Institution: City, University of London (City)
Unit of Assessment: 4 Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Title of case study: Enabling Democracy: Using Work Psychology to Improve National and Local Political Leadership in the UK
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004-2016

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jo Silvester	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):** Professor of Work Psychology	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:** Sept 97 – Aug 02 *and* Feb 06 – Apr 18

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-ongoing
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Yes

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Since 2001, Professor Jo Silvester's unique programme of applied psychology research has directly impacted professional standards and training in UK political contexts and inspired changes in Parliament's working culture. The selection and assessment processes she designed for the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats have been used to approve nearly 400 parliamentary candidates in four general elections and increase gender diversity. Around 30,000 local Councillors in England and Wales elected since 2013 have benefitted from the Political Skills Framework created by Silvester. New since REF2014, Silvester's research influenced the reform of governance structures in the House of Commons. She designed the culture change programme and identified shared values that were incorporated into the House Service Strategy 2016-20.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Millions of elected members and officials work in local and national governments worldwide. To date, however, psychologists have paid very little attention to the knowledge and skills elected members need to perform their roles and to deliver strong political leadership, nor to the unique challenges faced by those whose work within legislatures supports and enables strong democracy and good governance. This case study reports continuing impact from Professor Silvester's REF 2014 case study regarding the approval of prospective parliamentary candidates by political parties and leadership development for elected members, as well as new impact resulting from later research in the House of Commons (HOC) on leadership in a legislature.

Research submitted to REF 2014
Silvester's research, aimed at improving the selection, development and performance of British politicians began in 2001. This research was the first to apply psychology research on employee selection and diversity to the work of politicians. Initial research with the Conservative Party involved three stages: (1) interviews/focus groups with party stakeholders to agree competencies and behavioural indicators, (2) design and implementation of a new multi-trait, multi-method assessment centre for assessing and approving prospective parliamentary candidates, and (3) a longitudinal evaluation to monitor diversity and candidates' performance in the 2005 general election. The research found equivalent male and female performance across all exercises and competences, refuting assumptions at the time that women's political style is less effective than men's, and showed that psychological characteristics are important for electoral performance [3.1]. This resulted in her developing assessment standards and procedures for prospective parliamentary candidates for both the Conservative Party (2002) and Liberal Democrat Party (2008) [3.1, 3.2].

To support the next stage of this work, Silvester received funding in 2008 and 2009 from the ESRC, Home Office, and IDeA (now Local Government Association; LGA) to investigate political mentoring and leadership development in local government. The LGA is the national membership body for the 339 local authorities in England and Wales working to improve the reputation and performance of local councils. The research conceptualised politicians as political workers and used a multisource Political Performance Questionnaire, developed following a qualitative competency analysis, eliciting behavioural indicators for good and poor political performance.

The empirical stage investigated shared latent performance constructs and tested hypothesised relationships between politician characteristics and received performance ratings. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of self- and received performance ratings revealed five latent factors: resilience, politicking, analytical skills, representing people, and relating to others [3.3, 3.4]. These results further validated the Political Skills Framework created by Silvester, published as a toolkit in 2013, which set out core skills for local councillors in England and Wales.

Post-2014 Research
The earlier research led Silvester to identify political work as an important, yet neglected phenomenon, intersecting psychology, management and political science. In July 2014 she hosted a one-day event at City, University of London (City) for eighty leading international academics, politicians (including the former Home Secretary Charles Clarke), and practitioners from organisations such as the Industry and Parliament Trust (IPT) and Operation Black Vote, to develop a broader understanding of the complex challenges of political work. Three themes emerged from the event, focused on political leadership, relating to performance, integrity, and more representative government [3.5].

MPs are supported in their parliamentary responsibilities by nearly 1,700 people, collectively known as House Staff, employed within departments of the House Service. As a direct result of the earlier event, Silvester was invited by the HOC and the Industry and Parliament Trust (IPT) to deliver a programme of MBA-style development sessions for senior House Staff. With Professor André Spicer, she designed a programme over six sessions, delivered with ten academics from City. Topics included leadership, organisational identity, industrial relations, resource management, collaboration working, and business sustainability.

The timing of these sessions (September 2014) was significant as the newly formed HOC Governance Committee was to undertake a review of governance. Silvester was asked to undertake a short investigation to understand existing working practices and propose recommendations for change. Working with Spicer, she conducted interviews with current and former senior House Staff and MPs. Their report found that the House Service operates in a plural and complex environment and made recommendations relating to governance, leadership, strategy, collaboration, culture, communication, change, and learning. Silvester and Spicer suggested that importing models of leadership from public or private sector organisations with relatively unitary goals would likely be problematic. The findings were submitted as written evidence to the Governance Committee's review and some recommendations were adopted by the Committee [3.6].

