

Getting beyond the ‘usual suspects’? Exploring two decades of witness engagement with the International Development Select Committee

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Introduction

This paper analyses witness engagement with International Development Select Committee, drawing on 20 years of witness data to identify patterns, explore trends, and outline implications for knowledge production and Committee effectiveness. The role of Select Committees in scrutinising government policies and practices has received growing academic attention in recent years. The ability of committees to perform these roles effectively is significantly affected by their ability to access the best evidence and most relevant witnesses for any given enquiry. This is a constant challenge, in no small part due to reluctance of potential witnesses to participate, practical constraints such as time and committee location, and ability of witnesses to communicate effectively with a policy audience. Consequently, Select Committees can come to rely on a narrow range of witnesses, whether specific individuals or organisations. We know surprisingly little about who these ‘usual suspects’ are in relation to specific committees, and even less about how this might shape the ability of committees to effectively execute their roles. This paper begins to address this gap, analysing two decades of written and oral evidence provision to the International Development Select Committee from 1997-2017. The paper will: (1) present original analyses of witness engagement with IDSC; (2) identify patterns and gaps in witness engagement over time and in the contemporary context; (3) reflect on how this may affect committee scrutiny of UK international development policy; and (4) examine how knowledge production by committees might be improved based on this new data and analysis.

Why does witness engagement matter? Knowledge production and post-legislative scrutiny

Departmental select committees ‘examine the expenditure, administration and policy’ of government departments (HC SO No. 152). They are ‘widely regarded as the most effective form of scrutiny’ in the House of Commons (Rush 2005: 239) and are argued to have ‘greatly enhanced the capacity of MPs to scrutinise the decisions taken by individual departments’ (Power 2006: 140). Scrutiny is often undertaken through inquiries on topics chosen by the committee, with outputs in the form of reports with recommendations to government. While the government is not obliged to implement recommendations, research has shown that the work of select committees matter. Hawes (1993) studied environmental policy and concluded

that 60 percent of recommendations were accepted by government. Benton and Russell (2013) looked at the work of seven select committees between May 1997 and May 2010 and found that 40% of recommendations were accepted. Tracing this further, they found that that 44% of recommendations were fully or partially implemented (see also Drewry 1985, Hindmoor et al. 2009). The importance of select committees appears to be increasing after the implementation of the Wright reforms in 2010, which introduced election of committee members and chairs, thereby reducing Executive influence and providing further autonomy and credibility to committees (Fisher 2015, Kelso 2016). This has resulted in increased public recognition of committee scrutiny. One metric of this is media coverage and Patrick Dunleavy's research points to a dramatic increase in coverage after the reforms, with the International Development Select Committee (IDC) quadrupling its coverage between 2008 and 2012 (Political and Constitutional Reform Committee 2013). If media is taking further interest in committees after reforms, it may also be more difficult for departments and ministers to disregard them, as Dunleavy acknowledges (Civil Service World 2014).

To carry out their mandate effectively, committees have the power to 'send for persons, papers and records' (HC SO No. 152(4a)). These persons, papers and records constitute oral and written evidence that select committees consider before finalising their reports. Evidence is often gathered from the department under scrutiny, but it is also common to send for witnesses representing academic, non-profit and private institutions. Evidence matters for three related reasons. First, it is a formidable opportunity to hold government to account through verbal questioning or by requesting written input. Evidence from non-governmental actors also 'provide[s] an important source of external input into parliamentary scrutiny' (Berry and Kippin 2014: 3). This external input can, for example, 'be used to reveal policy failings or limitations', or help a committee 'understand empirical data on a policy issue' (Geddes 2017: 5). Second, and in relation to this, evidence helps MPs build relevant policy knowledge (Thompson 2014). For MPs familiar with a policy area, evidence may deepen or challenge pre-existing knowledge. For those not familiar, evidence allows MPs to learn about new topics. Moreover, reports and evidence can be consulted by other committees and the House of Lords, and may be adopted by the House of Commons Library, thereby building up the institutional knowledge base of Parliament (Geddes 2017). Third, evidence matters as it gives 'people a voice' (ibid: 6). Select committees allow citizens affected by particular policies to give their input or voice their concerns over those policies.

What do we already know?

