On 1st November 2016, one hundred people are coming to parliament to tell politicians and officials why evidence matters. Among them a fire officer, a football supporter, a farmer, a housing officer, a teacher. Coming from all over the UK, they will fill every available space in one of parliament’s largest rooms to explain how they use evidence and why they expect people in authority to do so.

There are many others who would have come in their place. People contact our organisation all the time with questions about the use of evidence on subjects as diverse as air pollution, childcare, the safety of military personnel and cause-of-death investigations. They want to make good choices and understand what policies will achieve. They aren’t looking for a sound bite or a quick fix.

As the idea of a ‘post-truth’ public rumbled through public life this summer, people started asking what it meant and whether politicians might start ignoring public values of truthfulness and accountability. They asked what they should do and what we at Sense about Science were doing. The answer now is that they and we are challenging this caricature that the public is uninterested in the soundness of policy. In the following pages you can read some of what they have to say. They have different opinions, they don’t agree on what evidence to prioritise and others would no doubt disagree with them. But in uniting over it’s importance to understanding, accountability and scrutiny, we hope they’ll inspire decision-makers to strive for better in public life.

Tracey Brown, director, Sense about Science

Sense about Science is an independent campaigning charity that challenges the misrepresentation of science and evidence in public life. We advocate openness and honesty about research findings, and work to ensure the public interest in sound science and evidence is recognised in public discussion and policy making.
The people and organisations in the following pages have an amazing range of stories to tell about why evidence matters to them. **Collectively they tell policymakers that:**

- We expect government to use evidence when making policy.
- We expect ministers to explain their reasoning.
- We expect parliament to seek and to scrutinise reasoning behind policies.
Why evidence matters to us: the stories heard in parliament and messages we received...

Alex Smith, mother of a child with a rare heart condition

My daughter Georgina was diagnosed with a rare heart condition called Ebstein's anomaly when she was two and a half years old.

Evidence is important to me to make educated decisions about the best treatment available for Georgina. But I need to understand that evidence too.

When Georgina was diagnosed, my world was thrown into turmoil, and I was immediately faced with making decisions about her care. I was having to make the right choices for her based on the information I was being given. It was a trying time and I was exhausted by the emotionally charged decision-making. What I needed was straightforward and clear information, at a time when I wasn’t thinking clearly.

There’s now a central website that gives information about the current evidence from children’s heart surgery units and what it can and can’t tell us. It gives the number of surgeries each unit performs, the survival rates and the complexity of the surgery they undertake; just the information I need. It is somewhere I will be looking when the time comes for Georgina to have surgery. Somewhere other heart families can go to, to make an informed decision based on current data.

Evidence matters so much to me because I need it to make the best decisions for my daughter.

— Chris Boardman, Olympic gold medalist

I don’t know where to start there are so many examples of why evidence is important to me, from the mundanity of knowing whether I am being ripped off by product claims to the enormity of deciding how to vote, from the emotional topic of whether to cull badgers to decisions about how and where to have my children, from making decisions about my family’s and my health/lifestyle to employing good practice to present balanced arguments in my job.

— Lucy Moore, medical writer

We need evidence to assess the truth about problems facing society. If we don’t know where we are, how can we decide in which direction to travel?

— David
I work with tenants in the Wheatley Group (Scotland’s leading housing, care and property management group), which encompasses Glasgow Housing Association. Evidence matters to us because it helps us assess the benefits (or drawbacks) of new schemes to make positive changes to social housing.

Some of the poorest people in society live in social housing. I think it’s important that we do our best by these people to improve the quality of their homes. It’s well established that the quality of social housing can affect the physical and mental wellbeing of tenants. In Scotland, people who live in Glasgow have an average life expectancy of 12.5 years less than the rest of the population of Scotland. This is known as the Glasgow Effect. Glasgow Housing Association have invested well in improving housing with the aim to improve health and wellbeing of tenants.

