

## **Research Proposal**

*A comparative study to investigate the link between an MP's majority and their level of activity in local and national press, and the 2001-2005 Parliament.*

### **Aim**

The aim of this research is to qualify the extent to which MPs in the British House of Commons feel more or less inclined to act, whether on behalf of constituents or not, on matters of public or private interest, and whether the majority that MP had at the last General Election has an impact on their behaviour.

### **Method**

To achieve this, we have selected three MPs who commanded amongst the largest majorities in the 2001 General Election. This research will then contrast them with three MPs who were among the smallest majorities in the 2001 General Election. We will do this from three different angles:

- Comparative analysis of how often they appeared in local and national press during the 2001-2005 Parliament.
- Examining their records within Parliament for those four years in terms of how often they speak, how often they get involved in select committees, and how often they rebel against their party whip.
- Analysing the MP's use of their website to consider whether it is effective or not at communicating their activities to their constituents.

The sources this research will use for each section of this analysis are listed in the Sources section below.

First of all, we need to select the MPs that will be involved in this study. We must bear in mind that the data available to us for some of these MPs may vary, particularly for analysis of the local media. As such, we have decided to only analyse MPs whose local newspapers are available on LexisNexis. This should help provide a certain element of fairness in the comparison. Some local newspaper websites, if not on LexisNexis, may not archive everything in their papers, and they may not stretch back in time far enough. In addition, the MP in question must also have a website, and they must also be still be in a MP in the new Parliament elected May 2005, so that the website is still updated and available.

We will start from the top of the list – with the largest majorities - and work down until we have our quota of three MP, whose local newspaper is available via a LexisNexis search. The three MPs selected, as well as their number within the list of majorities follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Majority</b>	<b>Local paper</b>	<b>Number on majority list</b>
Eddie O’Hara	Knowsley South	21,316	<i>Liverpool Echo</i>	<i>2nd</i>
Stephen Byers	Tyneside North	20,668	<i>Northern Echo</i>	<i>4th</i>
Joe Benton	Bootle	19,043	<i>Liverpool Echo</i>	<i>8th</i>

Having filled the quota of three, we now reverse the process: starting with the MP with the smallest majority and working up the list until we have three MPs whose local newspaper is available on LexisNexis, and they are an MP with a website in the current 2005 Parliament. The data follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Majority</b>	<b>Local paper</b>	<b>Number on majority list</b>
Jim Knight	Dorset South	153	<i>Dorset Echo</i>	<i>654th</i>
Annette Brooke	Mid Dorset and Poole North	384	<i>Dorset Echo</i>	<i>648th</i>
Norman Lamb	North Norfolk	483	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>	<i>646th</i>

Therefore, the six MPs that will be studied are:

**Eddie O' Hara, Stephen Byers, Joe Benton, Norman Lamb, Annette Brooke, Jim Knight**

### **Sources**

To conduct the analysis on each of these MPs this study will use *LexisNexis* to search the archives of the six newspapers listed above. We will also expand the search to three national newspapers: *Times*, *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. Again, these searches will use *LexisNexis*.

The search will be for the name of the MP, restricted to the time period of the 2001-2005 Parliament. All articles that match will be considered, including those which appear to be non-political, since MPs may nevertheless gain from the exposure of such an article.

The sources required for the analysis of their parliamentary behaviour will be:

- <http://www.parliament.uk> (including Hansard)
- <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>
- <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk>

This data will be analysed for frequency and length of contribution.

For the analysis of the MP's websites, this project will consider the amount of data put on the site, how often the site is updated, whether the site is attractive to visitors, the accessibility of the site, its effectiveness in communicating information, and any other features unique to each site which are relevant. The following websites will be used:

Eddie O' Hara - <http://www.knowsleysouth.labour.co.uk/>

Stephen Byers - <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/MPWebsites/Stephen+Byers/>

Joe Benton - <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/MPWebsites/Joe+Benton/>

Norman Lamb - <http://www.normanlamb.org.uk/>

Annette Brooke - <http://www.annettebrooke.org.uk/>

Jim Knight - <http://www.jimknightmp.com/>

### **Time Plan**

- **W/C 2/1/2006**  
Conduct the search for data on the first three MPs: local media only
- **W/C 9/1/2006**  
Conduct the search for data on the final three MPs: local media only
- **W/C 16/1/2006**  
Conduct a search of the three mainstream media titles selected for all six MPs.
- **W/C 23/1/2006**  
Begin collecting the data from Hansard relating to all debates, questions tabled, select committees attended, standing committees attended etc.
- **W/C 30/1/2006**  
Continue collecting data from previous week.  
Collect data on voting behaviour
- **W/C 6/2/2006**  
Begin data analysis of newspaper content
- **W/C 13/2/2006**  
Continue analysis of newspaper content.  
Begin analysis of Hansard data.
- **W/C 20/2/2006**  
Begin analysis of MPs websites.
- **W/C 27/2/2006**  
Formulate conclusions and begin project write up: introduction and aims.
- **W/C 6/3/2006**  
Continue project write up.
- **W/C 13/3/2006**  
Continue and conclude project write up.
- **20/3/2006: Submission Date**