

Standards, Procedures, and Public Appointments Committee

Committee effectiveness – background and resource overview

1. Purpose

This paper sets out detail of the research and data sources to support the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's inquiry into Committee Effectiveness. It does not represent a comprehensive package of evidence, rather a starting point to inform and support inquiry scoping. It is based on data which is in the public domain, and is separated into three sections –

1. Contextual research and data around understanding committee effectiveness.
2. Research and data related specifically to the Scottish Parliament, collated by SPICe research.
3. Research and data based on external sources and examples, collated by the Committee Adviser, Dr Danielle Beswick.

As this paper was produced to support the Committee in agreeing its approach to evidence taking, and aimed to support decision-making on further evidence-taking, it does not cover background detail from Scottish Parliament Standing Orders or guidance, nor does it cover [evidence taken by the Committee from former conveners in February 2024](#).

2. Context – understanding effectiveness

1. This section repeats context, collated by SPICe, which was provided to the Committee earlier in its scoping process, and flags significant reports of interest.

Measures of effectiveness

2. Measuring committee effectiveness is complex. There are numerous ways in which effectiveness could be measured appropriately. Having a shared understanding of what effectiveness means and how it should be assessed is key and central to any data collection for analysis.
 - Parliamentary scrutiny (legislative, post legislative, delegated legislation, public appointments, budget and in terms of accountability/policy choices).
 - Impact (e.g., % of committee recommendations taken forward by Government), influence (e.g., how well committees communicate their message, and whether those messages are taken up by others), visibility (e.g., media pick up)¹.
 - Outputs (e.g., number of reports, how well evidence is used, number of committee debates).
 - Democratic indicators such as transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, diversity of witnesses and evidence and level of participation.
 - Structural and practical issues (e.g., whether committee structures are efficient, how much time is spent considering legislation/taking evidence/private discussion).

Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees

3. In 2021, Professor Diana Stirbu, undertook a project to develop a framework to enable the Senedd to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the activity of its committees. The project explored *“both conditions leading to effective committee work (features of effectiveness) and the conditions in which evaluation and assessment of effectiveness take place”*. The report, [Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees](#):
 - articulates the characteristics of effective committee activity and the conditions in which evaluation and self-reflection can take place.
 - identifies appropriate measures of effectiveness across the full range of committee roles.
 - develops a comprehensive analytical and deliberative framework to assist committees in strategically planning and focusing their work; and,

¹ Terms such as ‘impact’ would have to be clearly defined in any study.

- considers how committees can improve the diversity of their evidence and witnesses, be more inclusive, and engage a wider range of people with their work.
4. The research took place over five months (September 2020 and January 2021), and consisted of:
 - a desk-based evidence and literature review exploring the concept and measurement of effectiveness in parliamentary contexts.
 - a two-stage field research consisting of 37 semi-structured interviews with politicians and officials supporting the work of committees at all levels of leadership, and three group discussions with different teams in the Senedd, followed by three collaborative workshops with Senedd officials during which participants explored shared narratives about what effective committees are and suggested ways to evidence and measure effectiveness.
 - three interviews with external and international stakeholders; and,
 - feed-back session with internal stakeholders to elicit further input from participants and offer in-depth feedback on the first draft.
 5. The report indicated different types of evaluation which could be considered by committees to inform improvement. The evaluation was split across three areas:
 1. **Committee** (supported by regular time for evaluation and timely, accessible and relevant data):
 - Self-reflection and evaluation in terms of strategic goals, ways of working, communication with the public, lessons learned, impact.
 - Sought consideration of stakeholders' feedback.
 2. Committee **systems** (supported by comprehensive data collection with access to data available to research organisations):
 - Scale, quality and impact of committees' engagement activity.
 - Diversity monitoring year on year.
 - Evaluation of stakeholder feedback with data on committees.
 - Analysis of committees' parliamentary activity (meetings, outputs, development opportunities etc) Media and social media analysis.
 3. **Independent evaluation** (supported by academic fellowships and internships supporting research and evaluation, independent commissioned research):
 - Long-term policy and legislative impact of committees or particular inquiries.
 - Analysis on knowledge, interest in politics and voter turnout in elections over time.

- Independent evaluation of committees' contribution to democratic process in Wales, improving governance and accountability, improving legislation and the Senedd's profile within the UK's parliamentary landscape.
6. The project saw structures, process and culture as key to supporting evaluation. Although the research highlighted the work already happening in these areas, it identified:
- “a significant missing factor in current practice is the consistency between and clarity of the strategic work done at the beginning of a Senedd term and the legacy work at the end– the ‘golden thread’ guiding work of committees... this links strategic objectives, measures of success, sources to help evidence success, committees’ activity and outputs in a process focused on improvement and long-term impact.”
7. The report also set out possible measures of effectiveness for committees whilst noting that “One of the biggest hurdles in developing a coherent framework for evaluation of committees’ work is that not everything can be easily quantifiable and measurable”.
8. The suggested measures included:
- % of recommendations accepted and implemented by government.
 - Changes in Government spending on areas highlighted by committees year on year; changes in policy and legislative priorities.
 - % committee stage amendments accepted.
 - % of bills getting pre and post legislative scrutiny.
 - Subordinate legislation considered.
 - Number of individuals taking part in committee engagement events.
 - Level of online engagement in committees work.
 - Positive references made about committees’ work by others and stakeholder perceptions on committees’ influence, impact and inclusiveness.
 - Witnesses’ perception of evidence gathering sessions.
 - Level and quality of engagement with research-based organisations.

Effectiveness of Select Committees at the UK Parliament

9. There has been significant work on issues linked to the effectiveness of Select Committees at the UK Parliament. Dr Marc Geddes of Edinburgh University, for example, undertook [a study of how MPs and select committees use evidence](#) in

2021-22; Dr Thomas Caygill² has assessed [post-legislative scrutiny recommendations](#), and Professor Patrick Dunleavy has produced work for Democratic Audit looking at how effective the [House of Commons two committee system is at scrutinising government policy making](#).

