

Interpreting Parliamentary Scrutiny

An enquiry concerning everyday practices of parliamentary actors in select committees of the House of Commons

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Abstract

This doctorate looks at the role of parliamentary select committees in the UK House of Commons. Though the literature on this topic is extensive, this research project explores the issue from a distinctive vantage point. While research on committees has predominantly focused on their outputs, such as committee reports, in order to assess the effectiveness of Parliament in holding the executive to account, this thesis looks at the input-side to committee work. It explores the individual beliefs, everyday practices and perennial dilemmas of parliamentary actors in select committees. In doing so, this thesis argues that understanding beliefs and practices of committee members, chairs and staff are crucial ways to better comprehend the way that scrutiny works in the House of Commons. This PhD finds that scrutiny is contested in a range of ways by a range of actors. In taking actors' interpretations seriously, this PhD reveals that each actor has their own performance style, which is used to enact beliefs about scrutiny. At its most simple, this PhD argues that scrutiny is pushed and pulled in different (sometimes conflicting) directions by parliamentary actors. There is no such thing as uniform, systematic select committee scrutiny; there exist only dense webs of scrutiny that rely upon committee members, chairs and staff to enact their roles in such ways to be conducive to holding the executive to account. These dense webs of scrutiny affect committee relationships, their ability to question witnesses in select committees, and construct consensus in writing reports.

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Introduction

arliamentary studies has traditionally not engaged with themes of everyday life as a topic to study. It is, justifiably, associated with ordinariness and normality. This ordinariness is pervasive: from the way we choose to organise our personal and working spaces to the way that we communicate with others both verbally and non-verbally. We do not notice the everyday as in some way politically significant or relevant for analysis precisely because it is perceived to be typical, routine, settled, established, standard, common – perhaps even boring, unremarkable, mundane. However, as we try to negotiate the world around us, it is important to realise that this ordinariness and this normality that we associate with the everyday is something that we have willed into being. As such, everyday practices are the result of our interpretations about the world, and the choices that we have made as a result (or, indeed, others have made on our behalf (willingly, unwillingly; knowingly, unknowingly)). Everyday life is only ordinary or unremarkable insofar as we interpret that to be the case. This is an important point because it implies the possibility that everyday practices are deeply political issues that deserve detailed attention. And yet, British political science, particularly the subdiscipline of parliamentary studies, has (until recently) largely overlooked or underplayed the value of exploring the everyday lives of political actors. This thesis seeks to engage directly with everyday practices as an analytical tool to better understand political phenomena and outcomes. This contributes to a wider ideational turn in political analysis (Hay, 2011), which has the potential to have considerable impact: theoretically, it asserts the relevance of interpretation in political science over positivist explanations that have dominated the second

half of the twentieth century; analytically, it centralises the importance of ideas, beliefs, practices, and traditions as explanatory tools; and methodologically, it offers novel ways to study political phenomena that have hitherto relied on traditional modes of inquiry. An ideational or interpretive turn is particularly important for the study of parliaments and legislatures because these institutions lie at the heart of democratic political systems. Taking an interpretive approach enables us to deepen our understanding of what happens in those institutions on a day-to-day basis, and how those quotidian practices make an impact on the broader political landscape. This seems to be needed at a time of declining trust in politics and a rise in cynicism over the motivations of elected representatives (Flinders, 2012a; Hay, 2007b; Judge, 2014). This is, arguably, a global trend, and one to which politics in the United Kingdom has not been immune. If politicians are not being accused of wrongdoing or misleading the public, they are found to be useless or ineffective (King and Crewe, 2013). Parliament, in particular, is perceived to symbolise this failure through its alleged inability to challenge the executive. And yet, the House of Commons has developed a range of mechanisms to hold government to account.¹ This PhD explores this topic, looking specifically at the changing role of select committees in the House of Commons.

In taking an interpretive lens, select committee scrutiny in the House of Commons poses a number of interesting questions. This doctoral research is guided by the following three research questions:

- 1. How can we understand the everyday lives of parliamentary actors?
- 2. How do political actors interpret and perform their role on select committees?
- 3. In what ways do everyday practices affect parliamentary scrutiny?

To answer these three questions, this thesis is correspondingly split into three broad parts, each containing three chapters.

The first three chapters comprise Part I, in which I seek to answer the first research question. In Chapter 1, I explore our current knowledge of Parliament

¹ Though 'Parliament' can be taken to mean both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, in this thesis it generally refers to the House of Commons, unless stated otherwise. Moreover, while 'Parliament' refers to the institution, 'parliament' refers to a specific time period or legislatures in more general terms.

and parliamentary scrutiny, and attempt to identify scholarly traditions of parliamentary and legislative studies. Though I identify four traditions (historical, rational choice, sociological and interpretive), the field of parliamentary studies has not, historically, engaged in theoretical reflection. This means that a large amount of research does not explicitly align with any scholarly tradition. In part, this may be due to the legacy of Westminster model and legalistic approaches to the study of Parliament. Though current scholarship has made significant contributions to our understanding of parliamentary government in the UK. I argue that parliamentary studies would benefit from a more theoretically explicit approach. I address this issue directly in Chapter 2, in which I reflect on theoretical possibilities for understanding Parliament. I propose an interpretive analytical approach based loosely on the work of Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (2003, 2006, 2010). Their work has made a big impact to the study of British governance, in which their decentred approach looks to unpack individual beliefs, everyday practices, webs of belief or traditions, and dilemmas that political actors face. In Chapter 2, I review and build upon their work in an attempt to encourage an interpretive parliamentary studies with a focus on analysing everyday practices as performances (in the theatrical sense of the word). This has methodological implications, which I address in Chapter 3. Here, I explain the methods used in empirical sections. I predominantly rely on participant and non-participant observation; semi-structured interviews with committee members, chairs and staff; and, textual analysis. I supplement these three methods with quantitative data and secondary material to enhance the rigour of the findings presented here.

In Part II, I look at how parliamentary actors interpret their scrutiny roles (thereby engaging with the second research question). Chapter 4 looks at Members of Parliament, specifically exploring how individual committee members interpret and enact their scrutiny role.² I argue that committee members can perform scrutiny in at least six different ways: (i) as specialists and advocates, (ii) as lone wolves, (iii) as constituency champions, (iv) as party helpers or safety nets, (v) as learners or (vi) as absentees. These performances are affected by other individual beliefs, parliamentary practices and dilemmas that MPs face every day. Chapter 5 looks at committee chairs, who not only

² While capitalised 'Members' refer to Members of Parliament or MPs, non-capitalised 'members' refers to committee members only.

interpret scrutiny in different ways, but additionally interpret and enact a leadership role. I show that chairs are likely to perform one of two roles: either, they seek to act as catalysts of committees, and thus seek to work with committee members; or, they seek to act as chieftains of their committees, and thereby seek to impose their agenda onto the committee. Chapter 6 turns to select committee staff, who have traditionally been overlooked in parliamentary studies. Clerks undertake a range of roles to support committees. Their beliefs are underpinned by a commitment to being hidden, unparalleled service to the House, and passionate impartiality.

How do these interpretations and practices affect parliamentary scrutiny? This is addressed in Part III. I begin by exploring the relationships between parliamentary actors (predominantly MPs) in Chapter 7. In particular, I look at how committees sustain parliamentary relationships, create norms and values and build performance teams, which in turn affect how committees undertake inquiries. I place this in a wider web of scrutiny. In Chapter 8, I look at the effect of everyday practices on who gives evidence to committees, and identify the range of dilemmas that committees face in trying to gain a range of diverse witnesses for oral evidence. These dilemmas are often played out in a way that sustains a London-centric, male-dominated elite. This raises questions over Parliament's ability to represent a diversity of interests in holding the government to account, and broader issues about the place of Parliament in the policy process. I bring the ideas raised in both Part II and Part III together in Chapter 9, in which I posit the broad conclusions of the thesis and return to the three research questions posed above. In sum, this thesis argues that: first, an interpretive approach – specifically the concepts of beliefs, practices, traditions and dilemmas - offers novel ways of understanding parliamentary scrutiny; second, committee members, chairs and staff interpret scrutiny in diverse (and occasionally conflicting) ways, which they subsequently enact or perform with equal diversity; and third, those interpretations are crucial in explaining how committees build consensus and gather evidence, both sustaining and overcoming dilemmas that committees face every day. This matters because it means that committees push and pull in a range of different (occasionally contradictory) directions. There arguably is no such thing as 'systematic' scrutiny but, rather, only dense 'webs' of scrutiny that rely upon parliamentary actors to identify and interpret scrutiny in such ways as to make them conducive to committee scrutiny. This is an important contribution to the wider literature because it arguably changes our perception of the role of select committees in British politics and highlights the importance of everyday practices in scrutiny processes.

This outline indicates that the following chapters are a departure from our current knowledge of Parliament's select committees. Indeed, this PhD is an explicit attempt to push our current understanding of committees to new limits and identify new ways of studying scrutiny along the committee corridor of the Palace of Westminster. This matters because MPs' everyday behaviour both within and beyond select committees affects the wider role of Parliament in British politics. In order to explain all of this, this PhD begins in earnest.

Part I: Theoretical Foundations

There are more ideas on earth than intellectuals can imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than 'politicians' think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, for or against them. Ideas do not rule the world. But it is because the world has ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not passively ruled by those who are its leaders or those who would like to teach it, once and for all, what it must think.

– Michel Foucault³

In these first three chapters, I focus on the theoretical principles that underpin this research. In Chapter 1, I begin by looking at the current scholarship on Parliament and, in doing so, identify an 'interpretive' gap. In response to this gap, I then develop the analytical framework that guides Part II and Part III (Chapter 2), before closely examining the methodology of this PhD (Chapter 3). Taken together, this theoretical part will set the stage for later empirical chapters.

³ Quoted in Didier Eribon (1991, p.282).

Chapter 1: Traditions

s the Hansard Society's most recent report on political engagement testifies, the general public do not hold Parliament in high esteem (only 32% of the public say they are satisfied with how Parliament works overall) (Hansard Society, 2016). In November 2013, the prominent journalist, Jeremy Paxman, even went so far as to describe politics in the United Kingdom as a 'green-bench pantomime' and the House of Commons as a 'remote and selfimportant echo-chamber' (Plunkett, 2013). This, arguably stereotypical, view of Parliament is shared by academics: for example, Ian Ward (2004, p.42) described it as 'puerile, pathetic and utterly useless'; meanwhile, and more recently, Anthony King and Ivor Crewe (2013, pp.361-2) refer to the House of Commons as 'peripheral', 'totally irrelevant' and 'passive'. And yet, as Matthew Flinders and Alexandra Kelso (2011) argue, this is a misleading caricature. Academic research within the field of parliamentary and legislative studies disputes the view that Parliament acts merely as a talking shop or rubber stamp at the mercy of an all-powerful executive. Rather, Parliament not only has a considerable legislative role to play (Thompson, 2015b), but affects policymaking more generally (Russell and Cowley, 2016).

In this first chapter, I review the academic literature to better understand how much we do know about the place of Parliament in British politics, specifically the role and purpose of select committees, and to situate this PhD in its wider context. The literature on Parliament is significant and wide-ranging, covering topics as diverse as the constitutional arrangements of the political system; the effect of devolution and the European Union on the function and effectiveness of Parliament; public perceptions of parliamentary activities; the different ways in which Members of Parliament (MPs) seek to influence legislation; how parliamentary actors are socialised; the pressures and strains that MPs face; a greater understanding of politicians' motivations and priorities; and, intra- and inter-party dynamics within the Houses of Parliament. Axiomatically, it is not possible to cover this vast range. Instead, this review is limited to understanding the perceived role of select committees in the UK as part of a broader thematic discussion about the scholarly traditions that have affected parliamentary research. In this way, this chapter cuts across a range of issues and engages not only with one specific aspect of Parliament's scrutiny role, but additionally examines the theoretical, analytical and methodological principles that underpin much of the sub-discipline of parliamentary and legislative studies. To do so, this chapter is split into three sections. I begin, in the first section, with a brief overview of the role and function of select committees in context of wider parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms in the UK. This charts a very brief history of select committees from the context of their introduction in 1979 to the present day. Additionally, I look at how scholars have made sense of select committees. In other words, I explore what the academic literature tells us about committeebased scrutiny in the House of Commons. In the second section, I situate this literature in wider scholarly traditions. I begin by looking at the organising perspective of parliamentary studies: the Westminster model. This model (closely associated with modernist empiricism in British political science generally) has a significant influence on parliamentary studies (and, indeed, British political science more widely (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003, pp.24-31; 2006, pp.35-55)). With that in mind, I identify four scholarly traditions in parliamentary and legislative studies: historical, rational choice, sociological and interpretive traditions. These traditions are important reference markers for parliamentary studies because they affect the analytical focus and methodological tools employed by political scientists in their study of Parliament, particularly with regards to research on select committees. That said, these traditions are not clearly demarcated or explicit cleavages: some studies overlap and borrow elements from different traditions to form hybrids; many more do not place themselves in any tradition at all. This makes an overview of the scholarship's intellectual roots more challenging, yet also more important. I try to bring this together in the third section, in which I summarise what we know

about parliamentary select committees but, perhaps most important, what we do not know and, in doing so, situate this PhD's original contribution to the field. Importantly, this chapter does not merely give an overview of the literature, but seeks to identify the ways in which the study of Parliament has been approached. This matters because, traditionally, parliamentary and legislative studies has arguably lacked theoretical and conceptual reflection. Consequently, the predominant focus of research has been on institutional relationships, which possibly overlooks other, fruitful avenues of research that focus on everyday practices of parliamentary actors – which this thesis pursues. Before getting to this stage, however, the chapter must start with a summary of the topic in more general terms, and it is here that our discussion begins.

1.1. Select committees and their history

Parliamentary scrutiny is not limited to select committees. It can be conducted through written and oral Parliamentary Questions; in public bill committees; pursued directly between frontbench and backbench colleagues; as part of activities by all-party parliamentary groups (APPGs); or through debates on the floor of the House and in Westminster Hall.⁴ Nonetheless, departmental select committees are perceived to be part of a systematic system of scrutiny or, as Alex Brazier and Ruth Fox (2011, p.354) put it, 'the principal mechanism through which the House of Commons holds the executive to account'. Here, I discuss, first (and briefly), the role and function of select committees, second, a concise historical overview of committees' development, and third, a discussion over academic research on select committees.

1.1.1. The role and function of select committees

Departmental select committees exist to: 'examine the expenditure, administration and policy' of government departments and their associated public bodies (HC SO No. 152(1)). In addition to departmental committees, a

⁴ All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal groups set up and run by MPs and peers, and some also have extensive involvement from individuals and organisations outside Parliament to support administration and activities. As they are informal groups, they have no official status within Parliament to conduct scrutiny. Nonetheless, many MPs count involvement with APPGs as part of their scrutiny work.

making and to support the House in its control of the supply of public money and scrutiny of legislation			
Task 1: StrategyExamine the strategy of the department, how it has identified its k objectives and priorities and whether it has the means to achieve them, in terms of plans, resources, skills, capabilities and management information.			
Task 2: Policy	Examine policy proposals by the department, and areas of emerging policy, or where existing policy is deficient, and make proposals.		
Task 3: Expenditure and performance	Examine the expenditure plans, outturn and performance of the department and its arm's length bodies, and the relationships between spending and delivery of outcomes.		
Task 4: Draft bills	Conduct scrutiny of draft bills within the committee's responsibilities.		
Task 5: Bills and delegated legislation	Assist the House in its consideration of bills and statutory instruments, including draft orders under the Public Bodies Act.		
Task 6: Post- legislative scrutiny	Examine the implementation of legislation and scrutinise the department's post-legislative assessments.		
Task 7: European scrutiny	Scrutinise policy developments at the European level and EU legislative proposals.		
Task 8: Appointments	Scrutinise major appointments made by the department and to hold pre-appointment hearings where appropriate.		
Task 9: Support for the House	Produce timely reports to inform debate in the House, including Westminster Hall, or debating committees, and to examine petitions tabled.		
Task 10: Public engagement	Assist the House of Commons in better engaging with the public by ensuring that the work of the committee is accessible to the public.		

 Table 1.1. Select committee core tasks (from Liaison Committee, 2012a, p.10)

Overall aim: To hold Ministers and Departments to account for their policy and decision-

range of further committees exist to scrutinise government: cross-cutting select committees provide thematic, whole-of-government scrutiny; domestic or internal committees look at administrative issues within the House of Commons; joint committees with the House of Lords may be established to provide more detailed scrutiny across Parliament; and, other *ad hoc* or temporary committees may examine specific issues. Departmental and cross-cutting investigative committees are the core pillar of scrutiny in the House of Commons, and therefore the predominant focus in this research project. In sum, this results in 25 select committees (see Appendix A for a full list).

Committees are cross-party and made up of between nine and 18 MPs. The party balance reflects that of the House of Commons. Over the 2010 parliament, a typical select committee of 11 members would usually have had five Labour Party MPs, five Conservative Party MPs and one member from a third party (often a Liberal Democrat) (in 2015, a typical committee would have six Conservative members, four Labour members and one from a third party). Similarly, chairs were allocated based on party balance. In 2010, the Labour Party held ten chairs, the Conservative Party held 12 chairs and the Liberal Democrats held three chairs. The precise balance is informally agreed by party whips (also referred to as the 'usual channels') but approved by the House. Since 2010, committee members have been elected through their party groups, while the chair is elected by the whole House, both by secret ballot (for a more detailed summary, see Rogers and Walters (2015)).

In order to carry out scrutiny, committees usually undertake inquiries, which involves taking written and oral evidence before publishing a final report. Committees can investigate any topic of their choosing (and guided by the Liaison Committee's core tasks (see Table 1.1)). Increasingly, committees have also begun to hold one-off evidence sessions, undertake 'evidence checks' and scrutinise government in more innovative ways to engage with the public (Liaison Committee, 2015). All select committees have the power to 'send for persons, papers and records' (HC SO No. 152(4a)). They are supported by a small secretariat of around six permanent members of staff that work towards the committees' inquiries full-time, as well as specialist advisers that are appointed on an *ad hoc*, part-time basis. The current arrangements have not always existed (indeed, they are still changing), and so it is worth (briefly) examining the development of select committees since their inception.

1.1.2. The development of select committee scrutiny

Though the present-day structure and operation of parliamentary select committees results from reforms undertaken in 1979, committees have a long history that stretches from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Kelso, 2009b, for a detailed history). Indeed, the Public Accounts Committee (which made headlines throughout the 2010 parliament) was introduced by William Gladstone in 1861. The case for departmental committees grew throughout the 1930s but, with the prospect of political extremism during the later 1930s and the Second World War between 1939 and 1945, the issue did not achieve any salience. It took many more years and a growing body of academic research (e.g. Crick, 1970; Walkland, 1960) before experiments with select committees were introduced in the 1960s (known as the Crossman reforms). However, it was not until 1979 when an incoming Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher, was persuaded to introduce a coherent, departmental-based select committee system (Giddings, 1994; Kelso, 2009b, pp.83-98). Until then, resistance took many forms but included an unwillingness from the executive to cede power to the backbenches, and fear from parliamentarians that select committees would divert attention away from the main chamber of the House of Commons.

The system introduced in 1979 was well-received (Ryle and Richards, 1988), but suffered a number of shortcomings: chairs were not paid (limiting incentives for an alternative parliamentary career path); committees were not given the power to force ministers to attend; the executive was not forced to accept committee recommendations; and no time was allocated for reports to be debated in the chamber. Arguably one of the biggest weaknesses, however, was the way MPs would be selected for committee service. Proposed membership was made to the Committee of Selection on behalf of party whips, effectively ensuring that political parties controlled who would make up committees and lead them. Between 1979 and 2010, but especially since 2000, a number of attempts were made to strengthen select committee scrutiny to ameliorate some of these weaknesses. Notably, the aforementioned core tasks were introduced during this period, as well as: further powers to appoint sub-committees and joint inquiries with other committees; the creation of a Scrutiny Unit to increase select committee resources; additional payments introduced for committee chairs to incentivise an alternative career structure; and, the introduction of evidence sessions between the prime minister and the Liaison Committee (see Table 1.2 for a summary, and Flinders (2002, 2007) for a discussion). Whilst these reforms arguably strengthened select committees, the continued problem of appointing members to committees remained (despite attempts to change this in 2002 (Kelso, 2003)).

In 2010, arguably the most important reforms since 1979 took place with respect to select committees. It came at a time when Parliament faced a crisis of confidence following the MPs' Expenses Scandal (Kelso, 2009a). In response to

Year	Nature of reforms	Key report(s)	Reference
1966	Crossman reforms: introduction of committees on agriculture, science and technology, education, race relations and immigration, overseas aid/development, and Scottish affairs.	Procedure Committee (1965)	Walkland (1976)
1979	Introduction of departmental select committee system by the newly elected Conservative government and led by Norman St. John Stevas.	Procedure Committee (1978)	Kelso (2009b, pp.95-101)
2002	Introduction of core tasks, additional pay for committee chairs, Liaison Committee evidence sessions with the prime minister, and introduction of the Scrutiny Unit.	Liaison Committee, (2000) Modernisation Committee (2002)	Flinders (2007)
2010	Wright reforms: creation of the Backbench Business Committee, and a shift from appointing MPs to select committees to a system of elections.	Reform Committee (2009)	Russell (2011)

Table 1.2. Timeline of select committee reform

the scandal, the prime minister, Gordon Brown, established the Committee on Reform of the House of Commons to look at ways in which the reputation of Parliament could be restored. The subsequent reform package, known as the Wright reforms (after Tony Wright, who chaired the committee), included the introduction of a Backbench Business Committee, to give backbench MPs the opportunity to influence the parliamentary timetable, and changes to committee membership, shifting from selection by party whips to a process of electing members (through party groups) and chairs (by the whole House) (for a discussion of these changes, see Russell (2011), and Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Though these reforms have been widely praised, the repercussions are not fully known, but to which discussion returns. For now, it brings attention to what we *do* know about select committees.

1.1.3. Studying select committees

A number of commentators and academics (indeed, parliamentarians themselves) have discussed, analysed and evaluated the select committee system. One important strand of the literature, already implied in the previous subsection, relates to the extent of parliamentary modernisation and reform. This has made an important contribution to our understanding of Parliament because it provides rich (yet also sometimes very broad) historical context for understanding parliamentary select committees, as summarised briefly above. This includes aforementioned work by Flinders (2002, 2004, 2007) and Kelso (2003, 2009a, 2009b), as well as perspectives from parliamentarians (Power, 2007; Wright, 2004). Frequently, this literature has distinguished between modernisation or efficiency reforms, on the one hand, and effectiveness reforms, on the other. Whilst the former results in making parliamentary processes more streamlined to sustain the executive, the latter results in strengthening Parliament's capabilities to scrutinise the executive. As a result, this literature has often focused on the relationships between executive and Parliament, and sought to evaluate the effectiveness of select committees.

