DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

UCL

SELECTIVE INFLUENCE

THE POLICY IMPACT OF HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEES

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The Constitution Unit

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Executive summary

- There is much scepticism about parliament's policy impact. The project that led to this report is part of a wider programme of work into this important question, and focuses on the impact of House of Commons departmental select committees. We studied the work of seven select committees over the period 1997-2010, in a collaboration between academics at the Constitution Unit and parliamentary staff in the House of Commons. We are very grateful to the members of the parliamentary team for their hard work.

- Parliamentary policy impact is notoriously difficult to assess, as it can take many forms, some of which are largely invisible. Because of this, we adopted a mixed methods approach. The work is based on study of committee reports, tracing of committee recommendations, and interviews with key figures associated with the committees. We focus largely on committee inquiries, rather than other work such as financial scrutiny or pre-appointment hearings, though findings from our interviews go somewhat wider.

- The first part of the report sets out some basic information about the select committees and their work: for example, the number of reports that committees produce, the kind of recommendations that they make, and the extent to which their work is reported by the media. This is the largest volume of data ever collected about the select committees.

- Some of the key findings here are that committees are producing increasing numbers of reports, and most of these respond to government policy initiatives. Fewer than one in 10 reports could be considered 'agenda setting'. We estimate that over this period select committees produced around 1450 inquiry reports (approximately 110 per year), and almost 40,000 recommendations and conclusions, of which 19,000 (around 1450 per year) were recommendations aimed at central government.

- Select committee recommendations call for a wide variety of actions by government. Relatively few (around 20%) relate directly to flagship policies as identified in government manifestos and Queen's speeches. Around 40% of recommendations call for only a small policy change or a continuation of existing policy, while the remainder call for larger changes.

- Contrary to the beliefs of some sceptics, around 40% of committee recommendations are accepted by government, and roughly the same proportion go on to be implemented in practice. Calls for small policy changes are more likely to be accepted and implemented, but around a third of recommendations calling for more significant policy changes also succeed.

- In terms of other factors associated with the success of recommendations, those calling for disclosure of information have a higher success rate than others, as do recommendations coming from a committee with an opposition chair. This latter effect may occur, somewhat counterintuitively, because opposition chairs make greater efforts to avoid knee-jerk criticism and to build cross-party consensus. But these results are tentative, as there were only two such chairs in our sample.

- In a section in the centre of the report, we openly draw attention to some problems associated with using recommendation success to judge committee effectiveness. There are many confounding factors which mean that acceptance and implementation of recommendations does not tell the whole story. This is why we also conducted qualitative analysis.

- Our qualitative analysis, based on interviews, helps us to understand better why some recommendations succeed when others fail. We provide examples of some successful select

committee reports, and suggest some common success factors that they demonstrate. These include basing reports on clear evidence and new research, following up previous inquiries to assess what (if any) changes have been made as a result, and examining more 'niche' subjects that ministers may have overlooked.

- There was general consensus, however, that adoption of committee recommendations is only one form of committee success, and perhaps not even the most important one. Select committees influence the policy process in many other more subtle, and less measurable, ways. We suggest seven forms of non-quantifiable committee influence: contributing to debate, drawing together evidence, spotlighting issues, brokering between actors in government, improving the quality of government decision-making through accountability, exposing failures, and perhaps most importantly 'generating fear'.

- This last factor – more commonly termed 'anticipated reactions' – is perhaps the most important of all, but also the least measurable. Quotations from our government interviewees confirm that it is very effective: ministers and civil servants now often ask themselves 'how would this look if examined by the select committee?' before taking decisions. This mode of thinking may even become so ingrained that it is largely subconscious.

- Although select committees are in many ways very successful, there is still room for improvement. We identify a number of problems, some of which have been widely commented on before. These include committees' frequent failure to follow up their recommendations; committees' relative inability to commission their own research; poor attendance and attention to detail by some committee members; and a failure by some in government to take committees sufficiently seriously. These last two points are interlinked: if committees can resolve the first, the second may resolve itself. An additional challenge is how to manage committees' relations with the media: media attention may benefit committees' status and influence, but being too media-driven can become a problem.

- Our conclusions are set out in greater detail in three separate sections of the report: conclusions of our quantitative analysis, conclusions of our qualitative analysis, and general conclusions at the end. These sections also summarise more of our findings. Our general conclusion is that it is erroneous to assume that select committees are not influential on government policy. They are largely taken seriously in Whitehall, many of their recommendations go on to be implemented (though sometimes not until years later), and they have an important preventative effect in encouraging more careful consideration of policy within government departments.

- Although this report focuses largely on committees' influence on government, we also find that some committees can have significant influence outside government, including on industry. This influence comes in particular through 'exposure'.

- We have collected a great deal of data about the select committees, not all of which it has been possible to make full use of in this report. We encourage other researchers to contact us if they would like to make more use of our data. We also suggest at the end of the report some possible directions for future research.

Introduction

Recent years have been characterised by scepticism – sometimes verging on cynicism – about the effectiveness of the British House of Commons. Particularly during the time of large government majorities following the 1997 and 2001 elections, MPs came to be characterised as 'poodles', and doubt was expressed about the extent to which the Commons could have a genuine impact on government policy. This was reinforced by the fact that during the entire period of Tony Blair's premiership, the government was defeated only four times in the House of Commons (though far more frequently in the House of Lords).

Whether this picture of the Commons' limited legislative influence is justified has been called into question (e.g. Cowley 2002, 2005, Hansard Society 2008, Russell and Johns 2007), and the issue is certainly worthy of further research. But it is notable that one aspect of the House of Commons' operation is almost universally viewed more positively: the departmental select committees, responsible for scrutinising government departments and conducting inquiries. Rush (2005: 239) notes that these '[i]nvestigatory committees... are widely regarded as the most effective form of scrutiny' in the Commons. Even those who have expressed strong concerns about parliamentary effectiveness in general note that '[o]ne of the most important innovations in Parliament in recent years has been the establishment of many more Select Committees... [which] has greatly enhanced the capacity of MPs to scrutinise the decisions taken by individual departments' (Power 2006: 140). Since the establishment of the departmental system of committees 30 years ago, they have come to be highly regarded both inside and outside parliament.

There is less certainty, however, about the degree to which these committees are influential on government policy. For example one popular textbook on British politics notes that '[f]ew departmental select committee reports are debated on the floor of the House of Commons, and ministers can (and generally do) ignore them' (Leach, Coxall and Robins 2006: 234). Yet while it is true that many committee reports are never debated, assertions about government responses to them are made on the basis of very limited evidence. There has been relatively little study of the select committees in the past 30 years, and an assessment of their policy impact is difficult. Nonetheless, given the growing profile of these committees, such an assessment is clearly needed. If the committees are influential this may change our view about the effectiveness (or otherwise) of parliament. And if they are not, or if that influence is limited only to certain committees, or certain committee activities, then this is something that the parliamentary authorities need to know.

That is why we chose to study the policy impact of House of Commons select committees, and to publish our research findings in this report. The report is the product of a collaboration between the Constitution Unit at UCL and the Committee Office of the House of Commons, with the research conducted jointly by Constitution Unit academics and parliamentary staff. We analysed the work of seven House of Commons select committees during the 13 years of Labour government, from 1997 to 2010. This work involved the collection of a large amount of information from select committee reports, and elsewhere, coupled with interviews with key players associated with each committee.

The main body of the report falls into two key parts: the early sections based on analysis of our quantitative data, backed up by figures in numerous tables, and the later sections primarily based on our qualitative interview research. We draw independent conclusions from our quantitative and qualitative analyses, and overall conclusions at the end of the report. The quantitative analysis is itself also broken into two main sections. The first of these presents basic information about the work of the select committees over this period, such as the number and focus of their reports, the number of recommendations that they make, and what kind of action these recommendations call for. This is the first time that such a large body of information has been collected about the work

of the select committees. We therefore hope that it will be of use to those involved in the work of the committees, as well as those outside who simply want to know what they do. The second quantitative section approaches the question of committee influence, asking to what extent committee recommendations go on to be accepted and implemented by government, and in what circumstances this is most likely to occur. Here we are able to test the claims of the sceptics that ministers 'can (and generally do) ignore' committee reports. Our results suggest that this is not in fact the case, and that the government in fact adopts numerous recommendations made by select committees.

We acknowledge, however, that this is only part of the story of committee influence. In a section in the centre of the report we set out quite openly some of the shortcomings of a purely quantitative approach. This leads naturally into the discussion of our more qualitative analysis of committee influence. Based on interviews with parliamentary and government insiders, and representatives of outside groups, we give some examples here of influential select committee reports, and reflect upon some of the factors associated with their success. We then broaden out our focus, suggesting that there are seven key forms of non-quantifiable select committee influence, much of it additional to the process of making recommendations in reports. Again our qualitative analysis suggests that select committees are more influential than they might appear, although there are limits to this influence and ways in which they could perform better. We therefore end with a short section on how the select committee system could be improved.

We recognise that this is a long report, containing a potentially bewildering quantity of data, and that many will not have the time or the inclination to read it all. We have therefore set out our findings in as structured away as possible, with clear signposts in the table of contents to key sections and figures. This provides, to some extent, a menu from which the reader can choose. We also include three conclusions sections (to the quantitative data, qualitative data and entire report respectively), as well as an executive summary, in which our key findings are summarised.

Before the analysis of our findings, the very first sections of the report give some background information on the select committees, and previous research into their policy influence, as well as setting out more detail about our research methods.

We hope that this report will be considered useful by those engaged with the work of the select committees, those interested in knowing more about them, and those curious about the extent to which parliament can really influence government policy. We also hope that our research, and the large dataset which we have collected, will spark further interest in researching parliamentary committees, and parliament more generally. There is almost certainly more that could be done with the data that we have collected, and we invite any interested researchers to contact us to discuss the possibilities.

The House of Commons select committees

The present House of Commons select committee system is essentially traceable to 1979. But the presence of select committees at Westminster dates back significantly further than that (Rogers and Walters 2006). For centuries the House of Commons used committees of members to conduct particular investigations. The use of committees for scrutiny of government action grew in the 20th century, and by the 1960s there was pressure to establish a more systematic set of committees to shadow government departments. This came about as a result of a package of reform in 1979, and although there have been various subsequent reforms (some described below) the basic structure of the system remains unchanged from that time.

The 'departmental' select committees are listed in House of Commons standing order 152. There are presently 19 such committees, whose role is to examine the 'expenditure, administration and policy' of the government department concerned, along with its 'associated public bodies' (e.g. regulators and quangos). The policy scope of the departmental committees generally changes when the responsibilities of government departments change: for example, when Cabinet reshuffles result in departments splitting or merging. These changes require standing orders to be amended, but this is usually a formality.

The membership of select committees is by convention broadly proportional to the party balance in the House of Commons. Hence if government has a majority in the chamber, it will also have a majority on each of the select committees. Likewise, in contrast to some overseas parliaments, the chairs of select committees are shared out between the three main parties in rough proportion to their strength. The precise means by which select committee members and chairs are chosen has however been controversial in recent years, and subject to reform, as discussed below.

Select committees are responsible for deciding their own topics of inquiry, and may choose to monitor ongoing government action, or conduct inquiries that are more 'agenda setting' and explore topics that are receiving little attention from government. Most committees choose to undertake a mix of the two, as our figures later in this report demonstrate. Committees may also conduct a combination of large, long-term inquiries and smaller, quicker inquiries, as well as returning to some topics regularly. Most inquiries will involve a committee taking written and oral evidence, including from government and outside groups, with (usually public) oral evidence sessions, supplemented sometimes by evidence-gathering visits. Committee reports are published and made available to both parliamentarians and the public (including now via the internet). There is no requirement for these reports to be debated in parliament, though they can be, but the government is required by convention to provide a written response to the committee within two months.

In recent years select committees have broadened their range of activities, and these are now more formally set out. Reforms introduced in 2002 (when Robin Cook was Leader of the House of Commons) introduced a set of 'core tasks' for select committees, which included considering departmental proposals in white papers and green papers, reviewing departmental expenditure, examining bills published in draft, and scrutinising key departmental public appointments. These tasks are now overseen by the Liaison Committee (which is made up of the chairs of the principal select committees) and each committee must report to it regularly on how the tasks have been carried out. One of the most notable features of the select committees is that they do not play a part in the normal legislative process. The 'committee stage' of government legislation is normally taken not by select committees, but by 'public bill committees' (previously 'standing committees'), which unlike the select committees are temporary, and non-specialist (see Levy 2009).

Because select committees do not consider legislation (with the exception of commenting on draft bills), it is very difficult to assess their impact on the policy process. Most modern parliaments have just one set of specialist committees, responsible for scrutinising legislation as well as for the 'oversight' and 'investigative' roles carried out by House of Commons select committees. Research on committee impact in other parliaments has often focused on the relatively measurable question of the extent to which committees amend or reject legislation (e.g. Mattson and Strøm 1995). These studies have sometimes even treated the House of Commons as if it had no specialist committees.

Because of the peculiar structure of House of Commons committees, authors studying Westminster have actually gone further than their counterparts elsewhere to consider how committees' non-legislative work can be assessed. For example, immediately after the modern

select committee system was established, it was subjected to assessment by a group of authors from the Study of Parliament Group (Drewry 1985c, 1989). They suggested that the influence of select committees was relatively slight, though difficult to measure. A number of other studies over this early period drew similar conclusions (Hawes 1992, 1993, Marsh 1986). The committees have at times been subjected to criticism for their lack of influence on key policy issues: for example their failure to report on the controversial community charge ('poll tax'), widely considered a policy disaster (Butler, Adonis and Travers 1994).

In more recent years, more anecdotal evidence has suggested that the select committees, at least at times, can be influential on policy outcomes (Blackburn and Kennon 2003, Horne 2006, Rogers and Walters 2006). The only systematic study in the last decade of the policy impact of House of Commons select committees was conducted by Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009), and focused on the Education Committee. This went beyond earlier studies in terms of methods, but was obviously restricted to only one committee. It suggested that relatively few of the committee's recommendations found their way into government legislation, but that the committee had other forms of less formal influence. One of the prime motivations for the current study is to explore how much these conclusions can be generalised to other committees, and to other forms of committee influence beyond legislation. In places further into the report we discuss in more detail the research methods employed by earlier authors, on which we seek to build. Our methods have also been influenced by one of the only studies of executive oversight committees overseas, conducted in Australia (Monk 2009a, 2009b).

Since the early UK studies, the House of Commons select committees have undergone significant change. At the most basic level, they have over time simply become a more established part of the parliamentary landscape, and are now generally well-regarded for their nonpartisan style and their expert reports. It seems likely that as the committees have become better established, more practised, and higher profile, their influence might grow. In recent years the committees have also benefited from increased resources, and their method of working has become more professional. The 2002 Cook reforms resulted in a significant expansion of committee staffing, the establishment of a new Scrutiny Unit to support all select committees in their pre-legislative and financial scrutiny work, the agreement of core tasks, and the introduction of an additional salary for the MPs who chair select committees (see Modernisation Committee 2002). Each committee is now generally supported by an experienced clerk, a second clerk, one or two committee specialists and one or two committee assistants (Rogers and Walters 2006). Committees can also appoint specialist advisers for particular inquiries. All of this represents significant improvement since their early days.

Reform of select committees has not been entirely uncontroversial, however. A decade ago the Liaison Committee (2000) raised concerns about the power, resources and autonomy of the select committees. Some of these were dealt with by the Cook reforms, but one key issue was left outstanding: :the matter of how select committees members and chairs were chosen. Traditionally members of select committees had been effectively chosen by the party whips (though their names were formally proposed by a Committee of Selection, and approved by the Commons chamber). Once members were in place, committees elected their own chairs. There were concerns that this system gave too much control to the party frontbench, and particularly to government ministers, hence the Liaison Committee (amongst others) called for change. In 2001 matters reached a head when government whips sought to block the membership of two established committee chairs (Donald Anderson, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Gwyneth Dunwoody, chair of the Transport Committee) from membership of their committees. The two chairs were reinstated, but the element in the Cook reform package which sought to change the appointment process was defeated in a vote in the House of Commons (for further details see Kelso 2003, 2009).

The means by which select committees are composed was therefore unchanged during our study period of 1997-2010. However changes to select committee composition were agreed at the end of the 2005 parliament, and put in place after the general election of 2010. These followed recommendations from the 'Wright Committee' on Commons reform (Reform of the House of Commons Select Committee 2009). As a result of these reforms, select committee chairs are now elected in a secret ballot by all members of the House of Commons, following a formal division of chairs between the parties on a proportional basis. Subsequent to this, committee members are elected in secret ballots within their parties. At the same time, the size of committees was reduced and penalties were introduced for members' non-attendance. The full effects of these reforms remain to be seen. But if the select committees have been strengthened over the previous decades, the likelihood is that these reforms will see them strengthened further still. The changes occurred outside our period of study, but our research may provide a baseline against which future developments can be compared.

Our study

Our study sought to fill a gap in the literature by investigating in detail the recent work of House of Commons select committees, and in particular by exploring their policy impact. For us this forms part of a larger study on the policy impact of the British parliament.[1] An opportunity to study the select committees in collaboration with the House of Commons Committee Office arose as a result of the 2010 general election, due to the time available to committee staff while parliament wasn't sitting during and immediately after the campaign period. We thus secured funding from the Nuffield Foundation for a joint project between staff at the Constitution Unit, UCL and staff working for parliamentary select committees (see Acknowledgements page for full details).

Research methods

The study was designed and managed by the UCL team, with much of the data collection, coding and data entry carried out by seven members of select committee staff under regular supervision. Each member of parliamentary staff was responsible for research on one case study committee. In five cases this was the committee for which he or she worked in their 'day job', and in two cases was a different committee (how we chose the case study committees is discussed immediately below). The parliamentary staff were recruited as volunteers by the Principal Clerk of Select Committees, Paul Evans.

The joint work on the project ran from March to October 2010, with the parliamentary staff input concentrated in particular during the dissolution period in April-May and the immediate post-election period up to July 2010 (after which the select committees were re-established). During much of this period weekly team meetings were held involving all of those engaged in the project. Joint working continued during the summer recess (August and September 2010), but with less frequent team meetings and with parliamentary staff working part-time on the project.

Much of the first phase of the work required coding select committee reports and recommendations. Detailed coding guidelines were drawn up by the UCL team, with input from the parliamentary staff, and a codebook was circulated to those responsible for this work. Team meetings were used to discuss and resolve any difficulties with coding, and an electronic forum was also set up for coders to compare notes and resolve difficulties amongst themselves and with the UCL team. In the latter stages of data collection, some additional volunteer help was brought in, both in the House of Commons and at UCL, to complete outstanding coding, particularly on 'acceptance' and 'implementation' of committee recommendations. These volunteer coders were also closely supervised and worked from the guidelines document. Coding of media coverage of select committees was conducted by volunteers at UCL, under supervision.

Each member of the parliamentary team initially collected and stored summary data about a wide range of reports published by their case study committee during the period of Labour government 1997-2010. Our primary focus was on reports made at the end of select committees inquiries, which committees choose to do on their own initiative, rather than as part of their routine oversight expectations. We collected additional data about all of these 'inquiry reports', including number of conclusions and recommendations, number of divisions (i.e. votes in the committee, indicating controversy), and the point in the policy process at which the inquiry occurred. The number of inquiry reports for each committee is shown in the first columns of Table 1.

This was too large a volume of reports to look at in detail, so we used the above attributes, combined with the committee and the timing of the inquiry (i.e. 1997-2001, 2001-05 or 2005-10 parliament), to select a stratified random sample representative of the entire population of inquiry reports for further investigation. This amounted to 216 reports out of a population of 505: a figure designed to provide results at a 95% level of confidence.

Table 1: Overview of numbers of reports and recommendations, in total and for samples

	Total inquiries		Sample inquiries			Sample of central govt recs			
	Reports	Recs & concs	Reports	Recs & concs	Central. govt recs	Reports	C. govt recs	'Clear' c. govt recs	'Measurable' c. govt recs
BIS	116	2404	48	1034	366	35	264	251	197
Defence	65	2066	28	1059	429	18	255	247	157
Foreign Affairs	51	1744	22	783	578	13	316	280	176
Health	59	1820	26	740	396	17	271	265	211
Home Affairs	53	1911	23	777	468	13	303	300	242
PASC	60	1003	26	372	200	26	200	194	132
Treasury	101	2268	43	917	428	29	297	294	219
Total	505	13216	216	5682	2865	151	1906	1831	1334

Further information was then collected and stored for each of these 216 reports, in particular including details of every conclusion and recommendation identified by the committee. This amounted to 5682 conclusions and recommendations. For the recommendations among these (3471), we recorded further information including who the recommendation was aimed at, and what it was calling for. As shown in Table 1, 2865 of these recommendations were aimed at central government. (Later in the report, in Table 6 and Table 8, we provide further information on these factors).

We originally planned to further trace every single recommendation aimed at central government from this sample: to determine the extent to which it was accepted, and (independently) went on to be implemented. However, due to the very large number of recommendations and the limited time available to the parliamentary team, we once again based this analysis on a sample: of 1906 central government recommendations in 151 reports. This sample is shown in the third block of columns in Table 1. From this sample we examined all recommendations which called for some clear form of action for acceptance (shown in the penultimate column), and traced all of those which were 'measurable' for the extent to which they went on to be implemented (shown in the last column). The details of our coding for these attributes are discussed later in the document.

The coding of committee reports and recommendations comprised one of our primary research methods, and generated a large dataset which could be subjected to quantitative analysis. The other main research method was interviews, conducted with many of the main protagonists. This enabled us to explore less quantifiable elements of select committee influence (as discussed in the later sections of the report). In total we conducted 56 semi-structured interviews with those who

had been directly involved in the work of the seven case study committees over the period. These included ten committee chairs, six other committee members, 18 parliamentary staff and committee advisers, eight ministers, 14 civil servants and other officials external to parliament, and four representatives of other outside groups. [2] These interviews were almost all conducted by the UCL researchers. Our interviewees are listed in the Acknowledgements section.

A particular challenge in carrying out research which relies on human coding against an agreed coding scheme is 'reliability'. That is, ensuring that results are as far as possible replicable, such that if different coders looked at the material again (or the same coders looked at it on a different occasion), the results obtained would essentially be the same (Krippendorff 2004, Neuendorf 2002). In respect of many of our codes some element of human judgement was required. We sought to ensure reliability as far as possible through circulation of the detailed coding guidelines, training exercises, and consultation amongst the team. We unfortunately did not have sufficient resources to conduct double coding on a sample of our data or formal reliability testing. But most of the data were quite thoroughly checked by members of the UCL team, as the analysis of reports and recommendations for each committee was read in preparation for interviews. This allowed inconsistencies to be picked up. For all but one of the committees the number of inconsistencies was extremely small, but in the one case where more than occasional problems were noted, the entire dataset for the committee was read and recoded where necessary by the UCL researchers.

The final method used was media analysis of newspaper stories mentioning the seven case study committees. This work was carried out by volunteers at UCL, and is described in more detail in the body of the report.

Our work has generated the largest dataset ever collected on the House of Commons select committees. This report sets out findings based on an initial analysis of the quantitative data, complemented by an analysis of information and opinions gathered during the interviews. We hope that this report, in itself, represents a significant contribution to the study of parliament, and that it will be considered a useful contribution to both academic and policy debates. But it is not possible to make full use of the large body of data that we have collected in a single, digestible, report. We will therefore be writing further papers drawing upon this data in the future. We would also be happy for the data to be used in the future by other scholars. Ultimately it is our intention to lodge our quantitative data set with the UK Data Archive. Until that time, researchers interested in using the data are welcome to contact us. It could, in particular, provide a useful basis for future PhD research.

The seven case study committees

Our study focuses on the work of House of Commons departmental select committees, of which there are currently 19. We wanted to select a broadly representative subgroup of these committees, in order to be able to draw general conclusions about their work and comparisons between the work of different departmental committees. There is a slightly blurry line between departmental and non-departmental committees, however. The main departmental committees as listed in House of Commons standing order 152 exclude one of the committees in our sample: the Public Administration Committee (PASC), which is in fact specified in standing order 146. However the Commons authorities themselves note that PASC 'interprets its remit very widely, and has become in effect a departmental select committee for the Cabinet Office and other government offices which are located at the centre of government'.[3] As one of our volunteers worked for PASC we therefore felt it justified to include. However we excluded from our study House of Lords select committees, joint committees (between Commons and Lords), domestic committees dealing with solely House of Commons business (e.g. Procedure Committee), and other 'crosscutting' committees such as the Environmental Audit Committee and Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Our choice of committees was determined by two factors: the desire for a relatively representative spread, and the expertise of the parliamentary staff who worked on the project. Four staff worked for clearly departmental committees (Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Business, Innovation and Skills) and a fifth worked for the Public Administration Committee. These committees therefore provided the starting point for our sample. The two remaining parliamentary staff worked for other committees clearly outside our scope (the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the House of Lords EU Committee). We thus chose two alternative committees complementary to the initial five: the Health Committee and the Treasury Committee. These are both concerned very largely with domestic (rather than international) affairs, and shadow departments whose policy responsibilities have changed little over our study period. In some other domestic policy areas (e.g. transport, local government) organisational changes in Whitehall have resulted in significant restructuring of Commons select committees over time which would have complicated the analysis. One committee in an important domestic policy area – the Education Committee – has already benefited from a recent study of its policy impact (Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon 2009).

Table 2: Committee chairs and their parties for each committee over time

	Chair	Period as chair	Party affiliation
Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	Martin O'Neill	1997-2005	Labour
	Peter Luff	2005-2010	Conservative
Defence	Bruce George	1997-2005	Labour
	James Arbuthnot	2005~	Conservative
Foreign Affairs	Donald Anderson	1997-2005	Labour
	Mike Gapes	2005-2010	Labour
Health	David Hinchliffe	1997-2005	Labour
	Kevin Barron	2005-2010	Labour
Home Affairs	Chris Mullin	1997-1999, 2001-2003	Labour
	Robin Corbett	1999-2001	Labour
	John Denham	2003-2007	Labour
	Keith Vaz	2007~	Labour
Public Administration (PASC)	Rhodri Morgan	1997-1999	Labour
	Tony Wright	1999-2010	Labour
Treasury	Giles Radice	1997-2001	Labour
	John McFall	2001-2010	Labour

Summary details about the seven case study committees are given in Box 1. A key factor which might be considered important in the functioning of select committees is the party allegiance of their chair. Two of our case study committees were chaired for at least part of the study period by opposition members, and the remainder by members from the governing party, as shown in Table 2. This is broadly representative of departmental select committees across the chamber as a whole during the period.

Box 1: Summary of the seven case study committees

Health Select Committee

This committee shadows the Department of Health and its associated bodies (e.g. National Institute for Clinical Excellence). It looks in detail at the work and management of the health service, and at wider issues such as public health and dentistry. Unlike some other committees in our study the Health Committee's responsibilities changed little over the period 1997-2010, and it was concerned almost exclusively with UK domestic affairs.

Home Affairs Select Committee

This committee shadows the Home Office and its associated bodies (e.g. UK Border Agency), and is therefore concerned with issues such as crime and immigration. Its remit changed somewhat during our study period as the responsibilities of the Home Office changed: for example when the Department gained responsibility over some constitutional matters from the Cabinet Office in 1998, and lost these again to the Department for Constitutional Affairs in 2003. Likewise responsibility for prisons transferred to the new Ministry of Justice (and associated Justice Committee) in 2007.

Foreign Affairs Select Committee

This committee shadows the Foreign Office and its associated bodies (including the British Council and the BBC World Service). Unlike most of the other committees in our study it is therefore largely concerned with government policy overseas.

Defence Select Committee

This committee shadows the Ministry of Defence and its associated bodies, with much of its work concentrated on the armed forces, ongoing military operations, and strategic issues such as defence procurement and the UK's role in international defence bodies, including NATO.

Treasury Select Committee

This committee shadows the Treasury, HM Revenue and Customs and associated bodies. These include, in particular, the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority (following its creation in 2000). Since the Bank of England was made independent in 1997, the Treasury Committee has held confirmation hearings with new members of the Monetary Policy Committee: a practice which influenced take-up of pre-appointment hearings by other select committees, particularly since 2008.

Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee

This committee shadows the Business, Innovation and Skills Department and associated bodies. The title and responsibilities of this government department have changed over time, and these changes have been reflected in the name and remit of the select committee. In 1997 it was the Trade and Industry Committee, shadowing the Department of Trade and Industry. This changed in 2007 to the Business and Enterprise Committee, and in 2009 to the present title. The 2009 change gave the committee responsibility for some areas previously overseen by the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee (2007-09).

Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

This committee is not formally a 'departmental' select committee (under standing order 152) but effectively shadows the Cabinet Office and its associated bodies. It scrutinises the reports of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, and has overall oversight of the civil service. Like several other committees in the study its responsibilities have changed to reflect the changing responsibilities of the Cabinet Office over time, in particular relating to constitutional matters. It has also taken a general cross-departmental interest in public service reform.

Basic information about committee inquiries

In this first section of the report we provide basic quantitative information collected about the activities of our seven case study committees over the period 1997-2010. The primary purpose of the project was to assess the policy influence of the select committees, in particular with respect to committee inquiries and government policy. The first step towards this is to explore what the select committees actually do. This section therefore presents descriptive data summarising the types of reports produced by our committees, and the types of recommendations included within them. This descriptive data represents the first such major study of select committee activity in this level of detail: covering 13 years of activity, 505 inquiry reports in total, and a representative sample of 216 reports and 5682 conclusions and recommendations contained within them. We hope therefore that even without the further analysis that follows in later sections of the report, the data contained here will be useful, including to the parliamentary authorities.

Reports produced

Select committees are appointed to examine the spending, policies and administration of government departments. As indicated above, the Liaison Committee's agreed list of core tasks for the committees includes a wide range of activities. Our analysis is restricted to the various kinds of *reports* produced by the select committees over the study period. That is, we logged and classified each publication produced by the seven committees, excluding committee annual reports (listing what the committee did during the year), publications of evidence alone, and government replies to committee reports (which are normally published as 'special' committee reports). The reports remaining therefore represented the committees' more substantive interventions into the policy process. Our classification allocated each report to one of the following categories:

- *Inquiry reports:* Inquiries are the primary tool that committees use to evaluate and contribute to government policy. The subject of inquiries may be long-lasting areas of interest that the committee returns to periodically or one-off investigations into specific decisions. Inquiries usually take evidence from ministers, experts and the public in order to scrutinise policy proposals or identify and examine areas of emerging or deficient policy. The resulting reports generally include a set of conclusions and/or recommendations. However, a small number of inquiry reports make no recommendations, or take no evidence. We considered the defining feature of inquiry reports to be that the subject was an investigation of some kind, but that it would not have fallen under any of the other categories below.[4] At later stages of analysis, we restricted ourselves to studying only these inquiry reports.

- *Departmental annual reviews*: Most committees conduct regular scrutiny of departmental annual reports. These provide an opportunity for committees to fulfil their core task of scrutinising the expenditure of the department. They also allow committees to question senior civil servants and ministers on a broader set of issues than during an inquiry. Examples include *The Creation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Departmental Annual Report 2008-09* (BIS, 2009) and the Foreign Affairs Committee's *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Annual Report*.

- *Other regular monitoring reports.* This category includes all other monitoring reports, scrutiny of estimates and arm's length bodies. Examples include the Defence Committee *Major Procurements Projects Surveys*, and the regular PASC report *Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions*.

- *Pre-legislative scrutiny*. Another of the core tasks of select committees is to scrutinise draft bills published by the department. Examples include the report by PASC on the *Freedom of Information Draft Bill* (1999) or the Home Affairs Committee on the *Extradition Bill* (2002). Occasionally committees report on bills presented to parliament rather than draft bills: these were coded as inquiries, as they clearly do not belong in this category.

- *Pre-appointment scrutiny*. The last few years have seen an increase in pre-appointment or confirmation hearings, including chairs of regulators, inspectors and other arm's length bodies (Waller and Chalmers 2010). Reports of this process include PASC's *Selection of a New Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission* (2008) and reports of *The Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England: Confirmation Hearings* by the Treasury Committee.
- *Informing the House*. Select committees formally issue all of their reports to parliament, but most committee work is aimed at and concerns government. However sometimes committees direct reports very specifically at the House of Commons, for example to provide material for debate in Westminster Hall or the chamber, or simply to provide information to other MPs. These reports tend not to make recommendations, but may take the form of reporting on an overseas trip, announcing interim findings of an inquiry, or updating the House on an issue previously reported on. They do not in themselves constitute reports of an inquiry. For example the BIS Committee report *Enterprise Policy in the Regions* (2001), the Foreign Affairs Committee reports *Visit to Turkey and Cyprus* (2007) and the Home Affairs Committee report *Bulgarian and Romanian Accession to the EU: Twelve Months On* (2008).[5]
- *Review of government response*. Sometimes committees produce reports which follow up the government's official response to a previous report, usually because the committee is dissatisfied with the quality of this response. Entering into a dialogue with government in this way rather than just moving on to the next inquiry demonstrates that the committee is not prepared to let the issue die. It may therefore help keep the department on its toes. Examples include the Foreign Affairs Committee's *Human Rights Annual Report 2000: Follow-up to Government Response* (2001).

Table 3: Types of report by committee

	Inquiry	Dept. review	Regular monitoring	Pre-leg. scrutiny	Pre-appt. scrutiny	Informing House	Review of response	Total
BIS	116 (89%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	3 (2%)	131
Defence	76 (68%)	7 (6%)	22 (20%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	111
Foreign Affairs	51 (58%)	11 (13%)	13 (15%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	9 (10%)	3 (3%)	88
Health	59 (95%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	62
Home Affairs	57 (80%)	1 (1%)	8 (11%)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	71
PASC	62 (64%)	0 (0%)	12 (12%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	3 (3%)	16 (16%)	97
Treasury	101 (75%)	0 (0%)	7 (5%)	0 (0%)	25 (19%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	135
Total	505 (73%)	22 (3%)	63 (9%)	33 (5%)	31 (4%)	18 (3%)	23 (3%)	695

The breakdown of these categories for each committee is shown in Table 3. Over the period 1997-2001 the seven committees produced a total of 695 such reports, with inquiries forming the lion's share of work. But both the overall number of reports produced, and the proportion accounted for by inquiry work varies significantly from committee to committee. The Health Committee produced at the smallest amount of reports overall, and the number of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs Committee reports was also relatively low. The Treasury and BIS committees each produced more than double the number of reports produced by the Health Committee.

