

UK Parliament
POST

Science in Parliament

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LHCb UK Student Meeting, 22nd November 2018

What is the UK Parliament
UK Parliament and Government
Legislation; Select Committees; Libraries
Who uses research at the UK Parliament

What is the UK Parliament?



House of Commons



House of Lords



The Monarch

What does the UK Parliament do?

- Represents the people
- Checks and challenges the work of the Government (scrutiny)
- Makes and changes laws (legislation)
- Debates the important issues of the day (debating)
- Checks and approves Government spending (taxes and budgets)



What is the UK Government?

The party or parties who can command the confidence of the House of Commons forms the Government.

The Government:

- runs public departments and public services (e.g. Home Office, NHS)
- proposes new laws to the UK Parliament
- is accountable to Parliament



Parliament ≠ Government

UK Parliament



- Commons, Lords and Monarch
- Holds Government to account
- Makes laws
- Enables the Government to raise and spend money

UK Government



- Some MPs and some Lords, chosen by the Prime Minister
- Runs Government departments and public services
- Is accountable to Parliament

Polycymakers

Wide range of people involved in making policy.

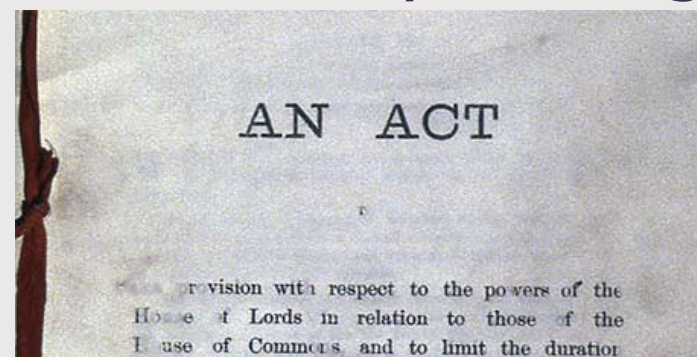
- Government
 - Ministers
 - Civil servants
- Parliament
 - MPs
 - Peers
 - Representatives at devolved administrations (National Assembly of Wales, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly)