For example, cladding and insulating homes to make them warmer has been shown to improve the mental and physical health of tenants. Providing green spaces and parks can also increase physical activity and improve health.

The Go East and Go Well projects in London and Glasgow look at whether the facilities provided by the Olympic and Commonwealth Games’ legacies have been beneficial to the health of tenants in these areas.

It’s important that the evidence from these projects is used to make improvements to social housing that can really make a difference to tenants across the UK.

— Paul Murphy, housing officer, Glasgow

Evidence should form the basis of all major issues discussed in parliament by our elected leaders. Emotional rhetoric simplifies discussions, reducing them to sound bites and breeds prejudice and knee-jerk reaction politics.

— Kevin Howell, illustrator/animator

I think evidence is an absolute requirement for making rational decisions on use of scarce resources in critical areas that affect everyone, but especially when people are at their most vulnerable. Healthcare and healthcare spending cannot be left to guesswork.

— Kathy Mills, implementation consultant, CTC Software Ltd

It’s my money they are spending, and I don’t want lobbying and guesswork involved in decision-making.

— Bob MacCallum, scientific web developer

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At Women’s Aid, evidence matters to us because domestic abuse has historically been hidden, ignored or misunderstood. We collect a wide range of data through our work and we use this to develop clear recommendations on what works in policy and practice. We also use the evidence to support campaigns led by survivors.

In January this year, we published the report “19 Child Homicides” a detailed investigation into cases where children had been killed by a perpetrator of domestic abuse during, or as a result of, unsafe child contact. The evidence in this report powerfully shows that the culture of ‘contact at all costs’ has fatal consequences. We have used this evidence to call for family court processes to be made safer for women and children survivors of domestic abuse. This campaign has been spearheaded by Claire Throssell, mother of Jack and Paul who were killed in October 2014 by their father after he was granted unsupervised contact with them by the family court. On Thursday 15th September, Claire’s MP, Angela Smith, led the first ever parliamentary debate on this issue, and the campaign has had a hugely positive response; we are currently collecting signatures for a petition and many MPs have pledged their support. We are also working with the relevant government agencies to implement the recommendations that we made in the report.

Evidence has helped us to make a strong, clear case for action in a troubled and often misunderstood area.
I've been heavily involved with Walthamstow's “mini-Holland” cycling programme for the last few years, in part because I live there. In Walthamstow’s “village” an entire area has been closed to through traffic to make it better for walking and cycling. Local residents and motorists were adamant this would cause gridlock on surrounding main roads and kill local shops.

Two big protests gathered at the town hall, thousands signed petitions, and a group even paraded a coffin symbolising the death of the main shopping street up and down it. Locally, it became accepted wisdom that the changes *had* introduced gridlock on the main roads. But when TfL actually looked at the evidence — from before and after the scheme — they found it had had no effect on bus times. And the council’s traffic counters found it hasn’t slowed down traffic.

Evidence matters to me because if local decisions like those about road infrastructure aren’t taken considering the evidence, then all too often whoever shouts loudest wins.

It is important that when schemes like this happen, authorities engage with communities early and address their concerns. They should be upfront about reasons for the scheme, the research on it, as well as the uncertainties, and challenge misleading claims early. And when constituents raise these issues, MPs and councillors need to look at the evidence and use that as a basis to respond. Luckily in Walthamstow, the key politicians did — and the scheme went on to remove thousands of vehicle movements a day from the area and has won awards. But in many other areas I’ve seen the opposite happen — politicians have listened to resident fear over evidence. That isn’t a good basis for making any decision.

A democracy is supposed to work by the people electing their representatives who should make informed decisions in place of the people. If they have to make decisions on issues that they are not themselves experts in, which we should assume will be almost all, they should be required to rely on facts and evidence to make the best decision for the people.

— Judith Stockem, analyst

Good evidence can lead to fit-for-purpose policies that save lives and money and ensure the country’s competitive edge in the international market, science and other communities.