In terms of focus on inquiries, the Health and BIS committees did little else over this period, while other committees carried out a wider range of work. The Foreign Affairs and Defence committees carried out the lowest proportion of inquiries relative to other work. Both of these committees conducted a significant amount of regular monitoring, and also published more departmental annual reviews than other committees. The high number of regular monitoring reports produced by the Foreign Affairs Committee is primarily due to the *Human Rights Annual Reports*, while that for the Defence Committee is primarily due to scrutiny of estimates and the *Major Procurement Projects* reports.

Three committees reviewed no departmental annual reports. This is unsurprising for PASC, as it does not shadow a government department as such, though it does produce a different kind of regular monitoring report on *Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions*. Similarly, the Treasury Committee makes up for the lack of departmental scrutiny by conducting regular inquiries into the Budget, Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review (coded here as inquiries). For the Health Committee the lack of departmental annual reports is more surprising, however it does an annual expenditure report in its Public Expenditure Questionnaire. The Liaison Committee (2008) observes that while 'virtually all' committees scrutinise departmental reports, only half report on them. Our figures represent the breakdown of reports, not of actual committee work.

There were a relatively small number of pre-legislative scrutiny and pre-appointment scrutiny reports. Because of the role of the Treasury Committee in examining members of the Monetary Policy Committee, it conducted far the highest number of pre-appointment hearings. In future the number of reports on hearings by other committees is likely to grow. Committees which shadow departments with little or no legislation, such as the Foreign Office and the Treasury, unsurprisingly published no pre-legislative scrutiny reports. But the Health Committee also did no pre-legislative scrutiny in this period. Because committees respond to bills that the government chooses to publish in draft, the variation in pre-legislative scrutiny principally reflects different cultures of departments rather than of committees.

These differences account for most of the variation in the proportion of reports devoted to inquiries, but there are also two other factors. The Foreign Affairs Committee produced a relatively high proportion of reports which seek to inform the House of Commons, principally updates on different countries. PASC has a far more established practice of responding to government responses than other committees.

Table 4: Number of inquiry reports produced per committee, by parliament

	1997-2001		2001-2005		2005-2010		Total
BIS	41	35%	34	29%	41	35%	116
Defence	22	34%	12	18%	31	48%	65
Foreign Affairs	15	29%	19	37%	17	33%	51
Health	17	29%	21	36%	21	36%	59
Home Affairs	14	26%	9	17%	30	57%	53
PASC	12	20%	12	20%	36	60%	60
Treasury	31	31%	24	24%	46	46%	101
Total	152	30%	131	26%	222	44%	505

Our main interest is in committee inquiries, and a more detailed analysis of these 505 reports is given in Table 4. This shows the breakdown of inquiry reports across the three parliaments in our study period, and demonstrates significant variation in the output of committees over time. All but one of the committees produced more reports in the 2005 parliament than the 1997 parliament, though this increase was not steady and in several cases the output in the 2001 parliament was lowest. The large increase in the number of inquiry reports in the 2005 parliament may be explained in large part by changes to the resources available to committees, including the Scrutiny Unit, which supports committees with their non-inquiry work, thus freeing up more resources for inquiries. Five of the committees (Defence, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, BIS and Treasury) also grew in size from 11 to 14 members at the start of the 2005 parliament, which may have resulted in larger numbers of proposals from members for inquiry topics. Both the Home Affairs and Defence committees had a change of chair in 2005, which may have been a further factor contributing to a change in committee style. But the largest increase in reports (a tripling) was with

respect to PASC, whose size and chair did not change. Another factor may be committees conducting more, shorter, inquiries in part in order to maximise their media impact.

Point in the policy process

The main purpose of inquiries is to influence government policy. But there are various ways that committees can engage with the policy process. For example, they can seek to proactively develop new ideas by identifying policy gaps or areas of emerging policy and making suggestions for government action. Alternatively, they can react to policy development by government by responding to consultations, tracking progress in policy development and implementation. At other times they can respond to external events. This assumes a 'stagist' or 'linear' model of policy-making beginning with agenda setting and ending with policy evaluation, and as John (1998: 23) observes, '[t]he idea that policy follows a sequential process is the most popular characterization of public decision-making'. Although we use this approach it should be noted that it has attracted criticism for being overly simplistic or idealised (e.g. Kingdon 1984, Lindblom 1968), and policy is increasingly seen as a cyclical process within Whitehall (e.g. Cabinet Office 1999). But we believe that it provides a useful and instinctively straightforward framework.

We analysed the introductory paragraphs of each inquiry report in order to classify the inquiry according to the point in the policy process at which it was conducted. For this we created a set of seven categories. These are not hard and fast: many inquiries have multiple aims, so for the purposes of our research we recorded the primary aim. The definitions that we adopted were as follows:

- *Opening debate in new policy areas and agenda setting*. Where the committee proactively sought to explore new policy directions, fact-find or open debate. The issue did not need to be an obscure or neglected one but could be something that had become fashionable, and perhaps been promoted by interest groups, but on which the government had not yet reacted substantively.
- *Examining proposals*. Inquiries responding to government announcements of projects, plans, programmes or funding packages, including publication of initiatives and strategies, white papers, green papers and occasionally legislation.
- *Reviewing progress*. Inquiries auditing the effectiveness and implementation of policies. For example evaluating reforms, analysing performance, scrutinising efficiency or examining the broad direction of policy and expenditure. The key difference to 'examining proposals' is that this category examines progress against objectives, rather than looking at plans.
- *Responding to perceived government failures*. Inquiries reacting to perceived failures of government action or inaction/negligence. Although other types of inquiry might have identified failure during their investigations, this category was only used for inquiries which were explicitly motivated by a crisis or political storm.
- *Responding to policy initiatives by others*. Inquiries which responded to reviews, consultations or initiatives by other bodies, for example *Climate Change and the Stern Review: The Implications for Treasury Policy* (Treasury Committee, 2008).
- *Responding to external events*. Where the committee was responding to an external event that was outside the government's control, for example *Mergers, Acquisitions and Takeovers: the Takeover of Cadbury by Kraft* (BIS Committee, 2010).
- *Picking up previous inquiries*. Where the purpose of the report was solely to follow up a previous inquiry.

Table 5: Point in the policy process of reports, by committee

	Agenda-setting	Examining proposals	Reviewing progress	Responding to failures	External initiatives	External events	Follow-up	Total
BIS	9 (8%)	25 (22%)	51 (44%)	7 (6%)	8 (7%)	14 (12%)	2 (2%)	116
Defence	4 (6%)	19 (29%)	36 (55%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	65
Foreign Affairs	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	31 (61%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)	51
Health	4 (7%)	16 (27%)	11 (19%)	26 (44%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	59
Home Affairs	1 (2%)	9 (17%)	26 (49%)	13 (25%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	53
PASC	11 (18%)	11 (18%)	18 (30%)	15 (25%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)	60
Treasury	9 (9%)	29 (29%)	37 (37%)	8 (8%)	8 (8%)	8 (8%)	2 (2%)	101
Total	39 (8%)	112 (22%)	210 (42%)	76 (15%)	23 (5%)	32 (6%)	13 (3%)	505

Table 5 provides data on the breakdown of reports across the different points in the policy process, by committee. We see that reports following up previous inquiries and responding to external initiatives and events are relatively rare. The four categories relating directly to different points in the government policy process account for 87% of all inquiry reports. But these figures indicate that it is easier for committees to react to, rather than shape, the government agenda: fewer than one in 10 reports seeks to set the agenda by exploring new areas of policy. By far the largest category is that of 'reviewing progress', which accounts for almost half of all inquiry reports. Around a quarter of reports review government proposals, while around one in six respond to specific government failures. We conclude that committees are relatively rarely proactive, and instead are driven by the government policy agenda most of the time. This could be seen as disappointing.

There are, however, again notable differences between the committees. This different spread of reports across different stages in the policy process may reflect committee style, and tendency to try to influence government in different ways, but also the nature of the department which the committee shadows.

PASC in particular produced a relatively high proportion of agenda-setting inquiries. It may have been easier for this committee to carve out an agenda-setting role due to the nature of the policy area – somewhat 'geeky' and low profile – plus the fact that the Cabinet Office is a relatively small department with less work to monitor than other departments. An example of one of PASC's agenda-setting reports was *Lobbying: Access and Influence in Whitehall* (2009), which was the first parliamentary inquiry into the subject since 1991. The introduction to the report justifies the choice of inquiry on the basis that 'the time was ripe in our view to consider whether the regulatory framework for lobbying in the United Kingdom could be improved'. Agenda-setting inquiries conducted by other committees include the Treasury Committee's *Women in the City* (2010) and the Health Committee's *Welfare of Former British Child Migrants* (1998). In the introduction to the second of these reports, the committee complained that this was 'a subject which until recent years has received shamefully little attention.' By conducting this inquiry very soon after the 1997 general election, the committee aimed to shape the agenda by bringing this under-examined area to the attention of a new administration.

The mainstay of most committees' work was reports reviewing government progress. A committee might decide to review progress following a previous inquiry into a particular topic, or take a general look at how the government is doing on a particular policy area like *Public Health* (Health Committee, 2001), *The Government's Drugs Policy: Is it Working?* (Home Affairs, 2002), or *UK Operations in Afghanistan* (Defence Committee, 2007). There is a lot of difference here between the committees, however. The Foreign Affairs Committee focuses most of its efforts in this area (though it also, perhaps unsurprisingly, produced the highest proportion of reports responding to external events). An example is its series of reports on *Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against*

Terrorism (2002-2005). In contrast the Health Committee and PASC produced a relatively much smaller number of 'reviewing progress' reports.

Most committees also produced a relatively large number of reports examining government proposals. The regular Treasury Committee reports on the Budget and Pre-Budget Report for example use the opportunity of these big announcements to gather evidence from a range of experts. Other examples of reports that examine proposals include the Home Affairs Committee's *Counter-Terrorism Measures in British Airports* (2010), which followed a series of announcements about measures to improve airport security. The committee decided to use these announcements to 'inquire into the counter-terrorism measures currently in place at British airports and the impact of the proposed changes on airport security and passengers'.

The table shows that the Health Committee focused far more than the other committees on government failure. Some of these inquiries were crisis-related, describing for example 'alarming stories' about provision for patients in *Head Injury: Rehabilitation* (2001) or 'failings this incident revealed' in *The Use of Overseas Doctors in Providing Out of Hours Services* (2010) as the motivation for the inquiry. However this difference may have been in part presentational, as the Health Committee seems to phrase even big set-piece reports in the language of government failure. For example its report *The Tobacco Industry and the Health Risks of Smoking* (2000) describes how it is 'astonishing to us that, almost 50 years after Government recognized the dangers inherent in smoking, tobacco products remained on sale in a remarkably unregulated fashion'.

Report recommendations

Committee reports, and particularly reports of inquiries, generally conclude with a section of conclusions and recommendations. Current practice is to pull out from the body of the report all the points emphasised in bold throughout the text, though this practice developed during our study period. The recommendations and conclusions section therefore functions in some ways as the summary of a report, and is one of the parts most likely to be read. This section is the primary means by which the committee can require the government to address a specific point, consider a course of action, or update the committee on progress on a particular area.

According to the guidance produced by the Cabinet Office (2005) on dealing with select committees (commonly known as the 'Osmotherly Rules') government departments should provide a formal response to committee reports within two months (except in exceptional circumstances, where the committee should be kept informed). The guidance states that it is 'recommendations' that require a response. But not all emboldened points in committee reports are recommendations. Some are conclusions, and some are simply statements of fact. Sometimes it is unclear whether the committee intended a point to elicit a government response or not.

The next stage of our research, following the collection of data about whole committee reports, was to collect far more detailed data about the recommendations made by committees following inquiries. In total, the 505 inquiry reports published by the seven case study committees during 1997-2010 included 13,216 emboldened paragraphs which appeared to be conclusions and recommendations. At the outset of this research we had planned to follow through every recommendation made by these committees over the period. However this volume of conclusions and recommendations was far too great to analyse in the time that we had available. At this stage we therefore selected a representative sample of committee reports to follow through in greater detail (see 'Research methods' section above). The resulting sample included 216 committee reports, and 5682 emboldened paragraphs, representing 43% of the total.

Number of 'true' recommendations

Our first step was to categorise each of these points according to whether it was a conclusion, a recommendation, or neither of these. The categories that we used were the following:

- *Expression of approval.* These are positively phrased conclusions where the committee voices its approval for something, including government action, without recommending any further action.
- *Expression of disapproval.* Similarly these are critical conclusions that make no recommendation for action.
- *Recommendation*. The most straightforward examples of recommendations are points which begin with the phrase 'We recommend…'. However, there are various other ways in which a committee can suggest action. For example it might express a desire to receive clarification on something, or state that a particular course of action 'should' be followed. We sought to include anything with a clear imperative in this category, even if the imperative was for inaction (i.e. for something to stay the same). All paragraphs that included a recommendation were coded as recommendations, even if they made additional more descriptive points. (Note that this means committee reports include more 'conclusions' than our figures suggest, as we counted each paragraph only once.)
- *Explaining or justifying another recommendation*. This category was used for points which supported other recommendations without recommending anything new, but restated, defended the rationale or provided background for something that was previously or subsequently called for.
- *Other type of point*. Encapsulates all other points, including administrative and introductory ones, or statements of fact, except those below.
- *Not clear if it is a recommendation*. This category was added because we came across a number of points which fell somewhere in between recommendations and conclusions. Here the committee seemed to want something but did not express this in sufficiently strong or unambiguous terms for its intention to be clear.

Table 6 shows a breakdown of emboldened points by committee. This collapses the three types of conclusion (expression of approval, expression of disapproval and other type of point) into one category for ease of comparison. A more detailed breakdown is provided in Table 7.

Table 6: Conclusions, recommendations and 'not clear if a recommendation', by committee

	Conclu-sion	Recommen-dation	Explaining another rec.	Not clear if a rec.	Total concs. & recs.	Total no. of reports	Average concs. & recs. per report	Average recs. per report
BIS	452 (44%)	485 (47%)	24 (2%)	73 (7%)	1034	48	22	10
Defence	446 (42%)	527 (50%)	13 (1%)	73 (7%)	1059	28	38	19
Foreign Affairs	142 (18%)	617 (79%)	1 (0%)	23 (3%)	783	22	36	28
Health	204 (28%)	512 (69%)	16 (2%)	8 (1%)	740	26	28	20
Home Affairs	212 (27%)	528 (68%)	26 (3%)	11 (1%)	777	23	34	23
PASC	98 (26%)	224 (60%)	14 (4%)	36 (10%)	372	26	14	9
Treasury	251 (27%)	578 (63%)	32 (4%)	56 (6%)	917	43	21	13
Total	1805 (32%)	3471 (61%)	126 (2%)	280 (5%)	5682	216	26	16

The first thing visible from Table 6 is the considerable difference across the committees in terms of overall number of points made. The total number ranged from 372 for PASC to 1059 for the Defence Committee and 1034 for the BIS Committee. This is accounted for to some extent by differing numbers of reports: the BIS Committee and Treasury Committee (accounting for the

second and third largest number of emboldened points, respectively) produced the greatest number of reports, and therefore had the largest number of reports in our sample. But this does not tell the whole story, as PASC and the Defence Committee in fact produced roughly the same number of reports. As shown in the right-hand columns of the table, the average number of conclusions and recommendations per report for PASC was 14, compared to 38 for the Defence Committee. The Defence Committee's report on the *Strategic Defence Review* (1998) also had the highest number of recommendations and conclusions combined: 139. The differing figures therefore primarily reflect different committee styles, with some committees tending to produce reports with larger numbers of conclusions and recommendations.

The number of recommendations in reports also varies considerably. Some reports in our sample contained one recommendation (and no other points). Examples include the PASC report *Taming the Prerogative: Strengthening Ministerial Accountability* (2004) and the Treasury Committee report *Banking Crisis: International Dimensions* (2009). The highest number of recommendations in any report in our sample came from the Foreign Affairs Committee's *Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism* (2004). This had 98 recommendations (and 29 conclusions). The Home Affairs Committee produced four of the ten top reports in terms of number of recommendations, including *Rehabilitation of Prisoners* (2005), with 89, and *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-Based Violence* (2008), with 81. PASC, again, has the lowest number of recommendations per report, while the Foreign Affairs Committee has the highest number (the Defence Committee clearly having a greater tendency to produce conclusions). In general larger inquiries may obviously generate larger numbers of recommendations. But committee reports may lose a certain amount of focus, and therefore impact, when this number gets too large.

Table 6 also shows that of the 5682 points, only 3471 were unequivocally recommendations. In this sense too, committees appear to have very different styles. Some use this section of their reports predominantly to make recommendations, while others make far more use of conclusions. At the extremes, 79% of Foreign Affairs Committee points were recommendations proper, contrasted with 47% of points from the BIS Committee.

The proportion of points coded as 'not clear if it is a recommendation' also varies somewhat between committees, although the maximum proportion of such points is 10%. Nonetheless all committees made some points that fell into this category. Inclusion in this category is to some extent subjective, but coders were asked to use it where they were genuinely unsure whether the committee intended a point to be a recommendation. These points are not merely descriptive, in that they appear to express a desire for change, but they do not endorse a particular outcome, and the language tends to be more vague. Examples include:

- 'We are not convinced that the Treasury's attempt to divide its own shareholder and customer interests can be made to work' *Royal Mint* (Treasury Committee, 2001).
- 'We conclude that an outright ban on all military activity abroad by private military companies would be counterproductive' *Private Military Companies* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002).
- 'We find the concept of using subsequent scientific advances to solve older cases sensible. There may also be a case for treating as new evidence the testimony of witnesses or physical evidence which existed but was not available at the time of the first trial' *The Double Jeopardy Rule* (Home Affairs Committee, 2000).
- 'We have received the impression that GAD is a rather under-utilised resource of which the Government could make more use in future' *Government Actuary's Department* (Treasury Committee, 2001).

There are several reasons why a committee can end up being unclear whether it is making a recommendation. For example, there might be a weak evidence base, and time pressures, but a desire to recommend due to relevance of an issue to the inquiry's terms of reference. Alternatively ambiguous wording can sometimes be the result of intentional 'fudging' or toning down of a point so that the committee can agree it. If the chair wants to avoid forcing a division or minority report, recommendations have to be the result of consensus across party lines and compromise between members. But unclear recommendations may be less successful at focusing government attention and gaining an adequate response.

Table 7: Conclusions, recommendations and not clear, with detail on types of conclusion

Type of point	No.	%
Expression of approval	361	6
Expression of disapproval	480	8
Other type of point	964	17
Recommendation	3471	61
Explaining or justifying another recommendation	126	2
Not clear if it is a recommendation	280	5
Total	5682	100

Table 7 shows a more detailed breakdown of points including the different types of conclusions, across all committees. This demonstrates that committees are not wholly negative in their conclusions. The proportion of conclusions expressing disapproval is only slightly higher than the proportion expressing approval. The proportion of conclusions that neither condone nor condemn is much higher than either of these: representing 53% of the 1805 conclusions.

Who are recommendations aimed at?

Although the purpose of recommendations is largely to influence government, not all recommendations are aimed at central government. Some are aimed at the arm's length bodies that the committee shadows, or at other associated public bodies and quangos. As the committee technically reports to parliament (not government), it might also choose to make recommendations to the House, to other committees, or to other MPs. Since a committee report is a public document, recommendations are sometimes also aimed at practitioners, experts, other stakeholders and even members of the public.

For the 3471 points coded as recommendations, we identified the following categories of body that they could be aimed at:

- *Central government*. We defined this as any branch or agent of central government, including the government department associated with the committee, another department, the Cabinet Office, non-ministerial departments and executive agencies, and 'the government' in general. This category was also used for recommendations that central government should direct other bodies to act.
- *Central government and others*. This category was for recommendations which were aimed at central government as well as any other category defined below.
- *Quangos and other public bodies*. We used this for recommendations aimed at any public body or quango, regardless of whether the committee had oversight responsibility for the body in question. Examples included non-departmental public bodies such as the Police and NHS, public bodies such as the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority (FSA), health authorities, hospitals, ombudsmen, advisory groups and research councils.

- *Local or subnational government*. This was for recommendations directly aimed at local authorities or devolved government.
- *Supranational governmental body*. We defined this as governmental bodies at global, international or European level, including the United Nations, NATO, the European Commission and the European Parliament.
- *Parliament*. Recommendations aimed at the UK Parliament or parts thereof, including other committees.
- *Other*. For anything not included in the above, including for example industry, the voluntary sector, overseas governments, members of the public.
- *Several of the above*. For any combination of the above, except where one body that the recommendation was aimed at was central government.
- *Not clear*. We also created a category for recommendations which expressed a desire for action but did not give any clear indication of who might carry it out.

Table 8: Number of recommendations aimed at different types of groups, by committee

	Central govt	C. govt & others	Public bodies	Local etc govt	Supra-national	Parlia-ment	Other	Several	Not clear	Total
BIS	324 (67%)	42 (9%)	62 (13%)	8 (2%)	0 (0%)	10 (2%)	27 (6%)	7 (1%)	5 (1%)	485
Defence	402 (76%)	27 (5%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	76 (14%)	5 (1%)	10 (2%)	1 (0%)	5 (1%)	527
FAC	536 (87%)	42 (7%)	10 (2%)	0 (0%)	3 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	4 (1%)	21 (3%)	617
Health	376 (73%)	20 (4%)	95 (19%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)	6 (1%)	0 (0%)	12 (2%)	512
Home	392 (74%)	76 (14%)	35 (7%)	2 (0%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	8 (2%)	0 (0%)	9 (2%)	528
PASC	144 (64%)	56 (25%)	9 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (5%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	224
Treasury	393 (68%)	35 (6%)	59 (10%)	0 (0%)	6 (1%)	6 (1%)	66 (11%)	3 (1%)	10 (2%)	578
Total	2567 (74%)	298 (9%)	271 (8%)	11 (0%)	88 (3%)	37 (1%)	119 (3%)	15 (0%)	65 (2%)	3471

Table 8 shows a breakdown of all 3471 recommendations in our sample, broken down by committee and who the recommendation was aimed at. This shows that overall committees aim over 80% of their recommendations at central government, or central government combined with other groups. After this, the second largest category is recommendations aimed at public bodies, accounting for a further 8%. Thus committees devote most of their energy to writing recommendations to the groups who are obliged to respond to their reports. The percentages across the other categories are all quite small, however in raw numbers they are not negligible: 88 recommendations were aimed at supranational government bodies, and 119 at 'other' largely non-governmental groups.

Comparing the committees, there is little difference in terms of the proportion of recommendations aimed at central government. The BIS and Treasury committees show the lowest proportion, at 75% and 74% respectively for 'central government' and 'central government and others' combined. This is explained by their business and industry focus which is displayed in a relatively high proportion of 'other' focused recommendations. The Health Committee aimed a considerable proportion of its recommendations at public bodies, including the NHS generally, Primary Care Trusts, health practitioners and subsidiary health bodies. Despite its international focus, the Foreign Affairs Committee made the highest proportion of central government recommendations: 94% for the two categories combined. This committee made relatively few supranational recommendations given its policy remit. The Defence Committee, in contrast, makes many more such recommendations, due to the close working relationship between the UK armed forces and international bodies such as NATO.

The nature of response that can be expected to these different sorts of recommendations is clearly rather different. Committees have a very strong expectation that recommendations for central government will receive a response. Similarly, committees have a reasonable expectation that either the department, or the body directly, will respond to recommendations aimed at arm's length bodies like the FSA or Bank of England. In contrast, recommendations aimed at industry or other groups engender no obligation to respond, but may have some chance of success, particularly if the groups concerned have given evidence in the inquiry, or have a close relationship with the committee.

Sometimes, however, such recommendations might serve a different purpose. For example alerting the government to an emerging problem and flagging up the fact that it might require future intervention if it is not otherwise put into effect. For example:

- 'We note that some major banks have not yet signed up to allow their current account customers to withdraw cash free over post office counters, a state of affairs which does not help promote access by the financially excluded to their accounts… We hope these problems can be overcome and that HSBC, RBS, and HBOS will soon allow their current account customers to withdraw cash over the post office counter. This would convince us of their commitment to tackling financial exclusion' *Cash Machine Charges* (Treasury Committee, 2005).

However some recommendations aimed at 'other' groups appear to have little chance of being implemented, or indeed even read, by the audience that they are aimed at, and have no obvious connection to government responsibilities. These could be considered to be a waste of committee time. Examples of recommendations which might be considered to fall into this – undoubtedly quite small – category include:

- '…We recommend that universities take a much more active role in discouraging irresponsible drinking amongst students. They should ensure that students are not subjected to marketing activity that promotes dangerous binge drinking. The first step must be for universities to acknowledge that they do indeed have a most important moral "duty of care" to their students, and for them to take this duty far more seriously than they do at present' *Alcohol* (Health Committee, 2010).
- '… Prospective tenants should make themselves aware of the information available to them from the pubco before committing to a lease. If there is information prospective tenants believe should be available but is not, they should ask the pubco for such information. If the information is not forthcoming, then prospective tenants should look to other companies' *Pub Companies* (BIS Committee, 2004).
- 'We welcome the creation of the Ministerial Committee of National Security as a mechanism for the Iraqi Government to begin taking control of the Iraqi Security Forces and to coordinate military and security policy with political and economic policies. These mechanisms now need to be developed further by the Transitional Iraqi Government as well as at working-level' *Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post-Conflict* (Defence Committee, 2005).

We had already excluded 280 points which were vague in terms of whether they were a 'true' recommendation. But at this stage we identified a further 65 points which were obviously recommendations, but where the addressee was unclear. Examples include:

- 'The Committee believes that the loose use of terms like "Islamic terrorism" should be discouraged and care taken to distinguish between the claims made by the terrorist groups and the faith of the vast majority of Muslims' *Terrorism and Community Relations* (Home Affairs Committee, 2005).

- 'We recommend that a very close watch is kept on developments in the Kosovo Protection Corps to ensure that its avowed civilian and multi-ethnic purpose is not subverted' *Kosovo* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2000).

In many cases such recommendations may be implicitly targeted at central government, though in some cases this is not obvious. Again, lack of clarity from committees may make it easier for government to dodge their recommendations.

What do recommendations call for?

Next we collected more detailed data on the 2865 recommendations aimed at central government (or 'central government and others'). We coded all of these recommendations using the following categories (some examples of their use are given below):

- *Legislation*. This category was used for recommendations explicitly calling for legislative action, including amendment or repeal of existing legislation, putting things on a 'statutory footing', and changes to secondary legislation. Where legislation might have been required to implement a recommendation, but this was not explicitly stated, we did not use this category.
- *Guidance*. This includes recommendations for guidance, information or direction to be provided to any relevant bodies, including the NHS, the Police, schools or local authorities. Again, although the word 'guidance' was not necessarily required to be used in the recommendation, the requirement for guidance or direction needed to be quite explicit.
- *Research or review*. Recommendations which call on the government to investigate, conduct research, evaluations or impact assessments, or for example set up a task force to review a policy area. Recommendations to government to 'consider' doing something were also often placed in this category.
- *Campaigns or public information*. This option applied to recommendations where the committee suggested raising public awareness on a particular issue, such as a new initiative or public health crisis.
- *Disclosure*. Recommendations which ask government to make information more readily accessible, clearer, or more complete, or call for new disclosure of information to the committee.
- *Funding*. As with legislation, this category was used for recommendations explicitly calling for funding, including the continuation of funding for existing programmes or reallocation of funding. Recommendations which might have required funding to implement, but did not explicitly call for this, were not placed in this category.
- *Attitude change*. We created this category for recommendations couched in general terms and asking government to adopt a change in outlook or attitude.
- *Several of the above*. Any combination of the above.
- *None of the above*. This category was used for any other recommendation where the action required was clearly set out, but did not fall into any of the other specified categories. Initially we intended to disaggregate this data but we had insufficient capacity to do so. However the kind of recommendations placed in this category were anyway very varied, including information sharing, pressure, or the strengthening of relationships within and between departments; changes in policy emphasis; reorganisation or creation of government institutions; giving new powers to associated bodies; diplomatic action; and other recommendations which implicitly (but not unequivocally) required legislation or funding. There appeared to be no single obvious missing category.

- *Not clear*. Finally it was once again necessary to create a category for recommendations where it was impossible to tell what action would be required.

Table 9: Action called for, by committee

	Legisl.	Guid.	Research	Camp.	Discl.	Fund.	Attitude	Several	None	Not clear	Total
BIS	17 (5%)	13 (4%)	76 (21%)	11 (3%)	60 (16%)	15 (4%)	22 (6%)	33 (9%)	103 (28%)	16 (4%)	366
Defence	2 (0%)	1 (0%)	111 (26%)	5 (1%)	59 (14%)	10 (2%)	16 (4%)	57 (13%)	155 (36%)	13 (3%)	429
Foreign	5 (1%)	4 (1%)	41 (7%)	3 (1%)	98 (17%)	13 (2%)	8 (1%)	131 (23%)	207 (36%)	68 (12%)	578
Health	20 (5%)	62 (16%)	150 (38%)	16 (4%)	19 (5%)	21 (5%)	9 (2%)	38 (10%)	52 (13%)	9 (2%)	396
Home	22 (5%)	12 (3%)	113 (24%)	14 (3%)	12 (3%)	20 (4%)	2 (0%)	48 (10%)	221 (47%)	4 (1%)	468
PASC	29 (15%)	21 (11%)	20 (10%)	4 (2%)	16 (8%)	4 (2%)	4 (2%)	13 (7%)	83 (42%)	6 (3%)	200
Treasury	6 (1%)	11 (3%)	137 (32%)	6 (1%)	131 (31%)	7 (2%)	29 (7%)	22 (5%)	73 (17%)	6 (1%)	428
Total	101 (4%)	124 (4%)	648 (23%)	59 (2%)	395 (14%)	90 (3%)	90 (3%)	342 (12%)	894 (31%)	122 (4%)	2865

As Table 9 shows, committee recommendations are very spread between these categories. Unfortunately the largest category overall is 'none of the above', though if this was disaggregated into different forms of action each of these might prove smaller than the detailed categories already created.[6] After this, the largest category is recommendations calling for research or review. The size of this category may be somewhat inflated, however, as committees can couch things in terms which we placed in this category for various reasons. Sometimes, for example, a committee may call for policy to be reviewed in order to make this appear less critical of government, when in fact their real objective is a more substantive outcome. Similarly, recommendations may sometimes be phrased in this somewhat 'softer' style in order to paper over disagreements between committee members. Examples of recommendations for research and review include:

- 'Work experience is one way to improve interest in manufacturing among young people. The Government should look at ways to ensure access to high quality manufacturing work experience for school children across the education system even before the age of 14' *Better Skills for Manufacturing* (BIS, 2007).
- 'We recommend that, in considering options for regulation, the Government examine carefully the United States government's regime for regulating and monitoring the activities of private military companies' *Private Military Companies* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002).

A large number of recommendations call for disclosure, though this figure is somewhat inflated by the high proportion of disclosure recommendations made by the Treasury Committee. This reflects the fact that the Treasury is such a central policy department, the substance of whose policy is difficult to influence. Many of the Treasury Committee's reports focus a lot of attention on the need for better, fuller or clearer figures, for example in the Budget and Pre-Budget Report. The committee also makes a number of similar disclosure recommendations aimed at the Bank of England. Another committee-specific trend is a tendency for the Health Committee to call for guidance. This is unsurprising given the large number of bodies within the Department of Health's remit. For example, calls for guidance to health professionals and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are included in this category, as are recommendations for revisions to codes of practice.

Overall, the categories for guidance, funding, and campaigns or public information are populated by relatively few recommendations. In the context of our study, it is particularly interesting that the same can be said for recommendations calling for legislation. The Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) study on the Education Committee that preceded ours looked only at legislative implementation. Our results suggest, therefore, that their analysis may have portrayed a very limited picture of committee influence. There are once again notable differences between

committees on this point, with PASC making considerably more recommendations for legislation than the other committees. For example:

- 'One of the major lessons to be drawn from the events of the last two years is that the rules for entry to the House of Lords are far too ad hoc. They must be clear; they must be widely agreed; and they must be of unquestionable legitimacy. In short, they must be statutory. We call upon the Government to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows to put the House of Lords Appointments Commission onto a statutory footing' *Propriety and Peerages* (PASC, 2007).

The proportion of recommendations calling for 'several of the above' actions is relatively high. Sometimes this form is used because the committee wants action from government (e.g. research and review), plus an update on the progress the government has made (i.e. disclosure). This might work well, but recommendations for multiple action in general seem less likely to be effective.[7] This has implications for the clarity and ultimate success of a recommendation as it may be easier for the government to dodge part of such a recommendation in its reply to the committee, and also potentially more difficult for the committee to follow up. Some examples are given below:

- 'The Committee supports the Government in its determination to review the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Treaty is currently 'leaking', and we recommend that the Government works in the closest conjunction with the US Administration to devise further specific and effective measures to enforce this crucial arms control agreement. The Committee expects to receive from the Government details of such measures' *British-US Relations* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001).
- 'The Department must implement the recommendations of the 2009 Performers List review without delay. We also recommend that the Department of Health review the merits of a national database for doctors working in general practice' *The Use of Overseas Doctors in Providing Out of Hours Services* (Health Committee, 2010).