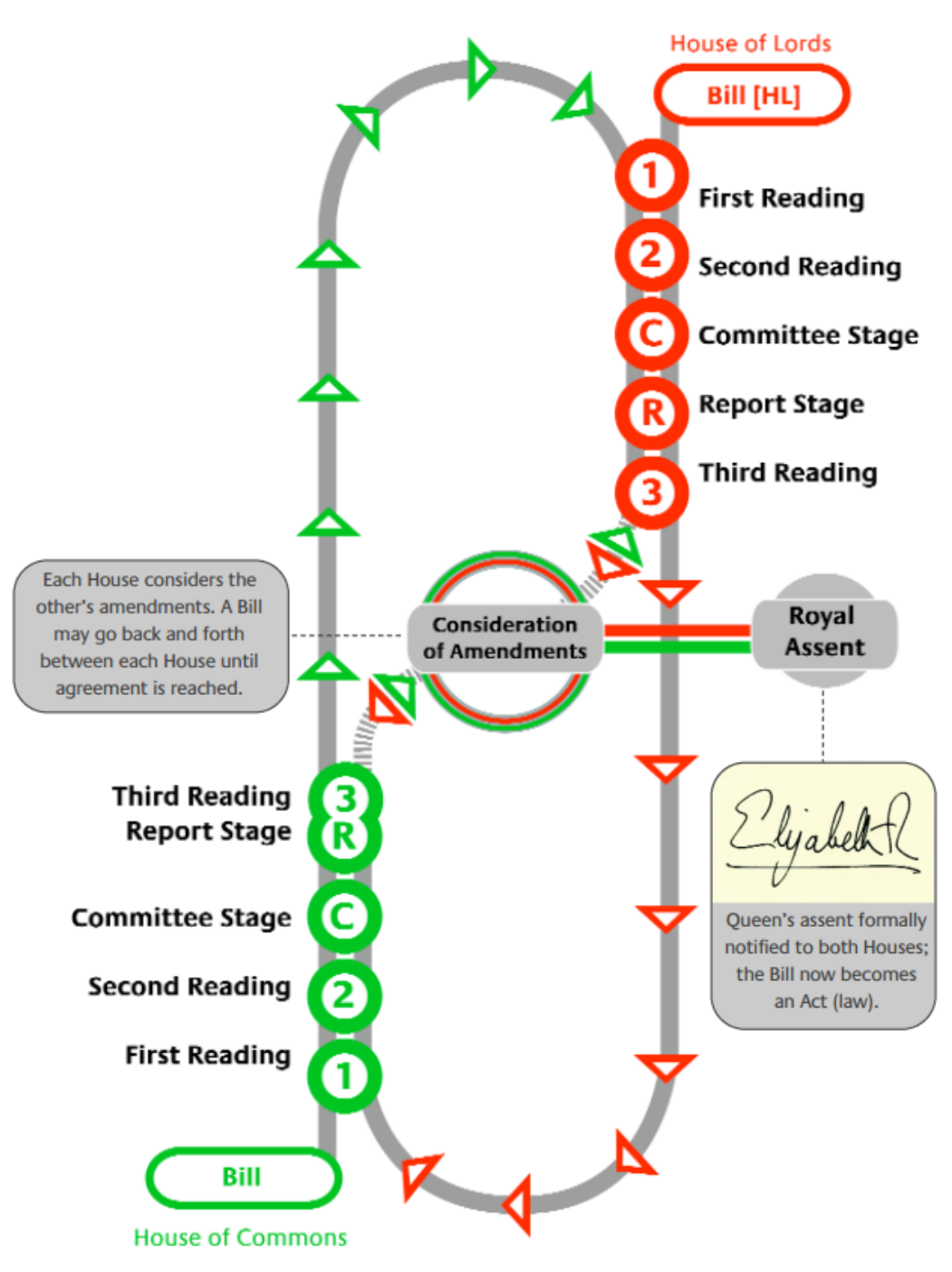
The business of Parliament

- Chambers
 - Debates
 - Questions
 - Statements
 - Legislation
- Committees
 - Select Committees
 - General Committees (legislative committees)

Legislation

- Most new legislation is introduced by the Government
- All legislation must be scrutinised by both Houses of Parliament
- Members suggest changes (“amendments”) at particular stages throughout the legislative process
- All Bills before Parliament can be viewed and tracked at www.parliament.uk – including Bill documents, explanatory notes, amendments, committee minutes and Library briefings





Select Committees

- Both Houses establish Select Committees to conduct inquiries and to produce reports on a range of matters, from the conduct of Government to specialist subject areas
- Invite evidence from witnesses
- Government must respond to Select Committee reports



