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spark

Knowledge Networks in Select Committees of the House of Commons

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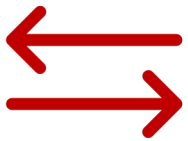
Context: democracy, knowledge and parliaments



Renewed questions over mis- and dis-information in democratic societies, rise of so-called ‘post-truth’ politics, etc.

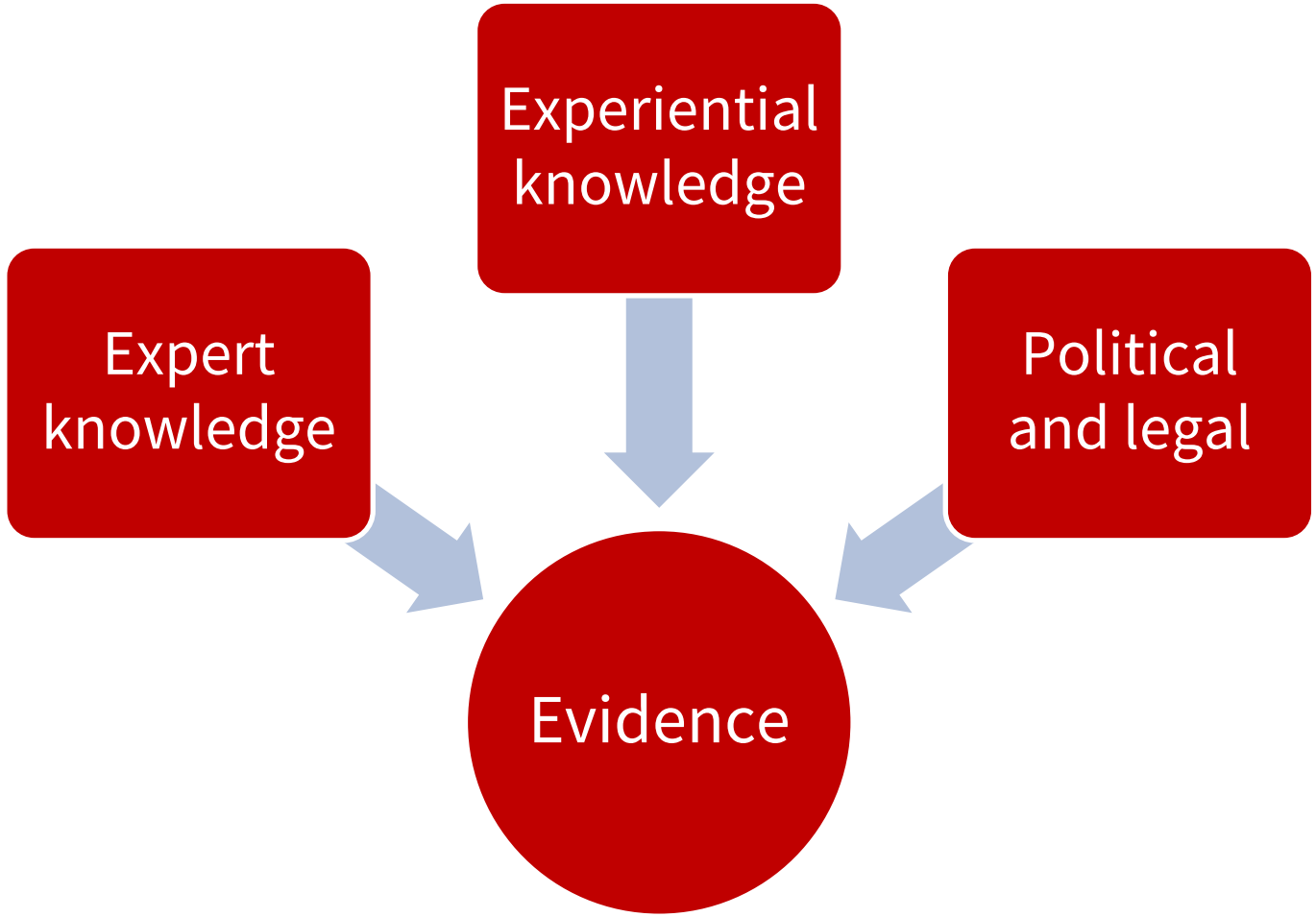
Public satisfaction in political institutions in decline, with some warning political systems at risk

Policy challenges increasing in scale and urgency: Covid-19, climate crisis and social and economic inequalities

Entanglements between parliaments and knowledge

- Wide-ranging research across arts, humanities and social sciences, e.g.:
  - Barriers and facilitators (Oliver et al. 2014)
  - Typologies of research use (Weiss 1979; Boswell 2009; Pielke 2007)
  - Practical guides (Cairney and Oliver 2017)
- Research on parliaments less well-developed and perhaps fragmented:
  - Science and technology assessment (Karaulova and Edler 2023)
  - Institutional access by interest groups (Binderkrantz et al 2015; Cross et al. 2021)
  - Small-scale and single case studies (Crewe 2017; Turnpenny et al. 2012)

Defining ‘knowledge’ and ‘evidence’