We also coded 122 recommendations as being unclear in terms of what they were calling for. As a proportion, this was a relatively small number (4%) of the total. But once again recommendations which are unclear in this sense may limit the effectiveness of a committee in terms of eliciting a meaningful government response. More precise wording could be advantageous. Some examples of such recommendations include:

- 'We believe that a firearm's potential to kill ought to be explicitly reflected in any system which seeks to regulate the possession and use of firearms' *Control over Firearms* (Home Affairs Committee, 2000).
- 'The current system of delegating pay and grading arrangements to individual departments may have its merits, but it can also be a barrier to staff development. Care should be taken that such arrangements do not militate against the free movement of talented staff across the Civil Service to develop their skills' *Skills for Government* (PASC, 2007).

The Foreign Affairs Committee in particular had a high proportion of recommendations (12%) which were unclear in this way. This committee often calls on the government to take steps, consider what measures to take, or act in accordance with its responsibilities in a certain area, without specifying detail of what this action would entail. For example:

- 'We conclude that developments in Montenegro have been extremely positive for the large majority of the Montenegrin people and for the United Kingdom and its allies, and that the British Government should continue to do all that it can to support the democratic process in Montenegro' *Kosovo* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2000).

The 'attrition rate' of unclear recommendations

There are three levels at which we found it necessary to create a code for 'unclear' recommendations: first, whether a point truly was a recommendation; second, who it was aimed at; and third, what kind of action it was calling for. At the outset this was not entirely predicted, but when the three kinds of 'unclear' recommendations are taken together, they account for quite a sizeable number of points made by the seven committees overall. This is summarised in Table 10.

Table 10: Total unclear recommendations, by committee

	Recs	Not clear if a rec	Total potential recs	Not clear who aimed at	Not clear what calling for	Total 'lost' as unclear	% of total 'lost'
BIS	485	73	558	5	16	94	17%
Defence	527	73	600	5	13	91	15%
Foreign Affairs	617	23	640	21	68	112	18%
Health	512	8	520	12	9	29	6%
Home Affairs	528	11	539	9	4	24	4%
PASC	224	36	260	3	6	45	17%
Treasury	578	56	634	10	6	72	11%
Total	3471	280	3751	65	122	467	12%

Adding all of the categories of 'unclear' recommendations together demonstrates that committees make quite a lot of recommendations that might be intended to be for central government action but cannot be clearly identified as such. Even if the government interprets them – more generously than we have – as recommendations for action, they are certainly easier to dodge. There is considerable variation amongst the committees, with the Home Affairs Committee and the Health Committee performing much better on this measure than the other committees. This might in part be due to policy area. Health policy tends to be more technical and precise and it is clear what the government can and cannot do, compared for example to many foreign policy problems, which are not in the UK government's power to resolve. Arguably our judgement about some recommendations may have been too harsh. Nonetheless it does appear that select committees limit their effectiveness at least to some extent by unclear recommendation wording.

How 'measurable' are committee recommendations?

A further way in which recommendations may be unclear is in terms of the ease with which it could be determined whether they have been carried out. We separated out those recommendations which were 'measurable' from others where a judgement about their implementation would be subjective, or simply impossible. If select committees want their recommendations to be acted upon, and particularly if they want to be able to follow up the success of these recommendations, it would seem advisable to phrase recommendations in clear and measurable terms. That is, in terms which would allow objective verification of whether the action called for had been carried out. However, we found that this was not always the case.

We coded measurability of all central government-focused recommendations according to a three point scale of how easy they would be to trace. In order not to create bias between committees making many recommendations for behind-the-scenes action (e.g. Defence) and those making more accessible recommendations, measurability was defined in terms of whether progress could be assessed notionally by a person in possession of unlimited time and resources, including access to classified sources. The aim was therefore to see how many recommendations were theoretically possible to trace an outcome of, rather than the extent to which this was practically possible. The categories were:

- *Easy to measure*. Such recommendations may, for example, contain a clear addressee, a clear timeline and details not just of outcomes but means by which they could be achieved.

- *Medium measurability*. For recommendations neither easy nor virtually impossible to measure.
- *Virtually or entirely impossible to measure*. Here it would not be possible to determine whether the recommendation had been implemented without making a subjective judgement or guess. Such recommendations were often vague, or suggested changes to dynamics, attitudes, relationships, prioritisation of goals, etc.

Table 11 shows data for the measurability of all recommendations not previously excluded as 'unclear', broken down by type of action called for. In total, roughly a third of recommendations were considered easy to measure, roughly half to be of medium measurability, and the remaining 16% to be virtually or entirely immeasurable. Although this category again makes up a relatively small proportion of recommendations, the number of such recommendations (at 381 is large. And of course, this is only a sample of the recommendations made by these committees over the period. The two examples below were both classed as 'immeasurable' due to the subjective judgement involved in terms like 'high quality' and 'fully resourced to operate effectively'.

- 'The Government should recognise that, in pursuit of its laudable objective to eliminate world poverty, all foreign investment by UK firms should be of high quality. British firms investing in countries which have signed up to international standards should at least respect those standards, even if the host country fails adequately to enforce them' *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (BIS Committee, 1999).
- 'We welcome the launch in April 2008 of the 'Honour Network' helpline for survivors of "honour"-based violence and forced marriage, and urge the Government to ensure that it is fully resourced to be able to operate effectively' *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence* (Home Affairs Committee, 2008).

There are clear relationships between different types of action and different levels of measurability. Perhaps unsurprisingly, recommendations for legislation and disclosure are particularly easy to trace. On the other hand, recommendations for attitude change were far more likely to be judged immeasurable.

Table 11: Measurability of recommendations, by action called for by central government

	Easy to measure	Medium measurability	Immeasurable	Total
Legislation	74 (73%)	24 (24%)	3 (3%)	101
Guidance	73 (59%)	50 (40%)	1 (1%)	124
Research or review	172 (27%)	404 (62%)	72 (11%)	648
Campaigns/ public information	19 (32%)	36 (61%)	4 (7%)	59
Disclosure	303 (77%)	87 (22%)	5 (1%)	395
Funding	31 (34%)	43 (48%)	16 (18%)	90
Attitude change	7 (8%)	31 (34%)	52 (58%)	90
None of the above	269 (30%)	429 (48%)	196 (22%)	894
Several of the above	67 (20%)	243 (71%)	32 (9%)	342
Total	1015 (37%)	1347 (49%)	381 (14%)	2743

How substantive are committee recommendations?

In assessing the extent to which select committees impact on the policy process, it is obviously important to ask how ambitious their recommendations are. It could be misleading to conclude that select committees are highly influential due to many of their recommendations being taken up, if in fact the substance of those recommendations was relatively trivial. We therefore collected data on the substantiveness of recommendations from our seven committees. We defined

substantiveness according to two dimensions: first, the degree of policy change that the recommendation called for (which we called 'alteration'), and second, the type of policy that this change was applied to (which we called 'policy significance'). Taking these two dimensions together, we can create a combined measure of substantiveness. For example, a committee might formulate a recommendation which represents minor tweaking to a significant, high profile, flagship policy, or it might suggest a change to a niche policy area which represents a complete reversal to current government thinking. The most substantive recommendations will be those calling for a major change to a high-profile government policy.

The first dimension is 'alteration': the level of change that a recommendation demands to government policy. We defined this as the extent to which acceptance of a recommendation would represent a reversal in government policy. Here it was important to consider government policy at the time that the recommendation was made (rather than at the time of the research, given that policy could have changed). We used the committee report alongside the expert knowledge of the researcher to develop a sense of what government policy was at the time of the inquiry, checking with other committee staff as necessary. We defined alteration on a three point scale (with an additional category for where policy was unclear):

0 *No change or only small change to government policy*. This was used for recommendations which supported or endorsed existing government policy or recommended at most tweaking or small modifications. Recommendations for disclosure were often placed in this category, particularly when these asked the government to set out its policy on something in its response. This code was also often allocated to recommendations calling on the government to merely 'consider' something, as well as those calling for a continuation of the status quo.

1 *Medium change to government policy*. This was used for recommendations which went somewhat further, but fell short of a reversal or near-reversal to government policy. For example, by calling for new action significantly different in terms of policy direction, priority or resources, or for exploration in areas where policy did not currently exist. Disclosure recommendations were occasionally placed in this category if they called for a change to the department's information policy or for the release of information usually kept out of the public domain.

2 *Large change or complete reversal of government policy*. This was applied to recommendations which significantly deviated from current policy or explicitly called for a reversal of current policy, such as the shutting down of programmes, dropping of targets, ending of funding, or adopting new action in clear conflict with existing policy direction.

n/a *Current policy not clear*. We added this code for cases where the government's position at the time could not be determined, or there was no policy position as such.

Table 12 shows how recommendations were spread between these categories, by committee. It demonstrates that recommendations for a medium level of change were the most common, and that recommendations which called for wholesale policy change were relatively rare. But this varied significantly between committees. The proportion of small change recommendations (i.e. recommendations broadly supportive of government) ranged from the Defence Committee's 14% to 55% for the Foreign Affairs Committee and 61% for the BIS Committee.

Examples of recommendations coded as small or no change are provided below. The first example calls for the disclosure of information in the government response. The second reflects government policy at the time of the committee report.

- 'We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government sets out details of when it intends to provide its view on the end of the current economic cycle' *The 2007 Pre-Budget Report* (Treasury Committee, 2007).

- 'We recommend that a pre-appointment hearing should take place only where the final decision on appointment remains in the hands of a politician' *Parliament and Public Appointments: Pre-appointment Hearings by Select Committees* (PASC, 2008).

Table 12: Level of policy change demanded by recommendations, by committee

	No/small change	Medium change	Large change	Not clear	Total
BIS	214 (61%)	128 (37%)	4 (1%)	4 (1%)	350
Defence	59 (14%)	336 (81%)	10 (2%)	11 (3%)	416
Foreign Affairs	281 (55%)	187 (37%)	24 (5%)	18 (4%)	510
Health	113 (30%)	249 (64%)	25 (7%)	0 (0%)	387
Home Affairs	122 (26%)	240 (52%)	73 (16%)	29 (6%)	464
PASC	80 (41%)	92 (47%)	13 (7%)	9 (5%)	194
Treasury	140 (33%)	254 (60%)	4 (1%)	24 (6%)	422
Total	1009 (37%)	1486 (54%)	153 (6%)	95 (4%)	2743

Likewise there was significant variation between committees in terms of the number of recommendations calling for major change. At the extremes there were just four recommendations (1%) in our sample from the BIS Committee calling for large change, compared to 73 (16%) from the Home Affairs Committee. The Home Affairs Committee is the clear outlier, as most committees hover around the 5% mark. Recommendations for large change to government policy from this committee included a call for a ban on violent DVDs and video games in young offenders' units (*Knife Crime*, 2009), a recommendation calling for mandatory drug testing for prisoners (*Rehabilitation of Prisoners,* 2005), and a call for reform to the 'law of severance' to require 'striking similarity' in child abuse cases (*The Conduct of Investigations into Past Cases of Abuse in Children's Homes*, 2002).

Our second dimension in terms of substantiveness was 'policy significance', meaning the relative importance of the policy to which the recommendation referred. We assessed this by coding the extent to which the policy area corresponded to the wording of Queen's speeches from 1997-2009 and Labour Party manifestos from 1997 to 2010. We created the following three categories:

1. *Minor policy area*. We used this for recommendations where we could find no explicit reference in speeches or manifestos. Either they were on a policy area not mentioned, or they only fell within a broad/vague policy area that was mentioned.
2. *Medium significance policy area*. This was applied to recommendations which had a match with a policy area in a manifesto or Queen's speech, but not to the same level of detail. It was not enough that a recommendation fell within a broad and general policy area (like 'primary education' or 'Lords reform'), there had to be a clear link to a policy commitment. Nonetheless it did not need to be on the exact same aspect of the policy as for the code 'major'.
3. *Major policy area*. This was for recommendations on policies explicitly mentioned in at least one manifesto or Queen's speech over the period, where there was a close match to the specific policy covered by the recommendation.

Table 13 shows the breakdown of recommendations by the extent to which they corresponded to flagship government policies. We see that relatively few recommendations relate directly to policies which were highlighted in manifestos and Queen's speeches. The great majority of recommendations – 80% – relate to 'minor policy', and only 3% relate to 'major policy'.

Recommendations which fall into the 'major' category included this example from the BIS Committee:

- 'The Trades Union Congress wants a statutory right for employees – to be able to train for a level 2 qualification in work time – a proposal that the Leitch report has recommended should be implemented if sufficient voluntary progress is not made by 2010. We agree' *Better Skills for Manufacturing* (2007).

A reference to a 'new national programme, working with employers, to ensure that employees who did not reach GCSE standard (level 2) at school will get time off for free training up to level 2' had been in the 2005 Labour Manifesto, hence this qualified as a 'major' policy. However, the committee's recommendation was clearly just indicating support for existing policy. This demonstrates why policy 'significance' on its own is a poor indicator of the importance of a recommendation: if that recommendation simply endorses the existing policy it may be of relatively little impact. The table indicates that the BIS Committee made a higher proportion of major policy recommendations and a relatively high proportion of medium policy recommendations compared to other committees (many of its major policy recommendations were on the subject of reform to postal services, a flagship government policy). But this committee also had the highest proportion of low alteration recommendations, suggesting that while the committee made many 'tweaking' recommendations, this may have often been because of the centrality of the policies concerned.

Table 13: Policy significance of central government recommendations, by committee

	Minor policy	Medium policy	Major policy	Total
BIS	263 (75%)	63 (18%)	24 (7%)	350
Defence	340 (82%)	65 (16%)	11 (3%)	416
Foreign Affairs	428 (84%)	76 (15%)	6 (1%)	510
Health	350 (90%)	27 (7%)	10 (3%)	387
Home Affairs	322 (70%)	120 (26%)	22 (5%)	464
PASC	177 (91%)	9 (5%)	8 (4%)	194
Treasury	314 (74%)	96 (23%)	12 (3%)	422
Total	2194 (80%)	456 (17%)	93 (3%)	2743

This provides support for our approach of combining the two dimensions of substantiveness in order to gain an overall view of the policy importance of committee recommendations.

Table 14: Substantiveness (i.e. last two dimensions combined), by committee

	0	1	2	3	4	6	Total	% 0 to 1	% 2 to 6
BIS	214 (62%)	85 (25%)	33 (10%)	12 (3%)	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	346	86%	14%
Defence	59 (15%)	276 (68%)	57 (14%)	8 (2%)	5 (1%)	0 (0%)	405	83%	17%
Foreign Affairs	281 (57%)	168 (34%)	42 (9%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	492	91%	9%
Health	113 (29%)	227 (59%)	39 (10%)	5 (1%)	1 (0%)	2 (1%)	387	88%	12%
Home Affairs	122 (28%)	162 (37%)	130 (30%)	8 (2%)	11 (3%)	2 (0%)	435	65%	35%
PASC	80 (43%)	83 (45%)	15 (8%)	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)	185	88%	12%
Treasury	140 (35%)	182 (46%)	68 (17%)	7 (2%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	398	81%	19%
Total	1009 (38%)	1183 (45%)	384 (15%)	45 (2%)	20 (1%)	7 (0%)	2648	83%	17%

We calculated substantiveness by multiplying the scores for alteration and significance. The results of this are shown in Table 14, by committee. The combined substantiveness scores (providing the column headings) deserve some explanation:

- As a score of 0 was allocated to recommendations for no or little change to policy, all of these recommendations receive a combined score of 0 (even where the policy topic was 'significant').
- A score of 1 represents a medium change (1) to a minor significance policy (1).

- A score of 2 is achieved by a medium change (1) to a medium significance policy (2) or a large change (2) to a minor significance policy (1).
- Recommendations for a medium change (1) to a major policy (3) score 3.
- A score of 4 means a recommendation for a large change (2) to a medium policy (2).
- And a score of 6 is achieved only by recommendations representing a large change (2) to a major significance policy (3).

The final two columns show the proportion of recommendations coded as being of low substantiveness (a score of 0 or 1) and the proportion coded as being of higher substantiveness. This demonstrates that most recommendations tend to be of low substantiveness. Over 80% are either for a small change or no change to policy, or a medium change only to a minor policy.

We can see less variation between committees here than when we compared the alteration and significance dimensions independently. The Home Affairs Committee, once again, is the outlier as 35% of its recommendations receive a score of 2 to 6. At the opposite end of the spectrum the Foreign Affairs Committee makes only 9% of recommendations of this kind. This obviously reflects the fact (shown in the previous two tables) that the Home Affairs Committee deals with high-profile policy which probably receives a disproportionate focus in manifestos and Queen's speeches (the latter due to the high volume of Home Office legislation), and also that the committee more often recommends large changes to policy than the other committees. Notably the BIS Committee, which made many recommendations on high-profile policy, does not score particularly highly on this compound measure (as predicted) since many of these were recommendations for small change. It is important to emphasise here that our compound measure is only one indicator of policy 'substantiveness', and does not necessarily reflect a normative judgement about the importance of committee recommendations. Many important policies will receive little attention in party manifestos and Queen's speeches, due either to their low public salience or their lack of reliance on legislation. However, it seems to offer a better overall indication of policy importance than either of the two dimensions taken alone.

Divisions held by committees

We collected further information on the number of divisions (votes) held by each committee over our time period. Divisions are clearly an indication of controversy in a particular area. But the engrained culture of consensus in select committees means that even divisive issues may escape a vote, especially if the chair is able to suggest a compromise to appease those committee members who would otherwise not be supportive. This was one of the explanations for the 'attrition rate' of unclear recommendations as discussed above, and perhaps also for the number of recommendations which were judged immeasurable. Recommendations can be intentionally 'fudged' in order that they are easy for all of the members of the committee to agree.

Table 15: Divisions on recommendations and reports, by committee

	Inquiry reports (all data)				Recommendations (sample data)		
	Total divisions	Reports w. divisions	Total reports	% of reports w. divisions	C. govt recs divided upon	Total c. govt recs	% of c. govt recs divided upon
BIS	2	1	116	1%	1	366	0.3%
Defence	9	2	65	3%	0	429	0.0%
Foreign Affairs	144	16	51	31%	13	578	2.2%
Health	19	8	59	14%	3	396	0.8%
Home Affairs	87	16	53	30%	11	468	2.4%
PASC	90	10	60	17%	9	200	4.5%
Treasury	200	27	101	27%	7	428	1.6%
Total	551	80	505	16%	44	2865	1.5%

Table 15 provides data on the number of divisions held in each committee over our 13 year study period. The first column shows the total number of divisions on inquiry reports, including those that did not go on to form part of our sample. The subsequent columns shows the total number of reports published during this period, and the number and proportion of reports on which where was at least one division. This shows that there were divisions on 16% of reports overall, with considerable variation between the committees. It is important to note that not all divisions on a report will relate to its recommendations: many will relate instead to conclusions, other paragraphs within the body of the report, the entire report (or proposals for a minority report), and even procedural issues such as whether to hold a press conference about it.

This point is emphasised by the right-hand side of the table, which includes data on divisions applied specifically to central government recommendations. Here the data is for our sample only. We see that a very small proportion of central government recommendations were divided upon.

Newspaper coverage of the select committees

The final set of basic quantitative information that we collected was on the media coverage of select committee activity during our period of study.[8]

Research into the media profile of select committees in recent years suggests that this has increased. Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) found a considerable increase in the number of stories about the Education Committee in six newspapers during the period 1997-2003, with a slight tailing off from 2003-05. This study looked for example at whether stories reported political splits or committee findings, in order to examine whether newspapers sensationalised committee proceedings. Surprisingly, the authors found that 62% of articles reported at least some committee findings or recommendations. Kubala (2011) conducted an analysis of coverage of all select committees in the *Times* and the *Guardian* from 1987 to 2007. He found that coverage significantly increased over this period, with growing interest in particular in reporting of committee evidence sessions. Monk (2009b) collected data on the reference of media articles to specific reports from Australian parliamentary committees, and took the analysis further to consider the relationship between media coverage and influential reports. He found that although committee reports received little media attention in general, 'effective' committee reports (i.e. those with at least one recommendation receiving a favourable response from government) showed a strong positive correlation with media profile.

Like these three studies in, our media analysis drew a distinction between references to committee findings (reports and recommendations) and other references to the committee. We looked at articles from two newspapers: the left-leaning *Guardian* and the right-leaning *Telegraph* from May 1997 to October 2010. We traced newspaper coverage beyond the end of Labour's time in office in order to allow (as far as possible within our own study period) for inquiries which had media impact beyond their publication date. We conducted a search for each of the seven select committees on Nexis UK, using a set of exhaustive search terms that each newspaper might use to describe it.[9] All articles were read, and we discarded cases where the article did not in fact refer to the select committee (but had come up on our search for spurious reasons – e.g. because it referred to a government committee on the same topic). We also excluded from our analysis letters, obituaries, articles written by committee members that did not otherwise mention the committee and other articles making non-relevant references to the committee.[10] For example, an initial search found 695 articles seemingly about the Health Committee, but only 620 of these proved to be relevant.

Kubala (2011: 13) notes that the 'Treasury Committee has dominated select committee coverage since the turn of the [21st] century'. Due to the particularly high volume of articles referring to this

committee (2240 on the initial search), a complete coding was beyond our capacity and we treated it slightly differently. A large proportion of Treasury Committee articles were associated with the high profile banking crisis evidence sessions. The number of hits increased from 78 to 344 from 2006 to 2007 alone (which explains why one committee member told us that he 'started to get recognised on the tube').

For each committee except Treasury, we coded every relevant article for the type of committee activity that was its main focus. We also recorded which specific report and recommendations the article referred to, if any, in order to examine (later in the report) whether this had a bearing on policy influence. In the case of the Treasury Committee, each article was skim read, and only those articles referring to a report were recorded.

Table 16: Newspaper references to the seven case study committees

	Inquiry launched	Inquiry underway	Evidence session	Report	Mentions chair	Mentions member	Other	Total
BIS	23 (5%)	70 (14%)	108 (22%)	157 (32%)	88 (18%)	11 (2%)	29 (6%)	486
Defence	17 (3%)	48 (9%)	99 (18%)	181 (33%)	108 (19%)	44 (8%)	57 (10%)	554
Foreign Affairs	12 (2%)	334 (46%)*	59 (8%)	125 (17%)	92 (13%)	52 (7%)	49 (7%)	723
Health	19 (3%)	35 (6%)	118 (19%)	228 (37%)	165 (27%)	26 (4%)	29 (5%)	620
Home Affairs	22 (2%)	80 (8%)	303 (31%)	224 (23%)	191 (19%)	106 (11%)	60 (6%)	986
PASC	12 (4%)	29 (10%)	65 (23%)	93 (33%)	48 (17%)	11 (4%)	25 (9%)	283
Treasury				284 (n/a)				
Total excl. Treasury	105 (3%)	596 (16%)*	752 (19%)	1008 (28%)	692 (18%)	250 (6%)	249 (6%)	3652
Total incl. Treasury				1292				

* Includes 251 references to the Hutton Inquiry

Table 16 shows the different forms of committee work that these newspaper articles referred to. In terms of basic numbers, it shows that select committees receive quite a lot of press coverage, with 3652 separate articles across the six committees for which we have complete data (i.e. an average of around 600 articles per committee, or one article per committee per week). The number of articles however varies considerably from committee to committee, with PASC receiving fewer than 300 hits, and the Home Affairs Committee almost a thousand. Consistent with Kubala (2011) we found that 28% of articles referred to particular committee reports (and/or recommendations).

We were quite literal in terms of coding whether an article referred to a report, and a far larger proportion of articles referred to the inquiry process overall. We coded this separately, including evidence sessions and the fact that an inquiry was being carried out or had occurred in the past. The Foreign Affairs Committee had relatively fewer reports referenced than most other committees, but by far the greatest number of references to inquiries overall, due to the large number of references to the evidence from Dr David Kelly (linked to its report *The Decision to go to War in Iraq*, 2003), which was much discussed in the context of the Hutton Inquiry. The largest number of references to reports was for the Treasury Committee, closely followed by the Health and Home Affairs committees. The committee with the smallest number of references to its reports was once again PASC, probably reflecting the fact that the topics of its inquiries often have less public salience than those of the aforementioned committees.

In terms of the most widely cited reports, the report with the largest number of media mentions was the Health Committee report *Obesity* (2004), with 40 hits. *The Decision to go to War in Iraq* (2003) had 31 direct mentions (separate from broader references to the inquiry process). The Home Affairs Committee report *The Government's Drugs Policy: Is it Working?* (2002) had 25 mentions, and

another report by the same committee *Police Disciplinary and Complaints Procedures* (1998) had 19. The Treasury Committee report *The Run on the Rock* (2008) had 17.

Non inquiry-related articles include those simply making reference to the chair, for example giving a comment on government policy announcement, and to other members in the context of their membership of the committee. There is some variation between the committees here, with some committee chairs being quoted considerably more often than others. The highest number of references was to the chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Key factors affecting committee influence

Before embarking on our quantitative analysis of the success or otherwise of select committee recommendations, and wider qualitative discussion of the forms of influence that committees can have, it is worth reflecting on some general factors liable to affect the degree of influence of all select committees. Introducing these factors here may help to illustrate further how these committees work in practice. It may also help begin to distinguish between the different cultures and practices that have developed amongst our seven case study committees. We draw here a little on comments made in our interviews with those who had worked with the seven case study committees, but returned later in the report to discuss more substantively what our interviewees suggested about committee influence.

There were six general factors mentioned repeatedly in interviews which are clearly important to understanding how any particular select committee works. These are:

- the background and approach of the chair of the committee;
- the nature of the department that that the committee is shadowing;
- the character of the Secretary of State and other ministers within the department;
- the nature of the wider policy community;
- the nature of the policy agenda;
- the reputation and culture of the committee itself.

Each of these factors is ill-defined, and they do to some extent overlap. We cannot therefore (with the exception of the well-defined factor of the political party of the committee chair) include these as variables in any formal sense within our analysis. But we discuss each of them briefly here.

Committee chair

When asked to reflect on the features associated with effective, successful or influential committees, most of our interviewees put great emphasis on the character of the committee chair. The chair is the most visible face of the committee – in the House of Commons, the media and the wider world – and has primary responsibility for working with the committee secretariat. He or she may therefore exercise significant control over the agenda and operating style of the committee, as well as helping determine its image and its external relationships. This includes with outside groups, journalists, ministers and senior civil servants. The chair obviously also has a key role in ensuring that the committee operates as an effective team in, for example, deciding topics for inquiries, questioning witnesses and drafting reports. As one interviewee said, a committee is very much 'in the image of its chair'. One former parliamentarian who served as chair of the Home Affairs Committee over this period claimed to have enjoyed more influence in this role than he did when acting as a junior minister (Mullin 2009).

Interviewees spoke largely positively about the attributes of members who had chaired the seven committees during our study period, although some were clearly regarded more highly than others. The positive attributes that committee chairs brought differed between committees, thus contributing to different committee cultures and strengths. For example, reflecting on the different characters of the two members under whom he had served on a committee, an MP described one

chair as 'more strategic' and the other as 'more active'. Some chairs are seen as more 'academic' and others as more media savvy. These kinds of attributes may have both advantages and disadvantages, but one way or another go on to shape the character of the committee. When the chair of a committee changes, its culture, and perhaps its level of influence, can therefore change as well.

One characteristic which is often considered important in academic analyses of parliamentary committees is the party affiliation of the committee chair (e.g. Calvo and Sagarzazu 2010, Costello and Thomson 2010). In the House of Commons, select committee chairs are shared out among the parties, as described above. Our sample of seven committees included two (Defence and BIS) which had opposition chairs for part of the study period. A key question is therefore whether a committee will be more or less influential when it has an opposition chair. This is one characteristic which it is easy to build into a quantitative analysis. However, there was no clear view amongst interviewees as to how an opposition chair changed the nature of committee working. Some suggested that an opposition chair would be a fiercer critic of government, or at least that their independence from government was more guaranteed (unlike, potentially, a 'tame' government backbencher). But others who had worked with opposition chairs actually suggested the reverse: that these chairs made greater efforts to work consensually, first because they realised that the majority of members on their committees were supporters of the governing party, and second because they were also keen to ensure that any criticisms of government by their committee could not be seen as party-political. On balance, the general view from interviews was that the party allegiance of the committee chair made little difference to the functioning of committees, as they operate largely in nonpartisan or cross-party mode. It was thus thought less important than other (less measurable) attributes of the committee chair. One former minister who had worked with both Labour and Conservative committee chairs concluded 'I can categorically say that the party affiliation of the committee chair made no difference whatsoever to me... My experience [was that] all the chairmen I dealt with were impartial, as indeed I think most of them recognised that the system only really works if they are not partisan'.

Of course the chair is not the only participant in committee proceedings whose personality and method of working may influence the committee's style. To a lesser extent other members of the committee may also be important here. Likewise the committee clerk, who is a far less visible figure, can be influential on the culture of the committee, including its mode of questioning and style of reports.

Nature of the department

The second factor which is clearly important to the functioning of the committee is the nature of the department that it is shadowing. Departments vary in size, some deal with higher profile policy, and each tends to have its own culture. All of these factors are important in its relations with the committee that shadows it, and this variety of departments was well represented in our sample. The Department of Health and the Home Office, for example, are both very large and deal with complex bodies of policy. As noted later in the report, a select committee in these circumstances may play an important role 'brokering' between different agencies and sections of the department. Home Office business was generally close to the top of the Labour government's policy agenda, and much of it was controversial. This department also deals with a range of large and complex agencies, including the Police and (until 2007) the Prison Service, while the Department of Health clearly deals with the NHS. Turning to other committees, the Treasury is a powerful central department, whose core policy is fixed at the highest level of government. In contrast, the Cabinet Office is one of the smallest departments in Whitehall, dealing with policy which is much further down the public agenda. The Foreign Office is an important department, but much of its policy is diplomatic and deals with issues outside direct UK government control. The Ministry of Defence is, as emphasised by many of our interviewees, a great deal more closed in its culture than most

other departments, dealing as it does with sensitive security issues. These factors were all critical to relations with the departments' respective committees, and may affect these committees' levels of influence.

Minister

While the overall culture of the department that the committee shadows has a long-term effect on its relations with government, the character of individual ministers (particularly Secretaries of State) has the capacity to alter relations more temporarily. As with committee chairs and members, personality of ministers may matter. Some Secretaries of State are more keen to engage with select committees than others, and an individual minister may also be keener to engage with one chair than another. Most Secretaries of State are MPs themselves, and some have previously served on select committees. Some will have good relations, which may date back years, with members of the committee shadowing their department, while in some cases relations will be less good. Some ministers are simply more open to outside policy ideas, while others will be more resistant to straying from the departmental agenda. All of these factors will affect relations with the committee.

We discussed with interviewees the specific informal mechanisms by which committee members and chairs communicate with ministers (and less often, with civil servants). Several who had served as ministers and chairs described cordial and constructive relations, and regular informal conversations. One former Secretary of State said of relations with committee chairs: 'you've always got to be careful that neither of you look like you're in hock to each other', but at the same time 'it would be a strange Secretary of State who didn't sometimes sit down and have a drink with the select committee chair'. The extent of these relationships however clearly differed: some committee chairs reported virtually no contact with ministers behind-the-scenes. Where discussions took place their purpose was generally for the chair and government minister to brief each other in broad terms about what the department and committee were doing. One Secretary of State compared these occasional briefings to the kind of discussions that on occasion might be held with opposition shadow ministers. In this case, therefore, there was no suggestion that informal discussions were in any way conspiratorial or improper.

Occasionally however, relationships with ministers may raise questions about committee independence. In one instance we were told of a Secretary of State who had invited the relevant committee chair to attend departmental team meetings. The chair enjoyed a good relationship with the minister concerned but clearly felt that this was inappropriate, saying that 'you mustn't become incorporated'. But the same minister occasionally suggested ideas for inquiries to the chair, some of which were taken up. Some might also consider this inappropriate interference, though the minister insisted that the chair concerned was 'no patsy', and ultimately it was of course the committee's choice whether to proceed with such inquiries. On at least one occasion the resulting inquiry exposed practices which would not perhaps otherwise have been uncovered without this ministerial 'tipoff', and the committee's report therefore successfully resulted in change. This demonstrates how a good relationship between the minister and chair has potential to increase the committee's policy influence – though at the same time it could be seen as indicating just the kind of 'incorporation' that the chair quoted above wished to avoid.

This kind of cooperation can occasionally happen out in the open, as well as behind-the-scenes. We were told of an occasion when a minister gave evidence to the Defence Committee that clearly signalled to the committee lines of questioning which could fruitfully be pursued with other witnesses. Committee members felt that perhaps these signals, which were nonetheless useful to the committee's inquiry, risked the committee being overly 'led' by the minister. One of the interesting aspects of influence which our research has uncovered is the ability for committees to at times play a brokering role: between ministers and their officials or outside agencies, and also at times between ministers in different departments.

Wider policy community

In terms of the wider policy environment in which the committee operates, the structure of interest groups is also likely to be important. In some policy areas where there is a wide range of different groups – e.g. industry groups, charities, campaign groups, think tanks – operating, the committee may be only one voice amongst many. Where groups such as these take an interest, there will be many who are keen to give evidence to a committee inquiry, and may help to provide a research base. This is the case, for example, in the more 'mainstream' policy areas of health and home affairs. In other policy areas, such as defence, there are many fewer groups operating, and the same can be true in more 'niche' areas of other government departments. Where there are fewer groups operating this can create challenges for the committee because it has a more limited evidence base and weaker stakeholder reinforcement. But it also means that the committee may be able to make a more unique contribution through its reports.

Nature of the issue

While the general culture of the department determines to an extent the kind of policy that it deals with, there will be a range of policy issues in all departments, and some will be more susceptible to influence by a committee than others. For example some policies are higher profile than others, some policy changes have greater cost implications, and some are more 'political' and of greater symbolic importance to the government in power. In addition, opportunities for committee influence sometimes arise suddenly as a result of crisis. This occurred during our study period for the Foreign Affairs Committee as a result of the war in Iraq, and for the Treasury Committee as a result of the financial crisis.