10. The most comprehensive and relevant recent work is perhaps the 2019 House of Commons Liaison Committee³ report '[The effectiveness and influence of the select committee system](#)'. The report was forward looking about the work of Committees and comprised of evidence and conclusions across seven themes:

- The work of committees.
- Select Committees and the UK's future relationship with the European Union.
- Evidence, engagement and research.
- Powers, privileges and contempts.
- Communicating work.
- Chairs and members.
- The role of the Liaison Committee.

11. The Liaison Committee recommended several changes as a result of the work. A non-exhaustive list of recommendations is provided below⁴.

- Changing the core tasks of committees to include the “how” as well as the “what” of committee work and articulation of revised core tasks (see Annexe A).
- Encouraging committees to publish and consult on their strategy at the start of a Parliament, including on how the public/stakeholders can submit ideas for inquiries.

² Dr Caygill subsequently undertook [a fellowship at the Scottish Parliament on post legislative scrutiny](#).

³ The House of Commons Liaison Committee is made up of all Select Committee Chairs, its work promotes effective scrutiny and considers the overall work of Select Committees.

⁴ Where recommendations included matters which the Scottish Parliament has already implemented/has similar arrangements, these were excluded. For example, the Liaison Committee suggested that select committees could:

“work together to consider how policies have affected a particular section of society, across departmental boundaries. At the start of each Parliament, the Liaison Committee might usefully decide upon two or three sectors or areas of the UK and invite select committees to work together to consider the impact of government policy across departmental boundaries.”

This appears similar to the [strategic priorities](#) identified by the Conveners Group.

- A call for every government department to produce an annual memorandum to the relevant committee setting out the progress on implementing committee recommendations.
- Encouraged the Procedure Committee to consider “the ways in which the select committees reinforce rather than compete with the work of the plenary, and be prepared to make recommendations which would represent a step change in that settlement.”.
- Steps to be taken to collect witness diversity data and encourage those giving evidence to consider diversity.
- The need for greater research, development and knowledge exchange capacity and best use of research capacity and knowledge of academic and research institutions.
- Recommendation for elected chairs to be extended to all select committees
- Gender representation on committees the Committee concluded was *“important enough to require positive action”*.

12. The Liaison Committee acknowledged the importance of planning and the effect of time constraints and resources available to committees on the choices they make, stating:

“Select committees must make choices about what they do and why. Members’ time and the resources we have to support committees are limited. Thorough planning and time for follow up are likely to deliver greater impact, more time for engagement, and better use of evidence.”

Research on effectiveness of Scottish Parliament Committees

13. There is limited external research on the effectiveness of Scottish Parliament committees.

14. In 2006, Professor Paul Cairney⁵ carried out research to understand the influence of committees by looking at legislative amendments. The research, whilst sound in basis, can be deemed to be out-of-date in terms of measuring recent legislative amendments.

15. Professor Cairney also wrote an article in 2013 [‘How can the Scottish Parliament be improved as a legislature’](#). Amongst the conclusions reached in the article were that government legislation is not scrutinised effectively, that the Parliament has insufficient staff to support committees, and that the party whip undermines independent scrutiny.

⁵ [Professor Cairney is an adviser to the Finance and Public Administration Committee](#) for its inquiry into public administration.

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

16. The [Commission on Parliamentary Reform](#) (“the Commission”) explored and made several recommendations on ‘More effective committees’ as part of its review (which reported in June 2017). It referred in this to the report published by the [Consultative Steering Group](#) (CSG) in December 1998 which set out aspirations and recommendations for the operation of the Scottish Parliament.
17. The core of the CSG’s vision was that the Scottish Parliament should have a single, elected chamber and for the day-to-day business to be carried out in committees which were to be the ‘engine room’ of the Parliament. These committees were to be at the heart of legislative scrutiny and of holding Government to account.
18. In its executive summary, the Commission explained that evidence suggested that at times committees had not been as effective as the CSG anticipated in holding the government to account. This was explained as being for the following potential reasons:
 - party discipline used to co-ordinate votes on legislation has been enforced during inquiries on non-legislative issues; some suggest this has hindered a committee’s ability to develop cross-party consensus.
 - some committees have seen so much legislation they have been unable to develop their own agenda with fewer opportunities to hold inquiries or focus on long-term or cross-cutting issues.
 - committees have also undertaken little pre- or post-legislative scrutiny; and
 - turnover of membership has been too high and prevented the realisation of the CSG’s ambition that members would develop an expertise in their subject area over the course of a parliamentary session.
19. The Commission made several recommendations aimed at supporting the independence, identity, and role of the committee system. These included that:
 - Parliament should put in place procedures for the election of conveners from the start of the next session [Session 6].
 - Whether conveners are then remunerated and/or receive additional resources for this role should be based on an objective assessment of their workloads and the expectations of their roles. This assessment should be part of a wider exercise considering additional remuneration for other parliamentary positions (such as party leaders) as referred to later in this report.
20. The Commission suggested that the following areas should be explored in relation to the election process:
 - whether all MSPs would vote in the secret ballot (for example, whether cabinet secretaries and ministers should have a vote).

