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POST

An Office of both Houses* of the UK Parliament providing MPs and peers with balanced and independent analysis of public policy issues that have a basis in science and technology

****this is very unusual – only other such Office is Broadcasting Service***



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The role of Parliament

- To scrutinise the fiscal and general activities of the government
- To debate and agree new laws and to review existing laws
- To be the premier institution considering issues of current concern to the people
- To be a 'look-out' for future issues???



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Overview

- A brief history of POST
- Organisation
- What POST does
- How POST does it
- Current and future priorities



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History

- **Early 1980s** UK office first suggested
- **1989** POST launched (with charitable funding)
- **1992** POST adopted as parliamentary body
- **1995 and 2000** – funding reviews
- **2001** POST – permanent status



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Organisation

- Serves Commons & Lords
- Total funding ~£600,000 per year
- Permanent staff of nine
- Plus ten Fellowship schemes
- All POST's activities governed by a parliamentary board



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What POST does

- Publications
- Assisting parliamentary committees
- Parliamentary seminars
- Parliament to the public –
 - **on-line** consultations
 - **other forms** of consultation



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Publications

- Two main types of ‘product’
 - **POSTnotes** - generally 4 pages (~20 per year)
 - **Reports** - up to 100 pages (~1 or 2 per year)
- Aim is to provide independent, balanced, comprehensive, relevant and timely briefing
- POSTnotes and reports both produced by the same process...

