



Submission of the British Academy of Management to the Liaison Committee's Inquiry into the Effectiveness and Influence of the Select Committee System

Overview

1. **The British Academy of Management (BAM) welcomes the Liaison Committee's inquiry into the effectiveness and influence of the Select Committee system.** BAM is the leading authority in the academic field of business and management (B&M) in the UK. As a learned society, we support the community of scholars in this inter-disciplinary field and foster engagement with our international peers. We have around 2000 members, almost a quarter of whom are based outside of Britain, and who range from world-renowned thought leaders and top academics in our field to early career researchers and doctoral students.
2. **The Select Committee system not only provides an important platform for scrutiny of government policy on important issues, it also acts as a conduit for research evidence to be put before policy makers in a constructive way.** That being said, there are ways that the system could be changed to improve the diversity of both evidence and witnesses that reach parliamentary Select Committees.
3. As discussed below, adjustments could be made to:
 - 3.1. **Improve public awareness of which inquiries are ongoing**, the stage in which they currently stand, and the contributions that researchers can make;
 - 3.2. **Widen the disciplinary and methodological range of evidence received** by the Select Committees; and
 - 3.3. **Increase the diversity of the individuals and organisations providing evidence** to Select Committees.
4. **Making these improvements would help ensure a fuller depth and breadth of available evidence reaches policymakers in a timely manner.**

Evidence

5. **A multitude of barriers can prevent policy makers from getting the information they need**, even when there is great will on the part of politicians and researchers to foster an evidence-based policy making process. Concerted efforts by UK universities and government over the last 40 years mean that we are thankfully now a far cry from the completely disparate and disconnected 'two communities' of research and policymakers first described by Caplan¹ in 1979. Differences in timescales, incentives, language, and culture do, however, remain – and while they are an important area for continued work by government, knowledge brokers and researchers,² such challenges are beyond the scope of this particular submission. Rather, **we focus our evidence here on relatively easy changes to Select Committee work and processes that could reap large changes in the diversity and depth of evidence received by these committees over time.**
6. **Select Committees are not currently receiving all relevant available evidence.** Many committees repeatedly hear evidence from the same individuals – researchers or public figures that are known quantities by committee clerks and knowledgeable about how the parliamentary inquiry process works, but who may not be those working on the ground or at the cutting edge of their fields. Too often these experts are all too much alike – not just in terms of gender and ethnicity, but also in terms of academic backgrounds, career stages, regional representation, discipline and outlook. **Many researchers with important evidence, crucially different perspectives, and new ideas for policy**



never ‘make it to the table’ – and while some of this is due to the wider barriers of timescale and incentives mentioned above, much of it is also due to procedural, attitudinal, and practical barriers that might be more easily addressed by undertaking the suggestions outlined below.

7. **Many in the research community believe that opportunities to give oral and written evidence are out of reach.** Some believe such opportunities are available only to academics towards the end of their careers, rather than to innovative or exceptional early career researchers (ERCs). Others believe evidence is only desired from distinguished professors who have followed a traditional research track or particular higher education institutions, rather than from those who have worked outside of the Russell Group, in and out of government, the third and private sector, or in the field. Many females, members of the LGTB community, or members of the black and ethnic minority community feel excluded. To overcome these perceptions and encourage researchers from across the spectrum of our society to share crucially evidence and different perspectives, **Select Committees need to actively seek oral evidence from beyond their usual sources.**
 - 7.1. **This will require some active work on the part of committee clerks to build connections to networks that can help them to identify a wider range of experts from whom to invite oral and written evidence.** This may require additional staffing or resources to help committee staff engage in such activities, but this would be a worthy investment as clerks are often already overstretched, carrying out vital duties with little support.
 - 7.2. **Learned societies, like the British Academy of Management (BAM), can help committee clerks tap into deep diverse networks of experts, to identify and connect them to the right experts for a given inquiry, that also come from different backgrounds and career stages.** BAM, for example, has access to almost 2000 members in the UK and abroad at all career stages and from a variety of methodological and disciplinary backgrounds. Like many of our sister learned societies, we also maintain a database of the expertise of our Fellows, who are peer-vetted for the quality and excellence of their work. Organisations like ours can easily pass on calls for evidence, and make introductions, to those working on the key questions for which select committees are seeking answers. We can also assist clerks in their efforts to put together more ethnically and gender diversified panels for oral testimony.
 - 7.3. Other knowledge brokers that can assist clerks reach a wider array of researchers include the university knowledge exchange offices, regional networks connecting policy makers and academics such as the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange ([SPRE](#)), the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods ([WISERD](#)), or the [Wales Centre for Public Policy](#), and the [Open Innovation Team](#) in Cabinet Office who work with a network of academics to bring their expertise to the policy making process.
 - 7.4. Clerks may also wish to dig further when they do find a piece of research they think their committee would like to know more about. For example, rather than automatically inviting testimony from the most senior contributor on a particular report, it might be worth asking who did the bulk of the writing and research on that same report – as the most senior contributor may not be the actual ‘expert’ on the subject or the right person for the committee to engage.
8. **Even when opportunities are actively presented to researchers to participate in parliamentary inquiries, those with the most pressing and relevant evidence to offer may shy away from the process** for lack of understanding, or because they find it



intimidating, time consuming, or difficult to navigate. Parliament has posted [helpful guides](#) on how to give oral and written evidence to Select Committees online, yet only a small percentage of the research community are aware of these, much less are they aware of the relative ease with which they might at least offer written evidence. **There are a couple of ways to address this issue.**

