Section A
Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: 28, History
Title of case study: Petitioning and campaigning for change in the past and the present
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2010 and 2020
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:
Richard Huzzey	Senior Lecturer / Reader / Associate Professor / Professor in Modern British History	2016 – present
Henry Miller	Senior Research Fellow and Post-Doctoral Research Assistant	2016 – 2019; 2020 – present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between 2016 and 2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N
Section B
1. Summary of the impact

Research on popular petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918, has:

1. changed the thinking, practice, and communications strategy of staff working for UK legislatures and administering citizens' e-petitions to parliamentarians today;
2. fashioned the design of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) offered to public audiences by Parliament's outreach staff, which reached 588 learners;
3. inspired and structured the creation of a digitisation of the historical records of parliamentary petitioning by a commercial publisher for sale to university libraries;
4. informed the strategies and ideas of campaign organisations by sharing analysis of the timescales, effects, and practices of campaigning in the past;
5. demonstrated change in the audiences of local community talks for greater willingness to participate in petitioning as a form of civic participation today, by understanding its impact – and limitations – in historical campaigns.

2. Underpinning research

The impact rises from two related research projects. The first is Huzzey's studies (2010-2020) of the British abolitionist movement, which transformed the character of popular petitioning to parliament in the period between 1787 and 1833. His prosopographies (group biographies) of those who organised local anti-slavery campaigning have enabled reassessments of the social and economic basis of abolitionism. They also inform a broader re-evaluation of the economic significance of theological or emotional arguments used to encourage petitioning against the slave trade or slavery. He argues that 'moral' condemnations implied material expectations of national advantage, separate from any economic theories of slavery's inferiority to free labour production. These findings address trans historical concerns about how campaigners engage the public in support of major reforms to moral norms, notably by subscribing support to petitions [R1, R2].

The second body of research examines the broader phenomenon of parliamentary petitioning, as explored by a Leverhulme project grant. This provides, for the first time, analysis of the data on the volume and types of petitions sent to the House of Commons, 1780-1918, and demonstrates the breadth and variety of political engagement before many men or any women enjoyed the right to vote. Huzzey (PI) and Henry Miller (PDRA, 2016-2019) discovered the continued popularity of petitioning after the enfranchisement of new voters in 1832 and 1867, with only a gradual decline in subsequent decades. This has implications for how we think about

political expression beyond (and indeed before the introduction of) the ballot box. Qualitative research recovers how MPs' attitudes to popular petitioning developed, but also how campaigning organisations refined the techniques of mass mobilisation in response to social, technological, and constitutional change. Huzzey and Miller [R3] argue that: (a) petitioning allowed for a personal expression of agency, for signers, and an exercise in affinity-building, for organisers; rather than expectation that MPs would relent to the demand, (b) many petitioning campaigns extended over decades and did not succeed on the first attempt; (c) petitioning was often most effective when used alongside other techniques, including electoral interventions, itinerant speaking tours, marches and other methods; (d) petitioners moved to alternative sites of authority, such as 10 Downing Street or local councils, as the power of the Prime Minister or devolution of local issues altered Parliament's relations with other branches of the state. An AHRC Research Network with Miller as PI and Huzzey as Co-I placed this research in a trans historical, interdisciplinary, and comparative context, by developing new paradigms to analyse petitions and petitioning from the middle ages to the present.

3. References to the research

R1. Richard Huzzey, 'A Microhistory of Abolitionist Petitioning', *Social Science History*, 43 (2019), pp. 599-623. [DOI 10.1017/ssh.2019.19]

R2. Richard Huzzey, 'The Moral Geography of British Anti-Slavery Responsibilities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (2012), pp. 111-39. [DOI 10.1017/S0080440112000096]

R3. Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, 'Petitions, Parliament and Political Culture: Petitioning the House of Commons, 1780-1918', *Past and Present*, 248 (2020), pp. 123-64. [DOI 10.1093/pastj/gtz061 – Gold Open Access]

4. Details of the impact

(i) Impact on UK legislatures

Principal impacts lie in changes to the understanding of petitioning by staff in UK legislatures and how they can draw on history to engage and inform citizens' use of petitioning as part of wider campaigns for change. This was achieved through a three-part process of increasing contact and reach, as Huzzey built a long-term relationship with the non-partisan public servants managing the work of UK legislatures. A placement, in summer 2017, allowed Huzzey to share research on both anti-slavery and nineteenth-century petitioning with those staff administering the petition.parliament.uk system and advising citizens on use of the service. The clerk of the House of Commons Petitions Committee identifies 'the substantial contribution made by our collaboration with Dr Richard Huzzey in the early years of Parliament's e-petitions system' in 'developing our thinking about how examples of historical petitions could be used to communicate key messages about contemporary democratic engagement' [E1]. She notes that the MPs elected to the Petitions Committee were 'very keen for the public to understand that a petition was only a step (often a first step) in a wider campaign for change'. Huzzey's historical evidence enabled this, since parliamentary staff's 'constraints of impartiality made it difficult to use recent examples' of campaigning on controversial topics. The research on past campaigning therefore changed how staff communicate with citizens seeking to start petitions or query the responses to them following 'extensive exchanges about the opportunities for using historical examples to build public understanding of how petitions could be used to campaign for a change

in policy' [E1].

