



# ACCA Guide to Parliament

## Parliamentary Committees

### Context

Much of the work of the UK Parliament takes place in committees, made up of between 10 to 50 MPs or Lords. These committees examine issues in detail, from government policy and proposed new laws, to wider topics such as the economy.

### Select Committees

Select Committees operate in both Houses. They examine and report on areas ranging from the work of government departments to economic affairs.

Departmental Committees, such as the Treasury Select Committee, are the parliamentary bodies responsible for scrutiny of each government department. Their role is to examine 'the expenditure, administration and policy' of the relevant department and its 'associated public bodies' (e.g. regulators and agencies). Their inquiries can shape policy and future legislation.

Some Select Committees have a role that crosses departmental boundaries such as the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) or Environmental Audit Committee. Depending on the issue under consideration they can look at any or all of the government departments.

Committees determine their own subjects for inquiry, gather written and oral evidence (and sometimes information from visits in the UK or overseas). Inquiries may last from one evidence session only, on a special subject, to an inquiry several months long. At any one time a committee normally has several subjects under consideration. They have powers to insist upon the attendance of witnesses and the production of papers and other materials.

The committee reports to the House – these reports are printed and placed on the internet. The government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

The public are usually welcome to attend evidence sessions, a number of which appear on BBC Parliament every week.

### Committee members

The party composition of select committees reflects that in the House. The membership of departmental committees is confined, in practice, to back-bench

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MPs; Ministers, opposition front-bench spokesmen, party whips and parliamentary private secretaries do not normally serve on these committees.

### The Committee Chair

The Chair of a departmental committee plays a key role in leading the Committee's work. S/he directs the questioning, can come in at any time with additional questions, plays a key role in deciding on the subjects for inquiries and the witnesses that will be called, and is the media front for the Committee when reports are released. S/he also has a casting vote if there is a tie in any vote within the committee.

Each Committee chooses its own Chair from among its members at the first meeting. An informal agreement between the parties usually provides for some committees to be chaired by an opposition MP.

### Sub-committees

All departmental committees now have the power to appoint a sub-committee. Sub-committees can be used in different ways – just to deal with one inquiry, as a regular body looking at one narrow aspect of a committee's remit or as an almost autonomous body. Sub-committees' reports have to be considered and approved by the parent committee.

### Joint Committees

Joint Committees are committees consisting of MPs and Lords. They have similar powers to Select Committees. Some are set up on a permanent basis, like the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Other appointments are for specific purposes, such as examining draft proposals for Bills on subjects ranging from gambling to stem cell research.

### How they work

In Joint Committees, Members from both Houses meet and work as one committee, and appoint a single chairman who can be an MP or Lord.

Joint Committees operate like Select Committees. They may conduct an ongoing examination of a particular area (such as human rights) or of a specific matter, such as Draft Bills or House of Lords reform. Reports are available to the public in printed and online formats.

Two Joint Committees meet on a regular basis: Human Rights, which meets to consider human rights issues in the UK; and Statutory Instruments, which meets to scrutinise delegated legislation.

### Other Joint Committees

Committees such as those on Consolidation Bills and Tax Law Rewrite Bills meet as Bills are referred to them. Joint Committees on specific topics, like those set up to consider draft Bills and other issues, (e.g. the Climate Change Bill) stop meeting once they have fully reported.

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### Differences between the two Houses

House of Commons Select Committees are largely concerned with examining the work of government departments. They are often seen as being more aggressive in their questioning than Lords Committees, as they are often seeking to make political points and to gain media coverage.

Committees in the House of Lords concentrate on four main areas: Europe, science, economics, and the UK constitution. Their investigations look into specialist subjects, taking advantage of the Lords' expertise and the greater amount of time (compared to MPs) available to them to examine issues.

Lords inquiries are also seen as being less 'political', and the constituency element which plays a part in the Commons is absent.

### ACCA's involvement

We regularly provide both written and oral evidence to Select Committees where their inquiries touch on our work. These inquiries often shape Government policy and future legislation and provide a forum for us to communicate our views and influence key opinion formers. We engage in order to:

- Raise ACCA's profile
- Inform and engage with influential MPs
- Influence the development of legislation and public policy
- Protect ACCA's reputation (where necessary)

We ensure that our witnesses are led by the Chief Executive or a Director, due to both the reputational advantages and risks involved.

The priority Committees for ACCA are:

- House of Commons Treasury Committee
- House of Commons BERR Committee
- House of Lords EU Sub Committee A
- House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee

### PAMR

ACCA's Public Affairs and Media Relations (PAMR) department is based in the UK, co-ordinating with colleagues in local offices. We also have an office in Brussels and a permanent staff member in Ukraine, focussed on Central and Eastern Europe.

The PAMR team aims to ensure that the views of our global membership are reflected in the world's media, and that issues of concern to finance professionals and the wider business community are raised with governments and regulators in order to protect and enhance ACCA's reputation and to increase our influence.

The Public Affairs team exists to protect and enhance the reputation of ACCA with

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government, policy advisers, key civil servants and other political and business stakeholders. It aims to build positive relationships with key decision makers, and to influence and inform legislation and policy ensuring the best possible outcomes for ACCA's work. We lead on all engagement with Parliament, monitoring Parliamentary activity and providing advice to colleagues.

The Media Relations team works to provide timely and useful comment to the world's media on key issues affecting not only the accounting profession, but business and personal finances. Our global network of offices engaged in communications ensures that every day of the year ACCA is offering wide ranging responsible advice or commentary on key issues on every continent.

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