

## Oficina C: Towards a Collective Intelligence to Meet the Challenges of Parliamentary Work in Spain

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**ABSTRACT:** The integration of scientific knowledge into parliamentary work is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of democratic resilience in the twenty-first century. Confronted with global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, demographic ageing, and political polarisation, parliaments must enhance their ability to deliberate on complex and uncertain issues. In Spain, the creation of Oficina C, the Science and Technology Office of the Congress of Deputies, represents a decisive step towards institutionalising science advice for democratic governance and strengthening trust between citizens and political institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** parliamentary science advice; collective intelligence; plain language; public participation; knowledge4policy

**SUMMARY:** 1. The European Conceptual Framework – 2. The Genesis and Institutional Legitimacy of Oficina C – 3. Evidence, Dialogue, and Change: The Impact of Oficina C – 4. Plain Language as a Democratic Tool – 5. Connection with Society: Pairing Schemes, Dialogues C, and Public Consultations – 6. The Role of Scientific Evidence Officers: a New Profession in Science – 7. Towards a New Culture of Collective Intelligence.

### 1. The European Conceptual Framework

The creation of Oficina C in the Spanish Parliament needs to be understood within a broader European tradition. Across the continent, the last four decades have seen the gradual development of institutions designed to connect parliaments with scientific knowledge. These bodies have emerged from the recognition that political representatives cannot legislate effectively in an age of fast technological change and social complexity without structured access to expertise.<sup>1</sup> What once could be solved through occasional expert hearings or government reports now requires a permanent, professionalised system of scientific advice that is credible, impartial, and able to communicate in clear language. It involves recognising that scientific knowledge is increasingly interdisciplinary, fragmented, and complex, which makes the identification of relevant evidence particularly challenging.

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The origins of parliamentary technology assessment can be traced to the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), created by the United States Congress in 1972.<sup>2</sup> The OTA was the first parliamentary body designed to provide legislators with in-depth analysis of scientific and technological developments, assessing their social, economic, and ethical implications. Although it was controversially closed in 1995, its influence extended well beyond the United States and inspired a wave of institutional innovation in Europe. The first European country to establish a similar mechanism was France, which created the Parliamentary Office for the Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Options (OPECST) in 1983 as a joint body of the National Assembly and the Senate. Shortly after, the Netherlands set up the Rathenau Institute in 1986, followed by the United Kingdom, which launched the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) in 1989. In 1990, the German Bundestag created the Büro für Technikfolgen-Abschätzung (TAB). Over time, each of these institutions developed distinct models adapted to their national parliamentary traditions, while remaining faithful to the original OTA mission of providing anticipatory, evidence-informed, and socially grounded analysis.<sup>3</sup> Their interaction and exchange of methods eventually gave rise, in 1990, to the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) network,<sup>4</sup> which today brings together parliamentary offices from across and beyond the continent.

These examples demonstrate the variety of approaches within Europe, but they all share a set of core principles: scientific rigour, independence, transparency, commitment to all political groups, and the ambition to make complex issues understandable to non-experts.

Today, EPTA brings together more than twenty-five members, including parliamentary offices, science advisory councils and research institutes with a mandate to serve legislatures. EPTA expanded to include most of the European Union as well as non-EU countries like Norway and Switzerland, becoming the key reference framework for parliamentary technology assessment in Europe. The network has been central in shaping a collective European perspective. Through its reports, workshops and joint projects, EPTA has enabled national parliaments to exchange practices, compare methodologies and work together on topics of continental importance, such as artificial intelligence, climate policy, bioethics, or new energy technologies. The network demonstrates that, while each office must respond to its national context, they are part of a common European conversation about how democracy and, in particular, parliaments as the main democratic institutions, deals with science and technology. Legislative science advice encompasses a broader range of practices and notions of impact than usually acknowledged, highlighting the need for more comprehensive studies to capture its diverse influences on parliamentary activity.<sup>5</sup>

The European Commission has also contributed significantly to this conceptual landscape by advancing the idea of science-for-policy ecosystems<sup>6</sup>. According to this perspective, the provision of scientific advice cannot be reduced to the linear production of expert reports. Instead, it emerges from a dynamic and

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Congressional Research Service, *The Office of Technology Assessment: History, Authorities, Issues, and Options*, Washington D.C., 2020.

<sup>3</sup> L. CRUZ-CASTRO, L. SANZ-MENÉNDEZ, *Politics and institutions: European parliamentary technology assessment*, in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 72(4), 2005, 429ss.