- whether all committee conveners should be elected by Parliament (should any distinction be drawn between mandatory and subject committees).
 - the consequences of only one candidate being nominated for election (or indeed no candidate being elected or standing for election); and
 - whether this procedure should also be extended to deputy conveners.
21. On the remit and size of committee, the Commission suggested that there should ordinarily be a maximum of seven members on committees (echoing the recommendations of the Session 4 Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in its [report on Committee Reform](#)). It recognised this would mean that some smaller parties would not be represented on some committees.
22. The Commission also recommended that Parliament should agree and make public a set of principles to inform:
- the decisions taken about the size of committees; for example, consideration might be given to larger committees where it is felt hearing all the parties' voices is important, such as in relation to constitutional issues; and
 - how committee remits and names are agreed; greater transparency in this process would assist public understanding of the basis upon which committees are established.
23. After the report, changes were made around the size and remit of some committees, however recommendations on elected and remunerated conveners were not taken forward as SPPA Committee investigation found that support for this among members [was found to be lacking](#) (albeit based on low response rates to consultation with MSPs).
24. Also relating to committees, several recommendations were made around gathering evidence at a regional and community level and better resourcing committees, which led to the creation of a dedicated Committee Engagement Unit (now the Participation and Communities Team), [a pioneering approach among legislatures](#).
25. On evaluation, the Commission did not make specific recommendations around the evaluation of committee work, however it did make recommendations about facilitating greater levels of post-legislative scrutiny. It also referenced the importance of evaluating the impact of community-based and engagement work.

3. Scottish Parliament related research.

26. Statistics on committees are collated and published through the [SPICe annual statistics volumes](#). The information on committees includes, for example, number of meetings, time spent in meetings, membership, witnesses, business (e.g., LCM consideration, inquiries, SSIs considered, petitions considered, and reports published).
27. SPICe has collated the following sample data from these statistics.
28. For the most part, detailed comparisons have been made between the current parliamentary session (Session 6) and Sessions 4 and 5. This is because of the change in session length from four to five years at the start of Session 4. Session 6 data runs up until 10 January 2025 (mid way through Year 4).

Committee membership

29. Note that there are some challenges in comparing Session 5 data to other sessions within this section because of the change in the size of four committees two years into the session, so averages have been used for that session.
30. The average turnover of members on committees through Session 6 has been 2.2 (i.e., for every committee seat, there have been 2.2 members in that seat to date this session). Of the 109 committee seats at the start of the session (excl. SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape), 37 members have remained in place throughout (noting that five of these members were on the COVID-19 Recovery Committee which disbanded in mid-2023). 11 Committees have had only one or two members present throughout the session, and only eight have kept the same convener.
31. This represents a lower rate of turnover than in Session 5 (2.5) and Session 4 (2.7), however this session is still in progress so there may be changes to come, and changes may be felt more because committees are smaller.
32. Across sessions 4-6, the committees most and least impacted by member turnover have changed from session to session. That said, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments has always been one of the two most affected committees, and Delegated Powers and Law Reform has also been heavily impacted. These are two of the smallest committees in terms of membership.
33. The committees with the most stable membership have been less consistent, but the Justice and Economy committees have both benefited from more stable membership in two of the three sessions explored. Social Justice has been both one of the most impacted and one of the least impacted across different sessions (despite minimal changes in committee size).

Convener changes, including Conveners Group

34. There have been almost as many Convener changes to date (as at 10 January 2025) in Session 6 than there were in the entirety of Session 4, and as many Deputy Convener changes as there were in the entirety of Session 5. There were

more convener changes in Session 5 than in other sessions, however this was not reflected in Conveners Group membership as there were more instances of conveners moving between committees.

35. Based on the equivalent point in the session, there have been more MSPs who have served on Convener's Group in Session 6 than in the previous two sessions. There have been slightly more 'static' members (9), which means the turnover of other members has been slightly higher than in sessions 4 and 5. The average amount of time spent as a member of Conveners Group is similar in session 6 to session 4 (but was higher in session 5).
36. Looking at the whole session, at this stage in Session 6 there has already been as many members of CG as there were across the entirety of each of the two preceding sessions. Of the 13 members who have left Conveners Group over Session 6, eight of these have done so to take up Ministerial posts, and three to take on shadow cabinet/spokesperson roles. In most cases, these roles have not been in areas or portfolios connected to the committee convened. The wider political context is likely to play a role – there have been three First Ministers and two leaders of the Scottish Conservative Party this session after a period of relative stability.

Committee structure

37. The number of committees has fallen slightly over time when looking at subject and mandatory committees only, but it is unsurprising that there are not big changes to this number, which averages at 15.6 committees over a session, because of the relatively consistent nature of mandatory and core subject committees. What has changed is the number of Bill Committees, ad hoc committees and sub-committees, which has been at the most 11 committees in two previous sessions, and a minimum, five. At the point of this data snapshot, only one ad hoc committee had formed in Session 6 (N.B. the two COVID-19 Committees were both subject committees so are considered among core committees despite being short life). Much of this is explained by a reduction in Private Bills (not to be confused with Members' Bills), with there having been none in Session 6 compared to five in Session 5 and nine in Session 4.
38. The size of committees has changed more dramatically, creating a variation in the number of committee 'seats' across the life of the Scottish Parliament. At the most, in Session 1, there were 138 Committee seats at the start of the session, with committees having between 7-11 members. At the least, there were 96 committee seats at the end of Session 3, with almost all committees having 8 members. The number of committee seats grew again to a second peak of 132 at the start of Session 5 when most committees had 7-11 members. There are currently 109 committee seats on subject and mandatory committees, the lowest number since Session 3, and more variance in committee sizes with four 5 member committees and two 10 member committees at either end.

Committee remits

39. Tracking the remits of committees varies in simplicity – sometimes the name has much of the detail, other times the remit on establishment does. Session 5 is when remits become simplified with descriptors like “matters falling within the remit of X cab sec” for several committees, which makes tracking secondary remits more challenging.
40. Several subjects have ‘floated’ around, with different pairings and lead focuses for committee. Notable are:
- Culture, which started with education, move to enterprise (economy), back to education, and finally to European.
 - Sport which was paired with both education and enterprise before finding a more stable home with health.
 - Housing moving between social justice, communities, infrastructure, and local government.
 - Various pairings and combinations of rural, transport, environment, climate change and infrastructure.
 - Climate change becoming distinct from environment.
 - Justice being split across multiple committees at different times or being a single committee at others.
 - Social security and communities coming in and out of prominent focus.