We have tried as far as possible in our analysis to take account of the particular characteristics of policies covered by committee reports and recommendations: for example by coding reports for 'point in the policy process' and recommendations for type of action called for, extent to which the recommendation would require a change to existing government policy, and centrality of the policy to the government's programme. The effect of these attributes is further discussed in the next section of the report.

Committee reputation and culture

The final factor liable to affect committee influence is perhaps the most elusive of all, in terms of the general reputation of the committee and its culture of operation. Some committees clearly have high reputations, and others less so, and the committee's reputation is – as indicated above – inextricably linked to the reputation of its chair. But there are also other factors. For example a committee which is known to have achieved policy success in the past is likely to be taken more seriously in the future. A committee with a high media profile may be considered to have a strong reputation, but too much focus on short-term media 'hits' can also lead to the committee being considered superficial. As one committee clerk noted, a committee's reputation is 'a bit self-perpetuating': if the committee has a good reputation good people will want to be on it, and consequently its reputation will become better still.

In interviews many people spoke of the importance of non-partisanship to a committee's culture and reputation. Ministers are clearly less likely to take committees seriously if they seem to be making party-political points. Although this is unusual, there are clearly occasions when committee members step over this line when questioning witnesses, and particularly ministers. For most interviewees the fact that committees produce unanimous reports was very important, and it was clear that committee chairs go to great lengths to avoid divisions (i.e. votes) on the committee, particularly along partisan lines. However it was also noted that what was described by one clerk as the committees' 'deep-rooted culture of consensus' had downsides as well. One committee member questioned whether the need for unanimity in order to achieve influence was in fact a

'myth', and others noted that the desire for consensus could result in unclear recommendations and conclusions (as discussed above).

In general, committees also face the dilemma of how openly critical to be of government, and how often. Clearly it is part of committees' role to 'speak truth to power'. But as one Permanent Secretary noted, 'if they just go on attack mode, the government goes into defensive mode'. This view was echoed frequently by other interviewees, including one committee member who suggested that 'the worst thing for a committee is to be irrelevant', but that it was possible to achieve this by being too confrontational. Various interviewees spoke of the ideal relationship with government being one of 'constructive tension' or 'critical friend'. As one committee specialist put it, the best relationship is perhaps one of 'consideration, admiration and respect, but also mistrust' between department and committee.

These various factors are all important in understanding the potential for influence among the seven case study committees during our study period. In very brief terms, the sense in which they affected the seven committees is summarised in Box 2.

Box 2: The culture of the seven case study committees

Health Select Committee
The Health Committee shadowed a major department many of whose policies were central to the objectives of the Blair/Brown governments. The Department of Health is large, and deals with a diverse range of policies, some of them technically complex. They are of major public concern, and there are many lobby groups working in the area. The committee also dealt frequently with professionals from the NHS. The committee was chaired throughout by Labour members who enjoyed good relations with ministers. However, because of the importance of this policy area, and the high cost implications for many aspects of policy change, a civil servant suggested to us that the committee's most influential reports were on quite 'off-centre' policies.

Home Affairs Select Committee
The Home Office is likewise a huge government department with many key agencies, and policy which was of central importance to Labour in government. It was suggested to us that the committee used to enjoy a very high reputation, but that in recent years this had declined. Chris Mullin as chair enjoyed a good, though constructively critical, relationship with Jack Straw as Home Secretary, though some interviewees clearly considered this relationship too close. John Denham chaired the committee between two spells as a senior minister, and was also seen as close to government. Under Keith Vaz some suggested that the committee was acting at too 'superficial' a level and was too 'prolific', providing a 'sort of running commentary on the issues of the day'. As with the Health Committee, some felt that given the importance of the department the committee could have been more influential. But it clearly has a lot of ground to cover and on many key issues the government was intransigent.

Foreign Affairs Select Committee
The main challenge for this committee is that the policies which it investigates are often largely outside the control of the UK government. Where government seeks to exert pressure it is often behind-the-scenes, so the committee makes many recommendations for diplomatic action, whose outcomes are immeasurable. As chair, Donald Anderson was clearly controversial, given the Labour whips' attempt to remove him in 2001. Yet a Foreign Office insider told us that the committee 'gets taken very seriously' in the department. The committee's highest profile incident by far in this period was the questioning of Dr David Kelly over the preparations for war in Iraq.

Defence Select Committee
The Defence Committee seems to face even greater problems than the Foreign Affairs Committee in influencing sensitive international issues. The Ministry of Defence was described by various interviewees an extremely closed, with the danger that the committee was shut out. There are very few policy experts outside the MoD itself, limiting the committee's witness base. The committee was also limited in terms of what it could publish, as much information was classified, and negative conclusions and recommendations could risk undermining the Armed Forces. The committee's main objective, and main area of success, was seen as being improving transparency in defence policy, and in particular in ensuring that parliament was adequately informed.

Treasury Select Committee
Decision-making in the Treasury is key to all government policy, and relatively difficult to influence given its centrality. The committee however also had important responsibilities monitoring outside organisations, in particular the Bank of England and FSA. In these regards (what one member described as the committee's 'day job') its recommendations were often relatively minor and procedural. But the committee achieved high prominence during the financial crisis, in particular through hearings with representatives of the financial services industry. This played to a separate strand of its work, which for some time had focused on transparency and customer service in the industry, over which it had some success.

Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee
This committee shadowed a department whose responsibilities were broad, and changed several times during the study period. Issues such as the department's loss of energy policy (to the new Department for Energy and Climate Change) created challenges for continuity in terms of the committee's agenda. However it was chaired by two well-respected individuals over the period (one Labour, and one Conservative), both of whom established reputations as authoritative and non-partisan contributors to policy debates. It had potential to influence industry, as well as government.

Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)
This committee dealt with the smallest of the seven government departments, and with policy which many would consider relatively obscure: though some of the issues that it dealt with, such as special advisers and Lords reform, were high profile. The committee began in relatively reactive mode, but over time took on a more agenda setting role. It also returned regularly to certain issues, in part due to the 11 year tenure of Tony Wright as chair. He was clearly widely respected as a non-partisan figure, who took a more academic than party-political approach. He enjoyed good relationships with government but, unusually, in part due to high turnover amongst Cabinet Office ministers, these were perhaps stronger with senior civil servants than with ministers.

The policy impact of committee recommendations: a quantitative analysis

This section contains our findings on the acceptance and implementation of recommendations. This analysis represents the most complete ever conducted with respect to the British select committees; nonetheless we are the first to accept that it represents only a partial, and in some ways flawed, picture of committee influence. We are aware that the take-up of recommendations represents only a small part of this influence, and that taken alone such measures cannot lead us to definitive conclusions. We discuss this further in the section that follows,, and then supplement this information with qualitative results from our interviews later in the report. Nonetheless success of recommendations is the only measure which can allow us to directly compare

committees with one another and avoid the rather more subjective approach of judging influence on the basis of anecdotes or case studies. In fact, Rush (1985a: 101), rather generously, describes '[t]racing the fate of recommendations' as 'no doubt the most important measure of the impact of the Committee'.

Several previous studies on select committee influence have adopted a similar approach to tracing recommendations, while acknowledging the limitations of this method. Both of the chapters by Rush (1985a, 1985b) in the initial Study of Parliament Group book on the early committees edited by Drewry (1985c) grouped government responses into categories such as accepted, rejected, or 'under consideration'. More recently, Hawes' (1993) study of the role of committees in the formation of environment policy graded government responses according to their level of acceptance and whether the government committed to immediate or future action. Hawes highlighted the necessity of looking beyond initial government response, however, due to the potential for government to implement a recommendation several years later: a phenomenon known as the 'delayed drop'. He therefore supplemented his quantitative methods with case studies. For the Study of Parliament Group, it was too early to measure whether recommendations were ultimately implemented, and different chapters in this early volume differed in their approaches to measuring impact, with no consistent definitions or methods.

Thus far only Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) have measured both initial government acceptance and eventual implementation. In their study of the Education Committee, acceptance was graded on a five point scale from 'agreeing with the committee's recommendation and promising to act upon it' to 'specifically rejecting it'. They then compared recommendations with the contents of government legislation by using House of Commons Library briefings to identify specific policy proposals, and grading for degree of similarity. Although this is the most ambitious quantitative study to date, it portrays a narrow picture of committee influence due to its focus on implementation only in terms of legislation. As discussed earlier, only 4% of recommendations in our sample (101 of 2865) called explicitly for a legislative response.

Our study likewise looked at both government acceptance and implementation. For acceptance, we traced all 1831 of the 1906 recommendations in our sample where it was clear what the government was calling for (including those which had been coded as virtually or entirely immeasurable), using government replies to committee reports. We then traced the outcome of all 1334 *measurable* recommendations to see how they had been implemented in different ways. This enabled us to go further in tracing non-legislative recommendations than other studies. It also meant that we could identify recommendations which were accepted but eventually dropped or, vice versa, rejected and subsequently implemented. We traced recommendations up to a cut-off date of 31 October 2010. This means, of course, that the likelihood of implementation of recommendations made earlier during our study period is slightly higher relative to those made later on.

Do committee recommendations have impact?

Acceptance by government of committee recommendations

Acceptance was measured only on the basis of the formal government response to a report. So, for example, if the government responded to the committee in a debate, or in a press release, we did not take account of this. We defined acceptance as the degree to which government responded favourably to a recommendation, including the extent to which the government attributed the idea to the committee. We measured government acceptance on a five point scale, with additional categories for where there was no government response or where the response was no longer available. However, we also gathered more detailed information on three of the five points, so that there were several subdivisions (e.g. within code 2 – partially or implicitly accepted – there were

options 2.1, 2.2, etc). The detailed coding scheme is provided in an Appendix. We refer to these more detailed codes in places later in the report. The main codes were:

1. *Fully accepted*. This was for responses where the government expressed agreement with the committee's recommendation, explicitly committed to taking the action requested, and made no suggestion that they would have done so in any case. It also includes 'disclosure' recommendations where the committee requested information which was provided in the response.
2. *Partially or implicitly accepted*. This code was applied to responses which expressed agreement with the general thrust of the recommendation but not to the level of detail required by the committee, or accepted the recommendation in part but ignored (but did not reject) another part. We also used this code for cases where the government claimed that what the committee wanted was already in progress, but where there was evidence that the action had been started only after the committee's inquiry began. The assumption in these cases was that the government had anticipated the content of certain recommendations from the inquiry, and acted prior to publication of the report.[11]
3. *Neither accepted nor rejected*. This was for recommendations which received a lukewarm response, either to say that something was under consideration, or that it was already being done (but with no indication that it had recently begun, and expressed in neutral terms). The code was also used for recommendations accepted in part but rejected in part.
4. *Partially or implicitly rejected*. Recommendations which were rejected but not explicitly, for example with the suggestion that the recommendation was in fact not necessary (including the claim that the government was already acting on it and that the committee was thus mistaken). Alternatively, for recommendations where part was explicitly rejected and part was simply ignored. We also used this code where the government's written response did not actually respond to the recommendation, or where it clearly dodged what the committee was asking for.
5. *Rejected outright*. This was used for responses where the government explicitly described itself as 'rejecting' or 'disagreeing'. It was restricted to cases where the government said nothing positive or lukewarm at all, and did not suggest it was doing something similar already or that its position might change in the future.
6. *No response*. This was used for recommendations in reports which received no written government response (rather than for individual recommendations which received no response, which were coded as 'partially or implicitly rejected', above).
7. *Response missing*. This code was applied to recommendations in a small number of reports where we had evidence (e.g. from the Sessional Returns) that the report had received a response from government, but where this response could not be traced.

Table 17 shows degree of acceptance for all recommendations in our sample, broken down by committee.

In overall terms, the table suggests that the government accepts committees' recommendations more often than it rejects them: 40% of recommendations were either fully or partially accepted compared to 33% which were fully or partially rejected. This can be compared with the findings from Rush's (1985a, 1985b) two studies, which coded responses on a three point scale. Rush found that the Education, Science and Arts Committee had 27% of recommendations accepted and 27% rejected, while the Social Services Committee had 35% accepted and 20% rejected. Our findings suggest that a rather higher proportion of recommendations are now accepted, though this could simply be accounted for by differences in our coding schemes. Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) found a far lower acceptance rate of 5%, however they defined acceptance more narrowly,

closer to the first 'fully accepted' point on our five point scale. Taking this into account, their results are commensurate with our findings on full acceptance of Health Committee and PASC recommendations, at 8% and 4% respectively.[12]

Table 17: Acceptance of recommendations by committee, 5 point scale

	Accepted	Partially or implicitly accepted*	Neither accepted nor rejected**	Partially or implicitly rejected***	Rejected	No response	Response missing	Total	Fully or partially accepted
BIS	37 (15%)	94 (37%)	64 (25%)	39 (16%)	7 (3%)	1 (0%)	9 (4%)	251	131 (52%)
Defence	32 (13%)	76 (31%)	56 (23%)	73 (30%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	247	108 (44%)
Foreign Affairs	47 (17%)	79 (28%)	53 (19%)	92 (33%)	9 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	280	126 (45%)
Health	20 (8%)	74 (28%)	69 (26%)	88 (33%)	14 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	265	94 (35%)
Home Affairs	36 (12%)	77 (26%)	89 (30%)	48 (16%)	23 (8%)	27 (9%)	0 (0%)	300	113 (38%)
PASC	7 (4%)	39 (20%)	48 (25%)	78 (40%)	16 (8%)	0 (0%)	6 (3%)	194	46 (24%)
Treasury	39 (13%)	71 (24%)	69 (23%)	90 (31%)	17 (6%)	8 (3%)	0 (0%)	294	110 (37%)
Total	218 (12%)	510 (28%)	448 (24%)	508 (28%)	96 (5%)	36 (2%)	15 (1%)	1831	728 (40%)

* This category includes 102 recommendations coded as 'already being done: but started after the beginning of the inquiry'
** Includes 151 recommendations coded as 'already being done: unclear when started'
*** Includes 166 recommendations coded as 'already being done: dismissal'

If (as we hope) our sample is representative of the work of these seven committees over the period 1997-2010, this suggests that around 2500 central government recommendations may have been accepted from the committees over this period. In turn, if these committees are representative of all 20 departmental committees (i.e. including PASC), then the committees probably made around 7000 recommendations in total aimed at central government that were accepted over the study period, which is quite impressive.

Straightforward cases where the government fully accepts recommendations are not, perhaps, as rare as one would expect. In 12% of cases – representing 220 recommendations from our sample – the government fully agreed the committee's recommendation. An example is given below:

- Committee: 'We recommend that applicants for shotgun licences should be required to show that they have a good reason to possess shotguns. We do not expect that this will impose a great burden on genuine and responsible occupational and recreational shotgun users: nor do we believe that it should' *Controls over Firearms* (Home Affairs Committee, 2000).
- Government: 'The Government believes that it is right in principle that a person wishing to own a lethal firearm such as a shotgun should put forward a good reason for wishing to do so, and therefore accepts this recommendation...'

The table demonstrates that government is however more likely to accept recommendations partially or implicitly, rather than explicitly. A further 28% of recommendations received what we might term a 'soft' yes. This includes cases where the government did not make an explicit commitment to certain action, or ignored the detail of the committee's recommendation, as can be observed in the following recommendation and response.

- Committee: 'The Government should consider implementing an overall communications strategy for domestic violence, including "honour"-based violence and forced marriage. This could perhaps be developed along the lines of the THINK! Road Safety campaign, which is well recognised and has wide coverage' *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence* (Home Affairs Committee, 2008).
- Government: 'We will be building a communications support package for this area of work.'

Likewise the government was more likely to give a 'soft' no than to reject a recommendation completely. As shown in the Appendix, many recommendations were 'ignored', 'dodged', or given a dismissive response indicating that the government was already taking such action (all coded as forms of implicit rejection), rather than being explicitly rejected. We also see from the table that a much smaller number of recommendations received an outright rejection than an outright acceptance. Only 5% of recommendations were firmly disagreed. It is this that results in the overall spread of government responses therefore leaning more to the acceptance than rejection side. The small numbers at either end of the scale suggest that government prefers to fudge or compromise somewhat in its response to a committee's proposals. A further 24% of recommendations were judged to be neither accepted nor rejected.

In terms of comparisons between the committees, we see that all committees show this pattern of a higher proportion of 'soft' responses rather than outright acceptances and rejections. However, the spread of acceptance and rejection nonetheless differs. This can be seen more clearly in Table 18 which collapses the 'full' and 'partial' categories together both for acceptance and rejection. Here we see that the BIS Committee has over half of its recommendations accepted while the equivalent figure for PASC is fewer than a quarter. The other committees are all clustered around 40%. PASC also has a higher proportion of its recommendations rejected than all other committees, and BIS has the fewest (again the other committees are clustered around 35-40%). This may reflect to some extent the kinds of recommendations that the committees are making, and the extent to which they challenge existing government policy: we have already seen that the BIS Committee makes more recommendations for small (or no) change than the other committees. But it may also reflect the culture of departments, and the officials and ministers responsible for agreeing the government's response. The proportion of recommendations that received no response is higher for the Home Affairs Committee than any other, followed by the Treasury Committee. But this is accounted for by only three reports in both cases.[13]

Table 18: Acceptance of recommendations by committee, 3 point scale

	Fully or partially accepted	Neither accepted nor rejected	Fully or partially rejected	No response/ response missing	Total
BIS	131 (53%)	64 (26%)	46 (18%)	10 (4%)	251
Defence	108 (44%)	56 (23%)	83 (34%)	0 (0%)	247
Foreign Affairs	126 (45%)	53 (19%)	101 (36%)	0 (0%)	280
Health	94 (36%)	69 (26%)	102 (39%)	0 (0%)	265
Home Affairs	113 (38%)	89 (30%)	71 (24%)	27 (9%)	300
PASC	46 (24%)	48 (25%)	94 (49%)	6 (3%)	194
Treasury	110 (37%)	69 (24%)	107 (36%)	8 (3%)	294
Total	728 (40%)	448 (25%)	604 (33%)	51 (3%)	1831

Implementation by government of committee recommendations

From the figures above we might conclude that committees are reasonably successful, as government accepts recommendations more than it rejects them, and 40% of committee recommendations are broadly accepted overall. We might also conclude that the BIS Committee is the most successful, and PASC the least successful amongst our seven committees. However, government response is only a test of immediate influence, and to base our judgement on this alone would be to take the government's word at face value. We therefore looked at the extent to which recommendations were actually implemented, in order to measure the true state of affairs against the government's initial promise, and also to tease out longer-term influence. In order to trace implementation, we excluded all recommendations coded as 'virtually or entirely immeasurable', as we had already established that this would be impossible in such cases.

At this stage we traced only 1334 recommendations. We excluded recommendations from this stage of the analysis on the basis of two factors. First, where the government response had said that it was already taking steps along the lines suggested by the committee (and we could find no evidence that these steps had been initiated following the launch of the inquiry). Otherwise our data would exaggerate influence by giving committees credit for things the government may have been already doing. This resulted in the exclusion of 317 recommendations. We then excluded a further 229 recommendations coded as 'virtually or entirely immeasurable', as we had already established that tracing implementation would be impossible in such cases

To determine the extent of implementation we searched legislation, policy documents, planning documents such as comprehensive spending reviews, departmental websites for items such as commissioned research, departmental annual reviews, white papers, green papers and press releases, plus online news sources. We also spoke to committee staff, departmental liaison officers, and other civil servants, where the aforementioned sources alone did not yield an obvious answer. Although we are confident that our searching was comprehensive, it would of course be very difficult to search every possible source of information. Moreover, in some cases we simply did not have access to the type of information that would be required. We have tried to build these limitations into our coding scheme. The categories that we adopted were:

1. *Clear evidence the recommendations has been implemented in full.* This was used in cases where there was clear evidence of implementation. Sometimes this evidence was provided by the government reply to the committee alone, in cases where the recommendation was for the disclosure of information and the response included this. In other cases the evidence necessary was guided by what the recommendation called for. For example amended legislation, amended guidance, commissioned research, publication of minutes, etc.
2. *Some evidence the recommendation has been implemented in full, or clear evidence the recommendation has been implemented in part.* This code was both for cases where we found evidence as outlined above for part of the recommendation, or where we found evidence that the government had implemented the recommendation but not to the degree of specificity required by the committee.
3. *Some evidence the recommendation has been implemented in part, or evidence of some limited attempts at implementation.* Where we could only find evidence of fairly limited attempts at implementation, we used this code. We also used it where the government response had clearly indicated that steps were being taken, but no further evidence could be found.
4. *No evidence of the recommendation having been implemented.* Inclusion in this category will generally imply that a recommendation has not been implemented, as no evidence could be found to confirm this. It is always harder to prove a negative (i.e. that something hasn't happened). However the category also includes recommendations where the information necessary to determine implementation was beyond our reach: for example if this would require access to classified information or knowledge of the processes and relationships involved at senior levels in the civil service. On balance, recommendations in this category are more likely to have been overlooked than acted upon.
5. *Evidence that the recommendation has not been implemented.* This was for instances where we could find evidence that something had not been implemented. Here a rejection in the government response was not treated as sufficient evidence: we required this to be verified by action. For example a recommendation for information to be included in the department's next annual review but such information not having been published.
6. *Opportunity to implement has not arisen.* This was used both for recommendations that had not yet had a chance to be implemented because they were made too recently, and where implementation was conditional on something else having happened first. For example the BIS

Committee recommended that '…should there be a 'yes' vote on a single currency referendum, the Government encourage businesses to prepare financial plans for the changeover…' *What would the Euro Cost UK Business?* (2000).

The findings of this process are shown in Table 19. The first thing to note is that more recommendations are implemented than are not implemented: 44% of measurable recommendations later go on to be implemented in full or in part, and a quarter are implemented to the level specified by the committee. In fact, we only found direct evidence of non-implementation in 19% of cases – though such evidence is often hard to find, and in an additional 15% of cases there was simply no evidence of implementation. But even when added together these two categories are smaller than those for fully or partially implemented. In another 18% of cases there was some limited evidence of implementation. As before, 'scaling up' to estimate the total number of committee recommendations implemented by government over this period suggests that around 2000 recommendations from our seven sample committees were put into effect. If our seven committees are in turn representative of the departmental committees as a whole, they probably made around 6000 recommendations aimed at government which went on to be implemented. This appears to be evidence of significant influence.

Table 19: Implementation of 'measurable' only recommendations, by committee

	Full	Partial	Limited	No evidence	Evidence not impl.	No opportunity	Total	Fully or part. impl.
BIS	63 (32%)	39 (20%)	30 (15%)	42 (21%)	13 (7%)	10 (5%)	197	102 (52%)
Defence	26 (17%)	28 (18%)	39 (25%)	44 (28%)	18 (11%)	2 (1%)	157	54 (34%)
Foreign Affairs	73 (41%)	43 (24%)	23 (13%)	26 (15%)	10 (6%)	1 (1%)	176	116 (66%)
Health	33 (16%)	45 (21%)	50 (24%)	58 (27%)	20 (9%)	5 (2%)	211	78 (37%)
Home Affairs	49 (20%)	46 (19%)	42 (17%)	33 (14%)	55 (23%)	17 (7%)	242	95 (39%)
PASC	42 (32%)	12 (9%)	19 (14%)	8 (6%)	49 (37%)	2 (2%)	132	54 (41%)
Treasury	54 (25%)	39 (18%)	38 (17%)	48 (22%)	36 (16%)	4 (2%)	219	93 (42%)
Total	340 (25%)	252 (19%)	241 (18%)	201 (15%)	259 (19%)	41 (3%)	1334	592 (44%)

There is some variation between the committees. Of 176 Foreign Affairs Committee recommendations, 66% were implemented, which is an impressive figure. The BIS Committee also achieves an implementation rate of over 50%, but only just. It may not be coincidental that these were the two committees which made the highest proportion of small (or no) change recommendations. The other committees are closer to the average implementation rate of 44%. The Defence Committee had the lowest rate, at 34%, followed by the Health Committee at 37%. But many Defence Committee recommendations not implemented fall into the category of 'no evidence of implementation'; here this committee is likely to suffer, due to so much departmental information not being in the public domain. The Defence Committee actually has a relatively small proportion (11%) of recommendations coded as 'evidence not implemented', although the proportion for Health, BIS and Foreign Affairs is even lower. In comparison the Home Affairs Committee has 23% of recommendations with clear evidence of non-implementation, and PASC has 37%. In part this may reflect the fact that the policy areas of these two committees make it easier to trace recommendations.

In comparison to the data on acceptance, it is striking that the figures for implementation in Table 19 show no tailing off of influence. It might be expected that 'warm words' from government in response to a committee report would be followed in many cases by inaction, leading the rate for implementation to be lower than that of acceptance. But this is not in fact the case. However, the two sets of figures are not directly comparable, as the data given above for acceptance included

recommendations coded as virtually or entirely immeasurable. To be sure we therefore need to consider the same sample of recommendations, and this comparison is shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Acceptance and implementation, on smaller (implementation) sample only

		Fully or partially accepted		Fully or partially implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	% of total
BIS	197	112	57%	102	52%
Defence	157	78	50%	54	34%
Foreign Affairs	176	104	59%	116	66%
Health	211	93	44%	78	37%
Home Affairs	242	106	44%	95	39%
PASC	132	42	32%	54	41%
Treasury	219	99	45%	93	42%
Total	1334	634	48%	592	44%

This confirms that the acceptance and implementation rates are very similar, with the implementation rate only marginally lower than that for acceptance. This shows a fair degree of success for the committees, although not evidence of overwhelmingly strong influence. The Foreign Affairs Committee and PASC have rather higher rates for implementation than acceptance, while some other committees the pattern is the reverse. In most cases the difference is small, but in the case of PASC is 9%. The largest difference is for the Defence Committee, which has 50% of its recommendations initially accepted but only 34% ultimately implemented. This may simply reflect the difficulties tracing defence recommendations, as indicated above. We therefore conclude that the government is fairly true to its word, and that its acceptance rate of committee recommendations is a good indicator of the extent to which those recommendations go on to be implemented.

Of course, it is not necessarily the case that the same recommendations that are initially accepted go on to be implemented. The government might respond favourably to a recommendation and then drop it, or might implement something that it initially rejected. Looking more directly at the relationship between recommendations accepted and implemented can therefore provide a fuller picture, and this is shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Implementation of recommendations, by acceptance

	Full	Partial	Limited	No evidence	Evidence not impl.	No opportunity	Total	Fully or part. impl.
Accepted	147 (70%)	28 (13%)	15 (7%)	11 (5%)	8 (4%)	0 (0%)	209	84%
Partially or implicitly accepted	126 (30%)	121 (29%)	111 (26%)	50 (12%)	14 (3%)	3 (1%)	429	58%
Neither accepted nor rejected	27 (10%)	63 (23%)	61 (23%)	59 (22%)	47 (17%)	14 (5%)	271	33%
Partially or implicitly rejected	27 (9%)	34 (12%)	47 (16%)	100 (34%)	81 (28%)	6 (2%)	295	21%
Rejected	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	6 (6%)	34 (37%)	47 (51%)	0 (0%)	93	6%
No/ missing response	10 (24%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)	4 (10%)	18 (44%)	41	32%
Total	340 (26%)	252 (19%)	241 (18%)	259 (20%)	201 (15%)	41 (3%)	1334	44%

This demonstrates that there is indeed a strong relationship between acceptance and implementation, with 70% of recommendations that are fully accepted going on to be fully implemented, and 84% being implemented in total. For just over half of recommendations rejected outright there was clear evidence that they had not been implemented, and a further 37% showed no evidence either way. However the table also shows that 21% of recommendations which were partially or implicitly rejected when first published went on to be fully or partially implemented at some later point, as did a small number of recommendations which were initially fully rejected. A

small number of recommendations which were initially accepted also showed evidence of non-implementation.

There are several explanations for these discrepancies. The first is that we coded recommendations which were ignored in the government response as partially or implicitly rejected, despite the fact that the government did not explicitly rule them out. Recommendations can also be rejected initially because of something outside the government's control but circumstances may subsequently change. Plus sometimes the government seems to genuinely change its mind. In the example below, the response to the recommendation to remove Robert Mugabe's honours received a politely negative response, but his honorary knighthood was annulled by the Queen in 2008.[14]

- Committee: 'We recommend that the Government take steps to strip Robert Mugabe of all honours, decorations and privileges bestowed on him by the United Kingdom' *Zimbabwe* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2003).
- Government: 'The Government has made it clear that removing Mugabe's honorary knighthood, conferred on him in 1994, on the recommendation of the previous government, is not our immediate priority. We may revisit this question in the future'.

There are also good reasons why the government may not implement a recommendation that it responded to positively at first. Recommendations may turn out to be more expensive, politically unviable or just harder than the government initially envisaged. For example the PASC recommendation in *Propriety and Peerages* (2007) to remove the last remaining hereditaries from the House of Lords was not implemented despite the government's commitment in principle to this change. Ultimately the provision – after many years of delay – included in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill, but removed in the legislative 'wash-up' before the 2010 election.

At other times it is simply that time passed and things changed. At the beginning of the Labour administration the Home Affairs Committee advocated retaining the status quo for the age of parliamentary candidates at 21, and the government agreed. That the policy was later changed does not mean the government reneged on its commitment, but the passage of time showed the committee to have been overly cautious.

- 'We recognise the argument for reducing the age for candidates to 18, but on balance we do not recommend such a change' *Electoral Law and Administration* (Home Affairs Committee, 1998).
- Government: 'We agree with this recommendation.'

The age of candidacy was later reduced from 21 to 18, in the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

In what circumstances do committee recommendations have impact?

At a basic level there seem to be some clear differences between the committees in terms of the success of recommendations. For example, the BIS committee has the highest level of recommendations accepted, and the second highest implemented. The Foreign Affairs Committee has the highest proportion of recommendations implemented, and PASC has the lowest proportion of recommendations accepted (but rather more implemented). There are many different factors that might explain these differences. How high profile a policy area is, whether the government already has a clear position on something, and the extent to which positions on a policy area divide along party lines may all make a difference. More fundamentally, if one committee is less ambitious in the kind of recommendations that it makes, or makes a lot of recommendations which are of a kind that are easily accepted (e.g. for disclosure) the figures may make this committee look more influential than it truly is. Finally it is not only the nature of the individual recommendation that may matter, but also committee-level attributes such as the

political party of the chair, and report-level attributes such as point in the policy process. In this section we explore these relationships.

We hypothesised that certain factors were likely to be important in determining whether committee recommendations were accepted and implemented. As far as possible we built these factors into our analysis, by coding for them. Some of the same points were emphasised to us by interviewees. These included:

- *Point in the policy process.* Reports produced in response to high profile government failures may meet great resistance, as may committee responses to new proposals where the government's position is already relatively fixed. In contrast, where the committee is 'agenda setting' and proposing directions in a policy area which has received little consideration from government, it may prove more successful.

- *Kind of action called for.* We might expect government to be prepared to at least 'consider' a change of policy, and thus to accept recommendations for 'research and review'. Similarly, it will often be easy to respond positively to 'disclosure' recommendations. In contrast, government may be more resistant to proposals for new legislation, or for funding.

- *Extent to which change reverses government policy.* In the words of one committee clerk, recommendations which go with the grain of government policy 'are more difficult for the government to ignore'. So if a committee accepts the broad thrust of government policy, but suggests minor improvements, these recommendations may prove more successful. These recommendations are also likely to be easier (and probably cheaper) to implement. In contrast proposals from the committee to completely reverse government policy are more likely to be resisted. This is captured by our 'alteration' code, discussed above, and we hypothesise that recommendations for minor alteration are most likely to prove successful.

- *Profile of policy area.* As one civil servant said to us, government is unlikely to respond well to the committee saying: 'your manifesto promise is a stupid one'. But recommendations in an area where policy 'isn't completely set' are likely to be most influential. We hypothesise that committees are likely to make less headway in areas where government has made firm commitments in manifesto pledges or Queen's speeches. This is captured by our 'significance' code, as discussed above. As indicated there, it is not significance alone and that is likely to be important, but this combined with degree of alteration, captured by our combined 'substantiveness' scale.

- *Main recommendations.* Another indication of the 'importance' of committee recommendations is the prominence which is given to them by the committee itself, when it reports. It is common practice with many committees to draw attention to particular recommendations, as being the 'main' proposals coming out of their inquiry. These recommendations, in turn, are likely to attract greater attention, both in the media (not least because they may be highlighted in committee press releases) and by government. It is possible, therefore, that government may feel more obliged to act on these recommendations, though it is also possible that these recommendations are in fact the most challenging and have a lower level of success.

- *Controversy.* Similarly, some recommendations may be more politically controversial than others. This is a difficult factor to capture in quantitative terms, but one indication of controversy is whether the committee 'divided' (voted) on the recommendation when agreeing its report. We therefore coded in each case whether or not a recommendation was voted upon by the committee. But in fact, as shown above, committee divisions on recommendations are rare. In only 15 cases out of the 1334 clear and measurable recommendations in our sample was there a division. This factor is therefore unlikely to have an impact on the overall picture, and we do not explore it further.[15]

- *Media profile*. The attention given by the media to committee recommendations may also be an indicator of their 'importance' and/or their controversy. As indicated earlier, we collected a great deal of data about newspaper coverage of committee inquiries and reports. Again, we could hypothesise that higher-profile recommendations are more likely to be taken seriously and acted upon by government. But we could also hypothesise that media attention focuses on those recommendations which are more critical of government policy, and which are in turn less likely to be accepted.
- *Political affiliation of committee chair*. Finally, it seems likely that the party affiliation of the committee chair may be important in how its recommendations are received by government. This is further discussed below.

Our data collection was thus designed in order to take these factors into account. As noted when some of these factors were introduced above, it is of course important to note that there is some overlap between them: for example government manifestos are likely to mention large rather than small policies, and certain types of action (e.g. disclosure) are likely to be coded as only a small change, rather than a major reversal of government policy. In the sections that follow we explore the bivariate relationships between these different factors and the extent of acceptance and implementation. At the end of this section we then provide a multivariate analysis, to explore which factors matter when they are considered independently.