— Dr Anusha Panjwani, science policy fellow, Campaign for Science and Engineering

The public deserve more than lies or to be patronised, especially in a post-Brexit Britain now that many believe they were lied to during the campaign.

— Katie Muddiman, PhD student, University of Manchester

Simon Munk, infrastructure campaigner, London Cycling Campaign

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— Katie Muddiman, PhD student, University of Manchester
I run a beach cleaning group in Cornwall. Evidence matters to us because it is delivering the proof that marine plastic is not just an eyesore on our beaches, but is causing serious harm.

Thanks to the growing body of scientific research into the longevity and toxicity of plastic in the marine environment our group, as part of a larger Cornish coalition, was able to make the case for banning plastic microbeads in cosmetics — which the government has thankfully heeded. It was hugely rewarding to know that evidence, passion and the voices of the hundreds of thousands of people who signed the petition had been heard.

Without evidence, who would have thought that these tiny particles — 2 million of which can be found in a tube of face wash — could cause such a problem when washed off and flushed down the drain?

Yet we now know that microplastics are readily ingested by zooplankton and filter feeders, with potential impacts on the entire marine food chain and possibly even human health.

There is still so much to learn about the rapidly growing problem of marine plastic, which some forecast will be more abundant than fish by 2050. We need to stay on top of the evidence to make sure we are doing enough to combat this problem.

— Claire Wallerstein, Cornish Plastic Pollution Coalition

It can take ten seconds to set a policy based on politics, and then ten years of science and debate to reverse it. Which is why it’s so important for governments to make decisions based on evidence right from the outset.

— Chris Packham, naturalist and television presenter

So that they can make more informed decisions.

— Raluca Matei, PhD student, Royal Northern College of Music

It’s easy to say that we live in a ‘post-truth’ era, but I don’t believe that. People want and need evidence now just as much, and probably more than, ever before. We want to make the right decisions for ourselves, for our families and for our country and the only way we can do that is with evidence... By championing evidence in parliament, the UK government has an opportunity to begin to help people to see how we can all use and interpret evidence to help us live better and more informed lives.

— Leah Fitzsimmons, medical researcher

It is vital that health policy is driven by evidence of what works and what does not, not by political fad or fashion.

— Andrew Conway Morris, medical doctor
Evidence mattered to me as a doctor because quite simply, evidence-based medicine saves lives. Here’s one story of how.

Until the 1980s there wasn’t any official advice about sleeping positions for babies. Parents did what seemed to them to be the right thing to do. Many put babies to sleep face down because they were worried about their baby choking in the night or their child’s head developing a flat spot.

In 1985 research was published suggesting a link between babies sleeping on their front and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, often referred to as “cot death”. In response to this initial observation more research followed and it became clear that there was indeed a link.

Between 1987 and 1993 governments in the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA, Sweden and Canada launched public information campaigns initially advising parents not to place infants face-down in their cot and later updating that advice to follow a formal “Back to Sleep” policy.

The best evidence that we have now shows that as the number of children sleeping on their backs rose, rising to 75% in one American study, the incidence of cot death declined. Between 1988 and 2001 the number of cot deaths in the USA fell by 60%, from 1.4 to 0.56 per 1000 live births.
Mrs M E Ram, homemaker

I work in policing, crime prevention and criminal justice more broadly. If the government paid more attention to the evidence there would be less crime, fewer victims and fewer people in prison.

— Gloria Laycock, professor

Amanda Jacks, football supporter, east London

I’m a football fan and I work for the Football Supporters’ Federation. We have been campaigning for safe standing at football stadiums for over ten years.

I think that the rules around standing should be based on evidence and clubs should have the choice to introduce safe standing areas if they see fit.