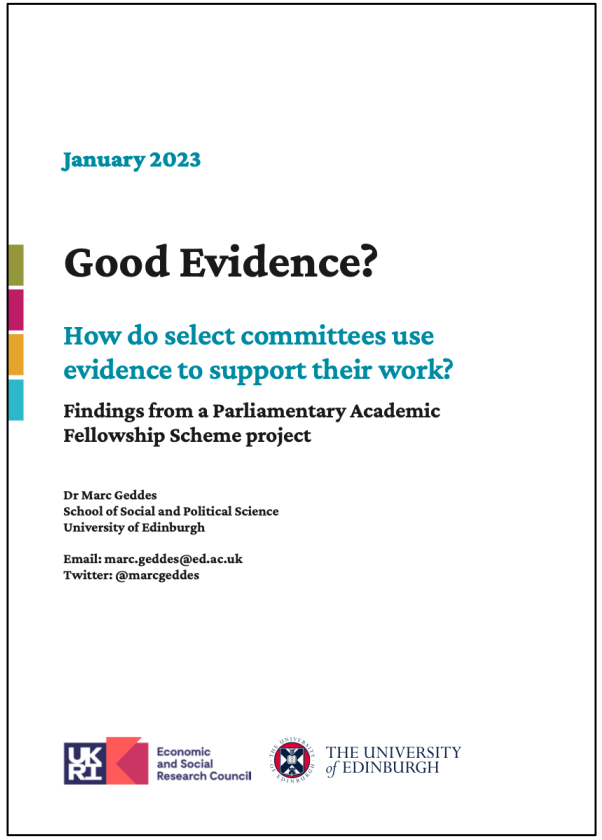


Select committees: form and function

- Structure and organisation:
  - Cross-party group of usually 11 MPs
  - Elected chair (by secret ballot) and elected members (within PPGs)
  - Supported by 6-8 staff (some have more)
- Main task: to ‘examine the expenditure, administration and policy’ of government (see Standing Orders)
- Conduct work through inquiries – approximately 40% of recommendations accepted (Benton and Russell 2013)

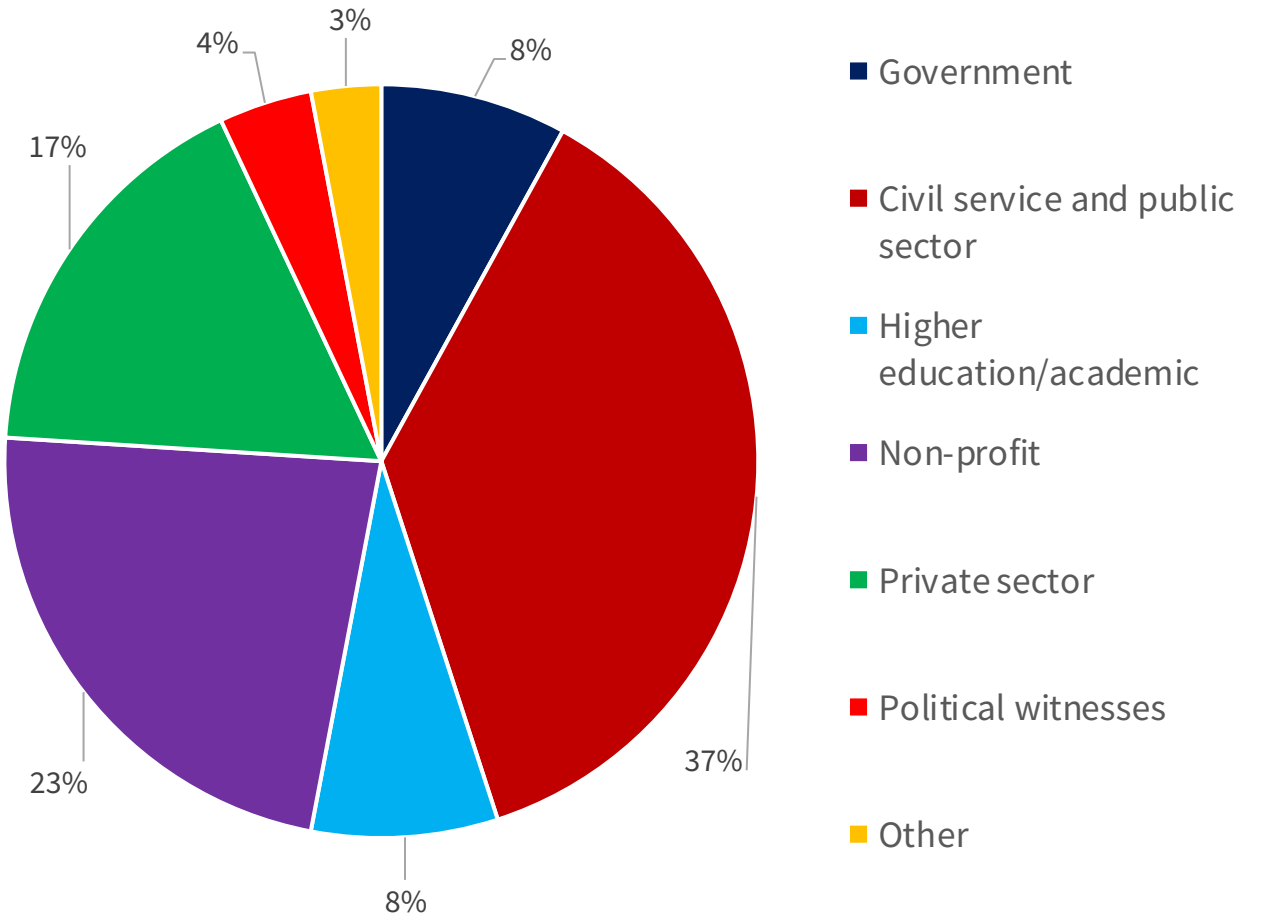
Select committees: gathering, analysing and using evidence

- Written evidence:
  - Open: call for evidence published
  - Anybody may submit through portal
- Oral evidence:
  - Closed: participation by invitation
  - Hearings in front of MPs in Q&A format
- Informal evidence-gathering
  - Committee visits
  - Social media engagement, etc.



Previous research: OE 2013-14

- Organisational breakdown →
- Gender:
  - 24% women
  - 76% men
- Geography:
  - Dominance of London and South England
- See: Geddes 2018, 2021, 2023



Developments

- Witness diversity
  - House of Commons monitoring
  - Part of *Good Parliament* report
- Exploring role of research
  - POST landmark report
  - Review of KE strategies
- Identifying evidence practices

Introducing our study: have things changed?

