developed countries face an increasing demand for information and research from parliamentarians. This demand is felt in terms of the increasing quantity of requests they receive and the decreasing timeframes in which they are expected to answer these requests. Parliamentary staff are known to pride themselves on providing ‘unparalleled service’, and interviewees spoke of the tension between meeting these demands whilst maintaining the quality of outputs. As a result, many PRS appear to sacrifice the depth of their research outputs and/or undertaking proactive work to maintain the quantity and quality of the work they are asked to do.

It's very much a service that's designed to respond to the emerging needs. The thing to notice is that 20 years ago, you know, committees might do one big study, a year over two years and now they're doing four or five concurrent studies in a few months, and they do two or three meetings. So the pace of our work has increased enormously and our ability to provide in depth research has been challenged. It's difficult to have confidence in doing in depth research when you have two days to do it on a new topic. So, this is I mean, I think it's probably the same with our colleagues in other countries and they're telling us the same kind of pressures are happening. It's the attention span is much shorter people are much more driven by social media. The way the political environment is evolving quickly and so the pace of our work has

²⁶ See Khatwani, M. K., & Panhwar, F. Y. (2019). Objectivity in social research: A critical analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal*, 37, 126-142

²⁷ Schick-Makaroff, K., MacDonald, M., Plummer, M., Burgess, J., & Neander, W. (2016). What Synthesis Methodology Should I Use? A Review and Analysis of Approaches to Research Synthesis. *AIMS public health*, 3(1), 172–215

increased accordingly, so it's very much responsive or reactive. #NA05 (North America PRS)

Some of the smaller services in less developed countries, however, don't face the same demand issues. Interviewees spoke of a lack of appetite for and awareness of research amongst parliamentarians and citizens in these countries, which is reflected in the resources made available for their work. These PRS tend to see themselves as advocates for evidence-informed parliamentary practice in societies where this is not the norm.

Members of Parliament come from various backgrounds, those who are intellectuals, those who are professors, those who are just coming from the villages in our case, so they're not so educated. So you really have to start from the basics and actually just putting together that sort of information. #AF07 (Africa PRS)

The skills of those involved in PRS are variable. PhDs and formal research training is not uncommon, but most services tend to employ staff with masters-level qualifications or below. It was rare for PRS leaders to talk in anything other than general terms about the skills and research methodologies used in their service. One interviewee, however, detailed how research staff were being trained in systematic review methodology as a way of increasing the quality of PRS outputs and provide additional rigor to the literature review process.

Yes, we are now training them. A lot of my colleagues were not aware of systematic reviews. They haven't yet got to grips with these techniques. So we are in the process of getting them on top of it. #AF03 (Africa PRS)

Language skills are seen as particularly valuable by some PRS. Those that have staff with skills in foreign languages are able to access materials (both academic and non-academic) published in other languages to their own, but most do not deliberately seek out staff with language skills.

We have an increasing number of people with very good language skills, particularly in the Asian languages. Most of the European stuff because of the EU is accessible to some extent in English, but much less so in Asia. So trying to access some of the Asian language stuff is very valuable. And we'd like to see more of that. #O06 (Oceania PRS)

PRS generally appear to be in a period of growth. Many reported growing in size and funding over the past decade, though this growth did not necessarily enable them to keep pace with demand. A strong senior staffer or MP (e.g. Speaker of the House) was crucial for securing additional resources and this tended to happen when that individual themselves had an academic background of some kind.

Our number was still very small for researchers – 7 - to almost 275 members of Parliament and about 32 committees. You know that was too much. So we kept asking that you add more researchers. They should add more researchers until 2019. Fortunately, we had a university professor who became the Speaker of Parliament so he understood our plea. He said 'this is the most important department, you must revamp it'. So he allowed us to recruit more researchers. And today we have 27 researchers in the research department. #AF03 (Africa PRS)

There is a sense that parliamentary research roles are in-between spaces – not just between academia and practice, but also between specialist and generalist. Most PRS have a range of generalists able to turn their hand to different research topics and areas. It can be difficult for these generalists to develop their careers and it appears rare for them to transition into roles as subject specialists. It can also be challenging for specialists to progress their careers. Many PRS are not structured to allow subject specialists to progress to higher levels of seniority and many researchers (specialist and generalist) instead move into managerial positions.

