

<b>Institution:</b> SOAS University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 22A - Anthropology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming Working Practices in the House of Commons		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2008-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Emma Crewe	Professor of Social Anthropology	2008-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Ethnographic research carried out by SOAS at the House of Commons has transformed working practices in the UK Parliament, leading to (a) a better understanding of MPs' circumstances, work and needs among Commons' officials; (b) service improvements, including better induction for MPs and support to constituency offices; (c) improved relationships between officials and MPs. Select committees have benefited from drawing in more diverse witnesses and viewpoints, greater procedural transparency in their conduct, better press coverage and a deeper understanding of the nature of evidence; and (d) closer relationships between Parliament and scholars, vital for gathering wide-ranging evidence and scrutinising government. Findings about these improved relationships have been adapted internationally to increase understanding of how to deepen democracy both at home and abroad.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Prior to 2000 the contemporary study of the UK parliament was dominated by political scientists focusing on outputs, functions and roles; they overlooked change, heterogeneity, and entanglements in politicians' work as well as cultural meaning-making, rituals and relationships. This mirrored a neglect of MPs' diversity, and those they interact with, by officials managing Parliament. These officials lacked an understanding of varying pressures on MPs and their staff. They used to contract an outside agency to conduct a survey with MPs about the services that officials provided and how they could be improved. It was rarely filled out by MPs and generated minimal information of use to parliament. In 2013-14 Crewe designed a new system of interviewing by officials within the House of Commons that replaced the old system of surveying MPs by an outside contractor, based on her 30 years of experience in evaluation. Her ethnographic approach generated far higher quality results and continues to the present in the Commons.</p> <p>Emma Crewe, Professor of Social Anthropology, employed by SOAS since 2008, has been studying parliament since 1998. Her research at SOAS has been funded by Leverhulme Trust (2011-2013, GBP44,975), ESRC-DFID (2014-2017, GBP502,000), AHRC/GCRF (2017- 2021, GBP1,843,004), ERC (2019-2024, GBP2,218,664). Her first ethnography of the UK's House of Commons, based on in-depth fieldwork carried out 2011-13, was published in 2015 [3.3]. Taking Westminster and selected constituencies as a field of study, Crewe's ethnography [3.3, 3.4] involved 350 formal interviews (including 56 MPs, 30 former MPs, 115 clerks and parliamentary staff, 24 MPs' staff and 10 journalists); close observation of day-to-day parliamentary business, including debates in the main chamber and inquiries by committees; shadowing MPs in 9 constituencies; and mini-histories of two bills and a by-election.</p> <p>Crewe's research uniquely explained how: (a) the diversity of experience among MPs create additional burdens on specific groups, including women [3.2, 3.4]. The provision of induction,</p>		

training and services to MPs used to be standardised on the flawed assumption that people should be treated the same, whereas equality is only achieved by recognising difference. This research alerted officials to how inequalities, past experience and distance to constituency lead to different needs and pressures for MPs; (b) the complex entanglement of different processes (representation, policy-making, governing, scrutiny, media etc [3.1, 3.3, 3.5]) meant that services provided to MPs have to take account of links between different types of work. Training should not be only offered when they join but throughout their terms, (c) significant changes to their work, including the decline in obedience to party and the huge increase in constituency work [3.1, 3.3, 3.6]), have to be factored into planning services for MPs.

Crewe also found through her research that select committees do not invite a diverse enough range of witnesses to give evidence and pay insufficient attention to how evidence is produced and what claims are made about its rigour. Crewe followed this up with research on select committees in 2019 [3.5], commissioned by the Clerk of Committees, with a psychotherapist, Nicholas Sarra (University of Exeter). They investigated the way committees are managed, presenting their findings to the Committee office and uniquely drawing their attention to the importance of recognising the emotional labour involved. In 2019-2020 she also collaborated with former Director of Human Resources and Change in the House of Commons, Andrew Walker, to learn the institutional lessons about the expenses scandal – why it happened and how such a failure of probity could be avoided in the future [3.6], at the suggestion of the then Clerk of the House. The main conclusion was this scandal was caused by the failure to adjust to broader social and political change (e.g., by addressing MPs' relatively low pay and anticipating the impact of the Freedom of Information Act) and cultural assumptions about their entitlements.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Crewe, Emma (2014) 'Westminster parliamentarians: performing politics'. In: Rai, Shirin, (ed.), *Democracy in Practice: ceremony and ritual in Parliament*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 40-59. <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/21680/> **Peer-reviewed**