A second strand of the academic literature on committees focuses more directly on the issue of select committee policy impact. Though some scholars do not view select committees as particularly important or meaningful (Mattson and Strøm, 1995), this view is not shared by most other research in the field. Andrew Hindmoor et. al. (2009), for example, look at the Education and Skills Committee between 1997 and 2005, and evaluate the extent of committee influence positively (though also cautiously). They look at, first, how many committee recommendations were accepted by government and, second, interview a range of parliamentary actors to establish influence. They acknowledge that identifying broad patterns and consistent effects is difficult, though note specific instances of (often informal) committee influence. Meghan Benton and Meg Russell (2013) have conducted a very similar piece of research. but looked at many more committees (seven case study committees) over a longer time period (1997-2010). They find that 40% of committee recommendations were accepted by the executive for their case study committees between 1997 and 2010 (including 55% of small-level, 31% of medium-level, and 14% of large-level proposed changes to government policy). These findings have been broadened out and summarised in more recent research by Meg Russell and Philip Cowley (2016) and Meg Russell et. al. (2016), who conclude that, contrary to our assumptions about parliaments and legislatures, the UK Parliament 'exerts a significant influence on government policy', particularly with regards to 'anticipated reactions' and behind-the-scenes negotiations (Russell et. al., 2016, pp.304-6). Further, more specific, research has been conducted by: Michael Tolley (2009), who looks at the effectiveness of

the Joint Committee on Human Rights; Robert Hazell et. al. (2012), who look at the effectiveness of pre-appointment scrutiny hearings in the House of Commons; Hugh Bochel et. al. (2015), who examine the accountability mechanisms in place for government security and intelligence agencies; and David H. Foster (2015), who explores the effectiveness of the Backbench Business Committee. Collectively, these studies reinforce the findings found by others that committee-based scrutiny does make an impact on government, though a quantifiable figure is difficult to ascertain. Often, this debate is couched between the term 'power', which has connotations of formal mechanisms of scrutiny, and 'influence', which indicates informal mechanisms to hold the executive to account, including aforementioned 'anticipated reactions' and behind-the-scenes negotiations. Very recently, Hannah White (2015a, 2015b, 2015c) has conducted research to explore these factors in more detail by looking at how select committees approach their work and how those approaches make an impact on government. She finds that committees have a diverse range of activities, but they are also (collectively) constrained by a lack of resources.

A small, though increasing, amount of research has begun to explore not only approaches taken by committees, but other input-related factors to scrutiny. Dennis Grube (2014), for example, explores the 'drama' of accountability hearings, noting that adversarial hearings encourage 'blame games' (Hood, 2011) between parliamentary and executive actors. To take another example, Richard Berry and Sean Kippin (2014) gave a snapshot of who gave evidence to parliamentary committees during November 2013 to establish the diversity of witnesses on which select committees base their evidence. This literature on the input-side of select committee activity has, however, been relatively small, especially in comparison to the research conducted on the policy impact of parliamentary select committees. Whilst the literature on committees has employed a variety of methodological tools and techniques, this indicates that, on the whole, the literature remains focused on institutional relationships between Parliament and executive. These studies have therefore made a significant contribution to our understanding of Parliament. That said, it also seems to reveal that the literature on select committees has not explicitly sought to reflect on the theoretical principles that underpins its research (for exceptions, see Cole and McAllister, 2015; Monk, 2010). Theoretical reflection matters

because it affects the approaches that we take in studying Parliament and, indeed, the methods we use to conduct those studies. In order to offer a little more coherence to the field of parliamentary and legislative studies, the next section attempts to identify traditions on which parliamentary studies is based.

1.2. Traditions in parliamentary studies

The rigour and relevance of current research on Parliament has made significant contributions to explaining parliamentary behaviour and executive-legislative relationships. This section does not attempt to critique the literature, but rather to examine their approach and focus, and identify broad traditions on which the scholarship is based. I identify: historical, rational choice, sociological and interpretive traditions. These do not exhaust analytical possibilities, nor are distinctions between them always clear-cut. Some studies overlap and borrow elements from different traditions to form hybrids, whilst many others do not place themselves in any tradition at all. This makes an overview of the scholarship's intellectual roots more challenging, compounded yet further by the broader heritage on which British political science has been built, namely the Westminster model (WM). This deserves brief comment before the aforementioned traditions are examined because the legacy of the WM on parliamentary studies (indeed, British politics more generally) has been, and continues to be, significant.

1.2.1. The legacy of the Westminster model and modernist empiricism

Studies of Parliament by British scholars have arguably been pervaded by what Andrew Gamble (1990, p.405) termed a dominant 'organising perspective' or British political tradition. Understood through the prism of Whig historiography, it stresses the centrality of political institutions, continuity in British history, and gradual change of the political system (p.407). Gamble identifies this as part of the Westminster model (WM). Amongst other things, the WM is commonly associated with an appeal to the sovereignty and primacy of Parliament; the centrality of individual ministerial responsibility to the House of Commons; and, the selection of the executive through a competitive, adversarial electoral system

(Gamble, 1990; see also Liphart, 2012). The model and its assumptions are used to explain the 'standard account' of the British state (Judge, 2014, pp.1-18) by placing Parliament in a broader constitutional context and focusing analysis on institutions, rules, procedures and formal organisations of government and state. Consequently, debates revolve around the extent to which parliamentary government in the UK still follows the central tenets of the Westminster model. This includes, for example, debates over the extent of parliamentary sovereignty in the UK (in light of devolution, the relationship between the UK and the European Union, and incorporation of the Human Rights Act 1998 (Judge, 2014, pp.107-34)), or the extent of ministerial responsibility to Parliament (especially given significant restructuring of the British state since 1979 (Flinders, 2002, 2004; Woodhouse, 2003)). These debates continue to rage, in part because there is no single agreed definition of the model (see Bevir and Rhodes, 2003, pp.24-31; Rhodes, Wanna and Weller, 2009, pp.1-9), and while this indicates that the Westminster model has come under challenge both as an idealised version of the British constitution and as an empirical-descriptive model, it remains resilient in British political science, which may be the result of a wider modernist empiricist tradition within parliamentary studies.

Both the narratives of the Westminster model and the focus of analysis on institutions, rules and formal organisations of government indicate a traditional approach to the study of Parliament with shared methodological assumptions. Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (2003, p.27) summarise this as: 'the tools of the lawyer and the historian to explain the constraints on both political behaviour and democratic effectiveness'. A great deal of research focuses on the interpretation of documents, texts and parliamentary procedure to locate the formal and informal decision-making powers of the two Houses of Parliament (e.g. Blackburn, Kennon and Wheeler-Booth, 2002; Norton, 2013; Rush, 2005). Indeed, this has been a lasting legacy for parliamentary and legislative studies in the UK, which has arguably prevented further theoretical reflection within the sub-discipline (Waylen, 2010, p.354). Thus, as Flinders (2011, p.308) puts it, there is an almost uniquely British approach to political studies as a cooperative enterprise between practitioners and academics, with little sophisticated modelling, a preference for qualitative methodologies, and a tendency to locate analysis within a normative democratic theory with a focus on British politics. As

Table 1.3. Approaches to the study of Parliament

Legacy of the Westminster model: An organising perspective that often underpins analysis in British politics, the WM is perceived to describe essential features of the British state. It focuses on the rules, procedures and formal organisations of government. It emphasises: the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, the importance of ministerial accountability to Parliament, and the selection of the executive through an adversarial electoral system.

Tradition	Analytical focus	Contribution to parliamentary studies	Contribution to select committee research	Methodology	Key examples
Historical	Role of historical context in shaping behaviour of MPs	Situates parliamentary change and reform in its historical context	Explains the broad history of select committees and how they have changed	Textual and historical analysis, supplemented with semi-structured interviews	Kelso (2009)
Rational choice	Asserts that all actors are goal-seeking	Explains institutional behaviour in rational, utility-maximising terms	Select committees are useful for giving information to MPs, but lack formal power	Quantitative analysis of data sets, including surveys and voting records	Mattson and Strøm (1995)
Sociological	Influence of rules, norms and values on MPs	Helps us to understand how MPs conceptualise and are socialised into their role	No detailed studies	Survey data and semi- structured interviews	Searing (1994), Rush and Giddings (2011)
Interpretive	Shifts focus from institutional landscapes to everyday practices	Explains parliamentary activities and practices in terms of the interpretations and practices of MPs	No detailed studies	Ethnographic techniques including interviews and observation	Crewe (2005, 2015)

the previous section has indicated, this is arguably true of research on select committees, too, where research has often focused on the balance between executive and legislature, particularly with regards to the extent of select committee influence over policy (e.g. Benton and Russell, 2013; Hindmoor *et. al.*, 2009). This has done much to shed light on our otherwise limited understanding of the policy impact of the House of Commons *vis-à-vis* the executive and disputes the caricatures of Parliament as a talking shop or rubber stamp.

As indicated earlier, many studies of Parliament overlap and borrow from different intellectual roots, while many more do not engage in theoretical reflection at all. Perhaps it is the dominance of the Westminster model that explains this. In an attempt to offer a little more coherence, I identify four broad traditions to parliamentary studies, three of which owe some sort of debt to the WM (either directly or indirectly), and one that draws more from anthropological approaches (see Table 1.3 for a summary). In each discussion that follows, I explore: the broad principles that underpin the approach, the methodological tools employed by those approaches, and the key debates or knowledge claims within the tradition, particularly with reference to select committees.

1.2.2. The historical tradition

Historical institutionalism (HI) has obvious roots from the organising principles outlined above, especially in sustaining the importance of historical context. HI has developed into a cohesive analytical framework of its own in response to debates over the role of institutions in the 1980s (Hay, 2002, pp.10-13). It is underpinned by a belief that political actors are rule-following satisfiers, interpreting dominant value systems and fitting their actions to institutional rules of the game. This means that actors' preferences are socially and politically structured by their surroundings, i.e. the institutional setting within which they operate (for a summary, see Sanders, 2006). This assumption about actors' behaviour has consequences for political analysis. It implies that institutions and political agents act in the future as they have done in the past. This describes the notion of 'path dependency', or as Faith Armitage (2012, p.137) puts it: '[p]ath dependency describes the tendency of institutions to be self-perpetuating and static'. This stability is reinforced by the concept of 'sunk costs', which Stephen Krasner (1984) explains as 'capital stock' in the form of information, trust and shared expectations that sustains the bedrock of institutions. These established structures facilitate the exchange of information and tacitly coordinate behaviour. Subsequently, future policy choices are constrained by the past. Accepted ways of doing things, either through habit, tradition or legal precedent reduce uncertainty (and therefore potential risks) for political actors. However, that is not to say that the approach fails to appreciate political change. Change is caused by critical junctures or windows of opportunity, which presume equilibrium or inertia until there is a confluence of circumstances that are capable of provoking change to take place. This may include things such as exogenous shocks, policy learning, destabilisation of institutional frameworks, or ambiguity between institutional principles and their application to a specific event. Central to HI is that change occurs in an incremental fashion. It is evolutionary and does not happen frequently, which has self-evident similarities to long-established views of the Westminster model (see above).

Taken together, these concepts have allowed HI to make an important contribution to parliamentary studies, allowing scholars to explain both the stability of the British political system through path dependency but also giving a convincing account of changes that have taken place at key points in Parliament's history. A good example of this is the debate about the nature of political reform in the House of Commons. Kelso (2003) outlines two perspectives. The first, attitudinal view, proposes that parliamentary reform depends on the inclination of Members and the satisfaction of three conditions: first, there must be disequilibrium with current arrangements; second, there must be a coherent reform agenda; and third, there must be some sort of leadership. These three factors amount to a critical juncture and their confluence allows for the opportunity for change. Philip Norton (1983; 2013, p.292) gives two examples: the introduction of departmental select committees in 1979 (MPs on both sides of the House desired reform; the Procedure Committee had published timely reform proposals; and Norman St John-Stevas, leader of the House, provided leadership), and the reform of select committees in 2010 (the MPs' Expenses Scandal created a crisis of confidence in Parliament; the Wright Committee provided coherent reform proposals; and leadership came from Tony Wright). This agency-centred view has been challenged by a second perspective on political reform, namely the contextual view. It emphasises the contextual nature of parliamentary reform, specifically the weight of history as a constraining force. According to Kelso (2009b, p.25):

[T]he structured institutional context of parliament has a highly significant degree of influence over those actors who operate there, and ... parliament's path dependency substantially constrained the range of reform options that might be realistically contemplated.

Proponents of this view (Crick, 1965; Flinders, 2002; Walkland, 1976) argue that reform originates, and is sustained by, the executive. In this vein, the introduction of departmental select committees in 1979 is actually something that maintains the pre-existing path of institutional development. Kelso (2009b, pp.95-8) argues that the reforms adopted in 1979 did not significantly upset the constitutional status quo in that the executive watered down the package of reforms to maintain its dominance over backbench parliamentarians. Others have also pointed out that, though the three conditions set out by Norton are important (and indeed may be necessary), they must be considered in combination with the political climate in which MPs find themselves (Power, 2007; Russell, 2011).

This debate is an important illustration of the impact and contribution of historical institutionalism to our understanding of Parliament, and specifically the evolution of the select committee system. It also allows us to make three broader claims about HI and parliamentary studies. First, the broad focus of the approach is (perhaps unremarkably) on institutional roles and landscapes. For example, the debate about select committees is usually about reform, and usually about reform of the balance between Parliament and executive. It is less often about individual political actors (such as committee chairs, members of staff, etc.) and their specific influence in shaping political outcomes. Second, it indicates that norms and values are inextricably linked to the weight of history, which forms the foundation for explaining stability in British politics. Third, and closely related to the second, analysis focuses on key events and historical processes. These three factors indicate that historical context is a pivotal analytical, structural and methodological anchor. For example, Armitage's (2012) research on Speakership elections uses HI to paint an historical analysis, pointing to key elections and their procedural impact on the broader institutional processes. Elsewhere, Flinders (2004) locates his research on the relationship between Parliament and arm's-length bodies (ALBs) within an historical analysis of the British ministerial department and the importance of that history on contemporary debates. To undertake these studies, academic research predominantly relies on qualitative methods, including textual analysis, commentary of key events, and (where possible) semi-structured interviews with elites. This allows academics to both access the historical background and assess the views of those involved in parliamentary activities. In privileging history, two consequences follow. First, it limits the potential for agency and their individual interpretations of the context in which they find themselves by attributing a strong causal role to historical context. Second, and in part as a consequence of the first, the framework predisposes research to focus on long-term changing relationships between institutions (such as the executive and Parliament) and less about the individuals that act within it. As a result, these studies may overlook political agency, the unintended consequences of daily life in Parliament and the importance of those everyday practices on broader events and traditions in parliamentary politics.

1.2.3. The rational choice tradition

In contrast to HI, the approach adopted by rational choice theorists and analysts places political agency at the heart of their research. However, political agency is developed in a very precise fashion, presuming that human behaviour is inextricably bound up with self-interest. As Kaare Strøm (1997, p.158) puts it: '[b]esides all their other charming idiosyncracies [*sic*], legislators are goal-seeking men or women who choose their behaviour to fit the destinations they have in mind'. Rational choice scholars are aware that re-election is a means to an end, which can be diffuse (making the world a better place) or particular (securing a specific policy outcome). However, to achieve those ends politicians need to maximise their power through office-seeking, utility-maximising behaviour. This assumption is extended to all political actors and parliamentary institutions, who are governed by a will to utility maximisation. This forms the bedrock of rational choice approaches to political science.

The basic assumption of self-interest as the driving force in human behaviour has profound consequences for parliamentary studies. At the broadest level, the founding assertion refashions the Westminster model as a chain of delegation and accountability: voters delegate their sovereign power to elected representatives; elected representatives in turn delegate decision-making power to the executive; and the executive delegates the implementation of decisionmaking to the civil service and ALBs (Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2003). In this Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) inspired model, the legislature remains the principal over the executive, and ultimately the people remain in control of the political class. Although an idealistic simplification of a complex reality, it mirrors the basic precepts of the Westminster model but, importantly, removes the model of historical context and minimises the role played by norms and values that might otherwise shape parliamentary behaviour. Rather, the model maximises self-interest of all involved because it is designed to: 'minimize the efficiency and transparency losses caused by multiple principals and agents observed in other Western democracies', which, 'avoids confusion about political responsibility' (Saalfeld, 2003, p.620). With respect to select committees, Saalfeld (pp.635-6) argues that these committees are seen as useful in providing information to politicians and the public at low cost. Though they have improved government accountability, their utility is left wanting due to a lack of formal powers over the executive (for example, the executive established what are known as the Osmotherly Rules that, though Parliament has never accepted them, restrict the extent to which civil servants can give evidence to committees in order to maintain the executive's interpretation of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility). The simple framework for rational choice theory means that it is ideal for quantitative analysis. This has made a substantial contribution to legislative studies in that it has offered broad comparative trends between a multitude of parliamentary systems of government, of which Ingvar Mattson and Kaare Strøm (1995, pp.249-307), who compare legislative committees across 18 European democracies, is just one example. In contrast to other studies that do not base their research on rational choice (for example, Russell and Cowley, 2016; Russell et. al., 2016; Thompson, 2015a), Mattson and Strøm (1995, p.260) find that House of Commons committees are 'the most deviant case' of their dataset and not seen as powerful compared to their other 18 country examples.

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Though rational choice approaches are popular in European and American legislative studies (e.g. Döring, 1995), they have arguably not made significant inroads in a British context, especially with regards to research on select committee scrutiny. The legacy of the Westminster model may have contributed to this; the focus on historical context, procedures and precedents, unwritten rules (norms and values), and informal policy influence sits uneasily with a rational choice framework that simplifies behaviour by political actors to selfinterest. Moreover, the breadth of the analysis necessarily sacrifices depth and nuance to which British scholars are often accustomed given parliamentary actors' reliance on unwritten rules. There is some research that has attempted to take account of that. Christopher Kam (2009), for example, explores the role of socialisation in the House of Commons and its effect on party unity in Parliament from a rational choice perspective. He argues that shared expectations about 'appropriate behaviour' (his definition of social norms) may help leaders to maintain control of situations by imposing obligations or promoting a sense of duty amongst MPs to vote with their party and to support their leaders. For Kam, supported by quantitative findings, socialisation processes actually form an important method by which political parties assume loyalty, leading him to conclude that social norms reinforce self-interested behaviour (Kam, 2009, pp.189-204). That said, Kam's conception of socialisation is considered in a very specific way, namely loyalty to the leader. This creates conceptual issues given that both the idea of socialisation and lovalty are not uncontested. A more nuanced approach is taken by Philip Norton (2001), who applies rational choice theory to parliamentary procedure. Echoing the concept of sunk costs (discussed in the previous sub-section), Norton argues that parliamentary procedures change when the costs of governing are too constraining. He cites Labour's demanding legislative programme in 1997 as an example of change; in other areas, MPs accept parliamentary procedure because the benefits of amending procedures outweigh the resources needed for change to occur. Norton's approach links rational choice theory with historical institutionalism, not only indicating the frequent decision by scholars to mix approaches, but also that the fundamental principle of rational choice - selfinterest - does not explain parliamentary behaviour in full. Indeed, rational choice scholars acknowledge that non-policy motivations 'may encompass a great swathe of the human condition, including such powerful focuses as love, jealousy, compassion, vanity, spite, and greed' (Strøm, 2003, p.81). And yet, the focus of analysis by rational choice analysts maintains that behaviour is ultimately dependent only on instrumental self-interest while other factors are rarely considered.

Scholars in this tradition frequently adopt positivist and quantitative methods to study parliamentary behaviour because of their ontological and epistemological commitment that politicians' motivations are known and can be studied objectively. This relies on the availability of data from publicly identifiable (and quantifiable) sources, such as formal powers of parliamentary committees or the voting behaviour of politicians. Whilst this does indicate broad, generalisable trends, it also sacrifices depth and nuance and, as noted previously, overlooks informal relationships that are far more complex than rational choice scholars are willing to admit (or include in their analyses). While some scholars believe these methods ensure rigour, parsimony and objectivity, others argue that rational choice theorists ignore other causal mechanisms, whether the weight of history, as proposed by historical institutionalism (above), or norms and values, as proposed by sociological approaches, to which we now turn.

1.2.4. The sociological tradition

A noticeable trend in research on parliamentary studies attempts to address the problems posed by the historical tradition (such as the lack of agency) and the rational choice tradition (equating agency with self-interest). The nature of academic study within this third tradition covers a wide range, which makes it difficult to offer a neat summary of the application of its principles to the study of Parliament. That said, it is possible to identify at least two strands of work within this broad tradition, namely: role theory and socialisation processes.

Theories and debates about representatives' roles have their roots in the famous address given by Edmund Burke to his constituents in 1774, in which he distinguished between 'delegate' and 'trustee' interpretations of what it means to be a Member of Parliament (Norman, 2014, pp.76-8). This proved to be influential for normative debates regarding the representative ideal of politics (Pitkin, 1967). Political scientists have used this distinction in order to examine

how politicians interpret their role, something which was popular in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Eulau et. al., 1959; Wahlke et. al., 1962). While interest in role analysis has declined, there is still a stream of literature on this topic (e.g. King, 1974; Radice et. al., 1990). Most famously, Donald Searing (1994) looks at the norms and values of politicians at the Palace of Westminster. Searing's study brought together elements of institutionalist and behaviouralist approaches, covered in the previous sections, by combining the powerful force of rulefollowing and ties this together with the idea that politicians can and do act purposefully in their own right. He does not reject self-interest as a motivation for action, but rather argues that it is one of many causes for political agents to pursue a course of action. Searing interviewed 521 MPs during 1970-71 to explore how MPs conceive of their role. Based on their responses, he identifies four preference roles (Policy Advocate, Ministerial Aspirant, Constituency Member and Parliament Man) and four position roles (Parliamentary Private Secretary, Whip, Junior Minister, and Minister), each of which also have subcategories. While Searing notes that roles are not mutually exclusive, he nonetheless implies that each role is fairly fixed with little role switching. This has been criticised by others. For example, Rudy Andeweg (1997), basing his research on survey data from the Dutch Parliament, identifies similar roles to Searing, including: advocates, parliamentarians and partisans (the lack of constituency-focused roles comes from the lack of geographical representation in the Netherlands). However, Andeweg also considers the possibility for role switching, which Searing does not. Other examples of role analysis include research conducted by Kaare Strøm (1997), who re-framed the approach as one about strategies of legislators (thereby creating stronger links to rational choice theory), and Roger Scully and David Farrell (2003), who identify social arbitrator (policy advocate), interest articulator (constituency-focused), parliamentarian and party-oriented roles (for a discussion, see Andeweg, 2014; more widely on roles, see Blomgren and Rozenberg, 2012).

A related theme to role analysis is how MPs are socialised into their roles, something which is taken up by Michael Rush and Philip Giddings (2011). In their study, they look at how MPs are socialised into three different, multi-faceted roles: legislative, scrutiny and constituency roles. According to Rush and Giddings (p.56):

[L]egislative socialisation [is] the process by which newly elected members of a legislature become acquainted with the institution's rules and norms of behaviour. This process may, to a significant degree, shape their attitudes towards the legislature and their role and behaviour in it.

They go on to identify functional, attitudinal and behavioural socialisation. The foundation of their approach is that norms and values matter and, subsequently, the focal point of their analysis is the interaction of those norms and rules with the perceived political identities and the institutional context in which actors find themselves. In order to do this, Rush and Giddings rely on survey data collected from MPs, but also make use of semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis where appropriate (note the difference between this approach and that of Kam, raised above). This type of research is taken a little further by Sarah Childs (2004, 2014), who analyses the role of gender in the House of Commons and the extent to which women have a different style of behaving in Parliament.

