I completed my POST fellowship between May and August 2013. The topic of my POST note was Autonomous Road Vehicles. I greatly enjoyed my time at POST and the experience is something I would definitely recommend to other PhD students.

Interviewing experts was the most enjoyable part of preparing the POST note. One of the most pleasurable ways of learning is having complex problems explained by experts. Everyone who I spoke to was extremely helpful and informative. Special mention should go to Prof. Paul Newman who allowed me to come and visit his lab and see (although not travel in) an autonomous vehicle. An interview in Brighton with Dr Blay Whitby gave me excellent background to the societal issues involved with automated vehicles. Prof. Rod Smith the Chief Scientific Advisor of the Department of Transport (DfT) was extremely generous with his time and helped me to make contacts.

Once I had finished interviews I had to condense the knowledge gained into my four page note. This was challenging but the support from my mentor at POST, Chandy Nath and the other permanent staff really helped to structure the note and keep it balanced. The experience has helped to refine my writing style. This is something my supervisor commented on when reading my first thesis draft.

My time at POST also gave me valuable opportunities to see how Parliament works from the inside. I attended Prime Minister’s questions and several select committee meetings. (Transport, House of Commons Science and Technology, House of Lords Science and Technology and the Public Accounts Committee). I also spent some time discussing autonomous vehicles with a HoC Science and Technology committee specialist who was preparing for this inquiry. I found the select committee work to be the most interesting aspect of the political process.

The more informal events held in Parliament were also really interesting. I attended several meetings and networking events including breakfast meeting of the Industry and Parliament Trust on the “Business of Science” and the RCUK event on the Science of Health and Wellbeing. These smaller events were a great opportunity to meet MPs, Peers and other interested people and discuss often complex science and policy issues.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed my time at POST and the whole experience has helped me to understand more about the workings of Parliament and science policy in general. The fellowship helped refine my science communications skills and improved my written style. Although the experience has not tempted me to make a transition into the science policy world full time, at least not at present, I intend to use the knowledge gained in the next stage of my academic career.