Given the importance of select committees and the centrality of evidence, surprisingly little research interrogates who the evidence providers are. This is all the more surprising given the availability of substantial witness data on select committee websites. Of the few available studies, Berry and Kippin (2014) looked at all witnesses appearing at Commons, Lords or joint committees from 8 October to 7 November 2013. They categorised the 583 witnesses and found that most evidence was provided by the public sector (including government),

followed by the non-profit and private sectors. Worryingly, only 24.7% of witnesses were women and this figure was even lower in Commons committees (24%). This gender disparity is echoed by Geddes (2017) who sampled oral evidence from 24 cross-cutting and departmental Commons committees from 8 May 2013 to 14 May 2014. This year-long study comprised 3225 witnesses and found that 24.6% were women. Interestingly, the IDC had the highest proportion of women with 42.2%. Other results share similarities with Berry and Kippin's in the sense that most witnesses came from the public sector, followed by the non-profit and private sectors. Another important finding of Geddes is that even if government, civil service and public sector witnesses are excluded, the majority came from London (47.1%) and South of England (18%). Geddes (2017) suggests several reasons for his findings, including that committees may prefer witnesses confident in a Westminster environment; inquiries may be launched on short notice which may favour local witnesses; and the pool from which evidence is drawn may suffer from gender imbalances itself.

Elsewhere, Green (2016) found that female witnesses are underrepresented in the legislative committees of France's National Assembly and Rumbul (2016) reached the same conclusion for the Welsh legislature. Halpin, MacLeod and McLaverty (2012) looked at both oral and written evidence given to the Scottish Parliament and found that there is a core of participants, a set of 'usual suspects' heavily involved in many hearings. It is noteworthy that this is the only obtained source considering written evidence and it did not find considerable differences in evidence givers between the two evidence types. In addition to this, Thompson (2014) has researched the impact of evidence taking in Bill Committees, and Pedersen, Halpin and Rasmussen (2015) looked at how variation in committee agendas and procedures for calling witnesses in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK influenced witness composition and evidence concentration. The latter study found that when committees invite witnesses, rather than using open access procedures, a more diverse set of actors are mobilised and evidence giving tends to be less concentrated in the hands of a few actors.

Available research suggests that 'usual suspects' heavily contribute to committees, that evidence givers are concentrated in London and South England, and that men give evidence much more often than women. In this paper, we will expand on this research and interrogate whether the same imbalances are present at single committee level. This will be done by drawing on a dataset from the IDC, covering both oral and written evidence from its inception in 1997 to the general election in 2017. In doing so, our dataset spanning 20 years will complement the shorter term, subnational or international data of existing research. This will allow us to get an understanding of whether the same imbalances are persistent over time, or whether other trends can be observed. It also allows us to begin considering whether, and to what extent, the department or policy area covered by a committee has particular characteristics which affect witness diversity and engagement.

International Development Committee (IDC) – history and characteristics

The Department for International Development (DfID) was established in 1997, following a landslide victory by the Labour Party in the General Election. Since 1979, select committees have been created and re-organised to mirror the configuration of government departments (see Maer, Gay and Kelly, 2009). Following the creation of DfID a select committee on International Development was thus formed and has persisted for the subsequent two decades, through five parliaments.

Though much younger than some, for example the Treasury and Defence committees, the IDC can be considered, following Norton (1998), to be reasonably well institutionalised. It has had 4 chairs in two decades, each of which had between 18 and 22 years' experience as an MP before becoming chair: Bowen Wells (Cons 1997-2001, elected 1979); Tony Baldry (Cons 2001-5, elected 1983); Malcolm Bruce (Lib Dem 2005-10, 2010-15, elected 1983); Stephen Twigg, (Lab, 2015-17, 2017-ongoing, elected 1997). During this same period there have been 8 DfID Secretaries of State (SoS), four Labour and four Conservative. Five of these had 7 years or less experience in parliament, three had a decade or more (Short, Alexander and Mitchell), and only one (Mitchell) had over two decades.¹ The chair of the IDC role has clearly been subject to less turnover than that of SoS and has been occupied by individuals with much greater experience in parliament. It has also, however, been occupied solely by men, whereas five of the eight SoS for International Development since 1997 have been women. Two SoS have also been from minority ethnic groups (Amos and Patel), though these served only 5 and 16 months respectively. The double terms of Bruce and Twigg as IDC chair, despite the latter serving during an unusually short parliament 2015-17, have provided a measure of stability and the opportunity to build expertise and name-recognition within government and the 'Committee public.' This consists of the external individuals and groups interested and involved in fields related to UK development policy, including non-profits, academics, private sector organisations, media, private citizens and international organisations.

The geographic and thematic scope of the work of DfID, and therefore the range of issues which the IDC can engage with through formal inquiries and other measures, is substantial. Accordingly the committee public is broad in the range of interests it represents and is geographically dispersed. Changes in DfID resources, remit and relationship with other government departments have shaped the context in which the IDC carries out its duties. Since 1997 DfID's budget has grown exponentially, bringing demand for greater oversight, transparency and accountability of aid spending. The focus on DfID spending, both the size of its budget and the way it is spent, was exacerbated by the decisions taken by the coalition government in 2013 to meet the 0.7% of GNI aid spending target and in 2015 to enshrine this in UK law. Reflecting this increased government and public focus on aid quantity and quality, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) was established in 2011, along

¹ These are as follows: Labour - Claire Short 1997-2003 (elected 1983), Valerie Amos 2003 (member of House of Lords 1997-2010), Hilary Benn 2003-7 (elected 1999) and Douglas Alexander 2007-10 (elected 1997); Conservative – Andrew Mitchell 2010-2012 (elected 1987-1997, 2001- present), Justine Greening 2012-2016 (elected 2005), Priti Patel 2016-17 (elected 2010), and Penny Mordaunt 2017-ongoing (elected 2010).

with a Sub Committee on the work of ICAI which reports to the House of Commons through the IDC.