Point in the policy process

The first thing we tested for was the stage in the policy process where a committee report attempted to influence policy. We might expect agenda setting reports to be more influential on government because policy is more malleable at this stage. As the Liaison Committee (2010) put it, '[i]t is when Government policy is not yet set in stone that committees often have their best opportunities to exert influence'. On the other hand, we might expect recommendations in reports which are 'responding to perceived government failures' to be less successful.

Table 22: Acceptance and implementation in reports at different policy stages

	Acceptance			Implementation		
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Total	Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	N	% of total
Agenda setting	55	15	27%	32	10	31%
Responding to failure	189	55	29%	151	58	38%
Other	1587	658	41%	1151	524	46%
Total	1831	728	40%	1334	592	46%

The acceptance and implementation of recommendations according to whether they are from one of these two kinds of reports are shown in Table 22. With respect to agenda setting, this suggests that, if anything, the effect is the opposite one to what we predicted. That is, recommendations in these reports are perhaps less likely to be accepted and implemented. Recommendations in reports responding to failure appear less successful than the norm, as predicted, though this effect is not particularly strong.

There are reasons why we might not expect to see an effect here at all: while a report may be agenda setting, individual recommendations within it may in fact refer to existing policy, and vice versa. Likewise, some individual recommendations in 'responding to failure' reports may in fact be supportive of government policy. It is thus more likely to be the nature of the recommendation, rather than the nature of the report in which it sits, that is important. It might also be the case that agenda-setting reports are associated with other factors which decrease influence, such as level of controversy.

Kind of action called for

Table 23 shows the level of acceptance by what action was called for in each recommendation. As anticipated, this shows that disclosure recommendations are far more likely to be accepted than other types of action, and less likely to be rejected. This is the only form of recommendation which achieves a more than 50% overall success rate (i.e. combining full and partial acceptance). These recommendations will often be accepted and implemented at the same time in the government response document. Similarly, the acceptance rate for 'research and review' recommendations, and also for 'public information' recommendations is relatively high. This again was to be expected. But 45% of recommendations for guidance are also accepted, and this might be considered more substantive. The recommendations least likely to be accepted are those for legislation, funding, and more surprisingly, 'attitude change'.[16] But while recommendations for legislation and funding are the least likely to be accepted, their acceptance rate is still relatively high, at 28% and 31% respectively. Funding recommendations are the most likely to be rejected.

Table 23: Acceptance of recommendations, by what calling for

	Accepted	Partially/ implicitly accepted	Neither accepted nor rejected	Partially/ implicitly rejected	Rejected	No response	Total	% Fully/ partially accepted	% Fully/ partially rejected
Legislation	4 (5%)	18 (23%)	20 (25%)	21 (27%)	7 (9%)	9 (11%)	79	28%	35%
Guidance	10 (11%)	29 (33%)	17 (20%)	27 (31%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	87	45%	34%
Research or review	34 (8%)	116 (28%)	120 (29%)	112 (27%)	24 (6%)	15 (4%)	421	36%	32%
Campaigns	2 (6%)	11 (34%)	13 (41%)	6 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32	41%	19%
Disclosure	108 (38%)	67 (24%)	47 (16%)	55 (19%)	6 (2%)	2 (1%)	285	61%	21%
Funding	3 (5%)	17 (26%)	16 (25%)	22 (34%)	5 (8%)	2 (3%)	65	31%	42%
Attitude change	0 (0%)	17 (28%)	18 (30%)	23 (38%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	60	28%	40%
None	41 (7%)	178 (30%)	155 (26%)	169 (28%)	37 (6%)	18 (3%)	598	37%	34%
Several	16 (8%)	57 (28%)	42 (21%)	73 (36%)	13 (6%)	3 (1%)	204	36%	42%
Total	218 (12%)	510 (28%)	448 (24%)	508 (28%)	96 (5%)	51 (3%)	1831	40%	33%

Table 24 looks instead at the actual implementation of recommendations for different sorts of action. As previously, the number of recommendations considered has dropped, as non-measurable recommendations have been excluded, as have those which the government initially indicated were already being done (and for which there was no evidence that government action post-dated the start of the committee's inquiry). This shows that consistent with the figures in the previous table, disclosure recommendations appear far the most likely to be implemented. Legislation recommendations are disproportionately represented in the 'not implemented' category, but this is in part because they are easy to trace and are thus less represented in the 'no evidence' category.

Table 24: Implementation of recommendations, by what calling for

	Full	Partial	Limited	No evidence	Evidence not impl.	No opp.	Total	% Fully/ part. impl.
Legislation	17 (23%)	11 (15%)	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	33 (45%)	1 (1%)	74	38%
Guidance	23 (32%)	13 (18%)	11 (16%)	16 (23%)	8 (11%)	0 (0%)	71	51%
Research or review	61 (20%)	64 (21%)	55 (18%)	87 (28%)	25 (8%)	17 (6%)	309	40%
Campaigns/ public info	4 (21%)	4 (21%)	9 (47%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	19	42%
Disclosure	115 (44%)	46 (18%)	42 (16%)	30 (12%)	28 (11%)	1 (0%)	262	61%
Funding	11 (23%)	7 (15%)	9 (19%)	11 (23%)	5 (11%)	4 (9%)	47	38%
Attitude change	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16	38%
Several of the above	24 (16%)	42 (28%)	29 (19%)	34 (22%)	21 (14%)	2 (1%)	152	43%
None of the above	84 (22%)	60 (16%)	76 (20%)	68 (18%)	81 (21%)	15 (4%)	384	38%
Total	340 (26%)	252 (19%)	241 (18%)	259 (19%)	201 (15%)	41 (3%)	1334	44%

The overall rate of implementation for legislation recommendations, at 39%, is in fact only slightly below that for research and review. This presents quite a positive picture. It is difficult to compare these results directly with those found by Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) with respect to the Education Committee, due to the use of very different methods. They searched backwards from legislation, and found that a third of legislative proposals brought forward by government in this policy field showed some overlap with committee recommendations. But the two findings are consistent in suggesting that there may be significant select committee influence on government legislation.

At first glance the figures for implementation in are higher than the government acceptance rate indicated in Table 23, but as we have already seen it is necessary to compare identical samples in order to get a clearer view. Table 25 shows this data. Here we see that the implementation rate is generally similar to the initial government acceptance rate. There appears to be a drop from acceptance to implementation in terms of recommendations for campaigns or public information, but this is based on very small numbers. It is interesting that legislation and funding recommendations – initially less likely to be accepted than other recommendations – appear to have a somewhat higher implementation than acceptance rate. However these numbers must be treated with caution, as they are again very small.

Table 25: Acceptance & implementation on smaller (implementation) sample, by what calling for

		Acceptance		Implementation	
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	% of total
Legislation	74	21	28%	28	38%
Guidance	71	39	55%	36	51%
Research or review	309	134	43%	125	40%
Campaigns/ public info	19	13	68%	8	42%
Disclosure	262	174	66%	161	61%
Funding	47	16	34%	18	38%
Attitude change	16	7	44%	6	38%
Several of the above	152	66	43%	66	43%
None of the above	384	164	43%	144	38%
Total	1334	634	48%	592	44%

Extent to which change reverses government policy

As noted, one reason that disclosure recommendations are likely to be accepted is that these generally require only a relatively small change to existing policy. But other types of recommendation can also require only a small change. Hence we next consider whether committees look influential principally by making unambitious or supportive recommendations. Table 26 shows the extent to which recommendations represent a change to government policy (i.e. our 'alteration' dimension, as discussed above), by extent of government acceptance. This shows very strong evidence of the kind of relationship that we would expect: minor recommendations are far more likely to be accepted, while recommendations which would require a large change to government policy are least likely to be accepted, and far more likely to be rejected.

In some cases recommendations are for no change to government policy at all, so in this case it is wholly unsurprising that they are accepted by government. E.g.:

- 'We recommend that the DTI continues its constructive dialogue with the testing and certification authorities in central Europe and welcome the fact that standards and certification are areas that the DTI has put forward proposals for "twinning" secondments' *Industrial and Trade Relations with Central Europe* (BIS Committee 1998).

Table 26: Acceptance of recommendations, by extent of change to government policy

	Accepted	Partially/ implicitly accepted	Neither accepted nor rejected	Partially/ implicitly rejected	Rejected	No response	Total	% Fully/ partially accepted	% Fully/ partially rejected
No/ small change	151 (21%)	251 (35%)	135 (19%)	157 (22%)	14 (2%)	18 (3%)	726	55%	24%
Medium change	59 (6%)	234 (25%)	269 (29%)	296 (32%)	58 (6%)	24 (3%)	940	31%	38%
Large change	3 (3%)	12 (11%)	27 (26%)	38 (36%)	23 (22%)	2 (2%)	105	14%	58%
Not clear	5 (8%)	13 (22%)	17 (28%)	17 (28%)	1 (2%)	7 (12%)	60	3%	3%
Total	218 (12%)	510 (28%)	448 (25%)	508 (28%)	96 (5%)	51 (3%)	1831	40%	33%

Nonetheless 15 recommendations (14%) calling for large change to government policy were implicitly or fully accepted, while 293 recommendations calling for medium change (31%) received the same response. If we extrapolate from our sample, this suggests that over 1000 recommendations calling for substantive change were accepted across the seven select committees over our study period. More speculatively, if our seven committees are broadly representative of the total 20 departmental select committees (including PASC), these committees might have had around 3000 substantive recommendations accepted over this period, or over 200 such recommendations per year.

In our sample, successful 'large change' recommendations included:

- ' …Given that the regulator may be in office by the autumn, we recommend that the Government consider withdrawal of the Order so that the Postal Services Commission can consider evidence put to them of the effect of a reduction in the monopoly threshold, and recommend to Government an appropriate monopoly threshold' *The 1999 Post Office White Paper* (BIS Committee, 1999).
- Government: '…the Government has considered and accepted the... Committee's recommendation that the new Postal Services Commission (PSC) should be charged with considering the monopoly threshold. The Government will therefore be referring the proposal to reduce the monopoly to the PSC as soon as possible. In the meantime the recent order providing for the reduction of the monopoly threshold has been revoked.'

Successful 'medium change' recommendations included:

- 'We recommend that the purchase or sale of any imitation firearm by or to persons under eighteen via telephone, mail order or Internet should be prohibited' *Control Over Firearms* (Home Affairs Committee, 2000).
- Government: 'The Government accepts this recommendation and would wish to consider carrying it further by prohibiting the sale of imitation firearms to young people under 18 under all circumstances, including face-to-face as well as telephone, mail-order and Internet sales.'
- 'Many healthcare workers remain fearful that if they are open about harm to patients they will be unfairly blamed for causing it; and that if they whistleblow they will be victimised…We recommend that the DH bring forward proposals on how to improve this situation and that it give consideration to the model operated in New Zealand, where whistleblowers can complain to an independent statutory body. We recommend that Annex 1 of the Health Service Circular, HSC 1999/198, "The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 Whistleblowing in the NHS" be re-

circulated to all Trusts for dissemination to all their staff as a matter of urgency' *Patient Safety* (Health Committee, 2009).

- Government: 'We accept that proposals should be brought forward as recommended to improve protection for whistleblowers. We will consider the practicalities of establishing a model whereby whistleblowers can complain to an independent statutory body…. We are working with PCaW and with NHS Employers, the organisation which represents the majority of NHS employing organisations in England, to ensure that the guidance we issued on whistleblowing is kept up to date and that access to PCaW's helpline is well publicised through bulletins and events.'

Similar patterns emerge when we consider implementation. As we would expect, Table 27 (again based on the smaller sample, and including acceptance figures for comparison) shows that recommendations that call for no or small change are far more likely to be implemented than those calling for more substantial change. But over a third of medium change recommendations are implemented. The proportion of large change recommendations implemented is lower, at just over a fifth. Nonetheless the raw numbers are fairly impressive. The table indicates that on 263 separate occasions recommendations for significant policy change were implemented by government. Again, extrapolating from our sample suggests that around 900 substantive central government recommendations were implemented from these committees over our time period, and perhaps around 200 select committee recommendations in total were implemented by the government each year.

Table 27: Acceptance and implementation of recommendations, by extent of change to government policy

		Acceptance		Implementation	
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	% of total
No/small change	518	352	68%	314	61%
Medium change	700	257	37%	245	35%
Large change	85	14	17%	18	21%
Not clear	31	11	36%	15	48%
Total	1334	634	48%	592	44%

The table also demonstrates that some 'large change' recommendations were implemented despite not being initially accepted. One example from our sample was PASC's recommendation for the Prime Minister to appear before the Liaison Committee on a regular basis, which was initially rejected outright but went on to be implemented in 2002. This example provides further evidence of the 'delayed drop' that we discussed earlier. Large change recommendations require more of a 'u-turn' on the part of government if they are to be implemented, which could be publicly embarrassing. The government might therefore prefer to implement such recommendations later, rather than give an immediate 'win' to the committee.

- 'We do not believe that Prime Minister's Question Time is an adequate or sufficient forum for considered probing of Government policy and recommend that an annual meeting should be arranged between the Prime Minister and the Liaison Committee, representing the chairs of all the select committees, under strict terms of agreement, using the Government's Annual Report as its basis. Questions might include the Prime Minister's responsibility for the Ministerial Code, and any alleged breaches, while the Prime Minister's own duty to account to Parliament in this way should be included as a provision of the Code' *The Ministerial Code: Improving the Rule Book* (PASC, 2001).

- Government: 'The Government notes this recommendation but continues to believe that the current arrangements, based on precedent under successive Administrations, provide for full accountability to Parliament. As with all Ministers, the Prime Minister is accountable to Parliament for his decisions and actions. He appears before the House more often than any departmental Minister. The Prime Minister's weekly 30 minute Question Time provides the House with an opportunity to question the Prime Minister, as head of the Government, on any issue of Government policy, including the operation of the Ministerial Code. The Government fully supports the role of Select Committees in holding the Government to account, and questioning Ministers on matters of policy. However, it believes that those best placed to answer these questions and to account for their actions and decisions are the Ministers with responsibility for the specific area of interest.'

We can also apply this knowledge to take a more sophisticated look at which committees are impactful. Table 28 shows implementation data on recommendations broken down by committee, excluding those which called for only a small change to policy. Previous studies of parliamentary committees have noted that committees can make themselves appear more influential by making trivial recommendations or advocating action that the government would have undertaken anyway (Aldons 2000, Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon 2009). Looking at substantive recommendations only is a more meaningful way to consider which committees are most influential.

Table 28: Implementation by committee, excluding recommendations for no or little change

	Full	Partial	Limited	No evidence	Evidence not impl.	No opportunity	Total	% Fully or part.impl.
BIS	18 (23%)	17 (22%)	10 (13%)	22 (28%)	8 (10%)	3 (4%)	78	45%
Defence	13 (11%)	20 (17%)	30 (25%)	38 (32%)	18 (15%)	1 (1%)	120	28%
Foreign Affairs	8 (14%)	10 (17%)	14 (24%)	17 (29%)	9 (15%)	1 (2%)	59	31%
Health	18 (12%)	29 (20%)	36 (24%)	43 (29%)	17 (12%)	4 (3%)	147	32%
Home Affairs	28 (16%)	33 (19%)	31 (18%)	21 (12%)	46 (27%)	12 (7%)	171	36%
PASC	18 (24%)	5 (7%)	8 (11%)	5 (7%)	36 (49%)	2 (3%)	74	31%
Treasury	20 (15%)	26 (19%)	21 (15%)	37 (27%)	29 (21%)	3 (2%)	136	34%
Total*	123 (16%)	140 (18%)	150 (19%)	183 (23%)	163 (21%)	26 (3%)	785	34%

* Note that this also excludes recommendations where government's existing policy was unclear.

Contrary to the picture presented above, where PASC looked amongst the least influential of the committees (with the lowest overall acceptance rate for recommendations, and a below average implementation rate), we see that PASC has the highest proportion of medium/large change recommendations fully implemented, at 24%. Taking into account both full and partial implementation, the BIS Committee ranks highest, with 45% of recommendations implemented at least to some extent. These percentages are based only on relatively small numbers of recommendations (74 and 78 respectively), so must of course be treated with caution. The Home Affairs Committee also appears relatively influential, with 36% of a total 171 medium/large change recommendations implemented. Notably the implementation rate for the Foreign Affairs Committee has dropped drastically, from 66% to 31%: demonstrating that its apparent success was based to a large extent on no/small change recommendations. Overall, there is less spread across the committees now that we are taking into account only more ambitious recommendations. Most committees have an implementation rate close to the average, in the low thirties.

Profile of policy area

Level of change demanded to government policy therefore accounts for much of the overall variation in implementation rate between the committees. But also likely to make a difference is the policy area that recommendations address, as flagship policies will be highly developed, the

government is likely to have considered alternatives and criticisms in considerable detail, and u-turns will be more embarrassing. Table 29 therefore shows the result of combining the two dimensions of alteration and policy significance (as discussed above). Because it excludes recommendations where current government policy was unclear, the numbers in this table are smaller than in some previous tables. An explanation of the various substantiveness levels can be found next to Table 14, above.

Table 29: Acceptance of recommendations, by overall policy substantiveness

	Accepted	Partially/ implicitly accepted	Neither accepted nor rejected	Partially/ implicitly rejected	Rejected	No response	Total	% Fully/ partially accepted	% Fully/ partially rejected
0	151 (21%)	251 (35%)	135 (19%)	157 (22%)	14 (2%)	18 (3%)	726	55%	24%
1	49 (7%)	181 (24%)	214 (29%)	237 (32%)	48 (6%)	20 (3%)	749	31%	38%
2	8 (3%)	59 (24%)	72 (29%)	80 (33%)	24 (10%)	3 (1%)	246	27%	42%
3	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	4 (21%)	10 (36%)	4 (14%)	2 (7%)	28	21%	50%
4	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	5 (33%)	1 (7%)	15	20%	60%
6	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7	29%	43%
Total	213 (12%)	497 (28%)	431 (24%)	491 (28%)	95 (5%)	44 (3%)	1771	40%	33%

As we already know from Table 14, there are relatively few committee recommendations which score highly in terms of overall policy significance. The great majority call either for a small (or no) change, or refer to a 'minor' policy as defined by our scheme (though this to some extent reflects problems with the scheme itself, and its bias towards legislative and publicly salient issues in Queen's speeches and manifestos respectively). The table demonstrates the pattern that we would expect, i.e. declining acceptance as the overall policy substantiveness of recommendations increases, but obviously there are very small numbers of recommendations in the top three categories (combining these three categories together gives 50 relatively 'more substantive' recommendations, with a combined acceptance rate of 22%).

A similar pattern arises for implementation, as shown in Table 30. Aside from recommendations for no or a small change to policy, most categories have around 30% of recommendations implemented. The 60% implementation rate for the most substantive group of recommendations can be largely discounted as it represents only five recommendations, but does show that it would be an error to assume that all such recommendations are rejected. Again, taking the top three categories together, 16 out of 39 of the 'more substantive' recommendations (41%) were implemented. One example of a recommendation coded as large change to major policy that went on to be implemented is the Home Affairs Committee's call for prisoners to receive mandatory drug testing (*Rehabilitation of Prisoners*, 2005).

Table 30: Implementation of recommendations, by overall policy substantiveness

	Full	Partial	Limited	.No evidence	Evidence not impl.	No opp.	Total	% Full / part. Impl.
0	206 (40%)	108 (21%)	85 (16%)	73 (14%)	35 (7%)	11 (2%)	518	61%
1	87 (16%)	100 (18%)	106 (19%)	136 (25%)	104 (19%)	20 (4%)	553	34%
2	28 (15%)	33 (17%)	42 (22%)	41 (21%)	45 (23%)	4 (2%)	193	32%
3	4 (17%)	5 (22%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	8 (35%)	2 (9%)	23	39%
4	2 (18%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	3 (27%)	4 (36 %)	0 (0%)	11	27%
6	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)	5	60%
Total	329 (25%)	248 (19%)	235 (18%)	256 (20%)	198 (15%)	37 (3%)	1303	44%

Media attention

Monk (2009b) found that the reports from Australian oversight committees that attracted the most attention from the print media were also more likely to receive a positive response from government. If government is indirectly influenced by media pressure, it might give more careful consideration to high profile recommendations and reports. However, the reverse effect is also possible. That is, that government is less likely to respond favourably to recommendations and reports with high media coverage because they tend to be more challenging and controversial. We applied our analysis at the level of particular recommendations rather than reports, and hypothesised that recommendations which received media coverage would be less influential on government than those that did not.

Table 31: Acceptance and implementation of recommendations, by level of media coverage

	Acceptance			Implementation		
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Total	Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	N	% of total
Some media coverage	141	51	36%	110	42	38%
No media coverage	1690	677	40%	1224	550	45%
Total	1831	728	40%	1334	592	46%

Table 31 shows no obvious relationship between newspaper coverage of a recommendation (as described earlier in the report) and its acceptance or implementation. Similar proportions of recommendations which received some coverage and no coverage were accepted and implemented. But it also shows that only a relatively small proportion (8%) of recommendations actually receive media coverage. The recommendations that received the most newspaper attention during our study period were unfortunately not in our sample, so are not included in these figures. They were two Home Affairs Committee recommendations in *The Government's Drug Policy: Is It Working?* (2002) for reclassifying cannabis from Class B to Class C, and reclassifying ecstasy from Class A to Class B. These recommendations each received more than 10 media hits in the two newspapers for which we collected data. A Health Committee recommendation for alcohol minimum pricing received six hits (*Alcohol*, 2010), as did two Treasury Committee recommendations: on preparing for a decision to join in the Euro (*The UK and Preparations for Stage Three of Economic and Monetary Union*, 1998) and on the shortfall of mortgage endowment policies (*Restoring Confidence in Long-term Savings: Endowment Mortgages*, 2004).

Main recommendation

The final measure of controversy/profile for which we collected data was whether something had been presented as 'main recommendation'. We defined main recommendations as any recommendation flagged up in a report's executive summary, introduction, or conclusion, or introduced explicitly as 'a main recommendation' by the committee.

Table 32: Acceptance and implementation of recommendations, by main recommendation

		Acceptance		Implementation	
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	% of total
Yes	182	83	46%	83	46%
No	435	216	50%	215	49%
Report does not identify main recs	717	335	47%	294	41%
Total	1334	634	48%	592	44%

Again, the data here might be somewhat misleading, as committees have different practices when it comes to identifying main recommendations. For example the Health Committee does not have a

culture of producing executive summaries, or of flagging up recommendations in any other way, so all of its recommendations were coded as 'report does not identify main recommendations'. There is also likely to be considerable overlap between what is defined as a 'main' recommendation and what receives newspaper coverage, as committees' press releases are often heavily based on the executive summary.

Table 32 shows no relationship between whether something has been identified as a main recommendation and whether it is accepted or implemented. As we noted, there are reasons to believe that main recommendations could either have a higher or a lower success rate than other recommendations; therefore it is of course possible that these effects overall cancel each other out.

Party affiliation of committee chair

Finally, we might expect that a committee chaired by an opposition party member would be less successful in its recommendations than a committee where the chair was from the government's own party. Opposition chairs might be expected to have cooler relations with departmental ministers, and ministers to be more reluctant to grant them a policy 'victory'. Such chairs might also be expected to encourage their committee to make more challenging recommendations. Over the time period that we studied, there was not a 1:1 relationship between committees and the party allegiance of their chair. Two committees (Defence and BIS) were chaired for part of the period by a Labour member, and part by a Conservative member. Interestingly, one of these committees had among the highest acceptance and implementation rates overall, and the other had among the lowest. The party allegiance of the chair could therefore be a confounding factor when looking at which committees are most influential.

Table 33: Acceptance and implementation of recommendations, by party of committee chair

	Acceptance			Implementation		
	Total	Partially/fully accepted		Total	Partially/fully implemented	
	N	N	% of total	N	N	% of total
Government chair	1610	606	38%	1174	499	43%
Opposition chair	221	122	55%	160	93	58%
Total	1831	728	40%	1334	592	46%

Table 33 shows the acceptance and implementation rates of recommendations, according to the party allegiance of the chair at the time that the recommendation was made. This suggests that, if anything, the relationship is the opposite to the one that we would expect. This perhaps accords with comments made by some interviewees that an opposition chair will want to see more reasoned and consensual reports, for fear of looking partisan (as discussed above in the section on 'Key factors affecting committee influence').

Multivariate analysis

The overlap between these different variables point to the need to conduct a multivariate analysis. For example, some committees may make a lower proportion of substantive recommendations than others, which could inflate our view of their influence. Similarly, there is a clear relationship between committee as a factor and partisan affiliation of its chair, which may result in effects being masked in simple crosstabular analyses. In addition, some 'forms of action called for' will tend to be of greater policy substance than others. We do not yet know, for example, whether 'disclosure' recommendations are genuinely more likely to be accepted, or whether their acceptance is simply due to their low level of substantiveness. For all these reasons, a multivariate analysis is beneficial.

We conducted this analysis using the same data discussed above: 1831 recommendations (reduced to 1726 due to missing data on individual variables) in a model with acceptance as the dependent variable, and 1334 recommendations (reduced to 1265/1246 for the same reason) in two models

with implementation as the dependent variable. With respect to implementation, the first model considers implementation independent of acceptance, and the second includes acceptance level as an explanatory variable. Following various exploratory analyses, all three models simply use the 'enter' method for all of the independent variables previously identified, including the committee concerned (NB. as committees are coded as dummy variables, the Health Committee does not appear in the table). All other independent variables are as identified above. All are dummy variables with the exception of acceptance and substantiveness, which use five point scales.

With respect to acceptance, the regression model confirms that the degree of change to government policy that a recommendation calls for is highly significant: with recommendations calling for medium or large changes less likely to be accepted. As predicted, however, even once this is taken into account substantiveness of recommendations (i.e. also including the importance of the policy area) has a significant, but smaller, negative effect on their likelihood of being accepted. Similarly, even with these factors held constant we see that 'disclosure' recommendations are more likely to be accepted than others, as are recommendations calling for guidance – though recommendations for 'research and review' show no greater likelihood of acceptance than others. Between the committees, the Home Affairs Committee is shown to be significantly more likely to have its recommendations accepted, and PASC significantly less likely than other committees. However, it is important to note that all of these effects are relatively small. On the five point scale for acceptance, only disclosure accounts for a difference of more than half a point, and the total extent of variance explained by the model is only 14.3%.

Table 34: OLS analysis of factors influencing acceptance and implementation

	DV = Acceptance	DV = Implementation model 1	DV = Implementation model 2
Constant	3.306***	3.423***	1.215***
Medium/large change	-.422***	-.660***	-.307**
Substantiveness	-.103*	-.012	.068
Type of action:			
- Legislation	.083	-.154	-.271
- Funding	-.221	.164	.402*
- Guidance	.305*	.498**	.287
- Research and review	.026	.161	.157
- Disclosure	.592***	.349**	.081
Opposition chair	.154	.454**	.324*
Type of report:			
- Agenda setting	-.123	-.133	-.086
- Responding to failure	-.054	-.133	-.086
Main recommendation	-.108	.018	.065
Media coverage	.011	-.191	-.220
Committee:			
- BIS	.206	.062	-.009
- Defence	.176	-.223	-.287*
- Foreign Affairs	-.019	.500***	.423**
- Home Affairs	.332**	.006	-.193
- PASC	-.337**	-.128	.106
- Treasury	-.041	-.058	-.057
Acceptance	-	-	.620***
Adjusted R^2	.143	.127	. 357
N	1726	1265	1246

Unstandardised coefficients,* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

In terms of implementation, model 1 first considers this independently of acceptance. Here calling for a medium/large change again makes a positive government response less likely, but the independent effect of overall policy substantiveness disappears. As with acceptance, calling for disclosure or guidance makes a positive government response in terms of implementation more

likely. The presence of an opposition chair also appears to make it significantly more likely that a recommendation will go on to be implemented. In terms of differences between the committees, the Foreign Affairs Committee appears to be significantly more likely than others to have its recommendations implemented. This committee showed up earlier as having a high implementation rate, but it appeared that this might be simply because it made relatively unambitious recommendations: the multivariate analysis suggests that it does genuinely have a higher success rate than other committees. Again, however, the actual effect of all of these differences is small, and the total variance explained by the model is only 12.7%.

In model 2, acceptance is included as an explanatory variable for implementation. We know that these two factors are related, and it is obviously more likely that a recommendation will go on to be implemented if it was previously accepted by government. In this model, as we would predict, acceptance is the single largest factor in explaining implementation and is highly significant. However, even after acceptance has been taken into account, recommendations calling for a medium/large change to policy are significantly less likely to be implemented, while recommendations from a committee with an opposition chair, or from the Foreign Affairs Committee, are more likely to be implemented. In addition, funding recommendations appear slightly more likely to be implemented than others, and Defence Committee recommendations are slightly less likely to be implemented (though this may be due to the coding difficulties discussed earlier in the report). This model has greater explanatory power, but nonetheless still only accounts for 35.7% of the variance in terms of implementation level of recommendations.

In summary, the multivariate analysis confirms that more minor recommendations are more likely to be accepted and implemented, though we already know that many more substantive recommendations are accepted and implemented as well. Returning to the other factors that we hypothesised would make a difference to committee influence, very little else that we predicted has been borne out. As the bivariate analysis suggested, the point in the policy process where the report seeks to have influence makes no statistically significant difference on the success of individual recommendations. Similarly whether something is a main recommendation, or whether a recommendation attracted media attention, seems to have little effect. Our 'substantiveness' variable, which builds in a measure of the profile of a policy area, only has a discernable impact on initial acceptance, not implementation. However the explanatory power of all of our models is limited. This tells us that it is difficult to predict the circumstances under which committees have impact, at least from a quantitative perspective.

Conclusions based on quantitative analysis

This section sums up the large amount of information presented in the 'basic information' section of the report, as well as the quantitative analysis of committee influence. Some of the key figures are summarised in Table 35.[17] This section also includes some reflection upon the meaning of these results.

This project has collected the largest quantity of data to date on the select committees. It therefore allows us to gain new insights into the volume and type of reports and recommendations that they produce. We have looked at 13 years of activity by seven 'departmental' select committees, out of the possible 20 such committees.[18] We sought to make these committees as representative as possible of the totality, and in choosing samples of reports and recommendations we sought in turn to make these as representative as possible of the seven committees' work. We thus hopefully have reliable data on the work of these committees, but also the ability to estimate with some reliability the overall output, and overall impact, of the entire select committee system over this period.

Some of our data covers the entire population of inquiries carried out by the seven committees 1997-2010. We know that over this period they produced 505 'inquiry reports', containing a total of 13,216 conclusions and recommendations. This is an impressive volume of work, and suggests that around 1400 such reports, containing some 38,000 conclusions and recommendations, were produced by all the committees over this period: that is, roughly 110 reports and 2900 conclusions and recommendations per year. We examined all 505 reports produced by the seven committees to establish the point in the policy process at which the committee sought to intervene, and found that committees are largely responsive to government initiatives, and relatively rarely 'agenda setting'.

Turning to conclusions and recommendations, we first examined all those in our initial sample of 216 reports (data not shown in Table 35). These reports in total included 5682 conclusions and recommendations. Of these, 61% (3471) were recommendations, and 32% were conclusions. Where committees draw conclusions we found that these were fairly balanced between those which were critical of, or supportive of, current policy, with many simply neutral in tone. Where recommendations are made, the great majority (83%) are aimed at central government, although many are also aimed at other public bodies and some (particularly for committees such as the Treasury Committee) at non-governmental actors such as industry. The kind of actions which committee recommendations urge government to adopt are very varied, and not easily classified. We identified seven relatively well-defined categories of action (e.g. calling for legislation, changes to funding, or disclosure of information held by government), but around a third of recommendations in our sample fell into none of these easy categories. Of the seven categories the most widely used was 'research and review', accounting for around a quarter of recommendations. That is, committees asking government to review its policy, or conduct new research, rather than specifying a concrete change of course.

The bipartisan and consensual ethos of the select committees is well known (and supported by our results showing that only 1.5% of central government recommendations are subject to a division (vote) in committee). This helps account, to some extent, for the number of relatively 'soft' recommendations of this kind. It also helps account for one of our more negative findings: that recommendations made by committees can quite often be unclear. We judged (though we admit that such judgements will always be subjective) that around 12% of potential select committee recommendations were unclear in terms of whether they were recommendations, who they were aimed at or what they were calling for. In addition, we judged that of the remaining relatively clear recommendations, 14% were not measurable in terms of what they called for. There are good reasons why committees may sometimes make unclear recommendations (particularly if seeking to achieve consensus on a difficult issue), and not all recommendations can be expected to be measurable (sometimes it may be sensible to, for example, simply ask the government to 'improve' something). But there is some food for thought here for the committees, concerning whether they could sometimes sharpen up their wording in order to achieve greater impact.

We also examined this sample of recommendations to determine how large a change of policy committees tend to call for. Here, again, there is a danger of being subjective, but according to our 3-point scale (described earlier in the report), around 60% of recommendations called for a medium or large change to government policy, while the remainder called for only a small change or a continuation of current policy. The importance of the policy area concerned also matters when asking how 'substantive' committee recommendations are (e.g. asking for a large change to a trivial policy is less substantive than asking for a large change to a flagship manifesto policy). Based on comparisons between committee recommendations and Labour manifestos and Queen's speeches, we found that only around 20% related to policy commitments or specific fields mentioned in these documents. That is, most committee recommendations are either on non-flagship policies, or relate to small details of such policy beyond what is publicly set out. This is not surprising, given

the large volume of recommendations produced by the select committees, and their focus on the detailed delivery of policy.

As shown in the table, the data from our sample suggests that the seven committees made a total of around 6500 recommendations aimed at central government over this period (i.e. around 500 per year collectively). Of these, we would expect around 3600 (275 per year) to have called for medium or large changes to government policy. If our committees are representative of all 20 departmental committees, we would expect these to have made around 19,000 recommendations (or 1450 per year) aimed at central government over this period, 10,000 of which (800 per year) called for medium or large change to government policy.

