

Why UKCRC Needs to Engage with Government

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This is a precis of the Consultation/Advocacy work conducted on behalf of the UKCRC. It was originally presented to a joint UKCRC/EPSRC meeting in Edinburgh, 6th December 2019¹.

The main message: Computing Science research needs a coherent voice to communicate our views, priorities and needs to Westminster and to the regional governments. We can also help them to inform policy and improve governance in areas of critical national importance ranging from AI/ML to the cyber security of infrastructures to cyber bullying and digital ethics.

These objectives require a dialogue; rejecting any feeling that we are the victims of government. UKCRC is committed to such a dialogue through its work on consultations. Every year, we brief Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet ministers. We provide witnesses to select committees and enquiries. We also respond to explicit requests for input on issues of public policy that have an impact on Computing Research². Recent examples include:

- The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications consultation on Internet Regulation
- The Department of Culture, Media and Sport consultation on a draft Code of Practice for a 'secure by design' Internet of Things
- Higher Education Funding Council for England's consultation on a Knowledge Exchange Comparison Framework
- Joint Parliamentary Committee on the National Security Strategy, consultation on the UK Government's approach to the cyber security of critical national infrastructure³
- House of Lords call for evidence on Artificial Intelligence

These responses are typically drafted in response to requests made either directly to UKCRC by Parliamentary committees or via the public requests available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations>

Why do we do this? Funding for UKRI is tied to political priorities and announcements. Schemes such as the EPSRC Big Ideas programme are a mechanism by which we can align our research interests with the interests of Westminster and with the general public⁴. However, by engaging with government we can prepare the way by making ministers aware of the most pressing issues in

¹ <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ukcrcepsrc-workshop-tickets-80436607057>

² <http://www.ukcrc.org.uk/resources/reports/index.cfm>

³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/news-parliament-2017/cyber-security-cni-launch-17-19/>

⁴ <https://epsrc.ukri.org/research/ourportfolio/epsrcbigideas/>

Computing Research. UKCRC is committed to working with EPSRC to sustain and grow the funds available to UK Computing Research.

This is particularly important given the commitment by Teresa May (20th November 2017) - to boost spending on R&D to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027, which could increase public and private R&D investment by as much as £80 billion over the next 10 years:

“The UK is a world leader in science and innovation. By delivering this significant increase as part of our Industrial Strategy, we are building on our strengths and working with business to ensure that UK scientists and researchers continue to push the boundaries of innovation.

“We want the UK to attract, and create, the best and brightest talents, from Nobel Prize winners to ambitious graduate students, and this game-changing investment will ensure we are the home of the industries of the future and high-quality, good jobs.”

What are the problems? Too many researchers complain about government policy – for example, in regulating the digital economy or developing policy to protect security critical infrastructures. Very few actively engage – only a tiny minority of UKCRC members send any technical responses to the invitations made on the members’ mailing list.

In other instances, members provide information that cannot be included within the formal consultations. Common problems include:

1. Self-referential replies – some respondents simply list their publications and “tell them to look there”;
2. “The wrong question” – some respondents said while these questions are interesting the committee ought really to be addressing other challenges.

Consultations ask very specific questions and all responses have to be framed by the specific context. For instance, UKCRC recently submitted a response to the Law Commission Open consultation on the Regulation of Highly Automated Road Passenger Services (HARPS). This is a detailed and carefully considered consultation document extending over 200 pages. You cannot answer the questions and explain how Computing research could influence these proposals if you have not read the consultation:

Consultation Question 12

Do you agree that HARPS operators should be subject to additional duties to report untoward events, together with background information about miles travelled (to put these events in context)?

[R12] We strongly agree with this proposal. However, provisions need to be made to ensure that the data is not simply ignored. Additional considerations include how this information might be made more widely available both to relevant safety agencies, to other HARPS operators and to the research community working to improve the safety performance of highly automated vehicles.

Concluding remarks: There are many areas of mutual interest between UKCRC, EPSRC and UK policy makers. We have unique opportunities to help shape the future landscape for our subject. We must respect and engage with the wider stakeholders: that includes the public but also elected officials and civil servants. The way to increase funding for Computing Science, as well as the impact

of computing research, is to engage with the interests and concerns of the policy makers who make decisions on funding.

Update on UKCRC Consultations 2018-19

The list at the end of this submission summarises all of the consultations that we have participated in since I took over the roles of coordinating UKCRC responses to consultations in late 2017.

There has been a cumulative effect of UKCRC work in this area – we are now being consulted directly by the civil servants assisting on a number of Parliamentary Committees. For example, we worked with EPSRC to help the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy identify academics capable of addressing the national sovereignty issues involved in 5G procurement.

We have also given presentations to Cabinet (Foreign Secretary, Industry Minister) and Shadow Cabinet (Cabinet Office, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence) following an appearance before the Commons Science and Technology Committee.

There are continuing discussions with the UKRI-EPSRC ICT SAT about increased engagement with government. I will circulate more details to the membership once these are agreed. It seems likely that this dialogue will be increasingly important as funding for research is being tied to policy announcements.