Committee sitting hours

41. It isn't possible to reliably include Session 1 in sitting hours as the Scottish Parliament Statistics Volume only dates back to 2001, and it should be noted that Sessions 1-3 were four-year sessions, and Sessions 5-6 were/are five year sessions which makes comparing business flow challenging beyond the first and last years.
42. In most sessions there has been a predictable trend of committee sitting hours increasing each year through the session, with some exceptions:
- Session 3, in which year 1 (2007-08) was much busier than year 2, with a build along more predictable lines from there.
 - Session 5, in which year 3 (2018-19) was quieter than the year before.
 - Following the move to 5-year sessions in Session 4, year 4 had fewer sitting hours than year 3.
 - Year 5 of Session 5 was considerably quieter than the previous session, but this may well be largely related to being the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Session 3 and Session 6 have had far busier first years than other sessions. Session 3 could be explained by the change in government. Session 6 may reflect an established government ready to hit the ground running, but may also be affected by the quieter, covid-affected previous year and the aftermath of Brexit.
- The devolution of further powers in Session 5 does not appear to have affected sitting hours.

43. Session 4 has been the busiest session of the Scottish Parliament so far in terms of sitting hours, by a considerable amount (a 27% increase on the Session 1-5 average). Looking at Session 6 in comparison to previous sessions by comparing years with complete data (years 1-3, sessions 2-6), it has been the busiest, especially when looking at only core committees (26% higher in sitting hours than the average across Sessions 1-6, and a 14% increase on the total for years 1-3 of Session 5).

44. Initial exploration of the 'business transacted' by committees in relation to referred work (Bills, SIs and SSIs and Memorandums) appearing on committee agendas, comparing the first two years of each session in line with the available data for the current session, Session 6 has been the session with the fewest items of business so far. The sessions with the most items are Session 2, followed by Session 5, then Session 3. Statistics suggest, conversely, that only Session 5 had more inquiries and consultations noted as transacted business in its first two years than the current session, and that the volume of petitions considered by subject committees, committee debates in the Chamber and proposed members bills are all lower than ever.

Previous Parliamentary scrutiny

45. In Session 4, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee carried out an inquiry into [committee reform, reporting in 2016](#). It concluded and recommended that:

- "Next session's committees should normally have a maximum of seven members.
- In proposing changes to committee membership, the Bureau should attempt to minimise turnover of members.
- We do not think that there is a case for significant changes to the way in which the remits of subject committees are decided.
- The Parliament should consider establishing two justice committees next session with different remits. If this option is trialled, our successor committee should review it after the first two years of the session.
- Within 3-5 years of Royal Assent, the Scottish Government should be required to publish a post-legislative report on the implementation of each Act of the Scottish Parliament.

- Early next session, our successor committee should review the changes made in session 4 to the structure of the Parliamentary week and consider whether they strike the right balance between Chamber and Committee time and members' constituency commitments.
- At the start of next session, discussions on working practices at committees' initial away days should include discussing the potential to use reporters. Later in the session, our successor committee should review what use is being made of reporters.
- We do not recommend that the Parliament makes any change to the current system of choosing committee conveners."

46. Specifically, on the themes that the current Committee is exploring, it said:

- "We considered whether there were other ways of organising committee remits to achieve a better balance between the workloads of different committees. We concluded that, over the course of a session, most committees manage to give time to their own inquiry priorities. This is even true in some of the most heavily-loaded legislative areas such as health and rural affairs. There are advantages in the current approach, where committee remits are broadly aligned to ministerial remits. This gives clarity about where responsibility for scrutiny lies, while allowing some flexibility. We do not therefore think that there is a case for significant changes to the way in which the remits of subject committees are decided."
- On elected conveners: "we have not heard anything in the course of our inquiry to persuade us that this is a change which would result in more effective committees or conveners."
- The report does not mention potential evaluation approaches, but it does draw attention to several committee achievements over Session 4 on the themes of "challenging government and influencing policy" and "hearing and raising people's concerns".

47. The Session 6 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee carried out an inquiry into [Public Participation in the work of the Parliament](#). This included running a Citizens' Panel on participation, which made 17 recommendations for the committee to consider. Of note, these included a recommendation on a 9-month deadline for feedback to participants on the outcome of any engagement, which might include inquiry outcomes. The committee agreed with this recommendation in the context of relaying how committees have used evidence. The committee also supported the panel's recommendation to institutionalise deliberative democracy and intends to lay a blueprint for how this may happen before the Parliament in time for potential changes to be made before Session 7.

48. Within committees there are ongoing examples of attempts to understand where committees had had an impact.

49. Through Session 6, the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has produced [annual tracker reports](#). These seek to follow key themes and priorities agreed by the committee through the session, with annual evidence gathering from stakeholders and ministers and a process of the committee assessing how much progress has been made against key aims.

50. Although only one committee takes this approach, several committees use the annual pre-budget scrutiny process to follow up on longstanding themes.

Scottish Parliament led and supported research

51. There are several examples of SPICe and SPICe-supported research which support an understanding of committee effectiveness.

52. To support the Citizen Participation and Public Participation Committee's aim of creating a blueprint for institutionalising deliberative democracy, a [SPICe Fellowship with Dr Ruth Lightbody of Glasgow Caledonian University](#) explored the core principles of deliberative democracy and created a potential framework for measuring impact. [The framework](#) references "effect on public policy and political decision-making" as one area of impact, emphasising the importance of committees understanding their own impact to support stakeholders and witnesses to see the overall impact of work.

53. A fellowship by [Dr Tom Caygill \(Senior Lecturer in Politics, Nottingham Trent University\)](#) reflected on the outcomes of post-legislative scrutiny undertaken in Session 5. This found that the Scottish Government had accepted 60% of the recommendations made as a result of post-legislative scrutiny inquiries and noted that committees tended to focus their recommendations on changes to policy and practice rather than legislation. Dr Caygill suggested that this "was a reflection that the legislative frameworks themselves were not necessarily problematic but that the main issue was rather how they were being implemented.". Dr Caygill highlighted that two key challenges were a lack of time and capacity to undertake scrutiny, and a lack of co-ordination across the committee system, and made several recommendations to remedy this.

