Recommendations for change

1. Committees are well-served by the small staff teams which support them. However, the changing media environment means that committee staff must work ever harder to keep pace with the expectations of members of the House and the general public in how the work of committees is communicated.

2. Members and staff invest significant time and energy in conducting inquiries and preparing reports. This investment in resource and time can go to waste due to the constraints in the support offered to communicate the work of a committee during an inquiry, and at the end of one.

3. The UK’s departure from the European Union, and the subsequent changes to the European Union Committee which will follow, present an opportunity to reflect on how the overall resourcing of committees in the House of Lords can be redeployed to meet the changing expectations while not increasing the House’s overall resourcing of committees unnecessarily.

Communicating the work of a committee

4. The current model of press and communications support constrains the ability of a committee to promote themselves effectively. The burden is increasingly being placed on the core staff of a committee (the clerk, policy analyst and committee assistant) to implement ideas by members, or generate their own ideas, whenever they have capacity alongside their day job. To generate attention and interest requires more effort for busy committee staff than should be necessary.

5. The press officers working with committee staff are not expert in the work of the committees they are assigned to, and are spread thinly across multiple committees. Further, there is little evidence that time is spent cultivating relationships with the press lobby, or with specialist correspondents who cover the subject area of the inquiry of a committee.

6. A more appropriate model could be to assign media officers within the Committee Office, with responsibility for one or two committees. Such a role would involve:
• preparing communications strategies for each inquiry, and for the committee overall on a sessional basis,
• running social media for committees (where they have accounts),
• identifying newsworthy aspects of written or oral evidence (and promoting these promptly to journalists),
• developing relationships with the press lobby and specialist journalists and newspapers,
• dealing with queries about the work of the committee,
• planning alternative means of promoting the work of a committee internally and externally (from videos and pamphlets through to more creative, cutting edge ideas), and
• looking for opportunities to promote the work of a committee externally (and not just when a report is coming out), as well as preparing press notices about evidence sessions and reports.

7. The media officers could become a core part of committee staff, sat alongside the team on a day-to-day basis, and their work managed by the clerk to the committee. This change gives them a chance to understand the work of the inquiry, and better familiarise themselves with the priorities of the chairman and committee.

8. Such a change to committee practice would enable the tailoring and professionalisation of all our communications activity, and increase the awareness of the House’s work beyond the Chamber.

Internal communications

9. It is easy for members of the House not to realise a report from a select committee has been published until there is a debate on it months later. Presently, efforts to directly contact members with information about a report from a committee have to be made by members of the Committee themselves. When this has taken place, members of the House not on Committees welcome being made aware of the work of a committee. Unfortunately, there is not a suitable conduit for facilitating this beyond emailing members directly, member-to-member.

10. A solution to this problem needs to be found, and it should be made easier for committees to share their reports with all members of the House on the day of (or even prior to) publication.

Redeployment of the expertise of the House

11. The inevitable winding up of the EU Select Committee’s sub-committees necessitates that there could be fewer committees upon which members of the House can serve. The EU Financial Affairs and
EU Internal Market Sub-Committees have 24 members (or spaces for members) and look at similar areas of inquiry as the Economic Affairs Committee.

12. The Economic Affairs Committee has the power to appoint sub-committees, which it uses only to appoint a sub-committee to consider the Finance Bill most years. The Committee has many potential lines of inquiry, and the House has members with significant experience of economic affairs. It stands to reason that the Economic Affairs Committee could also, therefore, appoint sub-committees to conduct inquiries, and to offer members of the House an opportunity to participate in committee work and for the House to take advantage of the expertise available to it. There could, for example, be a sub-committee on trade, which should have much to focus on once the UK leaves the European Union.

13. The only restraint on not using the power to appoint a sub-committee more frequently is the capacity of the main Committee’s staff to deliver the high-level of support expected to more than one Committee. If it was found to be desirable for the Committee to make more regular use of sub-committees to fill the void left by the cessation of the EU Committee’s sub-committees, it would have to be ensured that the staff of the Committee felt they were properly supported and resourced to undertake the additional workload.

Additional thematic investigation area

14. In addition to the possible restructuring of committee activity, as above, the House could be well served by a permanent committee considering educational issues. This would sit alongside the existing sessional committees, who all have their distinct thematic areas.

15. There have been many reports by select committees of the House which have considered education in some aspect (not least of all the recent report from the Economic Affairs Committee, *Treating Students Fairly: The Economics of Post-School Education*) in recent years.\(^1\) This demonstrates the desire by the House for scrutiny of the area, and given that there are many members with an educational background (be it teachers, academics or ministers), the Committee would be able to take advantage of the expertise of colleagues.

Committee attendance

16. A potential reduction in the number of available committee places for members to take makes membership of a committee even more valuable. Members should be encouraged to attend as frequently as

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\(^1\) See for example, the reports of the Select Committee on Digital Skills, the Social Mobility Committee, or the Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence.
they can. One mechanism for incentivising this could be to publish annual, or sessional, attendance statistics for each committee.

17. These statistics could be used as a basis for discussions about ongoing membership of a committee with any member who, for example, has not been able to attend more than 50 per cent of meetings. This should be a conversation in the first instance between the Chairman and that member. There are, of course, members who cannot attend for extenuating circumstances but still add tremendous value when present, and this should be considered when considering attendance overall.

18. The Guide to Financial Support for Members advises that only the reduced daily allowance may be claimed for each day of a formal committee visit. It is difficult to see the justification for reducing the allowance by half for a day spent out of Westminster by Committee members on inquiries. Committees should be encouraged to conduct visits so as to be seen to be engaging with real issues affecting people beyond Westminster.

**Summary**

19. Recommendations:
   - Media officers should be assigned to one or two committees, and be embedded into the core teams supporting committees.
   - It should be made easier for committees to share their reports with all members.
   - The Economic Affairs Committee should utilise its power to appoint sub-committees to replace the EU Financial Affairs and Internal Market sub-committees, and to be properly resourced to do so.
   - A permanent committee considering educational issues should be established.
   - Attendance statistics for each committee should be published on a regular basis.
   - Members should be able to claim the full daily allowance if they are participating on a committee visit.

18 June 2018

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean
Chairman of the Economic Affairs Committee