

An Overview of REF 2014 Impact Case Studies that refer to Engagement with the Assembly Research Briefing

December 2018



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National Assembly for Wales
Senedd Research

An Overview of REF Impact Case Studies that refer to Engagement with the Assembly

Research Briefing

December 2018

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Introduction

Since 1986, higher education institutions across the UK have been evaluated for the quality of their research. For the first time in 2014, this national evaluation included the assessment of non-academic impact generated from the research. Higher education institutions submitted their evidence of research impact in the form of ‘impact case studies’, which are now publicly available as a searchable database.

This briefing paper examines the impact case studies that clearly outlined engagement with the National Assembly for Wales. The aim was to understand the routes for achieving impact with the Assembly (as submitted in 2014), and thus identify common mechanisms of engagement.

Key findings include:

- Research categorised as **social sciences** contributed the majority of case studies that clearly outlined engagement with the Assembly.
- The majority of case studies that clearly outlined engagement were submitted from **Welsh higher education institutions**.
- **Assembly Committees** were the most frequently reported site of engagement.
- **Giving evidence** was the most frequently reported mechanism of engagement.
- Substantive **policy and legislative outcomes** of engaging with the Assembly were also outlined, including generating policy recommendations, implementing new legislation and revising the decision to implement legislation.

Overview of the UK Research Excellence Framework

The UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a process of expert review that evaluates the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEI). Part of this nationwide assessment involves evaluating the non-academic impact of research in attempt to capture the value and benefits to wider society. The REF was introduced in 2014 to replace the previous Research Assessment Exercise which ran from 1986 to 2008. REF 2014 was the first time UK HEI's were asked to demonstrate the reach and significance of non-academic impact. As subsequent allocation of research funding is partly based on evaluation scores in this area, this provided a financial incentive for universities to demonstrate the impact of their research.

The REF was introduced by the four UK higher education funding councils: Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (**HEFCW**), the Scottish Funding Council (**SFC**), the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (**DEL**), and what was then the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (the research and knowledge exchange duties of HEFCE have now been taken forward by a new council called **Research England**).

In REF2014, **154 HEIs** submitted their research for evaluation across the 36 pre-defined disciplinary areas, known as Units of Assessment. These 36 Units of Assessment were broadly categorised into four main areas of science, known as Panels A to D. Panel A focussed on the life sciences, Panel B on the engineering and physical sciences, Panel C on the social sciences and Panel D on the arts and humanities (see Table 1 for full list for Units of Assessment and corresponding Panels). A sub-panel of experts within each Unit of Assessment evaluated the research submissions.

For REF2014, HEI's were required to submit evidence of research impact in the form of case studies. Each of the four Panels provided the **assessment criteria for impact** (PDF, 537KB). In total, **6,975** impact case studies were submitted. As directed by REF guidance, these case studies were the strongest examples of impact for the submitting HEI's and were required to link directly to published academic work that is at least '**recognised internationally**' (PDF, 987KB).

All 6,637 non-redacted case studies are available as a searchable **online database**.

For details of the impact generated by Welsh universities, please see the King's College London **analysis of REF2014 case studies** as commissioned by the **Learned Society of Wales**.

The next REF cycle: REF 2021

The next REF evaluation is scheduled for 2021. The UK Parliament and the devolved legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are keen to support academics to engage with their work. Since January 2018, colleagues from the UK legislatures have been working together to inform the development of guidance and assessment criteria for REF 2021. This is to ensure that the REF panel members who assess the submissions have a clear understanding of what impact means for UK legislative bodies.

As part of this, the Assembly, alongside the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly, have co-produced a **briefing note** (PDF, 719KB) providing an overview of research impact in legislatures. This briefing has been cited directly in the draft **guidelines on submissions** and **panel criteria** recently published for REF 2021.

Methodology

This briefing paper focusses on exploring the case studies submitted by UK HEIs to the REF 2014 that outline engagement with the National Assembly for Wales.