54. As noted, committees often refer to long-standing issues within pre-budget scrutiny. Over the past two budget rounds, SPICe has supported a holistic and cross-cutting overview of committee pre-budget scrutiny. As well as involving a more coordinated research support approach and statistical analysis to support the Finance and Public Administration Committee in its development of guidance to committees, this has included providing research overviews covering:

- key themes in committee pre-budget scrutiny;
- overlaps in witness base and themes across committees; and,
- overviews of the extent to which committees' recommendations were reflected in the Budget.

Ailsa Burn-Murdoch

SPICe Research, January 2025

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

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4. External research collated by committee adviser

Committee structures

55. As in the Scottish Parliament, committee structures are set out in standing orders. Parliaments often have a wide range of committee types, though often with broadly similar structures. For example, the **Australian parliament** [has seven categories of committee](#) and the Scottish Parliament has three [types](#) (mandatory, subject and bill committees), with a further distinction between committees that are sessional and those that are ad-hoc (time and purpose limited).
56. In the **Senedd**, [standing orders](#) specify that the Business Committee is set up at the start of a new session and must table a motion proposing the titles and remits of committees. There is limited public information on how this is decided, for example whether these directly mirror government departments or might vary from this.
57. **Australia's House of Representatives** has a [set of general standing committees](#) which are constituted at the start of each parliament. The number, title and coverage of these has varied, with between nine and 13 since 1996. 'Select committees' are usually time- and purpose-limited.

Committee establishment

58. In the **UK Parliament**, committees are established by Standing Orders, usually via a government motion ([Hansard Society, 2023](#)). New committees tend to be created when there is a change in government departments, usually following election or change of prime minister. The **House of Commons** has departmental select committees which generally reflect government department title and remit. These usually exist through the whole parliamentary session. In addition, it has a range of cross-cutting and other committees (e.g. Environmental Audit), and **joint committees with the House of Lords**. There are also three Grand Committees (Scottish, Welsh, Northern Ireland).
59. **Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords** also have time-limited committees established under temporary standing orders. One example in the Commons was the Exiting the EU Committee (2016-21). This committee is potentially interesting for this inquiry to explore as it was established with much larger membership than usual, 21 rather than 11, reflecting the need to allow for a wider range of views. In the House of Lords, committees are generally either permanent with a broad focus area (e.g.: Public Services; Built Environment) or temporary special inquiry committees that report on a current issue, usually within a year (e.g.: Artificial Intelligence in Weapons Systems, 2022-3; Preterm Birth, 2024-5).

Varying remits of committees

60. Initial research suggests there are not significant differences between how mandatory and subject committees operate elsewhere, though there are some

differences in how chairs/conveners are allocated (particularly in which convenerships are allocated to government members, usually by tradition). As is the case in the Scottish Parliament, different committees will be subject to different amounts of referred work, which can create an imbalance in legislative burden and restrict the ability to undertake proactive and topical work. In the Scottish Parliament, this has been a concern, leading to the rebalancing of the Justice remit. That issue is not reflected in publicly available UK Parliament documentation.

61. In the **Senedd**, a 2016 Business Committee [report](#) indicated that unevenness was an issue of concern and they took steps to alleviate, or at least better distribute, the burden. The same report considered whether to separate out legislative and policy communities, mindful of uneven workload burden across committees. They ultimately decided to retain the combined approach but increased the number of policy and legislation committees from 5 to 6, set up a reserve committee to soak up excess work, and increased provision for unallocated committee time.

Sub-committees

62. One option for relieving the burden on committees is the use of sub-committees. In the **Senedd**, sub-committees may be established and report to their parent committee. They must include at least one member who is from the executive group and one who is not. Finding examples and information on these committees is challenging using publicly available sources, and for the one clear example - [rural development \(2011\)](#) – there is little detail on why it was created or on the relationship to the parent committee.
63. In the **Australian** Parliament [sub-committees can be appointed with up to 3 members](#), with the same powers as full committees but only able to report to their committee (not the senate or parliament directly). From the publicly available information, sub-committees in this system seem to be time and purpose limited.
64. The **Dáil** [provides committees with ‘the power to appoint sub-Committees](#) and to refer to such sub-Committees any matter comprehended by its orders of reference and to delegate any of its powers to such sub-Committees.’
65. In the **UK Parliament**, select committees can create a [sub-committee](#) of no more than 7 members, with permission of the House, which reports to its parent committee. For example, the International Development Committee has a Sub-Committee whose role is to scrutinise the reports of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) and government responses to these. Other examples include a Culture Media and Sport Committee [Sub-Committee on Online Harms and Disinformation](#) in 2020, covering this broad topic and forthcoming legislation on online harms. The Foreign Affairs Committee had a Sub-Committee on The Overseas Territories, established to consider the FCDO’s management of relations with the Overseas Territories, though this seems not to have been reconstituted following 2024 general election. Defence has previously had a [Sub-Committee on AI in Defence](#).
66. The examples here suggest that sub-committees are useful in at least two scenarios:

- where there is a need for a smaller group of committee members to build up specialist or more technical knowledge on a topic (e.g. technical knowledge on AI, or an appreciation of the challenges of overseas territories which may differ from those of the UK); and,
- where there is a public body whose work overlaps significantly with that of the committee (e.g.: ICAI with its remit to scrutinise UK aid spending, including across departments).

Joint/cross committees, inquiries, and scrutiny activity

67. Parliaments have also made use of joint committees and cross-committee working, both cutting across chambers and within a single chamber, to coordinate inquiries into topical or complex and cross-cutting issues. This can help to avoid the siloing of scrutiny and the duplication of work. For example, if key witnesses appear before one joint committee rather than multiple separate committees this makes questioning from multiple angles possible, as well as reducing member, staff, and witness preparation time and potentially freeing up sitting hours.

