

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 19) Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Implementing Gender Sensitive Reforms in Parliaments: creating a more diverse and inclusive UK Parliament		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 - 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sarah Childs	Professor of Politics and Gender	09/2003 - 08/2017
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact

Childs published *The Good Parliament* Report in 2016, following a 6-month House of Commons secondment. With its 40+ recommendations, the Report has driven extensive and unprecedented institutional change: **(i) the adoption of new gender and diversity sensitive formal parliamentary rules and practices**, including a permanent change to the House of Commons Standing Orders regarding proxy voting; **(ii) the institutionalization of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) practices** at Westminster via the establishment of: the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion, the Women and Equalities Committee, and a 'Gender Sensitive' audit of both Houses; and by **(iii) informing and supporting GSP reform and adoption** in UK devolved and other national parliaments worldwide.

2. Underpinning research

Across the globe, national and international parliaments face urgent challenges regarding representativeness, inclusivity and accountability, which negatively impact institutional effectiveness and legitimacy. Notably, in 2019, only one in four parliamentary seats were held by women in parliaments worldwide. In order to improve representation and inclusion in the UK Parliament, Prof Childs was seconded to the House of Commons in 2015 [v], hosted by the Speaker, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP, to write *The Good Parliament Report* (TGP). TGP [3.1] distils Childs' research on women's political representation, undertaken at the University of Bristol. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, Childs has extensively documented the causes and consequences of women's under-representation in British politics, including among the Labour and Conservative parties; examined supply and demand-side interventions to increase women's presence in politics; and analysed the dynamics of gendered political institutions, documenting how women representatives inhabit masculinized parliaments and have to negotiate overt and covert institutional resistance.

(1) Gendered Political Parties and Parliaments

Childs' research has shed light on the gendered nature of political institutions such as political parties and Parliaments and the need for gender sensitive reforms. More specifically, she has shown that **political parties** in the UK act as gatekeepers to women's political recruitment [3.2] [3.3]. Women's under-representation at Westminster largely reflects party 'demand' for women candidates as well as variability in the adoption by political parties of equality rhetoric, promotion measures, and guarantees such as quotas. For instance, Childs' analysis of the effectiveness of Labour's All Women Shortlists [3.2] prompted specific recommendations (R) in TGP [3.1] for quotas (R9, 15) and the enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 (R22, 24), which provides for publication and monitoring of candidate diversity data. Consideration of the symbolic

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as well as substantive representation linked to women's political presence [3.2] [3.3] drove multiple recommendations in *TGP* to political parties (R43), the House of Commons Commission (R17-21) and the Commons Reference Group (R6-12).

Regarding the gendered nature of the **UK House of Commons**, Childs' research has shown that mothers are significantly under-represented. Surveys of MPs undertaken with Campbell (Birkbeck, University of London), first established [3.4], and then showed a closing, of the 'motherhood gap' in MPs' parenting, prompting recognition of the additional obstacles facing the mother politician. The research called for a reconfiguration of political life to accommodate those who care and generated reforms in *TGP* to make Parliament family-friendly, including maternity leave and breastfeeding (R12).

(2) Institutionalizing Change through Gender Sensitive Parliaments

Childs' research into women's political representation has also established that regulation as well as formal and informal institutions are key in promoting sustainable gender sensitive reforms. Her study of feminization in the Labour and Conservative parties [ii] [iii] [iv], alongside reflections on party regulation and intra-party democracy [3.3] [3.6], suggested that where institutions are saturated by gender insensitivity, reform needs to be comprehensive and systematic; hence *TGP*'s 'shopping bag' of reforms approach. The study of women's parliamentary friendships [i] [3.4] also showed how, as an informal institution, this constituted a site and actor of feminization, and an important political and personal resource. Together these studies strongly influenced *TGP*'s approach and reforms by identifying actors, institutions and moments that might be more or less conducive to feminist change. Specific recommendations in *TGP* focused on institutionalization – embedding the commitment to diversity in the everyday workings of the Parliament – and included the initiation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Gender Sensitive Parliament audit (R5) and, critically, underpinned the recommendation to establish a new group of MPs, the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion. This body of research also informed Childs' impact efforts aimed at disseminating GSP practices beyond Westminster.