I think we do hire some specialists who have expertise in an area, but because we are so reactive to what the committee wants to do, if they're moving from you know a tax study, to climate change study, we need analysts who can do both. #NA05 (North America PRS)

Most PRS are supportive of professional development, with many having schemes in place to allow for visits and exchanges with other parliaments. Opportunities such as secondments to other departments or roles tend to be limited by the size of the PRS, with smaller services unable to support these.

It basically is research officers and there's managers and a director. But there's not senior and junior. So in part because there's so few we kind of count on everyone to be sufficiently senior when they come in to Take a Member's request and run it to the ground and then be prepared to brief that member on it. #NA04 (North America PRS)

Several PRS that we interviewed had been subject to organisational changes aimed at increasing workforce effectiveness and capacity whilst decreasing cost. Many of these changes were related to the configuration of generalists and specialists across the service. PRS seem to be increasingly moving away from subject specialist arrangements towards more interdisciplinary arrangements out of a desire for more joined-up working or in recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of many policy areas. Movement between structures to support individual MPs and select committees has also taken place, with committee work seen as a key way of managing demand.

We used to be organized by professionals. In 2008 we restructured and created multidisciplinary teams. We wanted to make sure that if you are if you're doing a pre-budget study that they have not just an economist but an accountant. And we very much try to have that cross fertilization [across all issues] because...you have to understand how legislation works. You have to understand how you know what the differential impact is upon economic or tax policy on different regions in the country being you know being a federation or in different population groups. The goal is to be as multidisciplinary as possible and bring that to the committee table. #NA05 (North America PRS)

In summary, the configuration of PRS workforces and the demands that they face are very different to those found in other research-oriented organisations. For PRS, there are tensions between meeting parliamentarians demands for research services and maintaining the quality of those services. PRS require staff who can act as advocates for evidence-informed parliamentary practice, particularly in countries where evidence-informed policy and practice is not part of the societal discourse. Individual researchers, whether generalists

or specialists, face career development challenges due to the way that PRS are configured and resourced. Despite these challenges, many PRS are growing and becoming more visible and valued, partly due to their ability to identify and mobilise powerful supporters for their work.

4.4 Evaluating Impact

A defining feature of many PRS is that there is little time or space to think about their own impact and little sense of how this could be done even if resources permitted. This means that it is difficult for services to work out what kind of work is most valued and effective and to direct their efforts accordingly.

Whilst many interviewees discussed measuring and demonstrating how PRS research outputs had been used and where it had made a tangible difference, most admitted resorting to satisfaction measures. Many PRS administer some sort of survey at the end of each parliamentary year in the form of a questionnaire to members asking them to report levels of satisfaction with the service. But the results of these are patchy and, in some cases, they have not been administered in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. PRS also seek feedback on a more ad hoc basis from those they have supported, and some have commissioned external researchers or consultants to conduct evaluations on their behalf. These also tend to focus on satisfaction, awareness, and experience of their clients.

Once every three years we commission an external review by consultants to do, as we called it, the client evaluation of library services. We very explicitly try to tease out from our parliamentary clients exactly what they think of what we do, what they value most, in granular detail, what services they use and their satisfaction with those things and all of those are public going back some time. #O06 (Oceania PRS)

Demand and repeat custom are widely used as proxy satisfaction measures, even though the latter is likely to be influenced by the development of trusted relationships with individual researchers as much as the quality of the service itself. Both have the advantage of being relatively straightforward to measure and monitor, even though satisfaction may not be the cause of any increase in demand or repeat custom. PRS in general are keen to develop new tools to capture and monitor feedback and to feed this into emerging practice, but during the research we were not able to find any clear examples of where this is being done.

