

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Lincoln		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Hearing Different Voices: The Diversity of Committee Witnesses in the Scottish Parliament and Beyond		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): BOCHEL Hugh	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Public Policy	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 19 Feb 90 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Parliamentary committees are responsible for scrutinising legislation and the actions of government and other organisations, and provide a valuable linkage between the state and civil society. Research for the Scottish Parliament has influenced and improved diversity in the selection of witnesses providing evidence to committees. The recommendations from Professor Bochel's research have led to 1) changes in the processes and practices of committee witness selection in the Scottish Parliament, including the introduction of new guidance for clerks and external organisations, and new committee responsibilities for annual diversity data monitoring; and significantly contributed to 2) developments in the wider acceptance of committee diversity in the Westminster Parliament and the US House of Representatives.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Hugh Bochel, of the ParliLinc Research Centre, has a long record of research on parliaments [e.g. 3.1], the policy process, including participation [e.g. 3.2], gender and representation [e.g. 3.3]. That work formed the basis for an academic fellowship at the Scottish Parliament, which applied and built upon much of this previous work in relation to committee witnesses.</p> <p>In its legacy report on Session 4 (2011-15), the Conveners Group of the Scottish Parliament recommended that research be undertaken on the diversity, or otherwise, of witnesses to committees. Competitive applications for that work were invited, and following discussions with staff of the Parliament, in January 2017 Bochel was appointed as an Academic Fellow of the Scottish Parliament, the first following an initial pilot scheme. The fellowship lasted until March 2018. He worked closely with Scottish Parliament staff, and in particular Anouk Berthier, a senior researcher in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). The project, focusing primarily on gender, but considering implications for other social groups, involved three key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. in-depth interviews with 16 MSPs (all were members of committees and 10 were committee conveners at the time), 8 clerks, 8 SPICe researchers, and 6 other Parliamentary staff, all of whom were involved in the identification of potential committee witnesses; ii a database, compiled by SPICe staff, of all witnesses (around 4,500) in the parliamentary years 1999/2000, 2015/16 and 2016/17, using committee minutes. This included information on witnesses' gender, their organisation and position, and the committee to which they gave evidence. This was expanded by Bochel to cover the 2017/18 and 2018/19 parliamentary years and more than 8,000 witness appearances, with the 2019/20 year also added later); iii consideration of a variety of literatures, notably those associated with representation, policy making and evaluation, and participation and legitimacy, to draw out the 		

potential benefits to parliaments, and committees in particular, that might be associated with hearing from a wider range of voices.

The results and recommendations from the research were published as a SPICe Briefing [3.4]. The report highlighted that: the Parliament now hears from around 2,000 witnesses each year; there are a range of potential benefits for parliaments in accessing a greater diversity of witnesses for committees; while the proportion of witnesses that were women had increased since the Parliament was created, around three-fifths were male; there were substantial variations in the gender make-up of witnesses across committees; and while committees already heard from a considerable range of voices, this was often in 'informal' ways. The report's recommendations included:

- a. producing guidance for committees on calls for evidence and witness selection, including highlighting the benefits associated with hearing from a wider range of voices;
- b. providing guidance to organisations providing witnesses;
- c. improved support for first-time witnesses and provision of feedback to witnesses;
- d. recording of the gender (and potentially other protected characteristics) of witnesses;
- e. better recording of informal meetings and events (which often involve hard-to-reach and more vulnerable groups) in inquiry reports to help demonstrate that they are valued;
- f. monitoring the impact of these changes.

In focusing attention on the benefits of greater diversity of witnesses and proposing ways to achieve and monitor that, the research complemented the work of the Commission on Parliamentary Reform, which reported in the summer of 2017 and also made a number of recommendations about both committees and public engagement.

In addition to the SPICe report, and academic publication in the *Journal of Legislative Studies* [3.5] and *Social Policy and Society* [3.6], the research has been presented at a number of conferences and workshops for both academics and practitioners, including, for example, to parliamentary officials at Westminster in July 2017.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Bochel, H. and Defty, A. (2007) *Welfare Policy under New Labour: Views from Inside Westminster*, Policy Press, Bristol. Available on request.
- 3.2 Bochel, C., Bochel, H., Somerville, P. and Worley, C. (2008) 'Marginalised or Enabled Voices? User Participation in Policy and Practice', *Social Policy and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 201-210. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1474746407004150>
- 3.3 Bochel, C. and Bochel, H. (2016) 'Women Candidates and Councillors in Scottish Local Government', *Scottish Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 161-185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/scot.2016.0125>
- 3.4 Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2018) *Committee witnesses: gender and representation*, Scottish Parliament Information Centre Briefing SB 18-16, Edinburgh. <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2018/2/27/Committee-witnesses--gender-and-representation>
- 3.5 Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2021) 'Parliamentary committee witnesses: Representation and Diversity', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, published online 25 August 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2020.1808341>
- 3.6 Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2020) 'A place at the table? Parliamentary committees, witnesses and the scrutiny of government actions and legislation', *Social Policy and Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1474746418000490>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The central impacts of this research have: 1) led to changes in the processes and practices of committee witness selection in the Scottish Parliament; and 2) made a significant contribution to wider acceptance of the benefits of committee witness diversity, including at Westminster and in the United States House of Representatives.