3. References to the research

- [3.1] Childs S. (2016) [The Good Parliament Report](#), (Bristol: University of Bristol).
- [3.2] Childs S. (2004) *New Labour's Women MPs*, London, Routledge.
- [3.3] Childs S. (2008). *Women and British Party Politics*, London Routledge.
- [3.4] Campbell R & Childs S. (2014). Parents in Parliament: 'Where's Mum?', *Political Quarterly*, 85, 4. DOI:[10.1111/1467-923X.12092](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12092)
- [3.5] Childs S. (2013). Negotiating Gendered Institutions: Women's Parliamentary Friendships, *Politics and Gender*, 9(2), 127-51. DOI:[10.1017/S1743923X13000019](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X13000019)
- [3.6] Childs S. (2013). In the Absence of Electoral Sex Quotas: Regulating Political Parties for Women's Representation, *Representation* 49(4),401-23. DOI:[10.1080/00344893.2013.850320](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2013.850320)

Research grants

- [i] Rai S (PI) University of Warwick, (Childs S (CI)). Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament, Leverhulme Trust Programme Grant, 2007 - 2011, GBP875,964
- [ii] Childs S. [Gender and the Conservative Party](#), ESRC, 2007 - 2010, GBP476,174
- [iii] Childs S. [Feminizing Politics and Power in the UK: Access, Voice and Accountability](#), ESRC Seminar Series, 2014 – 2017, GBP30,371
- [iv] Childs S. The PLP Women's Committee, The British Academy, 2014, GBP10,000
- [v] Childs S. Gender Sensitive Parliaments, ESRC Impact Acceleration Award - Secondment to House of Commons, 2015 - 2016, GBP20,000

4. Details of the impact

The Good Parliament Report (TGP) [3.1], launched by Mr Speaker in July 2016, documented the House of Commons' diversity insensitivities and set out a comprehensive reform agenda, with 43 formal recommendations. In the words of Rt Hon John Bercow, *TGP* is 'A superb, evidence-led, ground-breaking report which began to shift the dial'; 'the beauty of it was that Sarah [...] captured the essence of our problem'; 'Sarah had ideas, offered evidence, forged links across the House and, through ability and application, made a real difference' [5.1]. Eighteen recommendations, which took the form of new or revised parliamentary rules and revisions to established practices, have since been implemented: R1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 28, 29, 40, 41, plus one on breastfeeding. As summarised by Bercow, 'the changes that took place to make the Commons more diversity sensitive [...] represent truly remarkable progress in a very small c conservative institution' [5.1].

(i) Adoption of Gender and Diversity Sensitive Parliament Practices in the UK Parliament

A More Diverse and Inclusive Parliament

The implementation of *TGP* recommendations has created a more diverse and inclusive experience for MPs in the House. For example, the new **dress code** (R16) set out in the updated 'Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House' (2018) revises the norms for men to dress more formally than women, and to reflect 'western' clothing [5.2]. Changes to the 'ten-year dead' rule, whereby only those dead for a decade are represented in **artworks** in the Palace (R40), ensures that portraits of newer MPs – those more likely to be female and BAME – will now hang in the Palace [5.2]. There is also an ongoing commitment to ensure the artwork is more diverse (R41) [5.2]. The **re-design for double-sided parliamentary ID passes** (R20), reduces micro-aggressions against young, BAME and women politicians [5.2].

With regard to other House rules, a change has been introduced regarding **select committee witnesses** to ensure a more gender balanced representation (R14), alongside sustained and substantial administrative efforts to monitor and improve outcomes (R28) [5.2]. The House of Commons Witness gender diversity report (2018) points to the *TGP* as prompting renewed efforts to increase and monitor witness diversity and recommends that 'a panel of three or more witnesses should normally include at least one woman' [5.3]. Measures to increase diversity of speakers, especially from under-engaged academic groups, have also been put in place by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology [5.2].