68. The term ‘joint committees’ in the **UK Parliament** refers to those cutting across the two chambers, but there are also many examples of cross-committee working within the **House of Commons**. [The IFG has praised this development \(2016\)](#), identifying examples of effective cross-committee co-operation including joint hearings (both evidence sessions and pre-appointment), jointly commissioned research to support scrutiny, joint sub-committees, and chairs co-authoring letters as a way to ‘combine forces’ and increase the ‘pressure they can bring to bear.’ More recent UK examples include a [four-committee joint inquiry on air quality \(2017-19\)](#), a two-committee [inquiry](#) into adult social care funding, including a [high-profile citizens assembly](#), and a [Covid ‘lessons learned’ joint inquiry](#) by the Health and Social Care Committee and Science and Technology Committee (2024).

69. In **Australia**, joint committees are established between the Senate and House of Representatives, usually to consider a topical issue and tasked with producing a report within a fixed time frame. Examples here include the [Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society \(2024\)](#). As Australia relies mainly on Standing and Joint Committees for scrutiny, select committees are rarely established in the House of Representatives. With [only four since 2017](#) they have not had chance to work together, and there is limited public information on cooperation and working across the single-chamber Standing Committees.

70. In the **Oireachtas**, [joint committees are similarly established across chambers, between the Dáil and Seanad](#). There is little public information available to indicate whether and how single-chamber select committees work collectively, but [standing orders do allow for select committees to request joint meetings with other select committees \(SO 107\)](#).

71. In the **Senedd**, there is also some evidence of cross-committee working. For example in 2018 the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee and the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee produced a [joint](#)

[report on Equalities and Brexit](#), with their chairs co-authoring a letter to the First Minister setting out the findings from their individual evidence sessions and joint recommendations. In a rarer example, a Senedd committee has also held [a joint meeting with a UK House of Commons committee](#) to take evidence on the draft Wales Bill (2015), with both subsequently producing separate reports and recommendations.

Elected conveners

Chairing allocation process

72. In the **UK Parliament**, at the start of a new Parliament the Speaker decides how many committee chairs should be allocated to each party based on their proportion of seats in the House (SO 122B).⁶ There is no published formula for this, and there are concerns, including raised by Professor Alan Renwick and Dr Tom Fleming writing for the [Constitution Unit](#), at the lack of transparency and the effects, specifically that small parties lose out and that large governing majorities lead to their committee dominance (both chair and membership) and to less effective scrutiny. Beyond Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Standards (opposition-chaired), there is no formal process for deciding which party chairs which committees, though the Foreign Affairs and Treasury committees traditionally are chaired by government MPs.
73. In the **Senedd**, for each committee established, the Business Committee tables a motion specifying the political group from which the chair will be elected. They are required under [Standing Orders](#) to ensure that the ‘balance of chairs across committees reflects the political groups to which Members belong’ (SO 17.2B).
74. In the **Australian Senate**, committee chairs are elected by the committee members, though usually the party decides in advance on which member will be put forward as nominee. Chairs of legislative committees must come from government parties, while chairs of references committees come from non-government parties.
75. In the **Dáil**, chairpersons of committees are appointed. [They advise that this is achieved ‘using the d’Hondt system](#), a formula that results in the committee chairs proportionately reflecting each party’s representation in the Dáil Chamber’, They also note that this ‘has replaced the previous practice of most committee chairpersons being from parties which are in government’, though there is little public information available on the appointment process and time frame for this.

Election processes

House of Commons Chairs have been elected since the beginning of the 2010 Parliament. Reflecting on [the impact of chair elections in a 2024 seminar](#), Margaret Hodge MP argued that this change has allowed chairs to benefit from both security

⁶ Backbench Business Committee is a notable exception to this – see [Standing orders Public Business \(2023\) 122D](#) but there are also other committees whose chairs are elected via different procedures. For these the chair is elected at first sitting, usually by vote requiring a simple majority.

of tenure and a degree of independence from their party. A [Hansard Society](#) briefing sets out how chairs are elected by vote of all MPs in a secret ballot via the Alternative Vote system. MPs must be nominated for chairship by the lower of either 15 or 10% of their own party MPs, and can also include up to five MPs from other parties in their nomination. The Institute for Government's report [Select Committees under Scrutiny](#) published in 2015 argued that the move to elect chairs had at least initially supported a shift away from the previously typical characteristics of chairs: The report highlighted, for example, first term members being elected as chairs, as well as elections seeming to favour members who were seen to be the most centralist of the candidates. In an analysis that broadly concurred with Margaret Hodge's claim of the impact of chair elections, they noted that:

“Some of the members who became chairs in the last parliament were perceived to have different characteristics to those appointed under the old system. The majority were still the sort of members who would have been appointed under the old system. However, a small but significant minority were not. While we heard plenty of evidence that whips remain involved in elections – making their preferences clear to those members who are willing to listen – the use of a secret ballot significantly weakens their power over the result.”

76. The shift to more first-term members being elected as chairs has however not been maintained over time. In [2024, a Hansard Society blog by Marc Geddes and Stephen Bates](#) noted that eight stood but only one was elected (the chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee, for which all candidates were first term MPs). In that period, 25 of 27 elected chairs had frontbench experience in shadow or ministerial roles, and over a quarter had previously served as a chair.
77. Separate to this, MPs are nominated by the Speaker to join the Panel of Chairs (formerly known as Chairs of Standing Committees), and they may then chair (or co-chair) Westminster Hall debates, Public Bill and General committees. There are currently 34 members of the Panel of Chairs.
78. In the Welsh Parliament, at the beginning of the Fifth Senedd (June 2016), the Business Committee proposed allowing all Members to elect the new chairs of the Senedd's Committees. This was in line with recommendations of the Chairs' Forum in the previous session. Members are nominated by a member of their political group, with a second needed if the group has 20+ members. If there is more than one nomination or the nomination is opposed, a secret ballot of the Senedd is held to elect the chair. Members are nominated for committee membership by their political group and must then be elected by the Senedd. Chairs have only been elected since the Fifth Senedd (2016-21), so there is some opportunity to make tentative 'before-and-after' observations here. [Diana Stirbu's report on Senedd committee effectiveness \(2021\)](#) suggests chair elections have provided more stability at leadership level, and her interviewees (including chairs) suggested that election provides them with a more powerful mandate.