<sup>4</sup> EPTA Network, [www.eptanetwork.org](http://www.eptanetwork.org) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>5</sup> C. KENNY, C.-L. WASHBOURNE, C. TYLER, J. J. BLACKSTOCK, *Legislative science advice in Europe: The case for international comparative research*, in *Palgrave Communications*, 3, 2017, 17030.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, *Supporting and connecting policymaking in the Member States with scientific research* (Staff Working Document SWD(2022) 307 final), Brussels, 2022.



plural institutional ecology where universities, public research organisations, advisory offices, ministries, civil society actors, and the media interact to bring evidence into policy debates. Within this framework, the Commission stresses four core conditions for effective ecosystems: credibility, legitimacy, relevance, and accessibility. Credibility is anchored in the scientific quality, transparency, and methodological rigour of the knowledge mobilised. Legitimacy derives from independence, inclusiveness, and openness to diverse perspectives. Relevance requires that scientific inputs address actual policy challenges and timelines. Accessibility refers not only to the clarity and usability of information but also to its availability at the right time and in the right format for decision-makers.

These principles have been further developed through the Commission's Policy Support Facility (PSF) Mutual Learning Exercises, particularly the 2023 initiative on *Bridging the Gap between Science and Policy*.<sup>7</sup> This initiative highlighted the persistent challenges of fragmentation, disciplinary silos, and insufficient institutional interfaces. The exercise also underscored the importance of professional intermediaries, trust-building mechanisms, and capacity development in both the scientific and policy communities. Science-for-policy ecosystems are not static structures but evolving arenas of interaction, where evidence, values, and political choices intersect.

Seen from this European angle, the creation of Oficina C was not an isolated experiment, but the Spanish contribution to an already well-developed continental tradition. Before the creation of Oficina C, Spanish deputies had only limited institutional channels to access independent scientific advice. Information could be requested from ministries, but this was often perceived as reflecting the perspective of the executive. Parliamentarians might also consult interest groups, private consultants, scientific societies or individual academics, yet these interactions tended to be *ad hoc*, fragmented, and not always perceived as representative of the broader scientific community. As a result, the Spanish Congress operated without the kind of structured and professionalised advisory support that many of its European counterparts had already established.

The situation evolved with the creation of Oficina C in 2021, which has since provided the Spanish Congress with a structured and independent channel to connect with scientific expertise. Rather than presenting itself as the sole answer, the office constitutes one more piece in a wider puzzle, reinforcing the knowledge ecosystem of the Congress of Deputies and establishing an institutional interface that brings the scientific community closer to the legislative process.

A crucial aspect of this European context is the attention paid to emerging technologies. EPTA has produced joint reports on artificial intelligence and its impact on democracy, or on the role of new technologies in the care of older people. These studies illustrate the type of dilemmas that parliaments increasingly face how to regulate AI while protecting human rights, or how to use digital monitoring tools in healthcare without undermining privacy. Oficina C has followed this same orientation, dedicating its first reports to issues such as artificial intelligence, hydrogen technologies or neurotechnology. By doing so, it has demonstrated that the Spanish agenda is not disconnected from European concerns, but rather fully integrated into them.

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<sup>7</sup> European Commission, *Mutual Learning Exercise on Bridging the Gap between Science and Policy*, online: <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/psf-challenge/mutual-learning-exercise-bridging-gap-between-science-and-policy> (last visited 08/03/2026).

Oficina C is both a response to a national deficit and an expression of a wider European trend. Spain needed to close the gap with its neighbours, and it has done so by creating an office that not only follows established principles of independence, credibility and clarity, but also adds its own innovations. Oficina C stands as an example of how European traditions can be adapted to specific political environments, and how parliamentary institutions can renew themselves by learning from international experiences while contributing back to them.

## 2. The Genesis and Institutional Legitimacy of Oficina C

Spain is not unfamiliar with the use of scientific advisory mechanisms. Within the legislative branch, deputies and senators rely on parliamentary committees and study groups, supported by the documentation services of both chambers, while political parties draw on their own trusted advisers and experts. However, no permanent structures for scientific advice had been institutionalised within Parliament. In 1989, the then President of the Congress, Félix Pons, committed to the creation of an Office for the Assessment of Scientific and Technological Options in the Spanish Parliament. Yet, following the early general elections called that same year, the initiative was not carried out.

Decades later, in 2018, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution, the citizen-led initiative *Ciencia en el Parlamento*,<sup>8</sup> with the close collaboration of the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT) and the COTEC Foundation for Innovation<sup>9</sup> as its main supporters and with the backing of the vast majority of Spanish scientific institutions, organised a two-day event in the Congress of Deputies. The encounter brought together deputies and scientists to showcase how such an office could operate in Spain. During the event, scientific evidence on twelve topics of social and political relevance, ranging from water scarcity to suicide prevention, was presented and discussed. Acting as a pilot exercise, the initiative simulated the workings of a potential parliamentary office of science and technology.