Research in this tradition rejects the assumption made by rational choice scholars that MPs' always behave in a self-interested, utility-maximising way. Rather, they look at the claims that political actors make about their role and use interviews, survey data and media analysis to explore what roles MPs adopt and how the institution has socialised MPs into their various roles. They have allowed us to consequently pose questions about MPs' behaviour that other approaches have not, such as the extent to which MPs perceive themselves to be following the will of their party, their constituents, or the will of Parliament. More widely, it examines how their role fits into the wider normative framework of the British constitutional system, i.e. narratives surround the Westminster model. However, these approaches are not without criticism, either. The work conducted by Searing is based on interviews from some 45 years ago, while the data on which Rush and Giddings rely is based on research from the 1990s. Crucially, Searing's study was conducted almost a decade before select committees were introduced, while Rush and Giddings' work is based on research from the 1990s and well before committee reforms took place. More generally, research in this tradition often relies on claims made by interviewees or survey respondents without supplementing those findings with other data.

1.2.5. The interpretive tradition

Some scholars have taken the principles of the sociological tradition further. In the last five to ten years, an emerging literature has combined traditional parliamentary research topics with innovative methods drawn from anthropological and post-structuralist perspectives to re-focus analysis in parliamentary studies. Emma Crewe and Marion Müller (2006, p.7) criticise traditional political science, including studies in the sociological tradition, as too focused on institutional structures; instead, they argue that the study of politics would benefit from exploring the effects of rituals, ceremonies and symbolism in political behaviour. For example, Marion Müller (2006) compares constitutional oath-taking in the UK, USA, France, European Parliament and Germany, arguing that studying these rituals and practices helps us to understand the political orientation of legislative actors. Elsewhere, Marc Abélès (1988, 2007) has studied the rituals and traditions of French local, regional and national politicians, and argues that studying political rituals allows us to better understand the resulting legitimacy in political decisions. The most comprehensive attempt to conduct an analysis of the UK Parliament using anthropological perspectives comes from the innovative work of Emma Crewe (2005, 2015). In her two volumes, she studies the House of Lords (2005) and House of Commons (2015) to establish the broad rituals, manners, rhythms and everyday behaviour of peers and MPs. She demonstrates that politicians do not act according to self-interest or historical context alone, though both may be important factors. She asserts that politicians' behaviours are underpinned by a range of motivations and enacted in a diversity of ways. Crucially, they are affected by political cultures that emerge within the Palace of Westminster to create sometimes very distinct tribes. In addition to Crewe's research, there has been other work that looks at the way in which rituals, ceremonies and the symbolic affect democratic practices and political outcomes. For example, in Shirin M. Rai and Rachel E. Johnson's (2014) recent edited collection, authors look at, among other things, the way representation is performed, the rituals of parliamentary behaviour and their effect on gender norms, and the politics of space, design and architecture. Indeed, Rai's research has led her to suggest a new framework for analysing parliaments and legislatures based on the idea that political behaviours and actions are political performances, which we can study by looking at, amongst other things, the physical embodiment of performances, the settings in which they occur, and examining speech acts and auditory rhythms. These help us to better understand political representation (identifying authenticity, mode, liminality, and resistance as key factors) (Rai, 2015b).

This new analytical focus, matched with ethnographic methodological techniques, poses new questions for the way in which parliamentary scholars understand and explain the roles of legislatures. The work conducted by Crewe and Rai are at the forefront of breaking away from what may otherwise be part of the sociological tradition. Rather, this research has carved out an interpretive tradition that focuses its attention on the everyday performances of political behaviour. That said, this tradition remains in its infancy and research has not been conducted on a range of parliamentary processes, including select committee scrutiny in the House of Commons. Moreover, there are trade-offs to be made in following this tradition. In particular, generalisability and parsimony (so often an important consideration) must be sacrificed in favour of depth and nuance. The approach also throws open a host of epistemological questions about subjectivity and the role of the researcher *vis-à-vis* their research that a simpler framework might very well avoid.

Taken together, this discussion has shown that there are at least four traditions within parliamentary studies. However, an important caveat must be stressed: the scholarship on Parliament is far more complex and nuanced than this review offers. Scholars cannot be divided into these traditions easily (nor, perhaps, would they want to be) for the simple reason that most scholars do not clearly articulate or identify the ontological and epistemological roots on which they base their research.⁵ It could well be argued that the sub-discipline has not engaged in significant theoretical reflection (rightly or wrongly), instead preferring an inductive method inherited from the Westminster model and modernist empiricism (see also Flinders, 2011, p.308).

⁵ For example, research by Philip Cowley (2002, 2005), Philip Cowley and Mark Stuart (1997, 2010, 2014), or Alison Plumb and David Marsh (2013), though high-quality and pertinent research, does not identify an analytical reference point. Though this is an important field, it is not possible to place this field of research into a scholarly tradition. This is not uncommon.

1.3. Identifying a research agenda

What this review indicates is that analysis of committees, specifically, and scrutiny, more generally, has focused on the function of legislatures in the twenty-first century and particularly the conflicting demands placed on the Westminster model following far-reaching constitutional reforms. Historical institutionalism has given us the historical context within which select committee reform has taken place. Rational choice theorists remind us of the instrumental motivations that often affect MPs' behaviour. However, as the sociological tradition argues, rational choice scholars arguably overstate their case. We must also look to the norms and values to explain behaviour, which the emerging interpretive tradition has taken much further than conventional research in the sub-discipline has done to date.

As a result of research undertaken on select committees, specifically, we have a better understanding of their history and development, especially since 1979. Not only can we better understand the nature of parliamentary reform (efficiency versus effectiveness reforms), but we can also place this in wider debates about the causes of reform (attitudinal versus contextual perspectives). Additionally, we know that select committee scrutiny does make a difference on government policy as a result of a range of mixed-methods approaches that have looked at committee recommendations and interviewed parliamentary actors about committee impact. That said, there remain a range of things that we simply do not know about committees, especially when coming from sociological or interpretive traditions. On the whole, we do not know how parliamentary actors, including committee members, chairs and staff, interpret their role on select committees. As a result, our knowledge of how parliamentary actors seek to perform their committee duties or how contrasting visions of scrutiny affect accountability processes remains thin. Furthermore, we do not know much about the evidence-gathering process itself. Whilst the majority of research has focused on committee reports' impact on government, the question of what goes into making a committee report in the first place has often been overlooked (Hannah White's research is a notable exception). Furthermore, though most research has acknowledged the importance of consensual reports by select committees, few have looked at how consensus can be achieved given the radically different perspectives of committee members.

Our lack of knowledge on certain topics can be explained by the dominance of certain parliamentary traditions that were identified in the previous section. The legacy of the Westminster model and modernist empiricism, in particular, have ensured a greater focus on institutional relationships between executive and Parliament. It has only been in recent years that this dominance has been challenged, and especially so by the nascent interpretive tradition in parliamentary studies. Indeed, this approach, which asks questions about the role of the everyday practices and interpretations of political actors, is particularly important because it links effectively to the previous paragraph's discussion about what we do not know regarding parliamentary scrutiny undertaken by select committees in the House of Commons. As the introduction to this thesis has made clear, it is precisely this gap that this doctoral research project seeks to fill by asking three questions relating to interpretations of scrutiny and everyday practices. These are:

- 1. How can we understand the everyday lives of parliamentary actors?
- 2. How do political actors interpret and perform their role on select committees?
- 3. In what ways do everyday practices affect parliamentary scrutiny?

These are important questions that hope to complement the current scholarship on scrutiny in the House of Commons, and questions with which the remainder of this thesis seeks to engage.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided an overview of current trends in research on select committees in the House of Commons as part of a broader discussion on the ways in which scholars approach and study parliaments and legislatures in the UK. I have sought to clarify what could otherwise be perceived to be an unreflexive scholarship (particularly with regards select committee scrutiny). This discussion has identified four dominant traditions that pervade the scholarship, underpinned more broadly by the legacy of the Westminster model and modernist empiricism. The interpretive tradition has begun to challenge this and, in doing so, identified an interesting gap in the literature on scrutiny. Whilst some academics (Emma Crewe and Shirin M. Rai, for instance) have begun to address the theme of the everyday in parliamentary activities, their research has not explored everyday practices of select committees. This indicates a fruitful avenue for further research that will complement the current literature on select committees. Thus, this chapter has been able to identify a clear research gap on select committees. Furthermore, given the focus of this chapter on the everyday, this research sits squarely within the nascent interpretive tradition. In order to fill this aforementioned gap using an interpretive approach, it requires further reflection on the ontological and epistemological foundations that guide this doctoral thesis. So, in the next two chapters, I ask: what are everyday practices? How important are they in affecting events, processes, institutions and traditions in Parliament? What underpins these everyday practices? How can we study them?

Chapter 2: Theory

esearching everyday practices has only recently become a topic of interest within the field of parliamentary and legislative studies. This is not necessarily surprising given not only the legacy of modernist empiricism (discussed in the previous chapter) but also the wider belief that 'everyday life' is ultimately about ordinariness and therefore unremarkable, mundane and ultimately unworthy of *political* study. And yet, a research focus on everyday practices can give us interesting perspectives about political processes and outcomes in the House of Commons that would complement more output-focused research on select committees that Chapter 1 has summarised. Having identified such a gap, it falls to this chapter to reflect more deeply on the theoretical foundations that guide this research project, with the aim of offering a philosophically rigorous and conceptually consistent outline to study everyday life in Parliament. This requires substantial depth because taking this approach to parliamentary studies has only recently begun to develop. In order to do this, this chapter is broken into three sections. The first section explores the broad philosophical roots that underpin this doctoral research. This is important because these ontological and epistemological outlooks significantly shape the topics that we choose to analyse, the methodological approaches that adopt to study those topics, and the way we then go on to evaluate our empirical findings. I draw on anti-foundationalist themes to explain the interpretive (and, by consequence, contested) nature of politics. This centralises the importance of interpretation, beliefs and everyday practices. In the second section, I examine the consequence of taking an anti-foundationalist perspective to political analysis. Though there exist a wide range of analytical frameworks that apply

such philosophical roots and principles, both from outside parliamentary studies (such as Norman Fairclough's (2010) discourse analysis or Maarten Hajer's (2009) frame analysis) and within it (such as Shirin M. Rai's (2015b) analysis of ceremonies and rituals). I take the work of Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (2003, 2006, 2010) as a starting point. The broad thrust of their approach has given us novel ways to study political issues, and has not only made a significant impact on British political science generally, but some of their empirical work has also touched on parliamentary issues (Rhodes et. al., 2009, pp.184-218). I summarise their key concepts - amongst them beliefs, traditions, dilemmas and practices - and explain their strengths and weaknesses for empirical research. In the third and final section, I tailor their analytical framework to something that is more explicitly focused on everyday practices. I draw on dramaturgical and anthropological insights to supplement Bevir and Rhodes' approach to define everyday practices in terms of style, space and speech. In sum, this means that we can examine everyday practices through not only parliamentary actors' beliefs, traditions and dilemmas about the world, but also in how they seek to enact or perform those ideas in their everyday behaviour as they navigate their scrutiny world (i.e. creating a sense of meaning-in-action). This forms the bedrock of the analysis that follows in empirical chapters.

2.1. Philosophical foundations

Philosophical reflection is important because empirical and conceptual debates often depend on our deeper theoretical outlooks (Hay, 2007a, pp.115-6). Our ontological and epistemological assumptions affect the research agenda that we pursue and the rigour of our empirical research. Additionally, engaging with these philosophical and theoretical questions helps to ensure that we remain reflexive and self-critical thinkers. This indicates, then, that this discussion is not about matching a research method to a research question; rather, these considerations shape our fundamental outlook on political science. So, in this section, I consider the ontological and epistemological roots on which this research based. I begin with the broad thrust of anti-foundationalist philosophy. These foundations lead us to an interpretive approach. In the second sub-section, I identify a definition of politics that encompasses interpretation and contestation as its central pillars. I conclude with a discussion of the relationship between interpretation, power and practices, which has considerable implications for an interpretive analysis of everyday practices in select committees of the House of Commons.

2.1.1. Anti-foundationalism

Most interpretive approaches to political science have their roots in antifoundationalist philosophy, which broadly asserts that our knowledge of the world cannot be regarded as certain (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, p.42). Antifoundationalism suggests that there is, as the name implies, no foundation or essence to reality. In contrast to positivists, who assert that objective meanings are 'out there' in the world waiting for us to discover or find them, antifoundationalists take as their starting point the principle that social (and political) realities are constructed through our experiences of and engagement with what we perceive of the world. Some scholars have taken antifoundationalism to mean that reality can have no meaning apart from what is believed by a particular group and that, therefore, all knowledge is relative (Trigg, 1985, p.22). However, this is a simplistic conclusion to draw from a more complex theory. Rosalyn Deutsche (1991, p.21) explains the consequences of anti-foundationalism differently:

This does not mean, as it is frequently held, that no reality exists or that it is unknowable, but only that no founding presence, no objective source, or privileged ground of meaning ensures a truth lurking behind representations ... any claim to know directly a truth outside representation emerges as an authoritarian form of representation employed in the battles to name reality.

Anti-foundationalism does not mean, therefore, that reality does not exist, but rather that individuals do not have pure, unmediated or objective access to it. As a consequence, an anti-foundationalist approach to knowledge is committed to a more holistic understanding of reality (or realities) by emphasising the contestable nature of truth. It suggests that truths are contingent, provisional and socially negotiated through communication and everyday actions; they are temporary, fleeting and valid only until new, more convincing interpretations become accepted. This is not only true of social sciences, but also the natural and physical sciences, as Thomas Kuhn (2012) famously pointed out, and which has since been examined by others (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 1999; Longino, 1990). That is not to say that objectivity is not possible; it remains a regulative ideal. In contrast to positivism, however, facts are not 'given' to us, but shared through our collective commitment to certain ideas and a rejection of others. As Mark Bevir (1999, p.98) explains, we need to think of objectivity in terms of agreed facts:

Objective knowledge arises from a human practice in which we criticise and compare rival webs of theories in terms of agreed facts. An agreed fact is a piece of evidence nearly everyone in a given community, especially any of them present as witnesses, would accept as true.

Concepts and ideas we have of the world (such as 'parliamentary sovereignty', 'accountability', 'scrutiny') only make sense as part of wider webs of belief, or traditions of thought. We build or construct these webs through theories we have in an attempt to categorise, explain and narrate our experiences. Rival theories and webs of belief must be tested, compared and negotiated, and it is through this process that objectivity becomes possible (see Bevir, 1999, pp.78-126 for a more detailed discussion). Thus, it is through our experiences of the world that we (attempt to) make sense of it. In doing so, we naturalise social and political realities, or *will* them to be ordinary, normal and routine because we accept them as part of our everyday life. It is in this vein that R.A.W. Rhodes (2011, pp.280-309) explains everyday life as 'willed ordinariness'.

Such philosophical foundations have implications for the way we define and undertake research on political phenomena. Before examining the implications on analysis, however, this discussion requires a little further comment with respect to how we define politics and the political, and the nature and role of power within politics.

2.1.2. Politics as contestation

In taking interpretation seriously, political behaviour is inherently unstable and, crucially, becomes value-laden, even if consensus on some issues, actions or practices have been stable for centuries. Things could always be interpreted in different ways, but those other ideas may be beyond the horizon of what is politically acceptable, legitimate or even imaginable within a particular tradition.

What makes something *political* is the contested nature of social practices in that it describes the contest of ideas and resources with respect to how society should ordered, preserved or changed (Mouffe, 2000). Politics is not necessarily about the resolution of a conflict, the settlement of a dispute, or the (ostensibly successful) outcome of a policy. Rather, it describes the process of contestation itself. The 'resolution' of a conflict, if accepted by a community, is merely a settled – and contingent – set of social practices which remain inherently unstable, complex and value-laden (for a discussion, see Hay, 2007b). As Alan Finlayson (2007, p.452) puts it:

If we begin with a clear and distinct concept of politics as the 'arena' within which we see expressed the irreducible and contested plurality of public life, the ineradicable contestation of differing world-views, then it is clear that what is distinct in politics is not the presence of beliefs but the presence of beliefs in contradiction with each other, not decisions about courses of action but of dispute over decisions and courses of action.

This discussion places contingency and contestation at the heart of how we define politics. It envelops politics as a process, constantly open to the possibility of change (even if this is unlikely), and about the values and beliefs that actors hold. Concomitantly, the nature of a 'settled' or 'resolved' dispute is nothing more than an established order produced by everyday life, including our ordinary, unremarkable, routine practices. This often takes the form of rituals, ceremonies, signs and symbols (Bourdieu, 1977; Kertzer, 1988; Rai, 2015a). These institutionalised forms of behaviour are the way by which we navigate our social and political worlds. However, they also affect the options available to us as political actors. As Steven Lukes (1975, p.301) argues with respect to rituals:

[Rituals] define as authoritative certain ways of seeing society: it serves to specify what in society is of special significance, it draws people's attention to certain forms of relationship and activity – and at the same time, therefore, it deflects their attention from other forms, since every way of seeing [is] also a way of not seeing.

Rituals and, by extension, everyday practices contribute to the dominant social and political order by sustaining particular sets of relationships and points of view. Thus, everyday practices create a sense of order by disguising or concealing conflicts, political differences and social tensions (Rai, 2015a). Rituals authorise and restrict, prioritise and disperse, open and close. Crucially, these decisions are affected by power relationships, which deserves direct attention.

2.1.3. Politics, power, practices

The concept of power is almost always associated with politics (Hay, 2002, pp.168-93). Indeed, given the above discussion, in which politics is presented as a set of contingent practices, power is an important point that requires discussion. Power has the ability to sharpen, blur, strengthen, soften and link policies and arguments together. Power is the force that mediates a rupture of contesting practices and traditions. This means that the issue of power is just as much about 'what' it is but also about 'how' it operates. Power must be seen in terms of strategic relationships that engage with political contests. This follows the spirit of Michel Foucault's (2000b, pp.337-8) work on power, who argues that:

[I]f we speak of the power of laws, institutions, and ideologies, if we speak of structures or mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term "power" designates relationships between "partners".

Power is therefore relational and fluid, and varies considerably between individuals. Furthermore, power relations 'are exercised, to an exceedingly important extent, through the production and exchange of signs' (*ibid.*). This links back to the point made above that practices (played out as rituals and through signs and symbols) are deeply political and indicates that we must focus our analysis of power relations to what Foucault termed a 'regime of practices'. He explains, with reference to his work on penal systems (Foucault, 2002a, p.225 (emphasis original)):

[T]he target of analysis wasn't "institutions", "theories", or "ideology" but *practices* – with the aim of grasping the conditions that make these acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but, up to a point, possess their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence, and "reason". It is a question of analysing a "regime of practices" – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect.

In this quote, Foucault identifies the link between power and everyday practices (though he arguably goes a little too far in removing agency), something to which we return in later sections of this chapter. Here, it is worth noting that the inextricable links between politics and contestation require us to pay attention to everyday practices because politics, contestation and power manifest themselves through those rituals, symbols, signs, routines, and so on.

Overall, we can see that everyday practices are deeply political. In defining politics in this way, it reinforces the guiding principle of anti-foundationalism that political realities are contested and negotiated, something which complements wider democratic principles about competition between ideas. Indeed, without the contest of ideas, whether played out on the floor of the House of Commons between government and opposition or on the sofas of breakfast news programmes between politicians and journalists, political action and reaction would be reduced to technocratic problem-solving. This is pivotal for the way in which we analyse scrutiny in the House of Commons and the everyday lives of MPs because it suggests that we need to take seriously the way in which they interpret their behaviour and the importance that they attach to scrutiny in the first place. This has significant repercussions for the way in which we approach political science, and raises questions over how we can analyse interpretations of scrutiny and their enactment in everyday practices. It is to this that discussion now turns.

2.2. The interpretive approach in British political science

There are a diverse range of approaches available to us to engage in an interpretive analysis (for an overview, see Wagenaar, 2011), but I take the approach adopted by Bevir and Rhodes (2003, 2006, 2010) as a starting point. Importantly, this research comes from similar epistemological roots, and so it is intuitively linked to the ideas raised in the previous section. The concepts and type of analysis that they have conducted have allowed them to apply their framework to a range of contexts. Other scholars have also applied Bevir and Rhodes' approach. Among other things, this includes: community leadership in local government (Sullivan, 2007), crisis management in policy departments

Concept	Definition		
To decentre	To decentre is to unpack practices as the contingent beliefs and actions of individuals, challenging the idea that inexorable or impersonal forces drive politics.		
Narratives	Narratives are a form of explanation that works by relating actions to individual beliefs and desires that produce them. This allows us to capture the way in which events happened in the past or are happening today.		
Situated agency	Individuals are 'situated' in wider webs of beliefs (traditions), which will largely shape their beliefs; yet, they retain a capacity for 'agency' in that they may respond to traditions, beliefs, practices and dilemmas in novel ways.		
Beliefs	Beliefs are the basic unit of analysis, in that they are the interpretations of individuals of their world and their surroundings.		
Traditions	Traditions are 'webs of belief', and form the ideational background in which agents find themselves. Usually, agents will adopt beliefs from traditions as a starting point, but may amend them (usually in response to dilemmas).		
Dilemmas	A dilemma is an idea that stands in contradiction to other beliefs, thereby posing a problem for individuals. Dilemmas may be resolved by either accommodating the new belief in the present web of beliefs, or replacing old beliefs with new beliefs.		
Practices	A set of actions that often exhibits a stable pattern across time. Practices are the ways in which beliefs and traditions manifest themselves on an everyday basis.		

Table 2.1. Bevir and Rhodes' interpretive approach: concepts

(Wilkinson, 2011), and beliefs of local government elites (Gains, 2009) (for a discussion, see Bevir and Rhodes, 2012, pp.203-4). Some research has also touched on parliamentary contexts (Rhodes *et. al.*, 2009, pp.184-218). That is not to say that their approach is not without problems. For example, Bevir and Rhodes privilege ideas and beliefs over and above other concepts (including dilemmas and practices) that crucially affects analysis. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Bevir and Rhodes offer us a philosophically rich and conceptually developed framework to guide empirical research on the House of Commons, and therefore deserves detailed attention.

For Bevir and Rhodes, ideas and beliefs are, arguably, the basic unit of analysis to explain political phenomena. To undertake their analysis, Bevir and Rhodes (2010, p.73) argue that we need to 'decentre' interpretations and concepts used by political actors. By this, they mean an analytical focus on 'the social construction of a practice through the ability of individuals to create and act on meanings'. As scholars, we must 'unpack a practice as the disparate and contingent beliefs and actions of individuals', and, in doing so, challenge the idea

that 'inexorable or impersonal forces, norms, or laws define patterns and regularities in politics'. Often, this takes the form of narratives or stories because this is the way in which political actors make sense of the world around them (for more on narrative analysis, see Bevir, 2006). This focus on ideas, interpretations and beliefs echoes earlier discussions about the contested nature of social and political realities. It hinges on a range of concepts that guide Bevir and Rhodes' analysis, which are summarised in a little more depth here (and summarised in Table 2.1).

