

Institution: The University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Changing how parliaments incorporate public engagement		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2019		
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:
Cristina Leston-Bandeira	Professor of Politics	October 2015 - current
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2015 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Professor Leston-Bandeira's research has changed the thinking of UK and international parliamentary officials on developing and implementing public engagement practices within their respective legislatures. In the UK, Leston-Bandeira's research has significantly influenced key elements of House of Commons public engagement practice, specifically in making its e-petitions system more effective. Internationally, her research has informed and guided the parliaments of Australia, Brazil and Portugal on how to design and reform their public engagement efforts to make them more effective, more citizen-led, and better positioned to shape parliamentary decisions. This has helped address the critical challenge of acute mistrust of politics in contemporary democracies.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Trust in political institutions in western democracies has been in decline over the last few decades, with only 19% in the UK saying they trust Parliament in 2019 [1]. Faced with rising levels of political disaffection, parliaments have become more pro-active in developing ways of engaging with the public. However, this has been a slow and inconsistent process. Professor Leston-Bandeira has researched this development, identifying how specific characteristics of parliamentary institutions influence the effectiveness of public engagement activities.</p> <p>The discipline of legislative studies has traditionally focused on the relationship between parliament and government, neglecting parliaments' relationship with citizens. Leston-Bandeira made a significant contribution in shifting this focus toward research on parliamentary public engagement (PPE). Through comparative research across different legislatures [1], she has examined specific forms of public engagement that have become particularly popular with parliaments, such as digital engagement and the use of e-petitions. Her findings in this area can be summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of a systemic 'institutional representation' of parliament, characterised by a collective and abstract style of representation, which constrains the practices of PPE [1]; • Establishment of the importance of symbolic representation (i.e. where representation is embodied in symbols, such as a building, rather than political messages) in the way the public develops connections to the parliamentary institution, and through which public engagement can act [1,3,4]; • Identification of the importance of integrating the activity of public engagement with actual parliamentary business rather than developing it separately [2,4,5]; • Evaluation of what makes for effective PPE, namely that it should be issue-based, go where the people are, and use a multiplicity of channels of communication and methods [2,4,5]. <p>Leston-Bandeira's research identified how the structures and processes of parliament – what she calls 'institutional representation' – inhibit implementation of public engagement activities. Parliaments are collective institutions lacking a single voice that speaks for the institution [1,3]. They serve multiple agendas of different actors, often in conflict with each other and the institution itself. Moreover, parliaments are highly visible institutions accountable to the public. The combination of these characteristics hinders organisational decision-making, rendering</p>		

parliaments particularly cumbersome, slow and risk-averse institutions; all of which are detrimental to the development of public engagement, which requires innovative, quick and flexible decision-making processes. Leston-Bandeira's research into parliamentary initiatives implementing public engagement has shown them to be led often by procedural objectives, such as the formal process to consider a bill, rather than engagement-oriented objectives, such as listening to the public's views [2,4-6]. The research has outlined that PPE relies mainly on the input from parliamentary officials, rather than politicians, and *avoids* politics [1-3], which explains why symbolic representation has become a key vehicle for facilitating engagement between legislatures and the public. Her co-developed research with the UK House of Commons Petitions Committee provided further evidence of the value of integrating public engagement with parliamentary business and focusing on the public rather than parliamentary processes [4-6].

Leston-Bandeira's analysis of specific public engagement activities, such as e-petitions [4-6] and the integration of the public's voice into the legislative process [2], has enabled a better understanding of how PPE can become more effective. The research stresses the importance of thinking carefully about the parliamentary processes in place and avoiding the pitfalls of developing public engagement as an add-on. It also shows that the public engages with parliament on issues that matter to them, rather than because of a generic desire to engage with democracy [2,4,5]. This implies an approach to public engagement focused on the public and their concerns, rather than on parliament and its processes, as well as one that integrates the public's input into parliamentary business, rather than as a parallel activity.