Table 35: Summary of key results and estimate of overall committee output and success

	Total from the seven committees	Total in our sample	Estimate for the seven committees (÷ 0.29)	Estimate for all 20 committees (x 20/7)	Estimate per year for all committees (÷ 13)
Inquiry reports	505	151		1443	111
Conclusions and recommendations	13216	3840		37760	2905
Recommendations		2298	7924	22640	1742
Central government recommendations		1906	6572	18778	1444
- Of those, 'clear' central government recommendations		1831	6314	18039	1388
- Of those, accepted recommendations		728	2510	7172	552
- Of those, fully accepted recommendations		340	1172	3350	258
- Of those, med/large change recommendations		1045	3603	10296	792
- Of those, med/large change recs accepted		308	1062	3034	233
- Of those, measurable and not already being done		1334	4600	13143	1011
- Of those, implemented recommendations		592	2041	5833	449
- Of those, med/large change recs		785	2707	7734	595
- Of those, med/large change recs implemented		263	907	2591	199

This is clearly a very significant number of proposals targeted at government. We therefore went on in the next section of the report to explore what happens to these proposals. That is, the extent to which government accepts and implements select committee recommendations.

We found that around 40% of select committee recommendations are accepted by government (i.e. in the government's official response to the select committee report). That amounted to 728 recommendations out of the total 1831 'clear' recommendations aimed at central government in our sample. Here our results may slightly downplay influence, as it is possible that government also accepted further recommendations that we had judged to be unclear. If this conservative figure is representative of the seven committees as a whole, they probably had around 2500 recommendations accepted over this period. In turn, if the committees are representative of all 20 departmental committees, then around 7000 select committee recommendations were accepted over this period, or around 500 per year.

Just as the figures can understate influence, there are also dangers that it can be overstated. In particular, we found many recommendations where the government indicated – in a neutral, negative or dismissive way – that it was already taking the action recommended (i.e. with no suggestion that this action had been inspired by committee). It would therefore have been wrong to trace these recommendations and take the fact that they had been implemented as a sign of committee influence. For this reason, we excluded these recommendations from the next stage of our analysis, when we traced government implementation of committee proposals. We also excluded those recommendations that we considered 'virtually or entirely immeasurable', leaving a reduced sample of 1334 recommendations. Of these, we found that 44% (592) went on to be implemented by government. If this is representative of all of the work of our seven committees,

we would expect around 2000 recommendations in total to have been implemented by government over this period, and almost 6000 (450 per year) to have been implemented from all 20 select committees. Again, these figures may downplay influence, however, because the government could have implemented recommendations that we considered to be immeasurable.

This suggests that it is quite wrong to allege that government ignores committee recommendations, or that committees have relatively little influence on government policy. If 450 recommendations from select committees are indeed implemented by government per year, that is a substantial figure. It is true, however, that government is more likely to accept and implement recommendations which propose little or no change to existing policy. We found that over 60% of small/no change recommendations were accepted and implemented, compared to around a third of recommendations calling for medium/large change. That is, two thirds of more substantive recommendations made by select committees go on to be rejected or simply ignored. This may be seen as a negative finding. Nonetheless, it must be put in the context of the very large number of recommendations that select committees make. Over our study period we estimate that around 1000 recommendations for medium or large change were accepted from the seven committees, and around 900 were implemented. If this is representative of the departmental select committees as a whole, it suggests that over 2500 substantive recommendations for change from select committees were implemented over this period, or around 200 per year. In terms of raw numbers, select committees therefore appear to contribute much to the policy process.

We also looked at various other factors and their relationship to the 'success' of committee recommendations. We found no evidence that committees' 'main' recommendations stand a greater or lesser chance of success than others, and similarly no evidence that media attention on committee recommendations affects their success (though, like other authors, we found that there is much media attention on the committees). We ended our analysis with a multivariate (regression) analysis, to determine which factors are associated with the success of recommendations; but all of the effects that we found were relatively small. One interesting result was that committees chaired by opposition members seem to have a slightly higher level of success. This was consistent with suggestions from some of our interviewees that these chairs work harder to achieve cross-party consensus. We also found some small differences between the committees, with the Home Affairs Committee slightly more likely to see its recommendations accepted, the Foreign Affairs Committee slightly more likely to see its recommendations implemented, and PASC slightly less likely to have its recommendations accepted.

Throughout these sections of the report we have highlighted various other differences between the committees. For example the BIS and Treasury committees produce a relatively higher number of reports, while the Foreign Affairs Committee and Home Affairs Committee include higher numbers of recommendations in their reports. As already indicated, the Treasury Committee makes relatively more recommendations aimed at non-governmental bodies, and it also makes a high proportion of recommendations for disclosure of information, while the Health Committee makes a relatively high proportion of recommendations for guidance, and PASC a relatively high proportion of recommendations for legislation. The BIS and Foreign Affairs committees make more small/no change recommendations, while the Home Affairs and Defence committees call more often for medium/large changes than other committees. These kinds of differences have some impact on the success of committees' reports. But one of the striking conclusions from our analysis is that quantifiable factors can only explain a relatively small proportion of the variance in the acceptance and implementation of recommendations. To understand these relationships better we therefore need a more qualitative analysis, and this is what the report turns to next.

Shortcomings of the quantitative approach

The limitations of assessing committee influence by measuring recommendations were widely noted in early studies. For example Baines (1985: 50) pointed out that 'a balance sheet of accepted and rejected recommendations is a poor register of influence', while Drewry (1985a: 6) observed that '[a]ttempts to measure in any precise way the impact of select committees on government are bedevilled by problems of causality'. Giddings (1985: 369) suggested that the multiple objectives of select committees mean that '[n]o easy measure of their achievements or effectiveness… is possible'. More recently, Rogers and Walters have claimed that '[t]here is no point in trying to measure effectiveness by totting up how many recommendations are accepted by the government' (2006: 375). Almost all of our interviewees also expressed scepticism about tracking the acceptance and implementation of recommendations as a way of measuring influence, and we draw from their more detailed comments in this section.

We have sought to use quantitative research methods that circumvent these problems, as far as possible. For example our coding scheme seeks to grade recommendations for the extent to which they represent a change to government policy, in order not to exaggerate the influence of insignificant recommendations. In this respect our work goes further – and gives a more reliable assessment of influence – than other studies. Nonetheless there remain four key limitations with attempts to quantitatively assess the influence of select committees. These are the impact of non-inquiry work, the broader impact of committee inquiries, the potentially misleading nature of tracing recommendations, and the difficulty in attributing change to the committee.

Non-inquiry work

The first challenge of measuring committee influence through take-up of inquiry recommendations is the large range of other committee work. Most of our interviewees seemed to believe that reports and their recommendations accounted for only about half of committee influence. One clerk described committee work as like an iceberg, where recommendations were the most visible but potentially least important aspect of a report, a report the most visible but potentially least important aspect of the inquiry process, and an inquiry the most visible but potentially least important part of committee work. In this respect focusing on the acceptance and implementation rate of recommendations in committee reports may significantly *understate* the extent of committee influence.

We did not focus in detail on other aspects of committee work. But for example several interviewees pointed to the importance of pre-legislative scrutiny and pre-appointment hearings (and committee staff and members expressed considerable enthusiasm for doing more of this work). Health Committee interviewees highlighted the importance of the Annual Public Expenditure Questionnaire and its large readership amongst NHS practitioners. Committees' reviews of departmental annual reports were also described as significant, particularly for the Defence and Foreign Affairs committees. One parliamentary clerk claimed that these changed the culture of the department in terms of greater openness, while a committee chair highlighted the usefulness of being able to put the Permanent Secretary on the spot on potentially everything. The Defence Committee's scrutiny of Estimates is also a key part of its work; one parliamentary clerk described these as a 'huge success' in getting government to disclose more information.

Other impact of the inquiry

Another factor is that even if inquiries are considered as the most influential aspect of committee work, it is not necessarily the report and recommendations but the process of running an inquiry that can effect change. One clerk that we interviewed went so far as to claim that 'if you were really cynical you wouldn't do reports, just announce inquiries'. Another suggested that 'it is a rare report that has more impact than just conducting an inquiry'. This is supported to some extent by our

media data, showing that many newspaper articles cover committee evidence sessions, and the same is found by Kubala (2011).

Even simply launching an inquiry into a particular policy topic (including an obscure one) can help focus minds in Whitehall on to that topic. This is discussed further in terms of 'spotlighting issues' in the section below on non-quantifiable forms of influence. Evidence sessions may also be influential (as also discussed further below under 'exposure'). A quango official – describing how seriously they took the process of monitoring evidence sessions – suggested that 'in a way reports are just a formality; no one is interested in the report, only in the evidence sessions'. Several interviewees had anecdotes about policy being announced in the course of an inquiry, particularly on the morning of the Secretary of State or Minister giving evidence. For example interviewees connected with the Defence Committee suggested that defence procurement decisions were often announced on the day of an evidence session. If policy changed during the course of an inquiry then committee recommendations in that area become less likely. Again these factors mean that tracing of recommendations is likely to significantly *understate* committee influence.

Misleading nature of tracing recommendations

The committee inquiry may therefore be more than the sum of its recommendations, as influence may pre-empt the report. But tracing recommendations can also exaggerate committee influence, as an unambitious inquiry can have more chance of success. One chair cited an inquiry – which looks successful in terms of simple numbers – as one which he regretted, because the committee failed to take the government's policy head on. In addition, several interviewees pointed out that ministers can directly influence ideas for inquiries. This was noted in early studies of select committee influence, for example Baines (1985: 50) observes that a high proportion of accepted recommendations may 'provide no greater evidence of the influence of a committee on a department than the department on the committee'.

Another way that recommendation take-up can exaggerate committee influence is if the committee has an eye to its own influence. Committees can tailor recommendations to make them more easy for the government to accept, thereby inflating the acceptance rate (Aldons 2000). One chair that we interviewed explained that their committee preferred to recommend 'consideration', as this was more likely to be palatable to government. But the clerks that we interviewed were split on this point: some acknowledged that recommendations are toned down with their potential for acceptance in mind, while others felt that fulfilling such crude measures of influence was of little interest to the committee. All of this indicates how 'performance measurement' based on the success rate of recommendations could be at best misleading, and at worst create perverse incentives for committees.

In other ways, tracing recommendations might downplay influence. For example there is the phenomenon of the 'delayed drop', where a recommendation is initially rejected but emerges later in some form, or where a report can 'stimulate change and development within the policy community irrespective of any action by government and for the practitioners to take on the colours, chameleon-like, of the committee report unilaterally' (Hawes 1992: 228). We found some examples, discussed later in the report, and our analysis avoids this problem at least partially by using a relatively long study period of 13 years. There are various reasons why 'delayed drop' might happen. For example government funding may not be available immediately to implement a recommendation, or changes of attitude may result from ministerial or civil service turnover.

Sometimes the committee may not intend for certain recommendations to be accepted at all. Several of the clerks that we interviewed spoke of writing recommendations that they didn't expect to succeed. One suggested that there was a strategic process of inserting recommendations which were 'out there, fun' alongside more conservative ones. A civil servant similarly suggested that a

committee is likely to throw in some 'off the wall' recommendations that they know the government will not accept, because it is seen as part of the committee's role to 'push and challenge the government on tricky issues'. These recommendations might be termed 'probing' recommendations, with a similar form and purpose as 'probing' legislative amendments. They may have little chance of success, but bring issues to light and put things on the political agenda. Hence treating them on a par with other recommendations may underestimate committee influence. Similarly some interviewees observed that a strongly worded conclusion can do more work than a recommendation in forcing government to rethink or scrutinise a policy position. Ignoring the influence of conclusions, by focusing on an analysis of recommendations, may again downplay committee influence. Indeed one interviewee pointed out that the story told by a report might not be easily reducible down to individual recommendations *or* conclusions, suggesting that a good report is a 'sustained, persuasive argument that doesn't always lend itself to a series of recommendations'.

A further shortcoming of our quantitative research is, of course, that we only traced recommendations aimed at central government. This discounts the fact that recommendations aimed at outside bodies may have some influence. This is particularly likely to be the case with other public bodies but, as discussed further later in the report, committee recommendations can also be influential on industry. Some interviewees suggested that reports could at times even be influential on foreign governments: the Foreign Affairs Committee evidence session with the Dalai Lama was cited as causing a stir with the Chinese government.

Who has influence?

Philip Norton suggests that while a select committee may have advocated a certain course of action and government followed it, 'cause and effect…cannot be proved: the government may have intended to take the action anyway' (2005: 130). Where change is directly observable and in line with committee recommendations, it may not be the committee – or only the committee – that is responsible.

An important factor is that the stakeholder community which is feeding evidence to the committee is also likely to be talking independently to government. This problem of ascribing influence has been widely noted in the literature. As Hawes (1993: 143-4) puts it, 'it is not always clear whether it was the committee's influence or another unacknowledged source which led to acceptance'. Examples that we encountered included the Health Committee report on *Health Inequalities* (2009), where the committee was working in a crowded field, so as a civil servant put it 'to single out the committee would be difficult'. Similarly another interviewee noted that it could be argued that the Defence Committee swung the Labour government in favour of a defence review, but that on the other hand 'everyone was calling for a review'. This of course depends on how crowded the field is. In the case of something like the crisis over Northern Rock, one interviewee suggested, 'the [Treasury] select committee was bound to be just one voice amongst a million'. In some cases multiple committees can even consider the same policy area, for example the Health, Home Affairs and Culture, Media and Sport committees all considered the issue of alcohol regulation. On other issues the committee might be a lone voice, making it easier to attribute influence.

Some interviewees suggested that despite this 'attribution problem' (as one termed it), a committee adds a different dimension to policy development. As discussed in the section on successful reports, a committee inquiry can provide a 'tipping point' in an ongoing debate, and the committee and interest groups can act as 'mutually reinforcing voices'. As a former minister suggested, committees are an 'integral part of the pressure' which may ultimately lead to policy change. Moreover, a committee can add political reinforcement which is unique. One Permanent Secretary observed that 'it is unsurprising that government and select committees come to the same conclusions on the basis of what's coming in as evidence at more or less the same time, but the

fact that the select committee is endorsing it is important'. Thus if the committee recommended something this 'gives it a much stronger chance of being legislated on', and in the competition for legislation, committee support is 'a very strong factor in pushing it up the pecking order'.

Another more subtle attribution problem is the challenge of disentangling the influence of the committee and its chair. Some chairs have influence in their own right, more or less independent of the committee. The Transport Committee's reputation, for example, was inextricably linked with that of Gwyneth Dunwoody as an outspoken critic of government. Chairing a select committee lends gravitas to what an individual says, while the reputation of an individual chair can similarly bolster the potential influence of a committee. Within our study several chairs had respected reputations and were listened to by government only in part because of their chairing of a committee. Personal reputation and committee reputation are therefore mutually supportive.

Box 3: How counting successful recommendations may fail to capture influence

May overestimate influence	May underestimate influence
If recommendations accepted/implemented are relatively trivial	If recommendations affect long-term government thinking and are accepted years later
If committees tailor recommendations to those that it believes government will accept	If committee makes 'probing' recommendations which it knows government cannot accept
If the committee simply echoes concerns expressed by other influential groups	If committee catalyses opinion and its report acts as a 'tipping point'
	If reports are only part of inquiry influence, e.g. because evidence sessions matter as much/more
	If government changes policy in anticipation of/during an inquiry
	If successful recommendations are targeted at other bodies, beyond central government

In summary, there are numerous reasons to be sceptical about the outcome of a quantitative analysis based purely on acceptance or implementation of committee recommendations. In various ways this may both exaggerate, and significantly downplay, the real influence of select committees, though on balance it seems likely that committees are *more* influential than simple counting suggests. Our quantitative analysis certainly appears to indicate, on its own, that committees are influential. Despite all of the observations made here, it is very unlikely that the 340 recommendations from committees 'fully implemented' in our sample all reflected actions taken coincidently by government which would not have occurred without pressure from a select committee. If this is representative of all departmental committees, some 3000 were probably 'fully accepted' over this period, and around 7000 accepted overall. Committees are therefore, at least to some extent, influential. The greater concern is that a quantitative analysis of recommendations completely ignores important less formal means by which committees influence government. These less quantifiable forms of influence are discussed in the following sections.

The policy impact of select committees: a qualitative analysis

The previous section has demonstrated why a purely quantitative analysis may give us only a partial understanding of select committee influence, and may even be misleading. This is why we complemented our data collection about the success of committee recommendations with interviews to provide greater context, as many other authors have previously done. We used these interviews to explore various aspects of select committee work, and particularly committee influence. In this part of the report we set out findings from this more qualitative research. In the first section we briefly explore some factors which contribute to successful committee inquiries and their reports. After that we propose a series of discrete forms of non-quantifiable influence.

Influential committee inquiries

One key question that we explored with our interviewees – many of whom had worked as staff or members of committees, and many others of whom had worked on the government side – was which particular committee reports they would single out, from our study period, as being influential. Some reports were mentioned repeatedly by interviewees, and examples of these are given in Box 4. By looking at these examples we can begin to draw some conclusions about factors which are associated with successful reports, as they share several interesting features. Reflecting on the examples that we were given also creates potential to compare our quantitative results with the more anecdotal evidence provided by our interviewees.

The extent to which we can draw such comparisons is limited by the fact that we followed through recommendations from only a sample of committee inquiries. As described earlier in the report, our initial sample of 216 inquiry reports was drawn from a total population of 505 over the period 1997 - 2010 (i.e. representing 43% overall). We followed through all of the recommendations from only 151 reports (30%) with respect to government acceptance and implementation. Therefore only a minority of reports mentioned to us by interviewees could be expected to fall within our sample, and we held data on the 'success' of recommendations in less than a third of all reports.

Nonetheless it became clear early on in our interviews that the 'success rate' of recommendations was only a partial indicator of committee success, partly for reasons already given. The example of the Home Affairs Committee illustrates this point well. One of this committee's reports from our sample with a particularly high success rate in terms of recommendations was that on *Electoral Law and Administration* (1998). Among its recommendations were the proposals to establish an Electoral Commission, introduce a rolling electoral register, and make the process of voting easier and more flexible through various other changes. Many of these were subsequently implemented by the government. However, interviewees confirmed that these proposals were already under consideration by government before the committee reported, so policy change could not be ascribed to the committee alone. Likewise, the committee's report into the *Extradition Bill* (2002) had many of its recommendations accepted. But neither of these cases were highlighted by interviewees as particular committee successes, and indeed the second was the cause of some regret to the chair at the time, who felt that the committee had been too cautious in its recommendations. In contrast, one of the reports that he highlighted as successful – *Police Disciplinary and Complaints Procedures* (1998) – was said to have had most of its recommendations rejected by government (this report fell outside our sample). Nonetheless, it was claimed, police practice changed significantly following the report, as a result of the committee having focused public attention on the problems with current procedures. As noted earlier, this report received a relatively large amount of media attention.

Box 4: Some examples of successful committee reports

Smoking in Public Places **(Health Committee, 2005)**

Labour's 2001 manifesto promised a partial ban on smoking in public places. A 2004 white paper consulted on a ban excluding membership clubs and licensed premises that did not serve food. Following consultation, Cabinet decided to stick with this policy, despite Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt reportedly favouring a more comprehensive ban. It was then included in the 2005 Health Bill. In response to the bill, the committee produced a report based on evidence from 40 witnesses, over 1000 responses to the chair appearing on Radio 4's *You and Yours*, and a visit to Ireland to view effects of a comprehensive ban. It argued against a partial ban for various reasons, including logistic problems and the need to protect all workers from secondhand smoke. Parliamentary pressure mounted: committee members tabled an amendment for a total ban and 90 backbench MPs signed a motion to the same effect. Negotiations between the committee chair and whips helped secure a free vote at report stage and the committee worked with the health lobby to persuade MPs to vote for a comprehensive ban, which they did overwhelmingly. The committee was not unique or even agenda-setting in calling for a full ban, but it provided crucial political reinforcement for the mounting medical evidence, and MPs took its endorsement seriously. As one put it, the committee 'crystallised an idea whose time had come'. The then Chief Medical Officer has described the committee as 'hugely influential' due to the perfect timing of its intervention.[19]

The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants **(Health Committee, 1998)**

The Health Committee described former child migrants – British children mainly in the care of voluntary organisations who were emigrated to former Dominions in the 1920s-60s – as 'a group whose fate had largely been forgotten'. Its inquiry received 300 pieces of written evidence, many handwritten from previous child migrants, and it visited Australia and New Zealand. The report argued that child migration was a 'bad, and in human terms, costly mistake' and made recommendations for reparation and reunions. In direct response to the committee's recommendations, the Department of Health set up a central database of records and a support fund of £1m to pay for family reunions. Frank Dobson, then Health Secretary, claimed that the committee influenced him 'significantly' and that policy changed as a direct result. Revisiting its recommendations in *The Committee's Work, Sessions 1997-98 to 1999-2000* (2001), the committee concluded that the government had accepted and implemented most of its recommendations**.** But developments did not stop there, as Gordon Brown apologised on behalf of the nation in February 2010 and pledged a further £6m for travel and reunion costs. The committee thus, as one interviewee put it, was 'not just a catalyst' but also a 'major player in the long-term process'. This inquiry was described by a member as one of the committee's biggest successes.

Cash Machine Charges **(Treasury Committee, 2005)**

This was one of a series of inquiries carried out by the committee into transparency and value for the consumer in the financial services industry. The report is relatively unusual (though not untypical of the Treasury Committee), in aiming many of its key recommendations at industry, rather than government. The committee took evidence from industry figures, drawing attention to the rising number of cash machines that charged for withdrawals, particularly in low-income areas. It saw risks of free cash machines increasingly being squeezed out, expressed concern about lack of transparency in charging, and called on the industry to agree and enforce tougher standards. Such standards were accepted by the industry during the course of the inquiry, though the committee report called for these to go further. It also concluded that 'an absence of effective self-regulation beyond this year would not be acceptable', leaving the threat of greater government intervention clearly hanging over the industry. The exposure provided through industry and other figures giving evidence, combined with this threat, was sufficient to result in several of the committee's main recommendations to industry being adopted. This issue clearly has a major impact on the lives of the British people, and cash machines which charge for withdrawals must now be clearly labelled.

***Pub Companies* (BIS Committee, 2009)**

In 2004 the committee published a report also entitled *Pub Companies*. It investigated the role of the large property companies that own more than half of UK pubs, many of which are let to tenants who must purchase most of their drink from the company. There was concern that the companies were too powerful, and that the terms set for tenants were contributing to increasing pub closures. The 2004 report highlighted problems with how the companies operated, but urged the industry to reform itself, suggesting that 'if the industry does not show signs of accepting and complying with an adequate voluntary code then the government should not hesitate to impose a statutory code'. The Campaign for Real Ale described this as a 'whitewash'.[20] Five years on, the committee returned to the topic, concluding that little had improved. It backed its findings with a survey, which found two-thirds of affected leaseholders dissatisfied with the system, and a similar number earning less than £15,000 per year. The 2009 report recommended urgent government action, including a reference of the 'pubcos' to the Competition Commission. This didn't happen, but government did appoint a minister for pubs, and publish a 12 point plan for the industry, giving it a year to fully comply with its Code of Practice, and threatening to make the code statutory if this failed. This was a high-profile issue, also subject to attention in 2009 by a report from the thinktank ippr.[21] But the committee's report, and particularly its survey, were important in making the case for reform.

***Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-Based Violence* (Home Affairs, 2008)**

This was a busy policy field with lots of work being undertaken by government including a national domestic violence delivery plan, inter-ministerial group on domestic violence and dedicated Forced Marriage Unit. Nonetheless the inquiry led to concrete policy changes, including a 'Together we can end violence against women and girls' strategy. Both specialist advisers on the inquiry were involved in implementing the strategy – one at the Home Office and one through the Association of Chief Police Officers. Domestic Violence Protection Orders recommended by the committee were also due to be piloted, but were deferred by the coalition government in August 2010. The evidence sessions also led to changes: the reluctance of some schools to display posters from the Forced Marriage Unit received a lot of media attention, and led to revised guidance to schools even before the committee reported. During the inquiry the government also announced measures to help victims of domestic violence with insecure immigration status and no recourse to public funds. It 'felt like the government was listening' said one of those involved with the committee. In a follow-up evidence session in early 2010 the chair described the original recommendations as having been received 'very warmly at the time'. This evidence session found that many of the committee's concerns had been addressed but there was still considerable progress to be made.

***A Draft Civil Service Bill: Completing the Reform* (PASC, 2004)**

Prior to the 1997 general election Labour was committed to a Civil Service Act, to put the core values of the civil service on a statutory footing. The Committee on Standards in Public Life urged government to act in 2000, and it promised to do so. In its 2001 report *Making Government Work: the Emerging Issues*, PASC concluded that 'the time is now overdue for a Civil Service Act'. When no action followed, the committee produced this report, largely comprising a fully drafted bill (alongside evidence from key individuals, such as former Cabinet Secretaries, supporting the change). Ten months later, in November 2004, the government published its own draft bill for consultation (which PASC responded to). From then on PASC raised the issue regularly, including in various evidence sessions with ministers and Cabinet Secretaries, asking for progress reports on the bill. Finally after Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, a green paper, *The Governance of Britain*, promised to legislate for the civil service (plus several other matters raised in a second PASC report of 2004, *Taming the Prerogative*). Provisions on the civil service were included in a draft bill in 2008, and in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill which achieved royal assent in 2010. One Cabinet office insider said that 'PASC was the most powerful driver' in bringing about this change, on which Tony Wright just 'kept on chipping away'. Many believe that without the pressure from PASC this legislation would not have happened.

***The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform* (PASC, 2002)**

Reform of the House of Lords was rarely off the agenda during Labour's time in office. The hereditary peers were removed by the 1999 House of Lords Act, and a Royal Commission was asked to consider the 'second stage' of reform, reporting in 2000. In 2001 government produced a white paper, *The House of Lords: Completing the Reform*, accepting the Commission's proposal that the reformed chamber should be largely appointed. PASC examined the white paper, and this report was its critique. Based in part on a survey of MPs which showed that only 7% supported the mainly appointed option, while 66% favoured a largely or wholly elected second chamber, the committee urged that the government proposals be dropped in favour of a 60% elected house. Under this and other pressure the proposals were abandoned, and free votes held in 2003 with inconclusive results. Further Commons free votes in 2007 favoured a largely or wholly elected chamber, and a 2008 white paper *An Elected Second Chamber: Further Reform of the House of Lords* proposed to bring this into effect. The same policy is supported by the current coalition. PASC's report was influential in debate, and several of its detailed recommendations were adopted many years later by government. Its proposal that 'the next step would be the production of a draft Bill for consideration by a joint committee of both Houses' was finally acted upon in 2011, nine years on. The committee therefore achieved both negative and positive effects: firstly, in helping block government policy in a major area, and second by providing alternatives which went on to be adopted far later.

***Overseas Territories* (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2008)**

In 2007-08 the committee conducted a major inquiry into the UK's overseas territories (OTs), for which the FCO has responsibility. The committee received a large quantity of written evidence from inhabitants, and in mid-March 2008 visited several overseas territories, including the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). It found that there was a 'palpable climate of fear' on TCI, and received serious allegations of corruption. As a result, the outgoing Governor announced the appointment of a commission of inquiry and in 2009 the minister responsible for the OTs announced a need to suspend parts of the TCI constitution and restore direct British rule. In a follow up report in 2010 the committee warned of the failure of government to put in place adequate funding arrangements for the work of the Special Investigation and Prosecution Team. The new government has agreed to delay the elections due to be held in August 2011 in TCI, and accepted the committee's analysis that there is a 'serious and deteriorating problem in the Turks and Caicos Islands'. This inquiry is widely cited as the most influential by the Foreign Affairs Committee over our study period. One interviewee described it as a 'clear case of influence on government policy, which – at least to staff and members – feels unusual'. But a former minister claimed that the committee influence was a matter of luck: they stumbled across the problem because they had time and resources to visit, so 'it was not the mechanism of the select committee... the all-party group would have found the same thing'. It is clear that the capacity of the committee to go on visits made a difference here: one clerk described this type of committee influence as 'turning over stones'.

***Educating Service Children* (Defence Committee, 2006)**

This inquiry took evidence through a website set up to consult with the service community. The website got 5000 hits and 115 postings from young people, service families, teachers and schools. The report argued for earlier warning to local authorities when a unit would be relocated in the area so that they could prepare adequately, and children would know in advance which school they would be sent to. It also recommended better liaison with the devolved authorities in Wales and Scotland. This was described by one clerk as 'a 'soft' subject' but one that 'would have been a nowhere subject in the MoD' were it not for the committee. As a result of the inquiry the department agreed to include a service children marker in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) exercise. One committee member described the report as welcomed by the service community, saying 'defence is about far more than weapons, procurement and training'.

Although our techniques for tracing recommendations seek to avoid some of these problems, for example by taking account of the extent to which recommendations are in line with existing government policy, it is nonetheless probably impossible to come up with a metric that describes a 'successful' committee report. When judging the success of reports, Monk (2009b) reduces this to a dichotomous variable: defined by whether a single recommendation in the report is accepted or not. This offers a very crude indicator of committee success. But, as the above examples illustrate, the overall success rate of all recommendations in the report may also be a poor guide, since many of these recommendations may be relatively minor or in line with existing policy. A report which has one single 'big' recommendation accepted could make more impact than one which leads to numerous small changes in government policy – though the reverse might also at times be true. Plus, of course, a 75% success rate for a report with four recommendations may be less impressive than for a report with 20, or 100, recommendations. For all of these reasons we do not consider it worthwhile to attempt to calculate which reports were most successful by using our quantitative results. It appears far more fruitful to try and draw some general lessons from the examples put forward by our expert interviewees.

The first example in the box offers an illustration of the difficulties (already mentioned in the previous section) of assigning unique influence to a committee. In the case of the smoking ban, there were many groups active in the field, lobbying government both for and against a ban. The committee stepped into what was already a relatively crowded policy field. But in doing so it was able to look at the competing evidence available, test the opinions of different specialists against each other in a public setting, and publish its conclusions. The government was widely believed to be split on the issue, so policy was hanging in the balance. The existing commitment was to a partial ban, but it now appeared that pressure was building to go further. This illustrates a phenomenon suggested to us by interviewees whereby a committee report acts as a 'tipping point' in an ongoing, finely balanced, policy debate. It is not that the committee necessarily recommends anything new, but that it makes an intervention, drawing on previous evidence, at a crucial time. One interviewee described this to us as a committee 'riding the crest of a wave' of public and specialist opinion. Several other interviewees used similar terms to describe this kind of report.

In this particular case, the committee's impact on parliamentary opinion, rather than directly on government action, was clearly very important. As the legislation was currently passing through the House of Commons, MPs' ability to influence the outcome was at its maximum. This is another phenomenon which is seen repeatedly in the case of successful committee reports (and is further discussed in the next section). A similar example given to us was the BIS report on *The Postal Services Bill* (2009), which included provisions for the involvement of a private sector equity partner in Royal Mail. The committee concluded that 'we are not persuaded that the provisions contained in the bill allowing such a partnership are necessary or desirable'. Following this and other objections the government dropped the bill. Once again, since there were many other opponents of these provisions (most notably the trade unions), this policy change cannot be ascribed to the committee alone. But as one interviewee put it, its report 'went into the melting pot', helped contribute to the public and parliamentary debate, and provided ammunition to the bill's opponents.

Another feature which is common to several of the successful reports described in the box is a firm research basis for the committee's conclusions. Committees rarely commission external research, not least because the parliamentary budget available for this is extremely limited. But they do have more resources available internally than applied in the past, through more generous staffing, including committee specialists, plus the ability to employ specialist advisers on an inquiry-by-inquiry basis. New technology also makes surveying opinion in the policy community significantly easier than it used to be. Two of the example reports were cited as being influential specifically because the inquiry included commissioning of new research, which meant that the

committee's report put new evidence into the public domain and was therefore harder to ignore. The BIS Committee report on *Pub Companies* (2009) benefited from a survey of tenants, which provided some fairly devastating conclusions. Similarly the PASC report *The Second Chamber* (2002) demonstrated through a survey of MPs that the government's proposals for House of Lords reform had very little parliamentary support. Other cases also built to some extent on research: for example the Home Affairs Committee report on *Domestic Violence* (2008) made use of an online consultation, and use of this vehicle is now increasingly common among select committees. When original evidence has been gathered it is harder to dismiss a committee's report as simply representing the prejudices of a small group of MPs.

Another attribute which is shared by several of the successful reports cited here is the repeated return by a committee to a policy area. This applies most notably in terms of *Pub Companies* and the PASC report *A Draft Civil Service Bill* (2004), as well as the Foreign Affairs Committee report on *Overseas Territories* (2008). Many interviewees spoke to us about the benefits of committees returning to policy topics to review government action, and/or wider developments, after an earlier inquiry. Sometimes, many interviewees acknowledged, it takes time to persuade government to change its mind. As one former committee chair put it, the first inquiry into a topic may be a case of 'planting a seed'. Or using another metaphor, it can 'take a long time to turn the ship around'. Sometimes government may not initially be ready to change policy, but if the committee report generates a wider debate, this can help demonstrate support for an alternative course of action which may be adopted in the end. Alternatively, it may simply be a kind of war of attrition. One committee clerk spoke of the 'drip drip drip of repeated sessions', and another said that 'you tend to wear the enemy down a bit... pennies begin to drop, or ministers begin to say 'there's something in that, I really sort of half agree with what the committee is saying'. One civil servant noted that sometimes the committee said something and the government responded negatively, but then it 'sits in the back of your mind', and consequently 'a lot of what we did was initiated by [the committee]'. At times changes of officials or changes of ministers may cause a department to look again at policies. One interviewee commenting on the proposed civil service act described progress to achieve this as a 'long hard road'.