Over the two decades since 1997 the remit of DfID has also expanded as analyses of the causes and consequences of poverty have highlighted challenges of conflict, insecurity and the failure of states to deliver development and security for their citizens. DfID has a seat on the National Security Council, one of only six government departments to do so. Engaging with issues of conflict and security has brought DfID, and by extension IDC, onto policy terrain previously occupied by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defence (MoD). This challenges Norton's suggestion that 'there is limited scope for overlap between the jurisdictions of the several committee (sic)' (1991: 149). The overlap stems partially from the fact that during the same period in which DfID budgets have risen dramatically, other departments, particularly the FCO, have faced deep cuts. Recognition of the connections between DfID, FCO and MoD activities was reflected in joint Public Service Agreements, before their abolition in 2010. It remains visible in cross department funding schemes which require the three to work together, such as the Conflict Security and Stability Fund. It was also reflected recently in an IDC inquiry into spending of aid allocated to departments other than DfID, estimated to account for around a quarter of the UK aid budget, including by the FCO and MoD, amongst others.

The scope of DfID work around the globe, the positive reputation it has developed for the UK as a global development leader, and the significant resources at its disposal to support development activities, combine to ensure the committee public is large, international and, in the case of some stakeholders, heavily invested in and affected by policy decisions and changes. DfID relies heavily on external organisations to carry out development-related work on behalf of the UK, including an array of non-profits, ranging from multi-national with thousands of employees to small grassroots service providers, private companies, think tanks, research institutes and academic institutions. UK development policy is also in part delivered through and shaped by UK involvement with international organisations, particularly the European Union and United Nations. These factors all affect who has an interest in the work of the committee and who might seek to engage with the IDC in order to influence UK development policy and debate.

Reviewing oral evidence presented to IDC 1997-2017 – whose voices are being heard?

The following sections focus in on specific categories of witnesses to present our findings on who is accepting invitations to present oral evidence to the IDC and whether/how this changes over time. The areas for focus overlap to some extent with those considered by other scholars, including patterns in witness gender and geography and the breakdown between research intensive (Russell Group) and other higher education institutions. It also goes into detail on two issues particularly relevant to the policy area of international development: first, considering which organisations amongst the large category of non-profit organisations can be considered to form the 'usual suspects'; and second exploring the breakdown of

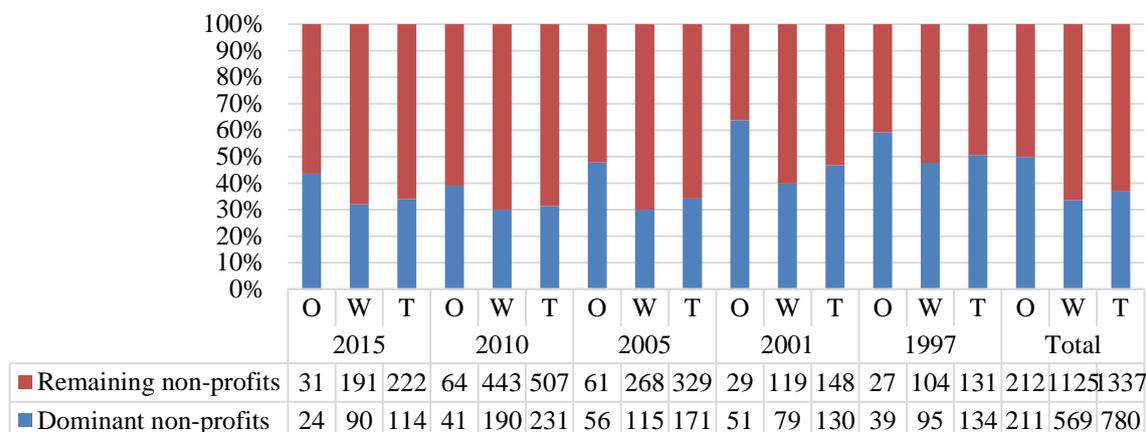
government witnesses to see whether, as non-DFID departments become more involved in spending UK aid, DFID remains the primary department called by the IDC.