The momentum created by this initiative was followed by a decisive institutional step. On 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019, the Bureau of the Congress of Deputies agreed to establish an Office of Science and Technology of the Congress to provide scientific advice to its members, with the precise terms to be specified in its future regulatory framework. A few months later, at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the Bureau of the Congress of Deputies considered it appropriate to enter into an agreement with the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), of a public nature and affiliated to the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, for the development and operation of the Office of Science and Technology of the Congress of Deputies. This agreement marked the formal beginning of a process that would culminate in the signing of an agreement for the development of Oficina C, in 2021.<sup>10</sup>

The creation of Oficina C in the Spanish Parliament cannot be seen simply as an administrative decision. It emerged from a broader political and social transformation in Spain, shaped by decades of democratic consolidation, evolving citizen expectations, and the pressing need to reinforce the role of parliaments in

<sup>8</sup> *Ciencia En El Parlamento*, online: [www.cienciaenelparlamento.org](http://www.cienciaenelparlamento.org) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>9</sup> *Fundación Cotec*, online: [www.cotec.es](http://www.cotec.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>10</sup> *Congreso De Los Diputados*, online: [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).



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an increasingly complex world. Significantly, its establishment was supported by the consensus of all parliamentary groups in the Chamber.

The creation of Oficina C was informed by institutional learning from Europe, and its design was adapted to Spain's specific context. Spanish representatives examined models such as POST in the UK and Rathenau in the Netherlands, which stressed clear and accessible reporting; TAB in Germany, which demonstrated methodological rigour; and STOA in the European Parliament, which showed how to serve all political groups without partisan bias. Support from European peers was reinforced in November 2021, when Spain joined the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) Network, embedding Oficina C within a wider European community of parliamentary science advisory bodies.

In addition to the expertise shared by our European counterparts, the support of Spain's scientific community has been instrumental in shaping the credibility and functionality of Oficina C. The Advisory Council brings together twelve key institutions: the State Research Agency (Agencia Estatal de Investigación, AEI),<sup>11</sup> the Science in Parliament Association (Asociación Ciencia en el Parlamento, CeeP), the Association of Science and Technology Parks of Spain (APTE),<sup>12</sup> the Centre for Energy, Environmental, and Technological Research (CIEMAT),<sup>13</sup> the Centre for Technology and Innovation Development (CDTI),<sup>14</sup> the Confederation of Scientific Societies of Spain (COSCE),<sup>15</sup> the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE),<sup>16</sup> the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC),<sup>17</sup> the Canary Islands Astrophysics Institute (IAC),<sup>18</sup> the Carlos III Health Institute (ISCIII),<sup>19</sup> the Royal Academies (Instituto de España),<sup>20</sup> and the network of Severo Ochoa and María de Maeztu Excellence Research Centres (SOMMa).<sup>21</sup> These institutions collaborate actively by advising the office, proposing topic ideas and experts, and participating in working groups. Their engagement not only supplies Oficina C with multidisciplinary expertise but also ensures its work reflects a broad consensus within Spain's scientific ecosystem, reinforcing its legitimacy in the eyes of both Parliament and society.

From its very first activities, Oficina C had to prove its usefulness. The early reports focused on issues of high political relevance, such as artificial intelligence, hydrogen technologies, or cybersecurity. These topics were chosen not only for their urgency but also for their capacity to demonstrate how scientific advice could enrich parliamentary debate. The reports were well received by legislators, who valued their clarity, concision and credibility. This reception contributed to strengthening the legitimacy of the office and to embedding it within parliamentary routines.

Of course, legitimacy is not automatically granted but must be constantly renewed. Oficina C operates in a political context, not very different from that of other comparable countries, where trust is fragile,

<sup>11</sup> *Agencia Estatal de Investigación*, online: [www.aei.gob.es](http://www.aei.gob.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>12</sup> *Association Of Science and Technology Parks of Spain (Apte)*, online: [www.apte.org](http://www.apte.org) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>13</sup> *Ciemat (Centre For Energy, Environmental And Technological Research)*, online: [www.ciemat.es](http://www.ciemat.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>14</sup> *Cdti (Centre For Technological Development And Innovation)*, online: [www.cdti.es](http://www.cdti.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>15</sup> *Confederación De Sociedades Científicas de España (Cosce)*, online: [www.cosce.org](http://www.cosce.org) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>16</sup> *Crue (Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas)*, online: [www.crue.org](http://www.crue.org) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>17</sup> *Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Científicas (Csic)*, online: [www.csic.es](http://www.csic.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>18</sup> *Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias (Iac)*, online: [www.iac.es](http://www.iac.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>19</sup> *Instituto de Salud Carlos Iii (Isciii)*, online: [www.isciii.es](http://www.isciii.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>20</sup> *Instituto de España*, online: [www.institutodeespana.es](http://www.institutodeespana.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>21</sup> *Alianza de Centros Severo Ochoa Y María De Maeztu (Somma)*, online: [www.somma.es](http://www.somma.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).

where parliaments are often perceived as arenas of confrontation rather than deliberation, and where scientific authority is sometimes contested. For this reason, the office must continually demonstrate that it is independent, that its methods are transparent, and that its outputs are useful. Legitimacy is built not only on formal rules but also on performance and perception. The office is judged by the quality of its reports, the fairness of its processes, and the clarity of its communication.