2.2.1. Situated agency

Following their anti-foundationalist principles, Bevir and Rhodes reject the idea that individuals can form and act on beliefs in a vacuum, which means that they ultimately reject the idea of an autonomous subject or self. Though this chimes strongly with post-structuralist themes, the two interpretive scholars distinguish between autonomy and agency. They argue that, while actors cannot access experiences and reason in a 'pure' way or autonomous from their social context, actors still react to ideas and interpret beliefs in their own, novel ways. In their own words (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, p.74):

As anti-foundationalists, we reject the possibility of an autonomous self, which forms beliefs and acts on pure experiences or pure reason. All experiences and reasoning occur within a web of beliefs. Yet to reject autonomy is not necessarily to reject agency. To accept agency is to imply people have the capacity to adopt beliefs and actions, even novel ones, for reasons of their own, and in so doing they can transform the social background. So, agency is possible, but it is always situated in a particular context.

Actors depend on this context to make sense of their world but, through their own 'local' reasoning (i.e. reasoning in their specific context), they are able to influence and modify it. This indicates a symbiotic relationship between individuals' interpretations and beliefs and the broader webs of belief. Beliefs inform actions and practices; these beliefs and practices weave wider webs of belief, or traditions, which in turn offer a starting point for further development of beliefs or actions (for a discussion, see Hay, 2011, pp.175-7).

2.2.2. Traditions

Traditions are the social context within which agents find themselves, or the 'situation' in 'situated agency'. They are webs of beliefs that act as organising perspectives or ideational context for individuals, groups and other political actors. Without traditions, actors would be thrust into the world in a vacuum, something that patently does not happen. As such, Bevir (2010, p.263) concludes that 'individuals are to a large extent what social traditions and practices make them'. This has strong echoes to concepts of social structure or, to put it into Kuhnian language, paradigms (Kuhn, 2012, pp.43-51). Policies, beliefs and actions are naturalised as possible, legitimate and normal ways of behaving within this context. However, Bevir and Rhodes (2010, p.78) argue that traditions cannot fix or determine behaviour in the same way that a paradigm would do because agents still have a capacity to interpret traditions in novel ways. So, traditions offer 'starting points' to political actors, who are under no obligation to follow a web of beliefs (for a detailed discussion, see Bevir, 1999, pp.174-220).

The flexibility of traditions has been a point of criticism from other scholars for at least two reasons. First, it makes it appear elusive and too agency-focused. Martin Smith (2008, p.146), for example, summarises traditions in the following ways: as a process of socialisation, inherited beliefs, the basis for institutions, a set of power relations, influential but not deterministic, strong because they socialise, weak because they are fallible (echoed by McAnulla, 2006). This implies that the explanatory force of the interpretive approach ignores social structures and that the concept of tradition is extremely fragile. Second, and possibly more damning, it is not clear why some traditions exert greater appeal on political actors than others, or why some aspects might resist modification. Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2008) make this point very well, and suggests that something is missing from Bevir and Rhodes' analysis. Bevir and Rhodes (2008a, pp.172-4) have responded to these criticisms: first, they point out that social structures need to be disaggregated with reference to beliefs, dilemmas and traditions; second, the concept of tradition is a pragmatic concept and therefore it is applied in different ways according to different circumstance or analytical focus; and third, the concept of tradition can be linked to that of power in that: 'power can refer to the restrictive consequences of the actions of others in defining what we can and cannot do', and therefore their analysis of narratives and stories are 'studies of both power and resistance'. This means that individuals' possibilities for action are restricted in that traditions suggest what is acceptable, legitimate or even imaginable within a particular web of beliefs, thereby sustaining some traditions while others become less convincing for political actors (see also Bevir and Rhodes, 2008b, 2010).

2.2.3. Dilemmas

Traditions are not static, but change in response to dilemmas. The concept of dilemma is rooted in Mark Bevir's *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, in which he argues that (1999, pp.221-2):

People develop, adjust, and transform traditions in response to dilemmas, where dilemmas are authoritative understandings that put into question their existing webs of belief. Dilemmas prompt changes of belief because they consist of new beliefs and any new belief necessarily poses a question of the agent's webs of belief.

This quote encapsulates the basic way in which a dilemma works, both in Mark Bevir's post-analytic philosophy and in his joint work with Rhodes. A dilemma comes about through a tension between two or more beliefs, but, crucially it depends on an actor interpreting two (or more) beliefs in this way. Given actors' capacity for agency and interpretation, dilemmas can come from anywhere: reading a book, personal moral reflection, contrasting experiences of the world, empirical evidence and/or statistics, unintended consequences, shock events, a faux pas, natural and/or artificial disasters, and many more beside (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006, pp.9-11). Conflicts between beliefs play out in different ways in that new beliefs could: (i) be discarded as unconvincing, (ii) be accommodated within the web of beliefs, or (iii) replace an older belief. This could then lead to ripple effects because it could now come into conflict with other beliefs within a tradition. This is how, incrementally, slowly and painfully, traditions and practices change over time. Alternatively, the introduction of a single new belief could have such substantive effects that the coherence of whole traditions are ripped apart. This shows that traditions cannot be all-encompassing or totalising, given the capacity for agency that Bevir and Rhodes have identified. An excellent

summary that ties together the concept of dilemmas with beliefs and traditions can be found in the concluding chapter of Bevir and Rhodes' *Governance Stories* (2006, p.166 (emphasis added)):

[P]atterns of governance arise as the *contingent constructions* of several actors inspired by *competing* webs of beliefs formed against the background of diverse traditions. Our governance stories thus explain *shifting* patterns of governance by focusing on the beliefs and actions by which a host of people construct varied practices. They explore some of the diverse ways in which situated agents are *changing* the boundaries of state and civil society by constantly *remaking* practices as their beliefs *change*.

Dilemmas matter because they help us to understand the contingent nature of British politics and the central mechanism to explain political change in the interpretive approach. They also identify the limits of webs of belief and how everyday practices come into conflict with one another. However, the concept has also been criticised by some because it seems underdeveloped. Colin Hay (2011, pp.178-9), for example, points out that when the concept has been applied, it is 'used to refer to little more than the simple juxtaposition, combination and recombination of ideas and insights'. This is especially problematic given that politics is ultimately about contestation (see above). Dilemmas are fundamental to how political actors negotiate the world around them and as a result it is, first, impossible to brush the concept aside and, second, disappointing that the concept hasn't been substantively developed. This is a point to which we return in the next section (see also Geddes, 2014).

2.2.4. Practices

Bevir and Rhodes (2010, p.75) argue that practices are part of a macro-level analysis that allows researchers to decentre prevailing social practices that sustain institutions, such as a policy department in Whitehall or, as in our case, parliaments and legislatures (and specifically select committees). In their own words:

A practice is a set of actions, often a set of actions that exhibit a pattern, perhaps even a pattern that remains relatively stable across time. Practices often give us grounds for postulating beliefs, for we can ascribe to people only in interpreting their actions. Nonetheless, practices cannot explain actions because people act for reasons of their own. People sometimes act on their beliefs about a practice, but, when they do, we still explain their action by reference to their beliefs about the practice, and, of course, these beliefs need not be accurate.

Contrary to beliefs or traditions, Bevir and Rhodes' concept of practices has, arguably, developed less consistently. It was not a clearly defined concept in Interpreting British Governance (2003) or Governance Stories (2006); but by 2010, in The State as Cultural Practice, the concept is discussed in its own subheading. The reason for the omission is fairly straight-forward in that Bevir and Rhodes privilege beliefs over actions (or at least maintain a clear epistemological divide between the two), which means that it has received less philosophical reflection. This arguably poses questions over the analytical purchase of the interpretive approach. Hendrik Wagenaar (2012), for example, believes that the concept should be central to interpretive approaches because individuals construct meaning not only through interpretation, but through action (which can confirm, alter, or discard beliefs). Bevir and Rhodes (2012, p.201) insist that practices embody beliefs and 'cannot properly be discussed without reference to these beliefs', which, though true, does not ameliorate the criticism that beliefs are only ever partial and actions are 'a move into an only partly known and knowable world' (Wagenaar, 2012, p.92). In other words, both beliefs and actions offer explanatory value in political science. This illustrates a current weakness in the analytical framework, to which I return shortly.

Bevir and Rhodes' interpretive approach, notwithstanding criticisms identified above, has received significant attention in British political science (especially regarding governance and the state (Turnbull, 2016)). It offers a way by which we can inject theoretical ideas into studying the House of Commons. This means that we can adopt the broad thrust of Bevir and Rhodes' framework. However, as noted in previous paragraphs, their approach requires further refinement, especially with regards to the concept of everyday practices (and, to a lesser extent, their concept of dilemmas). This is particularly important because of the preceding section's linkage between politics, contestation, power and their manifestation through practices. It is to this issue that discussion now turns.

2.3. Towards interpretive parliamentary studies

In this section, I build on the analytical framework identified above. First, I attempt to supplement the concept of practices by drawing on a rich literature on performance to deepen analytical possibilities. This is necessary given the discussion in earlier sections about the anti-foundationalist principles on which an interpretive analysis is based. I then, in the second sub-section, summarise how the interpretive concepts of situated agency, beliefs, traditions, dilemmas, and practices, matter for an interpretive parliamentary analysis.

2.3.1. The centrality of practices

Given the emphasis placed on the everyday in the first section, the importance of practices in political analysis cannot be understated. Thus, it is not just what people say about what they do that matters, but also requires us to closely focus on their actions, and what those actions tell us about their beliefs (and, by extension, the traditions on which those beliefs are based). Moreover, even if practices are only a manifestation of individual beliefs (as Bevir and Rhodes maintain), we still need a detailed explanation of the concept. Given its centrality, it is a little surprising that Bevir and Rhodes did not articulate the concept in the same level of detail as traditions, beliefs and dilemmas. However, this does not mean that the framework introduced by Bevir and Rhodes is not useful. Rather, it requires further depth and clarification. Axiomatically, the literature on practices is wide-ranging and contested, which makes a concise discussion (let alone definition) of practices difficult. As such a discussion goes beyond the parameters of this chapter, this thesis offers a bricolage conceptualisation of 'everyday practices' by drawing on a rich literature and a range of authors. In particular, I take inspiration from the literature on dramaturgy, which draws on similar ontological and epistemological roots discussed earlier, and especially the dramaturgical concept of 'performance'.

The metaphor of everyday practices as performances is a fruitful way by which we can analyse the myriad ways in which practices manifest themselves in everyday behaviour. The literature on this has been widely established and grows far beyond the realm of the political. For example: the anthropologist, Victor Turner (1982), believed performance to be a natural form of human expression; elsewhere, Erving Goffman (1990) argued that the 'self', the 'performer' and the 'character' are enmeshed if not equated. There is no better way to demonstrate this than through an extended extract from Jean-Paul Sartre (1969, p.59), in which he examines a performance at a café:

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes towards the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tightrope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and the hand. All his behavior [*sic*] seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a café. There is nothing there to surprise us. The game is a kind of marking out and investigation. The child plays with his [sic] body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to realize it.

This illustrates that an individual takes on an established social role and enacts this according to a range of codes. In political terms, Maarten Hajer (2009, p.7) argues that, through the presentation of the political self, meaning is given, roles are defined and narratives of conflict or cohesion are promoted. In order to take on these roles and perform effectively, performers need to interpret their surroundings (which links us back to 'situated agency', above). Performers need to interpret the social norms, values, etiquette, expectations and accepted modes of behaviour associated with that situation, which consequently requires practical judgements as well as taken-for-granted or tacit knowledge. A performance, then, has a range of elements. Here, I limit discussion to three: style, space and speech.

Style. Erving Goffman (1990, pp.34-5) identifies two elements of what I term a performance style: first, the appearance of the performer (including dress and body language), which indicates the social status of the individual; and, second, the manner adopted by the performer (gestures, tone of voice, etc.) which functions to indicate the role that the performer expects to play. He describes that performers idealise their enactment by trying to remove blemishes to the

contrary of their intentions, or 'conceal action which is inconsistent' with 'ideal standards' (*ibid.*, p.50). Actions are stylised according to a set of informal codes or cues (of course, the performer is under no obligation to accept these codes and cues, and may choose to subvert them). Non-verbal behaviour could include, among other things, scratching heads, waving hands, knocking on desks or other furniture, clapping or shrugging shoulders. These are signs that can symbolise shock and awe, disagreement or agreement, etc. More generally, performance styles are the ways in which situated actors negotiate their political space as everyday practices, which reveals much about the identities of individuals, their beliefs, and their knowledge and/or interpretation of the world.

Performances, of course, do not occur in isolation. Other actors are present as part of a cast in an enactment, which Goffman (*ibid.*, pp.83-108) refers to as 'performance teams'. The relations within teams are vitally important. At the most basic level, a smooth performance depends on every individual remaining committed to their role and to their script. Goffman calls this a 'working consensus' among all participants, in which actors are expected to follow social codes or etiquettes, and to suppress their immediate feelings or urges of the contrary in order to allow for a temporarily acceptable social interaction (ibid., pp.20-1, pp.90-1). In doing so, collective performances layer each actor into their respective role, which may of course change depending on the setting or situation of the performance, but which in each case determines their status in social and political terms. This reinforces earlier points about the significance of power relationships that influence everyday practices (though, as noted, actors are free to subvert dominant social cues if they so choose). Certain performances become naturalised, and turn into rituals, ceremonies, routines or, in short, practices.

A team enacts its performance in front of an audience (note, though, that audiences behave both as spectators and perform as audiences; similarly, performers are spectators of each other as an enactment occurs (for a discussion, see Fitzgerald, 2015)). For Goffman (*ibid.*, p.108, pp.74-5), a team has 'something of the character of a secret society' because each actor is 'in the know' of the performance, which the audience respects to allow the performance to take place; too close an inspection would prevent the performance from being enacted successfully and so the audience needs to co-operate through distance between itself and the performers. This brings to mind a distinction between insiders and outsiders, or an 'us' and a 'them'. In doing so, it allocates different performance roles, with some playing central parts and others supporting roles. More fundamentally, it demarcates between those that should be included in a performance and those that act as an audience. This is part and parcel of social interaction, and crystallised especially through the physical demarcation of space.

Space. Shirin M. Rai (2015b, p.1183) argues that:

The backdrop, the stage, the entry and exit points shape the kind of politics that is performed, the shifts and struggles that take place – who constructs, reflects, claims and polices the space of politics.

Space privileges certain types of behaviour, allowing some practices to occur, while others are seen as illegitimate, wrong or inappropriate. It follows that the way space is used or organised (whether intentionally or unintentionally) is important to regulate behaviour. Nirmal Puwar (2010), for example, has examined the way in which parliamentary spaces are gendered to segregate men from women. Elsewhere, Jean-Philippe Heurtin (2003) showed that the layout of the French parliamentary assembly changed seven times over the French revolutionary period in order to reflect different political priorities and values of its members. In his own conceptualisation of performances, Goffman defines spatial arrangements in terms of both a 'front stage' and 'back stage': on the front stage, performances are enacted, involving the furniture, décor, physical layout, and background items which supply the scenery and provide props for actors (Goffman, 1990, pp.32-3). At the back stage, preparations take place, illusions are constructed, props and personal items are stored or hidden, dress is adjusted and scrutinised, rehearsals take place and, more generally, where performers can relax and 'step out of character' (*ibid.*, pp.114-5). Axiomatically, there is a tension or weakness in this approach because it implies that actors can step outside of their social setting or web of beliefs, which, in line with the discussion in previous sections, is not the case. That said, distinguishing between a front stage and a back stage is still helpful because they entail different types of performances, with different expectations, social codes and cues, participants, and audiences (Rai, 2015b, p.1184). So, in as much as a back stage exists, it remains a *stage*. This links physical space back to ideational contexts: our interpretation, our knowledge (tacit or explicit) is fundamental to identifying appropriate stages or contexts in which we act, demonstrating the enduring connection between beliefs and practices.

Speech. Political actors may follow a script and stage directions, whether written and formalised, or unwritten and informal. These must fall in line with the appropriate social cues or performance styles as well as the appropriate setting or stage. Some voices, tones of voice or auditory rhythms are encouraged to fill spaces; others are assigned the status of hysterical, chaotic or disruptive and consequently marginalised (Puwar, 2010, p.299); some voices can be 'cultured' or well-modulated, while others still are pejoratively labelled as 'shrill' (particularly with respect to gender) or 'rough' (particularly with respect to social class) (Rai, 2015b). More generally, as Theodore Schmauk put it over a century ago (1890, p.113):

With reference to the various properties of tone, we say a voice is rich, full, deep, piercing, sweet, rough, smooth, ringing, bird-like, flute-like, trumpet-like, manly, womanly, child-like. As a reflection of the apparent natural mental state of the speaker, a voice is pathetic, solemn, tranquil, grave, serious, animated, gay, playful, mirthful, rollicking, melancholy, sublime, courageous, scornful, defiant, threatening, despairing, awe-stricken, alarmed, horrified, revengeful, kind, tender, hopeful, truthful.

Therefore, language, vocabulary or tone of voice are things that sharpen or blur a particular performance in a particular setting; some voices are regarded as 'fit' for certain performances, others are not. This is undoubtedly true of politics, too. We are all too aware of the public's disdain for shouting, booing and making animal noises in the main chamber of the House of Commons, for example. Yet, these rituals persist. This is because this type of behaviour has arguably become part of established performances within adversarial (and gendered) British political traditions. The nature of voice is therefore something that deserves further attention as part of a wider parliamentary performance and everyday practice in terms of how this affects scrutiny in select committees. Whilst delving further into the literature on speech analysis, discourse analysis or rhetorical analysis arguably goes beyond the purview of this chapter (and perhaps the analytical framework identified here), it is sufficient to note that we must be

Concept	Definition
Style	Adoption of manners, appearances, and actions; an attempt to follow social cues; and an attempt to conceal behaviour that would be inconsistent to the present performance.
Space	The organisation of stages in order to create a particular type of performance, including furniture, décor, physical layout and background items. These may be distinguished between front and back stages.
Speech	In addition to the content of a speech act, this includes the particular vocabulary, style of speech, tone of voice and so on. Broadly, this is closely related to studying the rhetoric of political actors.

Table 2.2. Everyday practices as performances

sensitive to the voices that are attached to parliamentary performances and the spaces that they fill (for more detail, see Finlayson and Martin, 2008; Finlayson, 2007; Hajer, 2009).

The literature on performance helps us to clarify the concept of everyday practices, and gives us, in addition to individual beliefs, three additional tools to analyse and unpack everyday practices, namely: styles, or appearances, manners, routines, and actions that actors adopt; *space*, or the setting or stage on which actors perform; and speech, or what actors say and how they say it, which we could also think of scripts and storylines (see Table 2.2 for a summary). In this way, this section helps to develop and take forward the interpretive approach developed by Bevir and Rhodes. It refines and sharpens their analytical framework by introducing a more developed conceptualisation of practices. This arguably has ripple effects for other concepts. So, with respect to beliefs, we must explore how actors produce or react to meaning-in-action; with respect to traditions, we can better understand how they are sustained through established performance styles and the power relationships they entail; and regarding dilemmas, we can see how contradictory beliefs and traditions are pushed and pulled in different directions and played out through everyday practices. Indeed, this last point is crucial because it ameliorates earlier shortcomings identified with the concept of dilemmas. As Foucault (2002a, p.236, emphasis added) says (with respect to penal reform):

If prisons and punitive mechanisms are transformed, it won't be because a plan of reform has found its way into the heads of the social workers; it will be when those who have a stake in that reality, all those people, have come into collision with each other and with themselves, run into *dead ends*, *problems*, *and* *impossibilities, been through conflicts and confrontations* – when critique has been played out in the real, not when reformers have realized their ideas.

The crucial point here is that this quotation centralises the importance of everyday life ('those who have a stake in that reality') or everyday practices in a context of conflict or contestation. Social order is sustained through these practices but, on a day-to-day basis, political actors confront dilemmas in which they must make choices to sustain, amend or discard performance styles. This is ongoing and becomes part of everyday practices. This suggests, in keeping with anti-foundationalist philosophy, that knowledge of the world is provisional and order is only ever the appearance of order through social negotiation, through ritual, through everyday protocols. More generally, this establishes practices as the intersection or nodal point between beliefs and traditions; they are the mechanism through which beliefs and traditions are 'played out'. Thus, everyday practices are the central analytical focus for this doctoral study. It is now worth turning to how these concepts form a framework for analysis that can be applied to a parliamentary context.

2.3.2. A framework for analysis

The above offers a conceptually rich way by which we can analyse select committee scrutiny in the House of Commons. With respect to *situated agency* and *traditions*, we must focus analysis on the context in which parliamentary actors are placed in interpreting and enacting their roles. We already know that MPs, clerks, researchers, journalists and visitors are situated into what may be termed the Westminster 'bubble' or 'village'. We also know that most official accounts of the parliamentary system formally assert the importance of the Westminster model as a tradition that guides institutional relationships in Parliament (Judge, 2014). However, is it possible to offer further nuance and depth about particular situations and traditions? With respect to this research project, we can focus on and ask ourselves about the context in which committee members, chairs and staff operate as part of the scrutiny work on select committees, and the wider webs of belief that inform scrutiny in the House of Commons.

Concept	Analytical focus	Applied in this PhD
Situated agency	How committee members, chairs and staff are situated in a particular context to undertake parliamentary scrutiny	Chapter 4 (membership trends), Chapter 5 (Wright reforms), Chapter 6 (the Committee Office)
Beliefs	The ways in which parliamentary actors interpret their role on select committees and associated concepts	Chapter 4 (members' beliefs), Chapter 5 (chairs' beliefs), Chapter 6 (staff beliefs), Chapter 8 (beliefs about evidence)
Traditions	The wider parliamentary traditions in which committee members, chairs and staff find themselves	Chapter 1 (scholarly traditions), Chapter 7 (webs of scrutiny), Chapter 9 (scrutiny in context)
Dilemmas	The problems that parliamentary actors confront based on how they have interpreted and enacted their role	Chapter 4 (members), Chapter 5 (chairs), Chapter 6 (staff), Chapter 8 (evidence)
Practices	How parliamentary actors have chosen to enact the interpretations of their roles and associated concepts	Chapter 4 (members), Chapter 5 (chairs), Chapter 6 (staff), Chapter 7 (relationships)

Table 2.3. A framework for analysing select committee scrutiny

Turning from traditions to individual *beliefs*, we cannot assume that committee members, chairs and staff act with rational self-interest, as other approaches have done, but rather that actors pursue a wide range of behaviours due to a variety of interpretations about their role. Thus, we must look to their interpretations of scrutiny in order to make better sense of their approach to their role. This, in turn, has consequences for the *everyday practices* of select committees. Here, we can focus on how parliamentary actors act on their beliefs to create meaning-in-action. We can look at the performance styles of committee members, chairs and staff; the relationships between them to understand the 'performance teams'; and the spatial arrangements that affect scrutiny behaviour on different stages. These parliamentary practices are constantly made and remade through the clash of beliefs and traditions in Parliament. These clashes are caused through *dilemmas* between interpretations of scrutiny and a multitude of other parliamentary roles and pressures that committee members, chairs and staff face in order to undertake their functions and enact their roles. Thus, when studying scrutiny by select committees, this concept helps us to understand the decisions that MPs and staff have to make when conducting scrutiny. However, this PhD is not a diachronic analysis, which means that the following empirical chapters cannot analyse changes in belief in response to dilemmas over time. Rather, the following analysis offers a snapshot of perennial and ongoing

dilemmas that actors face. In adjudicating between beliefs and dilemmas, parliamentary actors establish certain performance styles and it is these performance styles that forms the focus of the research. Taken together, we can better understand how scrutiny is conducted in the House of Commons with reference to a range of concepts that guide parliamentary actors. The above outlines the analysis that follows. Clearly not all concepts can be analysed in detail (due to space, resource and time limitations), and clearly the concepts are also closely interwoven. This means it will not be possible to isolate each factor and give a clearly demarcated analysis of *just* beliefs, *just* practices, or *just* dilemmas (something demonstrated by the overlapping chapter foci in Table 2.3). It may well be that we lose some conceptual clarity as we venture into the rich detail of empirical discussion. However, these concepts are always there, either directly and explicitly to explain parliamentary behaviour, or indirectly and implicitly, to guide discussion further.

