

## Public Engagement with Parliamentary Committees

### 1. What Committee/Inquiry did you submit evidence to?

#### Justice

**Other (please specify):** During the session 2013-2014 to Select Committee on the European Union sub-committee F; Joint Committee on Human Rights; Second Delegated Legislation Committee; Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, as well as standing committees on bills. Questions answered in respect of Justice Select Committee (Impact of Changes to Civil Legal Aid).

### 2. How did your organisation learn of the inquiry?

Through general reports or word of mouth

### 3. The terms of reference give you enough guidance about the issue?

Yes

### 4. Did your organisation gather information especially for the inquiry?

Yes

No

### 5. Was this information concerned with;

**Both the issue and member attitudes**

**Other (please specify):** we gathered evidence from members.

### 6. In determining your organisation's position, did you engage in some special non-routine consultation process with all or some segment of your organisation's membership?

Yes

### 7. Which type of submission did your organisation prepare?

**Both** (Written and Oral)

### 8. In preparing for the inquiry, please indicate which of the following activities were undertaken, including how significant this activity was in providing material for your submission.

**Very Significant Role 1**

**Significant Role 2**

**Minor Role 3**

**Not Used 4**

Established internal task force

Task one or two staff members with producing a response **1**

Circularise members/member groups inviting their views **1**

Consult informally with selected members with specialist knowledge **1**

Use material already prepared for department or other inquiry **2**

Draw on general knowledge of issue and members views of existing office bearers **2**

Discuss issue with other organisations **2**

**Other (please specify):** Establish internal task force sounds rather grand, but we did have a group of members reviewing evidence and drafting.

**9. How important were the following outcomes for your organisation?**

**Very Important Outcome 1    Important Outcome 2    Minor Outcome 3    Not an outcome 4**

We had an opportunity to present our views to Parliament **2**

The committee accepted some of our arguments, which were reflected in the report **1**

Our evidence influenced the committee report and later government policy **1**

Members heard what we had to say and this may influence their future approach **1**

Giving evidence raised our public profile and gave us a platform **2**

We obtained new information about the issue itself **1**

We obtained new information about government policy/perspectives **3**

We obtained new information about departmental attitudes/judgements **3**

We obtained new information about the attitudes of other organisations **friendly** to our position **2**

We obtained new information about the attitudes of other organisations **hostile** to our position **4**

We formed new or strengthened links with other groups sharing our concern for the issue **2**

**Some other Outcomes (please specify):** As to the outcomes above, we distinguish between the importance of the outcomes and whether they happened in this particular enquiry. For example we regard getting new information about departmental attitudes/judgements as very important, but in this particular enquiry we did not get much new information. Scores above relate to what we achieved in this particular enquiry rather than the importance of each type of outcome in the abstract. For example, we did not obtain new information about organizations hostile to our position: what we read, we knew already. Had we obtained such information, it would have been very important. In indicating that we obtained new information about the issue or the attitudes of other organizations, what we mean is that we obtained new evidence (that submitted by other organizations)

**10. (Please only answer this question if you gave oral evidence)**

**In giving your evidence to the committee please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements about your experience:**

**Strongly Agree 1    Agree 2    Disagree 3    Strongly Disagree 4**

Individual questions were probing and relevant **3**

Committee members paid attention and followed our evidence closely **2**

Committee members were polite and encouraging in their approach **2**

We were given a fair opportunity to develop our case **4**

In general we were impressed with the experience of the hearing **3**

**11. Would you please indicate the role (if any) of the following actions in reporting back to members. Would you also please indicate how important this activity was as a means of communication?**

**Very Important Role 1    Important Role 2    Minor Role 3    Not Used 4**

Individual report to Committee meeting **3**

Article in your house journal/newsletter/online message **1**

Blog report **4**

Use of online social media, e.g. Twitter, Facebook or similar **3**

**Other (please specify)** : Emails Article in our hard copy publication to all members, information in our peer reviewed journal.

**12. Did you view or read the Committee report?**

**Yes**

**13. Would your communication to your members have benefitted from an easy to read or generally more accessible version?**

**No**

**14. Did you take any of the following actions as a result of the Committee report? (Please tick all that apply)**

Contact any of the members or staff of the Committee **YES**

Contact another MP **NO**

Contact a minister **YES**

Contact a department **YES**

**Other (please specify):** Get in touch with peers. Get in touch with non-departmental public bodies and urge them to get in touch with the committee. Get in touch with other non-departmental public bodies to draw their attention to the report. Pick up the report in general meetings with the department. Work with lawyers to ensure that the findings could be used in litigation.