The legal position on standing at football matches in England and Wales is outdated and not based on the facts or the reality of what actually happens in stadiums. Every week thousands of football fans stand in seated areas supporting the team they love. I think they deserve proper safe standing areas. Everyone would benefit as those who wish to stand can do so while those who prefer to sit no longer have to worry about having their view blocked.

It’s frustrating that conversations about this are often based on misunderstandings or even total myth rather than evidence.

In Scotland they have different rules, and this season Celtic FC have introduced a standing section at Celtic Park. The sports minister has said she will look at the evidence coming from Celtic. This is great and will hopefully mean we have a more informed policy discussion. We hope this will lead to a change in the law and give fans the choice to stand safely and in comfort.

David Flint, management consultant, Cass Business School

To have the best chance of working, policies need to be based on the best possible understanding of a situation. That requires evidence and sometimes trials of several policies to see what works. This is demanding. It also requires a kind of political courage. To be willing to say to the public and the press, “Actually, we don’t know what would work best — but we are determined to find out!”

— David Flint, management consultant, Cass Business School

Not just politicians, but all of us should listen to facts and evidence in an era of “spin” and opinion. Information, not guesswork and charisma, is necessary to make wise and economical choices regarding health-care, education, economics and the environment.

— Mrs M E Ram, homemaker
Evidence matters to me because I need to know that in my classroom the limited resources and time I have with the children are being spent on things that work. Teachers are under increasing pressure to get results and there are many different claims about learning styles and what does and doesn’t work in the classroom. For example, some teachers give their students surveys to determine their preferred learning style — visual, auditory or kinaesthetic — and tailor their lessons for each style. Not only is there no evidence to support this, it might even hinder the progress of children who benefit from learning in many different ways.

It’s so important that the Department for Education considers research evidence and supports policies that will make the most difference in the classroom. It’s great it has been trying to do this and I hope teachers can be more closely involved in the process.

Ahmed Moustafa, secondary school teacher, Corelli College, Greenwich

Evidence-based teaching practice is essential in ensuring that pupils derive the greatest possible benefit from their education experience and should be used more, not less, in making education policy decisions. For the sake of the pupils, education must stop being a political battleground and focus solely on providing young people with the best possible start in life.

— Jo Isherwood, modern foreign language teacher, Leicestershire

Evidence is the substance upon which decisions should be made, and the foundation of subsequent action. Not “I feel that...”, “I think that...”, “people say...”. But all the evidence needs to be considered and not cherry-picked just to support one side of an argument. Politicians need to understand that the electorate are not fools.

— Andrew Stracey, retired

Decisions made in Parliament must always be based on a thorough analysis of unbiased evidence in order to make the best decisions for the long-term benefit of the country.

— Dr Donald Coppen, biotech consultant

How can they govern the country fairly without it? One important subject is climate change and of course the environment and its effect on it.

— Janice Taverne, retired microbiologist

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I am the Director of Response and Resilience for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The work of the FRS has led to fewer lives lost and a trend towards fewer fires in recent years. Evidence suggests there are fewer fires in homes but I cannot ignore the fact that these incidents are disproportionately affecting some of the most vulnerable individuals within our communities.

The evidence also suggests there are fewer fires in non-domestic premises but this has to be balanced against the evidence that each incident is now showing a significantly higher individual loss to businesses and to the UK economy.

So, with that knowledge, we continue to work with our colleagues across the fire sector to minimise the effects of all fire incidents on our communities through engagement, through education and, of course, through response. But collectively we can do more.

— Lewis Ramsay, fire officer, Strathclyde

The evidence shows that provision of sprinklers both in the domestic and commercial sectors, selected through a risk-based approach, can significantly improve the outcomes for individuals within our communities, for business continuity, for consumers, for the insurance industry and the UK economy.

I feel the time is right for us to take the opportunity to come together and deliver the common sense, risk-based, thought out provision of sprinkler systems. This will not only provide valuable safeguards within commercial premises, but will, in the right circumstances, provide a potentially life saving intervention for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

—Dualta McQuaid, healthcare worker

Policy making should be based on evidence as much as this is available. I am particularly concerned about the consideration of evidence found through medical research and public health research in the implementation of policies to address public health issues and medical care.