In sum, the aim is to decentre parliamentary practices of committee members, chairs and staff to demonstrate that scrutiny of the House of Commons depends on how parliamentary actors have interpreted the concept, acted upon it in their everyday lives, and how dilemmas have affected those practices. The empirical sections that follow will examine these key issues in more depth with reference to the way in which scrutiny is interpreted, performed and problematised in select committees of the House of Commons. In Part II, the spotlight turns on the key characters of this research project: committee members (Chapter 4); chairs of committees (Chapter 5); and parliamentary staff (Chapter 6). In each of these chapters, I ask: How do they interpret their role? What beliefs guide them? What role(s) do they consequently adopt on different stages? How are these roles affected by dilemmas? In Part III, I turn attention to how those interpretations affect scrutiny in the House of Commons: in Chapter 7, I look at how committees build 'performance teams' by exploring the relationships between committee members and chairs both within and between committees; and, in Chapter 8, I examine the dilemmas that committees face in gathering evidence. Finally, in Chapter 9 I tie all this together to indicate how everyday practices affect scrutiny (see Table 2.3 for a summary).

Chapter 2: Theory

Concluding remarks

This chapter began by charting the ontological and epistemological roots that underpin this doctoral research project. This was an important exercise because such issues strongly affect the focus of research that we, as scholars, go on to pursue. In this case, it has emphasised the importance of individual beliefs and everyday practices to make sense of the world around us. This has consequences for the way in which we view (i) politics, namely as contestation, and (ii) power, namely as relationships that constrain others. From this, it was necessary to explain how such principles could be rendered useful for political analysis. Bevir and Rhodes' work has offered a significant starting point. In this chapter, I have sought to offer further depth and discussion on their work, particularly with regards to the centrality of everyday practices as an analytical focus. This, then, hopes to make a distinctive contribution to the debate on the added value of interpretive approaches to studying political issues. Specifically, this chapter has shown that everyday practices are crucial to understand and explain the relationship between beliefs, traditions and dilemmas. It offers us a philosophically rigorous and conceptually consistent way to study scrutiny in the House of Commons, and it is this framework for analysis that underpins this PhD's approach to interpretive parliamentary studies and the empirical findings that follow. However, before jumping ahead to the empirical sections, a question remains: how are we to operationalise our analytical framework? This question turns our attention from the philosophical underpinnings to the practical questions of methodology, which are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

ocating the importance of the ideational as a research focus demands not only discussing why everyday practices matter, but also how they can be studied. This is the central concern of this chapter, where the overall aim is to offer a pragmatic focus as to how interpretive principles that underpin this research project have been applied at an empirical level to parliamentary select committees in the House of Commons. Though an interpretive approach to political science rests on a philosophical analysis of action as meaningful, and therefore does not prescribe any particular method (Bevir, 2006, p.283), a number of influential studies tend to privilege qualitative research methods, especially through the use of observation techniques. For example, R.A.W. Rhodes (2005, 2007, 2011) uses non-participation observation and interviews for his work on everyday life of ministers and permanent secretaries. Elsewhere, Catherine Durose (2009) explores the everyday work of frontline workers in local governance through a six-month period of observation and 45 interviews. And, at an anthropological level, Emma Crewe (2005, 2015) spent two years in the House of Lords for her anthropological study of the upper chamber, with a similarly detailed approach to her volume on the House of Commons. This shows that there is some variety in the way that interpretive scholars can undertake empirical research, but it also shows that there is an emphasis on qualitative techniques - particularly on participant and nonparticipant observation (for a summary, see Table 3.1). In this PhD, I adopt such methods: (i) participant and non-participant observation; (ii) semi-structured interviews with committee members, chairs and staff; and (iii) textual analysis of written records with small databases on committee MPs and witnesses. This

Scholar(s)	Торіс	Approach	Methods	Key reference
R.A.W. Rhodes	Everyday life of ministers and permanent secretaries	Interpretive political studies	Non-participant observation of two ministers and three permanent secretaries for about 7 days each; 35 interviews that totalled 67 hours; supplemented study with written records	Rhodes (2011)
Catherine Durose	Frontline workers in local governance	Interpretive political studies; narrative analysis	Observation for six months; 45 interviews through snowballing	Durose (2009)
Francesca Gains	Local bureaucratic elites	Institutional interpretivism	100 interviews in a representative range of 15 local authorities, with chief executives, leaders, and many other stakeholders	Gains (2009)
Neil Ward, Andrew Donaldson and Philip Lowe	Foot and mouth disease crisis of 2003 in the UK	Policy framing	Reports from national inquiries, written submissions, notes from meetings, interviews with stakeholders, and experiences from Ward as member of the Rural Task Force	Ward <i>et. al.</i> (2004)
Maarten Hajer	Governance in an age of mediatisation	Discourse analysis and dramaturgy	Interviews, looked at public events, studies documents, observed a range of meetings	Hajer (2009)
Shirin M. Rai	Ceremonies and rituals in parliaments and legislatures	Political performance framework (PPF)	Non-participant observation of the Indian Parliament (details not cited)	Rai (2015b)
Emma Crewe	Rituals, manners and ceremonies in the House of Lords	Anthropology	Access to the Palace of Westminster through a staff pass for two years. Attended a range of meetings, observed peers, shadowed staff, watched ceremonies; interviewed 199 peers, 63 members of staff and 26 other individuals; sent out a survey	Crewe (2005)

Table 3.1. Application of interpretive principles

chapter will explore each method in turn, but I will discuss observation in more depth because it most directly challenges the conventional methods adopted and employed in British political science (especially in parliamentary and legislative studies). Over the course of each section, I summarise the key analytical focus and the strengths and weaknesses of the method, indicate the contribution that the method makes to our understanding of scrutiny in the House of Commons, and explain how the method has been applied in this research project. In the concluding section, I bring together the three methods and discuss how this combination results in a robust interpretive methodology.

3.1. Participant and non-participant observation

Some textbooks on methodology, designed specifically for political researchers, do not mention observation as a method in a scholar's armoury to understand and explain political issues (e.g. Box-Steffensmeier et. al., 2010). In others, ethnographic techniques are treated with some suspicion. For instance, Peter Burnham et. al. (2008, pp.280-1) believe that the challenge falls on the participant observer to convince scholars that their analysis is accurate and valid rather than offering 'merely impressionistic accounts of alternative lifestyles'. This implies that to make use of this research method is distinctive (and perhaps even a little daring). There are indeed sparse examples of published research in British parliamentary studies using such ethnographic methods (with notable exceptions covered in Chapter 1). There are a number of reasons for this, but the most decisive seems to be the positivist legacy in the social sciences that forbids the use of creative methods in the name of 'validity', 'reliability' and 'generalisability'. Additionally, of course, there are practical issues that have often limited this type of research: it is resource intensive and often unpredictable, rendering carefully thought-through research designs to the dustbin. Consequently, gaining funding for this type of research can be difficult. There is also a wider assumption that other, more conventional, ways of doing political science can achieve the same results. After all, we have studied political elites, specifically those in the House of Commons and its select committees, for decades (as noted in Chapter 1). So, what is the added value of ethnographic research?

3.1.1. Analytical focus

The inherent value of observation (whether as a participant or non-participant) is that it allows researchers to look at political issues from a new vantage point. Observation opens what is ordinarily hidden in official documents and structured interviews. Documents have been written for a particular audience and a specific purpose, which may make it difficult to tease out hidden meanings in texts (or, indeed, meanings written in plain sight). Moreover, documents tend to be final products in which the process of writing has been airbrushed out. The value of observation is that the research is able to access meaning 'in the making', or as Rhodes *et. al.* (2007a, p.2) put it:

It is characterised by 'deep immersion' in social worlds to understand day-today practices, and how these practices become meaningful. Ethnographers emphasise and observe human acts and interaction in physical, economic and social context. They understand how these acts and interactions become meaningful because of bigger symbolic and interpretive structures that are the outcome of earlier acts and interactions. Ethnographers try to grasp the 'making' of meaningful social behaviour.

This guote illustrates the fundamental benefit of observation, which focuses the analytical lens on everyday practices, connecting those to beliefs of political elites and examining how they make an impact on politics. This is important because, as Chapter 2 was at pains to point out, everyday practices are the process by which we create meaning and enact our beliefs. In observing those processes (and in some cases participating in them), the researcher is able to see social and political behaviour through the vantage point of political actors. In this way, observation allows researchers to analyse the everyday behaviour of groups and individuals because researchers have access to what Dvora Yanow (2004, p.12) calls local knowledge: 'the very mundane, yet expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience'. It is a kind of non-verbal knowing that evolves from seeing and interacting with other people, places or things over time. This is crucial, especially in the context of the previous chapter that emphasised the importance of performance styles (manners and appearances, unwritten norms and values, social cues), spatial arrangements (different settings and stages), and forms of speech (tone of voice, vocabulary, and so on). The key analytical focus of observation, then, is on

micro-level, everyday behaviour and it is this that makes this research method pivotal in this study of everyday parliamentary practices. Other research methods, such as interviews and textual analysis, would possibly miss the nuances of minute everyday influences, or at best offer a partial view of them because they offer only a snapshot of beliefs or practices (Soss, 2006, pp.138-40). Observation often takes place over a period of months that enables deeper immersion to grasp not only the importance of everyday practices, but additionally the everyday relationships between political actors, and between actors and their political environment. In doing so, a key aim is to see the world as the actors see it, and experience it as they experience it. Despite this positive analytical focus, there are a number of perceived shortcomings of undertaking this type of ethnographic research. Notably, there are issues regarding validity and generalisability; positionality of the researcher; and, entry and access issues. These deserve further comments (covered in turn).

3.1.2. Validity and generalisability

A limitation of the analytical focus identified above is that it prevents scholars from designing a deductive research framework, and thus being able to test theories, hypotheses and concepts. Keeping to research designs is not possible for those employing participant and/or non-participant observation because of the inductive nature of the approach. Consequently, ethnographic research is perceived to be subjective, with obvious validity and reliability issues. The assumption of subjectivity in observation is often contrasted to objectivity in other research methods (notably quantitative approaches). To take this view, however, is to ignore the epistemological principles outlined in the previous chapter, in which a single, universal truth is not possible in a world of contested meanings. Therefore, preferences for an 'objective' research project that is 'generalisable' miss the point: there is no single, objective and generalisable way to interpret practices. This does not mean that research on everyday practices is inauthentic or invalid, but rather that a comprehensive or totalised interpretation of Parliament is not possible, and in any case not the aim of this study. Rather, the aim here is to enrich existing theories by providing nuance and depth to the way that political actors interpret their role in the House of Commons and specifically how those interpretations affect their work in

scrutinising the executive. This requires scholars to follow their intellectual curiosities, and prioritise their observations. Through deep immersion, researchers are able to reach 'theoretical saturation' where they note recurring themes, where the same names get mentioned, or where key events are often cited (Crang and Cook, 2007, pp.14-5). A key issue is when and how to follow our curiosity without compromising the rigour of research designs. Researchers make these types of decisions all the time, especially with regards to what is perceived to be important to study, what interests them in their research, and what is more likely to gain funding in an increasingly competitive and marketised system of higher education. This is not limited to political, or even social scientific, research (Latour and Woolgar, 1986). This does not diminish our research but, hopefully, strengthens it.

3.1.3. Positionality

The above discussion demonstrates that researchers play a key role in all research, which is arguably accentuated in inductive fieldwork research. This feeds into the second issue indicated above, namely about the positionality of the researcher. Mike Crang and Ian Cook (2007, p.9), both experienced ethnographers, believe that 'research is an embodied activity that draws in our whole physical person, along with all its inescapable identities'. Ethnographic research involves relationships developed between people of similar and/or different cultures, classes, genders, sexualities, (dis)abilities, generations, nationalities, skin colours, faiths and/or other identities. A key point is that research on everyday practices and social (political) relationships is made out of everyday practices and social relations, too. This raises a key question about the effect of the researcher on participants, and indeed the effect of fieldwork experiences on the researcher. It has long been accepted that the presence of an observer can change behaviour amongst those being studied (Landsberger, 1968). This can take a number of forms: participants can behave in terms of how they expect the researcher to behave, as opposed to how they would behave without an observer; some participants may feel uncomfortable being observed, and so try to limit any controversial or normatively 'deviant' behaviour; others may stress practices that they deem as normatively good; still others might ascribe reasons for acting in a particular way because that is what they believe

the researcher wants to hear (either to support their research or purely to impress them); and, finally, some participants may react (positively or negatively) to the way that the researcher dresses or speaks. Clearly this prevents what positivists would deem to be access to 'pure' forms of data because observers cannot see 'natural' behaviour. However, these effects are pervasive in *all* social interaction and flows naturally out of Erving Goffman's (1990) ideas on dramaturgy (see Chapter 2). Researchers perform their role in the same way that other actors do. We can acknowledge this without condemning this research technique because, as pointed out repeatedly, objectivity and neutrality do not exist in the positivist sense. Additionally, the social relations between researcher and respondent can reveal quite a lot about the priorities, values and beliefs of those under study (Hunter, 1995, p.160). Moreover, sustained involvement in a group can help to overcome formalities. Getting to know people and building their trust breaks down barriers, enabling the researcher to gain valuable insights to the respondents' lives.

A related issue to the above is to prevent the researcher from 'going native'. This could have significant repercussions for research in that researchers may wish to champion their colleagues, they may be unable to critically examine events and issues (and make erroneous conclusions as a result), and more widely fail to problematise social and political relationships (Busby, 2011, p.14). There are various mechanisms to minimise this risk, notably by maintaining distance as a 'professional stranger' (Rhodes *et. al.*, 2007b, p.223), such as undertaking analysis or academic research alongside fieldwork.

3.1.4. Entry and access

Entry and access have been cited by academics as one of the most difficult aspects of engaging in ethnographic research (Hunter, 1995, pp.154-6; Moeran, 2009, p.141). This is especially true of political elites, which are, by their very definition, exclusive social groups with high entry barriers. Political elites keep their cards close to their chests, for this is imperative to their political survival in which different political parties, factions and groupings out-compete one another, especially in the context of an adversarial political culture such as that found in the UK House of Commons. This means that the issue of trust becomes a central concern for both the researcher and the research participants. Mutual trust is a key foundation for both sides: the researcher needs to trust participants to tell the truth; participants need to trust the researcher not to twist or exploit what they say and do in private. Without a sense that sensitive information will remain private (or at least anonymous), ethnographic research will not be possible.

Anthropologists have noted that the best way to gain entry to the field is through a personal contact (Fetterman, 2010, pp.36-7). This reinforces a tension about subjectivity, but so long as researchers are sensitive to this issue, and do not predetermine with whom they engage as a result of this (where possible), then the method of snowballing can be an effective mechanism to build high-trust relationships. That said, access is a fragile opening through which the researcher conducts fieldwork. Hugh Gusterson (1995), in his study on scientists in laboratories working on nuclear weapons, was beset with problems over access as he was unable to gain necessary security clearance for some of his research, This meant that, whilst the personnel were described as 'polite' and 'friendly', they were also 'profoundly unhelpful' (p.191). Access cannot be taken for granted and demands constant renegotiation. This demonstrates the power of elites, which has implications for later analyses of fieldwork and the extent to which field notes can be used in publications. R.A.W. Rhodes et. al. (2007b, pp.214-6) point out that the powerful can refuse interviews, deny access, delay publication and declare documents secret or confidential at their own discretion - even after previously giving the researcher permission. This can not only frustrate research designs, but even limit a future career for researchers. Of course, this becomes less likely as the outsider/insider distinction breaks down (usually as trust increases). Mirko Noordegraaf (2007, pp.100-1) comments, on his own research on the Dutch civil service:

Similarly, Rhodes (2007, p.25) comments that he became 'part of the furniture' and 'blended in with the wallpaper' to such an extent that occasionally he was

Once I was 'in', there was hardly any signs of hesitance or attempts to obscure things. In fact, after a few meetings, 'being there' is either regarded as 'normal' or it is not noticed at all, especially when encounters involve lots of people and outsiders.

almost left behind as ministers and civil servants rushed from one meeting to another.

The key issues discussed here demonstrate that there are formidable challenges that ethnographic researchers need to negotiate in their fieldwork, particularly in making research valid and authentic, accepting the positionality of the researcher, and managing to negotiate and re-negotiate access to places, papers and persons. Though of course it is not easy to overcome these issues, there are obvious consequent benefits to undertaking this type of research. The analytical focus dovetails almost perfectly with the analytical framework proposed in Chapter 2, giving researchers the opportunity to recover the beliefs, values and ideas of political actors, and locate these within wider traditions or webs of belief. With these issues in mind, it is now possible to have a frank discussion about how this method is applied to this research project.

3.1.5. Application

I worked as a research assistant to a select committee in the House of Commons for 14 weeks during the second half of the 2010 parliament (which amounted to approximately 600 working hours). Every week, I was able to observe private and public meetings of the committee (which I refer to as 'my' committee in this project), attend and participate in team meetings, observe proceedings of parliamentary debates and evidence sessions, helped to write briefing material for committee members and the chair, and contributed to the drafting of committee reports (as well as a range of other duties). This was supplemented with negotiated access to observe other committees' private meetings and team meetings. I supplemented my observations through watching and analysing 100 hours of evidence session made available online, which was conducted after my research placement. Collectively, this means that I was both participant and observer: I was a full member of the committee staff team and contributed to their work, whilst also able to observe the everyday lives of MPs and staff.

The opportunity to undertake this fieldwork was organised through my doctoral supervisor (who identified key contacts), the Scrutiny Unit in the House of Commons (which organised the research placement) and the Economic and Social Research Council (which part-funded the placement). My fieldwork time was restricted both temporally (14 weeks) and spatially, in that I had only partial access to the Palace (a 'blue' pass had limitations about unaccompanied access, and in any case I could not – rightly – roam through 'Member's Only' areas). This doctorate is not, then, an *ethnography* of Parliament, though it uses *ethnographic techniques* (Fetterman, 2010, p.39). None of this invalidates the research, but simply highlights the practical limitations of ethnographic research in political science and in elite settings.

The precise details of which committee I supported, and at what presice point during the 2010 parliament, will remain confidential (indefinitely). This is to protect the anonymity of my former colleagues. Though this may not be ideal in that it does not allow the reader to grasp the full context of certain events, beliefs or practices, it allows (with the approval of the Committee Office) me more candour in empirical sections and allows me to construct an authentic picture of parliamentary practices. This research has received ethics approval from the University of Sheffield, and both the Head of the Scrutiny Unit and I agreed to the terms of the research placement through written and verbal agreements (see Appendix B and C). However, confidentiality remains a necessary aspect of the Committee Office (discussed in Chapter 6), which means that the use of fieldwork notes is restricted.

As part of my fieldwork, I kept a fieldwork diary (FWD). This is a personal, private and confidential journal, and not accessible to anyone other than myself (indefinitely). There are four comments to make about this regarding process, content, style and status. First, the process. I wrote rough notes using pen and paper at the time of events or closely afterwards, and then wrote these into a journal at weekends. Within two months of the internship, notes were typed up to make it easier to read and search for key ideas. Second, the content. The FWD contains observations from a range of things that happened in Parliament (and also references to things outside). It contains discussions with staff and MPs, summaries of meetings, and summaries of my interviews (see next section). It summarised what I did each day and observations of what others did (in terms of performance styles, space and speech). The vast majority of the content is ordinary behaviour that would be banal to anyone except myself. Third, the style.

The diary is written as an entirely confessional account, in the first person, in which I observe and reflect personally on the research process and my general everyday life. Any persons mentioned have been made anonymous through a code. Every paragraph was numbered for citation purposes. Fourth, the status. I draw on the FWD in empirical work, all of which is referenced as 'FWD <paragraph number>'. Where possible, I have sought approval from the Committee Office to make direct references to the FWD. Approval has not been sought if the issue has been corroborated by at least two interviewees and/or written records, refers to information already in the public domain, or relates to details that are judged sufficiently minor.

3.2. Semi-structured elite interviews

There are significant advantages to using interviews, in general, but particularly for this study on ideas and beliefs of political elites. As Crang and Cook (2007, p.69) point out: 'the main aim of interviewing in ethnographic research is to allow people to reveal their own versions of events in their own words'. This is ultimately why interviews are sought, and a central plank of the interpretive approach to political science.

This discussion needs to be linked to the epistemological values outlined in Chapter 2, which affects the status of the interview as a research technique. Political actors cannot, and do not, report 'given facts'. Rather, they present a particular narrative or story and, in doing so, they will undoubtedly omit certain details and emphasise others (*ibid.*, 2007, p.11). We do not have 'pure' access to respondents' accounts and lives. This does not mean interviews lose their value. As Jody Miller and Barry Glassner (2004, p.126) point out, '[r]esearch cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experience and social worlds'. This analytical focus on beliefs, values and priorities of respondents is fundamental, and dovetails very well to the analytical framework because it stresses a sense of agency that scholars may neglect if looking at only textual forms of data or third-person accounts. Traditions and practices are sustained by a belief in them by political actors. Interpretive research is not just about what happened *to* someone, but how they reacted to and felt about events, ideas and dilemmas (Soss, 2006, pp.141-3). Indeed, this is also where we find added value of interviews over observation: it is often not possible to stop events as they unfold or interrupt practices to ask detailed questions about why they occur. These questions are possible in interviews. This feeds into a bigger point about the value of interviews, i.e. that they are often the only way to access the view of elites (Lilleker, 2003, p.213; see also Seldon, 1996, p.353):

Much of what occurs in politics is 'off-stage' and is either unrecorded or it is locked away under a 30 or 50-year rule and therefore inaccessible. This making contact with those within the political process is often the only way of uncovering details about your area of research.

Moreover, files can be incomplete or wrong; they can focus on administrative process rather than the causes and/or effects of events; or there can be too many of them for us to make sense of which ones were important (Booth and Glynn, 1979; Davies, 2001). Interviewees can tell us which documents mattered and how they interpreted their importance (Seldon, 1996, p.358). That is not to say that written records are not important – they are a fundamental source of data in their own right and, additionally, help us to corroborate claims made by respondents (see next section). This turns out discussion to an important perceived limitation of interview data: truth and bias.