Some interviewees suggested that committee reports were more likely to be successful in relatively more obscure or 'niche' areas of departmental policy than on higher-profile flagship policies. This clearly applies to the Health Committee report on *The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants* (1998) and the Defence Committee report on *Educating Service Children* (2006). Both of these were successful because they raised the issue up the departmental agenda, and made proposals in an area where departmental policy was not firmly fixed. The same might be said of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on *Overseas Territories*. However it is clear from earlier examples that committee influence is by no means restricted to obscure and minor policies: the smoking ban, the Postal Services Bill and House of Lords reform certainly do not fall into this category.

In a perhaps connected point, it was suggested to us by several interviewees that a committee is likely to benefit from using 'creativity' in terms of interpreting its policy brief. A committee which simply responds to government initiatives, where in many cases policy will already be relatively fixed, is unlikely to make as much difference as a committee which pushes the boundaries of existing policy. An example of this is the Treasury Committee report on *Cash Machine Charges* (2005), which was one of a set of inquiries that the committee ran into the impact of the financial services industry on the consumer. This could again be seen as relatively 'niche' in Treasury terms (and largely the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority), but undoubtedly was of very mainstream concern to the public. One committee member suggested that had the committee confined itself simply to scrutinising the Treasury, for example through looking at the Budget and Pre-Budget Report, it might have had little influence. But by focusing on these other matters it filled a gap where there was relatively little other political accountability.

One committee of our seven, the Public Administration Committee, ticks several of these boxes at once. As demonstrated by our earlier figures, over our study period it conducted more 'agenda setting' inquiries than any other committee, and also published more reports following up on previous inquiries. One reason for this repeated return to particular topics was perhaps its continuous chairing for 11 consecutive years by a single member. The nature of its policy responsibilities also meant that many of the topics that it investigated were relatively niche or low-profile compared to those covered by, for example, the Health Committee or Home Affairs Committee. Because it is not strictly a departmental committee it also has slightly more freedom to define its own agenda, and look at cross-departmental topics such as public service reform. Arguably more than any other committee it employed the kind of 'creativity' suggested above. It was also a fairly isolated contributor to policy debates in these areas compared to other committees which operated in fields more populated by outside interest groups. Hence government take-up of its recommendations is a fairly clear indication of committee success. Consequently, although PASC did not show up as particularly impactful in quantitative terms according to our earlier analysis, many interviewees considered it highly influential. Over our study period it was fairly clearly linked to, for example, changes in the Ministerial Code, reform of the Government Information Service, the introduction of the Prime Minister's appearances in front of the Liaison Committee, and of pre-appointment hearings by select committees, plus changes to the rules on lobbying, the granting of honours and the Royal prerogative. One of the committees 'successes' with the most far-reaching consequences was its proposal in 1999 that the provisions of the Freedom of Information Bill should be extended to parliament. This change was made after an amendment was proposed by committee members, and eventually helped lead to the MPs' expenses crisis of 2009. This demonstrates that even seemingly obscure policy changes can have high-profile effects.

Finally, it is worth noting that committee reports can be influential in the negative sense, by persuading government not to do something, as well as in a positive sense, through promoting new proposals. The PASC report on *The Second Chamber* succeeded in this negative sense, by contributing to a climate which forced government to drop its proposals for House of Lords reform. Again, a quantitative analysis of the success of the recommendations in this report would suggest that the committee was not influential, since the proposal that a reformed second chamber should be majority-elected has not (yet) been implemented. But nonetheless, this was an important report which in some ways helped form a blueprint for future proposals. The publication in May 2011 of Nick Clegg's plans for Lords reform could be seen as an example of the 'delayed drop': though it also illustrates how ascription of influence to a committee is difficult, as there were many others pressing for this change. At other times a committee's recommendations can be more explicitly aimed at stopping government policy, as in the case of the *Postal Services Bill* discussed above. Another example cited by interviewees was the Home Affairs Committee report on *Policing in the 21st Century* (2008), which recommended against proposals in a recent green paper for directly elected members of police authorities. The Labour government did not proceed with these proposals, although similar plans are now being pursued by the coalition government.

Key non-quantifiable forms of select committee influence

Our quantitative analysis of committee recommendations accepted and implemented offers some evidence of committee influence on government policy. But as discussed earlier, it gives an incomplete, and in some ways even flawed, account of committee influence. Quantitative analysis may in some ways exaggerate committee influence (for example if the committee has been one of many calling for a certain policy change), but in other ways it may downplay the extent of influence (for example because hearings themselves may be influential, and government may change policy in advance of a committee publishing a report).

Others writing on select committees, along with many of those we interviewed, have articulated problems with a purely quantitative analysis. One of the key purposes of the interviews was therefore to gain a fuller understanding of the nature and forms of select committee influence on policy. In this section of the report we set out the other forms that select committee influence may take, and suggest that these fall under seven headings.

Previous authors have also proposed various lists of types of committee influence. For example Blackburn and Kennon (2003) suggest five forms, while Hawes (1993) provides an exhaustive list of 18 different ways in which influence policy.[22] Summing up the first major study of the House of Commons select committees, Giddings (1985) did not produce a list as such, but evaluated committee influence on three different sectors: the government, the House, and public opinion. Inevitably our classification includes elements of overlap with these authors' earlier categories, though unlike Giddings our primary focus is on how the committees influence government: both directly and indirectly. We do not pretend that our list is necessarily superior to those which have gone before, as there is rarely a single correct means of summarising complex concepts such as these. But we do believe that our list represents well the various modes of influence enjoyed by the contemporary select committees, which may be somewhat different to those which were relevant in the past. Over time the committees have gained in resources, public profile and reputation. Although this is impossible fully quantify, our research suggests that over the same period they have gained in influence as well.

Added to the most obvious form of committee influence, as discussed earlier in this report, we therefore propose that there are seven relatively distinct forms of policy influence enjoyed by select committees:

- Direct government acceptance of committee recommendations (discussed above)
- Influencing policy debate
- Spotlighting issues and altering policy priorities
- Brokering in policy disputes
- Providing expert evidence
- Holding government and outside bodies accountable
- Exposure
- Generating fear (anticipated reactions)

The extent to which each of these forms of influence applies varies between the committees in our sample, and for each committee varies over time according to factors such as those discussed earlier (e.g. character of the chair, minister, nature of the policy issue). Each is discussed in turn below, with some examples given from the seven case study committees.

Contribution to wider debate

The role of select committees in contributing to policy debate has been widely recognised by other authors. For example Drewry (1989: 398) notes that '[t]he potential attrition value of select committee investigations and reports in putting new ideas on the agenda' and 'changing the way people think' lies at the heart of any appraisal of their 'success'. Select committee reports are clearly public documents, now more widely available than in the past via parliament's website, while both committee reports and hearings also get significant media coverage. Committee members also feed directly into debates at Westminster.

Some that we interviewed considered this contribution to broader debates to be the most important aspect of committee influence. One committee member emphasised repeatedly that evidence taking and the production of reports was 'part of the ongoing process of political debate', while another proposed that committees were 'simply part of the political process'. They bring issues to political attention, and provide evidence and arguments to fuel continued debate. One

example of this working effectively was the PASC report on *Taming the Prerogative* (2004), which in the words of one interviewee 'set the tone of debate and discussion', and proved very influential on the *Governance of Britain* green paper published three years later.

The way in which a select committee brings unique input to debate may be subtle. As already indicated, the select committee is often just one of many voices advocating particular forms of policy change. Various interest groups may have lobbied government, and perhaps also had a media presence, in advance of a committee starting an inquiry. But as mentioned above, many interviewees emphasised the potential for a committee to 'crystallise a body of opinion' and sometimes provide the 'tipping point' in a policy debate. Likewise several interviewees suggested that that some successful committee reports can 'surf the crest of a wave' of popular opinion and hence ultimately bring about change. At times the committee's involvement in a field may even be controversial if that field is felt to be already crowded. One example given was the Health Committee's inquiry on *Health Inequalities* (2009), carried out at the same time as the Marmot review on the same topic, which reported in 2010.[23] Some questioned whether this was unwise duplication, but an official close to the process noted that the committee could 'create a political narrative and give weight to a direction of policy', in a useful way. In contrast most members of the Marmot review were academics.

Select committees can also have a role in providing a voice to those who have been relatively overlooked in policy debates. One committee member said that 'one of the great things about select committees is you can choose who you invite to give evidence' . This means, he continued, that you can expose views that 'might otherwise have difficulty getting into the public domain'. One example mentioned by several interviewees was the Home Affairs Committee inquiry and report on *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System* (2007) which brought witnesses into parliament who might rarely be heard, and which is still quoted today approvingly by the sector. As one interviewee suggested, committees can provide a forum for proposals from groups who feel that they have reached a 'dead end with the government'.

One particular way in which committees can inform and influence debate is obviously through parliament itself, to which they have a unique form of access. Once again, the fact that committees report from a political point of view, and usually on a unanimous cross-party basis, is important. There are many other sources of information, such as House of Commons Library papers, from which members can inform themselves, but a report endorsed by their colleagues may have greater weight. One committee clerk suggested that committee reports can become 'part of the folk knowledge of the House of Commons' and one committee member similarly suggested that they can be very influential on the 'future thought of parliament'. At times committee reports can be very specifically targeted at informing parliament: as in the case of the Defence Committee report on *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent* (2006): which intentionally included simply analysis and no recommendations. Similarly the Foreign Affairs Committee report *Foreign Policy Aspects of the Lisbon Treaty* (2008) was deliberately timed and 'tagged' to the debate to inform the House's consideration of the European Union (Amendment) Bill which put the Treaty into effect. For these two committees, informing parliament may arguably be their most important form of influence. In addition, for all committees, there is obviously also direct input into parliamentary debates by committee members, past and present. These contributions, and more generally the policy expertise that committees allow members to develop, may help shape the tone and quality of debates. At times select committees members are also selected to sit on Public Bill Committees, which can represent a further way in which their expertise can feed into the legislative process.

In terms of wider public debate, the primary means by which committees are able to feed in is through the mass media. The viewing of committee hearings via the parliament channel remains a specialist pursuit but, as our figures on newspaper stories demonstrate, committees also have far

wider reach in terms of generating stories about their evidence sessions and reports. For example several interviewees noted that the Defence Committee report on *Helicopter Capability* (2009) got significant media coverage, and that this in turn drew MPs' attention to the issue which fed into parliamentary debates and private conversations with ministers. Coverage in specialist media, as well as the popular press, may be important. For example it was suggested that reports of the Health Committee's work in the *Health Service Journal* (i.e. the main trade journal) contributed significantly to the committee's reputation in the health policy community. Many of those interviewed clearly felt that media profile was an important part of building up a committee's authority, and therefore its influence. The exposure created by journalists attending committee hearings and the government's obligation to publish and defend responses to committee reports was also seen as creating an important check. As one committee member put it 'the committee is not taken seriously unless it has the ability to generate media attention: how else will it generate fear?'.

But there were also many negative comments made by interviewees about committees' relationship with the media. Some committees were seen as too driven by the desire for media attention, as discussed further in the section on 'Weaknesses in the select committee system', below. If committees measure their success too much in terms of media coverage this will result in short-termism and a focus on attention-grabbing issues to the detriment of other important policy areas. In addition it was widely noted that media coverage is almost invariably negative, at least as far as the government is concerned. One committee clerk suggested that the media has a 'template story' for select committee articles, and that these stories invariably run 'committee of senior MPs puts boot into government'. A minister lamented that 'select committee reports are part of the armoury used by the media to attack government'. If this is routinely the case, ministers are more likely to react negatively or defensively to committee reports. Indeed a former minister said that the higher profile of select committee reports in recent years has had a detrimental effect on government's response: while in the past the department would digest a report fully before responding within the two-month deadline, today's media environment requires that the department should have a 'line to take' on the day of publication. This makes it difficult to respond positively to the committee's recommendations later.

Drawing together evidence

One way in which committees contribute to debate is clearly by drawing together a body of information on the topic of an inquiry, informed by expert opinion. Most simply, in the words of one member, committees 'put into the public domain a lot of evidence'. Committees therefore not only draw attention to issues that are important, but draw conclusions based on a significant body of data, which is published. On some topics this evidence base may be more extensive, or more original, than that put together previously by other groups. Several interviewees suggested that committee recommendations were more likely to be taken seriously by government if they were clearly based on firm and/or new evidence.

Former ministers that we spoke to confirmed that the evidence base provided by a committee may be important to informing their thinking. One minister suggested that committees are able to go into an issue in far greater depth than a minister can. He also pointed out that the fact that the information is filtered through politicians (the majority of whom, after all, will be from the government party) makes the committee's conclusions particularly worth ministerial consideration. Another former minister, however, said that committees he had dealt with addressed issues too superficially and could not compete with the evidence base supplied by civil servants. This difference of view no doubt reflects differences between departments and policy areas (dependent on civil service resources and departmental culture), the culture and behaviour of particular committees, and to some extent the attitudes of the individual ministers concerned. In some cases,

where the classification of information is common, committees will obviously struggle to put information in the public domain.

Our interviewees drew attention to good examples of evidence-based reports, but also to some problems. The Health Committee report on *The Influence of the Pharmaceutical Industry* (2005) is well respected, and said to be used as a reference text in universities on the subject. But while the Health Committee has access to many outside experts who can inform its reports, the same is not true of all committees. In particular interviewees emphasised that the Defence Committee has difficulty finding expert witnesses from outside the Ministry of Defence and armed services (and that armed services witnesses are obliged to take the Ministry of Defence line). As one interviewee put it, this committee has 'a monopoly supplier of information', which makes it difficult to draw up independent evidence-based reports.

Although several interviewees emphasised that, in the words of one member, committees 'dig deeper' and 'drill down' into policy issues, it also seems that this is an area where there is room for improvement. While some committee reports are strongly evidence-based and may as a result be influential, other inquiries may be too rushed or superficial to achieve this. We note in particular that two of the influential committee reports featured in the section above were backed up by original research commissioned by the committee, but that such research is unusual and the funding for it is very limited. We return to this in the section on 'Weaknesses of the select committee system'.

Spotlighting issues and changing priorities

Select committees have a particular role in drawing attention to policy issues that may not be receiving adequate ministerial attention. These will obviously tend to be relatively smaller areas of government policy, rather than large flagship policies (or they may relate to overlooked details of more central policy topics). When committees focus on these issues this can have the result of changing policy priorities within the department. As one clerk put it, committees can have the effect of putting the 'spotlight on certain things and raising them up the departmental and ministerial agenda'.

While ministers may be preoccupied with the broad general thrust of policy, items put on a select committee's agenda – sometimes by outside groups, and sometimes by members as a result of constituency work – can therefore be brought suddenly to the fore. As one interviewee put it, 'when the inquiry is announced it sets hares racing'. The department, and perhaps outside agencies, will need to look at the issue and prepare briefings in preparation for ministers or senior officials potentially giving evidence to the committee. This requires senior figures to think about the issue carefully, perhaps for the first time. One interviewee talked of how the Health Committee inquiry on *The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants* (1998) asked for a memorandum from government, and this required policy to be 'hastily developed'. Another described how an official who had been working on a policy area for many years was at last invited into brief a minister following the announcement of an inquiry. The Home Affairs Committee report *Monitoring of the UK Border Agency* (2009) was described as an example of where 'junior civil servants are trying to make something work that isn't going to work, and people higher up the hierarchy haven't taken seriously the alarms that have been raised'. A committee inquiry brings issues such as this to the attention of ministers, and requires them to be addressed.

Obviously the policy concerned may be addressed by government in its response to the committee's report, where recommendations for change must be considered. But the effect may also happen much more quickly than that, with government changing its position during the course of the inquiry. This once again illustrates the shortcomings of a purely quantitative approach which follows through recommendations, since the committee will obviously not recommend change if

the government has already changed direction. We were given several examples of ministers changing policy as a result of evidence sessions. One of these was the PASC *Debt of Honour* (2006) inquiry into compensation for former Japanese prisoners of war, which resulted from an ombudsman case. It was only when the Veterans minister, Don Touhig, was invited to give evidence to the committee that a civil servant went to see him to say 'I think we've got a problem here'. In his evidence the minister admitted that a mistake had been made, and that policy would change. Another example resulted from evidence by an outside group, rather than a minister. This resulted from the Home Affairs Committee inquiry into *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-Based Violence* (2008), where the committee heard evidence that some schools and local authorities were refusing to display information on forced marriage. This hearing received significant media attention, and before the report was published the government wrote to local authorities and schools to remind them of their responsibilities as a result. Cases like these demonstrate why a response from government that something is 'already being done' can indicate committee influence if this government action began after the committee's inquiry.[24] As indicated above (and in the Appendix) we found 102 recommendations where government action to implement a recommendation had started after the beginning of the inquiry. This indicates that inquiries themselves are regularly influential – and more so than this figure alone suggests, given that the committee may not feel the need to make a recommendation if government policy has already changed.

Brokering

A related point is the extent to which a select committee can fulfil a brokering role between ministers (the political arm of government) and the various officials and bodies that report to them. Several of those interviewed pointed out how the process of a committee inquiry can improve communication and transparency within the government department itself. One former minister said that once a parliamentary inquiry began this meant that you would 'get a flow through to the Secretary of State', so that 'you as Secretary of State can get a better understanding of what is going on'. The most dramatic case of this kind of brokerage during our study period was the statement by Home Secretary John Reid to the Home Affairs Committee that his department was 'not fit for purpose'. This statement, made shortly after his appointment to the role, demonstrated the extent to which ministers may be prepared to go in enlisting committee members in their support in order to achieve change in government. As one former minister suggested, 'sometimes it's politically useful to say something to the select committee'. It can be a way of saying to your MP colleagues 'I'm on your side'.

This kind of relationship between a minister and a committee is particularly likely to occur in larger, more disparate, government departments where it may be difficult for the Secretary of State to get a grip on all departmental activity, including that in (sometimes numerous) executive agencies. As another former minister put it to us, these are 'big, powerful bureaucracies' that are 'difficult to penetrate' and 'arm's length from the officials in headquarters'. In the Home Office, for example, these include the Prison Service, Police and UK Border Agency. In such large, complex departments it is quite likely that there will be tensions between different groups, and a select committee may be an effective vehicle for bringing discussion into the open and ventilating evidence. It may even suit a minister to point the committee carefully in the direction of something that requires investigation, as a committee report supporting the minister's view will strengthen him or her politically. In the case of one inquiry a former minister confessed to being very much 'on the same page' as the committee, but suggested that 'we wouldn't have been able to change the law without that report'.

The same kind of tensions can of course exist between different government departments (and consequently sometimes between their ministers). In this case a committee report may help to strengthen the position of one department against another, and once again this sometimes happens

with the covert support of the minister in the department that the committee shadows. The most obvious such form of tension is between individual departments and the Treasury over demands for spending. An example during our study period was when the Treasury removed currency protection from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2007, which made departmental spending very vulnerable to currency fluctuations. In its report *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Annual Report 2007-08* (2009) the Foreign Affairs Committee described this change as 'deplorable', and the position was reversed in 2010.

Lastly, the committee may also play a brokering role between government and external actors. Obviously this often takes the form of the committee putting forward a case to government that has been made by outside interest groups, or by other MPs, and pressing for a change in policy. Sometimes, however, the committee's influence can work the other way, if it concludes that the evidence supports the government's position. In these circumstances a committee report can help legitimise the government's position and/or delegitimise the claims of its critics. When this happens ministers will often seize on the committee's report and use it to claim that their policy is independently supported.

Accountability

Although the previous four forms of committee influence are clearly very important, the next three were almost uniformly brought to our attention by interviewees, and are probably where the greatest extent of overall influence really lies. However, these forms of influence are even less visible and measurable than the ones just discussed.

Several interviewees suggested that the key contribution of select committees was ensuring 'transparency' and 'accountability'. In this respect select committees carry out a kind of auditing role: checking what government, and to a lesser extent outside bodies, are doing, and reporting on whether there are things that parliament should be concerned about. At times, reports may indicate that policy is being well handled, and suggest no more than minor change. Such reports do not look influential, and even acceptance of all their recommendations would indicate little change on government's part. But the fact that this form of accountability exists is nonetheless important. At times the way that reports put forward evidence and inform debate is simply a transparency mechanism: as with the Defence Committee's Estimates reports, described by one interviewee as giving 'parliament a real insight into what all the money it was voting in the main Estimates was actually going to be used for'.

But this form of accountability not only improves parliament's engagement with the policy process, through greater transparency and presentation of facts; more importantly it has a significant impact on government, and encourages better executive decision-making. Partly this effect is preventative and prospective (as further discussed in the final section below). But accountability can also be retrospective, as for example in 'responding to perceived government failures' inquiries. More frequently it takes place concurrently with government decision-making. Thus one clerk suggested that the key form of committee influence is not through implementation of recommendations, but simply through 'getting people to explain themselves'. Similarly, one committee chair suggested that influencing future policy is only half of a select committee's job, and that 'holding the government to account for poor performance is equally important'.

Many interviewees felt that committees carried out this role quite effectively. For example a former minister described committees as 'robust vehicles' for testing government, while a civil servant suggested that their work was 'invigorating of the system'. Clearly there are many other accountability mechanisms within parliament: most obviously parliamentary questions (both written and oral), government statements, adjournment and general debates. But several witnesses commented on how the environment of the select committee works better in terms of close

examination and sustained questioning. For example one former Secretary of State described written parliamentary questions as being 'like table tennis in very, very slow motion'. He suggested that this made it relatively easy to give bland answers or dodge difficult questions, in stark contrast to committee hearings where ministers or officials have to answer questions in real time, in an interactive setting in front of the media. To perform well in this environment requires them, as one committee chair put it, to 'master their brief'. If they don't, there are obvious risks. One civil servant claimed that 'one of the intangible things that select committees do is make judgements on Secretaries of State, and that seeps into the system'. Committees not only enjoy the 'power of embarrassment' through their hearings, but can also uncover poor judgement or processes within departments that can be damaging when brought to light.

In terms of contemporary decision-making, committee inquiries can be useful to ensure that departments properly think through their policy options. This process is actually welcomed by many ministers and officials, though others clearly find it an irritation. One former minister felt that select committees aided decision-making, as it was useful to have the objections to policy pointed out. He suggested that 'even when [select committees] produce reports you think are just wrong, their very existence means you have to address issues' and for example 'think, "why do I think this is a bad idea?"'. Thus committees help ensure that 'you think things through and have justification for your policy'. On occasion this may also cause government to change its mind. One civil servant recalled a policy that government had already defended in front of various committees, but in preparation for another hearing the Permanent Secretary concerned said 'maybe we should look at this', and consequently policy was changed. He concluded that 'politicians won't necessarily do what the committee wants, but they will certainly think hard about it'.

Similar effects can occur with respect to committee examination of outside groups, particularly quangos and other public bodies. One committee clerk recalled that just inviting in an outside agency to give evidence 'made them aware that they were being watched'. A key role of the Treasury Committee, for example, was described as being to get the FSA to defend or articulate what it was doing. This form of accountability and transparency can also help witnesses by getting their comments on the record. One interviewee said that 'it's quite useful to refer to the fact that you have given evidence with select committees and the fact that you have got your comments recorded', adding that it was 'my defence on *Newsnight* when I was having the living daylights kicked out of me'. In this case he was able to say 'I've been trying to reform [this organisation] since I took over: read my comments in [the committee's report]'.

Of course a key part of the accountability of government with respect to select committee inquiries is the requirement to respond to reports. One civil servant suggested that the committee 'creates a climate where it becomes imperative to address issues', and this is particularly true when drafting the government's response. Here select committee reports differ in an important way from those by almost any other body. Committees may produce reports on issues that have long been pressed by industry, voluntary organisations or thinktanks, none of which have the same power to demand a government response. This was cited with respect to the influential BIS report on *Pub Companies* (2009), where a thinktank had pressed similar issues earlier the same year, but it was the committee's report that finally forced the government to respond. Government of course must consider carefully what it puts in its response, which is open to scrutiny by the media, parliament and outside groups. As one committee member suggested, 'it's a huge risk to ignore a report' because if 'something goes wrong then this comes back to haunt them'. This attitude was echoed by a civil servant, who suggested that 'the worst thing you could do is ignore a recommendation and a scandal blew up'; hence 'you forget what [a committee] said at your peril'.

Exposure

A particular form of accountability, sufficiently important to consider separately, is the ability of the committee to expose wrongdoing, poor decision-making or questionable policy in a public arena. This effect is undoubtedly important with respect to government. But it is perhaps even more important with respect to outside bodies, which would otherwise not have to face questioning in such a public forum. As our media data showed earlier, select committee work, including evidence sessions as well as reports, now receive a fair degree of public attention. Kubala (2011:16) found that in recent years evidence sessions have received the largest proportion of committee media attention, and that within these, evidence sessions with 'industry representatives, interest groups and experts' receive more coverage than those held with ministers.[25]

Ministers obviously face regular interrogation on the floor of the House of Commons, and also appear on public platforms to defend their policies. Nonetheless, as already indicated, select committee hearings can be a more challenging environment. And, as one committee member commented, 'no minister likes getting done over by a select committee'. This clearly has a major influence in departments, as discussed in the following section. But the effect of exposure is much clearer on those who are not subject to other forms of public accountability. The first such group is senior public officials, both in Whitehall and arms-length public bodies. One of the widely noted effects of the 1979 select committee reforms was to open these groups up to far greater scrutiny (Drewry 1985b: 388-9). This exposure is now normalised, and select committee appearances are a regular expectation of members of the senior civil service. But as one civil servant told us, these remain 'the only form of public accountability that officials have'. As such, they are clearly taken seriously at the highest levels, not least because they have potential to cause embarrassment. As one minister told us, if she was concerned that the department was not pursuing the right course she would say to civil servants 'I don't want the Permanent Secretary having to appear in a year's time' in front of the committee and have to defend it. She felt that this was effective in concentrating minds.

Committee appearances are clearly built into the culture of government departments, and have an important preventative influence, as further discussed below. But outside organisations, particularly in the private sector, are less well prepared for the kind of exposure which select committees can enforce. Although private sector organisations are not directly accountable to parliamentary committees, and do not even have an obligation (as government does) to respond to committee reports, the simple act of requiring senior executives to appear in public can be surprisingly effective.

In our study period we saw this in particular with the Treasury Committee, although the same effect clearly applies to a lesser extent to several other committees. As already noted, the Treasury Committee received disproportionately high media coverage for its evidence sessions. For several years before the banking crisis the committee had developed an interest in transparency and value for money for the consumer from the financial services industry. This covered issues such as cash machine charges (discussed in more detail above), store cards, endowment mortgages and insurance. Frequently this required representatives of the industry to attend and give evidence to the committee. It provided a unique forum in which such industry representatives had to explain and defend their policies in front of the media. As one member put it, the committee could 'provide a platform for transparency and put people under pressure'. Thus on cash machine charges, a member of the committee suggested that 'we changed policy by just calling them up in front of the TV cameras'. Another key moment in terms of exposing questionable practices was during the course of the inquiry on *Transparency of Credit Card Charges* (2003) when the Barclays Chief Executive said that he would not borrow large sums of money on a credit card from his own company because it was 'too expensive'.[26]

In these matters it was not only the industry which was under pressure, but also its regulator, the FSA. By exposing these practices, the regulator was encouraged to act. We were told that 'there was a reluctance [by the FSA] to take action on bad behaviour until it started to be pointed out', and that 'partly it was [a matter of] pushing the FSA to do its job'. But exposure in committee hearings can also have a direct effect on such regulatory bodies. For example we were told that the committee achieved progress by 'hauling Hector Sants [FSA CEO] up' and asking how he could defend the kind of adverts for credit that the committee put in front of him.

Several witnesses reflected on how the process of exposure when applied to outside bodies can be particularly effective. Although senior figures giving evidence may be used to managing large organisations, and large budgets, this level of public accountability is relatively novel. Hence witnesses may be more easily caught out than ministers or senior government officials, and the resulting publicity can reflect badly on the organisation. Committees may therefore be able to extract concessions. One civil servant suggested to us that committees 'possibly have more impact on private sector companies than on government, because government is used to being unpopular but CEOs are very un-used to this direct form of public questioning', and they 'find it very uncomfortable'. A minister commented that this kind of exposure is effective, simply because 'banks don't like bad publicity'. Hence at least one interviewee noted that the Treasury Committee's effect may be far greater on industry than it is on government. This of course is a form of influence not captured at all in our quantitative analysis.

The Treasury Committee's exposure role meant that it (in the words of one interviewee) 'came into its own' after the financial crisis – although it may have been less successful in terms of bringing about change here than it was in its earlier inquiries. Once again, witnesses from industry were exposed to the kind of public questioning that would not have occurred in any other forum were it not for the existence of the committee. At times they slipped up, as when Lord Aldington, Chair of Deutsche Bank, confessed that he was unable to explain Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDOs). Some of these hearings were extremely high profile in media terms. They may not have had direct policy effects, but were clearly important contributors to political debate. As one interviewee put it, the committee stepped into a space that the public demanded by, for example, asking senior bankers to apologise. The committee 'asked a lot of questions the public were asking': the 'Middle England questions'.

Generating fear (anticipated reactions)

The functions of accountability and exposure are particularly closely linked to the committees' last, and perhaps most important, form of influence. This is the least visible of all, as it relates not to things that the government does (or indeed that others do) directly as a result of committee action, but of how they adjust their behaviour in anticipation of how the committee *might* react should a certain course of action be taken. This was referred to by one of our interviewees as the capacity of committees to 'generate fear'. This is a primarily *negative* and *prospective* form of influence: discouraging government (and to an extent outside bodies) from behaving in certain ways, for fear of how the relevant select committee(s) may react in the future.

This is a classic form of parliamentary influence, and also classically difficult to assess. It is what Blondel (1970) referred to as parliaments' 'preventative' influence, contrasted to their more measurable 'reactive' work. Typically legislative studies scholars agree with Arter (1985: 68) that significant changes in policy wrought by parliament... tend to be achieved not in parliament, but in advance of a measure being submitted to it'. Hence in the Westminster context, Norton (2005: 246) observes that:

> *Ministers cannot ignore Parliament. They can and do anticipate reactions. Some proposals that ministers may instinctively wish to pursue may never reach the stage of being articulated within*

government because of the negative response expected from MPs and peers. The problem with this is... measuring it.

This form of influence was widely raised by interviewees in respect of various different committees. For example, one committee chair referred to how government 'aims to make policy as committee-proof as possible'. This was clearly not fanciful, as it was confirmed by various government insiders. Civil servants emphasised how officials want to avoid criticism by committees, with one suggesting that while influence can come through committee reports and recommendations, the 'much bigger influence is the fear of having to appear in front of them'. Hence when thinking through policy options, another official suggested, 'you've always got to think, how would I explain that to the committee?'. Several former ministers made similar observations. One suggested that, 'from a policy point of view you would always bear [the committee] in mind'. This is because 'you would not want to have an adverse report slagging you off', and hence you would 'proactively have [civil servants] in if you thought that it was going to happen'. As another former minister put it, the knowledge that you will have to appear and defend what you have done leads to 'risk management'. A third minister said that he would often ask himself 'how would this look if there was an inquiry into it?', and concluded that, 'a wise Secretary of State would never disregard a select committee'. All of this supported the claim made by a clerk that a select committee 'acts as a conditioning factor in the minds of policymakers... they should be careful about going down this route as they don't want to be appearing in front of it in six months' time'.

One minister, who had served in several departments, drew a useful analogy with other parts of the system, saying that 'you have to think: what are the opposition going to say? What's the select committee going to say?'. He added that ministers will also think in similar terms about the media and pressure groups. When asked where the select committee would rank in importance, compared to these other groups, he responded that this varied very much by department. In some departments where there was a powerful outside lobby, this would come first. Similarly, if the opposition spokesperson was particularly strong then this could be the critic who ministers most feared. But in at least one department in which he had served, 'undoubtedly the select committee was more influential'. A senior civil servant, asked the same question for a different department, concluded that the media would come first, then the select committee, and only then the opposition and outside groups.

The 'anticipated reactions' of the select committees serve a primarily negative purpose, in discouraging government from particular paths of action. But on occasion this effect can also encourage government to adopt a policy, if they know it is likely to achieve backing from the select committee. Thus one civil servant suggested that 'if [the committee] had said we should do it, it was a very powerful argument to ministers that "[the committee] would welcome this"'.

Conclusions based on qualitative analysis

Although we learnt a great deal from our quantitative analysis, in many ways our qualitative analysis is far richer. It helps us to answer some of the unanswered questions remaining at the end of the quantitative sections of the report about the influence of committee recommendations. It also enables us to answer wider questions about committee influence, going well beyond what is in these reports.

Our multivariate analysis on government acceptance and implementation of committee recommendations was unable to explain much of the variation in recommendation success. Taking into account factors such as which committee was making the recommendation, what kind of action it was calling for, whether it sat in an agenda setting report, or achieved media coverage, and the partisan affiliation of the committee chair, we were still able to explain only 14% of the

variance in terms of government acceptance of recommendations, and 13% in terms of government implementation. Even once acceptance was taken into account when explaining implementation, 64% of the variance remained unexplained. However our section on successful committee reports, based on interview data, helped significantly in explaining why some reports and recommendations succeed while others fail. This appears to be accounted for by factors which are not easily quantifiable: for example whether a report was published at a key moment in a debate, the extent to which other actors were calling for the same changes, whether recommendations were backed up with firm evidence, and whether the committee had built up expertise and consistently returned to the same theme. The example reports summarised in this section are just some of those that we could have selected in terms of having influence, and they are quite varied. One, for example, fed into a parliamentary debate at a crucial time. Others drew relatively obscure issues to ministers' attention. Some drew on new research to convince government of their case. Sometimes influence was not direct, or even positive: for example PASC's report on Lords reform helped stop government from proceeding with a policy, rather than succeeding in getting it to act in an alternative way (although government did ultimately act, many years later).

