

<b>Institution:</b> University of Lincoln		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20 – Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Parliaments: Engaging with and Listening to Different Voices		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 - 2020		
<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>
BOCHEL Catherine BOCHEL Hugh	Associate Professor Professor of Public Policy	1 Sep 91 to date 19 Feb 90 to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 - 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) Research by Dr Catherine Bochel and Professor Hugh Bochel has changed the ways that the United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments engage with and listen to those outside the legislatures. It has influenced the operation of the e-petitions system introduced at Westminster in 2015, and procedures and practice in the selection of committee witnesses at the Scottish Parliament, enabling the two legislatures to hear from and be informed by a wider range of voices, contributing more diverse experiences to scrutiny and policy-making. The research is also having a wider influence, including on the introduction of an e-petitions system in the Parliament of Canada and witness diversity monitoring in the US House of Representatives.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) Dr Catherine Bochel and Professor Hugh Bochel, of the ParliLinc research centre, have produced a significant body of work over time on the policy process, including participation and gender and representation [e.g. 3.1, 3.4]. In recent years, aspects of that research have developed further. This has included applying some of the core underpinning ideas to examining ways in which elected bodies in the UK can engage with, hear and learn from a wider variety of voices drawn from across society [e.g. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5]. That work has highlighted, in particular, the benefits to legislatures of hearing from more diverse perspectives and the importance of fair processes associated with that.</p> <p>Building on their previous work, particularly around participation and the policy process, Dr Bochel's research on petitions systems, from 2009, was initially funded by the British Academy. It included interviews with petitioners, committee clerks and members of elected bodies, drawn from the Westminster Parliament, the devolved legislatures and local authorities. In it, she distinguished between 'descriptive' systems, which simply accept and record petitions, and 'substantive' systems, where the emphasis is on the content of the petitions, and which are able to act upon them, with the latter therefore having the potential to give some petitioners more opportunity to engage further with the political system, and in some instances to increase the prospect of influencing social policies [3.6]. She also used key characteristics of procedural justice to develop a framework for measuring their use in petitions systems [3.6], and argued that they could be used to underpin the workings of such systems. She identified a number of positive features of a petitions system, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a petitions committee to consider petitions;</li> <li>• The ability to use a variety of forms of response, and not simply being driven by particular signature thresholds;</li> <li>• Providing the opportunity for petitioners to engage with the political system, and potentially to learn more about it;</li> <li>• Integrating the petitions system into the broader workings of the elected body.</li> </ul>		

Importantly, this work identified weaknesses in the petitions system established by the Coalition government in 2011 [3.2, 3.6]. For most participants the system afforded an opportunity to air their views, but with little or no real participation or empowerment. The voices of many petitioners therefore risked being automatically excluded from further consideration by the petitions system and thus by Parliament, rather than potentially allowing citizens to 'reach in' to democratic political systems [e.g. 3.4]. In addition, petitioners might feel that their participation was not valued, risking disillusionment, and potentially undermining not only the petitions systems but wider perceptions of the political system. This research was recognised, and further work facilitated, by Dr Bochel securing a three-year (2016-19) House of Commons Academic Fellowship, using procedural justice to explore broader aspects of Parliament's engagement with the public.

In 2017, Professor Bochel was appointed as the Scottish Parliament's first Academic Fellow following an initial pilot scheme. Building on his previous research with Dr Bochel around the policy process, participation and representation, he was asked to undertake research on the diversity, or otherwise, of witnesses to the Parliament's committees, an issue identified in the legacy report of the Conveners Group for Session 4, and to produce a report and recommendations for action. He worked closely with Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) staff. The research involved interviews with MSPs and parliamentary officials undertaken by him, and the collation of a database of around 4,500 witnesses for the 1999/2000, 2015/16 and 2016/17 parliamentary years by SPICe (then expanded by Professor Bochel to cover more than 8,000 witness appearances with the addition of the 2017/18, 2018/19 and subsequently the 2019/20 years). The project also drew on a variety of literatures, including around representation, policy making and evaluation, participation and legitimacy.

