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Select Committees and Research Impact

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Steps for Engaging

First, identify the select committee(s) whose area of policy is most related to your research and examine what current inquiries they are undertaking. The Commons has around 20 committees which monitor the work of the main government departments such as Health and Social Care, Education and Home Affairs and a further 8 which are ‘cross cutting’ such as Environmental Audit and Women and Equalities. The Lords has 8 ‘permanent’ select committees, for example, Economic Affairs, but they do not monitor government departments. The Lords also has ‘ad hoc’ committees which are appointed to consider topical issues, for example, The Gambling Industry.

New committees are established as government departments are reorganised. The new departmental Science, Technology and Innovation Committee now monitors the new Department.

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relevant committee's website and social media and also to the UK Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit.

Second, submit written evidence on a specific inquiry addressing the key questions posed in the call for evidence. Follow the guidance on deadline, word length and the requirement that only original work can be submitted. However, you may also wish to highlight questions that the committee has not considered. Avoid simply submitting a dry summary of research on a subject. Try to address the main purpose of the inquiry outlining your insights and recommendations in your evidence. Don't be too objective!

Third, offer to appear as a witness to give oral evidence. This allows committee members to pose questions relating to your written evidence. It also allows you to offer insights from your expertise and suggest policy recommendations that the committee could include in its report. Middlesex Universities researchers brought their humanoid 'Pepper' to assist the Education Committee's Inquiry into artificial intelligence!

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Select Committee Dynamics

It is important to consider the dynamics of select committee. Members applied to be elected to specific committees because they have a strong interest in that committee's area of work. They see themselves playing an important role in holding government to account, reviewing areas of policy and exposing scandals and irregularities. This is one of the most satisfying parts of their role as MPs and they feel empowered when questioning Ministers and Senior Civil Servants and witnesses on inquiries relating to wrongdoing.

A strength of the system is that committee members, who are all backbenchers, work together across party lines and it is frowned upon to use membership of a committee to gain political advantage.

The key figure to liaise with is the Committee Clerk who, in practice, drafts the final report. Committee staff include other clerks who are strictly impartial and also a media expert. Most inquiries have a specialist advisor, often an academic, who

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universities. They do not have your expertise and are keen to draw on your evidence and credibility. They want you to propose recommendations on policy which they can consider putting on their report. *'Tell us what you think the government should do'.*

As part of an inquiry, the committee may undertake visits to organisations and stakeholders at home and abroad or meet with groups affected by the issues being investigated. Invite a committee to your university as part of an inquiry to help them understand research projects first hand. This is a valuable way for your university to demonstrate impact and secure media coverage. A simple tip is *'help the committee do its work.'*

Government Response

Government departments should publish a response to select committee reports within 8 weeks and address each recommendation. This response is published by the Committee. Ministers are not bound by any recommendations made by a committee. Critics see this as a weakness in the

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monitor the whole process – reports, government response, further scrutiny, ministerial statements and policy change.

Select Committees have widened their role to include in pre legislative scrutiny where they examine a Bill in draft form and invite outside experts to give evidence. The Culture Media and Sport Committee recently examined the Draft Media Bill and the Justice Committee examined the Draft Victims Bill.

Academic researchers can give evidence to the Committees as part of the process and so have an impact on the legislative process. Another recent innovative has been the appointment of independent expert panels by select committees to monitor specific areas of policy. The Health and Social Care Committee has appointed expert panels monitor pharmacy and the NHS workforce. These panels include academic experts.

Effective Engagement

Engaging with the select committees can therefore give researchers potential impact in parliamentary scrutiny and

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Committee evidence is a valuable research resource, as witness evidence submitted to an inquiry is published in the committee's final report and this material will usually include submissions from government departments, stakeholders, campaigning organisations as well as academics. Oral evidence sessions are 'on the record' and transcripts of the questioning of witnesses including Ministers is readily available. Select committees are a gold mine of policy material.

Finally, certain universities have a strong record in engaging with select committees. The potential exists, with good training and support, for every interested researcher to identify current inquiries relating to their area of expertise which they can submit evidence to.

Huw Edwards is a former university lecturer in social policy who was Labour MP for Monmouth for nine years and a select committee member. He is now practitioner researcher at the University of Wales. He is available to provide training and advice for universities on research impact and policy

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