Deputy chairs/conveners

79. In the **Australian Parliament**, Senate committee deputy chairs are elected in the same way as chairs. [In the House of Representatives, chairs are all from the government party](#) and are appointed by the prime minister, while deputy chairs are appointed by leader of the opposition from non-government parties. Deputy chairs of committees where the chair is from the government party must come from a non-government party. The reverse also applies.
80. In the **Oireachtas**, [a committee may choose to elect a vice-chair](#), either permanently or temporarily in the absence of the usual chair and vice-chair.
81. In the **UK Parliament** and in the **Senedd**, there is no evidence to suggest that there is a formal deputy chair role. However, it may be of interest that in 2024 [the Senedd Business Committee held a consultation on job-sharing for committee chair role](#). The consultation elicited responses from representatives from Canada and Ghana, as well as academics such as Professor Sarah Childs, and these responses may help to identify sources of further information for this inquiry.

Payment for chairs/conveners

82. In the **UK Parliament** the role of select committee chair has been a paid position since 2003, based on a recommendation from the Review Body on Senior Salaries. [A 2014 House of Commons Library note](#) sets out a useful overview of the path to chair payment and its connection to efforts to 'modernise' the select committee system. It highlights [a 2010 report by the Liaison Committee](#), which suggested chairs should be rewarded and supported for this work. This proposed either payment or increased office costs allowance to cover administrative and research support. A much earlier [Hansard Society Commission on Parliamentary Scrutiny \(2001\)](#) also favoured payment, and at equivalent salary to that of a government minister. The library note also highlights some of the objections raised by MPs along the way, including that paying chairs creates an inequality between them and the committee members, and that singling out committee chairship as uniquely important undermined other alternative (not frontbench-focused) MP career paths (e.g. constituency-focused or issue-campaigning).
83. Since 2012, responsibility for pay level sits with IPSA. [It last conducted a pay review in 2016](#), incorporating a consultation on pay for committee chairs and members of the panel of chairs. The former have always received a flat rate.⁷ Up to 2015 the latter were paid based on the length of service, but since 2017 they also receive a flat rate in line with that of select committee chairs.⁸

⁷ The [IPSA 2016 review](#) found no there was 'no objective hierarchy of importance in the work done by different committees'

⁸ The IPSA review of chair pay in 2016 considered whether panel chair pay should stay at one rate, vary for time spent (e.g. fee per session chaired), or vary depending on difficulty of the committee work. The latter was rejected as the factors affecting level of difficulty could not be easily identified and quantified. Payment based on total time spent chairing sessions was also criticised for potentially penalising more efficient chairs.

84. To determine level of pay, [the Senior Salary Review Board previously compared the chair role to that of a Parliamentary Under Secretary \(PUS\)](#) and found the chair role required less time, setting a pay rate just over 50% of PUS salary. Cuts to PUS salary saw this proportion rise to around 65% by 2016. [In April 2024, select committee chair salary rose to £18,309](#) (82% of PUS salary). This means select committee chairs and members of the panel of chairs now earn an additional 20% on top of basic member salary.
85. [In Australia, committee chairs are paid an additional sum](#), varying by committee, of between 11% and 16% of their base salary, while deputy chairs are also paid for their role and receive an additional 5.5-8%.
86. [In Wales, chairs are paid a supplement of either £9,751 or £14,636](#) (13-20% above base MS salary). These are higher and lower rates, but it is not clear from information in the public domain which committees sit in each category and how the determination of 'higher' or 'lower' rate is decided and justified.
87. In the **Oireachtas**, the chair of a Dáil or Senedd committee is paid an additional €10,888. [In 2024, this was equivalent to just under 10% of a TD salary](#) and just under 14% of a senator salary.

Committee establishment with elected chairs

88. In the **House of Commons**, the motion to allocate chairs to parties must be tabled within two weeks of a new parliament forming (Standing Order 122B), which means that other business including swearing-in can delay approval. Once approved, election of chairs must take place within 14 calendar days. A Hansard Society report suggests that timeline from speaker election to committee formation has generally been around 30 sitting days, but timings of election and recess means that in reality this can add up to several (as many as three) calendar months. In contrast, **the House of Lords** in 2019 had committees established within six sitting days. It is not required to allocate chairs by party, nor do parties hold internal elections/processes to arrive at their candidates. The Committee of Selection either nominates members and chairs, or committee members select their chairs at their first sitting.
89. In the **Senedd**, the standing orders say only that 'The Business Committee must, as soon as possible after every Senedd election, table a motion or motions in accordance with Standing Order 16.1 proposing the titles and remits of committees.' There is no public data on how long the process typically takes from election to committee membership being confirmed.

Role of conveners

90. The [Institute for Government](#) is among those who have posited a strong connection between the chair and the effectiveness of a committee, stating that "the chair of a select committee determines its impact more than any other factor". In the **UK Parliament**, IPSA (2016: 3) describes the role as a demanding one that goes beyond the formal meetings, '(o)ther work is done by Chairs outside of formal sittings, including acting as ambassadors for their committees, and liaising with

ministers, overseas organisations, external audiences and the media. As such, Chairs of Select Committees can be subject to greater public scrutiny than some other MPs.’ In navigating this range of roles, [Geddes’s research suggests chairs adopt two types of leadership style](#). These are ‘catalysts’, who seek to work collaboratively with other committee members and to develop policy influence, and ‘chieftains’, who seek to develop their own strategic priorities and focus on setting the media agenda and public debate. In a 2024 online seminar on [‘How to be an effective select committee chair’ organised by the UCL Constitution Unit](#), former chairs emphasised the importance of knowing your members well, and being able to build consensus across members and across parties. They also highlighted the need to represent a cross-party committee position rather than taking a party position, including often choosing inquiry topics that would allow chairs to take members along with them. The discussion also noted that new chairs are offered coaching by parliamentary authorities on how to be a chair and also how to engage with the media, pointing towards formalised CPD and training in this case.