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

3.1 **Silvester, J**. & Dykes, C. (2007) Selecting political candidates: A longitudinal study of assessment centre performance and electoral success in the 2005 UK General Election. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 80, 11-25. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317906X156287

3.2 **Silvester, J.** (2012) Recruiting politicians: Introducing competency-based approval processes for prospective parliamentary candidates. Chapter 2 in A. Weinberg (ed.) *The Psychology of Political Leadership*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/452

3.3 **Silvester, J.,** Wyatt, M., & Randall, R. (2014) Politician personality, Machiavellianism and political skill as predictors of performance ratings in political roles. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 87, 258-279. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12038

3.4 Wyatt, M. & **Silvester, J.** (2018) Do voters get it right? A test of the ascription-actuality trait theory of leadership with political elites. *The Leadership Quarterly, 29(5),* 609-621. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.02.001 [pub online 15-Feb-2018].

3.5 **Silvester J.** (2014) Power, Personalities, and Principles. Discussions from a Cass Business School workshop on improving political leadership through cross-disciplinary research. Available at: https://www.cass.city.ac.uk/faculties-and-research/research/cass-knowledge/2014/november/power-personalities-and-principles-improving-political-leadership

3.6 **Silvester, J.** and Spicer, A. (2014). Leading a Legislature: A Report on Findings. Evidence submitted to the House of Commons Governance Committee by Cass Business School. Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmgovern/692/692.pdf

Peer reviewed journals:
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. British Psychological Society (5yr impact factor 2.652). *The Leadership Quarterly* Impact Factor 5.63 (5yr = 6.84); ranked 6th/82 in Applied Psychology.

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

This section describes continuing and extended impact of the political selection research reported in REF2014 (4.1, 4.2) and reports new impact from the post-2014 research investigating leadership in a legislature (4.3). Figure 1 below shows the impacts and timelines.
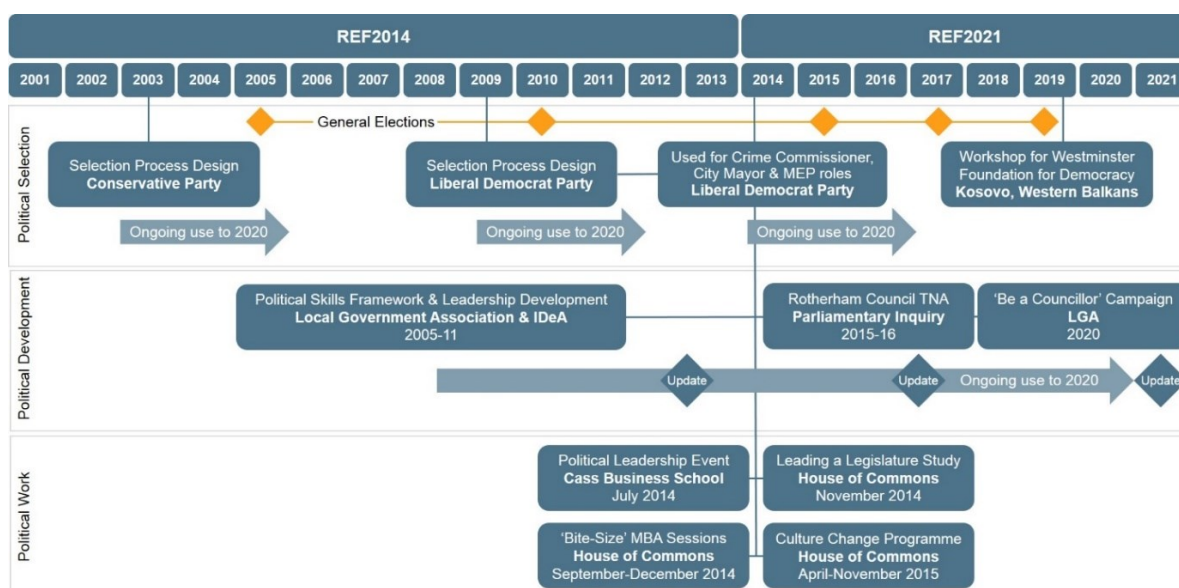

Figure 1 Continuing impact and new impact during REF2014 and REF2021

4.1 Political Candidate Selection: Continuing and extended impact since REF2014

Silvester's research-based assessment criteria and procedures have been used by the Conservative Party since 2002 [5.1] and the Liberal Democrats since 2009 [5.2] to approve approximately 400 candidates subsequently elected as first-time MPs in four general elections 2003-2017. Since 2012, the Liberal Democrats have extended use of the selection process to candidates for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, European Parliament, and major local government roles (i.e. City Mayors, Crime Commissioners) [5.2].

Regarding gender diversity, since Silvester's competencies and assessment process were introduced in 2002 as part of the Conservative Party's standard approval process for prospective parliamentary candidates, the number of Conservative women candidates has increased, with women MPs increasing from 8% to 24% between 2005 and 2019 [5.1]. Her work has influenced other researchers and, indirectly, HOC procedures, being cited in Professor Sarah Childs' 2016 report [5.3], which made recommendations for a more representative and inclusive HOC. Childs' report has been referenced in over 30 debates in both houses of Parliament [5.4] and influenced Dame Laura Cox's 2018 report into bullying in the HOC. In 2020, MPs voted for an independent panel to deal with bullying and harassment allegations against them.

