



SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRIES

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Select committee inquiries A-Z: www.parliament.uk/business/committees/inquiries-a-z

What is a select committee?

A select committee is a cross-party group of MPs or Lords who come together to look at a particular subject and make recommendations on how things might be improved. Select committees are established by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and have powers to summon witnesses and papers as evidence, as part of their inquiries.

The membership of select committees is normally comprised of back-bench MPs who are appointed to the committee for the whole Parliament (the time between two General Elections). Since 2010 the majority of select committee chairs have been elected by their fellow MPs.

House of Commons select committees have been used for many centuries for many different purposes, including investigating a subject rather than simply debating it.

The most prominent of Commons committees are those that shadow government departments and contribute to the close scrutiny that government policy receives in Parliament. Other

select committees report on the procedures and administration of the House itself. There is also a Backbench Business Committee which can schedule business in the Commons Chamber and in Westminster Hall at times set aside for non government business.

House of Lords select committees focus on subject areas, rather than specific government departments – for example, the Science and Technology Committee investigates a wide range of policy issues relating to science, health and medicine, food and the environment. As in the House of Commons, other committees focus on administrative matters.

Some issues require parliamentary scrutiny, and require a committee membership from both Houses eg the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Setting up a select committee inquiry

At any one time, a committee may be conducting several inquiries into different issues.

When a subject is chosen, it is announced in a press release with a call for evidence from interested parties (although anyone can submit relevant information).

Select committee meetings and support

In committee meetings MPs sit around a horse-shoe shaped table. This is a less adversarial layout than the chambers and encourages committees to act in a more collaborative way.

Committee staff provide administrative support, gather and analyse evidence, advise the committee on questions or lines of inquiry and help in drafting reports.

Evidence and reports

Once written evidence is received and analysed, it may be supplemented by oral evidence from key witnesses.

Oral evidence sessions provide committee members with the opportunity to follow-up

on points raised by written submissions and to ask in-depth questions. Evidence sessions are normally held in public. Transcripts are usually published on the Parliament website soon after the session.

Study visits may be conducted both in the UK and abroad so committee members can gain first-hand knowledge of the issues.

After written and oral evidence has been provided, a report will be prepared by the committee. The text of the report and recommendations made are generally agreed by consensus, although sometimes a vote is required.

Once agreed, the report is published and made available on the Internet.

After the report

Government departments are expected to respond to reports from departmental select committees within 60 days. Occasionally, committees then publish a further report addressing the Government response. Some committees follow up reports at later dates, asking Ministers to give further evidence as policy develops or the situation changes.

Commons committees can recommend their report for debate in the House. These usually take place in Westminster Hall but three days are available each session for reports to be debated in the Commons Chamber. House of Lords committee reports can be debated in the Lords Chamber.

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