9. **First, changes should be made to the [parliament.uk](#) website to make it clearer, more inviting, easier to use, and up-to-date to help ensure increased participation from different parts of our society.**

9.1. Some tweaks are simple. For example, the language in the 'get involved' section of the [parliament.uk](#) website could be far more welcoming and encouraging, specifically highlighting that Parliamentary Select Committees are looking for a range of views and perspectives in response to their inquiries. It is excellent that the 'get involved' section of the website is included in the tabs at the top of the page, but it could also be added to the 'quick links' section on the right-hand side of the page for greater visibility.

9.2. An adjustment that requires more concerted effort, but which will reap great benefits in the long run, is to **improve the sections of the [parliament.uk](#) website announcing and inviting evidence for Select Committee Inquiries**. It is often difficult for even the most actively engaged researcher trying to participate in the inquiry process to know exactly which inquiries are truly ongoing and still accepting either written or oral testimony. To address this, it would help specifically to:

9.2.1. Ensure that the [web-page listing open inquiries](#) is updated *daily*. From user experience, this page (<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/inquiries-a-z/current-open-calls-for-evidence/>) is rarely up to date, which can be highly frustrating both for researchers and knowledge brokers trying to connect research evidence to policy makers.

9.2.2. On the [web-page listing open inquiries](#) and on individual Select Committee websites, clarify which 'open' inquiries are *only* inviting oral testimony versus those that are inviting *both* written and oral testimony.

9.2.3. On the [web-page listing open inquiries](#) and on individual Select Committee websites, clarify what is truly meant by an 'open-ended' inquiry. Currently, the phrase 'open-ended' appears to cover: 1) those inquiries that are actively seeking written testimony after a previously stated deadline because not enough submissions or evidence was received; 2) those inquiries that may accept written testimony after a previously passed deadline with explicit permission of the clerks, but for which they are already in the process of putting together a report; 3) inquiries where written testimony is no longer accepted, but oral testimony continues to be sought and scheduled; 4) inquiries which are not formally closed, but for which no written or oral testimony appears to be actively sought at the moment for an undisclosed reason (perhaps because the person that pushed for the inquiry has left the committee, or because of more pressing business).

9.2.3.1. Evidence providers wish to know in which of these categories an 'open-ended' inquiry falls, in order to determine how best to connect their information to policy makers. Simple wording for these categories could be: 1) 'open-ended: actively seeking written evidence'; 2) 'open-ended: written evidence accepted by clerk's permission'; 3) 'open-ended: oral evidence ongoing'; and 4) 'open-ended: on hold'.



10. **Second, the process of giving oral evidence could be made far more accessible.**

As highlighted in the submission by the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange ([SPRE](#)) to this inquiry, accepting and encouraging formal oral evidence to be given by video-conference and adjusting hearing times to allow researchers to make same-day or simpler journeys from outside of London, would vastly increase regional perspectives and evidence provision by those working outside of London.³ Similarly, SPRE's suggestion of undertaking informal evidence sessions outside of London may encourage testimony from ERCs and others from diverse groups who either find the formal Parliamentary setting intimidating or who do not have the time or money to travel to London.

11. **Third, more sustained public outreach and education on how to 'get involved' with Select Committee Inquiries is also needed beyond the parliament.uk website.**

Supporting, and more widely advertising, the [academic training](#) that the Parliament Office of Science and Technology is already doing in this area will be crucial to the future success of the system. Undertaking similar training sessions at the annual conferences of learned and professional societies, and at universities across the UK's many regions, is an important step to reaching those who may be unfamiliar with the inquiry process (such as ERCs) but who have important information to share with policy makers.

NOTES

¹ Caplan, N. (1979). The two-communities theory and knowledge utilization. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 22, 459–470. [doi:10.1177/000276427902200308](https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427902200308).

² Lenihan, A. T. (2015). Institutionalising evidence-based policy: international insights into knowledge brokerage, *Contemporary Social Science*, 10:2, 114-125, [doi: 10.1080/21582041.2015.1055297](https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2015.1055297)

³ See: The effectiveness and influence of the select committee system inquiry. Evidence submitted by Nick Bibby, Director, Scottish Policy and Research Exchange.