1. Background

1.1 The Houses of Parliament’s bicameral Participation Team submitted written evidence to the House of Lords Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee in October 2017. This gives a good overview of the work we do.¹

1.2 Within the Participation team, the Select Committee Engagement Team delivers events around the UK for the public to informally engage with select committee inquiries.

1.3 Our main aim with these events is to reach groups that the committee wants to hear from but know they won’t via the formal routes of written and oral evidence.

1.4 Our indicators of success in this programme of work are:
   - 60% or more of participants agree that by attending an event they feel their views will shape the inquiry
   - 90% or more rate the event as good or excellent
   - 40% or more will never have engaged with a select committee before
   - 85% or more events will be held outside of Westminster

1.5 From November 2016-November 2017, we delivered three engagement events with three House of Lords committees (Charities, Citizenship and Civic Engagement, and Economic Affairs). Two were held in Westminster and one in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex. Across the three events, an average of 90% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of attending they felt their views would help shape the respective inquiries.

2. How can House of Lords Committees develop a national conversation to complement their inquiry and scrutiny work?

2.1 We have nine methods to informally engage the public with the work of select committees:

   - **General promotion of inquiries**
     We can use our extensive databases to promote inquiries to people in specific geographical areas or with relevant interest areas.

   - **Go-To Democracy**
     A process where committee members go to where participants already meet. E.g. parent toddler groups

   - **Deliberative workshop**
     Facilitated group discussion that gives an opportunity to exchange views, ideas and experiences.

• **Open Space**  
An event that enables participants to discuss the issues they think are most important under a broad theme.

• **Conversation or World Café**  
Intended to allow participants to build on the ideas of one another, thereby exploring issues deeply.

• **Filmed or photographic evidence via semi-structured interviews**  
Members of staff go to where participants are to conduct interviews and film or photograph them.

• **Early-career academic receptions**  
A networking event to widen the field of experts that know about your committee.

• **Distributed Dialogue**  
Involves creating a dialogue pack which existing networks can use to get feedback from the people with whom they work.

• **Pyramid Events**  
A process of initial events outside of Westminster, with a final event held in Westminster with committee members.

2.2 All three events delivered for the House of Lords between November 2016 and November 2017 followed the deliberative workshop format where committee staff framed the discussion questions before the event. One of the key advantages of the deliberative workshop method is its flexibility. Deliberative workshops can be of very different lengths, styles and feels due to each one being put together from thousands of possible exercises. They can be used to achieve many different aims and engage a wide range of potential participants.

2.3 There is clearly, however, much more scope for using different methods for House of Lords committee engagement work, as well as the capacity to deliver more events. The Select Committee Engagement Team is well placed to deliver these events to support House of Lords Committees develop a national conversation to complement their inquiry and scrutiny work.

3. **How can House of Lords Committees increase their impact inside and outside the House?**

3.1 **Planning for public engagement**

3.1.1 To diversify the range of people engaging in inquiries, it would be beneficial for committees to take a joined-up approach to planning. This should involve a meeting of the House of Lords digital and press teams, as well as the Select Committee Engagement Team, to explore all communication and engagement options at the outset, or even before an inquiry is launched. A shortlist of public engagement opportunities could then be presented to the committee to make a decision about what public engagement activities they would like to undertake.

3.2 **Accessibility and terms of reference**
3.2.1 The use accessible language is a challenge face by all public organisations. If an inquiry has the goal of engaging people beyond the usual suspects then the style or format of its language can be a barrier.

3.2.2 We would recommend an audit of all committee documents to assess their accessibility and a move away from relying on PDF documents due to their accessibility issues.

3.2.3 We would recommend that a statement is added to committee documents that states “If you require this information in an alternative format – such as audio, large print or Braille – please contact us.” This would allow for the committee to produce accessible communication formats/alternative formats based on user need.

3.3 Event facilitation

3.3.1 To help ensure committees get the most out of events with the public, we need to prepare Members properly for these interactions and ensure they are able to make the public feel engaged and listened to.