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

- [1] Judge, D. and C. Leston-Bandeira. (2018), 'The institutional representation of parliament', *Political Studies*, 66 (1), pp.154-172: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717706901>.
- [2] Leston-Bandeira, C. and L. Thompson (2017), 'Integrating the view of the public into the formal legislative process: public reading stage in the UK House of Commons', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 23 (4), pp. 508-528: <http://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2017.1394736>.
- [3] Leston-Bandeira, C. (2016), 'Why symbolic representation frames PPE', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18 (2), pp. 498-516: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1369148115615029>.
- [4] Leston-Bandeira, C. (2017), *An evaluation of the UK Parliament's e-petitions system*. Final report of Impact Acceleration Account Knowledge Exchange Fellowship, for the House of Commons Committee Service – Petitions Committee. Available on request.
- [5] Asher, M., C. Leston-Bandeira and V. Spaiser (2019), 'Do parliamentary debates of e-petitions enhance public engagement with parliament? An analysis of Twitter conversations', *Policy & Internet*, 11 (2), pp.149-171: <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.194>.
- [6] Leston-Bandeira, C. (2019), 'Parliamentary petitions and public engagement: An empirical analysis of the role of e-petitions', *Policy & Politics*, 47 (3), pp.415-436: <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557319X15579230420117>.

Associated grants:

- [a] British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Research Grant, 2015-16: 'Truly engaging citizens with the parliamentary process? An evaluation of public reading stage in the House of Commons', (GBP8,011, SG141934). Leston-Bandeira, C. (with L. Thompson, University of Manchester).
- [b] ESRC Impact Acceleration Account Knowledge Exchange Fellowship 2016-17: 'The Petitions Committee: developing a new style of public engagement', (GBP9,545). Leston-Bandeira, C.
- [c] AHRC GCRF (Global Challenges Research Fund) Area Focused Network Plus Grant 2017-20: 'Deepening democracy in extremely politically fragile countries: networking for historical, cultural and arts research on parliaments and people', (GBP1,999,999.79, AH/R005435/1) Leston-Bandeira, C. (CoI) (with E. Crewe (PI), SOAS).

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

Leston-Bandeira's research has (i) altered parliamentary officials' understanding of public engagement in Australia, Brazil, Portugal and the UK, and (ii) changed how public engagement is implemented in the Brazilian, Portuguese and UK parliaments. Her research has provided an evidence-base and policy recommendations that have helped parliamentarians better understand, enhance and promote engagement with the public. Whilst parliaments have therefore been the direct beneficiaries of her research, the general public also ultimately benefits through access to more effective mechanisms (e.g. e-petitions) and greater capacity within parliaments to facilitate this engagement.

i) Changing understandings of public engagement within parliaments

Leston-Bandeira's longstanding expertise on PPE has led to invitations from several legislatures to be part of key commissions reviewing public engagement processes and/or to give evidence to key inquiries. She was first invited in 2014 by the Speaker of the UK House of Commons to be the only academic among eight core members of the *Digital Democracy Commission* (DDC). Since then, drawing on her research developed at the University of Leeds, she has continued to be involved in the implementation of the DDC report's recommendations within the UK Parliament, engaging with officials on a regular basis across a range of services, from committees to digital engagement. This has led to further invitations and a deeper working relationship with parliamentary officials in a range of legislatures besides the UK Parliament. In 2016, she was invited by the President of the Portuguese Parliament to be the special adviser to their *Digital Parliament Commission* (DPC), which was followed by an invitation to help shape and give evidence to the Scottish Parliament's *Parliamentary Reform Commission* (PRC) in November 2016. These Commissions and their subsequent implementation work drew heavily from her research [1-3,5,6], with Leston-Bandeira's input being instrumental in highlighting the importance of focusing parliamentary tools on the needs of the public, rather than on parliamentary processes. The former UK House of Commons Speaker explains that her 'evidence-based approach' made 'an enormous contribution to the success of the [DDC]' [A], whilst the Portuguese Parliament's President remarks that collaborating with Leston-Bandeira was 'invaluable' for the DPC [B].

In 2019, Leston-Bandeira played an important role in the House of Commons Liaison Committee's inquiry into the effectiveness of select committees. Besides her formal submission of evidence, she was closely involved in the set-up of the public engagement themes of this inquiry, as well as shaping the inquiry's recommendations. She was firstly invited to a private meeting of the Committee, where she made key contributions, as recognised by the Former Chair of the Committee in her letter commending Leston-Bandeira's involvement [C]; this was followed by meetings with the Committee's clerks in the run up to the writing of the inquiry's report. Leston-Bandeira's research on PPE became a key piece of evidence convincing the Committee of the need for a more systemic approach to public engagement and of the importance of listening rather than broadcasting, reflected in the report's first heading about public engagement ([D], p. 22). Her evidence was cited 17 times in the report to support a move towards a more integrated use of public engagement across committee work, rather than as a parallel or an add-on activity, and the adoption of more accessible formats in committee reports in order to reach a wider audience of citizens. One of the most senior officials of the House of Commons at the time, the Clerk of Committees, stated that the 'landmark report' established that committees should 'turn towards the public in all committee activity' [D].