91. In the **Australian Parliament**, committee chairs are tasked with maintaining order, including on issues of admissibility. Either the chair or deputy must be present for each committee meeting. In most committees, the chair also has a deliberative and a casting vote, if votes are otherwise equally divided. Until its abolition in 2009, there was a separate ‘questions to committee chairs’ session in the chamber.
92. Similarly, in the **Oireachtas**, chairs have a procedural role in meeting management. There is however a stronger focus on impartiality. Specifically, [official guidance notes that](#) ‘The chairperson must act in an impartial manner. For that reason, if a chairperson wishes to express a view favouring one side of a discussion, he/she should vacate the chair and become an ordinary member of the committee for the duration of that debate.’ Chairs are also responsible for ensuring progress against the committee work programme.
93. In the **Senedd**, committee chairs are similarly responsible for maintaining order and have both a deliberative and a casting vote. In public meetings, [they are required to ensure equality of opportunity to speak](#) and a fair balance between asking questions and hearing response from the witnesses. [A Business Committee report on committees in 2016](#) set out 10 key expectations of chairs (Annex C, p.11). This includes mention of chairs having ‘knowledge of the subject matter’, which may lend itself to professional or other relevant experience as a requirement for chairship of particular committees.

Career progression for conveners

94. Much of the detail available in this area comes from the **UK Parliament**. The decision to pay UK select committee chairs [was described by IPSA as directly intended to recognise the work of chairs](#) and to provide an ‘alternative career structure in parliament for those who do not take up ministerial or other frontbench roles.’ This building of an alternative career structure was also a stated intention behind some of the broader reforms flowing from the [Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons](#) (2009). However, [based on data from the UK House of Commons \(2005-2022\), Bates \(2023\)](#) suggests that this has not come to pass, with

‘chairships increasingly acting as launchpads for, or interludes between, (shadow) ministerial posts.’ This became more pronounced during the period of churn associated with Liz Truss’s period as PM, with 11 chairs becoming ministers or shadow ministers from 2019-22. Bates identifies four pathways: chairing as destination, or as postscript to ministerial or shadow ministerial career, both in decline; or as launchpad for such roles, or interlude between such roles, which have increased.

95. It is perhaps also useful to note here that the UK Parliament has term limits for chairs set out in standing orders – ‘Unless the House otherwise orders, no select committee may have as its chair any Member who has served as chair of that committee for the two previous Parliaments or a continuous period of ten years, whichever is the greater period.’ (SO 122A). This may be relevant when thinking about scope for conveners to build up a specialism.

Evaluation

Role of committees

96. The **Senedd** sets out committee establishment and processes in Sections 16-17 of [Standing Orders](#). This states that the role of committees is fourfold: ‘examine the expenditure, financing, administration, and policy of the government and associated public bodies; examine legislation; undertake other functions specified in Standing Orders; and consider any matter affecting Wales.’ The [2016 Business Committee report](#) also sets out their vision of ‘world class committees’, highlighting what the committee system should aspire to be and to achieve.

97. In the UK Parliament, committee establishment, chair election processes and other details are set out in detail in [Standing Orders 121-152L](#). For select committees related to government departments, these note that ‘Select committees shall be appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the principal government departments as set out in paragraph (2) of this order and associated public bodies.’ For each of the other committees, a brief note is given on their role, size and operation.

98. Committee roles, functions and procedures in the Dáil are outlined in [Standing Orders 93-153](#).

How committees are evaluated elsewhere

99. This is an area where there is considerable and recent research that the Committee can draw on. The UK House of Commons Liaison Committee held an inquiry in 2019 on the ‘Effectiveness and Influence of the Select Committee System.’ This was slightly curtailed by the calling of a general election, but the Committee [did publish a substantial report](#) and the [written evidence submissions and oral transcripts](#) would provide useful information for this inquiry.

100. For the **Senedd**, Diana Stirbu’s 2021 report (‘Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees’) qualitatively explores what committee effectiveness means and how it might be supported and measured. Based on scholarship review,

interviews and workshops with chairs, officials, and external experts, she identifies key features of effective committees (p.48-51). She also identifies conditions necessary for effective evaluation (p.52-56) and proposes an extensive range of potential indicators for evaluation towards the end. This research was conducted through an academic fellowship, which could be considered a form of hybrid (neither purely internal or external) evaluation. [Another Stirbu piece \(2022\)](#) discusses public engagement and how this can strengthen committee work, and this may be a further avenue for considering how committee effectiveness is defined and measured.

101. Other notable pieces of work that have sought to draw together evidence on UK parliamentary committee effectiveness, which begin to suggest how it might be evaluated, include two from the [Institute for Government \(2015\)](#) and [Constitution Unit \(2011\)](#). There is also significant evidence available on evaluating specific aspects of committees' work, [including by Danielle Beswick and Stephen Elstub on witness and evidence diversity](#), on engaging with the public in general (including extensive and international comparative work by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira and the International Parliament Engagement Network), and on evaluating engagement with academic researchers (including [reports by Danielle Beswick and Marc Geddes](#); and a [recent article by Prabhakar](#) on academic fellowships).

102. Outside of legislative bodies, it is worth noting that other scrutiny bodies are in a similar position of trying to understand the impact of their work. Audit Scotland published details of its [impact monitoring, evaluation and reporting approach](#) in July 2024, which included setting out a framework for monitoring, evaluating and reporting impact.

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