Silvester's political selection research is starting to have international impact too. Since 1999, there have been frequent elections in post-conflict Kosovo and, in 2019, Silvester was commissioned by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the UK government body supporting democracy internationally, to write a report and deliver a workshop on 'Political Selection' for Kosovan political parties. Since then, the WFD Country Representative for Kosovo reports that in 2020 two of the main parties developed proposals to put in place Candidate Selection Processes. First, the Democratic Party of Kosovo relating to women candidates, then the current largest party, Vetevendosje [Self-Determination], *"asked WFD to initiate a support project to introduce the Candidate Selection Process within their political party"* [5.5].

4.2 Political Development, Local Government: Continuing impact since REF 2014

Selection and development go hand-in-hand in most places of work, yet until 2004 development for the 20,000 councillors in England and Wales was limited, with little evidence to support training needs analysis and design appropriate interventions. Silvester's Political Skills Framework identified six core skills: leadership, partnership working, communications, scrutiny and challenge, regulation and monitoring, and political understanding. Adopted by most of the 300+ local authorities and re-published twice as the Political Skills Toolkit, it is now integrated into the Local Government Association's sector-led Leadership Development Programme and revised [Member Charter](#) (2016; Element 2.2). Local election cycles since 2013 involved around 30,000 seats and the LGA's Head of Improvement writes:

> *"[Silvester's] work was particularly important, as many newly elected local councillors have little or no experience of working in politics"* and confirms it *"continues to underpin leadership, training and development work"* [5.6].

Since REF 2014, Silvester's political skills framework has also been used to address catastrophic failures in local governance. In 2015, following recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation, all elected members on Rotherham Metropolitan Council received a bespoke development programme and training needs analysis based on Silvester's framework [5.6].

4.3 Political Work in the House of Commons: Post-2014 research and impact

Since 2014, Professor Silvester's research on leadership in legislatures has achieved new impact by improving governance structures in the HOC and facilitating a unified House culture through their influence on the House Service Strategy. The House of Commons Governance Committee Report published in December 2014 [5.7] cited Silvester and Spicer's evidence three times (pp.11, 33, 34) and echoed their recommendations for more clarity around roles, an improved culture of stewardship, and more open and honest communication across the House Service. The evidence also contributed to a recommendation that *"structural changes*

will need to be underpinned by cultural change" (p.63). In January 2015, the Report was debated and agreed unanimously in the HOC Chamber, with the Management Board tasked with achieving culture change.

As a consequence of their research evidence, and building on the success of the MBA sessions, the HOC's Director of People Development invited Silvester and Spicer to run a two-day event for senior leaders from the House Service (April 2015), focussed on increasing awareness of organisational culture and leading people through culture change. Building on organisational psychology research, Silvester led activities designed to elicit leaders' perceptions and descriptors of the existing culture, generate behavioural indicators, and identify whether values were shared. These findings were shared at a meeting of all senior leaders, and discussed at the HOC Management Board in May 2015 [5.8, pp. 5-7).

Silvester and Spicer were then invited to collaborate with the HOC People and Strategy Group in designing and delivering a change programme for House Staff aimed at identifying and agreeing shared core values for a new unified House culture. The 'Join the Conversation' programme was attended by over 200 staff from all areas of the House Service and twenty MPs, Management Board members, and senior House Staff were interviewed.

Silvester synthesised the information to develop a new values framework and behavioural indicators [5.9]. An update for the HOC Executive in October 2015 by the Director of People Development reported that the project had:

> *"… received a positive response from staff, due to an inclusive process of consultation and engagement which we believe is vital to build ownership of the revised and elaborated values. [The] Executive Committee has a vital role to play in framing, endorsing and subsequently role modelling the values …"* [5.9].

The core values were published internally in November 2015, and departments and individuals were encouraged to apply them in business plans, performance reviews and day-to-day work. The values – for example, 'customer focus' – continue to underpin the 2016-21 House Service Strategy [5.10, p.11] and will be taken forward into the 2019-2025 Strategy.

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

5.1   Testimonial from Chairman of Candidates Committee, Conservative Party. (13.11.20).

5.2   Testimonial from President, Liberal Democrats. (02.10.20).

5.3   Childs, S. (2016) The Good Parliament Report Available at:
https://old.parliament.uk/business/news/2016/july/the-good-parliament-report-launched/

5.4   Hansard Record for debates mentioning The Good Parliament Report, 2016.

5.5   Testimonial from Country Representative for Kosovo, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (Balkans Division). (28.10.20).

5.6   Testimonial from Head of Improvement, Local Government Association. (23.10.20).

5.7   House of Commons Governance Committee (2014): House of Commons Governance Report

5.8   House of Commons Governance Office (2015): Report for the Management Board on the 2015-20 Parliament Strategy

5.9   Report from the Director of People for the House of Commons Executive Committee: Governance Report: Culture Change – Progress

5.10 House of Commons Service Strategy 2016-21