What organisations, groups and individuals contribute written and/or oral evidence to select committee inquiries?

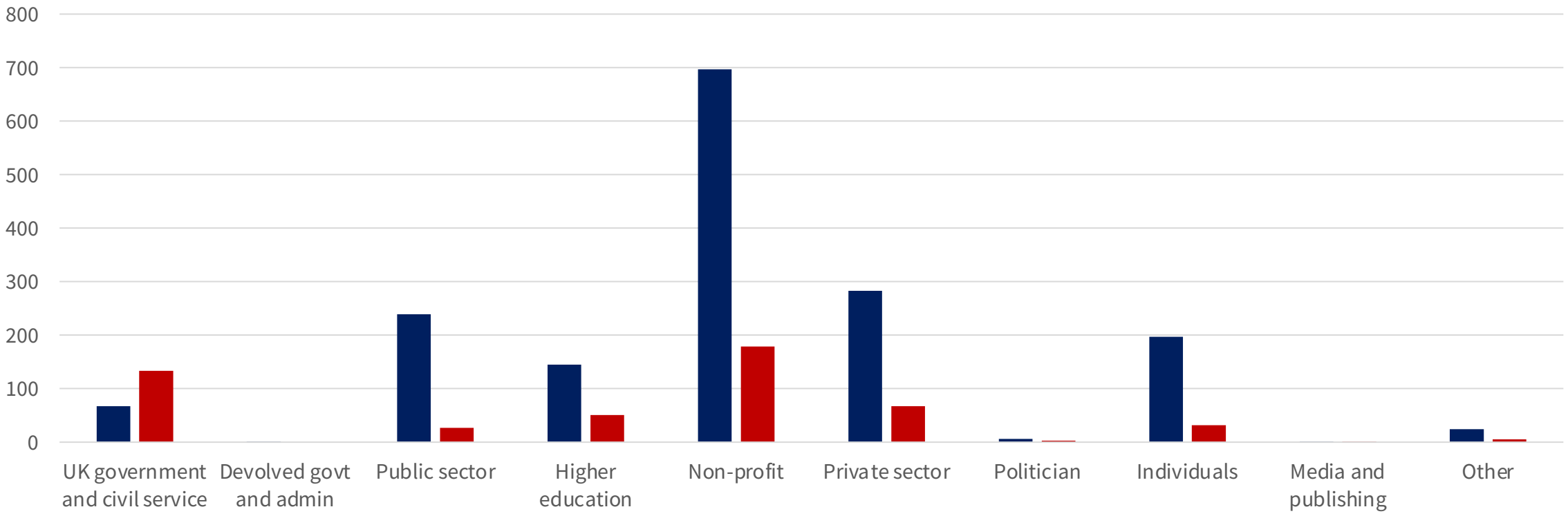
What evidence is included, excluded or preferred in select committee reports?

How has participation in select committee inquiries and the evidence used in reports changed over time?

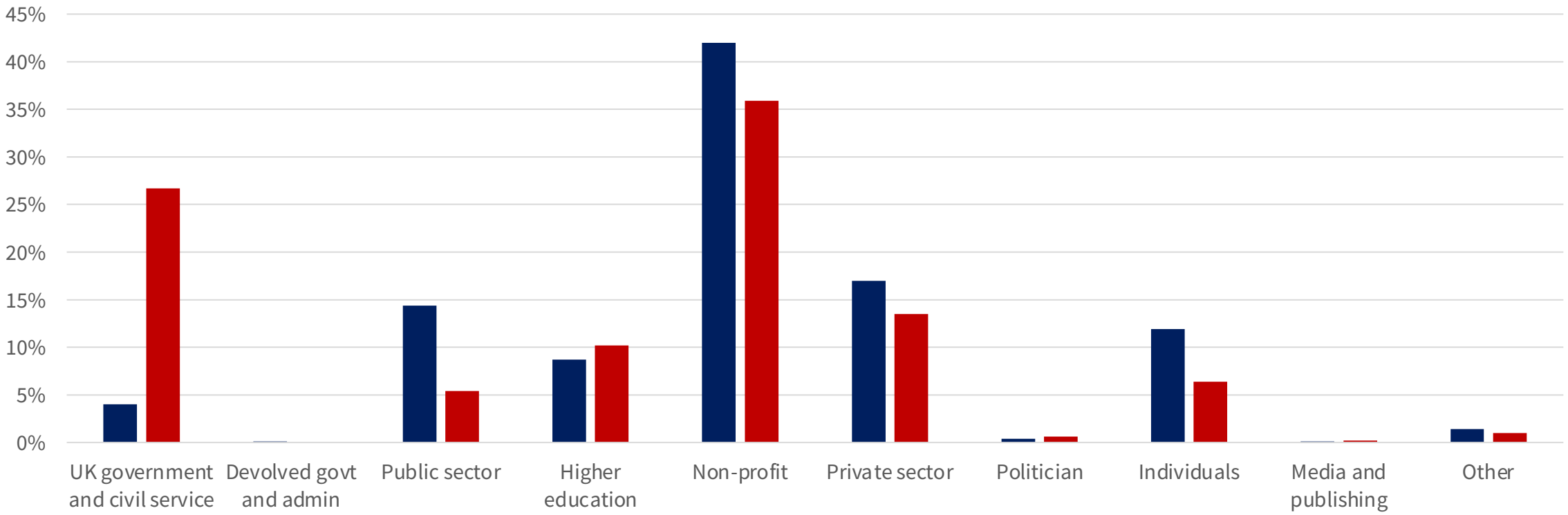
Our study: methodology

- Case study committees
  - Environmental Audit Committee
  - Health and Social Care Committee
  - Work and Pensions Committee
- Coding scheme focuses on organisation, gender and geography
- Data collection
  - Oral and written evidence 2021-22 (498 witnesses and 1660 written submissions)
  - Oral evidence for 2022-23 (619 witnesses)
- **We are presenting interim findings: more to follow including coding of reports!**