1. Changes in the processes and practices of committee witness selection in the Scottish Parliament

Following the identification of concern by the Conveners Group at the end of Session 4, Bochel's Academic Fellowship research addressed the characteristics of witnesses to the Scottish Parliament's committees, highlighting the value and importance of ensuring diversity among committee witnesses, and its recommendations have led directly to changes in the guidelines and processes of the Parliament, to more women appearing as witnesses, and the introduction of an ongoing survey to monitor committee witnesses' characteristics and inform the Parliament. The Parliament's Presiding Officer noted, '*You have identified the issues which shape which witnesses are called and more importantly, what we can do about it*' [5.1], while the Head of Committees and Outreach stated, '*this research has been extremely valuable and has allowed us to establish a baseline and to develop an action plan to increase the diversity of those giving evidence to committees*' [5.2].

The report was published by SPICe and discussed by the Conveners Group (the conveners of all of the Parliament's committees) in both January and February 2018 [5.3], which tasked the Committee Office to develop an action plan to take forward the recommendations. In May 2018 the Conveners Group approved the Action Plan, with timescales, lead offices and main target groups identified for each of the main tasks [5.4]. It also agreed a data collection pilot. Changes resulting from the research and Action Plan have included [5.5a]:

- a. new 'Witness Diversity Committee Clerk Guidance' for committees on calls for evidence and witness selection highlighting the benefits associated with hearing a diversity of voices [5.5b];
- b. new guidance for organisations providing witnesses, encouraging them to consider diversity when choosing witnesses [5.5c];
- c. piloting of possible approaches to gathering the gender and other protected characteristics of witnesses, with Bochel being closely involved in those discussions. A new, ongoing, comprehensive survey was planned to be introduced for all committees from September 2020 to provide that data, although the Covid-19 pandemic meant that was delayed until 2021 [5.5d];
- d. for the first time, and to ensure ongoing scrutiny of witness diversity, the Conveners Group gave the Equalities and Human Rights Committee responsibility for annual consideration of the figures. Bochel was asked to continue to provide witness figures for committees for two years, replicating the work for the original report, with the collection and collation of the data then shifting to the Parliament, including through the new survey of witnesses. The results for 2018-19 were received by the Conveners Group and the Equalities and Human Rights Committee in September and November 2019 respectively, and for 2019-20 by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee in November 2020 [e.g. 5.5e]. Some committees now also publish figures on witnesses in their Annual Reports, including from Bochel's work [5.5d, 5.5f (example Health and Sport Committee report)]
- e. in addition, other recommendations relating 'to engagement more widely', for example improved support, especially for first-time witnesses, are 'being taken forward through other work streams' (Clerks to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee report to Scottish Parliament Conveners Group, September 2019) [5.5a].

Bochel's later analyses, requested by the Parliament, show that, following his research and the commencement of the implementation of the Action Plan, the proportion of witnesses who were women increased steadily from 38 per cent in 2016-17 [5.5e] to 43 per cent in 2019-20 [5.5f].

The research has also fed into other important elements of the Parliament's work, including being reflected in the new public engagement strategy for 2018 setting the goal for 'Members to be able to hear a more diverse set of views and evidence to inform their scrutiny and legislating work', and the strategy for 2018-21 for the newly-established Committee Engagement Unit including, 'Drawing on witness diversity survey data, work with 2-3 pilot committees to help them develop a diversity strategy for their area and identify learning for other committees'. In July 2020 the Head of Committees and Outreach wrote to Bochel, '*We couldn't have got to this stage without you and it's making such a positive difference*' [5.6].