Select Committees: getting involved

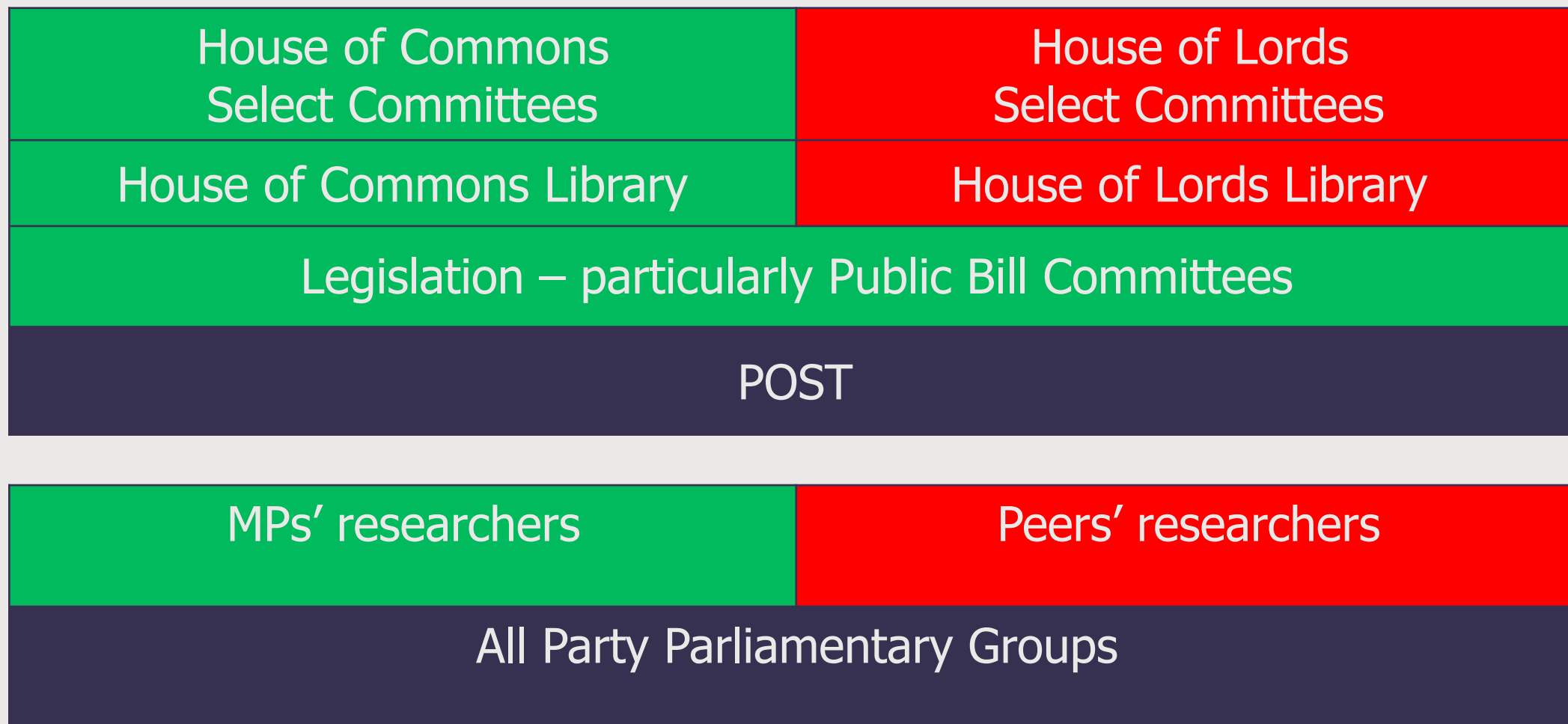
- Committees issue a “call for evidence”
- Committees also send out updates on Twitter
- Respond by submitting written evidence - this may lead to an invite to give oral evidence
- Committees sometimes appoint a specialist adviser when expertise is needed to inform oral evidence sessions or shape a report. Advisers are usually academics/expert practitioners
- You could offer to host a visit for a Select Committee
- Suggest a subject for a Select Committee inquiry to the Clerk or to Members of that Committee

Commons and Lords Libraries

- Provide specialist impartial information and briefing service for MPs, Peers, their staff, committees and staff of the Houses
- Produce wide range of briefing material
- Work tends to be reactive and responsive to questions from Members, business in each House and current affairs.
- Briefings available online at www.parliament.uk under research publications



Who uses research in the UK Parliament?



POST

Who works in POST: research teams, staff

What POST does: Horizon scanning, reactive advice, knowledge exchange, training

Fellowships at POST

Get involved with POST

POST

- Bridging research and policy
- Science in the broadest sense of the word
- To ensure that the best available research evidence feeds into the legislative process and scrutiny of Government



POST's history

- Early 1980s: The office was first suggested
- 1989: POST was launched (with charitable funding)
- 1992: POST was adopted as a Parliamentary body (subject to regular reviews)
- 2001: POST was established as a permanent institution (funded by Parliament)

POST's research teams

Biological
sciences and
health



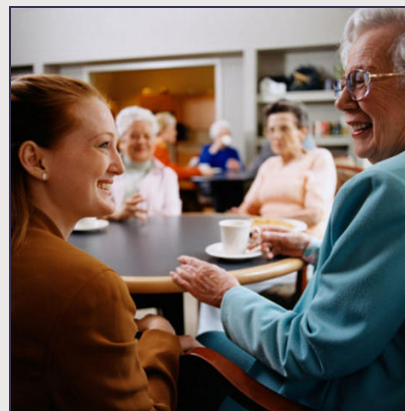
Physical
sciences and
computing



Energy and
environment



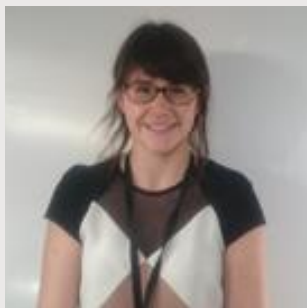
Social
sciences



E · S · R · C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL


Department of Science, Technology,
Engineering and Public Policy
UCL STEaPP

Who works in POST?