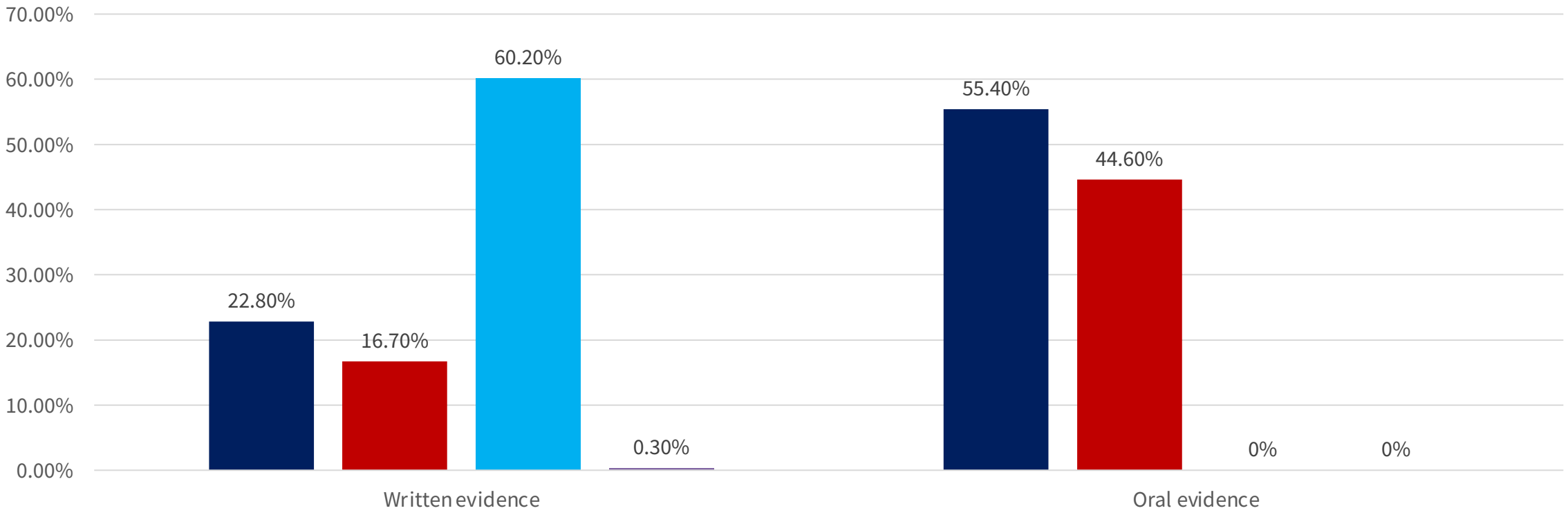
Interim findings: organisational affiliation in WE (blue) and OE (red) (no.)



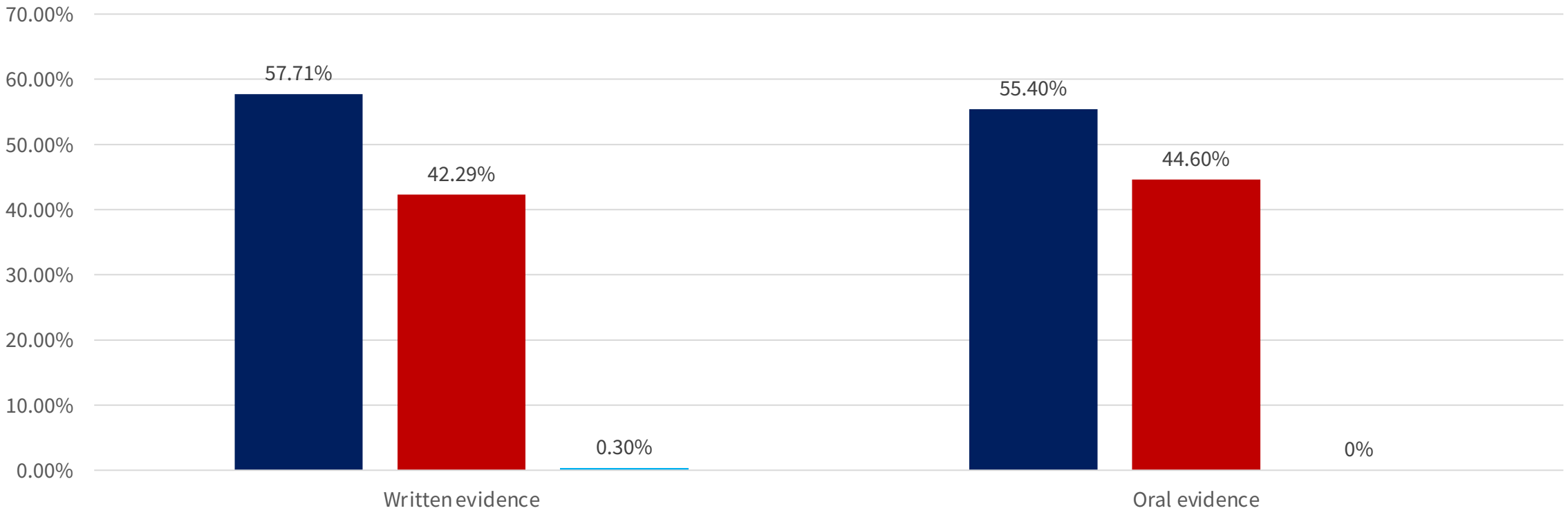
Interim findings: organisational affiliation in WE (blue) and OE (red) (%)