**15. Overall, how favourable to your organisation were the Committee findings generally?**

**Very favourable**

**16. Please tick if you agree with the following statements. Please tick all that apply.**

The Committee findings were generally fair and reasonable **AGREE**

The Committee findings would be acceptable, if they could be enforced on all stakeholders

**AGREE**

The Committee findings would be acceptable, if we could reopen the issue as subsequent events demonstrated the error of the original decision **AGREE**

The Committee clearly understood our evidence **AGREE**

The Committee reached unworkable conclusions

The Committee failed to anticipate the consequences of its recommendations

**17. How would you describe the worthwhile features of a Parliamentary Committee inquiry compared to other ways of influencing policy? Please check any of the following statements you agree with in terms of the indicated scale**

**Strongly agree 1   Somewhat agree 2   Neither agree nor disagree 3**

**Somewhat disagree 4   Strongly disagree 5**

The open and public form of a Parliamentary committee inquiry makes it preferable to a governmental consultation or some other more closed approach to policy development **2**

Parliamentary Committees provide a fairer procedure for analysing public policy issues than a government consultation **2**

Our organization learned more about a controversial issue through participating in the Parliamentary Committee inquiry than by making written responses to a government task force or Green Paper **3**

The inquiry did not affect your organisation's position on the issue **1**

Your experience of the inquiry helped to develop your organisations attitudes towards other issues **4**

Participation affected your judgement of the effectiveness of parliament **4**

**Some other Outcome (please specify):**

Were government consultations done well then they would potentially be better than parliamentary enquiries because of the potential for evidence gathering, presentation of past data, "pilots" etc. When detailed pieces of research are done and the findings put out for consultation with open questions this has the potential to gather a lot of evidence and a parliamentary enquiry can then play a supplementary role, interrogating ministers and questioning the officials who have done the research and analysed the data. Where Government consultations present no primary research or data and questions are closed and designed to eliminate the possibility of particular answers, parliamentary committees have to step into the breach. All too often in such cases the real work starts when the Government produces its evidence in rebuttal of the Committee's findings, by which time the Committee may have moved on. It is vital that Committees follow up on revisit a particular area if the work invested in the initial enquiry is to be made to tell.

**18. How would you rate the worthwhile features of a Parliamentary Committee inquiry?**

**Strongly agree 1   Somewhat agree 2   Neutral 3   Somewhat disagree 4   Strongly disagree 5**

The open and public format of a Parliamentary Committee inquiry makes it preferable to a departmental inquiry or some other more private approach to policy development **2**

Parliamentary Committees provide a fairer procedure for analysing public policy issues than a departmental procedure **3**

Our organisation learned more about an issue through participating in the Parliamentary Committee inquiry than by making written responses to a government task force or Green Paper **4**

Members of parliament are better qualified to judge the public interest on particular matters that ministers are too busy to handle personally, and that would otherwise be determined mostly by civil servants or advisory bodies **4**

A parliamentary enquiry created a platform for our organisation **2**

**Some other statements about the good or bad aspects of the Parliamentary Committee procedure compared to other methods of investigating controversial or medium-term issues:**

We value the opportunity to have input into a report that is widely circulated and has weight because people respect the cross party opinion that comes from such an enquiry. We are grateful for the opportunities we have been given to give evidence.

In the oral evidence session in which we participated, lawyers from different areas of practice were put together. The questioning as a result was very brief. Many organizations with valuable evidence were not represented. It felt as though the opportunity were not best utilized for all of us, especially as people had given up a day of work and travelled very long distances to be there, having undertaken substantial preparation. It was possible to follow up in writing afterwards, but the points arguably did not have the impact on busy MPs that they would have had if made orally.

See response to questions above. We have answered the questions in respect of the particular parliamentary enquiry (Justice Select Committee) rather than in general – but the answers do depend upon the particular government consultation and the particular parliamentary enquiry.

**19. Please indicate what other government inquiry processes you have participated in. Tick all that apply.**

Formal/informal evidence to departmental inquiry/task force **YES**

Independent agency inquiry/task force **YES**

Informal meeting with ministers/opposition spokespeople **YES**

Membership of an advisory body **YES**

Evidence to an independent inquiry **YES**

**Other (please specify)** Bilateral meetings. Correspondence. Regular formal meetings. Commenting on ideas/ drafts. Task forces to work on a particular resource to perfect it (e.g. teams of users on the immigration pages of gov.uk).