The creation of Oficina C shows the ability of institutions to adapt and innovate. Long seen as a weakness, the absence of a parliamentary advisory office has now been addressed with an additional tool that strengthens Congress's capacity to legislate, deliberate, and represent citizens in a knowledge society. Oficina C's legitimacy rests on its institutional anchorage, independence, clarity, and openness to society. Therefore, in recent years, Spain has witnessed the emergence of a more structured and ambitious science-for-policy ecosystem, one that is opening an important window of opportunity for consolidation and advancement in the near future. This evolution has been shaped by a series of institutional and legislative innovations that explicitly integrate scientific and technical advice into the executive and legislative branches, improve governance, and foster a stronger culture of evidence use in public decision-making, while also connecting Spain to the international circuits of strategic foresight and scientific advisory bodies.<sup>22</sup> The revised Law of Science, Technology and Innovation (LCTI), which entered into force in September 2022,<sup>23</sup> placed particular emphasis on knowledge transfer and public-sector innovation, highlighting the importance of bringing scientific evidence into the design of innovative public policies. It introduced provisions to promote researcher mobility across public and private institutions, including the possibility of engaging in scientific and technical advisory activities, and it also updated evaluation criteria to recognize valorisation and advisory work as relevant contributions to research careers. The subsequent Plan for Transfer and Collaboration, approved in December 2022, reinforced these objectives. Notably, it called for strengthening the Science and Technology Office of the Spanish Parliament, extending advisory models across public administrations, and embedding scientific advice into crisis-management systems and evaluation mechanisms. Complementing these efforts, the Law 27/2022 on the institutionalisation of public policy evaluation<sup>24</sup> marked a decisive cultural shift by establishing evaluation as a systematic and collective learning tool, supported by a new State Agency for Policy Evaluation and interministerial coordination units. This was followed by the revised Fourth Open Government Plan (2023),<sup>25</sup> which expanded citizen participation and integrated academic actors into open governance structures, and by the new University Law (LOSU),<sup>26</sup> which underscored the commitment of higher education to open science, citizen science, and collaboration with public authorities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies.

Taken together, these reforms signal the growing awareness among political leaders of the need to rely on expert knowledge and the readiness of the scientific community to engage more actively in policy

<sup>22</sup> C. CAÑIBANO, J. REAL-DATO, *El ecosistema de asesoramiento científico y técnico a las políticas públicas en España*, in L. MELCHOR, K. KRIEGER (eds.), *Science for policy ecosystems in the European Union*, Luxembourg, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> *Boletín Oficial Del Estado*, Ley 17/2022, de 5 de septiembre, de modificación de la Ley 14/2011, de 1 de junio, de la Ciencia, la Tecnología y la Innovación, Madrid, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Ley 27/2022, de 20 de diciembre, de institucionalización de la evaluación de políticas Públicas En La Administración General Del Estado, MADRID, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> *Gobierno de España*, IV Plan de Gobierno Abierto de España 2020–2024 (Revisión 2023), Madrid, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Ley Orgánica 2/2023, de 22 de marzo, del Sistema Universitario, Madrid, 2023.

processes. They provide a strong legal and institutional foundation for the consolidation of a science-policy ecosystem in Spain that is not only more coherent and participatory but also aligned with European and international standards, thereby setting the stage for deeper interaction between research institutions, public administrations, and society at large.

### 3. Evidence, Dialogue, and Change: The Impact of Oficina C

The successful collaboration between the Spanish Congress of Deputies, through the Directorate of Studies, Analysis and Publications of the General Secretariat, and the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT) has been key for the implementation and development of *Oficina C*. This partnership has strengthened the role of science and technology in legislative work and in the wider functions of Congress. Since the agreement for the development of *Oficina C* in 2021, the Congress has not only consolidated ties with the national and international scientific community but has also become an active member of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) Network.

Over the past years, *Oficina C* has delivered tangible results, including the publication of 14 scientific and technological evidence reports (*Reports C*<sup>27</sup>), with three more underway in 2025; the pairing of 30 scientists with Members of Parliament (and clerks); and the organisation of the annual Science Week “Semana C”, bringing together all parliamentary groups, representatives of the Spanish science and technology system, media, and civil society actors.

Focusing on the Reports C, one of the most distinctive contributions of *Oficina C* to the national landscape of parliamentary scientific advice is the creation and systematic application of what has become known as Method C.<sup>28</sup> This methodology is more than a simple procedure for producing reports. It represents a philosophy of how parliaments can interact with knowledge, how they can ensure transparency in their decisions, and how they can open their doors to scientific and social expertise without losing autonomy. In this sense, the Method C is not just a technical protocol but the foundation of a transparent instrument, designed to support the quality and legitimacy of legislative work.