Leston-Bandeira's research has also impacted upon the planning of public engagement by the House of Lords, namely through the written and oral evidence she submitted to its Constitution Committee in 2018, specifically on effectively integrating public engagement into the law-making process [2,a]. This evidence was cited in the inquiry's report, with paragraphs 110 to 112 listing further opportunities for public engagement in the legislative process, directly following Leston-Bandeira's own recommendations [E].

Beyond Westminster, Leston-Bandeira's research has informed the Scottish Parliament PRC's 2017 conclusions, namely recommendations no. 62 and 67, which call for the creation of a Committee Engagement Unit and a 'more personalised system of feedback to those who engage with it' ([F], p. 61, 66). Both recommendations reflect Leston-Bandeira's oral and written evidence calling for a better integration between public engagement and parliamentary

business by focussing on committees and being issue-led, which makes sure the feedback loop to citizens is closed. The new Unit was subsequently created in 2018, with which Leston-Bandeira has continued collaboration and direct policy change. As noted by the Head of the Committee, Leston-Bandeira *'was a key influence on the remit given to my unit... focusing on issues-based engagement in the work of committees (...) we have drawn on [her] research in developing our engagement practice (...) in particular her findings about the importance to citizens of the engagement process (...) [and] on the role of social media in public engagement to develop our use of social media towards dialogue rather than just information giving'* [F].

As outlined above, Leston-Bandeira has also changed the thinking of parliamentary officials beyond the UK. In 2019 she was invited for a Visiting Fellowship in Brazil where she advised officials in the Brazilian Congress on the integration of public engagement into parliamentary structures, based on her research on e-petitions [6]. The Head of the e-Citizenship Programme of the Brazilian Senate confirms, *'her research on the UK e-petitions system (...) enlightened me and directly influenced me (...). This [new method] enables citizens to have a clearer perception of how their input into the Senate's e-Citizenship programme has led to specific draft bills and other outputs'* [G]. The international reach of her research is further demonstrated by invitations from the petitions committees of the Australian Parliament and of Western Australia's State Legislature, which cited specifically her expertise when inviting her: *'given your work on parliament and public engagement, the Committee is interested in your insights into the role of petitions in a modern parliament'* [H]. Leston-Bandeira's evidence was cited eight times in the Australian Parliament's report on their petitions system, in relation to how debates on petitions are conducted. The committee subsequently recommended the introduction of debates on petitions to enhance petitions' visibility [H].

ii) Changing how parliaments implement public engagement

Besides changing understandings of public engagement, Leston-Bandeira's research has also impacted upon actual practices, with consequent benefits for both officials and the general public. She was involved with key preparatory work for the new UK Parliament e-petitions system launched in 2015. Since then, over 70,000 petitions have been submitted to this new system, with over 21,000 accepted, nearly 200 debated and over 24 million unique signatures. Since joining Leeds in 2015, she has worked closely with the new Petitions Committee to provide research evidence and expert advice on the new system's processes and policy, to make it more impactful in terms of policy effect and petitioners' satisfaction. This has been facilitated via over 100 regular meetings, email correspondence with the Committee staff, co-development of research and participation in events.