Table 1: Non-profit (Charity and Campaigning) organisations who gave evidence to the IDC on more than 20 occasions from 1997 to 2017

Organisation	Oral	Written	Total
ActionAid	21	60	81
Amnesty	7	16	23
Bond	11	42	53
CAFOD	7	33	40
Care	6	20	26
Christian Aid	25	78	103
Dev. initiatives	4	20	24
Global Witness	7	15	22
International Alert	6	14	20
Int. HIV/Aids Alliance	7	13	20
Int. Rescue Committee	6	16	22
Marie Stopes Int.	4	29	33
Oxfam	40	66	106
Saferworld	15	43	58
Save the Children	36	59	95
VSO	3	24	27
WWF	6	21	27
Total	211	569	780
Category total	423	1694	2117

Evidence from Non-profit (Charity and Campaigning) organisations

Figure 1: Ratio of evidence provided by dominant non-profit charity and campaigning organisations



The dominant non-profit charity and campaigning organisations giving evidence can be seen in Table 1. All organisations providing evidence at least twenty times between 1997 and 2017 are included and this amounts to seventeen well-known non-profits. These seventeen organisations gave oral evidence 211 times, which is 49.88% of the category total. This figure is interesting when compared to written evidence. The dominant non-profits provided such evidence 569 times, which amounts to 33.59% of the category total. This sharp difference illustrates that the dominant non-profits are much more prominent as oral witnesses in committee hearings than they are in terms of providing written evidence. The provision of oral evidence is much more concentrated, indicating that committee hearings are to some extent populated by ‘usual suspects’. Figure 1 shows this concentration over time. For oral evidence, the dominant non-profits were responsible for roughly 44% in the 2015 Parliament, 39% in the 2010 Parliament, 48% in the 2005 Parliament, 64% in the 2001 Parliament and 59% in the 1997 Parliament. They were more prominent in earlier parliaments and constituted over half of all witnesses in this category. The trend shows that this dominance has decreased over time but they are consistently overrepresented in committee hearings compared to written evidence provision.

There are several possible explanations for this, one of which is that most of the dominant organisations have established intimate relationships with DfID. Up to December 2016 DfID held long-term Programme Partnership Agreements (PPAs) with organisations recognised for their contribution to delivering the Millennium Development Goals and for being ‘good value for money’, demonstrated through competitive selection (UK Government 2017). Between 2011 and 2016, 41 organisations held PPAs and twelve of our seventeen dominant non-profits were among them. The remaining five have also received funding from DfID.² If we look at the top four evidence givers (ActionAid, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Save the Children), then Oxfam received the largest amount of funds of all 41 PPA organisations

² These are the International Rescue Commission (DfID 2012), VSO (2018), Amnesty (NGO Monitor 2012) Bond (DfID 2017) and Global Witness (UK Government 2013).

between 2011 and 2016 (£64,233,457), Save the Children the second largest (£54,099,804), Christian Aid the fourth largest (£41,721,578) and ActionAid the ninth largest amount (£23,684,273). Most top evidence givers are thus significantly funded by, and work closely with, DfID. The IDC may invite them more often than other organisations on the basis that they are likely to have knowledge of, and experience from, the policies and programmes scrutinised by the committee.

Two contributing explanations are location and longevity. Of the seventeen organisations, ten have headquarters in London and of the remaining seven, four have offices in London. The four most frequent evidence givers all have offices in London. In terms of longevity, the average founding year of the seventeen non-profits is 1966, whereas the average year is 1944 for the four most dominant. We have not looked at location and longevity for all non-profits giving evidence but this comparison of dominant non-profits suggests that a London office and longevity correlate with increased evidence giving. If inquiries are sometimes established at short notice and if committees may prefer witnesses confident in a Westminster environment to facilitate a smooth-running questioning process, as Geddes (2017) argues, then longstanding organisations with offices in London have an advantage over other potential evidence providers. Proximity caters for rapid committee engagement and longevity helps organisations build social capital with the select committee. Conversely, many inquiries consider topics directly pertaining to overseas non-profits and they frequently provide written evidence. Their remoteness may disadvantage them for several reasons. They might lack the necessary capabilities to travel to London, they might be deemed unfamiliar with the inquiry process, and it may not be apparent to the committee that they are involved in the policies or programmes under scrutiny. While more in-depth research is necessary to corroborate these assumptions, they do question whether the committee is subjected to the most relevant knowledge at all times.