2. Significant contribution to wider acceptance of the benefits of committee witness diversity

Although the recommendations are still in the implementation stage at Holyrood, impact has already occurred elsewhere. In the UK Parliament, Bochel has met regularly with the leads on witness diversity for House of Commons select committees to share information and ideas, and his work has been used in internal training on witness diversity [5.7a]. In June 2018, the Liaison Committee published a report on the gender diversity of witnesses, which devoted one page of its substantive 14 pages to highlighting Bochel's research, citing all of his recommendations to the Scottish Parliament directly, and noting that these were being considered for the Commons [5.7b]. In that report the Committee agreed the importance of diversity, that in most circumstances there should not be all-male panels of witnesses, and an aim that at least 40 per cent of 'discretionary' witnesses (not ministers or heads of key organisations) should be female, ideas reiterated in a further Liaison Committee report in 2019. The Sessional Returns for 2017-19 subsequently showed that 39 per cent of the 4,000 discretionary witnesses were female, up from 32 per cent in 2016-17. Bochel has also discussed with Committee Office staff the plans for a survey of the broader characteristics of witnesses to select committees. Subsequently, a pilot was approved but was then delayed due to Covid-19 [5.7c]. Bochel's work on witnesses also encouraged the publication of gender data on public bill committee witnesses in the 2017-19 Sessional Returns for the first time, which showed that only 28 per cent were female, with the Clerk of Legislation noting that his involvement had '*telescoped this process so that we were able not only to benefit from your insights in the data collection but also make a start on influencing behaviour by the very fact of your asking the right questions to the right people in the process*' [5.7c].

In June 2018, Bochel was also invited to a private meeting with the Chair and Clerk of the House of Lords Liaison Committee, and other House of Lords officials, to discuss witness diversity before committees in relation to potential developments in the Lords. A House of Lords Liaison Committee report produced during 2019 reiterated the importance of achieving a greater diversity of witnesses.

Beyond the UK, in December 2019 the US Congressional Hispanic Caucus (leading a Tri-Caucus initiative also involving the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus) approached Bochel about both the principles and practice with regard to their desire to monitor witness diversity in the House of Representatives, which was initially introduced as a pilot from January 2020 [5.8a], with his advice, drawing on his research on the Scottish Parliament, being seen as 'So helpful' [5.8b]. During 2020, the Tri-Caucus sought to have the monitoring of witnesses institutionalised, using Bochel's research to '*fortify our own argument with colleagues across Capitol Hill*', to '*anticipate committees' challenges*', and to learn best practice [5.8c], with the result that at the end of 2020 the *Rules for the 117th Congress* included requiring '*the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to develop a system, which the House will implement, to ensure that the House tracks the diversity of witnesses as a next step in the effort to increase witness diversity*' [5.8d, page 33], with this system to be introduced by the end of July 2021. In December 2020, the Policy Coordinator for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus wrote that Bochel's '*research and expertise has been valuable every step of the way*' [5.8c].

In addition, organisations such as the OECD have taken note of the research, with a report on gender equality in Canada [5.9a], citing Bochel's research and its recommendations as something that the Parliament of Canada could learn from, and the Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy inviting Bochel to contribute to the Westminster Workshop on Gender Sensitive Scrutiny in June 2019, which involved elected representatives from more than twenty legislatures, with the programme intended to allow the sharing of knowledge and experience and to allow parliamentarians to reflect on their roles, responsibilities and opportunities [5.9b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Email from Presiding Officer, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.2 Letter from Head of Committees and Outreach and Clerk to the Conveners Group, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.3
- a. Papers for Conveners Group, January 2018
 - b. Minutes of Conveners Group, January 2018;
 - c. Papers for Conveners Group, February 2018
 - d. Minutes of Conveners Group, February 2018.
- 5.4
- a. Papers for Conveners Group, May 2018
 - b. Minutes of Conveners Group, May 2018.
- 5.5
- a. Papers for Conveners Group, September 2019;
 - b. 'Witness diversity committee clerk guidance';
 - c. 'Witness diversity – guidance for external organisations';
 - d. Email from Senior Researcher, Scottish Parliament;
 - e. Papers for Equalities and Human Rights Committee meeting, November 2019
 - f. Minutes of Equalities and Human Rights Committee meeting, November 2019;
 - g. *Annual Report of the Health and Sport Committee for 2019-20*.
- 5.6 Email from Head of Committees and Outreach and Clerk to the Conveners Group, Scottish Parliament.
- 5.7
- a. Emails from specialist advisers to the House of Commons Women and Equality select committee;
 - b. House of Commons Liaison Committee (2018) *Witness gender diversity*;
 - c. Emails from Clerk of Legislation and committee specialist to the Women and Equalities Committee.
- 5.8
- a. Press release on witness diversity monitoring initiative in the House of Representatives;
 - b. Email from Policy Coordinator, Congressional Hispanic Caucus;
 - c. Letter from Policy Coordinator, Congressional Hispanic Caucus;
 - d. US House of Representatives (2020) *Rules for the 117th Congress*.
- 5.9
- a. OECD (2018) *Gender Equality in Canada*;
 - b. CPA UK Westminster Workshop on Gender Sensitive Scrutiny.