These early contacts broadened through a comparative AHRC research network in 2018-19, which shared research with staff administering e-petitions for the National Assembly of Wales and the Scottish Parliament, as well as the UK Parliament. Clerks from Westminster and Holyrood attended the first event, where Huzzey, Miller, and other scholars presented their work. Afterwards, the parliamentary staff shared with their teams their changed thinking about the histories of 'signatures, and how they were (or were not) gathered, the ideas around "representation" and engagement' and 'the concept of petitioning as a communal act, a request for action or an expression of opinion inter alia' [E2]. As part of a 2019 roundtable for practitioners at the final event, a clerk managing the Welsh Assembly's e-petitions highlighted that it was 'incredibly valuable to someone doing my job to learn the long-term background' and to discover how nineteenth-century officials had acted to 'present barriers' to certain groups; 'hearing historic examples and people's analysis has led me to question some of the things that are features of modern petitioning' and to ask anew 'what are modern petitions for?' [E3].

In a final tranche of events, the relationship expanded beyond staff managing e-petition systems to address parliamentary staff who would encounter petitions and petitioners in their work for other committees and services. After a March 2018 public talk in the Palace of Westminster, an attendee from the Parliamentary Digital Service recorded that data on the long nineteenth century had led him 'to consider the role of petitions and non-voters' and how petitioning revealed a 'depth that I did not appreciate before' in representative systems [E4]. In response to a 2020 briefing, a Principal Clerk, who manages select committees that consider petitions, explained that the UK Parliament was 'like a Venn diagram – lots of bits are invisible to people in different circles: this gives an insight into another part of the system'. The research on historical campaigns meant that she has urged 'more attention be given to paper petitions which may reflect the view of underrepresented groups', as well as e-petitions. Staff from the Welsh Assembly and UK Parliament engaged in outreach work reported that they had previously 'thought petitioning was a modern phenomenon'. In particular, they had not considered 'some of the implications of our hosting' e-petitions rather than accepting paper petitions collected by outside groups; the fact that parliamentary websites now assumed some of the role performed by historical campaigners in circulating petitions to potential signatories led to changes in the advice these staff gave to the 'current petitions team about their public engagement strategy' [E5].

Staff from the UK Parliament record that '[a]s a direct result of attending the workshop' in 2018 'we decided to re-launch our petition of the month section on the parliament.uk website' to bring historical case studies to the attention of current staff and petitioners [E2]. Huzzey has, according to the first clerk of the Petitions Committee, 'made a substantial contribution to the "Petition of the Month" feature hosted on the Petitions Committee's web pages'. As she notes, the House of Commons enjoyed 'consistently good levels of engagement with "Petition of the Month" on social media—comparable to, and sometimes exceeding, the levels of engagement with content about current events' [E1].

(ii) Impact on MOOC learners

During his 2017 placement with the Commons Petitions committee, staff recommended Huzzey share his research as part of the UK Parliament's Future Learn MOOC on petitioning. 588 learners undertook the course, which was advertised to the general public in 2017-18. The Senior Learning Projects Officer who led the MOOC attests that a video interview with Huzzey and a written summary of his research communicated the historical functions of petitions in 'awareness raising, education and public engagement'. She designed part of the MOOC in response to his research revealing the ways that abolitionists perfected the adaptation of petitioning from a means of expressing personal interests in government policies to a means of protesting opinion and morality. Her team 'were able to build a whole step which helped learners reflect on their own experiences of signing petitions that they would not directly benefit from'. His findings also challenged learners to 'consider timeframes and the beneficial outcomes of

incremental steps in the journey of a campaign, which may have taken years to effect change in policy or legislation.' [E6]. One learner consequently commented that '[s]tudying historic petitions and campaigns teaches me about the human capacity for resilience, fortitude and self-sacrifice in the face of overwhelming odds'. Another user, prompted to comment on how petitioning in the past affected behaviour today, noted '[h]ow much harder it was for them to collect all those signatures than it is now when e petitions can be signed at a touch of a button' and 'I feel that I should be more involved as petitions may bring about change' [E6].