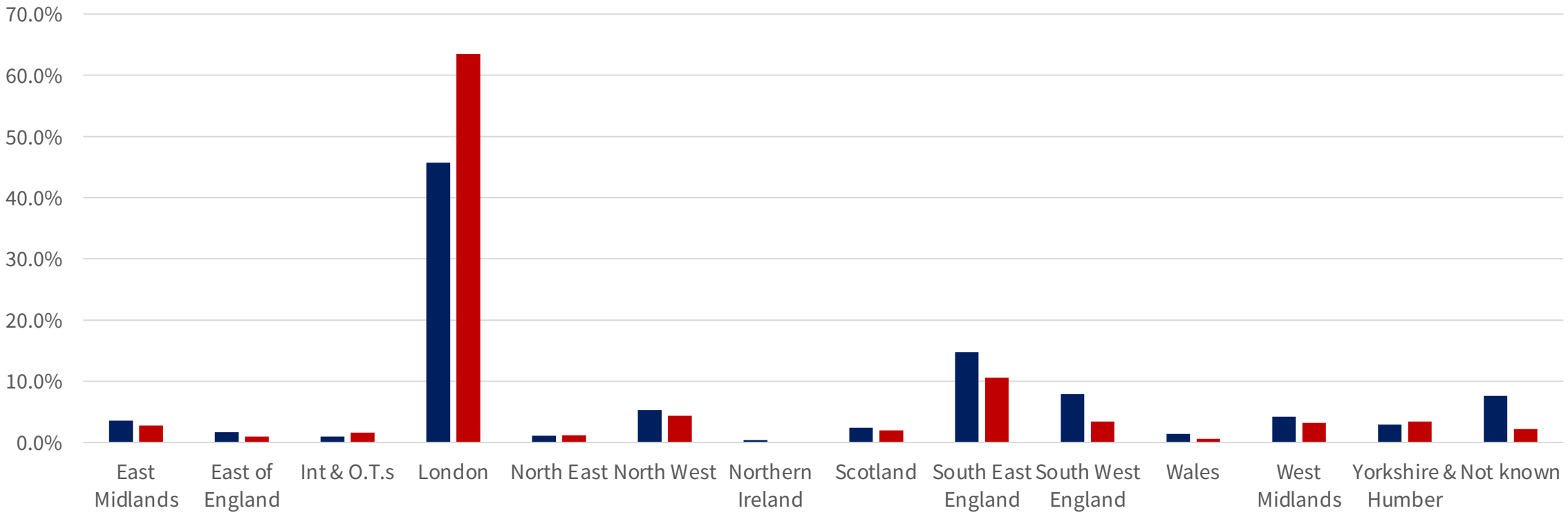
Interim findings: men (dark blue), women (red), and org. only (light blue)



Interim findings: men (dark blue) and women (red) only



Interim findings: geography in WE (blue) and OE (red) (%)