Higher education institutions

Figure 2: Ratio of evidence provided by Russell group and London universities

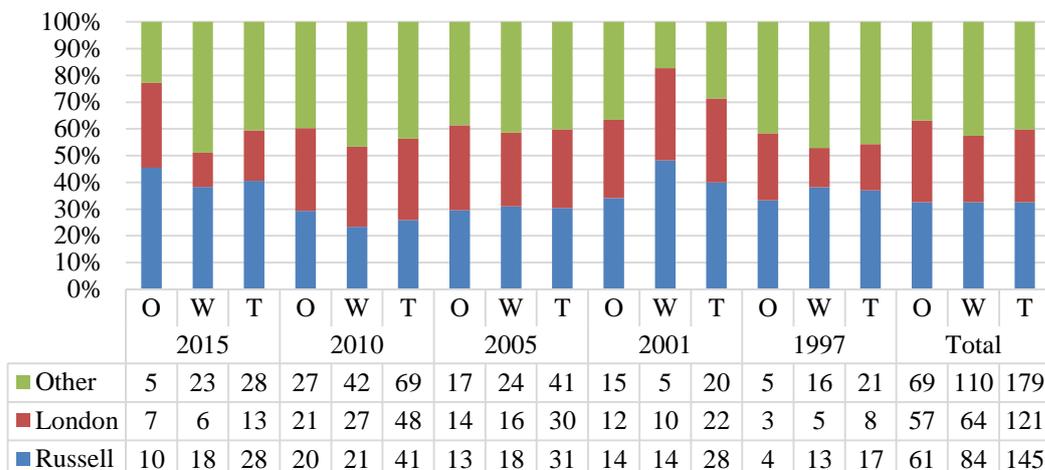


Figure 3: Ratio of evidence provided by Russell group and London universities, excluding Sussex and foreign universities

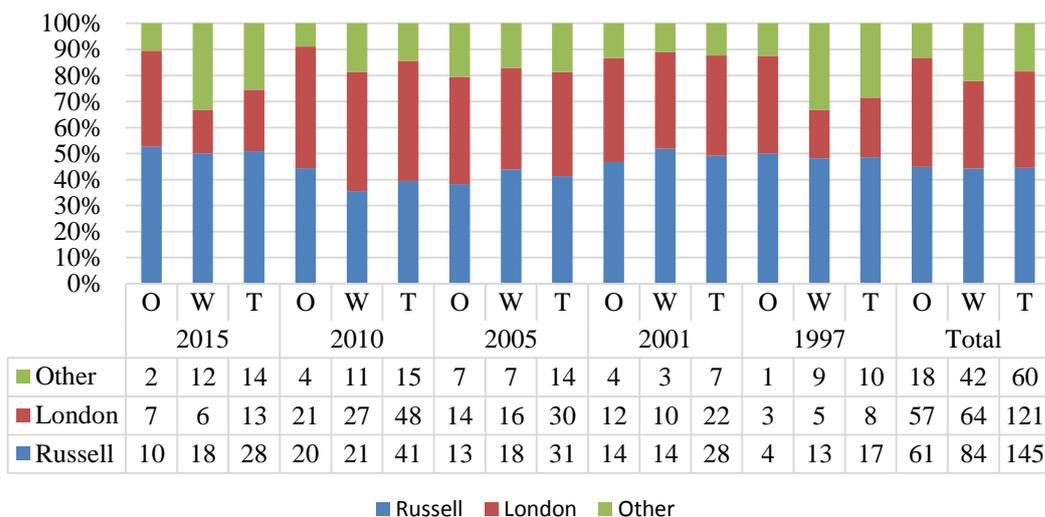


Figure 3 shows the ratio of evidence provided by Russell group and London universities. Caution is advised when interpreting this figure. Sometimes several universities collaborated in the submission of one piece of evidence. Here, each institution is counted once, which means that the total number of institutions would exceed the amount of evidence given. Moreover, categories are overlapping; UCL is for example counted in both ‘Russell’ and ‘London’ groups. Evidence totals should for these reasons not be deduced from the figure. Instead, its sole purpose is to show the ratio of evidence provided by a) universities belonging to the Russell Group, b) universities located in London, and c) universities fitting neither category.

At first glance, it is apparent that Russell Group and London universities are very well represented, giving between 50-80% of oral and written evidence in all parliaments. On average, Russell Group and London universities were responsible for just over 60% of oral evidence and just under 60% of written evidence. One might assume from this that the top evidence providing university would belong to the Russell Group and/or be located in London. However, The University of Sussex is the top provider. They gave oral evidence 41 times and provided written evidence 43 times, which is roughly four times more than any other university. The very high amount of evidence provided by Sussex, we believe, has to do with the world renowned reputation and research impact of its Institute of Development Studies. According to Quacquarelli Symonds' world ranking of development studies institutions, Sussex has been the top university for three of the past four years, outperforming the likes of Harvard and Oxford (QS 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015). This ranking takes into account reputation among academics and employers, but also research citations per paper and H-index. The latter two components measure academic impact and Sussex's engagement with the select committee suggests that its policy impact is equally impressive.