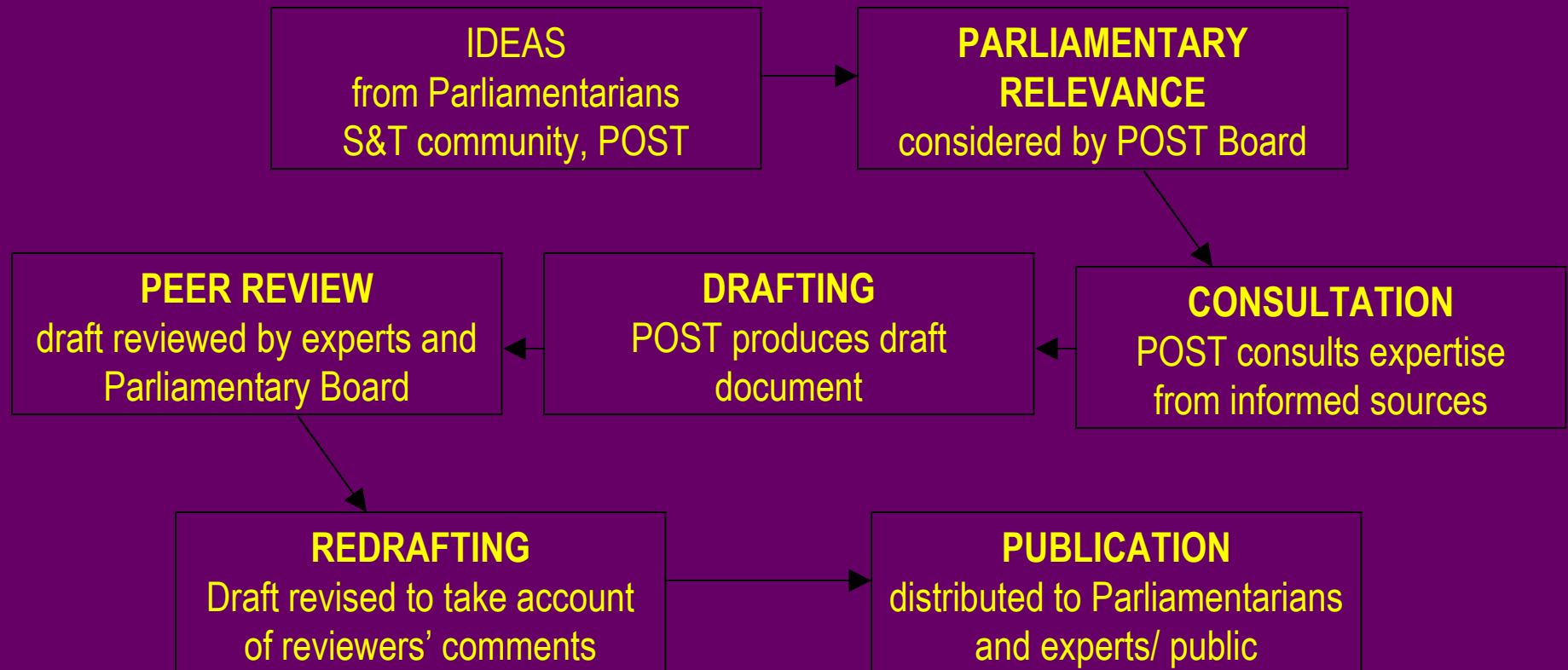


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Publications - process



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Publications - ideas

- **Some are reactive (e.g. BSE, 9/11, oil spills)**
- **But largely POST tries to be proactive, and identifies up and coming issues by:**
 - **tracking key S&T trends (GM, genomics, climate change)**
 - **monitoring legislative proposals - e.g. from the EU (GM labelling/traceability)**
 - **horizon-scanning and scenario activity**
 - **listing forthcoming international meetings, summits, etc.**
 - **Sheer luck – e.g. early warning for natural disasters**



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Activities – Parliamentary relevance

- POST's Board evaluates:
 - **Timeliness** – media interest, constituency interest, forthcoming legislation
 - **Scope/relevance** – how much interest in general among Parliamentarians
 - **Other relevant work** – parliamentary committees, advisory bodies
 - **Resource implications** – how many people, how much time



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Publications

POSTnotes

- **Carbon Capture and Storage**
- **Fishing**
- **Avian 'flu**
- **Chewing Gum in Cities (!!!!!)**

Reports

- **Terrorism and Nuclear Facilities**
- **Children's diet**



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Parliamentary Committees and POST

POST works closely with committees

- Advising on subjects for inquiries
- Preparing briefings
- Advising on specialists and witnesses
- Reviewing evidence and drafting reports
- Running seminars and online discussions



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Committee work - examples

House of Lords

Stem cell research

Animals in research

Science and Technology Committee

Radioactive waste, Science and society

House of Commons

Environmental Audit - Renewable energy

Education - Early years learning

Work and Pensions - Year 2000, Government IT

Defence - Depleted uranium, Nuclear security

Culture, Media & Sport - Communications

Trade & Industry - Space policy, MOX fuel, Energy policy

Foreign Affairs – Iran's nuclear power programme

Science and Technology - Human genetics, Science education



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Other activities

- **On-line consultation/discussion** – women in science, flooding, data protection
- **Parliamentary seminars** – air quality, electronic convergence, '24 hour society'
- **Original research** – analysis of media and GM foods debate



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Current priorities

- Increase cooperation with Europe, especially with 'STOA Consortium'
- Increase UK Parliament's awareness of international development issues
- New service for developing country Parliaments
- Encourage greater use of POST publications outside Parliament (e.g. as media sources)
- Assess/improve impact of POST's work within Parliament)
- More original research



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How effective is all this?

- Over 50% of 1000+ parliamentarians signed up to receive *all* POST output
- Frequent mention in parliamentary debates, questions, etc.
- Six-fold increase in attention to S&T issues since 1990
- POST has a very good external image



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Website

www.parliament.uk/post



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The European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA)

Members

European Parliament (STOA)

Catalunya

Denmark **

Finland

Flanders**

France

Germany**

Greece

Italy

Netherlands**

Norway 2006 President

Switzerland

United Kingdom**

Associates

Council of Europe

Austria

Belgium

Sweden

Portugal??

** Member of the STOA Consortium



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The European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA)

Five organisational structures: I

- A formal committee of the Parliament
Committee for the Future, Finland VAST, Italy
- An official internal office of the Parliament
 - conducting its own studies: POST, UK;
OPECST, France
 - commissioning studies externally:

STOA - European Parliament



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The European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network

Five organisational structures: II

- A dedicated external organisation with a contract from the Parliament

TAB, Germany

Dansk Teknologirådet, Denmark

- An external preferred organisation with occasional contracts from the Parliament

ITA, Austria



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What does EPTA do?

- The STOA Consortium
- Exchange of experience - networking
- Joint studies – ICT and privacy
- Staff training
- Annual Directors' Meeting and Conference



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The European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA)

www.eptanetwork.org



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