**Video interview: Professor Simeon Yates**

**Transcript**

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

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

My name’s Simeon Yates. I’m Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Liverpool. I mainly do research on the social impacts of digital technologies and particularly around digital inequalities. I’ve interacted with Parliament in a number of ways. We've given written evidence to a number of calls from parliamentary committee for submitting written evidence. The team that I lead has given face to face evidence to the House of Lords and I've provided evidence for a policy brief put together by the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, particularly around digital skills and digital inclusion and those people with lower digital attainment or digital skills.

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

It’s been a bit of a sort of journey, because I do a lot of work with Government, not Parliament. And kind of as a result of all of that kind of work, I guess I’m on people’s radars and the team’s been on people’s radars. And so for example for the House of Lords verbal evidence, one of my team members presented their part of the project we had around citizens’ data literacy and skills alongside the charities that we work with, things like the Good Things Foundation. So we were invited to give evidence to that, and that was a really positive thing. It was great to get our research directly fed in.

Similarly when I gave evidence or provided information for the evidence brief put together by POST. Again that was direct contact from them saying they've seen the work we've done, they were aware of the work we've done and so they've got in contact.

Some of the other times we submitted written evidence, it's because we've seen that on websites, you know the Parliament website, and we've seen that that's relevant and responded to it.

I guess the real big answer is that because we've tried to do impactful policy-facing work on the back of our research work, that's put us in contact with government agencies, national and local government. And so the idea of giving evidence or providing support kind of becomes part of that package and you're aware of it and start to see the channels by which you can do it.

**What did you do which you found worked well when engaging with Parliament?**

I think what works well is where you have got to the point where you've got a bit of an understanding of what goes on in Government and Parliament and how the systems kind of work a little bit. I guess having that understanding allows you to think much more clearly about how to present evidence to Government. Not just dumping a lot of academic materials or academic papers, or kind of presenting it as you would do at an appropriate academic conference, but kind of understanding that parliamentarians, Members of the House of Lords, the people receiving this evidence kind of need it much the same way as you would present it to the well-informed charity people you work with or the well-informed industry person.

I mean, my own research involves an awful lot of statistics. There's no point just kind of throwing statistics and graphs at people. Boil it down to what are the key messages? What does it say in my area about digital inclusion, you know, that access is not enough, that there’s skills and there's context and there's other issues that need to be taken into account. Those are the ones that you want policymakers to think about and listen to.

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

I’d say that just engaging cold is quite hard. I mean, yes, you can submit evidence when there's a call out and so on. But that kind of is quite a limited engagement. So it tends, I think, to me be part of a process, or a kind of a journey; that you may have already engaged with other parts of Government that give you an insight, or your research is being or has fed into activities, whether it's national Government, local Government or industry or whatever. That kind of gives you a profile so that you've got something kind of to bring with you and therefore you know how to have that conversation.

**What impact did your engagement with Parliament have for you as a researcher and as an individual?**

I think for me, I do research that I want to have social impact. So being able to ensure that the work we've done forms part of policy statements or forms part of advice or forms part of committees’ conclusions and feeds into, potentially into legislation, it's just really, really important. It's part of the kind of the end of a process that you want to complete. For me I would encourage people to do that, because especially for those of us working in social sciences, we don't want to just, it just to sit on the shelf. We want it to have some kind of impact. And often it’s not going to have an impact unless there’s a policy environment for it to kind of embed in. And so you need to have at least some engagement with the processes of Parliament and Government to make sure that happens.