The report was published by SPICe in February 2018 [3.5]. It highlighted, for example, that: there are a variety of potential benefits to legislatures in hearing from a greater diversity of voices, including witnesses to committees; while the proportion of witnesses that were female had increased since the Parliament's creation in 1999, of around two thousand witnesses each year three-fifths were male; there were significant variations in the gender balance of witnesses across committees; and that while committees were already making efforts to hear from a wider range of voices, that was often in 'informal' ways that were less well recorded. The report made a number of recommendations, including that the Parliament should:

- provide guidance for committees on calls for evidence and witness selection, including highlighting the benefits associated with hearing from a wider range of voices;
- provide guidance to organisations that are providing witnesses;
- improve support for first-time witnesses and provision of feedback to witnesses;
- record the gender (and potentially other protected characteristics) of witnesses;
- better record informal meetings and events (which often involve hard-to-reach and more vulnerable groups) in inquiry reports, including to help demonstrate that they are valued.

The research has also underpinned academic outputs in *Social Policy and Society* [3.7] and *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, and further work on committee witnesses.

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

- 3.1 Bochel, C and Bochel, H. (2008) 'Women "Leaders" in Local Government in the UK', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 426-441. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsn010>
- 3.2 Bochel, C. (2012) 'Petitions: Different Dimensions of Voice and Influence in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales' *Social Policy and Administration*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 142-160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2011.00828.x>
- 3.3 Bochel, C. (2016) 'Process Matters: Petitions Systems in Britain's Legislatures', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 368-384. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2016.1202644>

- 3.4 Bochel, C. and Bochel, H. (2017), 'Reaching in? The potential for e-petitions in local government in the UK', *Information, Communication and Society*, vol 20, no. 5, pp. 683-699. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1203455>
- 3.5 Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2018) *Committee Witnesses: Gender and Representation*, Scottish Parliament Information Centre, Edinburgh. <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2018/2/27/Committee-witnesses--gender-and-representation>
- 3.6 Bochel, C. (2013) 'Petitions Systems: Contributing to Representative Democracy?', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 4, pp. 798-815. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/pa/gss005>
- 3.7 Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2019) 'A Place at Table? Parliamentary Committees, Witnesses and the Scrutiny of Government Actions and Legislation', *Social Policy and Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1474746418000490>

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

The key impacts of the research have been in influencing changes in the processes and practices of the Westminster and Scottish parliaments, and how they engage with and listen to a more diverse range of external voices. In addition, the research has influenced developments in the Parliament of Canada and the US House of Representatives.

##### ***A new e-petitions system in the House of Commons***

In March 2013, Dr Bochel gave written and oral evidence on her research on petitions systems to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. That was cited extensively in its report, *Revisiting Rebuilding the House: The Impact of the Wright Reforms*, which recommended that a new system be established for public petitions [Supplied as **5.1a**, **5.1b** for reference]. In May 2014 the House agreed to support a collaborative petitions system with the government. Her research then had a significant impact on the establishment of the new system:

- Dr Bochel was invited to give oral evidence to the Procedure Committee for its inquiry, 'E-petitions: A Collaborative System', 25 June 2014.
- The Committee accepted several of her recommendations, including, crucially, that a new Petitions Committee be established, and that there be a wider range of more flexible responses to petitions. The House approved the report, and, following Dr Bochel's recommendations to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, the new committee was allowed, for example, to ask for further information from relevant organisations, invite petitioners to give oral evidence, or undertake an inquiry into the topic [**5.2a**, **5.2b**].
- The Clerk to the new Petitions Committee then asked Dr Bochel to 'advise the Committee as it thinks about how to address the task ahead of it'. She attended meetings with the clerk and also provided a written statement of recommendations which were '... enormously helpful' [**5.3a**, **5.3b**].
- The Committee adopted several of these recommendations, for example, on the wording of statements for its new website about what petitioners can and cannot achieve, and for the purpose of the system to be communicated to petitioners by a variety of means, including a short video. A further email from the clerk noted that the Committee had launched a consultation on its working methods and stated, 'You will recognise some of your recommendations in there (sometimes adapted to fit the framework the House has given us)' [**5.3c**].