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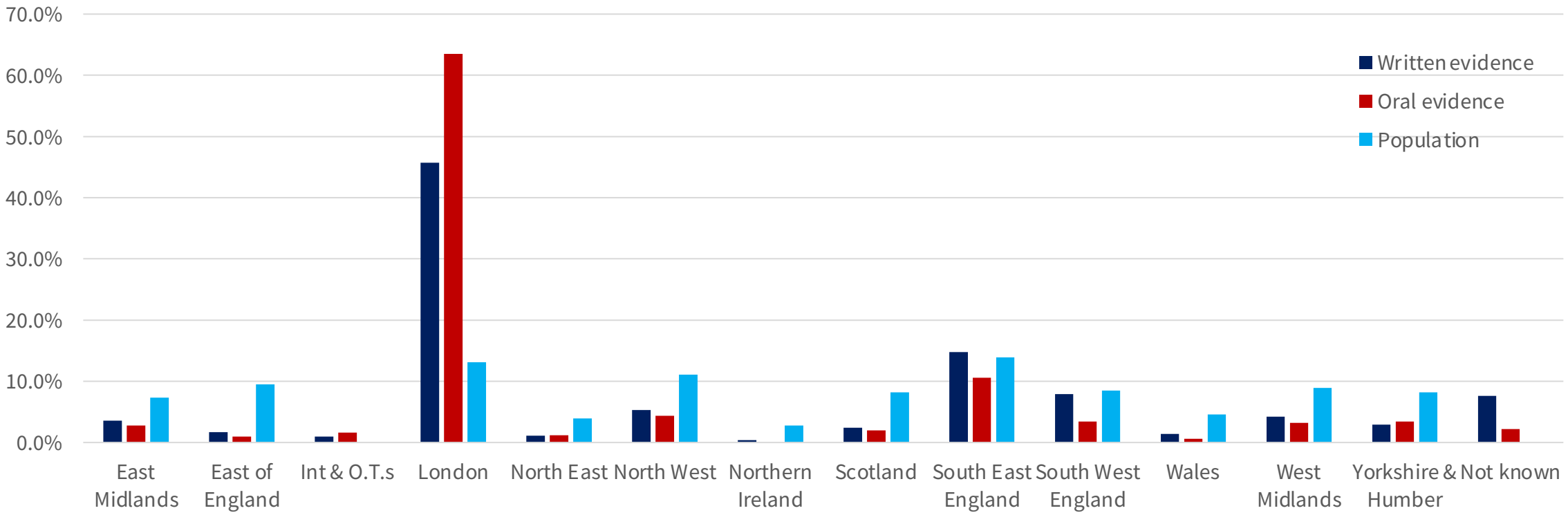
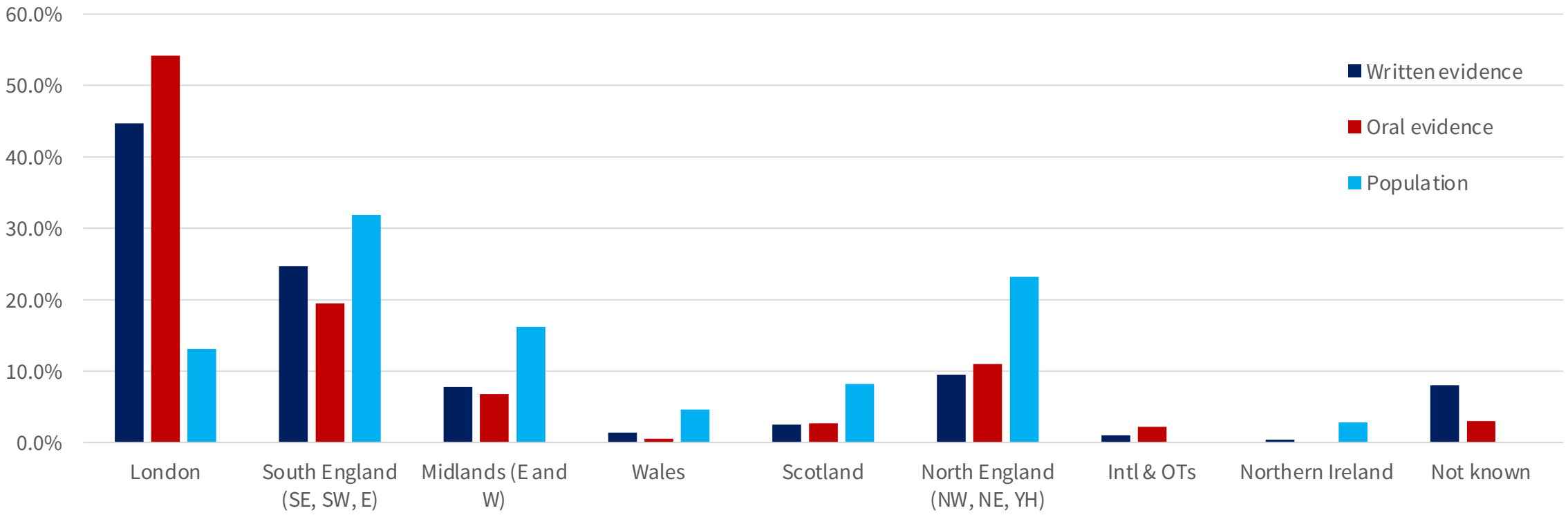
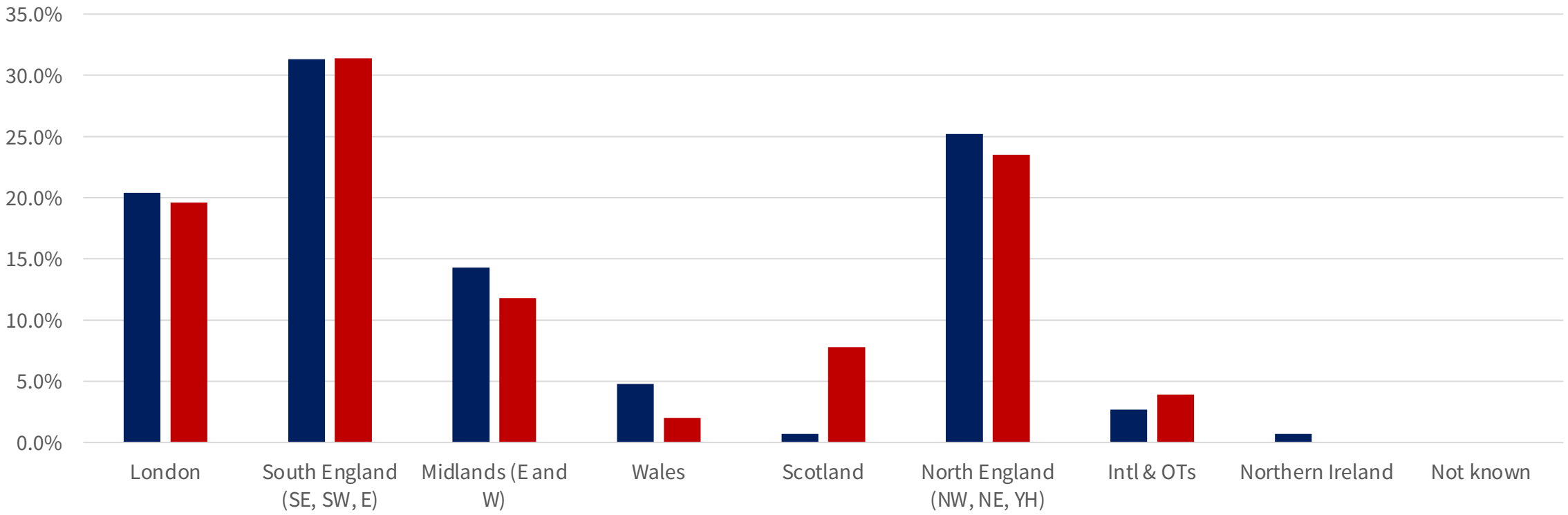


Interim findings: geography in WE (blue) and OE (red) (%) – exc. govt.



