ESRC End of Award Report

For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. We reserve the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant Reference</th>
<th>RES-061-25-0391</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grant Title</strong></td>
<td>The Scrutiny Universe: The House of Commons Select Committees and the Psychology of Group Processes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grant Start Date</strong></td>
<td>1 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grant End Date</strong></td>
<td>31 July 2013</td>
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<td><strong>Grant holding Institution</strong></td>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
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<td>02380 592 544</td>
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Co-Investigators (as per project application): Institution

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To cite this output:
ESRC End of Award Report, RES-061-25-0391. Swindon: ESRC.
1. Non-technical summary

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by us to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project. [Max 250 words]

House of Commons select committees are now the powerhouses of parliamentary scrutiny of the executive. This project explored their work, organisation and impact, mapped their functional scrutiny universe and the impact of party on that universe, and sought to understand how they operate as groups. The project focused particularly on the leadership role of committee chairs, and discovered that opposition chairs behave differently to government chairs and are more pro-active during committee proceedings, which is an important finding as the chair role becomes more pivotal, and also affords insight into how opposition chairs remain more active without alienating committee colleagues. The project conducted an extensive analysis of House of Commons chamber proceedings, and found great divergence in how select committees promote their work there and press their scrutiny case in parliamentary environments, which helps us understand the intra-institutional connections which do (and do not) exist at Westminster in scrutiny terms. More broadly, the project also conducted several small case studies of committee activity: first, looking at how certain committees approached particular policy issues of contemporary relevance; second, how the press covered examples of select committee activity; and third, how witnesses to select committee inquiries approached the evidence-giving experience. Overall, through a combination of interviews, detailed analysis of parliamentary records, and case studies, this project has delivered new and important insights into what select committees do, how the chair role is evolving, how they organise themselves in institutional terms, and how others interact with them in turn.

2. Project overview

a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to us. [Max 200 words]

The project aimed to pursue three linked research agendas. First, to explore how select committees function and interact as groups, how party identities and conflicts are managed in all-party environments, and how chairs manage their leadership role, in order to better understand select committees as parliamentary institutions; this part of the project particularly sought to assess the utility of group psychology approaches in understanding committee interactions. Second, to analyse how committee members perceive their scrutiny tasks, how group dynamics impact on committee work schedules, and how committee agendas are set, particularly in the context of conflict over controversial inquiry topics. Third, to map how committee work impacts on the House of Commons more broadly and whether it helps it to deliver more rigorous scrutiny of the executive, and how committee work and outputs are perceived by non-parliamentary actors, and under what conditions committee inquiries gain media attention.
b) Project Changes
Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with us. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. [Max 200 words]

There were some minimal changes to the original aims and objectives in terms of the research undertaken. Once the project got underway, the group psychology approach proved to be of more use in some parts of the project than others. The exploration and mining of the select committee records and the Hansard records proved to be far more time-consuming than predicted, which curtailed the range of work undertaken by the project research assistant, and we consequently reduced the time committed to the newspaper analysis of select committee work in order to maximise the project findings. For example, we focused particularly on the Liaison Committee, which enabled us to hone in on both the leadership and scrutiny angles, given that committee's role in questioning the Prime Minister.

In addition, there was a project underspend. This was the result of: transcription charges being considerably less than anticipated; fewer trips to London required due to successful clustering of interviews; and a decision not to participate at the proposed conferences in USA and Canada (in part because other more valuable conference opportunities presented themselves), which naturally reduced travel costs significantly.

c) Methodology
Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. [Max 500 words]

First, the project sought to apply the group psychology approach to the study of House of Commons select committees. As small, complex groupings comprising MPs from different parties, it was hoped that the group psychological approach would help deliver fresh insights into how committees functioned, and how their members interacted. In broad terms, that approach did yield dividends. However, the experimental approach utilised in group psychology studies meant most strategies were inapplicable to this study, and could not be adapted for use empirically. Nonetheless, some of the key insights from the group psychology literature have been extremely useful in delineating committee functioning, and particularly in helping to explain the behaviour of committee chairs.

Second, the project utilised more traditional methods of investigation in order to more fully understand committees in the context of the parliament of which they are a part. Highly detailed analysis of House of Commons records – parliamentary debates, committee hearings - were undertaken to answer questions across different strands of this research, and that analysis is amongst the first of its kind to be done. This involved a number of different approaches.