The Chair of the new Petitions Committee acknowledged Dr Bochel's contribution [**5.3d**], with the significant influence of her work further underlined by the Clerk to the Petitions Committee, who wrote, '*... your research has played, and continues to play, a hugely important role in informing the establishment of the UK Government and Parliament petitions system ... your evidence to the [Procedure] Committee assisted in the development of the proposals that were finally implemented ... I am hugely indebted to your work on the concept of "procedural justice" in shaping my thinking about how a petitions system should work in practice. It has underpinned the development of a framework for the new petitions system and the working methods of the Petitions Committee*' [**5.3e**]. The Clerk of Committees also recognised Dr Bochel's contribution,

stating that ‘... your evidence to the Procedure Committee helped it in its development of the framework for the new petitions system ... Your work continued in your assistance to the Clerk of the new Petitions Committee in developing its working methods’ [5.3f].

### **Improving diversity and monitoring of committee witnesses in the Scottish Parliament**

Professor Bochel’s Academic Fellowship addressed the Scottish Parliament’s concern with the characteristics of witnesses to its committees. The Parliament’s Presiding Officer described his report [3.5] as, ‘excellent ... You have identified the issues which shape which witnesses are called and more importantly, what we can do about it’ [5.4]. Following discussion by the Conveners Group [5.5a-d], an Action Plan was approved in May 2018, with timescales, lead offices and main target groups identified [5.5e, 5.5f]. The Head of Committees and Outreach noted that the research ‘has allowed us to establish a baseline and to develop an action plan to increase the diversity of those giving evidence to committees’ [5.5g]. Changes arising from the work have included:

- New ‘Witness Diversity Committee Clerk Guidance’, including highlighting the benefits of hearing more diverse voices [5.6a];
- New guidance for organisations providing witnesses, encouraging them to consider diversity when choosing witnesses [5.6b];
- The Equalities and Human Rights Committee was given responsibility for annual scrutiny of witness diversity [5.6d, 5.6e], and the Conveners Group also considers the information;
- Piloting the collection of data on the protected characteristics of witnesses, with a comprehensive new survey, planned to be introduced from May 2020, delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic [5.6c]. Professor Bochel was asked to continue to provide data and analysis on witnesses to the Parliament for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 years [5.6d, 5.6e];
- Feeding into other areas of the Parliament’s activities, such as the aim in the new public engagement strategy for 2018 that, ‘Members be able to hear a more diverse set of views and evidence to inform their scrutiny and legislating work’, and the strategy for the new Committee Engagement Unit for 2018-21 including working with pilot committees ‘to help them identify a diversity strategy for their area and identify learning for other committees’;

Following the implementation of the Action Plan, the proportion of female witnesses increased steadily from 38 per cent in 2016-17 to 43 per cent in 2019-20. In July 2020, the Head of Committees and Outreach wrote to Bochel, ‘We couldn’t have got to this stage without you and it’s making such a positive difference’ [5.7].

Impact has also occurred in the House of Commons. A Liaison Committee report in 2018 on the gender diversity of witnesses highlighted Bochel’s research and recommendations for the Scottish Parliament (taking up one of the report’s substantive fourteen pages), noting that these were being considered for the Commons. It set a target of at least 40 per cent of ‘discretionary’ witnesses for select committees being female, and that there should not generally be all-male panels of witnesses [5.8a]. Subsequent figures showed that 39 per cent of discretionary witnesses in 2017-19 were female, up from 32 per cent in 2016-17. The research has also been used in internal training [5.8b] and Professor Bochel has been involved in discussions about a witness diversity survey, although while a pilot was approved it was then delayed due to Covid-19. Also, following discussions with Professor Bochel, in 2019 the Public Bill Office published data on public bill committee witnesses in the Sessional Returns for the first time [5.8b].