3.2.1. Truth and bias

Jeffrey Berry (2002, p.680) notes that interviewees are under no obligation to tell us the truth or to be objective about their views. Even if they are trying to be truthful, actors may exaggerate their own role unconsciously, or their memories could fail them. Both affect the reliability and accuracy of their accounts. But, as Brian Rathbun (2008, p.690) indicates, some scholars take this too far and assume that these problems are irresolvable. Corroborating the account of one interviewee against others, and other types of source (written records and observation in this study), help us to ensure authenticity and truthfulness. More fundamentally, as Rhodes *et. al.* (2007b, p.221) remind us:

All of us during our everyday lives develop skills in interpreting what others mean when they speak to us. Thus, we judge whether someone is lying by many verbal and body cues. We do not leave such skills at the door of the interview room. Every interview involves such judgements.

This point implies that interviews are two-way experiences, which reminds us that it is not possible to access the beliefs of political actors in some neutral way. Interviews require good rapport, without which questions can fall flat, answers will be generic and uninformative, and discussion more generally will be brief. As Miller and Glassner (2004, pp.141-2) point out:

Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasuries of information awaiting excavation – as they are constructors of knowledge in association with interviews. Interviews are collaborative accomplishments, involving participants in meaning-making work in the process.

They describe interviews as an 'interpersonal drama with a developing plot' (*ibid.*, p.149). This directly speaks to Goffman's idea, developed in Chapter 2, that social interactions are a performance, which includes interviews. Interviews are not an exchange of words or information alone, but also involve physical gestures, silences, use and tone of voice, and laughter. These are all things that the interviewer needs to consider. Indeed, we are part of this drama in that we choose to wear certain types of clothes, try to appear disarming, always arrive on time to give a perception of reliability and punctuality, ask questions in a particular way to elicit the responses we want, and so on (Morris, 2009). All of this depends, in part, on the type of interview that researchers pursue (my own interviews were semi-structured (see below)). Semi-structured interviews, an often followed technique, are delicate balancing acts. Interviews can be more like conversations at times, with a certain give-and-take, which makes interviews unpredictable. That is both an advantage and a danger of interviews, but in any case makes them very resource intensive. This shows that there can be considerable limitations to interviewing. Most of these can be overcome or negotiated in some way, and, in any case, the shortcomings are outweighed by the original contributions that interviews can make to political research. That said, this often depends on access, which can be a substantial problem. This moves our discussion explicitly towards the application of the techniques in this doctorate.

	Invitations			Gender			Political balance		e
	No response	Negative	Positive but no interview	Positive	Female	Male	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
Members	12	9	5	23	8	15	9	12	2
Chairs	6	3	1	10	3	7	3	6	1
Staff	3	0	2	10	3	7	-	-	-
Total	21	12	8	43	14	29	12	18	3

Table 3.2. Interviewees

3.2.2. Application

I undertook 43 semi-structured interviews (see Table 3.2 for a summary), which were scheduled, one-on-one meetings with select committee members, chairs and staff.⁶ All of these (except one) took place during my fieldwork in London (and thus on the parliamentary estate). In order to identify appropriate interviewees, I used a snowballing technique, where I invited individuals through email, but often followed it up with a telephone call. I began by interviewing MPs from the committee that I worked for, and followed recommendations from clerks. I requested an interview with almost every chair of departmental select committees and interviewed ten of these. These became priority committees in that I focused on interviewing MPs that served on those committees and the clerks that worked for them. This has been useful, but of course wasn't fool-proof: not all of my invitations were accepted. Those that agreed to an interview clearly had an interest in select committees and believe their role was important as part of scrutiny processes. Though this could skew the empirical findings about how MPs interpret their scrutiny role, I was predominantly interested in precisely why MPs did serve on committees. All interviewees (with two exceptions) were recorded using a recording device, which helped to ensure that the record of the meeting was accurate and complete. The drawback of this was that some interviewees were less open on

⁶ This excludes the countless informal conversations I had during my fieldwork in the House of Commons. I spoke to people as we rushed to and fro meetings, on my way to the office, in the cafeteria, in our committee office, over the phone, in emails, at bus stops, in the Westminster Gym, and in the Palace's numerous bars – amongst others.

record, who gave me further material off-the-record afterwards. I believe that the advantages of recordings outweighed not recording interviews because encounters rarely strayed into sensitive areas. If they did, then I reassured interviewees I would not quote them without their permission (let alone make those quotes attributable to them in any way). All interviewees signed an informed consent form (with one exception) (see Appendix D for a standard interview consent form).

All interviews were semi-structured. I arrived to each interview with a set of three themes that I wished to discuss (interpretation of their role, approach to their role, relationships between political actors), as well as a more detailed checklist of sub-topics (see Appendix E). Despite these themes, every interview was different in terms of content, and differed radically in terms of timing. Some discussions ran through the topics of conversation in order without fuss and fairly briskly; others veered off into a range of directions. I was very flexible because I wanted to understand the priorities and beliefs of parliamentary actors. A rigidly structured interview would have prevented this. That said, it meant that emphasis of my themes changed, making conventional comparisons between interviews difficult. I draw on interviews heavily throughout my account, which explains frequent and detailed quotations. Direct quotes are cited through a code (M denoting committee member, C denoting chair, and S denoting staff) and italicised.

3.3. Supplementary data: textual analysis and descriptive statistics

Observation and interviews are the main forms of data on which I draw in my empirical sections, which are used to also corroborate one another where possible. However, in order to do so most effectively, textual forms of data are key to supplement this doctoral research, as well as small databases on (i) committee MPs, predominantly their attendance records; and (ii) on oral witnesses during the 2013-14 parliamentary session. A few comments on these supplementary forms of data are necessary but, as they are not the main research methods, not the same level of detail as the previous two sections.

While textual analysis of primary and secondary written records are not the foundational method in this doctorate, documents are a key part of the House of Commons. Parliament produced hundreds of pages of documents every single day, both internal and external, and they play a role throughout the everyday lives of all political actors involved. Documents keep Parliament running though routine tasks of recording, filing, archiving and retrieving information. Indeed, given the emphasis of research on committee outputs, many would regard select committee reports as the most important output from scrutiny. Therefore, any analysis of scrutiny in the House, specifically looking at the work of select committees, needs to keep in mind that written records are key to understanding how organisations actually work. This importance cannot be understated because it begs a number of key questions: who produced a written record and why? How was it produced? And how was it then used? These questions fit together very well to the overarching research agenda of this doctorate in that it is concerned with the way in which select committees interpret their role and how they undertake their work. Part of this requires asking questions about the production of committee reports and the evidence on which they are based, the way that they frame arguments and ideas, and the way that this helps them become authoritative to political actors. This analytical focus can be linked to the methodological focus of analysing written documents.

In asking the questions above, it becomes clear that written records enshrine what Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey (2004, p.59) call a 'distinctively documentary version of social reality'. They go on: 'They have their own conventions that inform their production and circulation. They are associated with distinct social occasions and organized activities'. Documents are products or artefacts in their own right. They are important for what they contain, but also what they command and instruct. They are often resources for further action, such as briefing material for MPs (Prior, 2004). This indicates that documents are not neutral, although they often appear that way (indeed, it is partly their aim) (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, p.61):

Documents are often used to create a certain kind of predictability and uniformity out of the great variety of events and social arrangements. That is, after all, one of the most important features of the bureaucratic mode of social organization: persons and courses of action are reconstructed in terms of the categories and rules of the organization itself. In other words, documents can focus on the administrative process that consequently limits or removes any sense of agency. The lack of a clear individual author is often intentional so that a report appears more authoritative and even scientific; the aim is to create a reality that exists independently of any individual observer, interpreter or writer (*ibid.*, 2004, pp.71-2). For this reason, other sources of data, such as interviews and observation, are crucial to fully understand where a document has come from. More broadly, this shows that there is bias in documents: they are edited and incomplete. In part, this makes them interesting to study in the first place, but it means that we must treat documentary evidence like 'an untrustworthy witness' (MacDonald, 2008, pp.286-7), and must ask questions about the reason for its existence, the way it was produced, the intended audience for the document, and so on. In order to do so, there are often four criteria used to evaluate textual forms of information: authenticity (concerns 'genuineness' - whether or not the document is what it purports to be); credibility (questions about the sincerity and accuracy of the document); representativeness (does the document constitute a representative sample of all the documents as they originally existed?); and, meaning (what are the literal and deeper meanings of the document?) (Burnham et. al., 2008, pp.209-12). Though this places doubt on the value of documents, they are very useful and play a key role in Parliament.

3.3.1. Application

I used textual analysis to explore the way that documents are used in select committees. As mentioned before, this was not done systematically in that I undertook a discourse analysis or content analysis of a representative sample of briefings or reports because this would not help to answer the research questions about beliefs and traditions. Therefore, it is not possible to offer a quantifiable summary of how many documents I read or analysed. I looked at reports from committees, email exchanges, copies of speeches, magazines and newspaper articles (online and in print), press cuttings, the Official Report (*Hansard*), guidelines and instruction manuals, evidence submitted to committees, briefings for MPs (I had access to 29 briefs from five committees), correspondence between committees and ministerial departments, and so on

and so forth. I looked at the way that reports are produced, and the way that written briefing material is used by committee members and chairs in evidence sessions (though much more could be done). This offered a great way to supplement first-person accounts and corroborate observations. Indeed, where interviews or observations were not possible, written documents offer crucial access to subject material. Of course, as a participant observer in the Palace and working for the Committee Office, I was partly responsible for producing written briefings and contributing to draft reports, which also added further nuance.

In addition to these textual forms of data, as mentioned, I constructed two small databases for this research project. The first was a small database, based on the sessional returns of the 2010 parliament, in which I collected information on the attendance rates for committee members and chairs. This database covers: attendance rates by each member by session and by committee; the number of meetings that the committee held; the gender breakdown of committee membership; and the number of reports published by each of the 24 committees under study (the Liaison Committee is excluded from this dataset). This database is predominantly used in Chapter 4 (on committee members), though see Appendix F for a summary. I additionally added information on committee chairs' backgrounds, which is used in Chapter 5 (see especially Table 5.2). The second database is one on oral witnesses that gave evidence to select committees during the 2013-14 parliamentary session. Information on these witnesses was collected from the UK Parliament website and order papers, as well as publicly available information on witnesses online. This database covers: organisational breakdown, geographical location and gender. This data is used predominantly in Chapter 8 (and see Appendix G and H for a summary). In due course, both databases will be made publicly available.

Concluding remarks

Taken together, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, when supplemented with textual analysis of written records (and even a small set of descriptive statistics) offer an overarching interpretive methodology. Each method makes a distinctive contribution to this research project, which the three

Method	Application	Analytical focus
Non-participant and participant observation	Working as research assistant to a select committee for 14 weeks	Performance styles, spaces and speeches; dealing with dilemmas
Semi-structured interviews	43 interviews (23 committee members, 10 chairs, 10 clerks)	Beliefs about scrutiny roles, practices and dilemmas
Textual analysis and descriptive statistics	A range of written records and two databases on MPs and witnesses	Situating actors in broader context; identifying dilemmas

Table 3.3. Applying the analytical framework: methods

sections above have identified. Participant and non-participant observation allows us to see beliefs in action, i.e. everyday practices. Interviews focus on individual beliefs and how they may be part of wider traditions. All three individual beliefs, everyday practices and parliamentary traditions - are affected by and make an impact upon written records. This is axiomatic in a literate society. The key point, however, is that no single method is able to capture all elements of the interpretive analytical framework. It is their combination that creates a robust methodology. So while observation gives us microscopic detail to study everyday behaviour at a very deep level, we are left with questions as to its wider validity and value once we leave the field; interviews give respondents an opportunity to explain their beliefs, but nonetheless we face questions about the truthfulness of their responses; and, written records are pervasive and foundational to keep Parliament running, but they would seem to be as partial as the political actors from whom we gather first-hand accounts; and, finally, quantitative data can illustrate broad brush trends, but not the nuance and texture that interpretation requires. Through 'triangulation' (Davies, 2001) we are able to corroborate what we ask interviewees with what they actually do by observing them in action; we are able to compare and contrast our observations with written records to understand the linkage between texts and behaviour; and, we can ask interviewees about which documents matter and what role they played in writing them. In sum, as Table 3.3 shows, this PhD therefore focuses on observation (14 weeks in Parliament) to explore how parliamentary actors enact their role and deal with dilemmas they face; interviews (43 in total) to identify and examine the beliefs that actors hold; and, texts and data (records and databases) to situate parliamentary actors in context and to give broad brush trends. In doing so, these methods dovetails to capture relevant fieldwork material to help answer the research questions identified and discussion in the

Introduction in that we are able to answer how political actors interpret and perform their role on select committees and how their everyday practices affect the wider traditions of parliamentary scrutiny in the House of Commons. This does not mean that the empirical sections are faultless. Every methodology has its limitations, including this one. It cannot offer a comprehensive picture of how all MPs interpret their role, nor is it possible to evaluate the role of ideas and beliefs against standards of what makes an 'effective' select committee system. Rather, this project was more specific in that it draws significantly from the committee for which I worked and more generally insights from the things that I was able to see over my stay in the Committee Office.

Fieldwork for this project produced a swathe of information, which required detailed analysis to answer the research question. In line with the analytical framework, I used an open form of coding by which I read through my FWD, transcriptions and various texts to develop various themes associated with individual beliefs, everyday practices, and parliamentary traditions (Crang and Cook, 2007, pp.137-9). This analysis established categories and codes, which became hooks on which the following empirical sections are based. It is to those that we now turn.

Part II: Interpreting Scrutiny

Welch Schauspiel! Aber ach! ein Schauspiel nur!

– Faust⁷

In each chapter that follows, I apply the analytical framework set out in Chapter 2. I do this in three ways. First, I situate agents in their organisational and/or historical context. Second, I ask: how does each actor interpret their role? In doing so, I describe how individual beliefs relate to everyday practices and performance styles. Third, I conclude each chapter by identifying broader themes associated with their role, moving from individual beliefs and practices to how actors negotiate everyday dilemmas.

⁷ Author's translation: 'What spectacle! But oh! a spectacle and nothing more!'. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1808) *Faust I*, v. 454 / Faust.

Chapter 4: Members

n May 2010, 650 Members of Parliament were elected to the House of Commons. At the broadest level, representatives are assumed to exist to serve the interests of their constituents in Parliament. Precisely what this means in terms of everyday activity, however, is part of the realm of contestation (echoing some themes from Chapter 2). This is exacerbated in the House of Commons because representatives do not have a job description, and their election depends not on professional experience or applying job-specific expertise, but on the will of some 70,000 constituents or so every five years. As a result, to be an MP is to be subject to a permanent sense of job insecurity and general day-to-day unpredictability. This also means that MPs can – and do – interpret their role as they wish, and consequently focus their energy on things that they deem important. In doing so, they often ascribe differing importance to representing their constituents, supporting their political party, or seeking to work towards a perceived national interest. These interpretations have been scrutinised by the media and the public without much agreement on how politicians best enact the 'representative claim' (Pitkin, 1967). Indeed, it is also subject to academic debate. However, as Chapter 1 has indicated, these debates have traditionally focused on institutional structures and procedures with less empirical research on how MPs interpret and perform different aspects of their role with reference to select committees. In this chapter, I begin to address this gap by looking at how MPs interpret their role on those committees. I present a simple argument: MPs are thrust into a chaotic and unstructured world, and, subsequently, they interpret their role in their own individual ways. In doing so, they create different parliamentary habits, routines and practices, which means

Situated agency	The first section of this chapter sets out the broad organisational structure in which committee members are placed, including the average length of service, attendance rates, etc.
Beliefs and practices	This covers the interpretations of scrutiny that MPs have about select committees. This finds that MPs push and pull in different directions, and enact their role through a range of performance styles.
Negotiating dilemmas	Here, analysis turns towards some of the key dilemmas that committee members face in their everyday life, including variable time commitment, building expertise, negotiating multiple loyalties and a desire to create a sense of ordinariness.

Table 4.1. Analysing committee members

Summary: In sum, these concepts indicate that select committee scrutiny depends not just on committees' formal powers but also the everyday practices of committee members and how they negotiate dilemmas that they face in enacting their role. Ultimately, this reveals that MPs' lifestyles are nomadic and flexible, and that they push and pull scrutiny in different directions. Committees fulfil a range of functions, and so, arguably, scholars must broaden their understanding of what it means for a committee to be 'effective'.

that members push and pull scrutiny in different directions. This supports the theoretical views raised in Part I that interpretations are crucial to navigate social and political worlds. In order to demonstrate the importance of individual beliefs, everyday practices, and negotiating dilemmas, this chapter is split into three sections (see Table 4.1 for a summary). First, I situate committee members in their organisational context by giving a brief, descriptive overview of the 2010 parliament and the scale and extent of select committee work (situated agency). Second, I identify different ways in which MPs interpret their role (beliefs and practices). I argue that committee members adopt different performance styles to enact their committee role, including the following roles: (i) specialists and advocates, (ii) lone wolves, (iii) constituency champions, (iv) party helpers or safety nets, (v) learners, and (vi) absentees. These roles are not exhaustive, nor do they form a *fixed* typology (in contrast to the work of, for example, Searing (1994), I argue that performance styles can and do change on a frequent basis (see Chapter 2)). Rather, the aim is to demonstrate that select committees represent a diverse range of ideas and interpretations that push and pull committee scrutiny in different directions. Third and finally, the chapter discusses how those 'pushes and pulls' are affected by committee members' other parliamentary roles. In short, I explore the dilemmas that MPs face in terms of their time commitments, the need to build expertise and professional competence, the multiple (and sometimes conflicting) loyalties that MPs face, and the broader dilemma of confronting the complexities of being an MP

through creating a sense of ordinariness around their lives to tame the contested nature of the representative role. Select committees offer an anchor to deepen their knowledge and understanding of policy-making, and additionally offer a way to reconcile the different aspects of being a Member of Parliament. In sum, this demonstrates that select committees offer much more than scrutiny of the executive.

4.1. Situating committee members: who are the scrutinisers?

Select committees exist to provide detailed scrutiny of government by backbench MPs in the House of Commons. Since 1979, this has developed into a range of joint committees, domestic or internal committees, departmental committees and cross-cutting committees. Though the history of committees was detailed in Chapter 1, it is worth re-stating the central functions of committees here with reference to its members. In order to scrutinise activities of government, committees undertake inquiries that involves (i) deciding on a topic (agendasetting), (ii) calling for written evidence and holding oral evidence sessions (evidence-gathering), and (iii) publishing committee findings through a final report (report-writing) (these phases are discussed in a little more detail in Chapter 7). Axiomatically, committee activity ranges significantly from this crude simplification, but in any case, committees rely on members who are expected to attend meetings regularly, participate in private discussions, ask questions in oral evidence to gather information or hold witnesses to account, and evaluate an inquiry's findings in advance of publishing a committee report. As noted in Chapter 1, the procedures for becoming a member have changed since 2010. This has arguably changed the dynamic of select committees. One interviewee described the old system in the following way:

Getting on a select committee in the first place was very difficult for me because, being on the left, the Blair machine, Blair regime didn't want anybody who was going to stir up trouble. So they deliberately stuffed it full of, you know, sycophants, Blair babes, loyalists, whatever you call them, Blairites, and kept anybody who was trouble out of the serious select committees (Interview M-08). The shift towards a more independent form of scrutiny has been acknowledged (even if only anecdotally) by a range of frontbench politicians, the media and scholars of legislative studies, with one MP saying that committees now work with 'renewed authority and zest' (Flynn, 2012, p.74; see also White, 2016). This is also supported in interviews (Interview M-12, Interview M-21). For example:

In general, people who are getting elected onto them are being elected because they might be good at that area or interested in that area, rather than because they've been a good boy and kept their nose clean and, you know, are being put there by the whipping operation and so I think that's a very positive change. It probably does mean that select committees are more outspoken than they used to be in the past ... and again, I think that's not a bad thing (Interview M-19).

With this in mind, it is worth going into more detail about who served on committees during the 2010 parliament.

Despite the well-established trend towards greater constituency activity (Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015), select committee work takes up a considerable amount of MPs' time. Over the course of the 2010 parliament, 24 departmental and cross-cutting committees (excluding the Liaison Committee) held 4,555 formal meetings and published 1,349 reports (see Appendix F). 398 out of 650 Members of Parliament (or 61.2%) served on these committees, a figure that rises even higher if domestic committees, temporary committees and joint scrutiny committees are included. Select committee service is something that most MPs experience over the course of their parliamentary career, including those MPs that went on to serve on the frontbench or, indeed, became prime minister.⁸ Appendix F offers a more detailed summary of descriptive statistics associated with select committees. It shows that the average age of joining a committee is 49.1 years old, which is broadly in line with the age of MPs in the 2010 parliament more generally, which was 49.9 years old (Audickas, 2016). Turning to the length of service, the average for an MP between 2010 and 2015 is 32 months (or just over two and a half years). On average, 21.1 MPs served on each committee during that time, with the lowest turnover from the Energy and Climate Change Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee (15 members), whilst the largest turnover came from the Justice Committee, Public Accounts Committee, and Work and Pensions Committee (28 members).

⁸ Between 2001 and 2004, for example, David Cameron served on the Home Affairs Committee and the Modernisation Committee.

Chapter 4: Members

Looking at gender, this reveals that the average committee would have had 15 men and 6 women committee members over the course of the 2010 parliament. Over the same period, and more generally across Parliament, 22% of MPs were women, which indicates that committees are, on average, representative of the House of Commons. Finally, the average attendance rate of MPs declines between 2010 and 2015, from 68.9% in Session 2010-12 to 63.6% in the final session. However, there is variety in this: the highest average attendance rate comes from the Home Affairs Committee in Session 2010-12 (81.0%), and the lowest from the European Scrutiny Committee in Session 2013-14 (43.6%). In sum, these statistics reveal parliamentary committees play an important role simply by virtue of the demand on an MP's time that they place and the range of meetings that an MP can attend. However, the statistics also only show a partial picture of committee members, and do not tell us very much about the motivations behind MPs' service or the how MPs interpret their role. Having situated actors into their broad organisational context, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the beliefs, practices and dilemmas of committee members.

4.2. How do committee members interpret their role?

A first question to consider with regards to how MPs interpret their role is to ask what they mean by 'scrutiny', which, though familiar terrain for parliamentary and legislative studies, is not unambiguous (White, 2015a). Most MPs mentioned terms such as 'accountability' and 'responsibility' in interviews and, for many, parliamentary scrutiny at a broad level is a catch-all term to describe the detailed examination of government policy. Specifically regarding select committee scrutiny, this is often defined in opposition to, or contrasted against, debates on the floor of the main chamber:

In the House of Commons you can get one or two questions, intervention in a debate but in a select committee you can pursue a pretty clear line of questioning ... and you've got a much better chance and opportunity of both finding out what's going on, finding out what the department is doing is consistent with the policy ... and also finding out if the policy makes sense (Interview M-21).

I think select committees are absolutely vital for the whole working of Parliament because for every government department there is a select committee, which is there to ... hold it to account in a detailed way. Yes, we have Questions on the floor of the House, but they are quick fire and it's all over in 30 minutes. Whereas I spent ten years or so on the [XX] Committee. We did some very detailed inquiries into [XX] (Interview M-15).