Mother and Family Friendly Reforms

The *TGP* recognized that given the nature of parliamentary hours, MPs would often be debating and voting whilst also caring for babies and small children; it also called attention to the failure to provide for maternity and paternity leave for MPs. *TGP*'s implementation led to a review of **crèche facilities**, following which an emergency childcare service was piloted (R13) [5.2]. In response to the recommendations to the *TGP*, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority also introduced changes to improve financial support for MPs with dependants [5.4]. Following R3, the Commons Reference Group endorsed Mr Speaker's approach to **allow children up to the age of five in the division lobbies** [5.2]. In September 2018, Mr Speaker permitted Jo Swinson MP to **bring her baby son into a debate**; and in December 2019 three women MPs – Creasy, Reeves and Badenoch – **brought babies to their 'swearing in'**. In February 2020, the new Speaker announced that he would permit **MP breastfeeding** [5.5].

Arguably, the most significant reform has been **the introduction of proxy voting for MPs on babyleave** (R12) – a change to the Commons' Standing Order which was made permanent in

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September 2020. It followed coordinated efforts by the Commons Reference Group, advised by Childs, and working with the 'mother of the House', Harriet Harman, which led to the Commons to adopt a resolution in its favour; a Procedure Committee implementation Report; a further non-voteable debate; and its passage without division in January 2019 [5.1]. According to Bercow, *'This is an historic change to the practices of the Commons, and it would not yet have happened without the leadership of Sarah Childs, I am very clear about that'* [5.1]. Evidence submitted to the Procedure Committee's review included Ellie Reeves MP stating that she would not have had a second baby without proxy voting [5.4]. Darren Jones MP claims that The EU Withdrawal (No 5) Bill (aka Cooper-Letwin bill), passed by a single vote (313 - 312), was due to his proxy [5.6].

(ii) Institutionalization of Gender Sensitive Parliament change in the UK Parliament

Institutionalization of GSP was designed into *TGP* through: **(1) linking each recommendation to particular individuals or institutions**, reflecting the dispersed nature of power in the Commons; and **(2) the creation of new institutions**. Designed as a key institutional driver of *TGP*, the **Commons Reference Group (CRG)** on Representation and Inclusion was established by Mr Speaker following a recommendation by Childs, who advised the group throughout [5.1]. Between 2016-18 the Group played a key role in prioritizing recommendations and undertaking various activities to ensure adoption [5.2]. For instance, in order to address the gender insensitive and hierarchical culture of the House (R1), and as part of Parliament's ongoing response to sexual harassment and bullying, the CRG recommended that *'the new Code of Behaviour explicitly discourage behaviour which silences or undermines'*. This is now reflected in the updated 'Rules of Behaviour and Courtesies' and is mentioned in the Speaker's statement made at the start of each session [5.2]. The Reference Group also played a key role in the successful efforts to make **the Women and Equalities Committee (WEC)** permanent by passing a motion of the House (R25). The WEC subsequently undertook formal Inquiries into women's political representation in the House of Commons, including evidence from Childs [5.7]. Another step in the institutionalisation of GSP was the completion of **the Inter-Parliamentary Union's GSP Audit** (R5) of both Houses of Parliament in 2018, the first of its kind in an established democracy [5.1] [5.4]. According to, the Manager of the Gender Partnership Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union, *'Sarah's very good knowledge of the IPU's GSP approach, her strong advocacy towards implementation of the recommendation of TGP, her connections with the Speaker and other members of influence in the UK Parliament paved the way to make the conduct of the Audit possible.'* [5.4].

The CRG, working with WEC, not only led on initiating gender and diversity sensitive reforms, but has also held other institutional actors named in *TGP* to account. As part of the IPU Audit [5.4], the Reference Group Clerk oversaw preparations by both Houses and worked with the IPU Gender Director, and MPs, Lords and staff during the Audit. The WEC, whose Chair Maria Miller was also a key member of CRG, undertook a follow-up inquiry in 2019 to chart progress from the 2018 IPU GSP audit [5.2]. This process generated a Response to the Audit from the House of Commons Commission and the House of Lords Commission in June 2019; and both institutions expressed their continuing commitment to future Audits [5.2].