The methodology begins with the selection of topics. While in many countries advisory offices primarily address parliamentary requests, *Oficina C* introduced a hybrid model. Topics are chosen by the Bureau of the Congress, taking into account proposals from parliamentary groups and committees of the chamber. They can also emerge from consultations with the scientific community and society at large. Unlike traditional models of expert advice, the Spanish office has explicitly sought to include voices beyond the scientific community. Through public consultations,<sup>29</sup> it allows citizens to express their concerns and priorities on issues under discussion.

These initiatives are not symbolic; they feed directly into the agenda of *Oficina C*. By opening the doors of Parliament to social dialogue, *Oficina C* has strengthened its democratic credentials and aligned itself with European trends of participatory governance. Its inclusion in Spain’s first Open Parliament Plan<sup>30</sup> further

<sup>27</sup> *Oficina C, Reports C*, online: [www.oficinac.es/en/reports-c](http://www.oficinac.es/en/reports-c) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>28</sup> *Oficina C, C Method*, online: [www.oficinac.es/en/metodo](http://www.oficinac.es/en/metodo) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>29</sup> *Oficina C, Public Consultation*, online: [www.oficinac.es/en/consulta-publica/participa](http://www.oficinac.es/en/consulta-publica/participa) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>30</sup> *Congreso de los Diputados, I Plan de Parlamento Abierto del Congreso de los Diputados (2025–2027)*, Madrid, 2025.

demonstrates this commitment, embedding the office within a broader institutional strategy aimed at transparency, participation, accountability, and innovation in the legislative process.

Once a topic is selected, the office engages in a mapping of knowledge. This stage involves identifying the relevant bodies of evidence, the key experts in academia and research institutions, and the stakeholders who have practical experience or are affected by the issue. This mapping is not limited to Spanish actors; international expertise is also included when necessary, ensuring that reports are informed by global knowledge. The mapping process reflects a principle of inclusiveness: that no single discipline or perspective can fully capture the complexity of modern policy challenges.

The next step is the interview phase. Experts are invited to share their views, not only through written submissions but also in structured conversations with the Oficina C team. These interviews are conducted with an emphasis on neutrality: the office listens to arguments, evidence, and concerns without privileging one source over another. This phase is crucial for ensuring that the report captures the diversity of views within the scientific community and among stakeholders.

During this process, the scientific evidence officer responsible for the topic proceeds to the drafting of the report. Here the commitment to clear language becomes most visible. The text is written with a deliberate effort to avoid jargon, to explain concepts in plain terms, and to present evidence in a balanced way. This structure ensures that the document does not prescribe a particular policy but instead offers a transparent overview of evidence and options. Importantly, the drafting process is iterative: drafts are reviewed internally and with external experts to check accuracy and clarity. A key characteristic of Method C is the emphasis on transparency about uncertainty. Instead of pretending that science can always deliver definitive answers, reports explicitly state where the evidence is contested, where gaps exist, and where more research is needed. This honesty strengthens trust: parliamentarians can see that the office does not hide complexity but rather equips them to make informed judgments in contexts of uncertainty.

Another distinctive feature is the review phase. Once a draft report is ready, it is sent back to a selection of experts for peer-review. These experts are invited not only to check factual accuracy but also to comment on whether the representation of different viewpoints has been weighted. This peer review process, similar to academic practice but adapted to parliamentary needs, enhances the credibility of the reports. It also ensures that the office is not accused of bias or partiality. By publishing the list of reviewers, Oficina C adds another layer of transparency to its process.

Following the Method C, Oficina C has proven capable of producing high-quality reports that summarise and contextualise available scientific knowledge in accessible ways. These cover diverse issues of social and political relevance such as neuroscience, disinformation, ageing and wellbeing, air quality, wildfires, artificial intelligence applied to education and healthcare, cybersecurity, green hydrogen, and other health-related topics including neurodegenerative diseases, and cancer.

The reports are then formally presented to Congress during the “Science Week”. The presentation is not a ceremonial act but an opportunity for legislators to engage directly in the findings. Committees of the chamber can use the reports to inform their discussions, parliamentary groups can cite them in debates, and individual members can use them to prepare interventions. In this way, Method C does not stop producing knowledge but ensures that it becomes part of the parliamentary process.

The final step of the methodology involves public dissemination. Each report is published with by a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) and deposited in the EPTA Network and the European Commission’s Zenodo



repository, which ensures accessibility and traceability. In addition, reports are made freely available on the Oficina C website, both in Spanish and English, often accompanied by summaries, infographics, and explanatory materials. This step embodies the principle that parliamentary advice should not be a closed resource for legislators only, but public goods that citizens can also access. The open dissemination of reports contributes to a culture of transparency and accountability, reinforcing the democratic role of the office.