Some of them come back because perhaps the one particular individual you see, they get satisfied with some researchers and they don't get satisfied with the work of other researchers. #AF03 (Africa PRS)

I need to get to know if any of the parliaments have actually successfully measured their impact in the research, I would like to learn. Because I don't think I have the right formula for where is the impact for Parliament of parliament research. You are providing services to the parliamentarians and you also do this academic research, so there is a mix between a serious research and also services provided to parliamentarians. So if there is any Parliament that are successfully doing that, please share with me because I will make sure that I'll make a trip to the Parliament and learn. #AS07 (Asia PRS)

There is high awareness amongst PRS of the complex nature of research use in a parliamentary context and the interweaving of various forms and sources of evidence in

debate and scrutiny. Nonetheless, interviewees told us that they would like to be able to capture how frequently and accurately the research provided is mentioned in debates in the chamber and how and where it is used in various parliamentary processes. These included crafting amendments, framing a costing request to the parliamentary Budget Office, developing terms of reference for a new committee inquiry, or responding to a campaign in a constituency.

Feedback is our current indicator for research success and it's Parliament's indicator for most of its units and divisions at the moment. It used to be response rates. So they've moved at least a little bit to there. But I think that the outcome is more important and I think everything that you know is happening, in our history. Plus, if we really saw that decisions were being made, better decisions were being made by Parliament in its committees and by members and that real change was happening, then that would be an outcome, thing of success. #AF28 (African PRS)

In summary, evaluating the impact of PRS is extremely challenging whilst being highly desirable. PRS lack the time or space to develop evaluation frameworks and mechanisms meaning that they mainly use proxy satisfaction measures such as demand to demonstrate their value. External evaluations are few and far between and there do not currently appear to be any common approaches to capturing and measuring the impact of PRS on parliamentary practice.

5. Conclusion

We began our Fellowship inquiry with the aim of discovering the kinds of research mechanisms that exist in parliaments across the world. We have presented these as a series of case studies focusing on those outside the Global North. This is because discussions of research often have a bias towards western, parliamentary democracies. Some of the headline things we have learned along the way include:

- Contrary to some of the claims in the science advice literature and the minimal consideration of parliaments in the EIPP literature, it seems that most jurisdictions do have some kind of mechanism for accessing and using academic research.
- Sometimes this is part of a parliamentary library service, but in many cases is an additional, specialised service.
- The widespread presence of these mechanisms suggests that the principles of evidence-informed policy and practice shape the operations of most parliaments even if the activities are not explicitly framed in this way.
- The capacity to produce in-depth advice and impartially distil information has sometimes been judged to be lacking in those PRS that operate primarily in response-mode, but this is based on a relatively narrow understanding of the types of evidence and forms of advice that are effective in a parliamentary context.
- Many library and research services operate on the grounds of impartiality and place extremely high value on this aspect of their work. This does not mean that they are always entirely independent of Government or the executive.
- Robust, high-quality outputs and materials produced by highly skilled and qualified staff are a hallmark of most PRS.

- Evidence produced by the various research PRS can be diverse. Evidence is not the same as science advice, it is broader and is often tailored to the needs of the jurisdiction to which it relates.

To conclude, our inquiry has moved beyond the current literature on research use in parliaments and the role of parliamentary research services. Our global focus has expanded the narrow, geographical boundaries of previous work to provide a more inclusive picture of research use by legislatures and challenge previous framings of research provision. Our mapping has shown that many parliaments across the world have large-scale and advanced infrastructure for accessing and harnessing research evidence. This is not restricted to the advanced democracies of the global north where the knowledge economy is commonplace but is also a prominent feature of parliaments in the global south. Robust, high-quality outputs and materials produced by highly skilled and qualified staff guided by a strong commitment to impartiality are a hallmark of most services, particularly those within Commonwealth parliaments. Whilst challenges remain, the landscape of parliamentary services appears to be strong and, in many cases, growing.