3.3.2 Good facilitation is key to all our events, and when members are in attendance this role sits with them. In a recent evidence review published by What Works Scotland (a collaboration between The Scottish Government, the Economic and Social Research Council, The University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow) about promoting equality in community engagement, it was noted that:

3.3.3 Support and training should be available for organisers and facilitators who play a crucial role in driving, shaping and supporting community processes. The skillset facilitators need has widened beyond steering participation and chairing meetings to encompass different approaches to collaboration and interaction (see Bynner et al. 2017; Escobar 2011). Facilitators need to: be flexible, responsive and sensitive to the needs of participants, manage time and contribution, and support participants towards constructive dialogue (Escobar 2011: 48). Facilitators can make the difference between good design and bad; between citizens finding the participatory process a positive experience and not; and can help to empower citizens to make changes for their communities (Bynner et al. 2017).²

3.3.4 If we desire effective engagement at our events, facilitation needs to be recognised as an important skill, and something that most Members will need support with. Our team will need support to deliver this message and any subsequent training to committee staff and members.

3.4 Recognition for attendance

3.4.1 Due to members’ time constraints, events usually happen during a week day. None of the participants are reimbursed for their time spent at these events, so unless they are attending on behalf of their organisation and therefore attending as part of their working day, they are volunteering their time.

3.4.2 One of the main criticisms of volunteering is that “socioeconomic resources and status are the principle determinant”\(^3\). We are thus automatically excluding the marginalised groups who we claim we want to hear from.

3.4.3 In the What Works Scotland Evidence Review they conclude that financial incentives go a long way in supporting certain groups to participate:

> There is evidence, particularly from deliberative processes, to suggest that providing compensation and/or incentives can help young people, single parents, carers and those suffering from financial problems to get involved (Fishkin 2009:114; Ryfe and Stalsburg 2012:51; Roberts and Escobar 2015: 34-35, 201-202). Offering financial or other incentives is important to compensate people for taking the time to participate and to cover expenses which may incur as a result of taking part such as child care, transportation, and wage replacement (Muir and McMahon 2015; Roberts and Escobar 2015:34-35). This will go some way to enabling people facing socio-economic challenges to take part and thus correct the over-representation of advantaged groups (Ryfe and Stalsburg 2012). There is also merit in considering how social innovations such as the Universal Basic Income may contribute to enhance democratic citizenship and community engagement (Bregman 2017).\(^4\)

3.4.4 In line with the House of Lords strategy point to provide more opportunities to engage with the work of the House of Lords, we hope to trial reimbursing people for any loss of earnings or additional expenses incurred as a result of attending our events.

3.5 Innovation pilots for Ad Hoc Committees

3.5.1 The structure and length of House of Lords Ad Hoc Committees allows for opportunities to trial and test engagement activities. It also would give the House of Lords Committee Office the opportunity to be at the forefront of innovation in public engagement through piloting different ways to engage the public.

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3.5.2 As we head towards the next round of Ad Hoc Committees for 2018/19 we have the opportunity to pilot with each committee some innovation in public engagement. This could include the methods outlined in point 2.1, or something different as agreed in collaboration with communication and committee teams.

3.6 People’s Panels

3.6.1 To help diversify witnesses and bring the user voice directly to committee sessions, the addition of people’s panels would ensure that committees go beyond the usual suspects (academics and charities) and hears directly from people. This would involve one evidence session panel guaranteed for people who have direct experience of the policy area under discussion.

3.7 Co-creation of inquiries

3.7.1 One of the most effective ways to deeply engage marginalised groups in the work of House of Lords committees would be to co-create inquiries with the groups that are affected. This would involve identifying groups who would be most affected by the inquiry area and working with them in scoping, planning, calling for and receiving evidence, and reporting. Listening to these communities in this way would be seen as very good practice, as suggested in the What Works Scotland evidence review:

> 3.7.2 Organisers must be prepared to listen to communities, hear what they think might be an effective way to get people involved and discuss the barriers they face. Young people in particular like to forge their own spaces and want to be heard on issues that affect their future. People with disabilities or older people are best equipped to provide guidance on what will make their involvement easier. Organisers of these events can share information and stories so that the most effective elements of participation is recognised.5

3.7.3 The Select Committee Engagement Team would be very keen to trial this approach with House of Lords committees.

4. Conclusion

4.1 There is scope for using different methods for House of Lords committee engagement work, as well as the capacity to deliver more.

4.2 This can be achieved by:

- Earlier joined-up planning
- Accessible language and formatting of documents
- Support for event facilitation

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• Reimbursement for loss of earnings for participants
• Using Ad Hoc Committees as innovation pilots
• Allocation of People’s Panels
• Co-creation of inquiries or engagement activities with relevant groups

This evidence is submitted on behalf of the UK Parliament Education and Engagement Service.

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