Case studies were obtained from the [online database](#) using search terms. First, search terms specific to Welsh national governance were used to generate the initial sample, including 'Welsh Assembly', 'National Assembly', 'Assembly' and 'Welsh Government'. 'Welsh Government' was included as a search term to capture case studies that mistakenly included a reference to the Government rather than the Assembly. Second, this initial sample of case studies was subsequently searched for the terms 'Wales' or 'Welsh'.

It was established whether case studies referred to the Assembly or the Welsh Government. This briefing paper focusses only on the case studies that clearly outlined engagement with the Assembly.

Caveats to the analysis

The analyses in this briefing paper are limited to what was contained in the original REF 2014 submission. This has three implications for the research findings contained in this briefing paper.

- First, the search terms used to create the sample of case studies may have not captured research engagement with the Assembly if the Assembly was not described using one of the search terms or if there was a misspelling.
- Second, case studies were excluded from the sample where it was unclear if the engagement occurred with the Assembly or the Welsh Government.
- Third, submissions contain only what the submitting HEI considered their strongest cases of impact. This does not necessarily reflect the full scale or diversity of academic engagement with the Assembly, nor the extent to which Assembly arenas use academic research.
- Additionally, the submissions were restricted to specific time periods. Only impact generated from research during the assessment period of 1 January 2008 to 31 July 2013, underpinned by research in the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 2013, were eligible for submission.

Overview of case studies referring to engagement with the National Assembly for Wales

Of the 6,637 non-redacted REF Impact case studies available on the [online database](#), 36 clearly outlined engagement with the Assembly. An analysis by Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) revealed that [1,282 case studies](#) outlined engagement with the UK Parliament.

This section reports on the subject areas of the 36 case studies that reference engaging with the Assembly, and the geographical location of the submitting HEIs.

As stated above the 2014 REF exercise only covered academic research carried out between 1 January 1993 to 31 December 2013, so predates the Assembly's more recent academic engagement initiatives. This analysis does however provide a useful benchmark against which future levels of engagement can be compared. It also provides some good examples of where academic research has had a direct impact on legislation/policy scrutiny and development.

Subject areas

Case studies that referenced engaging with the Assembly were found in all four main subject panels, with Panel C (Social Sciences) contributing 58% (21) of these (see Table 1). Similarly, an analysis by POST showed that Panel C had [the most case studies \(45%\)](#) that referenced engaging with the UK Parliament.

There were case studies that reported engagement with the Assembly for 19 of the 36 possible Units of Assessment. Note that since the REF2014 exercise, further areas of policy have been devolved, most recently as a result of the [Wales Act 2017](#).

Table 1. Number of case studies submitted to REF 2014 that detailed engagement with the National Assembly for Wales.

Panel	% Total	Unit of Assessment	No. Case Studies
A	14%	1 Clinical Medicine	0
		2 Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care	2
		3 Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy	2
		4 Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience	1
		5 Biological Sciences	0
		6 Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science	0
B	3%	7 Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences	1
		8 Chemistry	0
		9 Physics	0
		10 Mathematical Sciences	0
		11 Computer Science and Informatics	0
		12 Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering	0
		13 Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials	0
		14 Civil and Construction Engineering	0
		15 General Engineering	0