**20. What would your attitude be to an extension of Parliamentary Committee powers? Please indicate on the scales given below.**

**Strongly agree 1 Somewhat agree 2 Neutral 3 Somewhat disagree 4 Strongly disagree 5**

Parliamentary Committees should have greater influence in the policy process. **3**

The influence of Parliamentary Committees is currently satisfactory. **4**

Parliamentary Committee inquiry is a waste of time. **5**

**21. Have you tried to find a report or other information on the Parliament website?  
Yes**

**22. If yes, could you please indicate if the outcome was any of the following.  
Information was easy to find**

We were frustrated by the lack of search capacity like Google

The basic presentation made it hard to follow

The presentation was too technical

**Other (please specify)** It is usually easier to find the report through google but we can use the parliamentary site when this proves unsuccessful. It is particularly annoying that when you go into the html version of a committee report (from google) you do not see its HC/HL Paper number and the date – you have to go into the pdf or back to the higher level menu (neither navigable from the document when accessed through google) to get these.

**23. This questionnaire seeks to assess your experience of Parliamentary Committee inquiry, your attitude to the outcome of the inquiry, and to an extension of the role of Parliamentary Committees in general. If there are other points relevant to these matters not covered in earlier questions please indicate your views:**

See comments above. We consider that it will be difficult to analyse the results of questions 17 and 18 because they do not distinguish the general and the particular, and different people will answer them in different ways. Government consultations are at the moment hugely unsatisfactory. A limited evidence base is presented in a partisan fashion, questions are designed to make it impossible to give certain responses. The overall total of responses is counted which

leads to pressure for, for example, individuals in a membership organisation to put in their own responses, just creating more paper through which to wade. Timing of publication is carefully managed, in some cases to ensure that evidence is out of date. Parliamentary committees need to take as their starting point the way in which Government is conducting consultations as this will determine their own role.

Party politics are not absent from parliamentary committees and while many committees work hard to achieve a consensual approach this can come at the expense of some issues being set aside or touched lightly. In the enquiry on the basis of which we answered this questionnaire it felt as though there was no desire, outside a couple members of the committee, to dig too deeply in to the controversial issue of immigration. The evidence session was incredibly short compared to the others.

Where a committee takes a sensationalist and headline grabbing approach and snatches a handful of evidence and brings out a report that has not been carefully considered, this brings the system into disrepute. This was not the case in the inquiry about which we have answered these questions.

Much of our work has been done with House of Lords Committees, where their ability to take the long view and their institutional memory makes things easier for us.

Specialist advisors to committees play an essential role and know who to invite to give evidence and which issues to investigate, at the outset or further in the light of evidence received. They have an important role to play in bringing the committee's interest to the attention of those best placed to contribute.

Committees need to go back to those who have given evidence to them on Government responses and get comments. Responses are sometimes misleading and a little further evidence/analysis gathering can generate important further questions to ask.

The best clerks are very mindful of the time organizations have at their disposal and the difficulties created by last minute requests or changes of plan. They are also incredibly helpful.

24. Please fill in the details below. The name of the respondent will be used for circulation of results only.

**Adrian Berry, Chair**  
**Immigration Law Practitioners' Association**  
**Email Address Elizabeth.white@ilpa.org.uk**

25. Do you have paid up or formal members? (If yes, approximately how many?) **Yes, between 1000 and 1100 but some are individuals and others organisations, including large organisations.**

26. Do you have web based members? (If yes, approximately how many?) Do not understand the question.

**27. How do you communicate with your members?**

**Print or electronic newsletter/journal**

**Blog**

**Twitter**

Facebook or other social media

**Other (please specify) Face to face meetings, emails, telephone**

**28. Would you describe your organisation primarily as**

A service organisation

A campaigning organisation

Not answered – we provide a range of services and work for a just and equitable, non-sexist, non-racist, immigration asylum and nationality law practice, but through providing evidence and information rather than “campaigning”.

**29. Has your organisation proposed an enquiry subject to a committee?**

**Yes**

No

**30. Would you welcome a routine opportunity to propose subjects?**

**Yes**

No

**31. Finally, could you please tell us how you personally get information about politics. Could you please rank your use of the following sources from 1 to 4 by dragging them into order of preference.**

Print media

Blogs

Electronic media

**Other:** Not answered. ILPA is a membership organization and the questionnaire has been completed on behalf of an organization.

32. If other, please specify.

The question is answered for the organisation, not for an individual

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your answers will help the Liaison Committee plan for the next Parliament. As soon as the results are compiled, you will receive a copy.

22 May 2015.