First, a search of the records of select committee hearings with high value actors such as ministers, in order to map chair behaviour during those sessions and thus delineate the different roles adopted by chairs during these high profile occasions. We completed this work for two different parliamentary sessions, primarily in order to compare chair
behaviour across changes in government and identify whether opposition chairs utilise the chair role as an oppositional resource.

Second, a comprehensive search of Hansard parliamentary records was undertaken, to identify utilisation of select committee work during House of Commons sittings, and particularly to identify how committee members, especially chairs, use the floor of the House to advance committee agendas, hypothesising that opposition chairs were more likely to fully exploit such occasions than government chairs.

Third, we also examined specific debates on select committee reports in order to map MP participation (with respect to the hypothesis that those who participate are predominantly those already on the committee) and specifically the contributions made by chairs to these occasions.

These methods proved to be far more time consuming for the Research Assistant than anticipated, due to the nature of the data and information being collected, but the blend of qualitative and quantitative information gathered is extremely rich and well worth the time invested. The project also analysed some of the data using quantitative methods which have not been comprehensively used before by the P.I., namely in terms of using SPSS, and this presented a time-consuming and challenging learning curve for both the P.I. and R.A. in ensuring the data collected from parliamentary records was in suitable SPSS form and that the resulting analyses were accurate. At the time of writing, work is still being undertaken on the SPSS analysis to ensure all is in order prior to submitting work for publication.

The project also used a series of interviews with select committee members to provide more qualitative insights into committee work. These delivered insights into how committee actors function and how the perceive their role, and the interviews with committee chairs were particularly illuminating (see below).

There were no ethical issues raised in this research.

d) Project Findings

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on the ESRC website. Any future research plans should also be identified. [Max 500 words]

The research project delivered a number of key findings in each of the three areas of work outlined, making contributions in terms of understanding the leadership role of committee chairs, the impact of committee work on the House of Commons more broadly, and the particular conceptions of scrutiny held by committee actors.

First, although the group psychology approach was of limited methodological utility in this project, due to its experimental nature, the insights of that approach as they pertained to our general understanding of committees is useful, and provides an alternative account of how committee members contribute to a social group in the complex parliamentary environment. The interviews conducted in the project provided detailed insight into how MPs manage party identities in committee settings, insights which add to our understanding of how actors navigate institutional arenas, and how they filter their various political
identities, party in particular, with case studies providing further detailed insight into
different scenarios in which party identity can either help or hinder committee work. Of
key importance, though, is the work done on the leadership role of committee chairs,
which demonstrates a spectrum of different interpretations of the chair role, and different
leadership strategies which are partially dependent on party identity. This is the first time
we have empirical evidence of exactly how party affects chair behaviour and leadership
style, and this contributes to new insights into political leadership in parliamentary arenas.

Second, the detailed Hansard record analysis work undertaken has demonstrated great
differences in how select committees seek to maximise the scrutiny impact of their work
outside the committee room. While some committee members make frequent references
to their committee’s work inside the Commons chamber, others are much less likely to do
so, and complementary interview work provided insightful accounts and explanations for
this. The work also found that much depends on individual actor approaches, with some
committee chairs taking a highly proactive approach to linking their committee work to the
work of the chamber more broadly. In this research, we find clear evidence that there are
very different parameters for the ‘scrutiny universe’ inhabited by different committees
depending on the qualities of the actors who comprise those committees and their
willingness to work together as a group outside the formal committee environment.
Moreover, select committee work and output is significantly under-utilised in chamber
proceedings. This part of the research presents key insights: first, about the actual role of
select committees as the engines of scrutiny; and second, whether parliamentary actors are
maximising the resources available to them in terms of the scrutiny outputs of select
committees, which is crucial as backbench/opposition MPs are frequently perceived as
resource-poor in comparison to government actors.

Third, the project uncovered much divergence amongst committee members about what
constituted meaningful committee work, which contributes directly to our understanding
of how MPs conceptualise their scrutiny role and the capacity of the committee vehicle
itself. This is of value in helping to account for differential committee activity, and also for
understanding committee continuity across time.