— Paula Ordonez Suarez, research scientist, The Francis Crick Institute

Proceeding with policies without any evidence of their efficacy or selectively ignoring evidence contrary with deeply held beliefs condemns the nation to waste resources and lose international competitiveness at a time when it can be least afforded.

— Nicholas Hopkinson, retired dentist

Everybody should listen to evidence. They take decisions about subjects in which they often have no expertise. I cannot imagine why anybody would not check the evidence.
I was brought in as chief executive in 2012 when The Silver Line, a 24-hour helpline for older people, was just a ‘good idea’. But establishing there was evidence of a real need among older people for the service was something else. That’s why I immediately ran pilots of a 24-hour helpline supported by friendship services in three parts of the UK with independent evaluation by the Centre for Social Justice.

The evidence showed there was a clear need among older people for our service and was vital in helping us to obtain a £5 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund to support part of the first two years’ operation.

This grant allowed the Silver Line to launch in time for Christmas 2013 — often the loneliest time of the year for older people. Since then the helpline has received over one million calls and we continue to use data to check that we are meeting our objectives for reaching the loneliest and most isolated older people across the UK.

So evidence matters to us because it helped us make the case for our founding, and it directs the way we use our resources. Evidence helps us help older people in the UK.
I am a chef working in the food manufacturing industry. This means that I develop and try out the recipes for our products. The food we make has got to be tasty and what people want to eat. I look at culinary trends as well as following our guidelines on nutrition and health for our products. So I am really at the cutting edge of discussions about our diet and health!

It matters to me that claims made about food are based on evidence. It is frustrating when people talk about nutrition and what they think is good for people, based on their feelings, not on evidence. When policymakers follow fads and trends they risk making policy that doesn’t help or missing opportunities for policy that does.

The government has done this well in some places, like the salt reduction program which is a collaboration between food manufacturers and the government.

I can see what power and what responsibility food manufacturers have when it comes to influencing people’s diets. How we reformulate or change our recipes can make a huge difference to people’s diets. But reformulation is difficult. It takes hard work, innovation and huge amounts of resource. Evidence-based information needs to be the driver of this work, not the rhetoric of a few charismatic campaigners.

Anthony Warner, chef and food blogger, St Albans

It matters because policy must be anchored by something, and what do we have that’s better than clear, transparent evidence? Even if, eventually, some policies and decisions must be made in spite of evidence, we still need to be conscious that we’re doing so.

— Lee Warren, consultant and business speaker, Invisible Advantage

Politicians may ‘listen’ to evidence — but invariably behind closed doors in secret; this enables truth/facts to be massaged to fit a political agenda.

— Mike Fisher, civil engineer

If you do not act on evidence you are very likely to make an issue you are trying to address worse.

— Susan Alam
Accurate scientific evidence and data extrapolation without political spin is crucial to the correct conclusion being reached.

— James Servaes, farmer, Carlton House Farm

Autistic people continue to be one of the most substantially disadvantaged groups in society, with lower life expectancy, poorer quality of life, and poorer general health than the wider public. These outcomes will not change with platitudes, individual pet theories or untested services or treatments. It will be scientific evidence which will explain the poor outcomes which autistic people face and give us the keys to longer, happier, healthier lives for all autistic people.

— Jon Spiers, CEO, Autistica

Out of pure self interest: I want personal care and public policy to be guided by evidence indicating how to do more good than harm.

— Iain Chalmers, health services researcher, James Lind Initiative

London Play is the capital’s charity for play, working on behalf of 1.8 million children. We strive for London’s children to have the best free play opportunities, near to where they live.

