**Video interview: Dr Ems Lord**

**Transcript**

This interview was conducted by the Knowledge Exchange Unit in Summer 2021.

**\***

**Please introduce yourself and tell us how you engaged with the UK Parliament.**

Hi, so I’m Dr Ems Lord, I’m a research fellow at Clare Hall, at the University of Cambridge. I specialise in mathematics education, I’m interested in encouraging diversity in maths and the use of transferable skills through the medium of maths. My day role is I’m the Director of NRICH, which is an outreach maths project at the university between the faculties of Maths and Education and I was recently President of the Mathematical Association. So far, my contributions have included chapters to two publications by the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession. The first one of these was a chapter for the response to ‘Trends Shaping Education’, which was a global report, and I wrote about global shifts in education drawing on my research into flexibility and using skills in different areas. And then the second was a chapter for the forthcoming publication ‘Reimaging Education’, and that was drawing on my experiences of researching teacher professional development.

**How did you find out about the opportunity to engage with Parliament?**

So, as a Maths Ed researcher and somebody who is passionate about increasing diversity in maths education, and the use of our transferable skills that you can do in maths, things like resilience, perseverance, collaborative problem solving, being flexible; that’s what I really want to talk about through my research. So, I tried some of the usual channels, I’d been in touch with my MP, and tried things that I knew about. But then, one day, an email came into my inbox which was talking about a day for researchers to engage with Parliament. So, I clicked on it, and it turns out it was a really good decision, because I went to that day – it was held over in Norwich – by a fantastic team who knew all different ways of engaging. So, they took us through the difference between Government and Parliament, because, everyday language, we use them the same way, but they mean different things. They took us through all the different opportunities, from secondments to communicating with Committees, but what was unique and what I really got out of it, was spending a day working with people who knew a lot about Parliament, but didn’t know much about my work, and it was about making those connections and bridging, so it took me out of my comfort zone, as a Maths Ed researcher, because what I had to do, is think how that connects, and is important to people in Parliament. And it could be somebody working in transport, somebody involved in the environment, and I was challenged to think, okay so I am interested in flexibility, problem solving, diversity, how does that fit? And, I really got a lot out of that day, we did presentations, I met people, I took down loads of ideas for follow up, which I went away and did, and now I’ve got a much better idea, of how to engage and make an impact.

**What did you do which you found worked well during this engagement with Parliament, and, is there anything that you would do differently, if you were to engage with Parliament again?**

I think the thing that’s worked most effectively for me is putting myself in other people’s shoes. Now, I’m a Maths Ed researcher, so, in my offices, I’m surrounded my mathematicians, which is great, because we speak our own language, and we have our key foci, that’s fantastic. But, if I want to engage more widely, I need to think about what issues are affecting other people, and get them engaged in what I do. And so, through the training and through engaging with Parliament, I’ve started to put myself more into other people’s shoes. And, the benefit for me, as well as helping to make an impact, is, when I want to apply for research grants, the people on the panel looking at research grants may not be Maths Ed researchers either, so the skills I’m getting working with Parliament, I’m finding also very helpful in my day job as well. So it’s kind of been a win-win. If I had to do things differently, I think it’s about allowing time to do it because I came across this during my work, and I’ve really run with it. And, what I’d like to do in the future, is when I’m planning projects and working out my workflow, allowing times for engagement. And I registered for things like emails when consultations are coming up, and instead of responding last minute, I’m going to get the heads up very early. So it’s about planning that, and valuing the time for it.

**What’s your one top tip for any researcher looking to engage with Parliament?**

I think my top tip is to do what I’ve done, to take yourself away from your research teams and your subject, and to reflect on how it can help others. So, my research into widening participation and gender, is of interest to a huge number of people. The approaches that I might take, what’s worked well and the difficulties I’ve faced are transferable to other areas. And it’s the same with my interest in transferable skills. The resilience, the perseverance, the working with others, all of those skills are really important whether you are working on a major infrastructure project, if you’re trying to deal with a major health initiative, they all matter, so my top tip would be to think really carefully how whatever your research area is, how that can benefit other people, and other people who may be way outside your normal comfort zone and people that you work with. It can be done, you just have to think very carefully about it.