

Parliament's pleas for evidence are pleasing, but pinpointing the opportunities can be a pain.

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The indication that influential UK Parliamentary committees want more academics to submit evidence is most welcome, says [Alex Waddington](#). But, he argues, there must be a smarter way of marshalling information from the Parliament UK website to provide a one-stop-shop for viewing the latest inquires and calls for submissions.



On a lovely sunny day in June, zinging through the chilled air of the conference room in Manchester, the message came across very loud and clearly; parliamentary committees want to hear more from academics. For someone whose is being employed to increase policymakers' engagement with Manchester's research and associated expertise, this rallying call from the [Parliamentary Outreach Service](#) brought a little bit of extra sunshine into my world. But while the academics in attendance fired in more cerebral questions about the mechanisms of Parliamentary decision-making, one thing was playing on my mind; where is the single place that I can go to find all the current calls for evidence?

Our affable presenter, Dr Stephen McGinness, Clerk to the Science and Technology Committee, admitted that providing this resource was something that was discussed from time to time among his peers. But the reality is that keeping abreast of the constant stream of calls means either buying in external intelligence reports (I saw an example of pretty a good one from [Public Policy Strategies](#) recently), or constantly keeping your own eyes on the work of each committee – whether they be Commons or Lords, Joint or Public Bill. You may think the latter approach shouldn't prove to be that much of a problem.

After all, if you are involved in researching carbon and energy reduction, relevant calls are likely to come from the Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee and also the Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, so they are definitely ones to keep tabs on. But during recent efforts to compile a master list of all active calls for evidence from Parliament, I came across an inquiry into 'Energy generation in Wales: Shale Gas' from the Welsh Affairs Committee – rather less likely to be monitored by environmental researchers. Then there is the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, which is currently inviting contributions to its new inquiry into waste and the bioeconomy, and the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee's latest inquiry into 'Economic Impact of Shale Gas and Oil on UK Energy Policy'.



Image credit: Francisco Diez (CC BY)

To find out about calls from these five committees would mean visiting the Parliament UK web page for each one, or registering for five separate email alerts. The alert service doesn't just tell you about new calls, but also all manner of other committee business, meaning a constant flow of information into your inbox. Needless to say, fatigue can quickly set in, and from the onwards it's all-too-easy to miss the new calls for evidence as they are announced.

In an attempt to make life a bit easier, the UK Parliament web site does offer a rather handy Quick Subscribe service, which allows you to manage all your alerts in once place through a process of ticking and un-ticking boxes.

In my engagement facilitation role for [Policy@Manchester](#), I have dutifully subscribed to updates for every Committee, whether that is a Lord or Commons Select Committee, Bill Committee or Joint Committee. So the theory runs that whenever there is a new call for evidence, I should be among the first to know.

But while updating my master list last week, highly caffeinated, working through all the alerts sprawled across my inbox, it became apparent this source alone cannot, seemingly, be relied upon. Upon visiting the UK Parliament web site and moving through the various Committee pages one by one, it quickly became apparent that many more new calls had been launched in the preceding weeks – but I had not received alerts to tell me about them.

It took over two hours of trawling through alphabetical lists of Commons, Lords and Joint Select Committees and checking the latest news on each page, to ensure I had everything. The end result was a list of active calls for evidence that had swelled in size to 50. During my navigational adventures, I did find a useful shortcut for checking out what all the Lords Committees are up to; the [House of Lords Committee Bulletin](#) is published daily at the close of business (when the House is not in recess), detailing all current inquiries and their submission closing dates. But while one might expect the same service to exist for Commons committees, this expectation quickly turns to disappointment when you try to find it.

While appreciating that managing the UK Parliament web site must be a mammoth task with only finite resource available, one feels that efforts to get a greater breadth of experts to provide input and insight into the constant stream of Committee inquiries would be helped considerably by some simple consolidation of information.

To use a pretty horrible cliché, it would be a win-win; academics (and associated professional staff like myself) get access to an ‘at-a-glance’ list of all the available opportunities to submit expert evidence to Parliament, with the exciting further possibility of citation in a final report or being called to give oral evidence – all of which is a great demonstration of impact. For Parliament, it would bring increased engagement and help facilitate better access to the latest evidence-based research and thinking on the big issues facing society.

It should not be complicated; a tantalising hint of what should be possible can be seen on the [Committees page](#). Scroll down to the bottom of the page to ‘Inquiries A-Z’ to see a list of the latest five inquiries, which has the look of being populated manually.

What one really wants to do here is click on the headline ‘New Inquires’ and be presented with a long list of new enquiries, in date order of which they were announced.

But despite best efforts, I cannot find such a long list, and certainly there is no RSS feed, which would pipe a lovely consolidated flow of opportunities on my desktop and various mobile devices as soon as they were published.

I’m optimistic that in the not-too-distance the required development may happen to bring some coherence to committee calls, and I have shared my thoughts on how the current presentation might be improved with the Parliamentary Outreach Service. But until such a day as this happens, readers are welcome to share [Policy@Manchester’s](#) latest, [lovingly crafted and compiled, master list of calls for expertise and evidence](#).

If you end up on Parliament TV, dressed in your finery, giving evidence as an expert witness, don’t forget to give us a wave.

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

About the Author

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