I could present a wealth of research on the benefits of play in a child’s development but a quicker route to your understanding would be to think of your own childhood and the moments of discovery, adventure, camaraderie and invention that are still with you today. Play is not trivial. Play matters.

And evidence matters to us because it helps us identify areas that need support and put forward the case for projects and the benefits of play.

With little UK research on the benefits of play we pull in data from a wide range of experts. Recently I wrote a paper on the impact of air pollution on London’s youngsters. It was submitted to the UN day of discussion held in Geneva in September. To make a compelling argument for action we drew on a wide range of research from many disciplines.

The UN panel accepted the paper and then we forwarded it on to the public health team at City Hall, using the momentum created in Geneva for a paper that was based on solid research by experts. This is an example of how we pursue our vision of London childhoods being the happiest, healthiest and most playful in the world.

Paul Hocker, development director, London Play
I’m active in Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking. The UK’s chief medical officers recommend 60 minutes’ daily activity for children and about 30 for adults. Walking is one of the most accessible ways to achieve this; with 1/3 of my borough’s kids overweight by Year 6, walking needs to be made safe and easy for them.

However, people are discouraged from walking, and injured when walking, by fast motor traffic. Driving more slowly means fewer crashes, and crashes that do happen cause less severe injury — especially to people walking and cycling. We’ve therefore campaigned for a borough-wide 20mph speed limit. Wandsworth Council consulted on introducing this speed limit, and we used all available evidence to help inform their decision. This measure has now been agreed for residential streets; the new limit will be introduced by next spring. I am pleased that the council responded to the evidence in favour of this improvement to our streets.

Susie Morrow, volunteer, Living Streets

We must have policies based on evidence not emotions and politicians should be at the forefront of telling us the public what research has shown.

— Ann Broadbent, company director

I think evidence is important in all decisions that matter, but an example in my mind at the moment is using evidence to decide on the allocation of funding to support cycling. If evidence is not used then money will be wasted and it is too important to do this. I want cyclists to be safe and there to be more of us (so we’re a healthier nation), for this we need initiatives that are proven to work.

— Holly Sheahan, business development manager

Lives depend on sound science.

— Dr AG Hunter, anaesthetist, KZN Health

NHS Choices is the official public-facing website of the National Health Service in England, with more than 40 million visits per month. Evidence is the cornerstone of all our health content. We strive to ensure that data is accurate and clearly presented and that editorial content is evidence-based: founded on the best scientific knowledge currently available.

— Victoria Hunt, product lead, Health Promotion, NHS Choices
As a physician I rely on evidence of high quality when making important diagnostic and therapeutic decisions. Advice or assertions that are based on no evidence or on evidence of poor quality lead to uncertainty and may result in decisions that lead to harm.

— Dr J K Aronson, honorary consultant physician and clinical pharmacologist

Sam Farmer, small business owner

I own a small cosmetics brand. Cosmetics might seem to some like a bit of a trivial subject, but we are talking about the products we all use every day. Evidence matters to me because there are consequences when it is ignored.

Take parabens for example. They are found in fruit and vegetables and we use them as a preservative; we can’t have face creams growing mould on your bathroom counter. Parabens have been used in cosmetics for over a century but one piece of misinterpreted research resulted in a scare story about a link with breast cancer. More research showed no such link exists but the damage had been done, to the industry and consumers. Suddenly products everywhere were declaring themselves paraben free; listing their ‘natural’ ingredients, some of which ‘naturally’ contain parabens. The industry was forced to find alternatives, and consumers were worried unnecessarily.

It is vital to my business that regulation and advice surrounding cosmetics is based on evidence, but it’s just as important to me as a consumer of these everyday products.

— Michael Blastland, freelance journalist

I will not vote for anyone of any party who does not take serious evidence seriously — whichever way it points, on whatever subject. No policy has credibility if it ignores good evidence. No government has my trust if it abuses evidence. And no-one is fit for power who cannot commit to treating evidence responsibly.