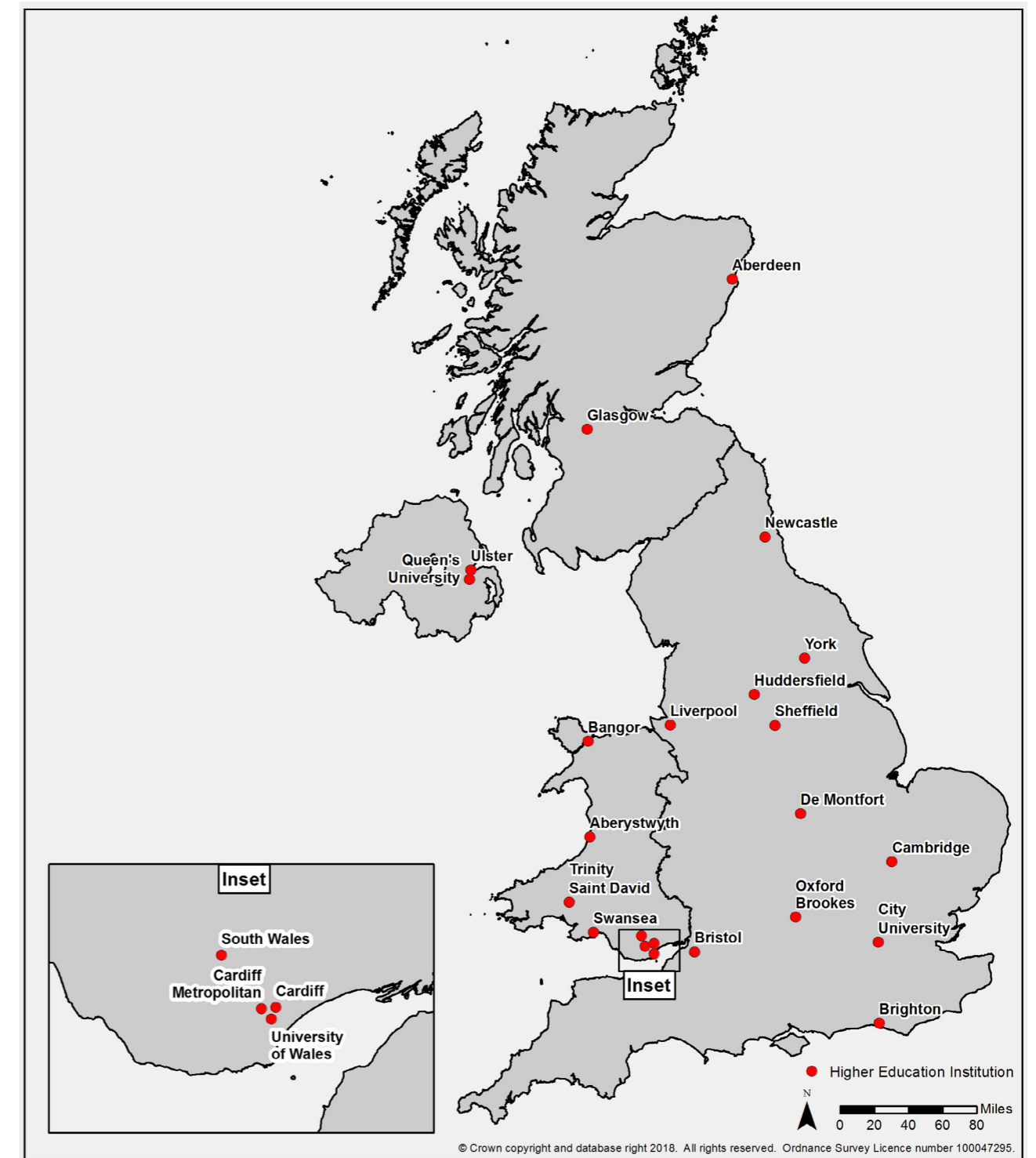
Panel	% Total	Unit of Assessment	No. Case Studies
C:	58%	16 Architecture, Build Environment and Planning	3
		17 Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology	2
		18 Economics and Econometrics	1
		19 Business and Management Studies	5
		20 Law	5
		21 Politics and International Studies	2
		22 Social Work and Social Policy	0
		23 Sociology	0
		24 Anthropology and Development Studies	1
		25 Education	1
		26 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism	1
D:	25%	27 Area Studies	0
		28 Modern Languages and Linguistics	3
		29 English Language and Literature	1
		30 History	1
		31 Classics	0
		32 Philosophy	1
		33 Theology and Religious Studies	0
		34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory	1
		35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts	2
		36 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management	0
Total			36