Method C is not static. It has evolved through practice and is subject to continuous evaluation. Each cycle of reporting brings lessons about how to improve mapping, interviewing, drafting, and validation. Feedback from parliamentarians, experts, and civil society is systematically incorporated into future practices. In this way, the methodology embodies a spirit of institutional learning, recognising that parliamentary advice is a dynamic function that must adapt to changing contexts. In 2025, the Method C is being expanded to accommodate a new, shorter, rapid-response report format, called Notes C, designed to address emerging policy issues.

The application of Method C has also shown its versatility. It has been used to address highly technical issues, such as hydrogen technologies, as well as more socially sensitive ones, such as prevention of suicide. In both cases, the methodology proved capable of integrating diverse knowledge, presenting evidence in a clear format, and offering parliamentarians an impartial basis for debate. This versatility demonstrates that the methodology is not a rigid template but a flexible framework that can accommodate a wide range of topics.

The philosophy behind Method C is therefore one of empowerment. Legislators are not expected to become experts in a given topic but are entitled to understand the evidence in a way that is accessible, balanced, and transparent. The methodology respects the autonomy of parliamentarians while enhancing their capacity to engage with complex issues. It also respects the plurality of science, acknowledging that experts may disagree and that evidence can be uncertain. By recognising pluralism and some degree of uncertainty, Method C avoids both blind faith in science and outright distrust of expertise.

Finally, the methodology has an important symbolic dimension. By codifying how evidence is gathered, processed, and communicated, Method C signals to society that parliament takes knowledge seriously. It demonstrates that democratic institutions can innovate, that they can develop rigorous practices without imitating the executive, and that they can become credible interlocutors between science and society. This symbolic role is crucial in times of mistrust, showing that parliaments are not only arenas of political contestation but also sites of informed, reasoned debate.

Yet despite this complexity, there is a clear need to understand and communicate what Oficina C is doing, how it is doing it and what difference it is making. To that end, Oficina C actively measure its impact. It distinguishes between outputs, such as the number of reports published, events held or experts consulted, and outcomes, which refer to the broader effects these activities have on parliamentary culture, public discourse and institutional learning. To capture both dimensions, Oficina C evaluates its work across six spheres of activity, including scientific reporting, parliamentary engagement, public communication and international collaboration. Each year, these are reviewed through a combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative insights.

In 2024, Oficina C published four new evidence reports, developed with input from 87 experts across disciplines and sectors. These reports were downloaded over 1,500 times and received more than 5,000

visits on the website within just a few months. They were cited in academic journals, university theses, policy documents and even in parliamentary debates and legislative proposals. Oficina C also facilitated over 20 structured dialogues between MPs and experts, and its pairing programme has now connected 60 researchers with members of Parliament since its launch.

The impact of Oficina C goes beyond producing reports or organising events. It reflects how the Spanish Congress has strengthened its legislative work by connecting more systematically with scientific knowledge and society. Impact is not limited to outputs but includes changes in culture, practices, and expectations both inside and outside Parliament. In line with European initiatives on science for policy, Oficina C shows that evidence and democracy are not opposing forces but mutually reinforcing ones.

Within Congress, MPs and legal advisors increasingly value reports that are concise, accessible, and politically neutral. Some have been explicitly cited in debates and committee work, showing that they are not static documents but practical tools.

Within the scientific community, satisfaction is extremely high. Surveys show that nearly all participants valued the activities positively, with many reporting that the office helps them understand parliamentary work and improve communication with policymakers. In society and media, the office has increased the visibility of the relationship between science and democracy. Citizens are invited to consultations and events, while journalists have reported more systematically on its activities. This has helped normalize the idea that evidence is a public good that belongs at the heart of democratic debate.

Beyond immediate outcomes, the office contributes to deeper structural changes. Institutionally, it is becoming a stable element of the Spanish parliamentary system, proving that democratic institutions can adapt and innovate by integrating expertise. Democratically, it strengthens trust by making parliamentary work more transparent and informed, a vital resource in times of polarization. At the European level, the office adds a distinctive voice to the EPTA network. Its emphasis on plain language and participatory tools enriches the tradition of parliamentary technology assessment. Spain thus moves from being a latecomer in the field to offering its own innovations.

#### 4. Plain Language as a Democratic Tool

The work of Oficina C cannot be understood without placing at its centre the deliberate commitment to plain language. While the production of knowledge is fundamental, knowledge that cannot be understood, accessed, or trusted loses much of its value for democratic governance. The emphasis on clarity is not merely a stylistic choice; it is a political one. In Spain, where legislative texts are often perceived as obscure, technical, and even inaccessible to the very citizens they regulate, adopting plain and precise communication represents a profound cultural shift. It embodies the principle that democracy flourishes when citizens, experts, and legislators can all interact with evidence in ways that are transparent and intelligible.