Appendix A: Mechanisms linking parliaments with research

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Africa	Botswana	Research unit of the parliament	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Botswana	Library and information services	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Ghana	Inter-departmental research and information group	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Africa	Kenya	Evidence Informed Policy Caucus, Parliamentary Research Services	Recommendation	Tier 1
Africa	Morocco	Parliamentary centre for research and studies	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Nigeria	National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Africa	Seychelles	Research Unit of the Seychelles National Assembly	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Sierra Leone	Information, Library and Research Service Department	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	South Africa	Knowledge and information services	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Uganda	Research department	Recommendation	Tier 1
Africa	Uganda	Ugandan parliament department of library services	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Africa	Zambia	Research department and library of the National Assembly of Zambia	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Asia	Cambodia	Parliamentary institute of Cambodia	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Georgia	Research and analytical service	Web search	Tier 1

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Asia	Hong Kong	Library and research office	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	India	Library, Reference, Research, Documentation and information (LARRDIS)	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Indonesia	Research Center of the Indonesian House of Representatives Expertise Board	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Library, Museum and Documents Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly and Islamic Parliament Research Center of the Islamic Republic of Iran	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Iraq	Parliamentary research and studies department	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Israel	Research and Information Centre (RIC)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Asia	Japan	Research and Legislative Reference Bureau (RLRB)/Science and Technology Research Office (STRO) of the National Diet Library	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Asia	Lebanon	Library of the Lebanese parliament	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Malaysia	Parliamentary library of Malaysia	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Pakistan	Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Asia	Philippines	CPBRD	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	Singapore	Library/Research Department	Web search	Tier 1
Asia	South Korea	National Assembly Research Service	Self-nomination	Tier 1

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Asia	Thailand	Bureau of academic services	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Albania	Parliamentary library and research service	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Austria	Institute of Technology Assessment of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW ITA)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Library of the Parliamentary Assembly	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Catalonia	Consell Assessor del Parlament sobre Ciència i Tecnologia (CAPCIT)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Croatia	Knjiznica Hrvatskoga Sabora / Library of the Croatian Parliament	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Cyprus	Research department of the house of representatives	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Czech Republic	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Czech Republic	Parliamentary institute	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Estonia	Foresight Centre at the Parliament of Estonia	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	European Union	European Parliamentary Research Service	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	European Union	Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA) for the European Parliament	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Finland	Committee for the Future, Finnish Parliament	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	France	Office parlementaire d'évaluation des choix scientifiques et technologiques (OPECST)	Self-nomination	Tier 1

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Europe	Germany	Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Greece	Scientific service of the Hellenic parliament	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Hungary	Information service for MPs	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Ireland	Library and research service	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Kosovo	Directorate for research and library services	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Lithuania	Committee for the Future of Lithuania	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Luxembourg	Parliamentary Research Service - "Cellule scientifique"	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Netherlands	Rathenau Institute	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Northern Ireland	Research and Information Service (RaISe)	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Norway	Norwegian Board of Technology (Teknologirådet)	Recommendation	Tier 1
Europe	Poland	The Bureau of Research	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Portugal	Directorate of information and culture	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Romania	Dept for parliamentary studies and EU policies	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Scotland	Scottish Parliament Information Centre	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Serbia	Library of the national assembly	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Slovakia	Parliamentary Institute	Web search	Tier 1