Geographical location of submitting higher education institutions

The majority (55%) of case studies that referenced engaging with the Assembly were from Wales – 20 of the 36 HEIs were Welsh (see Figure 1). Eight of the nine Welsh universities (the Open University is classified as being in the ‘South East’ region of the UK by the REF online database) were represented, either as single submissions or part of a joint submission. For example, the Wales Institute for Research in Art and Design case study submission represented Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. POST’s study of case studies referencing the UK Parliament also found a trend for submitting HEI’s to be near the legislature’s location, with a higher density of case studies **from universities in London and the South East of England.**

A study commissioned by the **Learned Society of Wales** analysed the case studies submitted by HEIs in Wales, totalling **273 case studies across the nine universities** (PDF, 5MB). The new analysis presented here suggests that approximately 7% (20 of 273) of all Welsh HEI case studies included a reference to engaging with the Assembly. Of the 273 case studies, **25% (67) were categorised as ‘interacting with policy makers’** (PDF, 5MB). Examples in this category included shaping policy debate and drafting legislation. The new analysis here suggests that approximately 30% (20 of 67) of these Welsh case studies that referenced policy-related impact involved the Assembly.

Figure 1: 2014 REF Exercise: UK Higher Education Institutions citing impact with the National Assembly for Wales



Mechanisms of engagement with the National Assembly for Wales

This section outlines the mechanisms that UK HEI's employed to engage with the Assembly, as detailed in the case studies. There were 37 impact events outlined across the 36 case studies – two separate engagement events were outlined in one of the case studies. By reading each case study, the following questions were addressed:

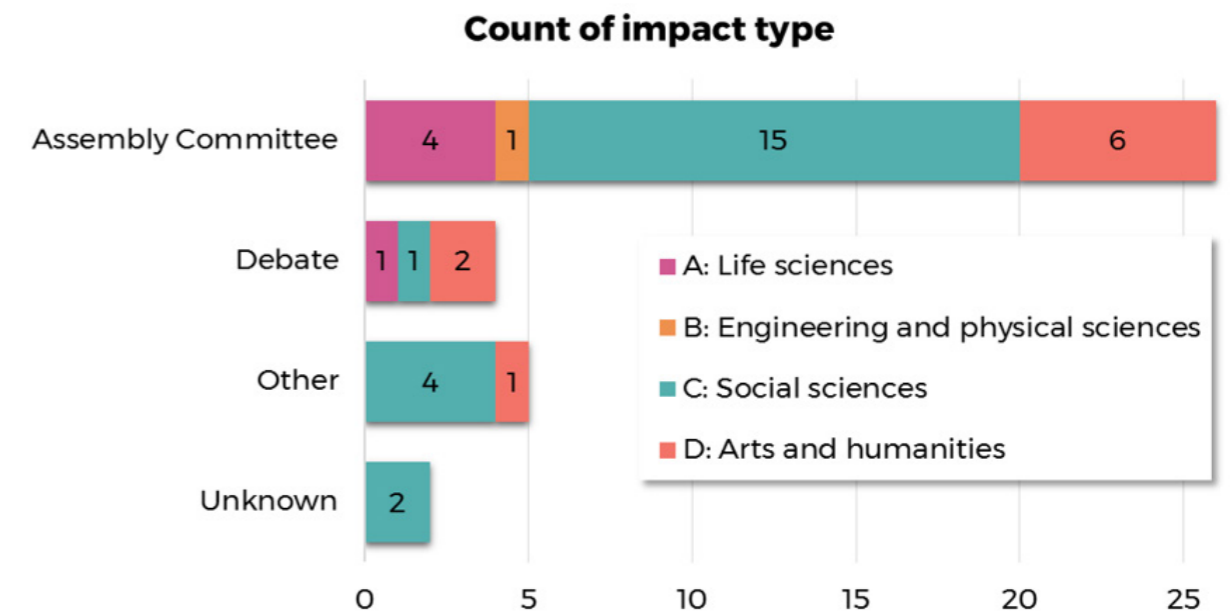
- Which Assembly arena was most commonly engaged with?
- What was the nature of these impact events?
- What were the most common routes for achieving impact with the Assembly?
- Did this vary by disciplinary area?