Interim findings: geography in WE (blue) and OE (red) (%) – HEI only



Notable initial observations

- Changes in, but still under-representation of, women in evidence processes
- Dynamics from written to oral evidence:
  - UK government and civil service: 4% WE to 27% OE
  - Public sector: 14% WE to 5% OE
- Significance of non-profit organisations: 42% WE and 35% OE
- Geographical disparities:
  - Analysis of WE suggests a heavy skew towards London/South England
  - … even when looking at HEI witnesses and WE (which is more reliable)
  - Especially under-represented: devolved nations and NE and E of England

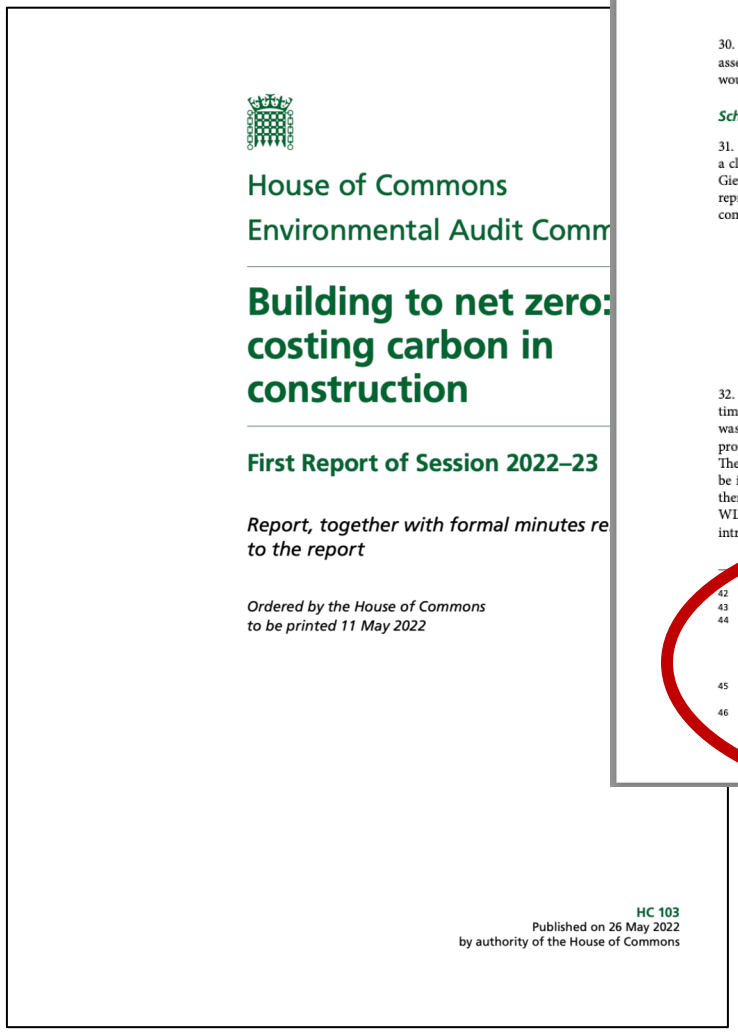
Our next steps: citation analysis

Call for evidence

Written evidence

Oral evidence

Report



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Comm

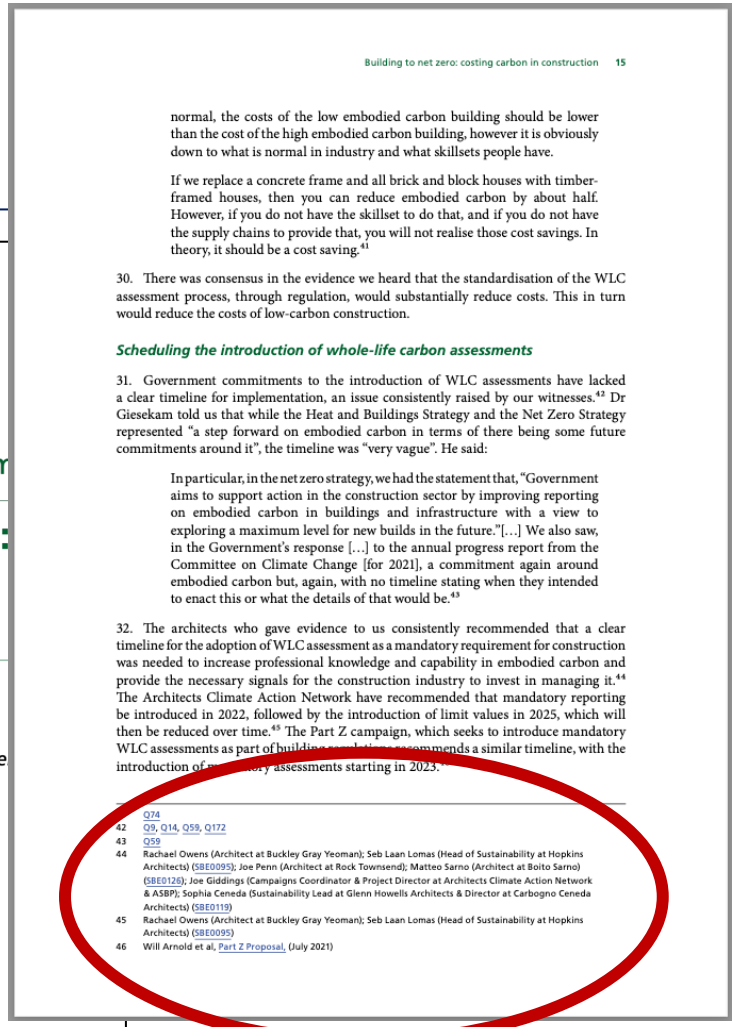
Building to net zero: costing carbon in construction

First Report of Session 2022–23

Report, together with formal minutes re
to the report

Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 11 May 2022

HC 103
Published on 26 May 2022
by authority of the House of Commons



normal, the costs of the low embodied carbon building should be lower than the cost of the high embodied carbon building, however it is obviously down to what is normal in industry and what skillsets people have.

If we replace a concrete frame and all brick and block houses with timber-framed houses, then you can reduce embodied carbon by about half. However, if you do not have the skillset to do that, and if you do not have the supply chains to provide that, you will not realise those cost savings. In theory, it should be a cost saving.[41]

30. There was consensus in the evidence we heard that the standardisation of the WLC assessment process, through regulation, would substantially reduce costs. This in turn would reduce the costs of low-carbon construction.