Other MPs have noted this difference to the main chamber, too. One said that it provides 'a different perspective to the ... theatre of accountability in the chamber' (Interview M-O1), and another said (though adding this is not always the case):

You're away from the Punch and Judy crudities of the chamber where the opposition are always wrong, and your side is always right. I mean ... we're veering onto intelligent conversation on committees (Interview M-02).

In other words, they are basing their scrutiny work on evidence gathered as part of committee inquiries, rather than party political arguments. This indicates that scrutiny is generally positively acknowledged and regarded as important. This is not surprising. Nevertheless, specific nuances or emphases placed on interpretations of scrutiny are critical because they affect MPs' approaches to their role, both in terms of the questioning and conduct of inquiries, as well as the focus and aims of inquiries. Some MPs believed that 'value for money' was a key factor in good scrutiny (e.g. Interview C-01, Interview C-08, Interview M-15), while others emphasised implementation of policy more generally (e.g. Interview M-20, Interview M-21). One MP's interpretation, who served on two committees, is a good example to demonstrate the effect of individual beliefs on scrutiny practices. Though she has more interest in one policy area over another, it is arguably her interpretation of the focus of scrutiny that serves as the real dividing line between her two committees. While one committee was praised as working as a team, and focusing on what is happening and why in policy implementation terms, the other committee is, 'all about the theory and not about what actually happens to people' (Interview M-10). She later added that the committee ignores the 'nuts and bolts' and the 'real questions':

There are times that we had [XX] in and you're asking them practical things about why haven't you hit this target? What's the matter? You don't look at the staff survey that says that all staff are working there? What's going on? What are you doing about [XX] and [XX]? And all those real questions that actually matter, it actually involves a bit of research and a bit of work. Whereas they [the other committee] can just go, "Well, what do you think [XX] is going to be this time next year?". It's easy, innit? ... just pondering, really, what they're doing.

The underlying difference between these two committees lies in her interpretation of scrutiny:

It's in the implementation that it matters and it's only by scrutinising, you know, whether what was intended is actually happening or there's unintended consequences. So I think you can dream of great ideas but it's in practice that you change people's lives, so I think you need to scrutinise the implementation and development of policies.

Though just one example, it is instructive of other MPs and their approaches. Another committee member, with a background in marketing and business, related her assessments to how events or policies would be made in the business world. So for instance, in a discussion about the lack of timely responses from the government to a report by her committee, she comments:

It's not a way to do business. You see, it wouldn't happen in the commercial world and I don't see why you shouldn't translate the commercial world across. ... If there's a criticism from a group of consumers – the company would respond (Interview M-04).

To take a final example, another MP, who used to be a school inspector in which he focused on '*evaluation and quality*', used this approach to scrutiny, i.e. focusing on '*self-evaluation*' of government ('*how do various ministers who've been with us, how do they evaluate their own performance?*') (Interview M-14).

The broad point of this discussion is to illustrate that scrutiny, though it has easily identifiable principles, is still interpreted in different ways that affect the way in which MPs approach their work. Furthermore, it raises the interesting question as to how different interpretations of their role affect their activities on scrutiny committees. This is important because it challenges the assumption that behaviour of committees is uniform in aim, focus and practice, and rather indicates a level of fluidity in executive-legislative relations. MPs adopt vantage points that affect their focus of questioning in public evidence sessions, their comments and discussions in considering draft committee reports, and, indeed, in the types of inquiry that they wish to promote for committee work. The variety of roles is impossible to quantify because, as Anthony King (1974, p.74) put it,

	5
Specialists and advocates	Usually adopted by 'core' members of a committee that regularly attend
	meetings, in this performance MPs seek to analyse the evidence pursue
	policy interests.
Lone wolves	Long-standing and personal interests are pursued in meetings, perhaps at
	the expense of a committee's inquiry that is focused on other issues – as a
	result, lone wolves are not team players.
Constituency champions	In this style of scrutiny enactment, committee members represent their
	constituents in the topics they pursue or the questions they ask.
Party helpers or safety nets	A performance in which a committee member may ask questions to
	witnesses for party political reasons, either to make a partisan attack or
	protect the witness.
Learners	In this role, committee members attempt to learn about a policy area or to
	find out more about government activity, rather than holding it to
	account.
Absentees	A committee member who is conspicuous by their absence, or who has
	made a minimal contribution, perhaps by 'dipping in and out' of the
	meeting.

Table 4.2. Performance styles in select committees

there are 'as many ways of being an MP as there are MPs'. Nonetheless, over the course of my fieldwork and following many interviews and discussions with clerks, MPs and chairs of committees, I believe that it is possible to identify commonly adopted *performance styles* that were explained in Chapter 2. This is not an attempt to create a fixed typology of scrutiny roles, nor is it an attempt to stipulate guidelines for ideal-types of MP. Any such endeavour would be hopelessly rigid and inflexible, as discussion in Part I have sought to show (e.g. Andeweg, 2014; Searing, 1994). Rather, there are different styles or dispositions that MPs can choose to adopt if they wish, which changes depending on inquiry, witness, other committee members, the lines of questioning, the broader political agenda of the day, etc. Each of these are examined in a little more detail here, and summarised in Table 4.2.9

4.2.1. Specialists and advocates

Many MPs explained that their committee had particular experts for different areas of policy. This usually stems from their policy interest and/or previous professional background. It is these individuals who arguably drive forward

⁹ I was partly inspired following an interview with a particular clerk (Interview S-03), who believed that there were at least four different types of committee member. On the whole, my observations led me to different theoretical approaches (preferring *styles* over *types*) and empirical findings, but I am indebted to this clerk for raising some of the ideas discussed in this chapter.

committee work and assist chairs as their most vocal supporting 'cast' (to extend the performance metaphor further). As this MP explained, it means that members can specialise and divide up tasks between them:

Within my party, there's a recognition that anything to do with the First World War, that's [AN73]'s subject, you know, because he's always rambling on about it. And there'll be other, I mean, I'm hopeless on finance, and I don't know anybody on finance, but we've got people who are brilliant on finance. So as in, as with a select committee, you all know that which members will have a specific interest (Interview M-15).

He went on to describe some of the committee-related interests of some of the members. Another MP:

[AU61], who's on the committee, ... she did research. So she's really, she's really read a lot of stuff about what the data means. ... [FW25] has done a big piece of work on people who [XX]. So I will know that she will do that better than me. [KQ91], a Conservative, he's got an accountancy background, so he will want to know about the numbers (Interview M-10).

This division of expertise has wider repercussions for the development of committee norms and values or performance teams (defined in Chapter 2, and examined in Chapter 7), which is significant because it indicates that effective committees work to each other's strengths. This is arguably where the chair's skills matter. One chair, for instance, prefers to allocate themes for inquiries to members who then use this theme for each witness throughout an inquiry (Interview C-05). Another chair gave two examples of MPs whose advice he would seek because they are experts in two areas of the committee's remit (Interview C-09).

A good indication of a specialist is the extent to which they use their expertise in other activities outside of committee work. To take just a single example: Paul Blomfield, before his election victory to represent Sheffield Central in 2010, was general manager of the University of Sheffield Students' Union. His work in Parliament reflects this background. For most of the 2010 parliament, he served on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, with an average attendance rate of 83.2%. Other MPs on the committee have noted his expertise in this policy area, particularly with regards to higher education policy (e.g. Interview M-18). However, he has also been involved in campaigns outside BIS Committee, attending conferences, meetings and events in relation to higher and further education, speaking at debates on these issues regularly in Parliament, and participating in campaigns relating to student issues (such as payday lending, student visas, financial support, and so on).¹⁰ During the 2010 parliament, he was also chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Students, vice-chair of the APPG on Apprenticeships, and secretary of the APPG on Universities (UK Parliament, 2015a).

4.2.2. Lone wolves

A lone wolf could be regarded as an extreme version of a specialist or advocate because these individuals zealously promote particular issues that they are interested in. However, while a specialist will provide expertise on particular areas for a committee's inquiry as part of a team, a lone wolf is not usually a team player. As this clerk describes:

It'll vary a bit from inquiry to inquiry, but somebody will always ask about x, and we always know they're going to ask about that. On [XX], they used to be that, they asked that, even if it wasn't terribly relevant to the inquiry you were dealing with (Interview S-03).

To be a lone wolf is to follow an issue or interest irrespective of the inquiry or, indeed, irrespective of the remit of the committee on which they are serving. One interviewee cited the following example:

I mean, one of my, of the Conservative colleagues on the committee is a passionate European, Eurosceptic. Consequently, you know, at every turn, there is a, let's get [XX] in, let's get [XX] in, ... whatever (Interview M-06, emphasis added).

During my fieldwork, my committee had an MP who would often operate as a lone wolf. The potential problem with such a character is that it could disorientate witnesses, who (in one case at least) were asked about things on which they had no expertise or knowledge (FWD 19.4.24). More generally, it can disrupt the flow of an evidence session (or indeed inquiry). One MP described this indulgence:

¹⁰ For example, see his interventions in these debates on the floor of the House of Commons: HC Deb 24 March 2014, c13; HC Deb 5 December 2013, c1084; and, introducing a Private member's Bill on payday moneylenders, HC Deb 12 July 2013, cc659-78 and cc688-737.

When we interview people, from my view you're not just finding out what they think, I'm trying to get across what I think. So the staff have a view and so sometimes the chair pulls me up and says, you know, but I want to be a witness rather than an interviewer and I do one way or another get my view across (Interview M-08).

Because of their approach, their style can sometimes be combative or confrontational, with an eye for the headline. Consequently, lone wolves are prone to go 'off-script', and it is chairs who play a leading role in managing this. This could cause arguments between the MP and the chair of the committee and, if the relationship turns sour, it is a likely cause of divisions in reports and a breakdown in consensual working (as witnessed a number of times in my fieldwork (FWD 3.1.13, FWD 10.3.25, FWD 47.11.10)). That said, lone wolves are also praised because they have, as one chair put it, 'a skill of getting to the heart of the issue' (Interview C-05). Another interviewee suggested that this made an impact with the frontbench: 'ministers are scared of us, and that's quite good' (Interview M-10). Examples of lone wolves could include: Paul Flynn, serving on the Home Affairs Committee and Public Administration Select Committee, who frequently spoke on issues about war; or David Tredinnick, serving on the Health Committee and the Science and Technology Committee, who is known for his strong interest in homeopathy and astrology as alternatives to mainstream healthcare (e.g. HC Deb 22 July 2014 cc1300-1302).

4.2.3. Constituency champions

Though there were some interviewees who noted the separation of their constituency, a large number of MPs made some link between constituency and scrutiny work.¹¹ It is possible that most did so because they are used to relating their everyday activity to constituents' interests. For example, the following comment from one MP who sat on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee is arguably applicable to any other constituency: '... and I have quite an enterprising constituency with quite a lot of small businesses and SMEs ...' (Interview M-18). Others believed that scrutiny work is enhanced by bringing 'constituency colour' into proceedings, sentiments with which most MPs could

¹¹ Those that considered the constituency and select committee role as separate include: Interview M-01, Interview M-13, Interview M-16 and Interview C-06. Those that viewed them as linked include: Interview M-18, Interview M-19, and Interview M-22.

arguably identify (Interview M-19). Even if this link is superficial, it is still telling because it shows the importance of electioneering that pervades an MP's thinking (Wright, 2010). That said, for some representatives, their constituency is the prism through which they view their parliamentary work. One MP puts this most starkly: *'There is really no point on being on a committee if ... it's not relevant to your constituents'* (Interview M-17). He said that a two hour committee meeting needed to be justified to his constituents, and that if his constituents are not writing to him on a particular topic on which his committee was undertaking an inquiry, then he will not spend a lot of time reading or preparing for sessions about that particular topic. In taking such a view, MPs will add constituency views to their work in almost every conceivable way: public evidence sessions, in draft report consideration, linking reports to constituencies, press releases, and so on (FWD 47.11.10, FWD 52.12.3). One chair noted someone with a constituency focus on her committee:

[FC06], who is one of my backbench members, she does it, everything she relates back to her constituency and I don't. I tend to look at the issue and if there's a constituency link I'll use it. I think she looks at the constituency and sees how she can feed that into her work. So I do it the other way around (Interview C-08).

This quote demonstrates the pervasive importance of the constituency link. Though it is something taken further by particular representatives in their service on select committees, almost all MPs (including chairs) will have the constituency at the back of their mind, echoing empirical analyses that show a growing importance to the constituency role by MPs (and, indeed, the public) (e.g. Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015; Crewe, 2015, pp.83-110). Though this doctoral research has not been able to quantify the extent to which constituency work takes up MPs' time, it raises important questions about the effect of the growing constituency burden for other aspects of an MP's role, such as commitment to scrutinising the executive.

A specific example of this approach can be seen by Greg Mulholland, MP for Leeds North West and member of the Public Administration Select Committee. He used an inquiry's evidence session to call on the director of NHS England, Simon Stevens, to apologise for the 'kneejerk decision' that resulted in the closure of a children's heart surgery unit in Leeds (PASC, 2014a, Q303-Q305), leaving it to the chair to tease out the wider issues relevant for the committee's inquiry on arm's-length bodies (Mulholland went on to use his exchange with Stevens as part of his constituency campaigning activities (Mulholland, 2014)). Another example could include John Woodcock's membership of the Defence Committee, whose constituency, Barrow and Furness, covers the site of nuclear submarine shipbuilding sites that are strongly tied to the Trident nuclear defence programme.

4.2.4. Party helpers and safety nets

In one interview, a clerk referred to this as a 'government help person':

Someone who sort of, you know, if the government's sort of getting in trouble will maybe step in a little bit. ... I wouldn't call them stooges, not the right word, but they feel, you know, the government shouldn't get such a kicking (Interview S-03).

An MP similarly noted this type of behaviour, though included the opposition:

There have been times when we've had people on the committee who've wanted to just push the, sort of, you know, the government line – and you're not there to do that. You're elected by Parliament, by the other parliamentarians, to do a job. You're not there to do the government or the opposition's job (Interview M-10).

This indicates that there are behaviours by some committee members to try to help their political parties. This type of performance is generally not common in the committee corridor because it is unlikely to receive widespread support from colleagues, including one's own party, as it damages the ability of a committee to build consensus. However, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this mode of behaviour is more recurrent at 'set-piece' events, such as evidence sessions with a secretary of state or minister. Nonetheless, it can be part of scrutiny hearings more generally, whereby individual MPs may try to use the committee as a '*political tool*', as another MP put it (Interview M-22). For example, on one particular issue, a committee member said:

There was a mood coming mainly from government, mainly from [the minister], that we were going to shift, move away from [a previous policy] ... and four out of the five interviewees [witnesses] said [XX] and they took my view. And so I deliberately gave them lots of easy conversation and the one

who was against [the previous policy] was intellectually less good (Interview M-08).

Though this was a long-serving MP, newer members of committees (and newer MPs more generally) are possibly slightly more partisan in their activities on committee (a point made to me in Interview M-07). One MP noted that there is a 'cooling off' period for representatives who had previously served on the frontbench (or supported it as parliamentary private secretary (PPS)), and would be discouraged by their colleagues to join a committee until they had sufficiently 'cooled off' (Interview M-11).¹² Indeed, a newly-appointed Conservative MP on the committee for which I worked occasionally took a view on some matters that would have given the government the benefit of the doubt, even though no one else on the committee agreed (FWD 52.12.3). This indicates the importance of socialisation processes – often imperceptibly informal – to ensure that MPs maintain a sense of cross-party working for their scrutiny work. This isn't easy – politicians are elected on a partisan basis, after all, and so the adversarial atmosphere still pervades parliamentary work.

4.2.5. Learners

Related to the point about socialisation, above, is a character that might be referred to as the learner. This can be adopted in two ways. First, newlyappointed MPs may take this position in private meetings. Here, they may ask more questions that are factual in order to familiarise themselves with committee work. By contrast, in public meetings, they might not want to be particularly vocal:

I didn't know how [TS49] was going to chair it, and I'd said to him earlier on, I just want to hold back in it, so I didn't take part in the beginning part and waited until a bit further ... you don't know what the dynamics were (Interview M-04).

¹² Parliamentary private secretaries may serve on select committees, but should 'withdraw from any involvement with inquiries into their appointing Minister's department, and they should avoid associating themselves with recommendations critical of or embarrassing to the Government' (Cabinet Office, 2015, p.7).

A second way in which an MP adopts the role of learner is through inquisitive engagement more generally with committee work. One clerk believed that a number of MPs adopted this role in his committee:

I think too many members see the committee meetings as an opportunity for a pleasant hour or so listening to some people talk and learning about things which they previously didn't know much about and they don't really see it as a really effective scrutiny opportunity. ... We've had a number of sessions recently where the chair took probably 80% of the questions because everybody else sits back and listens. And, you know, they enjoy it, it's very interesting and all the rest of it, but they're not really scrutinising (Interview S-05).

I have observed some committees (including the one mentioned by the clerk above) where MPs attend but then do not ask questions in evidence sessions (FWD 52.10.20) Or, if they do ask questions, their approach may not be fully developed or thought-out, as this clerk describes:

The sessions are not courtroom, they're schoolroom for a lot of them and they're finding out about the topic. So therefore, whereas I've read – not all the stuff – but I've read the brief and I know what it's about, whereas quite often they haven't and they're finding out for the first time (Interview S-03).

This indicates that even high attendance at committee meetings does not automatically translate into effective scrutiny or – perhaps alarmingly – any form of scrutiny at all. This has quite obvious consequences: a committee could be perceived as driven by the chair, or MPs on the committee do not offer critical and detailed oversight of a policy area, both of which detrimentally affect a committee's impact on government policy.

4.2.6. Absentee

As the name implies, this MP is attached to a committee but does not attend. It can also include those committee members that appear briefly, or only for a small part of an evidence session, who are more interested in boosting their attendance rate and going through the motion of asking a question rather than undertaking any form of scrutiny. Absentee members are not thought to make much of an impact on committee work because they are not there to discuss proposals for inquiries, question witnesses, or offer their views in the consideration of draft reports. However, non-attendance can have substantial consequences. By virtue of their absence, it reduces the number of opportunities available to scrutinise government and to use the MP's expertise to inform committee work. Moreover, and possibly most important, those that do attend have the power and influence to push forward their views – even if this skews the party balance.

Aside from one interview, regular absentees were largely unreachable and, axiomatically, they were difficult to observe in committee meetings. Thus, they remain elusive. The only exception came in the form of a 20 minute interview with an MP who attended well below half of all his committee meetings (Interview M-12). He described his committee work as a '*marginal pastime*' and '*not particularly onerous*'. He said that, although he believed MPs should spend 80% of their time on scrutiny committees, he only spent one or two percent on them because of the demands placed on him by his constituents (which, he believed, did occupy 80% of his time). This indicates that perhaps a reason for a low attendance rate for some MPs, and an absentee reputation, is explained through the competing pressures placed on them and the fact that they have prioritised other aspects of their role (to which I return below, in the third section).

These roles do not exhaust the possibilities of the modes of behaviour that MPs may choose to enact on committees (e.g. there could be MPs vying for the limelight or others deliberately attacking the government without scrutiny in mind). Nor are these performance styles fixed. A performer may change their style depending on circumstance: an MP will not be a specialist for every area of policy, and so whilst another fills the gap, the aforementioned MP will be placed in a learning role. Another time, she may not be able to attend an evidence session, and the following meeting will be perceived as a lone wolf as the MP did not hear previous oral evidence. The role adopted may also change depending on the constituency, balance of power between government and opposition, the performance of the chair, relationships with other committee members, the political agenda of the day, and so on. Furthermore, these roles must be distinguished from individual questioning techniques and styles. No single type of behaviour noted above necessarily leads to particularly combative or

conciliatory questions, nor does it mean that one type of role is more effective at scrutinising than the other. Therefore, while these roles are not mutually exclusive or fixed identities, they are important ways of grounding the focus of analysis for representatives when they are approaching and undertaking scrutiny activity. It is worth looking at what this means in practice.

4.2.7. On the frontstage: enacting scrutiny

Immediately before an evidence session with a high profile witness began, an adviser turned to me and said, *'this is going to be a piece of theatre'* (FWD 3.1.9). This reinforces other fieldwork observations and responses by interviewees that indicate evidence sessions are performed and enacted. Here, I want to give two examples of the way in which scrutiny is performed: a session from the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) and another from the Work and Pensions Committee (WPC). Both sessions questioned their ministers on the same morning, but the two performances were very different in *setting, speech* and *style*.

On 11 June 2014, Francis Maude, then minister for the Cabinet Office, was asked to give evidence before PASC (2014b). The evidence session took place in a committee room in the Palace of Westminster and, though scheduled to begin at 9.30am, started at 9.50am. As the main minister that answers to PASC (making it a quasi-departmental, quasi-cross-cutting committee), the session focused not only on one of its inquiries regarding impartiality of the civil service, but additionally on other topics (regarding a late response to a report on the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA) and regarding the delay of the Chilcot Inquiry, something that featured in the news around that time (Graham, 2014; Wintour, 2014)).

Though calm, the session arguably did not go well. Francis Maude's answers were designed to shut down discussion. Two (of many) examples:

Q482 Lindsay Roy: Is it your contention that the main fault for the delay lies within the Civil Service?

Mr Maude: No, I would not want to say that. I am not going to apportion blame. All of us should have moved more quickly on this, and I regret that we didn't.

Q483 Lindsay Roy: So what key lessons have you learned from this? **Mr Maude**: To do things more quickly.

Q487 Paul Flynn: Isn't the likely explanation for the delay that everyone involved – civil servants and politicians – has a vested interest in keeping a watchdog like ACOBA continuing in its futile way without teeth or claws and with no powers to impose its views? Isn't it that we have got the establishment deciding not to act, sitting on their hands for 21 months to protect their prospects for retirement jobs? **Mr Maude**: No.

More generally, the body language adopted by the minister, and his actions on occasion (tapping desk, looking around the room, long intakes of breath, etc.), indicate resistance or boredom to answering questions. The session was not helped by the approach or performance style taken by some members. Paul Flynn, in particular, adopted the role of 'lone wolf': an ardent anti-war campaigner, his questioning focused on the Chilcot Inquiry beyond the wishes of the chair; furthermore, his questions (i) were adversarial in tone, (ii) acted as disguised speeches and (iii) were closed rather than open (particularly Q497, Q498, and Q499).

By contrast, on the very same day and at the very same time, the Work and Pensions Committee questioned the minister of state for disabled people, Mike Penning, and three civil servants, on the operation of Employment and Support Allowance and Work Capability Assessments (Work and Pensions Committee, 2014b). This session took place in a very different setting: the Grimond Room of Portcullis House. While the session with Francis Maude above started over 20 minutes behind schedule, this one began on time and lasted much longer. I bring attention to this session because MPs adopted a range of styles, including a specialist or expert role (Debbie Abrahams drew on her record in public health research), constituency champion role (Sheila Gilmore identified constituency issues on two occasions), and absentees (in that Kwasi Kwarteng, though present, only asked one minor question (Q487)). This session was also party-political, given the news coverage around welfare reforms (and especially regarding the role of Atos, a public service provider (BBC News, 2014a)). For example, after Glenda Jackson describes the need for specialist examiners as part of contractual agreements for a new public service provider to replace Atos, she asks (and then interrupts):

Q469 Glenda Jackson: [...] How are you going to ensure – I presume this is going to be a requirement of the new contract – that these promises will, in fact, be met and monitored?
Mike Penning: Yes, it will be.
Q470 Glenda Jackson: How?
Mike Penning: If I can just explainGlenda Jackson: Good.
Mike Penning: I do not speak quite as fast as some of you.
Q471 Glenda Jackson: It is not a question of speed of word; it is a question of speed of thought, but please do go on.
Mike Penning: It may be, but if you are not willing to listen to the answer, it is a bit difficult.
Glenda Jackson: Well let us hear it.
Chair: Minister, the floor is yours.