3.2 Crewe, Emma (2014) 'Ethnographic research in gendered organizations: the case of the Westminster parliament'. *Politics and Gender*, (10) 4, pp 673-678. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X14000476> **Peer-reviewed**

3.3 Crewe, Emma (2015) *The House of Commons: an anthropology of MPs' work*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN: 9781474234573. Submitted to REF2021. **Shortlisted by the BBC/British Sociological Association for the Ethnography Award in 2016.**

3.4 Crewe, Emma (2018) 'Ethnographies of Parliament: culture and uncertainty in shallow democracies'. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, (7) 1, pp 16-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JOE-11-2017-0057> **Peer-reviewed**

3.5 Crewe, Emma and Sarra, Nicholas (2019) 'Chairing UK Select Committees: Walking Between Friends and Foes'. *Parliamentary Affairs*, (72) 4, pp 841-859. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsz036> **Peer-reviewed**

3.6 Crewe, Emma and Walker, Andrew (2020) *An Extraordinary Scandal: what happened in the 2009 expenses scandal and why it still matters*, London: Haus Publishing. Submitted to REF2021.

**All outputs have been produced under the auspices of peer reviewed projects, funded by the UKRI and European Research Council.**

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Many scholars, MPs, civil servants and Commons officials have been significantly influenced by Crewe's findings and her ethnographic approach transforming both the study of parliament but also the evaluation of Commons' services and the running of select committees. Crewe's research has enhanced the in-depth scrutiny of parliament, the commitment of the House of Commons to undertake research (on its own and with others), and its capacity to improve the management of the institution. Officials have introduced new processes, acknowledged and addressed both cultural and practical problems, and developed processes for evaluating and improving management. The institution and its members have benefitted in the following ways: MPs experience better services and support; the culture that was supporting falling standards in the

conduct of politicians is better understood and steps have been taken to strengthen probity and standards; and the increased diversity of outside experts called upon to give evidence to select committees has led to better scrutiny of government. The impact of these benefits go beyond the institution of Parliament as MPs serve all four nations of the UK, so developing their capacity has the potential for national (and even international) impact.

*Transforming induction, training and support to MPs and their staff*

Crewe's guidance to officials led to the replacement of an annual survey of services in 2013 by a system of qualitative evaluation [5.1a]. With officials she co-designed the system for reviewing services and assisted in training staff to interview MPs. In the first instance 95 MPs were interviewed, their views analysed and recommendations implemented. The impact has been multi-fold [5.1a, b]. The Commons has better information about how different MPs and MPs' staff view services, which has alerted officials to the diversity of their circumstances, work and needs, leading to individually tailored induction and training for MPs and their staff, first introduced in 2015. Flowing from this better evaluation, service improvements included: (a) a 'buddying system' pairing officials with every new MP to give them individual advice about how to set up offices and learn key elements of the job, which has transformed induction since 2015; (b) bringing in more external experts to facilitate continuing professional development, which has also been positively rated by MPs; (c) better support and improved security for constituency offices, especially since 2017. Subsequently, the Commons undertook a dedicated evaluation of the specific experience and needs of women MPs. The improvements, and the value of Crewe's advice and guidance given between 2013 and 2014 on the methodology, were acknowledged (a) in a report to the Administration Committee in 2014, by the Director of Service Delivery [5.1b], and (b) in a report about 'Research Impact and Legislatures' by UK Parliament, showcasing the impact of academics including Crewe [5.2a] and championing several new academic fellowship schemes in Parliament and greater involvement of academics established to build on these achievements [5.2b].

Parliament reported in 2018 that Crewe's work "led to the 2014 House of Commons Administration Committee recommendation to replace the annual survey of Members and Members' Staff with a detailed series of interviews. The academic trained parliamentary staff on qualitative interviewing and has continued to provide advice on the scope and design of subsequent projects" [5.2a pg3]. The current CEO of the Commons added: "The findings were used to inform work on Departmental action plans and have also supported organisational change, including the establishment of new teams focused on customer insights and evaluation. The findings also led directly to a series of constituency regional roadshows, to support the needs of their constituency-based staff." [5.1].

