

Submitting Evidence to the UK Parliament

by Emma Crewe, 29 May 2020

The UK Parliament has four kinds of committees: select (scrutinising government), joint (i.e., both houses), general (including 'public bill', revising legislation) and grand (concerned with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Select Committees, established in 1979, aim to hold government to account and are growing in influence. 40% of their recommendations to government were implemented during 1997-2010. While most of the House of Commons select committees shadow the work of government departments, the House Lords committees deal with specialist topics. All Committees have members from across the political parties but aim to produce unanimous reports; nonetheless, evidence is always entangled in politics ([Crewe and Sarra](#) 2019, open access).

Select and Joint Committees hold inquiries and make calls for written evidence. These can be dominated by 'usual suspects' so Parliament is aiming to diversify witnesses, listening to more women and BAME experts as well as those overseas. At SOAS we have been encouraging select committees (especially International Development and Foreign Affairs) to take evidence from people in other countries affected by UK government policy. Passing this information on to colleagues in the Global South would be extremely helpful to that initiative.

In 2019 the Royal Anthropological Institute launched a new Committee on [The Anthropology of Policy and Practice](#) for both academic and policy/practitioner anthropologists, and those who consider themselves both, as well as others interested in anthropology in the UK and overseas. One of our activities is to alert anthropologists to [calls for evidence](#) that may be specifically of interest to them as well as other humanities scholars or social scientists.

Key tips for giving evidence:

- You can find the on-going [inquiries](#) and calls for evidence on Parliament's website
- Keep the evidence short (usually no more than 3,000 words but sometimes they ask for less) and put a summary at the beginning
- Explain who you are and why they should take you and your evidence seriously
- Write in an accessible language but provide references and other sources of evidence
- Use numbered paragraphs, include pithy quotable statements (so you are more likely to be quoted in reports), and make recommendations that the government can act on
- Committees will often accept submissions late (if the date has passed but the inquiry is still open, then ask the committee staff whether they are still accepting evidence)
- If you are then asked to give oral evidence, study all the written and oral evidence. Committee staff will give advice so it is worth talking to them beforehand

Selected References and Resources

The House of Commons have provided [information](#) about how researchers can engage and a [guide](#) for witnesses about giving evidence. The knowledge and exchange unit are offering [training](#) for academics about how to engage. Parliament has a new [hub](#) for all COVID-19 related work. You can find a short video explaining what committees do on [YouTube](#). The House of Commons [Library](#) has valuable briefings about issues that Parliament is debating. For information about researchers' engagement, see [Global Research Network on Parliaments and People](#).

Visit our website for further briefings (<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/>). If you would like a personal briefing or clarification on any of the issues raised here, please contact the author at ec15@soas.ac.uk. Do contact Professor Alison Scott-Baumann and her team for further briefings and access to other experts as150@soas.ac.uk

The views expressed in SOAS COP Briefings are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of SOAS.