

Submitting Parliamentary Evidence: A Good Practice Guide for Academics

Introduction

This guide intends to provide a comprehensive overview on submitting evidence to parliament. As experts in your own fields, academics are well placed to give details of their research in order to influence policymaking. As this guide explains, the process of submitting evidence is straight forward and gives you the chance to make a tangible contribution to democracy and decision-making.

What is a Select Committee?

- Based both within the House of Commons and the House of Lords, a select committee is a small legislative group chosen to examine a certain purpose or to scrutinise government activity
- Usually made up of 11 members, membership reflects the proportions of parties in the House of Commons, the current government always have a majority – most committee chairs are also elected by fellow MPs
- Committee hearings differ in length from one day to several months
- Evidence is either submitted in written or oral format
- Following submission a report will be commissioned and evidence cited, with the aim of influencing policymaking decisions

Why are they important?

Protocol dictates that the Government needs to respond to the produced report within two months, addressing the main recommendations made.

If your evidence influences recommendations it may be directly addressed by the Government response, increasing your academic profile.



What do they want from me?

Select Committees call for witnesses from a wide range of sectors to provide on the area of scrutiny. As an academic your knowledge is valuable.

Why submit evidence?

Wider research benefit

Submitting evidence to Select Committees can be very beneficial and is a great way to lay the foundations for the impact your research and expertise is having, as well as it being of use to wider society. Points and suggestions you provide may well be quoted in the report or may be included in the recommendations; it can be very effective at creating change.

Personal benefit

It can lead to a more prominent expert profile, particularly in the media - your name will then be in government reports as an attributed expert on a topic. The press often attend select committee hearings. If this happens, and you are asked for comment, the university press office can help you manage requests.

Additionally, submitting such evidence may help to fulfil obligations of a grant or even forming part of an impact case study.

Long-term effect/ your contribution

It is possible to track the impact of your evidence over time.

By contributing to a Select Committee you are helping ensure that the information used to influence policies is accurate and coherent.

***"It is important to have it clear in your head
what main messages you want to get across
and to be able to back these up"***

*Prof Luke Georgiou
Vice-President for Research and Innovation*

How to contribute

Serendipitous submission

Academics are often called to give evidence following extensive research from parliamentary clerks who may invite them to contribute due to their research interests matching the topic being scrutinised. This highlights the importance of insuring your research is readily accessible online and that contact details are kept up to date.

It is not unknown for parliamentary researchers to use Google to identify experts on specific topics! Writing blogs for outlets, such as our Manchester Policy Blog site, can further increase your chances of being invited to submit evidence in this way.

Proactively seeking opportunities

You can keep informed of upcoming enquiries by checking the select committee [website](#) and by following committees of interest on Twitter. You can also set up email alerts to find out what committees may currently be looking for. By signing up to their communications you are putting yourself on their radar.

Working with Policy@Manchester to seek opportunities

Policy@Manchester can help in matchmaking academics to calls for evidence, based on their expertise. Regular contact can ensure relevant and timely submissions to maximise the policy impact of research from across the university.

Types of evidence

Written evidence

- Address the terms of reference and the questions posed
- Have a clear structure with headings and bullet points
- Use simple language for non-academics to understand
- Keep your evidence under 3,000 words – less is more
- Try to offer a perspective that may not have been given by other bodies (such as industrial groups, charities and special interest organisations)
- With sufficient notice, the Policy@Manchester team can give advice and look over written submissions in advance
- Further advice on submitting written evidence can be found in our [‘written evidence briefing’](#)

Oral evidence

- Before a committee session a press notice will be issued announcing its time and date
- Research the other witnesses giving evidence and find out what they will be saying – it can be beneficial to coordinate efforts to ensure a stronger case
- It can be useful to research previous committee hearings to familiarise yourself with proceedings
- Prepare structured and clear points to submit. Even if questions from the committee lead you off track at times

you know you have these to refer back to.

- Be confident in the benefit you’re providing – committee rooms can seem intimidating at first but they are there to listen to what you have to say. Without evidence contributions Select Committees could not exist
- With enough notice, oral evidence preparation sessions can be arranged ahead of your visit to Parliament. On some occasions a member of the Policy@Manchester team may be able to attend the evidence session with you.

Top tips

- Check deadline dates
- Suggest solutions as well as addressing problems
- You’re more likely to be called to give evidence if you have a different perspective to offer
- Don’t hesitate to contact the committee clerk for advice and to discuss your submission – the clerks are the gatekeepers of knowledge
- Remember that impact of your evidence can take time to come to fruition yet the end goal can be positively influencing policy change



Further Engagement

Following findings being published, you can further challenge recommendations which may have been ignored by the government. Question why recommendations have not been taken up and continue your engagement to push for change.

Additional information

Additional reading on being called as a select committee witness can be found in this [parliamentary guide](#). For information about current inquiries currently open for evidence please look at the [open calls for evidence list](#). This [short film](#) provides a guide to giving select committee evidence.

For further information contact Policy@Manchester on policy@manchester.ac.uk or +44 (0) 161 275 3038 @UoMPolicy