*Enhancing standards of politicians' conduct*

Crewe's research deepened officials' and outsiders' capacity to operate more effectively within the Commons. Since 2016, her 2015 book has been issued as part of the induction for members of the Standards committee: "I have myself frequently described the volume on the House of Commons as the best guide to what it actually feels like to be an MP that is available. When we appointed a new breed of "lay members" of our Standards Committee in 2015, the senior governmentside MP on that committee asked, successfully, that each of the newly appointed lay members should be provided with a copy of that book out of public funds. I believe that is a strong testimony to the esteem in which Professor Crewe's work is held by legislators themselves", writes the former Clerk of Committees. [5.6]. This has inspired others to seek Crewe's advice on conducting research, training and management. The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) inquiry has published research about MPs' work as part of its inquiry into MPs' outside interests and included some of Crewe's data about MPs' daily schedules [5.4b], which has been reprinted by the government [5.4c]. The former Clerk/CEO asked Crewe to research the lessons learned from the 2009 expenses scandal with a parliamentary official, written up in Crewe and Walker (2019), indicating how much she is trusted but also enhancing the Commons' potential to learn from the past [5.6]. Lord Bew, Chair of the CSPL, recognises that Crewe's work has been a "valuable contribution" to the CSPL's pushing ahead with recommendations for increased transparency to "prevent further erosion of public trust" [5.4a]. The parallels between this and prevention of abuse led the Leader's Office, and the Director of Cultural Transformation, to call

Crewe to meetings to discuss how to prevent and respond to allegations of bullying within Parliament.

*Increasing diversity of expertise and understanding of evidence in select committees*

Since 2015 Crewe has advised Committee Office staff about improving their assessment of evidence [5.1a, 5.6], and how to judge rigour, as well as relationships with existing and potential witnesses. The former Clerk of Committees commented, “The value of Professor Crewe’s work and the esteem in which she is held have been amply demonstrated by the frequency with which she has been asked to assist committees of the House by giving formal evidence and expert advice, including on matters of governance and ‘culture’ as well as her particular specialism of development studies” [5.6]. Drawing attention to the quasi-legalistic language, assumptions and rules of select committee evidence sessions led to improvements in communication with witnesses. She gave evidence to select committees (both written and oral, public and private, to five committees) and has been quoted in several select committee reports [5.3 a, b, c, d]. She has contributed to diversifying witnesses to improve the range of evidence available to select committees [5.7a].

As Director of the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People, Crewe assisted scholars from the Global South to give oral and written evidence to the International Development Select Committee (IDSC) [5.7a]. In 2017 the then Head of International Development Research at the ESRC, acknowledged Crewe as generating a “wealth of questions” for poverty alleviation policy making, especially on partnership and capacity development in the Global South [5.5]. In 2019 she persuaded the IDSC, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Global Challenges Research Fund to host an international conference in the House of Commons for 150 MPs (global), peers, officials, scholars and activists [5.7b]. This showcased research by Global South scholars but also enabled discussion about how to improve links between scholars and politicians, particularly the process of giving evidence to Parliaments. The IDSC publicly committed to taking more evidence from Global South scholars at the conference. In 2017, Crewe launched the new Royal Anthropological Institute Committee on Anthropology of Policy and Practice [5.8.a], with links to the Whitehall Anthropologists Network, which regularly shares information about select committee calls for inquiries. Crewe has also published associated guidance to UK and global scholars about giving evidence [5.8 b].

As the Clerk of the IDSC explains, Crewe helped to increase parliamentary accountability noting that Crewe “continues to be one of the academics making a regular contribution to parliamentary scrutiny”, helping to “organise external analysis of, and support for, the proposal that Parliament retain and/or develop a dedicated select committee to scrutinise Official Development Assistance to mitigate the merging of DFID into the FCO. The arguments presented...prevented a loss of a respected focal point for aid and development discourse, an important channel into government, as well as expertise, contacts and capacity for Parliament, all of which is expected to help maintain the UK’s ability to reach exceptional standards in its international development policy and programmes.” [5.7].