(iii) Gender Sensitive Parliaments in devolved and international governments

TGP has also had an impact beyond the UK Parliament. Childs gave evidence and commented on the draft report of the Commission on Parliamentary Reform for the **Scottish Parliament**, with the *TGP* cited in the report on gender and representation of witnesses, which advocates for similar reforms to the UK's. The Scottish Parliament recognised that *'[i]n relation to diversity, and gender in particular, The Good Parliament report, by Childs, has been an important influence'* [5.8]. Childs'

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impact has also centred on her formal membership, on a job-share basis with Rosie Campbell, of the Expert Panel on the **National Assembly for Wales (NAfW)** [5.9]. Its Chair states, *'without doubt, Prof Childs' work with legislatures elsewhere, as well as the comparative conclusions that she was able to draw, solidified our specific recommendations on quotas and job share.'* [5.9] Moreover, *TGP* had direct impact on the **States Assembly of Jersey** to make it *'more representative of the community it represents'*, including the establishment of *'a Diversity Forum, made up of States Members'*, which undertook a GSP audit and *'a recent paper on initiatives to improve candidate diversity, approved by the Privileges and Procedures Committee in October 2020'* [5.10]. According to the Deputy Greffier (clerk to the legislature), *'I firmly believe that Professor Childs' active involvement from these early stages [...] was pivotal in gaining support [...] across the political spectrum for the aim of working towards a gender-sensitive parliament'* [5.10].

Following its publication Childs was asked to present *TGP* internationally to Alberta State legislature, Catalunya, Finland, Jersey, and New Zealand Parliaments. In this way, Childs has supported other academics and parliamentary staff's GSP efforts (Kantola, Finland and EU; Ashe, Canada; Verge, Catalunya). She also met with Speakers (Canada 2016, Iceland 2016) and Leaders of international Parliaments (Canada 2018) to discuss recommendations from *TGP*, and gave evidence to parliamentary inquiries (Canada 2018). *TGP* drove Childs' authoring of the 2020 GSP Commonwealth Parliamentarian Association GSP guidelines, and (with Palmieri) the UN Women GSP Covid-19 Primer & Checklist.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [5.1] Testimonial - Rt Hon John Bercow, former Speaker of the House of Commons (2020).
- [5.2] UK Parliament (2019). Gender Sensitive Parliament (House of Commons) inquiry: [Written submission from the House of Commons Service Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group \(GSP0016\)](#)
- [5.3] House of Commons Liaison Committee (2018). [Witness gender diversity: next steps for select committees](#)
- [5.4] i) IPU (2020). Testimonial – Manager, Gender Partnership Programme - regarding the ii) [UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018](#); including written evidence submitted by iii) Ellie Reeves MP (GSP0015); and iv) the Independent Standards Parliamentary Authority (GSP008)
- [5.5] Politics Home (2020). [Speaker Lindsay Hoyle gives green light for female MPs to breastfeed in Commons chamber](#)
- [5.6] Bristol Live (2019). [Bristol MP helped stop no-deal Brexit – and he wasn't even in Parliament](#)
- [5.7] i) Women and Equalities Committee (2016). Inquiry: Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election; and ii) House of Commons (2017). Debate Pack: Barriers for women in standing for Parliament
- [5.8] i) The Scottish Parliament, SPICe Briefing (2018). [Committee witnesses: gender and representation](#); and ii) Commission on Parliamentary Reform (2017). [Report on the Scottish Parliament](#)
- [5.9] i) Cardiff University (2020). Testimonial - Chair of Assembly (now Senedd) Expert Panel on Electoral Reform *that produced*, ii) National Assembly for Wales (2017). [A Parliament that works for Wales](#)
- [5.10] i) States of Jersey (2020). Testimonial - Greffier and Deputy and ii) States of Jersey (2019). [States Assembly Gender Audit: Diversity Forum Report](#)