What POST does

- Partnering with academia and industry to ensure the best available evidence is incorporated into policy
- Organising timely advice to be presented to Parliamentarians
- Synthesising research evidence into summaries accessible to policy-makers
- Training the next generations of policymakers and policy-wise researchers

What POST does: activities

- Horizon scanning
 - POSTnotes
- Reactive advice to Committees and the Libraries
 - POSTbriefs
 - Ad hoc assistance
- Knowledge Exchange – external to Parliament
 - Brokering service – academia, industry, learned societies
 - Training and informing
 - Widening participation
- Knowledge Exchange – internal to Parliament
 - Embedding research evidence use & appraisal
 - Events
- Training
 - POST Fellowships
 - Academic Fellowships



Horizon scanning

POSTnotes

- Primary, flagship product
- Topics: less evidence, more controversial, developing areas
- Horizon scanning (1 year)
- Interviews to support literature (more grey, less primary/secondary)
- 4 pages at present
- Chosen/prioritised by POST Board
- Main customers: all internal & external
- Extensive peer review



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

POSTNOTE
Number 559 July 2017

Online Information and Fake News



Digital technologies such as internet search engines and social media platforms are an increasingly popular way of accessing news and information. This note considers how people access news online, how algorithms (sequences of instructions) and social networks influence the content that users see, and options for mitigating any negative impact.

Overview

- Social media platforms and internet search engines have made it easier to produce, distribute and access information online.
- These technologies, combined with user behaviour, filter the content that users see. Some studies suggest that this limits users' exposure to attitude-challenging information, while others argue that users still see a wider range of information than offline.
- Online fake news has the potential to confuse and deceive users, and is often financially or politically motivated.
- UK efforts to address these issues are largely led by industry and focus on fake news. They include better identification, fact-checking and user education.

Background

In 2017, the proportion of UK adults consuming news online exceeded those who watched news on TV (74% versus 69%).¹ Meanwhile, a smaller proportion read news in print (41%), compared to in 2013 (59%).^{1,2} Social media platforms (such as Facebook) and internet search engines can help users to find the items that they consider most interesting or useful by filtering content. Some suggest that filtering could lead to users seeing only content that conforms to their pre-existing opinions.^{3,4} Others argue that users will see more diverse views than, for example, via print, TV or radio.^{5,7} Internationally, politicians, journalists and others have raised concerns about false information online, and the effect that it may have on political events such as elections.^{8,9} This POSTnote explores:

- how people in the UK access and share news online
- the effects of filtering
- the factors driving fake news and its effects
- approaches to addressing the challenges.

Accessing and Sharing News Online

People can either access online news directly – via websites or applications (apps) – or through intermediaries such as social media platforms, internet search engines and news aggregators (that select and present news from multiple sources). Content is created not only by traditional news providers, but also by other organisations and individuals.

The Reuters Institute and Ofcom found that the websites or apps of TV and radio companies are the most popular source of online news in the UK.¹⁰ For instance, 47% of UK adults who accessed news online (surveyed in 2017) said that they had used BBC News online in the past week.¹ People are increasingly using social media to access news in the UK.¹¹ 41% of adults asked in 2017 reported using it as a source for news in the past week, up from 20% in 2013.¹² Search engines are also key for finding news; 30% of adults who accessed news online in 2016 did so via a search engine, up from 19% in 2013.^{10,12} Children's online news consumption may differ from adults', however the available data is limited.¹³

Social Media Platforms

Facebook (39 million UK users) and Twitter (22 million UK users)^{14,15} are the most popular social media sources of news in the UK (Table 1). They have two main features that provide content:

- a personalised list containing material from the user's connections (e.g. friends, followers or 'liked' pages)
- a list of popular (trending) topics from the site (Box 1).