*Increasing public awareness and understanding of parliaments in the UK and abroad*

These enhancements in support, conduct and diversity have been complemented by Crewe’s campaign to encourage public engagement through a better national and international understanding of parliament. Through accessible publications, social media and media coverage [5.9a-e], she has informed political observers about the recent changes to parliament as well as the need for further reform. This resulted in impact within the creative sector – most notably the inclusion of her research ‘An MP’s Typical Day’ in the National Theatre’s production of Hansard [5.10]. In order to create similar opportunities for scholars to improve working practices within parliaments in other countries, she led a team to establish a new programme of research and engagement for civil society and universities in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia and Myanmar. Raising more than GBP4,000,000 in total from the AHRC/GCRF in 2017, and from the ERC in 2019, has enabled Crewe and partners to give grants to researchers and creative industries to scrutinise their political worlds. They have audited public engagement, assessed the performance of parliament, and researched the relationships between politicians and the public to make



recommendations for change and reimagine the democracies of Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia and Myanmar [5.9e].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Improvements in MPs' surveys: (a) Letter from the Clerk of the House/CEO and (b) Letter from Director of Service Members and Members Staff Interview Project Report

5.2 Improvements in parliamentary services: (a) Research Impact and Legislatures, Parliamentary Office on Science and Technology et al, September 2018 – see page 3 [https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/research-impact-in-legislatures\\_final-2.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/research-impact-in-legislatures_final-2.pdf) (pg 3); and (b) UK Parliament introduced major academic fellowship schemes, 16 November 2016: <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/post/fellowships/parliamentary-academic-fellowship-scheme/?platform=hootsuite>

5.3 List of written / oral evidence to House of Commons committees: (a) Liaison Committee HC 954, 2014-2015, p.36; (b) House of Commons Governance HC692 2014-15, p.28; (c) Administration Committee Election Planning and Services, HC588, 2016-17 p.12, 31; (d) IDC on Parliamentary Strengthening (HC704) 2014-15, p.24, 30, 31, 32, 43, 53.

5.4 Improvements in standards: (a) Letter from the Chair of the Committee on inquiry into MPs outside interests July 2018 with (b) full report: Committee on Standards in Public Life (2018) MPs Outside Interests and (c) public facing appendix: MPs' outside interests: typical day in the life of an MP, 3 July 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mps-outside-interests-typical-day-in-the-life-of-an-mp>

5.5 The pursuit of impact through excellence The value of social science for development, a funder's perspective, 6 March 2017: <http://www.theimpactinitiative.net/impact-lab/collection/pursuit-impact-through-excellence>.

5.6 Email reference by the former Clerk of the Committees

5.7 Increasing participation: (a) Letter from Clerk of the International Development Select Committee and reference to (b) Mobilising Global Voices 2019: Perspectives from the Global South Conference Feb 2019: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/events/calendar/mobilising-global-voices-2019-perspectives-from-the-global-south-conference/>

5.8 Impact on quality of parliamentary evidence: (a) Homepage of the Anthropology of Policy and Practice Committee: <https://www.therai.org.uk/committees/anthropology-of-policy-and-practice-committee>

and (b) SOAS policy briefing on Submitting Evidence to Parliament: (<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Submitting-Evidence-to-the-UK-Parliament.pdf>)

5.9 Media file

(ai) BBC's BookTalk (last broadcast Sept 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b061gxrh>) and (a ii) (last broadcast April 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000flkz>),

(b) Transcript - BBC's Thinking Aloud (October 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07z4djx>).

(ci) GRNPP homepage [www.grnpp.org](http://www.grnpp.org), and (cii) Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/GRNPP/>

(d) Transcript - Iain Dale's Book Club podcast no 74, November 2019 <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/chapter-74-emma-crewe-and-andrew-walker/id1436324930?i=1000456865616>

(e) Film made by Halcyon Films (<https://grnpp.org/partners-research/> and also on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=luOxkvp61nE&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=luOxkvp61nE&feature=emb_logo)).

5.10 Email from the National Theatre requesting use of research in a programme