In November 2021 over 110 MPs, peers and parliamentary staff got involved in Evidence Week in UK Parliament, run by Sense about Science.

Evidence Week in Parliament equips MPs, peers and staff with the insights and tools needed to use and scrutinise evidence for decisions. During the ongoing coronavirus pandemic constituents have understandably been asking more of MPs, expecting them to get across extremely complex issues with emerging and evolving evidence. This has highlighted the need for MPs to not only be able to understand the issues at hand, but also communicate the uncertainties and trade-offs involved in making evidence-based policy decisions.

Sense about Science was supported by our lead partner the Institute of Physics and our communication partners POST, the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), and Ipsos MORI.

To launch Evidence Week, an outstanding panel of Committee Chairs and experts from a number of the country’s leading scientific organisations came together with MPs to answer questions. These were submitted by constituents from across the country, through the #AskAnMP platform, on how evidence is being used on the issues that matter to them. Throughout the week, MPs were able to engage with 3-minute briefings from our partners both in person and via the Evidence Week website, on how to handle and understand evidence in 14 pressing policy and research areas. The week was closed with a training session on using evidence specifically designed for parliamentary staff.

A summary of Evidence Week’s impact in numbers...

- The Opening Event was watched by nearly 300 people.
- 590 people visited the online exhibition, including 130 MPs, Lords and parliamentary staff.
- Throughout the week 114 parliamentarians actively engaged with Evidence Week including 68 MP’s and peers, 46 parliamentary and government members of staff.
- Evidence Week partners had over 150 meetings
- Our Evidence Week tweets received 126.5k impressions during the week

“Maybe it’s the ex-police officer in me but I’m a big fan of evidence and expertise! Thanks to Sense About Science for such a useful Evidence Week.” – Wendy Chamberlain MP
An overview of the week

Opening event 1st November

A panel of experts and committee chairs joined constituency MPs to answer questions from across the country about how evidence is being used on the issues that matter to them. Questions were raised by a diverse audience of constituents through the #AskAnMP platform, wanting to know how parliament was understanding and using data on a range of issues that matter to them and their communities.

Panel

Ed Humpherson Director General for Regulation at the UK Statistics Authority
Ian Diamond National Statistician
Prof Dame Ottoline Leyser Director of UKRI
Philip Dunne Environmental Audit Committee Chair
Lord Krebs Food, Poverty, Health and Environment Committee Chair
Ruth Jones Welsh Affairs Committee
Elisabeth Costa Senior Director of Policy and Partnerships at Behavioural Insights Team
Carol Monaghan SciTech Committee

By offering this event in a virtual format, 26 people were given a platform they would not otherwise have had for their concerns and questions to be heard and addressed.

“I love Evidence Week, I think it's absolutely fantastic. When you do my job, every week is Evidence Week but it's really nice to join lots of other people in caring about evidence.” – Ed Humpherson, Director for Regulation at the UK Statistics Authority

The event highlighted the desire of constituents for greater clarity on the evidence used to make decisions that affect them, and their concern that evidence is used appropriately in public policy making. Our goal had been to remind people that you don’t have to be a scientist to be able to evaluate and weigh up decisions based on scientific evidence.

“This past year has shown the stark necessity of good data and evidence for robust decision-making. As the echo-chamber of social media gets bigger, and the voices within louder, it is essential that parliamentarians have access to high quality data, and also the people who can explain it to them and help them turn that evidence into robust policy. Evidence Week is an essential tool to helping us do just that.” – Simon Fell MP

“As an MP and an engineer, I strongly believe that rigorous evidence is an essential part of policymaking. It is essential to have scrutiny of the use of evidence in policymaking if parliamentarians are to be held to account for our decisions and their consequences.” – Chi Onwurah MP
3-minute evidence briefings
2nd – 3rd November

Through our virtual platform we hosted video briefings from 14 of our research partners, including our lead partner the Institute of Physics. These briefings covered a wide range of issues.

- Plants and microbes that can combat climate change (John Innes Centre)
- The basis of public support for climate policies (Taylor & Francis)
- Digital copies of our cities to predict when infrastructure fails (University of Bristol)
- Personalized medical data to revolutionise healthcare (CompBioMed, UCL)
- Monitor antimicrobial resistance in the environment (Society for Applied Microbiology)
- Reliable data about our food supply (University of Lincoln & Food Standards Agency)
- How to work out the UK’s geothermal energy potential (British Geological Society)
- How to generate evidence when little is known - insights from the pandemic (NIHR)
- An evidence base to end homelessness (Centre for Homelessness Impact)
- See the Harwell net-zero living laboratory (UKRI)
- The data needed to stimulate remanufacturing (University of Exeter)
- Contribution of physics to net-zero (Institute of Physics)
- Monitor whether industry supply chains are decarbonising (Imperial College London)
- Youth employment prospects after mental health problems (LSE)
- Making Sense of Risk Project (Sense about Science)

For the full programme see the Evidence Week website. These briefings were visited over 220 times throughout the week online and in person. On the 2nd and 3rd November academics from the 14 institutions were on hand to speak to the MPs, Peers and Parliamentary staff in Upper Waiting Hall.

Staff training 5th November

We once again created and delivered a crash course in using scientific evidence, research data and resources, specifically designed with Parliamentary Staff in mind. Created in partnership with ONS, Ipsos Mori and Making Sense of Risk project, this session introduced staff to the basics of understanding scientific evidence, and highlighted where they could use these skills and resources in their work - whether it is assisting their MP in making policy changes, drafting a speech or responding to casework.

This session was incredibly popular with attendees from MPs and committee offices.

We received feedback that this kind of training was exactly what parliamentary staff had been waiting for, and the recording has since been shared more widely throughout parliament.
Engagement

Over 114 MPs, Peers and their offices were represented throughout Evidence Week either during the opening event or through participation in briefings from the research partners online and in person. In addition to this, every single MP received the full programme of partner briefings by email.

By producing 3-minute video briefings this year as well as in person, the partners now have an accessible tool that they can continue to use and share on social media and other platforms to promote their research and the importance of evidence in policy making.

Looking ahead

Evidence Week brings together three groups; policymakers, researchers and the public, in a unique environment to promote parliament asking questions that reflect the public interest in sound science and evidence; public identification with evidence as a source of accountability; and governments anticipating public scrutiny. In another challenging year for policymaking, Evidence Week 2021 was able to do this.