The engagement mechanisms outlined in this briefing paper are restricted to those which have been detailed in the impact case studies. These analyses do not reflect all possible routes for research to create impact in the Assembly, and nor do they reflect the extent to which Assembly arenas use research. For further information on how the Assembly now uses research and opportunities to engage, please see the Assembly's [Academic Engagement webpages](#).

Assembly arenas of engagement

Assembly Committees were the most frequently reported site of engagement, with 26 of the 37 impact events occurring in this Assembly arena (see Figure 2). Panel C (Social Sciences) represented 58% of cited contributions to Assembly Committees. Engagement with Assembly debates was reported on four occasions. As this analysis was focusing on engagement with the Assembly, only instances where the information was introduced by a non-Welsh Government Minister were included in this category. Panel D (Arts and Humanities) contributed the most impact events to this arena (see Figure 2). The majority of the category 'other' was also from Panel C, which included engagement with arenas such as the Assembly Commission and individual Assembly Members. Panel C (Social Sciences) contributed to the greatest range of Assembly arenas. For two of the impact events, it was unclear which Assembly arena had been engaged with.

Figure 2. Assembly Committees were the most frequently reported site of engagement within the National Assembly for Wales. Panel C (Social Sciences) contributed to the greatest range of Assembly arenas.

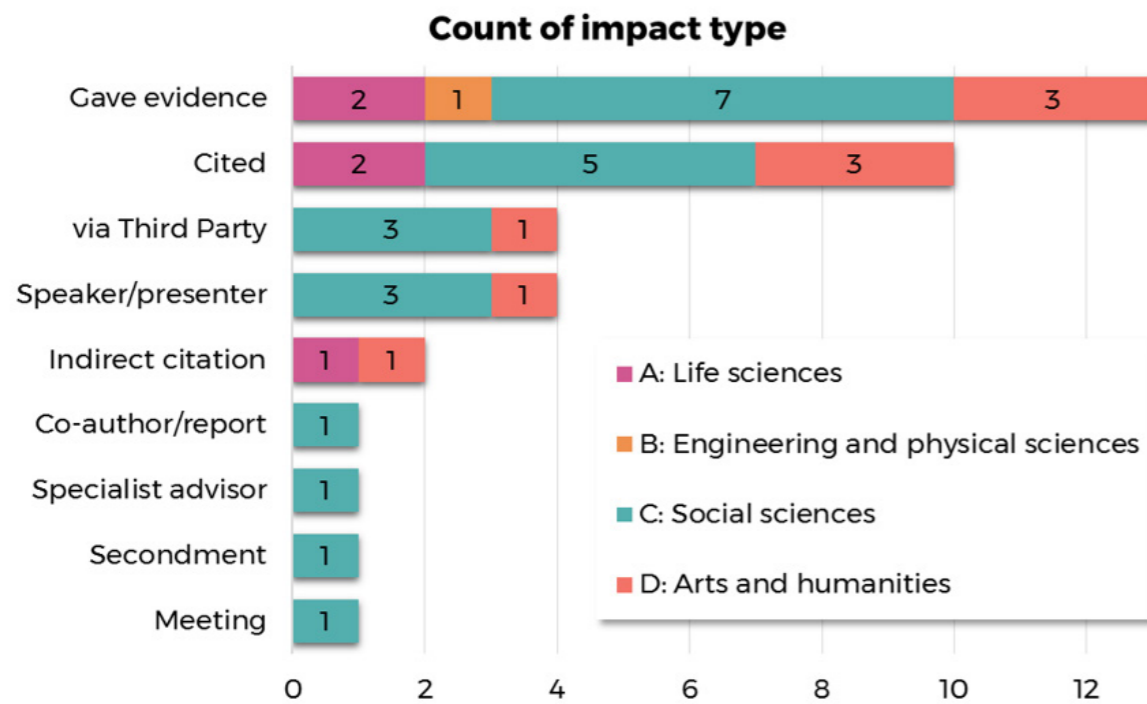


The analysis of case studies referencing the UK Parliament conducted by POST also found Committee submissions to be the **most commonly reported site of academic engagement** (PDF, 719KB), followed by individual Members of Parliament (MPs) or Peers, Bill committees and Debates.