Scheduling the introduction of whole-life carbon assessments

31. Government commitments to the introduction of WLC assessments have lacked a clear timeline for implementation, an issue consistently raised by our witnesses.[42] Dr Giesekam told us that while the Heat and Buildings Strategy and the Net Zero Strategy represented "a step forward on embodied carbon in terms of there being some future commitments around it", the timeline was "very vague". He said:

> In particular, in the net zero strategy, we had the statement that, "Government aims to support action in the construction sector by improving reporting on embodied carbon in buildings and infrastructure with a view to exploring a maximum level for new builds in the future."[…] We also saw, in the Government's response […] to the annual progress report from the Committee on Climate Change [for 2021], a commitment again around embodied carbon but, again, with no timeline stating when they intended to enact this or what the details of that would be.[43]

32. The architects who gave evidence to us consistently recommended that a clear timeline for the adoption of WLC assessment as a mandatory requirement for construction was needed to increase professional knowledge and capability in embodied carbon and provide the necessary signals for the construction industry to invest in managing it.[44] The Architects Climate Action Network have recommended that mandatory reporting be introduced in 2022, followed by the introduction of limit values in 2025, which will then be reduced over time.[45] The Part Z campaign, which seeks to introduce mandatory WLC assessments as part of building regulations, recommends a similar timeline, with the introduction of mandatory assessments starting in 2023.[46]

Q74
42 Q9, Q14, Q59, Q172
43 Q59
44 Rachael Owens (Architect at Buckley Gray Yeoman); Seb Laan Lomas (Head of Sustainability at Hopkins Architects) (SBE0095); Joe Penn (Architect at Rock Townsend); Matteo Sarno (Architect at Boito Sarno) (SBE0126); Joe Giddings (Campaigns Coordinator & Project Director at Architects Climate Action Network & ASBP); Sophia Ceneda (Sustainability Lead at Glenn Howells Architects & Director at Carbogno Ceneda Architects) (SBE0119)
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46 Will Arnold et al, Part Z Proposal, (July 2021)

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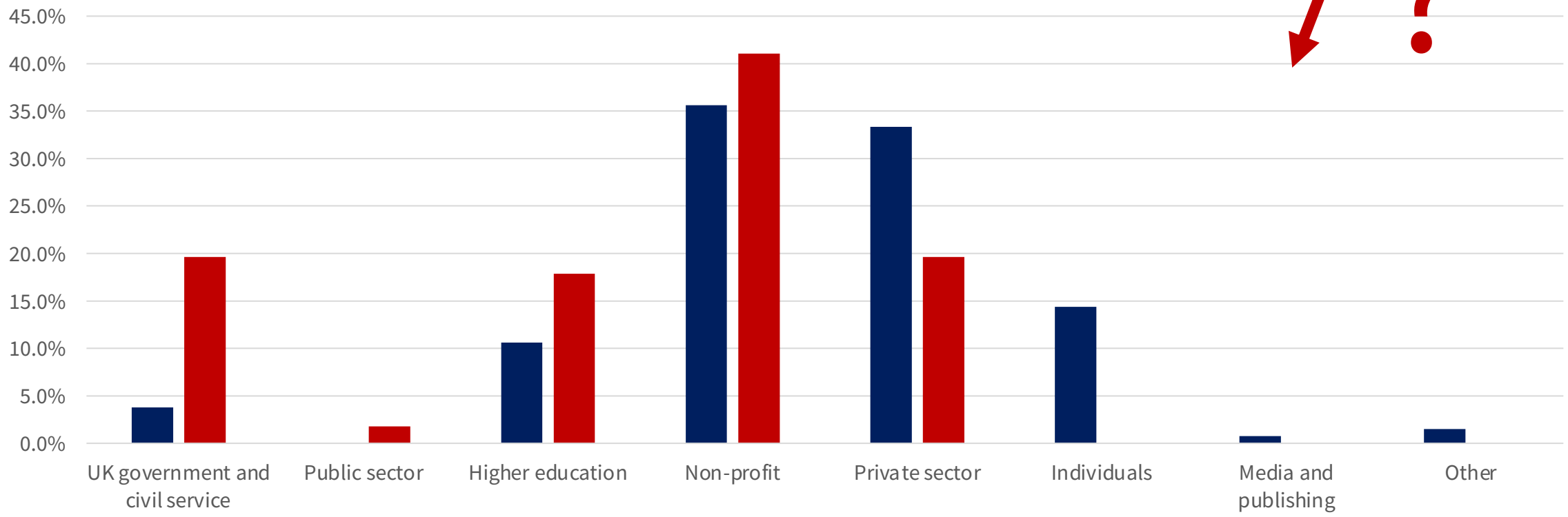
Our next steps: example of one EAC inquiry



Our next steps

- Data-gathering continues
  - Oral evidence for three committees and beyond
  - Written evidence for further sessions
  - Citations in case-study reports for each committee
- Integrating qualitative data (e.g. Geddes 2023)
- Unknowns:
  - Can we include a temporal dimension to observe change over time?
  - What have we not considered?
  - Problems or limitations of our coding scheme?
- **Suggestions very welcome!**

ERC Starting Grant (funded by UKRI) 2024-29
Studying Parliaments and the Role of Knowledge (SPARK)

Re-thinking parliaments as knowledge institutions

Objectives to examine:

(1) Patterns and practices of knowledge use

(2) Values underpinning knowledge use

(3) Impact of knowledge use on parliamentary functions

Ambitious comparative research design

Case study approach:

(1) Seven parliaments at national, sub-national and supra-national levels

(2) Three thematic policy areas with significant challenges for democracy

Wide-ranging tools

Mixed-methods:

(1) Citation analysis

(2) Corpus analysis

(3) Stakeholder database

(4) Interviews

(5) Observation

(6) Qual. text analysis

Sparking debates about the health of democracies