At last year's AGM (2018), we discussed whether it would be possible to put up copies of all responses in a timely fashion. As explained in the meeting, all responses are emailed to the membership and we cannot post submissions that have not been formally accepted by Parliamentary Committees. It is my intention to put up a list of all live submissions without the detailed response every quarter but this is subject to workload and support from other members given that any individual submission takes 2-3 days of time to coordinate, draft and submit.

I would encourage all members to check the following URL in case there are calls that I may have missed:

<https://www.gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations>

I would particularly like to thank my predecessor Martyn Thomas who continues to alert me to new calls for evidence. I would also like to thank Sally Fincher, Chair of CPHC, for support in a number of joint submissions and in proposing mechanisms for further collaboration. David Hutchison has also provided numerous hints and suggestions for many of the consultations listed below.

2019

Calls out to UKCRC Membership

December

- DCMS consultation on Cyber Security Incentives and Regulation⁵

Completed consultations

November

- Law Commission Open consultation on the Regulation of Highly Automated Road Passenger Services (HARPS)⁶

October

- DCMS Open Consultation on Reforming Consumer Advocacy in Telecoms⁷

August

- Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy Inquiry into Access to “Safe” Technology: The UK’s 5G Infrastructure and National Security⁸

June

- DCMS Consultation on regulatory proposals on consumer IoT security⁹

May

- DCMS/Home Office On-line Harms White Paper¹⁰

April

- DfT/BEIS Consultation on Code of Practice for the Trialling of Automated Vehicles¹¹

March

- Commons Science and Technology Committee, Commercial and Recreational Drone Use in the UK Inquiry¹²

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-security-incentives-regulation-review-call-for-evidence>

⁶ <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/automated-vehicles/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/open-consultation-on-reforming-consumer-advocacy-in-telecoms>

⁸ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/inquiries/parliament-2017/access-to-safe-technology-inquiry-17-19/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-regulatory-proposals-on-consumer-iot-security>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/automated-vehicle-trialling-code-of-practice-invitation-to-comment>

¹² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/commercial-recreational-drone-uk-17-19/>

- HMRC. Consultation on Electronic Sales Suppression ¹³

February

- Meeting with Nia Griffiths team, Shadow Defence Secretary
- Meeting with Jo Platt, Shadow Cabinet Office Minister
- HMRC Consultation on Digital Service Tax ¹⁴

January

- Commons Science and Technology Committee, Brexit, Science and Innovation: Preparations for 'No-Deal' inquiry¹⁵
- Evidence before Commons Science and Technology Committee

2018

December

- Dept for Education, Improving adult basic digital skills¹⁶
- HM Treasury, Digital Competition Expert Panel: Call for Evidence¹⁷
- Ofqual Regulating Basic Digital Skills Qualifications¹⁸

**** 2018 AGM *****

September

- Parliamentary Science and Technology Select Committee on Digital Government¹⁹
- Commons Science and Technology Committee Consultation on Balance and effectiveness of research and innovation spending²⁰

August

- Dept of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with Margot James - Creating the environment to develop the cyber security professional in the UK²¹

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/electronic-sales-suppression-a-call-for-evidence>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/digital-services-tax-consultation>

¹⁵ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/news-parliament-2017/brexit-science-and-innovation-preparations-for-no-deal-inquiry-launch-17-19/>

¹⁶ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-basic-skills-team/improving-adult-basic-digital-skills/>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/digital-competition-expert-panel-call-for-evidence>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulating-basic-digital-skills-qualifications>

¹⁹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/news-parliament-2017/digital-government-inquiry-launch-17-19/>

²⁰ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/news-parliament-2017/research-innovation-spending-inquiry-launch-17-19/>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-the-uk-cyber-security-profession>

June

- House of Commons Education Select Committee, Consultation on the Fourth Industrial Revolution²²
- Department for Transport, Future of mobility call for evidence²³

May

- The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications consultation on Internet Regulation²⁴
- The Department of Culture, Media and Sport consultation on a draft Code of Practice for a 'secure by design' Internet of Things²⁵;
- The Department of Culture, Media and Sport consultation on the Security of Network and Information Systems Directive²⁶;
- Higher Education Funding Council for England's consultation on a Knowledge Exchange Comparison Framework²⁷;
- Joint Parliamentary Committee on the National Security Strategy, consultation on the UK Government's approach to the cyber security of critical national infrastructure²⁸
- House of Lords call for evidence on Artificial Intelligence²⁹.

²² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2017/fourth-industrial-revolution-launch-17-19/>

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-mobility-call-for-evidence>

²⁴ <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/communications/InternetRegulation/Internet-regulation-call-for-evidence.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/secure-by-design>

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-security-of-network-and-information-systems-directive>

²⁷ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/ke/kef/>

²⁸ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/news-parliament-2017/cyber-security-cni-launch-17-19/>

²⁹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/ai-committee/news-parliament-2017/call-for-evidence/>