Internet Search Engines

Globally, Google, Bing and Yahoo are the most-used search engines, with estimated monthly visitors of 1.6bn, 400m and 300m respectively.¹⁶ Users typically type a query into a computer (or ask a question via a voice-activated platform

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, Westminster, London SW1A 5AA, Tel: 020 7219 2345, email: post@parliament.uk, www.parliament.uk/post

Reactive advice to Committees and the Library

POSTbriefs

- Topics: yield to systematic review and evidence synthesis
- Responsive
- Few, if any, interviews
- Digital first
- Primarily to support committee inquiries, secondarily to support library sections
- Main customers: committees
- Academic-style peer review



Knowledge exchange – external to Parliament

The Knowledge Exchange unit supports the exchange of information and expertise between researchers and the UK Parliament.

- Contact, advice and training for academics, including regional event series
- Facilitating and strengthening engagement between UK Parliament and diverse groups of researchers
- Online resources: www.parliament.uk/research-impact
- Liaison with Research England on REF and KEF



Research impact at the UK Parliament

Everything you need to know to engage with Parliament as a researcher.

What interests Parliament?



Why engage with Parliament?



Parliament and the Research Excellence Framework



Find out more about Parliament and the 2014 and 2021 Research Excellence Framework exercises.



How Parliament uses research



Ways to engage with Parliament



What does the UK Parliament do?



Find out more about the role of Parliament.

www.parliament.uk/research-impact

How to guides



Academic fellowships



Researchers' stories



Find out first-hand what it's like to engage with Parliament from academics who have done so.

Training and events November 22, 18

Get in contact with Parliament

Knowledge exchange – internal to Parliament

POST events provide a forum for researchers and parliamentarians to meet, exchange knowledge and ideas and form relationships

Recent topics include:

- The science of managing UK fisheries
- Why scrutinising evidence matters
- LGBT+ health inequalities
- Sleep and health
- Rise of experimental Government



Training

POST Fellowships:

PhD students

Run with Research Councils, learned societies and charities

Parliamentary Academic Fellowship Scheme:

Specific research projects issued by Parliament, or project proposed by academic

Currently under evaluation – see webpage for next opportunities

House of Commons/PSA Academic Fellowship Scheme:

Senior political and social scientists researching Parliament

Currently under evaluation – see webpage for next opportunities

<https://www.parliament.uk/academic-fellowships>



POST Fellowships

- www.parliament.uk/postfellowships
- Fellows have gone on to policy jobs in government, research councils and learned bodies.
- Fellowship placements also available at SPICe, Welsh Assembly, NI assembly (RaISE), Royal Society, Centre for Science and Policy, GO-Science, Government Departments (DfE, DCMS, Home Office etc), Academy of Medical Science, Food Standards Agency, Public Health England, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Sentencing Council, Youth Justice Board for Eng and Wales, HM Courts and Tribunal Services...

The Application Process

- I applied through the [RCUK policy internship scheme](#)
 - STFC only funds POST and the Government Office for Science
 - 1 STFC fellow per year at each
- Application deadline ~August, interviews ~October
- Material needed
 - Sample POSTnote (2 page limit)
 - CV
 - Answers to application questions (~1,500 words)
- Time consuming application – start early
- Happy to offer advice to potential applicants

My POST Fellowship

- I worked at POST for three months from April to June 2018
- My POSTnote topic was the security of UK telecommunications



The Topic



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Undersea Cables: Indispensable, insecure
Dec 1, 2017



Read Publication



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NEWS POLITICS VOICES FINAL SAY SPORT CULTURE VIDEO INDY/LIFE INDYBEST LONG READS INDY100 VOUCHERS

This incredible map shows the undersea cables that keep the internet alive — and security services are worried Russia could cut them



The Washington Post Democracy Dies in Darkness Sign In

Europe

Russian submarines are prowling around vital undersea cables. It's making NATO nervous.