Mechanisms of engagement

There were nine different mechanisms of engagement identified within the REF2014 case studies that referenced engaging with the Assembly (see Figure 3). Giving evidence was the most frequently reported mechanism of engagement, with 13 of the 37 impact events (see Figure 3). This category combines case studies that referenced either oral or written submissions of evidence. This was closely followed by direct citations of research with 11 reported impact events. Impact events were classified as 'via third party' if the original research was presented via an intermediary that was separate to the submitting HEI. 'Indirect citation' included impact events that involved the citation of a report/project that referenced, or was based on, the original research. Panel C (Social Sciences) contributed to the greatest range of mechanisms of engagement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Giving evidence (oral and written combined) is the most frequently reported mechanism of engagement. Panel C (Social Sciences) uses the greatest range in mechanisms to engage.

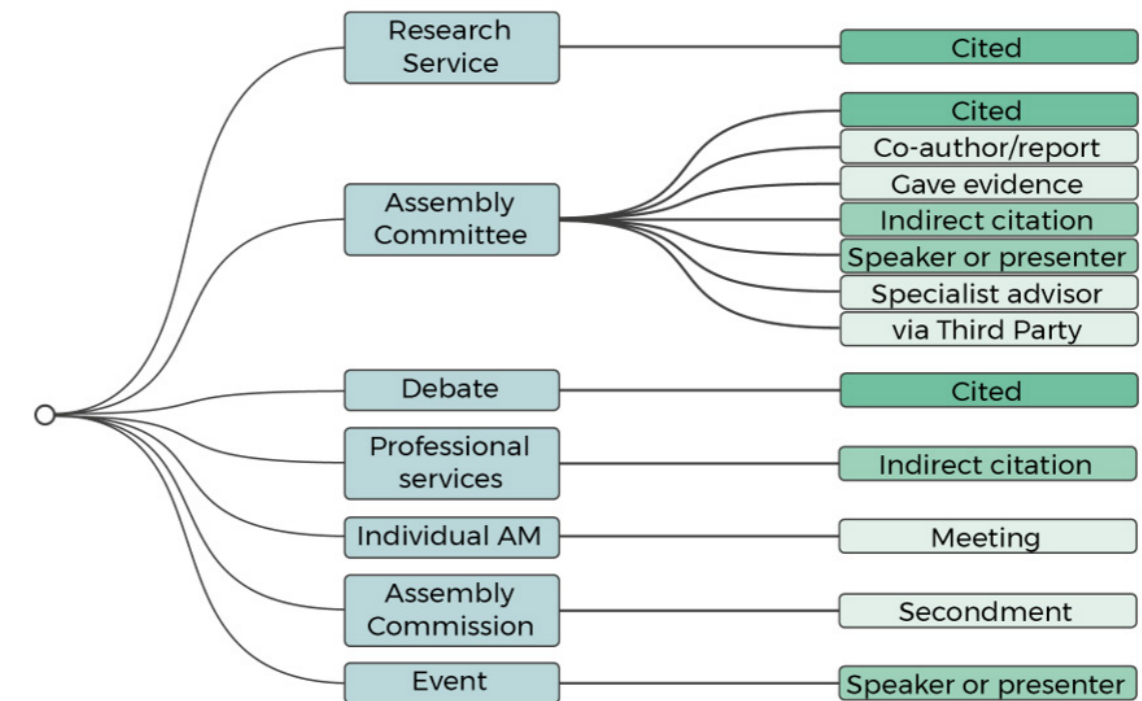


Case studies that outlined engagement with the UK Parliament showed a similar pattern: the most commonly reported mechanism of engagement was for **research to be cited**, followed by giving evidence and via third party. In total, academics reported engaging with the UK Parliament in 23 different ways.

Pathways to engagement

There were 13 unique pathways detailed in the case studies for engaging with the Assembly (for two impact events, the Assembly arena was unclear; see Figure 4). Of these 13, the most commonly reported pathway was giving evidence at an Assembly Committee, followed by being cited in either an output relating to Assembly Committees or in an Assembly debate.