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Europe	Spain	Spanish foundation for science and technology	Recommendation	Tier 1
Europe	Sweden	Evaluation and Research Secretariat (ERS) of the Swedish Riksdag	Web search	Tier 1
Europe	Switzerland	TA SUISSE	Recommendation	Tier 1
Europe	UK	House of commons library	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	UK	Parliamentary office of science & technology (POST)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Europe	Wales	Senedd Research	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	Canada	Parliamentary Information, Education and Research Service, Library of parliament, Canada	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	Canada (Ontario)	Library and research department, legislative assembly of Ontario	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	Canada (Quebec)	Library of the national assembly of Quebec	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	Mexico	Office of Scientific and Technological Information	Web search	Tier 1
North America	USA	Congressional Research Service	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	USA	Missouri Office of Science and Technology (MOST) Policy Initiative	Self-nomination	Tier 1
North America	USA	Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team (STAA) of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Oceania	Australia	Australian Council of Learned Academies	Self-nomination	Tier 1

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Oceania	Australia	Science & Technology Australia	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Oceania	Australia	Australian Parliamentary Library	Recommendation	Tier 1
Oceania	Fiji	Research Service, Parliament of the Republic of Fiji	Web search	Tier 1
Oceania	New Zealand	New Zealand parliamentary library	Self-nomination	Tier 1
Oceania	Solomon Islands	Parliamentary research service	Web search	Tier 1
South America	Argentina	Scientific Office for Legislative Advice (OCAL)	Self-nomination	Tier 1
South America	Chile	Parliamentary Technical Advisory (ATP) of the Library of the National Congress of Chile	Self-nomination	Tier 1
South America	Colombia	Centro de Investigaciones y Altos Estudios Legislativos	Self-nomination	Tier 1
South America	Guyana	Parliamentary library of the National Assembly	Web search	Tier 1
Africa	Africa	African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE)	Recommendation	Tier 2
Africa	Africa (Anglophone)	Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR-AA)	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Africa	Egypt	Parliamentary research sector	Web search	Tier 2
Africa	Gambia (The)	Data and research interns	Web search	Tier 2
Africa	Madagascar	Commission and studies department	Web search	Tier 2
Africa	Namibia	Research Information and Technology Service	Web search	Tier 2

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Africa	Senegal	Research and documentation service	Web search	Tier 2
Africa	Tunisia		Recommendation	Tier 2
Africa	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe parliament research department	Recommendation	Tier 2
Asia	Armenia	National Assembly Library	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Bangladesh	Parliamentary Library	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Bhutan	Research and Hansard division	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Brunei Darussalam	Research and development unit of the Prime Ministers office	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Jordan	The Center for Legislative Studies and Research	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Kazakhstan	Information-analytical department	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Maldives	Library of People's Majlis	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Mongolia	Parliamentary Research Institute of Mongolia	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Asia	Myanmar	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Nepal	Parliamentary Studies and Research Division	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Saudi Arabia	Research and Studies Department	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Sri Lanka	Department of Legislative Services	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Taiwan	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Asia	Timor-Leste	Parliamentary research and library service	Web search	Tier 2
Asia	Uzbekistan	Information and analytical department	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Belarus	Department of information and analysis	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Belgium	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Belgium	Spiral research centre, University of Liege	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Europe	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Research section of the Parliamentary Assembly	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Bulgaria	Library of the national assembly of Bulgaria	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Denmark	Danish Board of Technology	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Europe	Estonia	National library of Estonia	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Europe	Finland	Library of parliament, Finland	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Europe	Iceland	Research and information office	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Italy	Library of the chamber of deputies	Self-nomination	Tier 2
Europe	Montenegro	Parliamentary Institute	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	North Macedonia	Parliamentary Institute	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Slovenia	Research and documentation sector	Web search	Tier 2
Europe	Switzerland	Swiss Parliamentary library	Self-nomination	Tier 2