### **Influence on legislatures beyond the UK**

The research has also had impacts on the processes of legislatures beyond the UK. For example, in Canada, when Kennedy Stewart MP introduced a motion to bring e-petitions to the Parliament of Canada, he drew on Dr Bochel’s research [e.g. 5.9a, 5.9b], and she subsequently gave oral evidence to a committee in support of it [5.9c]. The proposal was agreed [5.9d] and the system introduced in 2016, with Kennedy Stuart writing that ‘Both the committee and I found



your insights invaluable' [5.9e]. The OECD also commended the Scottish Parliament work and recommendations in a report on gender equality in Canada [5.10f].

In December 2019 the US Congressional Hispanic Caucus approached Professor Bochel about principles and practice with regard to their desire to monitor witness diversity in the House of Representatives. This was introduced as a pilot from January 2020 [5.10a], with his advice, drawing on his research on the Scottish Parliament, being seen as 'So helpful' [5.10b]. During 2020, the Tri-Caucus sought to have the monitoring of witnesses institutionalised, using Bochel's research to '*fortify our own argument with colleagues across Capitol Hill*', to '*anticipate committees' challenges*', and to learn best practice [5.10c], with the result that 2020 the new *Rules for the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress*, adopted in late 2020, included requiring 'the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to develop a system, which the House will implement, to ensure that the House tracks the diversity of witnesses as a next step in the effort to increase witness diversity' [5.10d, page 33], with this system to be introduced by the end of July 2021. In December 2020 the Policy Coordinator for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus wrote that Bochel's 'research and expertise has been valuable every step of the way' [5.10c].

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

- 5.1 a. Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Revisiting Rebuilding the House: the impact of the Wright reforms, Volume I, report and oral evidence, pp.38-41. Transcript of oral evidence, Ev 12- 16; 28-29; b. Volume II, written evidence, Ev w8-10.
- 5.2 a. House of Commons Procedure Committee, E-petitions: a collaborative system, Third Report of Session 2014-15, pp.9, 18-19; b. Oral evidence (transcript) to House of Commons Procedure Committee, June 2014 (pp. 3-5, 8, 10-12, 13-15, 18).
- 5.3 a. Suggestions for the new Petitions Committee, June 2015; b. Clerk to Petitions Committee email, June 2015; c. Emails from Clerk of the Petitions Committee; d. Letter from Chair of Petitions Committee; e. Email from the Clerk to the Petitions Committee; f. Letter from the Clerk of Committees, House of Commons.
- 5.4 Email from Presiding Officer, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.5 a. Papers for and b. Minutes of Conveners Group, January 2018; c. Papers for and d. Minutes of Conveners Group, February 2018; e. Papers for and f. Minutes of Conveners Group, May 2018; g. Letter from Head of Committees and Outreach and Clerk to the Conveners Group, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.6 a. 'Witness diversity committee clerk guidance'; b. 'Witness diversity – guidance for external organisations'; c. Email from Senior Researcher, Scottish Parliament; d. Papers for and e. Minutes of Equalities and Human Rights Committee meeting, November 2019.
- 5.7 Letter from Head of Committees and Outreach, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.8 a. Liaison Committee Report on *Witness gender diversity*; b. Emails from specialist advisers to the House of Commons Women and Equality select committee and emails from Clerk of Legislation and committee specialist to the Women and Equalities Committee.
- 5.9 a. Stewart, K., Cuddy, A. and Silongan, M. 'Electronic Petitions: A Proposal to Enhance Democratic Participation', *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Autumn 2013, No. 1. pp. 9-13; b. Stewart, K. (2014) *Modernizing Petitions in Canada: Proposal for an electronic petitioning system*, House of Commons, Canada, November 2014; c. Evidence to Procedure and House Affairs Committee of the Canadian Parliament, November 2014; d. Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of the House of Commons, Canada, 33rd report, 26 02 2015 (see pp. 2-3); e. Letter from Kennedy Stewart MP; f. OECD (2018) *Gender Equality in Canada*.
- 5.10 a. Press release on witness diversity monitoring initiative in the House of Representatives; b. email from Policy Coordinator, Congressional Hispanic Caucus; c. letter from Policy Coordinator, Congressional Hispanic Caucus; d. US House of Representatives, Rules for the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, p.33.