Figure 4. The 13 unique engagement pathways detailed in the 36 case studies (excluding the two 'unknowns'). Figure 4 was drawn using the open source visualisation tool RAW.



Outcomes of engagement with the National Assembly for Wales

For eight of the 36 case studies, the policy or legislative outcomes of engaging with the Assembly were also outlined. This section provides further detail of these outcomes, including:

- What policy-related outcomes were detailed in the case studies?
- What engagement pathway was most commonly associated with generating policy-related outcomes?
- Which disciplinary area(s) outlined policy-related outcomes within the last REF period?

The policy-related outcomes detailed below are restricted to those that were included as part of the case study submission. It does not reflect the full breadth of outcomes following engaging with the Assembly. For example, the remaining 28 case studies may have generated policy outcomes since the REF2014 submission, however, that is beyond the scope of this briefing paper.

Outcomes relating to changes in legislation

Three of the eight case studies outlined changes to legislation, and included revising the decision to implement legislation, implementing new legislation, and amending existing legislation. All three outcomes could be traced to engaging with an Assembly Committee. Two case studies were from Panel C (Social Sciences) and one was from Panel B (Engineering and Physical Sciences).

- **Revising the decision to implement legislation:** Research submitted by the [University of Brighton](#) (PDF, 381KB) to the Sustainability Committee in 2010 led to the Welsh Government at that time deciding not to introduce legislation on access to inland water. Instead, the Welsh Government at that time followed the 'voluntary approach' to accessing inland water.
- **Implementing new legislation:** A researcher from [Oxford Brookes University](#) (PDF, 208KB) conducted a standards regime review for the Committee for Standards in 2001. From this, it was recommended that office of Commissioner for Standards should have enhanced powers and responsibility. The legislation required to permit this was included in the Government of Wales Act 2006, with the first statutory Commissioner in post in 2010.

- **Amending proposed legislation:** The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 was shaped by research from [Swansea University](#) (PDF, 47.6KB). Following evidence submission to the Children and Young People Committee and Legislation Committee No.5, the draft Measure was amended to reflect research findings. As per Swansea University research, the amendment stipulated that there is a 'pervasive legal duty' for Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Outcomes relating to policy

The remaining five case studies that included outcomes associated with their engagement involved policy: policy recommendations, implementing new policy, and amending existing policy. Four of the five outcomes were related to Assembly Committees. Two case studies each were from Panel C (Social Sciences) and Panel D (Arts and Humanities), and one from Panel A (Life Sciences).

- **Policy recommendations - bioethics:** Research from the [University of Cambridge](#) (PDF, 167KB) was submitted to the Health and Social Care Committee in relation to their inquiry on the Human Transplantation (Wales) Bill in 2013. Recommendations for clarity in communication around the proposed changes to an 'opt-out' system were included in the Committee's report.
- **Policy recommendations - Welsh literacy:** Evidence submitted to the Culture Committee by [Swansea University](#) (PDF, 55.4KB) in 2003 led to the Committee recommending the creating of a 'Library of Wales'. The then Welsh Government provided funding for this initiative.
- **Policy recommendations - Welsh public law:** Research from [Bangor University](#) (PDF, 164KB) was submitted to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee in relation to their inquiry on the establishment of a separate Welsh jurisdiction in 2012. The findings in relation to access to justice, legal institutions, and the legal profession were cited in the Committee's report and were the basis for a recommendation.
- **Implementing new policy:** Evidence submitted to the Enterprise and Learning Committee by the [University of Sheffield](#) (PDF, 235KB) in 2008 led to policy involving early screening for dyslexia in primary schools.
- **Amending existing policy:** The publication of research in 2010 by the [University of Bristol](#) (PDF, 298KB) on the impact of school performance information on pupil progress led to debate in the Assembly, with questions posed to the First Minister. Subsequently, a new system of publishing school performance information was introduced in 2011.