The small case studies undertaken provide further illumination of committee activity. For
example, analysis of public contributions to a routine Health Committee inquiry provided
insight into why people choose to give evidence at all, and what they expect from the
experience, which delivers much-needed knowledge about committee interactions with the
public, and what the public expect from those interactions. Analysis of media coverage of
the Liaison Committee sessions with the prime minister offered telling insights into how
such occasions are framed as combative jousting-matches that are ultimately perceived as
zero-sum, providing insight into media framing of parliamentary committees in institutional
terms.
3. Early and anticipated impacts

a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on the Research Outcomes System (ROS). This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. [Max. 400 words]

Several draft papers detailing early research findings have been delivered at a number of venues: to invited seminars at the Universities of Sydney and Canberra in Australia; conference papers have been delivered at the European Consortium of Political Research Workshop Sessions in Antwerp, the Policy & Politics Conference in Bath, and the Political Science Association Conference in Cardiff. All these papers form the basis of articles which are now nearing completion and which are due to be submitted for consideration at leading journals in the field. As the quantitative work and the SPSS analysis accompanying it were new to the P.I., the decision was taken to delay submission of articles for publication in order to be sure that the data and analysis were accurate, and to enhance the analytical case made across the various pieces with more considered reflection on the complete data, which was not possible during the ‘heat’ of data collection itself.

Dealing with the impacts for MPs and select committees themselves has required more careful reflection. The finding that different committees have differential impacts on proceedings on the floor of the House is a key one, but interviews demonstrate different views from MPs about this in terms of scrutiny contribution. Towards the end of the project, I approached committee MPs with a view to holding an informal seminar/forum with them to explore some of these findings, in terms of what they might tell us about enhancing parliamentary scrutiny more generally (in line with the original project proposal), but although some MPs were interested in this, it proved difficult to agree a date and secure a sufficient number of interested MPs, and the decision was taken not to waste public money on a poorly attended event for just a handful of MPs. There are other routes to maximising the impact of these findings, such as via the Study of Parliament Group or Hansard Society events calendar, and this will be pursued later.

The project has had impacts beyond the specific parameters of the project. The programme
of work, and the delivery of conference papers, has led me to be involved in other related research agendas, most notably an international project comprising over two-dozen scholars working to produce a significant and highly original volume detailing and comparing parliamentary investiture rules around the world.

b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. [Max. 200 words]

I note above that I still plan to organise an event with MPs, perhaps through the Study of Parliament Group or Hansard Society, to deliver key insights of the project and to probe reflexively with MPs collectively about what the findings might mean for enhanced scrutiny inside committees. This will be done when we are sure of finding a suitable occasion/date, and when I am confident of maximising the research findings for that audience.

Work on how the public interact with select committees was pursued late in the project in response to insights gained along the way, and there was no time to fully exploit those insights prior to the end of the project. This is, however, an extremely interesting area of work. Using other funds, I hope to do more on this, in terms of how the public perceive their interactions with committee inquiries, and hope to add to the single case study undertaken. Given the very compelling insights gained from the public participants so far, it is clear this is an area with the potential for valuable conclusions about what committees can do to enhance their public engagement strategies in future, which is likely to have particular resonance with parliamentary actors and interested observers at a time when public engagement continues to be a pressing issue amid concerns about declining efficacy of democratic institutions and processes.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.
4. Declarations

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed. Please note hard copies are **not** required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

**A: To be completed by Grant Holder**

Please read the following statements. Tick **one** statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section (this should be an image of your actual signature).

**i) The Project**

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X The Project</td>
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**ii) Submissions to the Research Outcomes System (ROS)**

Output and impact information has been submitted to the Research Outcomes System. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available. *[NOTE: At time of submission, I am awaiting assistance from ROS team to help upload conference papers to the system; journal publications will follow in due course]*

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<tbody>
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<td>X Output and impact information has been submitted to the Research Outcomes System</td>
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<tr>
<td>or This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to the Research Outcomes System as soon as they become available.</td>
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**iii) Submission of Data**

Data arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the UK Data Service. *Please note – final amendments to dataset currently under way – will be offered once data is cleared for upload*

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<td>X Data arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the UK Data Service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>or Data that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the UK Data Service has been notified.</td>
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<td>or No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.</td>
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