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NEWS

Home UK World Business Politics Tech Science Health Family

UK England N. Ireland Scotland Alba Wales Cymru Local News

Russia a 'risk' to undersea cables, defence chief warns

15 December 2017

Researching and Writing

- 1. Gather information
 - Reading press releases, Government reports...
- 2. Interview 20-35 experts
 - Lead Government department, regulator, industry experts, academics...
- 3. Write and (re)write
 - Balance the views of different organisations
- 4. Peer review
 - Send the note to experts for comment

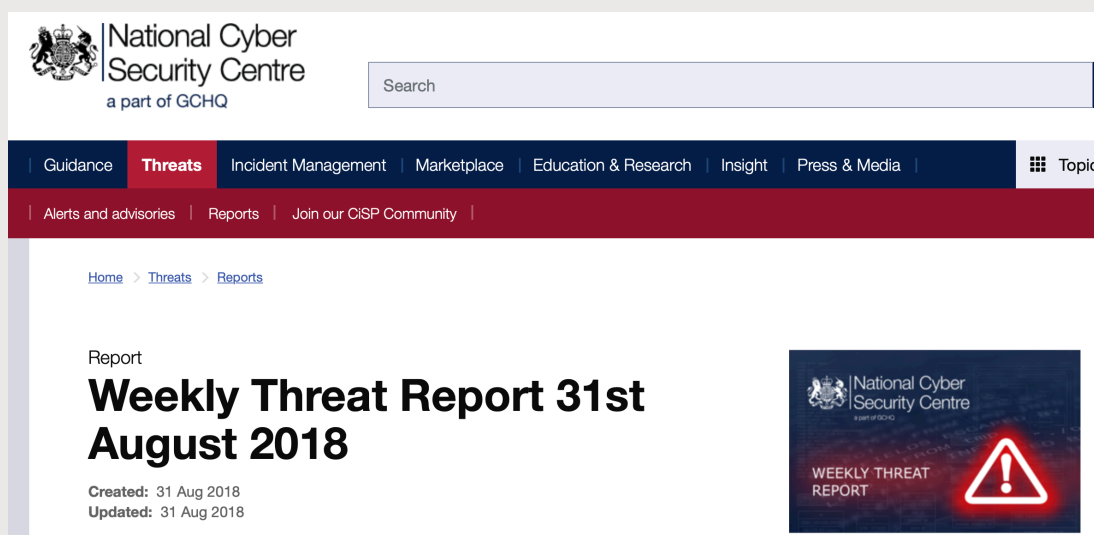
Acknowledgements

POSTnotes are based on literature reviews and interviews with a range of stakeholders, and are externally peer reviewed. POST would like to thank interviewees and peer reviewers for kindly giving up their time during the preparation of this briefing, including:

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- Civil Contingencies Secretariat*
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- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport*
- EE*
- Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group*
- European Subsea Cables Association*
- Institution of Engineering and Technology*
- International Cable Protection Committee*
- International Telecommunication Union*
- John Stonehouse, Aurum Globe*
- Met Office*
- National Audit Office*
- National Cyber Security Centre*
- Ofcom*
- Openreach*
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- Professor Timothy O'Farrell, University of Sheffield*
- Rishi Sunak, MP*
- Royal United Services Institute*
- TalkTalk*
- TechUK*
- Three*
- Vodafone UK*

The End Result

- Publicly available on [Parliament website](#)
- Featured in the National Cyber Security Centre [Weekly Threat Report](#)



