

Giving evidence in Parliament: summing it up with ten top tips for academics

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/12/05/giving-evidence-in-parliament-summing-it-up-with-ten-top-tips-for-academics/

12/5/2016

*Providing evidence to policymakers through select committees is a great way for researchers to influence current policy debates. But if you haven't done it before, the formality of the task may appear daunting. In the final part of a series on [giving evidence in Parliament](#), **Patrick Hanley** has compiled thoughts and experiences from LSE academics and reveals the top tips on how to make the most of engaging with select committees.*



Over the course of this series, we've heard from academics across LSE who have had the opportunity to give evidence before parliamentary select committees. Through their diverse perspectives we've aimed to distil their experiences and create a durable set of best practices for those looking to engage with select committees.

In the [first post](#), we began to explore the ways in which the opportunity to give evidence came about. Either through serendipity, that out-of-the-blue phone call with an urgent request to appear with your policy-relevant evidence, or networking, professional networks and word-of-mouth.

In the [second post](#), we looked at how to *create* the opportunity. Academics looking to proactively raise their profile with select committees can follow a few simple steps to put themselves on the committee's radar. Signing up for email alerts, following the committee on social media and keeping up with current inquiries will give you a sense of priorities and what the committee is looking for in terms of evidence. The next step, submitting written evidence, can often lead to the invitation to appear before the committee, or will at least make your original research known during the committee proceedings. Your evidence will often also be included in the committee's report.

In the [third post](#), we looked at training and support. The Parliamentary Outreach service offers training across the UK to bolster knowledge and skills of Parliament's inner workings and select committee procedures. This can be a great jumping-off point for academics who want to see how their research can join with parliamentary activities.



Image credit: [Parliament in winter](#) by almost witty. This work is licensed under a [CC BY-SA 2.0](#) license.

Throughout the series, we've heard expert advice on how best to prepare for the day, formulate and submit written evidence, what sort of training to undertake and our academics' thoughts on impact. Pulling together the range of opinions from our academic experts, here is a 'top 10' list of tips for any academic looking to engage with select committees:

Oral evidence

1. **Do your homework and brush up on committee dynamics.** Watch videos of past sessions to get a sense of the format. Know why the inquiry came about and familiarise yourself with other submitted evidence.
2. **Consult with the clerk and other witnesses.** Committee clerks are a font of knowledge and it is helpful to know what other witnesses will be saying.
3. **Prepare succinctly and present for a lay audience.** Know your arguments and have the list of points you want to make. Eliminate jargon or overly academic language for non-expert policymakers.
4. **Expect the unexpected.** Questions won't be in the same format as in your preparation and MPs are free to deviate from the pre-arranged topic areas. Have an answer to the "you're the expert, you should know" line of questioning.
5. **Don't be too nervous.** It can be intense but you aren't on trial, they are looking for expert advice to inform their work.
6. **Get further training.** Seek out training from the Parliamentary Outreach service on how academic research can support parliamentary activities.

Written evidence

7. **Respond directly to the questions asked.** Ensure your responses are strictly within the scope of the inquiry. Extraneous information or ‘hobby-horse’-type arguments will make your evidence less useful.
8. **Keep it brief and make your recommendations clear.** The usual limit is 3,000 words or fewer and make sure to include an executive summary.
9. **Stick to the facts.** Only include your own original information, allow the committee to draw conclusions.
10. **Use consistent formatting.** Ensure it conforms to the guidelines; don’t use images and make sure to number your paragraphs. This will make it easy for the committee staff to use and publish.

At first glance, engaging with Parliament and select committees can seem a daunting task. Though many academics are accustomed to presenting their work, Parliament can be a new forum for many. While it does have its own set of quirks and things to know, it can be a prime opportunity to showcase your policy-relevant research. By following these ten tips, you can make yourself a bit more at ease when the opportunity arises and make the most out of your engagement.

A special thanks to our academics who contributed to this series, without their willingness to participate it would not have been possible to produce!

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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