— Stuart Maytham, physiotherapist

Pseudo-science is worryingly prevalent in private physiotherapy where practitioners prey on the vulnerable and make them dependent on their placebo treatments. This is not sustainable or beneficial for the patient or the industry. We live in a science-based society in which very few understand the basic principles of science. If we, as a nation, are not able to think critically, to ask skeptical questions and question those in authority then we are up for grabs from the next charlatan that comes a blog along.
I am an arable farmer on the Welsh border. Back in 2012, major rain storms did huge damage to farms, especially where we are in the west, and caused major floods all over the UK. At the time, I’d just planted and prepared 150 acres of my land with rape seed. When I inspected those fields the morning after the storm, I might as well have been looking at a lake.

Unhealthy soil doesn’t allow water to drain properly. The water sits there and becomes a pond — so farmers tend to rely on industrial drainage systems that flush it downstream, which might save the crop but can worsen floods.

But there are techniques that farmers can use to make soil better at absorbing water — like zero tillage, which we’ve been trying. The evidence for improved farming techniques is well established, and they’re a win-win. Not only does farmland become better at ameliorating flooding, it becomes more productive and profitable for farmers too.

So evidence matters to me — because I care about the future of my farm, and the community around it. The more that government can support and encourage farmers to try out the latest techniques, the better our countryside can work for everyone.

— Tim Ashton, farmer, Shropshire

I think it is particularly important that government uses the available evidence when making decisions on matters concerning the countryside. It is clear that, to date, policy has been largely driven by the anecdotal comments of a small number of farmers rather than by evidence based policy.

— Mark Crutchley, retired

As a scientist who has always aimed to be as objective as possible, my professional ethic was offended by the pseudo-science that I have experienced: it is a lousy approach to public decision-making in a democracy.

— Professor John D Goss-Custard, research ecologist specialising in shorebirds, Natural Environment Research Council (retired 2002)

Government ministers and the public are being misled and polarised by the power of the media and of individuals who want to divide us and lead us down pathways that often have no basis of truth. We need to base decision-making on proper evidence, gathered and presented in a clear and fair way.

— Paul Broadbent, author
What we’re asking for: when is evidence expected?

Policymaking is about finding ways to influence and organise society, so it is based on a combination of politics, values and pragmatism. Some claims about why a policy is being introduced cannot be tested with evidence and some can.

But while we can all agree that there are many factors in a decision, it’s useful to distinguish where we would expect supporting evidence, and where we wouldn’t. We have a right to know when policymakers are simply asserting beliefs and when they are making claims about fact. There is a world of difference between expressing political values and making promises that could one day be proved right or wrong. For example...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Hosting the Olympics will be an exciting and prestigious thing for our city to do.”</th>
<th>“Hosting the Olympics will encourage more people to take up sport and get more exercise, and there will be a net financial benefit from increased tourism and investment.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Marriage is the bedrock of our society and we should support and recognise that commitment through a married couples’ tax allowance.”</td>
<td>“A married couple’s allowance will increase the number of children growing up in married households and reduce anti-social behaviour.”</td>
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<td>“Supporting children from all backgrounds is a priority for this government, so we need a national network of early years centres to show that commitment.”</td>
<td>“If we provide early years centres we will measurably improve the education of children who have access to them.”</td>
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<td>“We don’t believe that what people do in their personal lives is our business. So we support decriminalisation of small amounts of cannabis for personal use.”</td>
<td>“Cannabis has substantial health benefits and we should decriminalise it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It is not fair that some rich people don’t play by the same rules as everyone else. ‘Non-doms’ should be taxed.”</td>
<td>“‘Non-doms’ should be taxed because it will bring more money to the Exchequer, even if some of them leave as a result.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“This government is committed to devolving power to the regions because everyone has a right to local democracy.”</td>
<td>“This government is committed to devolving power to the regions because it will stimulate economic regeneration.”</td>
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