This approach draws on an international movement for plain language in public administration and law.<sup>31</sup> The idea that laws and regulations should be understandable to those who must follow them has gained

<sup>31</sup> *Real Academia Española, Red Panhispánica de Lenguaje Claro y Accesible*, online: [www.rae.es](http://www.rae.es) (last visited 08/03/2026).



ground over the past decades. The European Union itself has emphasized the importance of accessible communication in its Better Regulation Agenda.<sup>32</sup>

The Spanish Parliament has also committed itself through its first Open Parliament Plan, which explicitly promotes transparency, accessibility, and citizen engagement as guiding principles for parliamentary action. Oficina C integrates into the parliamentary context, arguing that the clarity of advisory reports is not only desirable but essential for their legitimacy and usefulness.

The contribution to parliamentary practice is becoming evident. Members of Parliament, often pressed for time and faced with an overload of information, welcome reports that can be read quickly and understood without technical expertise. Thanks to their clear language, the reports produced by Oficina C have been cited in debates, non-legislative proposals, supported interventions, and informed committee discussions. Their accessibility increases the likelihood that they are used as practical tools rather than remaining static documents.

The adoption of plain language also places Oficina C within a broader European debate about science-for-policy ecosystems. According to analyses from the Knowledge4Policy platform of the European Commission, one of the major challenges of these ecosystems is the “translation gap”: the difficulty of transforming scientific evidence into formats that are usable for policymakers

But clarity also benefits the scientific community. Experts who contribute to reports can see that their insights are faithfully transmitted in ways that do not distort but illuminate. This visibility encourages further collaboration, as scientists recognise that their work can have real impact in the democratic process. Reports C are being cited in scientific papers, reviews and university research projects. In addition, they are used as teaching material which proves they are also useful for the scientific community.

Moreover, citizens themselves, through public dissemination of reports, gain access to parliamentary debates in ways that are rarely possible. The publication of clear, accessible reports helps to reduce the traditional distance between science, parliament, and society.

## 5. Connection with Society: Pairing Schemes, Dialogues C, and Public Consultations

One of the most innovative aspects of Oficina C is its determination to open the doors of parliament to society and to transform the relationship between legislators and citizens. While many parliamentary advisory offices around the world focus primarily on producing reports for the internal use of deputies, Oficina C has expanded its mission to include a wider ecosystem of engagement. Through pairing schemes,<sup>33</sup> the so-called closed-door Dialogues C,<sup>34</sup> and public consultations,<sup>35</sup> it has created channels that bring together parliamentarians, scientists, and civil society in constructive dialogue. This dimension of its work is not secondary but essential, as it reinforces the democratic legitimacy of parliamentary decision-making and nurtures the collective intelligence required to address complex societal challenges.

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<sup>32</sup> *European Commission, Better Regulation*, online: [https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/better-regulation\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/better-regulation_en) (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>33</sup> *Oficina C, Pairing scheme*, online: <https://www.oficinac.es/en/node/86> (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>34</sup> *Oficina C, Dialogues C*, online: <https://www.oficinac.es/en/dialogues-c> (last visited 08/03/2026).

<sup>35</sup> *Oficina C, Public consultation – Participate*, online: <https://www.oficinac.es/en/consulta-publica/participa> (last visited 08/03/2026).

The pairing scheme represents a landmark in this endeavour. Inspired by similar initiatives developed in the European Parliament and in some national parliaments, it consists of temporarily “pairing” a scientist and a Member of Parliament (MP) and Congress clerk so that both can better understand each other’s worlds. For a short period of time, a researcher shadows an MP in their daily work, attending sessions, and meetings. This immersion has several benefits. On the one hand, scientists acquire first-hand knowledge of how political decisions are made, the pressures that parliamentarians face, and the time constraints under which they operate. On the other hand, MPs gain direct insight into the daily life of research, the processes of scientific discovery, and the challenges of funding, publishing, and collaborating internationally.

The transformative power of this programme lies in the better understanding of both roles. Too often, scientists view politicians as distant, ideological, or even ignorant of evidence. Similarly, parliamentarians may perceive researchers as abstract, disconnected from reality, or too specialised to provide concrete advice. Pairing breaks down these stereotypes. It creates empathy, fosters mutual respect, and establishes networks of trust that can endure beyond the formal programme. When an MP who has spent time in a laboratory later participates in a debate on research funding or technological regulation, their interventions are informed not only by technical evidence but also by lived experience. Similarly, when a scientist who has shadowed a politician later participates in a consultation, their proposals are more realistic, tailored to the dynamics of parliamentary work.

Equally important are the Dialogues C, which have become one of the flagship activities of Oficina C. These dialogues are structured forums in which parliamentarians meet with experts, stakeholders, and representatives of civil society to deliberate on pressing issues. Unlike traditional hearings or committee meetings, the dialogues are designed to be more interactive and less hierarchical. They combine short expert input with facilitated discussions, where MPs can ask questions, challenge assumptions, and listen to diverse perspectives. Topics have ranged from the ethical implications of artificial intelligence to the potential of hydrogen technologies for Spain’s energy transition.