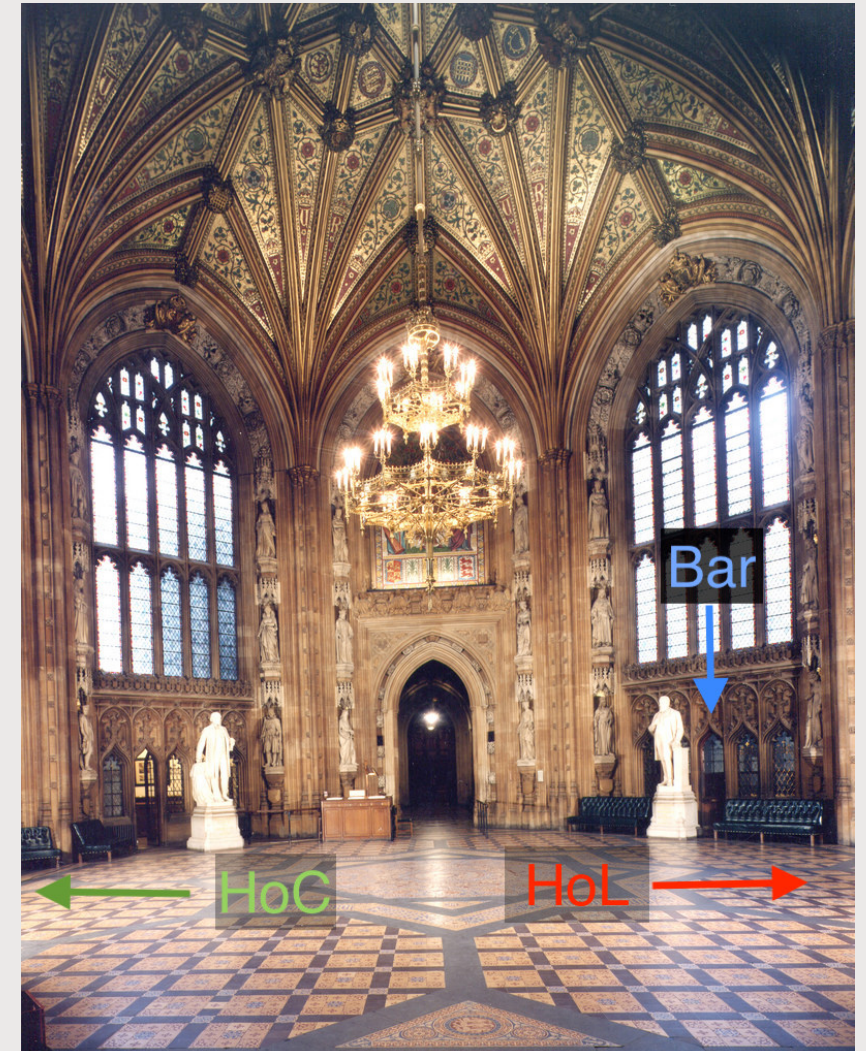
The screenshot shows the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) website. At the top left is the NCSC logo, a part of GCHQ. A search bar is visible. The navigation menu includes: Guidance, Threats (highlighted), Incident Management, Marketplace, Education & Research, Insight, Press & Media, and Topics. Below the menu are links for Alerts and advisories, Reports, and Join our CISP Community. The main content area shows a breadcrumb trail: Home > Threats > Reports. The featured report is titled 'Weekly Threat Report 31st August 2018', created and updated on 31 Aug 2018. A thumbnail for the report is shown on the right, featuring the NCSC logo and a warning sign icon.



The screenshot shows a 'POSTNOTE' document from the Houses of Parliament, Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology. The document is titled 'Security of UK Telecommunications' and is dated August 2018. It includes an overview, background, and sections on telecommunications infrastructure and fixed-line networks. The overview section lists several key points: telecommunications networks face physical and cyber threats; concerns have been raised about the security of undersea cables; the Communications Act 2003 requires companies to maintain security and resilience; and resilience methods include investing in infrastructure and installing back-up power supplies. The background section discusses the UK's Chief of the Defence Staff's concerns about submarine threats to undersea cables and the increasing targeting of UK telecoms companies by Russian cyber-attacks. The telecommunications infrastructure section explains that networks rely on infrastructure to connect users and are divided into a core and an access network. The fixed-line networks section notes that they provide telephone, TV, and broadband services.

Perks

- Tour of Parliament
- Free roam of Parliamentary estate
- Debates in the Commons or Lords
- Prime Ministers Questions
- Secret entrance to Parliament from Westminster tube
- Many (taxpayer subsidised...) bars and restaurants
- Accommodation and travel expenses



Reflections

- Giving up research for three months can be daunting
 - Ongoing roles like liaisons need to be covered or given up
 - Hard to fit around LTA
 - Good if waiting on MC or stripping
 - Getting back into research was surprisingly quick and easy
- No strings attached way to find out what it's like to work in policy
- Opens doors to policy and science communication jobs

Get involved with POST

- Apply for a Fellowship
- Contribute to a current note
- Sign up to our mailing list
- Follow us on Twitter: @POST_UK
- Propose a POSTnote
- Attend an event
- See www.parliament.uk/POST for all of the above

Contact us



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