Select Committee Impact and Effectiveness: Early Reflections

Early findings from a collaborative project between the Constitution Unit and Select Committee staff
22 July 2010

Meg Russell, The Constitution Unit
Sarah Pettit, Home Affairs Committee
Georgina Holmes-Skelton, Defence Committee
Part 1 ...

- Rationale for the project and research questions
- Research methods
- Research team and timetable
- Summary data: committee reports
- Categorising/coding committee recommendations
Measuring Parliamentary Influence

• Why measure parliamentary influence?
  – Parliament is generally seen to be weak.
  – Crude measures, such as lack of Commons defeats or bills rejected, may reinforce this.

• Challenges to measuring influence
  – Parliamentary influence may be indirect (e.g. via media) or hidden (e.g. in party groups and private meetings).
  – Biggest problem is that of ‘anticipated reactions’: the presence of parliament may deter executive action, without any actual conflict occurring.
Measuring the Impact of Select Committees

• Most studies of select committees are descriptive and out of date (e.g. Drewry 1985).

• Crude measures (total number of recommendations accepted, etc) tell only a partial story.

• Useful recent study of Education Committee (Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon 2009).

• Demonstrates need for mixed methods to get a full picture, but also need for careful coding of reports/recommendations.
Central Research Questions

• How influential are the Commons select committees on the policy of the departments that they shadow?
• To what extent is this policy influence direct and visible and to what extent indirect and invisible?
• What does this tell us more broadly about the nature of parliamentary influence?
Further Research Questions

• Which kinds of activities by committees appear most influential? E.g. kinds of inquiries or recommendations, other forms of work?

• How does wider influence of committee recommendations (e.g. via media, parliamentary debates) interact with influence on government policy?

• How does the performance of different committees compare? What if anything can they learn from each other?
Project team

- Meg Russell, Meghan Benton, Kristina Wollter (UCL)
- Parliamentary team, each looking at one committee:
  - Defence (Georgina Holmes-Skelton)
  - Foreign Affairs (Brigid Fowler)
  - Home Affairs (Sarah Pettit)
  - Business Industry and Skills (Ben Williams)
  - Public Administration (Pauline Ngan)
  - Health (Michael Torrance)
  - Treasury (James Clarke)
Methods and Timetable

Project runs April 2010 - January 2011
Funding from Nuffield Foundation (thanks!)

Key methods:

• Inquiry level analysis of reports 1997-2010 (complete)
• Select sample of inquiries for detailed study (done)
• For sample inquiries, detailed analysis of all recommendations (nearing completion)
• Interviews with main protagonists (later)
• Media analysis (later)
• Parliamentary debate analysis (later)
Report Attributes Coded

- Type of report
- Point in the policy process
- Chair, clerk, etc
- No recommendations and conclusions
- No witnesses
- No pieces written evidence
- No divisions
Basic Data on Reports (1):
Number of Reports per Committee/Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BIS</th>
<th>Defence</th>
<th>FAC</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>HAC</th>
<th>Treasury</th>
<th>PASC</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2001</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>204</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001-2005</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>179</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-2010</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>319</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1085</td>
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## Basic Data on Reports (2): Point in the Policy Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point in the Policy Process</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening debate in new policy areas and agenda-setting</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining proposals</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to perceived government failures</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing progress</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picking up previous inquiries (only)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to policy initiatives by others</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to external events</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>504 *</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This table includes data from inquiry-reports only*
# Basic Data on Reports (3):
Number of Recommendations by Committee

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>BIS</th>
<th>Defence</th>
<th>FAC</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>HAC</th>
<th>PASC</th>
<th>Treasury</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total recommendations</td>
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<td>2854</td>
<td>2543</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>2214</td>
<td>1229</td>
<td>2512</td>
<td>15764</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total reports</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>691</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average recs per report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
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Selecting the Sample of Reports for Further Study

<table>
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<th>Treasury</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1997-2001</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001-2005</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-2010</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>218</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation Attributes

- Is it a recommendation?
- Who is it aimed at?
- What calling for?
- How “substantive” is it?
- Was there a division?
- Was it a “main” recommendation?
- How “measurable” is it?
- Was it accepted?
- Was it implemented?
- Several of these lead to measurement problems…
Points for Discussion

For the next stage(s) of the project:

• What would you expect about links between report/recommendation media coverage and likelihood of acceptance? A positive or negative relationship?

• Ditto for parliamentary debate…

• If you could interview committee members/chairs, ministers and civil servants about policy influence of committees and their inquiries, and what leads to recommendations being accepted, what would you like to ask?!