The value of Dialogues C lies in their deliberative quality. They provide MPs with a safe space to explore uncertainties, to confront the complexity of evidence, and to understand the social implications of policy options. At the same time, they allow stakeholders and citizens to see that parliamentary decision-making is not a closed process but one that can be enriched by dialogue.

As we have already mentioned, the third pillar of this societal engagement is the use of public consultations. Oficina C has developed mechanisms to invite citizens to contribute their views on topics under consideration. They combine clear and accessible information about the issue at stake with structured questions that guide citizens to reflect and provide constructive input.

The democratic implications are profound. In an era of declining trust in institutions, initiatives such as pairing scheme, Dialogues C, and consultations demonstrate that parliaments are willing to listen, to learn, and to adapt. They signal to citizens that their voices matter and that politics is not confined to party negotiations but is open to societal input. This openness does not mean that every opinion becomes law, but it does mean that decisions are better informed and better aligned with public concerns.



## 6. The Role of Scientific Evidence Officers: a New Profession in Science

The institutionalisation of science advice in parliaments is not only transforming decision-making processes but also opening up new professional pathways for scientists. The emergence of evidence officers, specialised professionals working at the interface between expert knowledge and legislative needs, illustrates how science advice has developed into a distinctive field of practice.

Unlike traditional academic roles, evidence officers are not primarily producers of original research. Their contribution lies in translating complex bodies of scientific knowledge into clear, balanced, and policy-relevant insights that can be directly used by legislators. This requires a combination of analytical skills, methodological rigour, and the ability to communicate uncertainty, consensus, and dissent in ways that foster informed debate without prescribing political outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

As a profession, science advice demands a unique skillset. Evidence officers must combine familiarity with the culture and procedures of parliaments with an understanding of how science is produced, validated, and debated. They act as boundary workers, ensuring that the dialogue between knowledge communities and policymakers remains credible, legitimate, and salient. This hybrid role also requires ethical sensitivity, as the trust placed in them depends on transparency, impartiality, and respect for plural perspectives. At the same time, the consolidation of this role raises important challenges. Evidence officers must operate close to political decision-making while preserving neutrality and credibility. In highly politicised contexts, maintaining this balance is not always straightforward. The long-term legitimacy of this emerging profession will therefore depend not only on technical competence, but also on transparency, institutional safeguards, and the ability to sustain trust from both the scientific community and policymakers. In practice, the consolidation of science advice as a profession is already visible in the growing number of parliamentary offices across Europe and beyond that employ dedicated staff for this purpose. Initiatives such as Oficina C in Spain, POST in the United Kingdom, or TAB in Germany show that parliaments increasingly rely on professionals trained to navigate both the scientific and the political worlds. The European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) Network further reinforces this development by offering a transnational community of practice where evidence officers can exchange methodologies and build collective expertise.

For scientists, this opens a new vocational horizon. Beyond careers in research or academia, they can now envision professional roles in which their scientific background is applied directly to the service of democratic institutions. The consolidation of scientific advice as a profession not only enriches the career landscape for researchers but also strengthens democracy by embedding evidence-based reasoning into legislative processes.

## 7. Towards a New Culture of Collective Intelligence

The future of Oficina C must be understood in the broader horizon of cultivating a new culture of collective intelligence in the Spanish Parliament. Collective intelligence does not imply unanimity, but the

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<sup>36</sup> European Commission, *Competence frameworks for policymakers and researchers*, online: [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/competence-frameworks-policymakers-researchers\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/competence-frameworks-policymakers-researchers_en) (last visited 08/03/2026).

recognition that pluralism, disagreement, and uncertainty are intrinsic to democracy.<sup>37</sup> Its strength lies in the ability of institutions to bring together diverse perspectives, weigh them transparently, and use them to guide legislative activity.

Oficina C is not an end in itself but a means to deepen the quality of parliamentary work and to strengthen the bond of trust between citizens and their representatives. By offering structured access to expertise, promoting dialogue with society, and aligning with international standards, it advances a vision of Parliament as a learning institution, capable of adapting to uncertainty and complexity depends on its capacity to consolidate credibility through neutrality, methodological rigour, and inclusiveness. Political consensus, organisational stability, and international recognition are not technical details but essential conditions for resilience. If these are secured, Oficina C can become a permanent pillar of Spain's parliamentary system, showing that complex challenges, such as climate emergency, the digital transformation, demographic transitions or social inequalities, cannot be faced by politics or science alone, but only through collaboration.

Ultimately, Oficina C embodies the idea that democracy is strongest when it listens, learns, and deliberates collectively. By anchoring itself in European networks, engaging scientific community, civil society, and committing to clarity, it points to a renewed vision of Parliament: one that is open, participatory, and evidence informed. Its promise is not only national but European, offering a reference point for how legislatures can reinvent themselves in an age of uncertainty.

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<sup>37</sup> D. INNERARITY, *Una teoría de la democracia compleja. Gobernar en el siglo XXI*, Barcelona, 2020.

