Select Committee Impact and Effectiveness: Early Reflections

Early findings from a collaborative project between the Constitution Unit and Select Committee staff
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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- Most studies of select committees are descriptive and out of date (e.g. Drewry 1985).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.

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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?

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)

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Basic Data on Reports (1):
Number of Reports per Committee/Session

	BIS	Defence	FAC	Health	HAC	Treasury	PASC	Total
1997-2001	46	36	26	17	15	40	24	**204**
2001-2005	37	19	30	21	17	33	22	**179**
2005-2010	48	56	32	24	39	69	51	**319**
Total	**214**	**166**	**144**	**100**	**103**	**215**	**143**	**1085**

Basic Data on Reports (2):
Point in the Policy Process

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

*This table includes data from inquiry-reports only

Basic Data on Reports (3):
Number of Recommendations by Committee

	BIS	Defence	FAC	Health	HAC	PASC	Treasury	Total
Total recommendations	2588	2854	2543	1824	2214	1229	2512	15764
Total reports	130	111	88	62	71	97	132	691
Average recs per report	20	26	29	29	31	13	19	23

Selecting the Sample of Reports for Further Study

	BIS	Defence	FAC	Health	HAC	PASC	Treasury	Total
1997-2001	16	9	7	7	8	5	14	**66**
2001-2005	13	6	8	10	4	5	11	**57**
2005-2010	19	13	7	9	13	16	18	**95**
Total	**48**	**28**	**22**	**26**	**25**	**26**	**43**	**218**

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?!