(iii) Impact on digital database product

The results of the Leverhulme Project demonstrated the research value of the hitherto obscure reports of nearly 1,000,000 petitions to the House of Commons, for the period 1833-1918, which lay outside the familiar, digitised run of parliamentary papers. This persuaded staff at Proquest LLC, an international publisher of print and online resources for universities, to invest substantial resources in digitising these sources as a new module for their 'UK Parliamentary Papers' product. Huzzey and Miller acted as consultants on the production of these records, the structure of data, and the search strategies most useful for future researchers using the product. Proquest's Senior Product Manager notes that they 'played an important role in the formulation, creation, and online delivery' by sharing their research on these sources and of changing practices by petitioners and parliamentary authorities. Their research guided the 'structure of the data' and 'identification of relevant metadata for rekey and discrete tagging'. Though revenue and sales data for the product is commercially sensitive, Proquest testify that 'the database would not have the form, function, or current customer base without their advice and promotion of the database through their scholarship' [E7].

(iv) Impact on campaign organisations

The 2018-19 AHRC research network also integrated campaigners from charities Friends of the Earth and Unlock Democracy to discuss how 'the context of petitioning has changed' and to inform their use of petition campaigns today. One campaigner attending workshops in 2018 and 2019 reported learning from the researchers that 'the process is as important as the petition itself'; petitioning was 'not only representative of communities but can create them' since those signing would feel affinity with further activism regardless of whether a specific demand was met. This informed her organisation's practice when communicating 'a response to communities if a campaign has not succeeded in a specific demand'. Moreover, historical research enabled contemporary campaigners to think differently about how both petitioner and petitioned 'gain from the petitioning activity and that it is a two-way process, either benign or less so' [E2, E3]. In 2019, Huzzey was interviewed about his research by Steve Tibbett of the Advocacy Hub for the '100 Campaigns That Changed The World' podcast. Tibbett notes that research on abolitionism and other campaigning 'informs and helps to shape my thinking in my consultancy practice, as a strategist and evaluator for civil society organisations, foundations and trusts and inter-governmental organisations'. In the interview, he probed the mutation of traditional forms of philanthropic giving to anti-slavery petitioning for legislative change in relation to contemporary practices of 'charity being attached to a political campaign' [E8].

(v) Impact on local community audiences

A programme of talks targeted local community audiences particularly interested in social history or political change, in such diverse venues as a theatre, a pub, a library, a museum, and a county record office. A total of 125 people completed audience surveys across 5 events in Manchester, Durham, and Chichester, with talks tailored to reveal local histories of abolitionist, women's suffrage, or temperance petitioning as case studies of the larger phenomenon. At the People's History Museum, Huzzey and Miller offered informal talks to those visiting the galleries on a Saturday, while in the Station House pub and West Sussex Record Office Huzzey spoke as part of long-running public lecture series. Attendees assessed their knowledge before and after each event, reporting an average increase of 65% in their assessment of how much they felt they knew about the topic. Many expressed surprise that petitions are not 'a relatively new phenomenon' and 'played a significant role in political change', even if they 'were never on my

radar' before. Asked to provide free-text responses to what words and phrases they associated with petitioning, audiences yielded an average of 2.7 words before and 5.9 words after the talk: Besides demonstrating their retention of more complex concepts, the responses suggested a diminishing focus on famous politicians or campaigns and a greater interest in the role of women or the inter-relationship of petitioning to other forms of active citizenship [E9].

Audiences across all events reported that learning about the history of these campaigns meant they were 47% more likely to sign petitions and 9% more likely to start their own petition now. The respondents recognised that petitioning in the past helped 'galvanise people about specific topics', '[h]elped sense of community', and had been the 'beginning of a change' by long-term campaigns, challenging preconceptions that success should be measured by instant success. 19% of attendees planned to learn more about petitioning, with one theatre-goer highlighting that the research revealed 'ambiguity around representation' and another noting their value as a 'method of self-expression'. 43% would discuss the topic with family and friends given the 'link to the present day' [E9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1. Testimonial from the Clerk to the Petitions Committee, House of Commons, UK Parliament.

E2. Testimonials from staff for the House of Commons Scottish Parliament, and Friends of the Earth participating in AHRC network, July 2018.

E3. Recording of impact lessons from practitioners (UK House of Commons, National Assembly for Wales, Unlock Democracy, Friends of the Earth) participating in AHRC network, April 2019.

E4. Surveys from talk at Palace of Westminster, UK Parliament, March 2018.

E5. Surveys from staff of UK legislatures at the Study of Parliament Group, Oxford, Jan. 2020.

E6. Testimonial from Senior Learning Projects Officer, UK Parliament, and comments left by learners on the UK Parliament FutureLearn MOOC on Petitions.

E7. Testimonial from Senior Product Manager, Proquest LLC.

E8. Testimonial from Steve Tibbett, producer of '100 Campaigns That Changed The World' Podcast.

E9. Surveys, testimonials, and survey data analysis from 5 talks at: People's History Museum, Manchester, Nov. 2017; Palace Green Library, Nov. 2017; West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, Mar. 2019; Station House, Durham, Nov. 2019; Gala Theatre, Durham, Nov. 2019.