These activities were supported by an ESRC-funded Impact Acceleration Account Knowledge Exchange Fellowship for Leston-Bandeira awarded in 2016 [b], which allowed her to shadow the Petitions Committee in 2016/17 and study its workings. This has led to continuing knowledge exchange and co-production with the Committee (with over 30 meetings with Committee staff and in excess of 100 email exchanges since the Fellowship), developing further research on the processes implementing the e-petitions system and petitioners' reactions to these [5,6]. This resulted in a 2017 report to the Committee, outlining five overarching recommendations and 39 specific recommendations [4], which has had a strong impact on the e-petitioning process. As one of the Committee's officials remarked: *'Cristina's research showed us that we were concentrating very much on what we could do, on changes that we could make (...). But looking at the report and the recommendations, it was quite clear that that was exactly our bias – it didn't reflect what needed to be done to achieve our aim of really enhancing the relationship between Parliament and the public'* [I]. As a result, the Petitions Committee has adopted Leston-Bandeira's 2017 report as a key element in its development, utilising her recommendations to plan further developments in the system, directly informing the Committee's Public Engagement Strategy. A Committee official explained the importance of the report for the Committee's self-reflection: *'the report and her work is frequently brought up in discussions about how we can do better, when we examine our working practices and is used as evidence to support the changes we need'* [J]. This led to changes, such as a differentiated focus on petitioners, by inviting them to the parliamentary debate of their e-petition, and an enhancement of the petitions debates so as to be more inclusive and integrated with parliamentary business. Specifically, the Committee used her

research *‘to evidence the need for changes to the e-petitions site, such as changing the language used’* and *‘to bid successfully for resources to connect petitioners with other items of parliamentary business related to the topic of their petition, which will affect how millions of people engage with Parliament’* [J].

Besides her work with the Petitions Committee, Leston-Bandeira has influenced how digital engagement is implemented in the House of Commons. For example, following a DDC recommendation to introduce ‘digital debates’, she led on a collaborative project with the House of Commons to investigate enhancement of digital engagement. Thanks to this collaboration, in 2019 three committees (on plastics use in packaging, pavement parking, and endangered species) accepted suggestions based on her research [2,4,6] to link their inquiries to ongoing petitions. This helped the Committees reach a wider public affected by the issues addressed in the inquiries (for example, in excess of 300,000 people in the case of the report into plastics use; [EFRA 2019](#), p.5).

In addition, Leston-Bandeira’s research [6] has informed the new e-petitions system and digital platforms in the Portuguese Parliament, inaugurated in 2018, by making it more public centred and enabling the public to track the progress of their e-petition. This resulted in a completely new approach on the parliament’s website, adopting open data, and a more citizen-oriented communication approach. The President of the Portuguese Parliament explains that Leston-Bandeira’s work *‘was decisive to develop even further the investment on citizens’ participation and to advance towards more and better instances of bilateral communication with citizens (namely through the creation of the online platforms, on Parliament’s new portal, the submission and collection of signatures of petitions, citizens’ legislative initiatives and popular referendums’ initiatives)’* [B]. Her research [5,6] has also led to changes in elements of the Brazilian Senate’s *E-Cidadania* platform to make the outputs of petitioning clearer to those citizens making suggestions for policy change [G].

Leston-Bandeira’s research has therefore both affected how officials perceive the purpose and use of public engagement, and resulted in changes in the actual practice of public engagement of at least three parliaments.

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

[A] Former Speaker of the House of Commons. Letter of corroboration dated 21 May 2015.

[B] President of the Portuguese Parliament. Letter of corroboration dated 17 April 2018 [Portuguese].

[C] Former Chair of the UK House of Commons Liaison Committee. Letter of corroboration dated 12 March 2019.

[D] House of Commons Liaison Committee. 4th [Report](#) of Session 2017-19 (pp. 22, 55, 59, 61, 63, 81). Written evidence [1](#), [2](#); [Blog](#) about report by Clerk of Committees.

[E] [Report](#) by the House of Lords Constitution Committee’s inquiry into the legislative process, including written and oral evidence given by Leston-Bandeira. (pp. 28, 30, 32; Oral evidence [QQ 161-67](#)). [Written evidence](#).

[F] Documents relating to Scottish Parliament: Head of Committee Engagement Unit Scottish Parliament. Letter of corroboration dated 14 October 2020; [Report](#); [Evidence](#).

[G] Head of the E-Citizenship Programme of the Brazilian Senate. Letter of corroboration dated 23 December 2019.

[H] Invitation letter from Western Australia Standing Committee, dated 25 October 2019; [Report](#) of the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions on the inquiry into the future of petitioning in the House, (pp. 39, 46, 55, 60).

[I] Petitions Committee Engagement Officer speaking at a public event, February 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvZy2BxJwBk>. Transcript provided.

[J] Former Petitions and Communications Manager, Petitions Committee, House of Commons. Letter of corroboration dated 13 June 2019.