We indicated in an earlier section of the report some of the difficulties with relying on quantitative analysis, and some of these problems are illustrated by our findings. For example, one committee chair took most pride in a report whose recommendations were almost entirely rejected, while claiming that other reports with many more accepted recommendations had made relatively little impact. This is in part due to the 'attribution problem', whereby the committee may be only one amongst many voices calling for a change. Although PASC appeared relatively non-influential in our quantitative analysis (and in particular had a significantly lower proportion of its recommendations accepted than other committees), it was widely considered influential by interviewees. This is in part because the committee operates in relatively obscure areas of policy, and in part because the 'policy community' operating in these fields is small. This meant that many changes of government policy could be ascribed directly to its influence. The committee therefore might be described as a 'big fish in a small pond'. In contrast, it is far harder for the Health Committee, for example, to have an impact in a large and high-profile policy field, where there are many different interest groups. This demonstrates that there is no single model of a 'successful' or 'influential' committee, and that it is unfair in some ways to draw comparisons between committees.

We then went on to explore other kinds of committee influence, beyond the acceptance and implementation by government of committee recommendations. We suggested that there are seven key forms of non-quantifiable influence: contribution to debate; drawing together evidence; spotlighting issues; helping broker within government; holding government accountable; exposing failures; and perhaps most importantly 'generating fear' in terms of anticipated reactions. Although the first half of the report suggested, using quantitative data, that committees have a relatively large number of successes in terms of their recommendations being put into effect, many of our interviewees felt that these other forms of non-quantifiable influence were more important. When faced directly with the question of whether implementation of recommendations or other forms of influence were more important, the general view seemed to be that the balance was about 50:50. The previous section gave many examples of these less visible forms of influence: from ministers changing policy ahead of a committee hearing, to committees influencing the opinions of other MPs, to industry figures squirming in public evidence sessions, or ministers and civil servants avoiding certain courses of action that they felt would not stand up to scrutiny by a select committee. In addition, committees have the ability to force a government reply on a topic for public scrutiny – an ability that most other policy actors lack. Although the take-up by government of committee recommendations is undoubtedly important, it is crucial that these other forms of influence are not overlooked or underestimated.

Weaknesses of the select committee system

The earlier sections of this report have demonstrated that the House of Commons select committees do have influence of various kinds, although this is not always easy to trace in quantitative terms. The evidence also demonstrates that, in the eyes of many in government, parliament and beyond, the committees are held in high regard. But it is important to add that this was not, by any means, a universal conclusion. Some of those that we interviewed held quite negative views of the select committees, and even many of those who praised them also drew attention to certain weaknesses or failings.

The primary purpose of this report has not been to assess the overall 'effectiveness' or 'quality' of the select committees, nor indeed to focus on possible future reforms. But the data that we have collected, both from quantitative analysis and from interviews, suggests some ways in which the system could be improved. In this final section, therefore, we make some recommendations of this kind. Some of them are based on specific points raised by our interviewees, and others on our more quantitative analysis. Several of the points made here have already been alluded to earlier in the report. In some cases it is not so much a matter of committees doing something wrong, but that we have noted activities pursued by committees which have been successful, but which are not widely used. Some of the points made in this section have been raised previously by other authors – in some cases repeatedly – but still await implementation by parliament.

Short-termism and media focus

One of the commonest complaints made by interviewees related to the relationship between select committees and the media. It has already been noted above that this relationship is complex. Select committees rely on the media, to a great extent, to get their message across, and their ability to attract media attention to their hearings and reports is a crucial to their influence. Three of the less visible forms of influence identified above – contribution to debate, accountability and exposure – would not operate effectively without media coverage of select committee activity. But at the same time, too great a focus on grabbing headlines can also weaken a committee's influence on important subjects which a longer term or less eye-catching. It can also undermine the committee's authority. There is a danger that given the increased media attention on select committees, and the increased focus within parliament on generating such attention, these negative effects may grow.

This concern was raised more often about some committees than others. It was brought up most consistently in relation to the recent work of the Home Affairs Committee. This committee has a high media profile, and is still referred to as the 'authoritative' or 'influential' Home Affairs Committee in media reports, but several interviewees commented that its authority and influence used to be greater, and that it has become something of an 'ambulance chaser'. That is, that the committee does too many short-term inquiries on headline-grabbing topics and invites too many 'celebrity' witnesses. This can obviously be successful, as in 2009 when an appearance at the committee by Joanna Lumley helped extract a policy reversal from government in the case of the Gurkhas; but it might also weaken the committee's influence on bigger matters. The committee was described by one interviewee as 'more tactical than strategic', and similar claims were made by other interviewees about other committees.

Particular members of our case study committees were singled out by some interviewees for complaint. One was described as being 'absolutely headline grabbing' and another as being a 'rent a quote'. One committee clerk accused committees of being more interested in influencing the *Daily Mail* than the House of Commons (though clearly some members might consider the former as an indirect means of achieving the latter). Although many saw the Treasury Committee as successful with regard to exposing failures around the banking crisis one interviewee suggested that at times members' primary interest was 'can the questioners get themselves on the 10 o'clock news?'. This is

a delicate balance, however. As one chair put it, to succeed committees 'have to walk the narrow line between sensationalism and wisdom'.

Lack of preparation and poor questioning

An even more common complaint related to the quality of select committee hearings, including preparation, quality of questioning, and attendance by members. This was an issue raised particularly by ministers, civil servants and others who had given evidence to committees, though some committee insiders raised it too. In the course of our study some particularly bad examples were brought to our attention.

Thus while committees were praised for putting pressure on witnesses, and for the value of their 'exposure' and 'accountability' roles, there were clearly feelings that they could do better in this regard. One insider complained that 'members regard their job as to ask the question rather than get the answer', while an external witness claimed that he was 'continually massively underwhelmed' by poor questioning and lack of knowledge by members, and another felt that questioning was not 'consistently robust'. Likewise a minister complained of 'disappointment that the committee wasn't composed of people who took it more seriously'. These problems relate both to members' level of preparation for committee hearings, but also to their poor attendance. As one civil servant said 'members come in and make their point and go', rather than staying for an entire evidence session. Two of the worst examples that we heard related to this phenomenon. One former Secretary of State complained that on one occasion when he gave evidence, he was the only MP who stayed in the room for the whole session. In addition, several witnesses recalled being asked the same question more than once during a hearing, because members did not listen to each other's questions, or in some cases were absent when they were asked. In one case a witness claimed to have been asked the same question three times by three different members, none of whom had been present for the others' questions.

A related point raised by several interviewees was that this lack of engagement by members can result in committees relying too much on their staff. Several interviewees recalled reports which seemed only loosely connected to the earlier committee hearings, presumably because questioning had been poor and/or the clerk and specialist advisers had sought to regain focus when drafting the final report. In this case, however, the report will clearly not have strong evidence base, and its influence may be weakened as a result. Specialist advisers, in particular, were felt to sometimes gain too much control over the committee's proceedings when members were not engaged. This was raised more than once with respect to the Health Committee. In technical areas, in particular, it was suggested that members (and even ministers with broad portfolios) cannot compete with specialist advisers' levels of knowledge, and hence witnesses might sometimes as well have a direct dialogue with the committee adviser.

It is difficult to know what can be done about these problems, as MPs clearly face many competing pressures on their time, and the collective nature of select committees means each member may think that they can leave primary responsibility to others (and particularly to the chair): a classic 'collective action problem'. A greater sense of collective responsibility is likely to be achieved in smaller committees, which was one reason that the Wright committee recommended a reduction in select committee size. This change has now been made, and its effect remains to be seen, as does the impact of the new attendance rule for select committee members, introduced as part of the same reform package.[27]

In some cases action has been taken to try and improve behaviour. We were told that Keith Vaz, as chair of the Home Affairs Committee, has sought to monitor members' contributions to witness sessions, to ensure that time is shared out broadly equally. Other committees could perhaps learn from this, and collect similar statistics. Gwyneth Dunwoody as chair of the Transport Committee

had a formidable reputation in many ways, and it is said that she forbade members of the committee from leaving the room during witness sessions, and also put pressure on them to prepare. This clearly requires a forceful chair, and even then there are limits to what MPs can be forced to do.

Lack of research base

One of the strengths of the select committee system is the gathering of information to inform policy recommendations, as acknowledged above. If reports are based on clear new evidence, this is often when they prove most influential. When discussing examples of influential reports earlier in this report, we noted that two of our examples in particular were of inquiries where a select committee itself had conducted original research: in the case of the BIS report on *Pub Companies* (2009) when a survey was conducted of pub tenants, and in the case of PASC's report *The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform* (2002), when MPs were surveyed on their views on Lords reform. Yet the commissioning of research by select committees is very much the exception, rather than the rule, and parliamentary funds for such activity are very limited. Other authors have previously drawn attention to select committees' inability to commission research as a weakness. For example Maer and Sandford (2004: 26) suggested that 'Committees need an adequate budget for commissioning research and guidelines and procedures on how to use it', noting that the budget for select committee research was tiny compared to the budget for committee travel. More generally, some of our interviewees felt that committees could benefit from a stronger evidence base. Several drew a contrast between the departmental select committees and the Public Accounts Committee, which benefits from significant professional support at the National Audit Office.

Government evidence and quality of responses

All three of the previous weaknesses relate to select committees themselves, but the system is also compromised to some extent by the behaviour of government. Several interviewees, particularly committee insiders, complained that government witnesses and government responses to committee reports do not treat the committees with adequate respect. This seems to be more of a problem in some government departments than others. Clearly relations between government departments and committees are two-way process, and where ministers and officials feel that committee members do not take their responsibilities seriously enough (as outlined above) this may be reflected in their own behaviour towards the committee.

The most consistent complaints of this nature related to the behaviour of the Ministry of Defence in respect of the Defence Committee. This department clearly has good reasons to be concerned about the release of certain kinds of information. But some interviewees suggested that the attitude of the department to the committee was positively hostile, that the department behaves in a 'duplicitous' manner regarding the committee, and that MoD insiders treated the committee as 'the enemy'. But one government interviewee also said something similar about the Health Committee, suggesting that 'most of the time civil servants regard it as a total irritant'.

One interviewee from outside government claimed to have heard many civil servants over the years make disparaging remarks about parliamentary committees, including senior civil servants who expressed 'not a huge respect' for them, and felt that they did not make much difference. This may reflect in part some of the problems above with committee behaviour, but also perhaps in part a simplistic view about how committee influence works. If officials gauge committee influence by the number of genuinely original recommendations made that go on to be adopted, they may indeed conclude that much of what committees do does not matter. But when committee influence is looked at more broadly, including committees' contribution to evidence gathering, accountability and exposure, their importance becomes more apparent. Like Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon (2009) we found a greater tendency by ministers (most of whom are of course MPs) to appreciate,

and find useful, these forms of committee influence – though some former ministers were also relatively dismissive of committees, and some civil servants strongly appreciative.

Various complaints were raised about the quality of formal government replies to committee reports. It was suggested that departments often do not read reports properly, focusing only on the emboldened recommendations and conclusions. And responses may be given only to recommendations, when some conclusions also are worthy of a response. One committee clerk claimed to often redraft conclusions to include the words 'we recommend...' just in order to ensure that they got a reply. More generally committee insiders complained that government responses may be slippery. One committee member claimed that 'sometimes [they] are so mechanistic it's untrue', and that civil servants may trawl through a decade's worth of old documents just in order to be able to claim that something is already 'under consideration' or being done. One committee clerk went further, and expressed doubts about whether the government is actually doing all the things it claims that it is doing in its response. These suspicions seemed to be confirmed to some extent by comments from our government interviewees. One civil servant said that 'it isn't a bad trick to say that they were going to do something anyway', in order to give the impression that the government agrees with the committee. Another civil servant admitted that there is a reluctance in government to simply reject recommendations, and pressure to accept at least some of them; so the department will sometimes say that they will 'consider' something, just in order to create a good impression. But of course our results show that many committee recommendations are implemented, and suggest that government is fairly true to its word.

Report and recommendation drafting

Our quantitative analysis demonstrated that there is some lack of clarity in how select committees express their conclusions and recommendations. It is sometimes unclear whether a paragraph included in the 'conclusions and recommendations' section of a report is actually a recommendation or not, and therefore whether it demands a government response. Such unclear wording obviously risks letting government off the hook. Similarly, recommendations which are not sufficiently clear about what they are calling for, or perhaps even who they are asking to do it, may reduce committees' effectiveness. Sometimes there are understandable reasons why the key paragraphs of committee reports are drafted in this way: particularly when there is a need to 'fudge' words in order to gain unanimous agreement across the committee. Members may feel that it is more worthwhile to have an unclear recommendation in the report than no statement on the issue at all. But at other times unclear recommendations may simply be the result of sloppy drafting, or may indicate that the committee has not fully understood the topic. Some improvements could almost certainly be made in this area.

The way that committee reports have been structured and drafted has changed over the period of our study, largely for the better. There is now more standardisation in terms of how they are set out, for example through the routine inclusion of a 'conclusions and recommendations' section. But some inconsistencies remain. For example, some committees tend to draw attention to their 'main recommendations', while others do so more rarely. Again, it may sometimes be difficult to get agreement between committee members about what the committee's main recommendations are. But the identification of main recommendations helps ensure that those responding cannot avoid the key issues, and also makes it easier in the future to follow up whether the committee's most important recommendations have been acted upon.

Poor follow-through, including in parliament

A further problem that was brought up in interviews, and also became clear during the course of our quantitative research when working with committee staff, is the lack of consistent follow-through of committee reports and recommendations in many cases.

The most obvious, and mechanistic, sense in which this is true with regard to follow up of recommendations. There is no standardisation with respect to whether and how committees follow up on the progress of recommendations after a government response has been received. Ours is the first serious attempt to trace level of implementation of recommendations, beyond legislative action by a single committee (Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon 2009). Yet acceptance of a recommendation in the government's official reply to the committee report is no absolute guarantee that the recommendation will go on to be implemented. It therefore makes sense for there to be some systematic tracing of the progress of recommendations after the government response is published.

Some committees have started to do this. Most notably, the Home Affairs Committee asked the Home Office in 2010 for a report on progress of all its recommendations in the 2005-10 parliament. This was a huge task for the department, and resulted in a large and somewhat indigestible document, but it was nonetheless a useful exercise. Such updates might perhaps be requested annually. The Home Affairs Committee has also held one-off evidence sessions to follow up the recommendations in some of its reports, including *Domestic Violence* (2008) and *Policing in the 21st Century* (2008). These kinds of sessions are useful, as they allow committees to press ministers on what progress has been made following earlier commitments. Follow-up of recommendations by other committees among those we looked at was far patchier, and largely limited to monitoring government replies, rather than actual implementation. This is despite suggestions going back many years that more systematic follow-up should be conducted. Nearly two decades ago Hawes (1993: 211) proposed that an 'audit of the fate of recommendations should be an established part of normal committee life'. Again in 2000 Peter Riddell (2000: 220) noted that committees were 'poor at follow-up', and that because '[f]ew committees sustain an interest in a subject... this allows government departments to provide evasive answers in their formal responses knowing that, in most cases, they will not be pressed on them'. There have been various recommendations for regular formal monitoring of recommendations (e.g. Liaison Committee 2000, Maer and Sandford 2004), but these have as yet not been systematically acted upon. Most recently Brazier and Fox have urged that 'committees need to be more rigorous about revisiting previous inquiries to assess whether actions promised by Government have occurred... Reliance on folk memory is of limited value given the frequent turnover of both members and officials' (2011: 363). As one committee clerk suggested, the continued failure to follow through committee reports methodically means that they may prove to be no more than 'one-day wonders'. Several interviewees suggested that this was still too often the case.

One way in which committees do more often follow up on subjects is by returning to a topic and doing a second inquiry, and even several subsequent inquiries. As discussed in the section on successful committee reports, this kind of persistence can pay off. The pursuit over many years by PASC of legislation on the civil service clearly helped to bring this about, and the return by BIS to the issue of pub companies led the committee to come up with far more forceful recommendations on the second occasion. But again, these examples are somewhat isolated. As Hawes (1993: 203) notes, the Procedure Committee long ago suggested that committees might be more influential if they carried out more follow-up inquiries.

A slightly separate complaint that was raised by several interviewees was the lack of connection between select committee business and the wider business of the House of Commons. One committee clerk complained that the chamber 'rarely even registers what's going on' in terms of committee reports. The lack of debating time available to discuss these reports has been complained of for many years. This was improved by the creation of Westminster Hall, and may be improved further following the establishment of the Backbench Business Committee.

Again some committees seem to make more effort to connect with the business of the chamber than others, for example through members raising issues in adjournment debates or questions. One link which is less commonly made is that to legislation. An important step in bringing about the civil service legislation referred to above was PASC's publication of a draft bill. But to date, this remains a unique intervention by a select committee. The publication of a bill is clearly a major exercise, though again the Backbench Business Committee may create new opportunities for such bills to be debated in future. But several interviewees noted that select committees could also make a greater impact by tabling amendments to government bills. As the example given above of the Health Committee's intervention regarding the smoking ban shows, this kind of action can be effective.

Conclusions

Taking all of the material in this report together, we almost inevitably end up with a mixed picture. The select committees are influential, but not all of the time. Much of this influence can be seen by tracing committee recommendations, but much of it is far less visible and tangible. A lot of what committees do, and have achieved, is impressive. But there is also room for improvement.

The policy impact of select committees

We have emphasised since the start of this report that it is difficult to reliably assess select committees' policy influence or impact. There are so many ways in which this influence may be exercised that it remains a very slippery subject. In addition, it is difficult to know what benchmark committees should be assessed against. How influential would we want them to be? If the select committees were routinely simply ignored by government – as some incautious commentators have claimed – that would clearly be a bad thing. But at the same time, few would suggest that they should have ultimate power to force government to take decisions. What we are looking for is clearly something in between.

We tried asking our interviewees a rather non-scientific question, which made sense only if answered quickly and instinctively, and would not stand up to careful analysis or deconstruction. This was, 'on a scale from 1-10, how influential on government policy is the ... committee?'. Not all interviewees were asked this question, and not all chose to answer it. But the responses are perhaps illuminating. Nobody rated the committee that they knew about at 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale, and equally nobody rated any committee at 9 or 10. All (20+) responses were clustered in the centre of the scale, with the modal (i.e. most popular) response being 5. This seems consistent with our wider findings, and also with what we would want to see from the select committees.

For example, our data showed that roughly 40% of committee recommendations were accepted and implemented by government, though two thirds of recommendations calling for a medium or large policy change ultimately failed. What would be the 'correct' success rate for either of these? We might worry if all committee recommendations were routinely ignored, but we might also be concerned if government uncritically implemented every committee recommendation. What we see from our qualitative analysis is that there is in fact a constant dialogue between committees and government, and also between committees and outside groups. Committee reports are therefore simply one factor contributing to policy debates, but one which is taken seriously. When reports are timed correctly, or built on a particularly firm body of evidence, or come up with new and sensible policy ideas, they can be successful. When they are overly media-driven, superficial, or make overambitious recommendations, they may be more likely to fail – as perhaps in such cases they should. But it remains important not to paint too rosy a picture – of 'good' recommendations being adopted and 'bad' recommendations being ignored. There are almost certainly cases where committees make valid and sensible recommendations which ministers and civil servants resist. As

discussed earlier, there will always be cultural factors affecting particular departments or particular ministers, making them more or less resistant to the suggestions from select committees.

An important question is whether the select committees have grown in influence in recent years, particularly given their increased profile and increased resources. Given the difficulties of measuring influence, this is a particularly tricky question to answer. In one sense our findings are completely consistent with earlier studies (e.g. Drewry 1985c, Hawes 1993), in suggesting that a fair but not overwhelming proportion of committee recommendations are taken up, but that this is not the sole indicator of committee influence, and the committees have many other forms of less visible and less measurable influence. Earlier studies concluded that committee influence is essentially unquantifiable in straightforward terms, so we clearly cannot apply an easy metric to judge whether committee influence has gone up or down. But at risk of drawing subjective conclusions, we sense that select committees are taken increasingly seriously by government, and have become an established and respected part of the system. Twenty-five years ago Giddings (1985: 376) suggested that '[t]he effect of these committees on ministerial and departmental policy-making has been indirect and marginal, contextual rather than substantive'. It would be hard to claim the same today. The committees to a significant degree condition the everyday behaviour of ministers and civil servants, and sometimes outsiders. They have achieved a high profile for their inquiries which enables them to threaten 'exposure', as well as the more mundane, day-to-day role of government accountability. And many of their recommendations, as we have seen, are taken up.

The challenges of assessment

A common theme throughout this report has been the challenge of assessing parliamentary influence. Here our findings are entirely consistent with those of established legislative studies scholars. It is impossible to judge reliably what proportion of committee influence comes through the adoption by government (and other bodies) of recommendations, as opposed to other means, though the feeling of our interviewees was that this balance was probably about 50:50. Many scholars have suggested that legislative influence may in fact come overwhelmingly through 'anticipated reactions', and thus be largely negative and prospective, rather than positive and retrospective, through government adopting parliament's requests for policy change (e.g.Arter 2006, Blondel 1970, McGann 2006, Mezey 1979). As Norton (2005: 132) suggests, 'Ministers and officials may thus decide, consciously or even subconsciously, not to pursue a particular policy for fear of parliamentary investigation'. This form of influence is notoriously difficult to detect. But as the quotations from interviewees in our qualitative analysis section show, sometimes the best place to look for indications of parliamentary influence is not at parliament itself, but inside government. Comments such as those from ministers and officials in this study that 'you've always got to think, how would I explain that to the committee?' are probably the clearest indicators of this crucial form of influence that scholars will ever be able to find.

The future

Although we conclude that there is much about the select committees system that works well, we do point out above that there are ways in which the system could be improved. It is somewhat frustrating that also on these points our conclusions echo those of earlier authors: in some cases proposals have been made repeatedly over many years, but little has changed in practice. We concluded that one of the success factors when looking at influential select committee reports was follow-through by committees of their earlier reports and recommendations, to determine whether the problems that they identified were subsequently resolved. Yet such follow-through remains relatively uncommon. Another success factor that we identified was the commissioning of original research by select committees, but this also remains relatively rare. An ongoing problem is that of poor attendance by committee members, and lack of detailed focus on their brief. This is a particularly difficult problem to resolve, given the many pressures on MPs' time. But the other ongoing problem – of government sometimes not taking committees sufficiently seriously – is

likely to continue for so long as this continues to be the case. A new challenge is how committees manage their relationships with the media – as increased media coverage has enhanced the visibility and prestige of the committees, and therefore potentially their influence, but if committee work becomes too media-driven this can also have a detrimental effect.

Our study related to the committees during 1997-2010, and since then important changes have been made. The moves as a result of the Wright committee reforms to elect select committee members and chairs potentially enhance the committees' independence and status. The related changes to reduce their size may deal, at least to some extent, with problems of poor attendance. Our study therefore remains a snapshot of the committees at one particular point in time. Other researchers in the future may wish to use it as a benchmark against which to test the (widely believed) hypothesis that the committees will be strengthened by the Wright committee reforms – although such comparisons will always be, as indicated above, fraught with problems. Other directions for research, going beyond what we have done, could also include more in-depth study of particular committee inquiries, which might replicate some early studies, more study of committee hearings and the quality of questioning, plus tracing the extent to which committee reports and recommendations are mentioned in parliamentary debate. In addition, the select committees in the House of Lords remain particularly understudied.

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Appendix: Detail of acceptance coding

This section provides further details of the scheme that we adopted for coding degree of acceptance in government responses. We divided acceptance into five codes within which there were several sub-codes. Only the results of the top-level codes were presented in the main body of the report. Here we provide the definitions of the sub-codes and present data on these detailed categories, by committee.

1. *Fully accepted*
   This was applied to recommendations unequivocally accepted, i.e. where there was explicit commitment to act on the committee's recommendation, and no indication that the motivation for action came from elsewhere such as the government's previously existing intentions.
2. *Partially or implicitly accepted*
   This top-level code was applied to recommendations where, on balance, the government's response was more in agreement with the committee than disagreement. Either the response to each constituent part 'added up' on balance to agreement, or there was a broad acceptance of the general thrust of the recommendation. The top-level code of '2' was made up of the following sub-categories:

   2.1. *Part accepted, part ignored* (this code was applied to recommendations where some aspect was accepted but another aspect was not acknowledged).

   2.2. *Implicitly accepted* (for recommendations given a 'soft' yes, e.g. because the government broadly accepted a recommendation but did not make explicit commitment to action or ignored some of the detail).

   2.3. *Now being done (but started only after the beginning of the inquiry)* (where the government claims the action the recommendation requires is already being done, but where there is evidence that it has been started since the beginning of the inquiry. In other words it seems likely that the inquiry prompted it. Sometimes the committee's influence is explicitly acknowledged in the government response).
3. *Neither accepted nor rejected*
   For recommendations which were given a neutral response, or where one part of the recommendation was given a positive response and one part a negative response, which adds up to a neutral response overall. The sub-codes were:

   3.1. Part accepted, part rejected (for recommendations where one part was fully accepted and the other fully rejected).

   3.2. Under consideration (where the government says it will consider the committee's recommendation).

   3.3. Refusal to respond due to problems with disclosure (where the government says the response to a recommendation would require the disclosure of sensitive information).

   3.4. Already being done (unclear when started) (this code was applied to situations where the government says it is already doing what the recommendation called for, but it is unclear whether this is something new or was previously in place. It is therefore unclear whether any influence can be attributed to the committee).
4. *Partially or implicitly rejected*
   This top-level code was applied to responses which were overall more negative than positive. The sub-codes were:

   4.1. Part rejected, part ignored or dodged (where part of the recommendation was rejected but another part was either not mentioned or sidestepped).

4.2. *Implicitly rejected* (for 'soft' nos, such as where the government disagrees that action is necessary, or where the government fobs the committee off e.g. by saying that more research needs to be done but not committing to do anything).

4.3. *Ignored* (where the government ignores the recommendation completely, for example where it packages several recommendations together and then responds in one chunk, leaving out the recommendation in question).

4.4. *Dodged* (where the government talks past the committee's recommendation or provides information on other unrelated steps it is taking).

4.5. *Already being done (dismissal)* (this was applied to recommendations where the government states that what the committee recommends is already being done, but where what they describe is different to what the committee recommended (hence the government is essentially dodging the issue) or where something was clearly already in effect before the inquiry (the implication is that the committee was mistaken in its assessment that the recommendation was necessary)).

5. *Rejected outright*
This is for recommendations which are explicitly rejected, in the sense that the government describes itself as 'rejecting' or 'disagreeing' the recommendation and does not say it is doing something similar already or indicate that it might change its position in the future).

Table 36: Detail on acceptance of recommendations, by committee

	BIS	Defence	Foreign Affairs	Health	Home Affairs	PASC	Treasury	Total
1 Fully accepted	37 (15%)	32 (13%)	47 (17%)	20 (8%)	36 (12%)	7 (4%)	39 (13%)	218 (12%)
2.1 Part accepted, part ignored	6 (2%)	12 (5%)	8 (3%)	23 (9%)	21 (7%)	1 (1%)	8 (3%)	79 (4%)
2.2 Implicitly accepted	67 (27%)	51 (21%)	60 (21%)	43 (16%)	40 (13%)	24 (12%)	44 (15%)	329 (18%)
2.3 Now being done (since inquiry started)	21 (8%)	13 (5%)	11 (4%)	8 (3%)	16 (5%)	14 (7%)	19 (6%)	102 (6%)
3.1 Part accepted, part rejected	7 (3%)	16 (6%)	10 (4%)	18 (7%)	20 (7%)	8 (4%)	14 (5%)	93 (5%)
3.2 Under consideration	48 (19%)	18 (7%)	16 (6%)	20 (8%)	43 (14%)	15 (8%)	34 (12%)	194 (11%)
3.3 Refusal to respond due to problems with disclosure	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	4 (1%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	10 (1%)
3.3 Already being done (unclear when started)	8 (3%)	21 (9%)	23 (8%)	30 (11%)	26 (9%)	25 (13%)	18 (6%)	151 (8%)
4.1 Part rejected, part ignored/dodged	0 (0%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	10 (1%)
4.2 Implicitly rejected	16 (6%)	18 (7%)	23 (8%)	22 (8%)	15 (5%)	21 (11%)	30 (10%)	145 (8%)
4.3 Ignored	6 (2%)	24 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	6 (2%)	39 (2%)
4.4 Dodged	7 (3%)	16 (6%)	21 (8%)	43 (16%)	11 (4%)	25 (13%)	25 (9%)	148 (8%)
4.5 Already being done (dismissal)	10 (4%)	11 (4%)	48 (17%)	22 (8%)	17 (6%)	31 (16%)	27 (9%)	166 (9%)
5 Rejected outright	7 (3%)	10 (4%)	9 (3%)	14 (5%)	23 (8%)	16 (8%)	17 (6%)	96 (5%)
No government response (yet)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (7%)	0 (0%)	4 (1%)	26 (1%)
No government response (not expected)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (2%)	0 (0%)	4 (1%)	10 (1%)
Missing government response	9 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	15 (1%)
Total	251	247	280	265	300	194	294	1831

[1] This wider programme of work is supported by Meg Russell's three year ESRC Fellowship (reference RES-063-27-0163), and has since been supplemented by a new grant from the Nuffield Foundation to study parliament's impact on legislation. See http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/parliament

[2] Note that these figures do not sum to the total number of interviews, as some of those interviewed had held more than one relevant position, some subjects were interviewed jointly, and some subjects were interviewed more than once. In addition, note that some of those interviewed (particularly ministers and parliamentary staff) were able to comment on the functioning of several committees and their relationships with several government departments.

[3] *Departmental Select Committees*, House of Commons Information Office factsheet P2, revised August 2010, p. 7.

[4] E.g. PASC's report *Too Many Ministers?* (2010) took no additional evidence but was based on evidence from previous inquiries.

[5] In the introduction to the BIS report the committee explained that 'We do not intend to make recommendations in this preliminary Report, nor do we expect a Government Response. Our prime purpose in this Report is to record some of our impressions and to identify issues to which those engaged in the area may wish to react to and which our successors may wish to pursue in the next Parliament.'

[6] Should any researcher be interested in disaggregating and categorising these recommendations, we would of course be happy to discuss sharing our data with them.

[7] For example the Health Committee's report *Alcohol* (2010) contains several packages of multiple recommendations within one paragraph. The recommendation for restricting the promotion of alcohol in areas where children could be affected includes nine subrecommendations about the location of billboards and posters, regulations on cinema and television advertising, events sponsorship, social networking and public health television campaigns.

[8] We recognise that a lot more use could be made of this rich dataset, which is stored in a database including the full text of the articles concerned in a searchable format. If anyone would like to use this data for future research they should contact the authors.

[9] For example the search terms for the Defence Select Committee were 'Defence Select Committee' OR 'Commons Defence Committee' OR 'Select Committee on Defence'. Note that the data for the *Telegraph* for 1997 to 2000 was unavailable on Nexis UK, so we used the British Library Newspapers Reading Room's Factiva software to access data for the early years of our sample.

[10] For example in one case an article referred to an award given to a journalist who had written about the committee.

[11] Hawes describes this as committee inquiries acting as a 'spur to action'.

[12] In fact Hindmoor, Larkin and Kennon report that 621 of 1022 recommendations were accepted and 46 of 1022 responded to as 'already being done', but the analysis and graph, as well as confirmation from one of the authors, make it clear that in fact it is the other way around, with 'already being done' being the largest category.

[13] One of these Home Affairs Committee reports has subsequently received a response, after our cut-off date.

[14] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7473243.stm

[15] Of these 15 more politically controversial recommendations, three (20%) were accepted, and six (40%) were implemented. In terms of acceptance this is a below average rate, but the numbers are so tiny that no conclusions can be drawn.

[16] In the latter case it might be that calls for attitude change are primarily negative in tone (i.e. implying that the government has got it wrong), and that this explains their low acceptance rate. We did not code for negativity of this kind – though we later also consider the extent to which the recommendation is calling for a change from current policy.

[17] For simplicity, the calculations in this table are all based (apart from the first two rows, where full data is available) on our smaller sample, used for tracing acceptance and implementation of committee recommendations. For some factors (e.g. number of recommendations calling for medium/large change) we also have date are available from our larger sample, but this results in very similar estimates.

[18] Note that here we are treating PASC as a departmental committee. As indicated earlier in the report there are 19 departmental committees listed in House of Commons Standing Order 152.

[19] Liam Donaldson quote taken from Institute for Government seminar *Policy Reunion: Reducing Smoking Rates*, Monday 9 May 2011.

[20] http://www.camra.org.uk/page.aspx?o=180809 (accessed 16 February 2010).

[21] Muir, R., *Pubs and Places: the Social Value of Community Pubs*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2009.

[22] Blackburn and Kennon suggest: fact that a committee has chosen a subject for an inquiry brings it to the attention of ministers; select committee scrutiny makes it more likely that the options rejected when a decision is made become known so decision-makers may be more rigorous in their assessment; the compilation of evidence (including giving a voice to critics of policy) encourages more open discussion of policy option; 'apparent parliamentary support may strengthen the case within government for one particular option'; continuing interest of a committee in an issue over years makes it harder for it to be avoided.

[23] Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., Grady, M. and Geddes, I., *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review,* London: The Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010, February 2010.

[24] In the latter case the committee's report, published in May 2008, stated that 'we were alarmed by the evident resistance of some schools and local authorities to displaying information, particularly on forced marriage… We

The departmental select committees of the House of Commons are well respected for their detailed scrutiny of policy and their non-partisan ethos. But much less is known about the extent to which the committees have an impact on government policy-making. This report explores the question of select committee influence, through analysis of committee reports and recommendations, and interviews with parliamentary and governmental insiders. It is based on a collaborative research project between the Constitution Unit and the Committee Office of the House of Commons, which was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The Constitution Unit was founded in 1995 to do detailed research and planning on constitutional reform in the UK. The Unit is the leading research body on constitutional change in the UK, and part of the School of Public Policy at University College London. The Unit conducts academic research on current or future policy issues, organises regular programmes of seminars and conferences, and conducts consultancy work for government and other public bodies. We work closely with government, parliament and the judiciary. All of our work aims to have a sharply practical focus and be clearly written, timely and relevant to policy makers and practitioners.

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