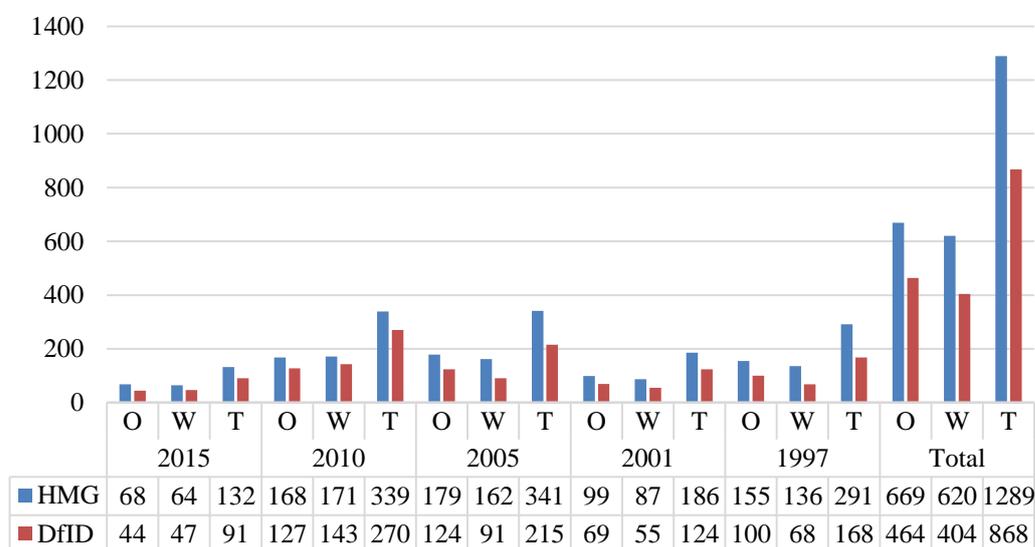
If we remove the University of Sussex and foreign universities from the 'other' category, then the dominance of Russell Group and London universities becomes all the more apparent. This is shown in figure 3 and it can be seen that the ratio of oral evidence provided by Russell and London universities is over 85%, whereas written evidence is just under 80%. These figures clearly show that – barring Sussex – UK universities not belonging to any of the two groups are significantly marginalised from the evidence process. Again we believe that a part of the explanation for this is location, with London universities having easier access to the select committee and being able to build up a good reputation as accessible evidence providers. For Russell Group universities, a part of the explanation lies in them having a long history of research experience, giving them the perception of providing cutting edge policy-relevant knowledge. This also means that both groups can be considered 'usual suspects' to the detriment of other UK universities.

HMG: DfID vs other departments

As discussed earlier, two trends can be observed in DfID's resources and responsibilities since 1997. First, DfID's budget has risen over the past two decades, whilst other departments such as the FCO have declined significantly. Second, DfID has engaged in more joined up work, particularly with the FCO and the MoD. Departments other than DfID are expected to spend around a quarter of the UK aid budget this year, a shift promoted by

Conservative Secretaries of State since 2010 but criticised by others concerned that national interest arguments for aid have superseded those based on a moral imperative. As aid has shifted to other departments and as DfID works increasingly across departments we might expect to see a fall in the proportion of HMG witnesses from DfID. Our findings, however, suggest this is not the case. DfID continues to account for the lion's share of HMG appearances before the committee, in oral evidence the proportion given by DfID representatives was 64% in the 1997-2001 parliament and averaged out at 69% over two decades. In one recent parliament (2010-15) DfID accounted for 76% of oral witnesses. These figures suggest that although other representatives, including from the FCO, MoD, Treasury and Department for International Trade may be called to give evidence to the committee, DfID remains the primary point of contact in HMG for the IDC.

Figure 4: Proportion of HMG evidence provided by DfID



How does IDC compare to other committees?

Geddes original categories	Geddes modified categories	Our categories comparable to Geddes modified. Percentages are 1997-2017 averages of oral evidence
Government: 7.97%	Government + Civil service and public sector + Research council (from HE category): 45.12%	Government, civil service and public sector, including research councils: 37.92%
Civil service and public sector: 36.81%	N/A	N/A
Higher education: 8.06%	Higher education - Research council - Learned society: 7.35%	Higher education, excluding research councils and learned societies: 8.47%
Non-profit: 29.43%	Non-profit + Learned society:	Non-profits, including learned

	29.80%	societies: 37.49%
Private sector: 10.70%	Private sector: 10.70%	Private sector: 7.81%
Politician: 3.72%	Politician: 3.72%	Politician: 5.96%
Other: 3.32%	Other: 3.32%	Other: 2.35%
Geddes non-profit category	Geddes modified non-profit category	Our modified non-profit category
Business and/or trade association: 6.39%	Business and/or trade organisation: 6.39%	Business and/or trade organisation: 0.60%
Charity and/or campaign group: 11.29%	Charity and/or campaign group: 11.29%	Charity and/or campaign group: 23.11%
International organisation: 0.59%	International organisation: 0.59%	International organisation: 9.40%
Professional association or body: 5.64%	Professional association or body + Learned society: 6.02%	Professional association or body: 0.71%
Think tank or research institute: 3.38%	Think tank or research institute: 3.38%	Think tank or research institute: 3.50%
Trade union: 2.08%	Trade union: 2.08%	Trade union: 0.16%
Other: 0.09%	Other: removed	N/A