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Europe	Ukraine	Institute of legislation/information and research centre (IDC)	Web search	Tier 2
North America	Cuba	Library of the National Assembly of Cuba	Web search	Tier 2
North America	Nicaragua	Library research service	Web search	Tier 2
North America	Trinidad and Tobago	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2
Oceania	Kiribati	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2
Oceania	Papua New Guinea	The Information Support Division	Web search	Tier 2
Oceania	Tonga	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 2
South America	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Library and historical archives	Web search	Tier 2
South America	Brazil	Library of the congress of Brazil	Self-nomination	Tier 2
South America	Brazil	Legislative consultancy of the Brazilian Parliament	Self-nomination	Tier 2
South America	Mexico	Bibliographic and documentary services	Self-nomination	Tier 2
South America	Paraguay	The Central Library and Archive of the National Congress	Web search	Tier 2
South America	Peru	Parliamentary Research and Documentation service	Web search	Tier 2
Africa	Burundi	Library and archives service of the Assemblée Nationale	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Congo	Department of studies and forecasts	Web search	Tier 3

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Africa	Côte d'Ivoire	Technical support office of the Assemblée Nationale	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Research office of the National Assembly	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Djibouti	National assembly Library	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Equatorial Guinea		Recommendation	Tier 3
Africa	Gabon		Recommendation	Tier 3
Africa	Lesotho	Research and library departments	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Mauritius	Parliamentary library and information office	Web search	Tier 3
Africa	Mozambique	Library of the assembly of the Republic	Web search	Tier 3
Asia	China	Research office	Web search	Tier 3
Asia	Libya	Office of Parliamentary Policy and Research Support at the House of Representatives	Web search	Tier 3
Asia	Russian Federation	Analytical Department of the Russian Council of the Federation	Web search	Tier 3
Asia	Sri Lanka	National Science and Technology Commission of Sri Lanka (NASTEC)	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Cyprus	Cyprus campus of the University of Central Lancashire	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	European Union (co-leads located in UK)	Energy-Shifts	Self-nomination	Tier 3

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
Europe	France	L'Institut des Hautes Études pour la Science et la Technologie	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	France	AGORA	Recommendation	Tier 3
Europe	Germany	Administration of the German Bundestag	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Greece	Hellenic Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Team	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Latvia	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 3
Europe	Northern Ireland	Matrix	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Republic of Moldova	Parliamentary Research and Studies Section	Web search	Tier 3
Europe	Scotland	Scottish Policy and Research Exchange	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Sweden	Research! Sweden	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	Turkey	Department of research services	Web search	Tier 3
Europe	UK	Closer	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	UK	Aston University	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Europe	UK	Universities Policy Engagement Network	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	Canada	Science & Policy Exchange	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	Canada	Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG)	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	Canada	Canadian Research Institute on Humanitarian Crises and Aid (OCCA)	Self-nomination	Tier 3

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
North America	Canada	Chaire de recherche sur la démocratie et les institutions parlementaires	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	Canada	Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE)	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	Canada	Institute for Science, Society and Policy, University of Ottawa	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	MA State House Fellowship - Harvard Medical School's Scientific Citizenship Initiative (SCI)	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	Kentucky Academy of Science	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	Virginia Academic of Science, Engineering and Medicine	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	Bridge Initiative for Science and Technology Policy, Leadership, and Communications, West Virginia University	Self-nomination	Tier 3
North America	USA	National Science Policy Network	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Oceania	Australia	Australian Academy of Science	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Oceania	Australia	Australian Academy of Technology & Engineering	Self-nomination	Tier 3
Oceania	Vanuatu	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 3
South America	Brazil	Evaluating Topic Models in Portuguese Political Comments about Bills from Brazil's Chamber of Deputies	Self-nomination	Tier 3
South America	Chile	Proyecto Vincula, Instituto para el Desarrollo	Self-nomination	Tier 3

Continent	Country	Name	Identification method	Tier
		Sustentable, Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile		
South America	Ecuador	Parliamentary library of the National Assembly	Web search	Tier 3
South America	Peru	National Science, Technology, and Innovation Council (CONCYTEC)	Self-nomination	Tier 3
South America	Uruguay	Parliamentary library	Web search	Tier 3