Table 2: Comparing Geddes (2017) with our dataset

Witness engagement with the IDC is put into perspective when compared to other committees. For this purpose, we compare our data to the datasets of Berry and Kippin (2014) and Geddes (2017). Berry and Kippin’s dataset includes all oral evidence given to Commons, Lords and joint committees from 8 October to 7 November 2013. Geddes’ dataset includes all oral evidence given to 24 departmental and cross-cutting select committees in the House of Commons from 8 May 2013 to 14 May 2014. There are differences between how we, Berry and Kippin, and Geddes categorise witnesses. We chose to undertake a partial comparison with Berry and Kippin’s data, and to restructure our and Geddes’ data to enable a full comparison with that larger dataset; this can be seen in Table 2. The first restructured category merged all government, civil service and public sector witnesses. This big category will mask internal nuances but gives an account of how often the government along with its civil service and public sector engage with the IDC and how that compares to other committees. That merged category accounts for 45.12% of all oral evidence in Geddes’ dataset, 51% in Berry and Kippin’s dataset (if looking exclusively at Commons committees) and 37.92% in our dataset. The ‘extended government’ sector appears to engage comparatively less with the IDC than with other select committees. The reverse is true for non-profit witnesses. Their input were more often called for by the IDC (37.49%) than the select committees covered by Geddes (29.80%), and Berry and Kippin (18% in Commons committees). Another noticeable difference is that the private sector engaged less with the IDC (7.81%) than the committees in Geddes (10.70%), and Berry and Kippin (17% in Commons committees). It is also the case that politicians, either domestic or foreign, not part of UK government appear more frequently at IDC hearings (5.69%) than those hearings analysed by Geddes (3.72%). If we break down the substantial non-profit category, further interesting differences can be observed. The IDC receives more witnesses from charities, campaigning groups and international organisations, whereas Geddes’ committees feature

more business and trade organisations as well as professional associations and trade unions. Berry and Kippin's data resonates with Geddes. For example, over all their committees, 11.2% of witnesses were charities, 5.8% were professional associations, and 3.4% were think tanks.

We believe that the subject matters considered in IDC inquiries can account for many of these differences. Charities and campaigning groups are prominent in the IDC since many work with international development issues and have significant contracts awarded by DfID, as previously discussed. Conversely, private companies, business and trade organisations, as well as professional associations and trade unions appear more frequently in other committees as their mandates and areas of interest are less likely to concern the policies and programmes scrutinised by the IDC. The reverse logic applies to non-profit international organisations; they are more likely to engage with the IDC than other committees since it scrutinises policies often pertaining to international organisations. For example, an inquiry into trade and development at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) concluded in 2003 and it featured a range of witnesses from both the WTO and the European Commission. (IDC 2003). The same logic applies to foreign government representatives. They appeared more frequently before the IDC than other committees and this is likely because many inquiries addressed DfID policies and programmes in those countries or in British overseas territories or crown dependencies.

For academic institutions, a slight difference can be observed between the IDC (8.47%) and the committees in Geddes' dataset (7.35%). Of the academic institutions in Geddes' dataset, 37.8%³ were London-based and 75.6% were Russell Group universities. In Berry and Kippin's dataset, 44% of academic evidence given to all committees came from London-based institutions. Our figures show that London-based institutions accounted for 36.84% and Russell Group universities for 35.09% of oral evidence during that time period (the 2010 Parliament). Those figures are relatively consistent over time; as an average between 1997 and 2017, London-based institutions accounted for 36.77% and Russell Group universities for 39.35% of oral evidence. The sharp difference between our and Geddes' datasets in terms of Russell Group dominance is surprising. Even if we exclude Sussex University from our dataset – the most dominant IDC academic witness – Russell Group universities would still only account for 52.63% (or 53.51% as an average between 1997-2017) of oral evidence in this category. This suggests that while Russell Group universities are well-represented in the IDC, they dominate to a much larger extent in other committees.

In terms of gender imbalance, 24.7% of witnesses are women in Geddes' dataset. This figure is 24% in Berry and Kippin's dataset covering Commons committees. Geddes also looked at the IDC and found that 42.2% of oral evidence was given by women, the highest percentage of all committees. Our 1997-2017 average is 28.09% in this regard. However, if we look over time, a positive trend is apparent: 25.80% of evidence givers were women in the 1997

³ Geddes' figures for London-based institutions are not directly comparable as they may include research councils and learned societies, two subcategories we have placed elsewhere.

Parliament, 24.15% in the 2001 Parliament, 24.19% in the 2005 Parliament, 30.30% in the 2010 parliament and 45.14% in the 2015 parliament. Geddes' IDC data resonates well with ours; the year covered in that dataset is a snapshot of a trend towards more equal participation.

Oral vs written evidence: Observations and implications for witness diversity

Before moving onto our concluding remarks, it is important to say a little more on written evidence, specifically what can examining patterns in written evidence submission tell us about the committee public and about the ability of particular categories or individual members to reach the stage of providing oral evidence. The studies with which we have sought to compare our research focus solely on oral evidence.⁴ In our analysis of the literature on select committee evidence this is reasonably typical. Oral evidence is by invitation and, by virtue of being delivered in person and discussed with the committee members, it has the guarantee of being heard by those empowered to influence policy. A call for written evidence is open to all, and this is reflected in the larger volume of written evidence compared with oral evidence across the parliaments we reviewed. There is an often unspoken but nevertheless clear sense that evidence is hierarchical – written represents the bottom, less important tier, whilst oral evidence is the more important and prestigious mode of engagement. There are of course pragmatic reasons why less oral evidence is received by a committee than written evidence. As Pedersen, Halpin and Rasmussen (2015: 412) argue in their comparative cross-national analysis of evidence-giving: '(l)istening to external actors takes time, and time is a scarce resource in parliamentary work.' Committee staff and chairs must make decisions on who to invite in order to ensure key stakeholders are included and that the best available knowledge is presented (2015: 411). These can both be considered, however, to be subjective decisions. Committee staff and chairs, particularly those with long experience in the role, committee or sector, will likely have an established pool of contacts, members of which can appear, often at short notice, to give evidence or can suggest alternatives from within their own sphere of connections. As we have seen in the discussion on non-profits, this is one of several potential reasons for a high concentration of oral

⁴ In reviewing literature for this study we identified one paper which considered both oral and written evidence presented to the Scottish Parliament. The authors note that 'Although space precludes us from reporting data by evidence type, we have conducted the analysis, which shows that for Scotland this picture did not change much when we looked at different evidence types. The only exception is for individuals – the bulk of the evidence given was written, with few invited to give oral evidence.' This is different to our findings, as will be discussed briefly later in the paper. See Halpin, D., MacLeod, I. and P. McLaverty (2012) 'Committee Hearings of the Scottish Parliament: Evidence Giving and Policy Learning', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 18, 1–20.

evidence coming from within a small group of organisations. This higher concentration is interesting as it contradicts Halpin, MacLeod and McLaverty (2012) who found no significant difference in evidence concentration between evidence types. While they found a set of 'usual suspects' heavily involved in evidence provision, we find that the usual suspects are more concentrated in committee hearings than in the provision of written evidence. This difference in concentration was not observed to the same extent when we looked at higher education institutions. Further research is necessary to establish more firmly whether this oral evidence concentration is a unique feature of the non-profit industry and its relationship with the IDC, or if it can be observed in other committees and sectors.

This discussion ties in with another point, which is that providing written evidence is an important, and perhaps the best, approach for an individual or organisation to advertise expertise and investment in an inquiry subject. Providing written evidence may therefore increase the likelihood of being called to give oral evidence. If this is true then the dominant non-profits may have been writing evidence on a regular basis to increase their chances of being called to give oral evidence. These assumptions could be substantiated through further research into the sequencing of written and oral evidence provision.

Conclusions and implications for further research

Our analysis of two decades of IDC witness data partially supports conclusions which have been observed by others who have studied witness diversity at the cross-committee level of analysis. Women are under-represented amongst those giving oral evidence to committees and this holds true for the IDC. The proportion of oral evidence given by women to the IDC is however above the average and has grown steadily in recent years. Further research could examine the characteristics of the committee and of the policy area, as well as any specific steps taken by members and staff, to explore the reasons for improving gender balance and whether these might hold lessons for other committees. Due to the nature of the data available we were unable to analyse patterns of representation for other protected characteristics such as race, disability and sexuality. This limits any assessment of witness diversity to post-hoc binary gender coding which, though providing a basis for comparing committees and assessing one aspect of diversity is far from a holistic account.

Our analysis of the academic witness category revealed a geographic skewing of the witness pool towards London and the South East. This dominance is in line with the findings of others, who also examined geographical location of witnesses in other categories. We also considered two questions specific to the IDC: which non-profits dominate the witness pool and is there evidence to suggest DfID is being challenged in its role as main source of HMG witnesses to the committee. Despite an increasing overlap between the work of DfID, the FCO and to a lesser extent the MoD, we did not observe any significant increase in non-DfID witnesses from HMG appearing before the committee. In both academic institutions and the non-profit (campaigning and charity) category we find a small group of witnesses to be dominant. This has implications for the nature of the evidence the committee is receiving and

the ways it is framed. Further research into the connections between dominant witnesses would shed light on the nature of the network which the IDC relies on in scrutinising the work of DfID and development policy more widely.

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