Or more generally regarding welfare reforms:

Q418 Sheila Gilmore: I am sure that organisations like Parkinson's will be very pleased to find that in June 2014, you are now discussing the question of whether these people are in the appropriate place, given that this is a matter that was raised, I think, with you when you first came into office – which is now a matter of some eight or nine months ago – with your predecessor, and with her predecessor.

Mike Penning: And the predecessors before the last election as well. **Sheila Gilmore**: This has been specifically raised and not dealt with over the last few years ...

Unsurprisingly, there are occasions when the government side felt that they needed to protect the minister, and so some committee members adopted the role of 'party helper' or safety net:

Q442 Graham Evans: Can I just give an example to the Minister of a constituent who is paraplegic? The changes that this Government introduced have enabled her to get a job in my constituency working for the public authority, so there are examples other than those the ones my colleagues on this Committee have given, which always seem to give the negative rather than the positive. Some of the changes that have been put forward do help people into work.

And later:

Q479 Graham Evans: In the evidence from Atos on Monday, they were saying that Dr Litchfield's recommendation regarding the introduction of the mental function champions was introduced in January and it had a positive effect. Whoever takes up the contracts in future, will those lessons be learned – that mental function champions can make a positive difference?

James Bolton: Yes, absolutely. Mental function champions have been in place since July 2011; as you highlight, Dr Litchfield pointed to the very positive contribution they make, and that will form an integral part of the contract. **Graham Evans**: Thank you.

Whilst this does not comprehensively evaluate the way this impacts the effectiveness of committee inquiries and reports, the key point of these two example evidence sessions is to demonstrate the wider issue about how different conceptualisations of scrutiny and its enactment directly affect the way in which scrutiny processes play against one another and affect the overall evidencegathering process. In other words, committee work is impacted in a direct, substantive way through actors' interpretations of the idea of scrutiny. It additionally raises issues about questioning techniques, the effectiveness of which by MPs is clearly mixed. Though this cannot be explored in detail here, there are particular questions about the role of training for members, on which there is no consensus (some MPs refuse to attend training because of their own self-belief, for example) (for a discussion, see Coghill et. al., 2008; Coghill et. al., 2012). Moreover, it raises questions more generally about relationships between committee members and performance 'teams'. This is something that we return to in Chapter 7, and it is sufficient to note here that: first, clearly good working relationships are necessary to prevent the persistence of partisan questioning, or, put more simply, everyone has their own role to play, but these roles must work in harmony; and, second, the role of chair is key in shaping working relationships between committee members, which also affects the approach that MPs take (see Chapter 5). These two points seek to show that roles develop not only through individual beliefs but through actions and practices of others. This leads to us to a wider discussion about how individual beliefs about the role of MP, and everyday practices in the House of Commons, affect approaches to scrutiny.

4.3. Negotiating dilemmas

In order to better understand the role that MPs adopt in select committees, four dilemmas deserve detailed attention: time commitment, building expertise and becoming an effective representative, multiple loyalties, and the formation of a willed ordinariness to tame the storm of being an MP. These are dilemmas that MPs face not only in select committees, but broadly as part of their representative role. However, they make an impact on committees, and so each of these deserves attention. While this PhD is not a diachronic analysis and therefore unable to indicate how these dilemmas affect MPs over time (see Chapter 2), committee members make choices about their roles more generally through considering these perennial or everyday dilemmas.

4.3.1. Time commitment

The variety of roles that MPs perform are shaped in part by their priorities as representatives as a whole, and, consequently, means that the commitment between MPs to their committee work varies substantially. Committees usually rely on a *'core'* band of members (in addition to the chair) to participate and drive forward committee work (Interview M-O1). At a private meeting of my committee, for instance, this numbered four to five MPs who were involved in discussions with the chair about all issues regarding committee work, while the remaining members (that attended) chipped in only on occasion (FWD 57.13.7). Staff have pointed this out, too:

I think committees always, you know, rely on a sort of central core of members who are the most engaged, the most knowledgeable and you always have, in my experience, a few who don't turn up that or much, you know, turn up but don't engage or whatever (Interview S-11).

As pointed out earlier, the average attendance rate for MPs was 65.9% over the 2010 parliament. For some committees, the average attendance fell far below the minimum attendance rate of 60% passed through a resolution of the House (see Appendix F). However, the aforementioned core members tend to have an attendance rate that exceeds 75%, of which there are usually four to five. Other than this broad brush attendance figure, quantification of the level of commitment for committee work is very difficult, for at least two reasons. First, attendance at meetings does not indicate commitment to scrutiny, and therefore represents only a coarse proxy for commitment. It does not, for instance, tell us how long an MP attended a meeting or how many questions they asked (and fieldwork observations indicate that MPs drop in and out of meetings rather frequently) or if they understand the topic; moreover, some MPs may well be in attendance at meetings but not enjoy their time there, use that time to answer

emails or, as in the infamous case of Nigel Mills, to play games on a tablet (BBC News, 2014b).¹³ Second (and in contrast), attending meetings is not the only way that MPs contribute to committee scrutiny. An MP may raise committee-related issues through Parliamentary Questions (both written and orally) or conduct meetings with stakeholders to understand a policy area a little better. In order to get a sense of the level of commitment for committee work, I asked interviewees about the way that they allocate time and how much of their role is occupied by select committee work. Though responses should not be taken at face value because they are self-evaluations and likely to be over-estimates, MPs generally believed to be spending between one fifth and one quarter of their time working towards committee scrutiny (e.g. Interview M-14, Interview M-19). That said, a number of MPs also responded that they find it difficult to isolate their select committee work, and their scrutiny work of government more generally, from other activities that they do (e.g. Interview M-06, Interview M-10). For example, one MP serving on the Defence Committee:

I probably spend about 80% of my time looking at defence issues and engage with defence. At lots of different levels, whether it's going to meetings ... going over to Chatham House, meeting people who are coming to speak in Parliament about defence issues and defence-related issues. Probably about 80% of my time (Interview M-09).

When I asked about the constituency, the MP responded:

I'll go into schools and they'll ask me about climate change and I'll talk about defence, and the importance of climate change from looking at the defence of the UK, the importance of being able to generate our own electricity and that's why wind is important, that's why waves are important ... going to have to look at whether or not fracking is feasible (Interview M-09).

This tells us that MPs' interpretations of what is important make an impact. This can also be regarded as a dilemma in that MPs' time commitments vary because of conflicting choices over time commitments, especially given that MPs' time is at a premium.

¹³ For example, one MP spent part of an evidence session inspecting the paintings around him (FWD 58.13.17), whilst another (in a separate session) spent the majority of the meeting on his iPad and not paying attention to others (FWD 47.11.10).

Chapter 4: Members

4.3.2. Building expertise

Despite the competing demands placed on MPs, many of them enjoy their time on committees. Policy interest is an obvious underpinning that explains why MPs serve on committees. As one MP put it: *'it was a way of really immersing myself in an area that I was interested in'* (Interview M-04). In some cases, this stems from professional experience before becoming an MP (e.g. Interview M-19, Interview C-07). Indeed, one chair noted that the ability to have an effect on policy through select committee scrutiny is important to a lot of MPs (Interview C-01). One MP noted that it is the ability to set the agenda through a good report that is most rewarding for her: *'wanting to try and make sure we're not just commenting in a vague* [way] *but trying to actually say something that might actually, genuinely make an improvement'* (Interview M-18).

Interest in policy and making a policy difference are often linked to a wider ability to build expertise and further the skills of an MP. One MP said that consistent involvement in her committee meant that she could be better prepared than a newly appointed minister of state before their appearance in front of the respective committee, for example (Interview M-10). This feeds into a broader point about professional development and continued learning. One MP, for instance, explained the move from a regional or territorial committee to a departmental committee in order '*to do something more stretching*' (Interview M-09).

This is especially important in the absence of systematic and professional training for representatives (Coghill *et. al.*, 2012; Cooper-Thomas and Silvester, 2014). To overcome this dilemma, MPs use select committees to practise scrutiny activity at private and public sessions to pick up effective questioning skills, develop different arguments, test ideas on others. During fieldwork, it was noticeable that some MPs were practising a point they would want to make later, in the chamber or elsewhere (FWD 3.1.12, FWD 52.12.3). This may explain why some committee members adopt a more partisan role (to test the weaknesses of their opponents) or a learning role (to understand a policy area for other parliamentary work). In recent years, select committees have given training to

their committee members, usually by experienced QCs or journalists (Interview S-08). This seems to indicate a growing awareness of the need for further professional training. MPs, on the whole, did not phrase committee service in terms of fulfilling a training or rehearsal space. However, it arguably does play a role, which would reinforce arguments made by Michael Rush and Philip Giddings (2011) in their work that committee service plays a part of socialising MPs into parliamentary roles. Both dilemmas covered so far, time commitment and building expertise, are significantly affected by the third dilemma, to which we now turn.

4.3.3. Multiple loyalties

Irrespective of the proportion of time that MPs say they devote to committee (and other) work, and contrary to popular belief and wilful media misconceptions, the House of Commons is underpinned by a culture of long hours, as evidenced by fieldwork observations, interviews and other research (e.g. Weinberg and Cooper, 2003; Weinberg, 2015). One MP said, for instance, that she would occasionally be forced to read committee papers at 1.00am (Interview M-19); another admitted to having done parliamentary work in hospital (Interview M-04). Another MP said that, because a debate finished too late one evening and another meeting the next day started too early, he stayed overnight in the Palace (FWD 10.3.3). Perhaps unsurprisingly, one MP said that he wished for a 30-hour day to help juggle with the work (Interview M-22). These things were generally not said to me to impress me; they were passing topics as we discussed other issues. Such long hours (and associated stress that may result) are driven by the competing pressures or multiple loyalties placed on Members, who face a daily dilemma in how they choose to enact their representative role. This could include, to name just a few examples: speaking on the floor of the House, scrutinising legislation on bill committees, involvement with interest groups and non-governmental organisations, addressing constituency concerns, participating in All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), following campaigns and policy interests, campaigning in their local constituency for re-election (or supporting the local association or party more generally), hosting visitors and guests at the House, and more. The competing demands and fluidity of their role explains, in part, the variable attendance of

some committee members. It is not that MPs are not doing work, but rather that they are enacted in different ways. In relation to the modes of behaviour identified above, it should therefore not come as a surprise that MPs who view their constituency as crucial will make sure that this feeds into other work. Different MPs will take their cue from their party, though this does not need to be conscious. For example, one clerk noted that differing world views mean that Conservatives usually voiced a greater role for the market and private sector in committee deliberations, while Labour MPs frequently believed that regulators need to play a greater role in public service delivery (Interview S-05). Politicians remain party animals. It should not be too surprising if some MPs on committees adopt the role of party helper or safety net on occasion.

A consequence of multiple loyalties is that MPs tend to get involved in only particular inquiries and not all of them. So while chairs keep oversight on the committee's work as a whole, a single MP will get more involved with only some inquiries and not others. For example, one MP noted that if it is an inquiry he suggested or helped develop, then it would not be uncommon for him to speak to the committee's clerk about the inquiry, help with its general focus and arrive early to discuss questioning. In contrast: 'if it's an inquiry I'm not particularly bothered about, I just arrive and, you know, pitch with whatever. And I think that's the approach that most people adopt' (Interview M-01). Indeed, this was echoed in other interviews, such as: 'sometimes one [inquiry] comes through ... actually, I'm not that interested in this, I'm not that fussed, then I probably won't do very much of any of that' (Interview M-05). Some MPs admitted that they sometimes did not have the time to prepare for meetings and at other times it will happen at the last minute (e.g. Interview M-17, Interview M-23). This explains why some MPs adopt a specialist or advocate role in select committees (and, indeed, why some take this even further and become a lone wolf). They are keen to develop specific interests within a policy area, something caused in part through multiple pressures from elsewhere.

A further factor that is often overlooked concerns the social and personal lives of representatives, which are frequently perceived to bear little on decision-making. The families of MPs matter, though, and so some MPs will prioritise taking their children to school on some days, or want to look after their small child but therefore be unable to travel with a committee on field visits (e.g. FWD 12.3.20, Interview M-18). The effect of this in terms of stress and strain has been documented elsewhere (Weinberg, 2014), yet deserves a comment here because it is a further pressure that MPs face in terms of how and with whom they spend their time. In addition to family relationships are the social ones between friends, who MPs are likely to want to support in Parliament. Some MPs joined a committee in part because they are friends with other serving committee members (e.g. Interview M-10, Interview M-12). In another case, an MP was willing to see past a colleague's frustrating behaviour at meetings because of the bond of friendship between them (Interview M-08). Indeed, some MPs noted that friendships and personal relationships are what makes committee work rewarding:

The committees can be a lot of fun, you know? The work is very serious, but in terms of the personal relationships and the banter, it can be quite fun. And it's the characters. You get to know people in greater depth. This place can be a very lonely place. And the people you're on committee with, because you've gone away together, you've done things together... (Interview M-09).

A chair, similarly, noted friendships he has made out of the process (Interview C-04). These personal and social factors are important because they, too, affect representatives' choices (for a discussion on parliamentary friendships, see Childs, 2014). It is additionally a factor to consider when thinking about relationships between committee members and the sense of performance 'teams' (see Chapter 7). More generally, this dilemma feeds into a broader point about parliamentary life and the motivation on the part of representatives to establish a sense of ordinariness.

4.3.4. Willed ordinariness

The choices that MPs make over their commitment to scrutiny is made more difficult because, as one MP explained, parliamentary timetables are increasingly *'crashing into one another'* (Interview M-07). One member explained that, because of these difficulties, she left one committee and joined a different one (Interview M-03). More broadly, given executive control of the parliamentary timetable, MPs' everyday behaviour and their commitments are governed by factors outside their control that can make their role unpredictable

at times, possibly chaotic. This dilemma was noticeable during fieldwork, where a range of MPs changed their interview time and location with me, sometimes on more than one occasion and only with very little notice (FWD 36.9.6, FWD 31.8.5, and FWD 51.12.11, FWD 56.13.9). Others were rushed or busy throughout the interview.¹⁴ One chair noted that regular committee meetings are a '*constant*' on an otherwise fragmented parliamentary agenda (Interview C-O2). Another chair commented:

As an MP you are subject to a blizzard of information, questions, interactions, of every sort and the, being on a select committee allows you to ... focus on an area of policy and within that area of policy on specific strands for a sustained period in-depth and, so, there's a certain joy in being able to do something which isn't passing and ... is in fact, you know, allows for a sort of deep reflection and continued learning. So, from a personal point of view, being on a select committee offers a real opportunity to feel that you're getting to grips with some of the big issues in an area and by dint of the position we hold, influence policy (Interview C-06).

This quote demonstrates a theme of not only gratification and policy interest, but the fact that it is part of a long-term routine. Other MPs have pointed towards something similar. For instance: 'for me, select committee stuff provides a kind of structure of parliamentary life' (Interview M-01), and, 'the vast bulk of my work is through the [XX] Committee and things that flow from that' (Interview M-06). Both MPs have a strong interest in their respective policy areas, and use committee work as a basis to work from. This goes on to feed into other work that they conduct, both of which are also woven into their professional experiences before becoming MPs. Another former committee member contrasted his role with PPS work:

The main difference, I would say, between the two is that the select committee work was a bit more structured. You knew when the meetings were coming up, or the trips, and you knew the process of ... we always [met] on a Monday. So you would get the papers for the following meeting normally on the Thursday before it. So I knew I had the weekend to read through it and, you know, edit draft reports ... the PPS role is, you know, more variable and less structured than the select committee (Interview M-22).

¹⁴ Examples of this: Interview M-05, Interview M-10, Interview M-17, Interview C-06, and Interview C-08 (see also: FWD 52.12.15 and FWD 52.12.15). Some also forgot who I was almost immediately after the interview took place (see FWD 53.12.5, FWD 56.13.24, and FWD 58.13.8).

This factor is often overlooked, yet arguably important because of the complexity of the role of being a representative and the many competing demands that MPs face. It gives MPs the opportunity to have a sense of focus and expertise that they would otherwise not have. Moreover, it is a way to overcome a loneliness that some MPs have noted in interviews (e.g. Interview M-10, Interview M-12; see also FWD 53.12.9, FWD 57.13.20, FWD 57.13.21). To put it into the language of Chapter 2, it is a way to 'willed ordinariness'. Whilst it could easily be argued that due to the time pressure, MPs would benefit from not attending committee meetings, most nonetheless believe that committee commitments actually help to manage their time better.

MPs face other dilemmas that could not be examined in detail here (including harassment by the public and security concerns (James, Farnham, et. al., 2016; James, Sukhwal, et. al., 2016), and, more generally, their demonisation by the media (Flinders, 2012b)). The four factors of time commitment, building expertise, multiple loyalties and willed ordinariness seek to show the fluidity of being a representative in the House of Commons. In making choices about these dilemmas, some committee members emphasise their constituency role, others are likely to adopt more specialist roles. The key point is that these are everyday or perennial dilemmas that affect MPs' choices about their role. Frequently, being an active member of a select committee is only one way to enact their scrutiny role, and in any case makes up only one element of the wider role in Parliament (no matter how central). The variable commitment by members means that MPs often rely on parliamentary staff for briefing material and other committee support.¹⁵ As Chapter 6 reveals, staff are all too aware of the competing demands on MPs' time, who consequently seek to support MPs as rigorously as possible (e.g. Interview S-04, Interview S-10). However, one of the consequences for the variance is that staff tend to focus more energy on their chair's priorities. Indeed, the chair's involvement in committee work is pervasive. They are, as the subsequent chapter will demonstrate, likely to prepare for every meeting and evidence session, which MPs – by and large – do not do (e.g. Interview C-08). That isn't to say that committee members play a lesser role on committees, but rather that they play a different role.

¹⁵ MPs, on the whole, do not employ staff to support their select committee (two exceptions: Interview M-08 and Interview M-20).

Concluding remarks

Being an MP is complex and contested, with no right answer. This is arguably linked to the idea, raised by others, that Parliament rarely acts as a collective entity (Power, 2007; Wright, 2004). One MP summarised the role through the metaphor of a jigsaw, worth quoting at length:

The role of a Member of Parliament is like a jigsaw. Okay? And there are many pieces of the jigsaw and ... now, is the [XX] Committee, is it the corner of the jigsaw? Is it the edge of the jigsaw? Is it the heart of the jigsaw? I don't know, because everything is jumbled up. ... They are pieces of the jigsaw, of the totality of being a Member of Parliament on a select committee, constituency MP, a parliamentarian, that ... the great joy of this job is that it's not a factory production line where 9 o'clock on Mondays is the same as 2 o'clock on Mondays is the same as 9 o'clock on Tuesday, et cetera, et cetera (Interview M-15, emphasis added).

This quote encapsulates many themes of this chapter. The chapter shows that being a Member of Parliament is an interpretive endeavour, and that their diverse individual beliefs push and pull committees in different directions. Crucially, select committees are not single-purpose institutional entities that allows the House of Commons to scrutinise the activities of the executive. The role of committees is far broader: they can act as rehearsal spaces for party politics in the main chamber; a tool to build expertise and learn about policy areas; as a mechanism to represent and serve the interests of constituents; a way by which MPs escape the tumult of adversarial politics; and, indeed, to scrutinise government policy and hold ministers to account. This chapter has focused precisely on this diversity, and in doing so indicated that *individual beliefs* of committee members matters to scrutiny. Furthermore, committee members do not just interpret their role in different ways but also enact or perform their role through everyday practices in select committees. Their performance styles are not fixed or total, but I would suggest that they are recurring and recognisable dispositions. The performer and the performance may differ from session to session (or from stage to stage), but the elements seem present frequently on many occasions in committee rooms. It is likely that MPs adapt performance styles and tailor them, perhaps even enmeshing different styles together.

MPs' everyday practices and individual beliefs are also shaped in response to dilemmas that they face in enacting their scrutiny roles. These tensions reveal issues regarding committee members' time commitments, professional development and skills, multiple (and sometimes dividing) lovalties, and a desire to tame their unstructured world through willed ordinariness. This has shown that, for some, the scrutiny role is the centre-piece for MPs' work in Parliament, yet for many others there are an abundance of other ways to piece together the role. This, then, opens further questions about select committees that go beyond this chapter, including the extent to which we can identify or generalise the findings presented here, or if there are other styles that deserve further attention. More generally, this chapter also questions what the current scholarship on Parliament might otherwise regard as an 'effective committee'. Clearly this must go beyond the policy impact because committees do not serve only as accountability mechanisms. This chapter contributes to the debate and literature in parliamentary studies through opening up new ways of thinking about select committees as sites of *performing* politics. This perspective is arguably not something that the current literature has often taken into account and therefore indicates a distinctive and original contribution to debates within and beyond parliamentary studies. This has been done by focusing on the individual beliefs of MPs, their everyday practices or performance styles, and how they negotiate dilemmas that they face in enacting their role. In arguing that MPs push and pull parliamentary scrutiny in a variety of different directions, it seems that other actors have to try to bring coherence to their performances. There is no single more important actor able to do this than the chair, and it is to this specific role that the thesis now turns.

Chapter 5: Chairs

lthough the last chapter has given a broad overview of how committee members interpret their role, it has only touched briefly on the importance of the role of the chairing MP, and it is to those parliamentary actors that our analysis shifts. The reputation of chairs of committees has noticeably changed over the course of the last five years (as this chapter will show). Increasingly, they are perceived to be carving out a distinctive role in parliamentary politics and, perhaps, in British politics more widely. However, despite high profile media performances and speeches, chairs have arguably remained somewhat understudied, with only anecdotal references to the importance of chairs in analyses of select committees in academic work (exceptions include Kelso, 2016; White, 2015b, 2015c). In an attempt to shed further light on chairs, this chapter asks how chairs interpret their role and what this means for everyday parliamentary scrutiny by select committees. The chapter is divided into three sections (summarised in Table 5.1). First, I explore the institutional and historical context, or *situated agency*, of chairs. Though this was partly covered in Chapter 1, here I focus specifically on the role of chair and how chairs themselves have assessed recent changes to their role (particularly since 2010). It reveals that chairs have a renewed sense of authority through the introduction of direct elections, which indicates that the belief in an alternative career in the House of Commons away from a traditional ministerial route has been strengthened and may be consolidated further over the course of the 2015 parliament. Second, I turn to the different ways by which chairs interpret their role on committees and, as a result, how they seek to enact or perform this scrutiny role (beliefs and practices). Here, I identify two

	Here, analysis begins by locating the role of chair in its historical and
Situated	institutional context, including the importance of direct election since
agency	2010 and how this has given chairs a renewed sense of authority and
	independence.
	In this second section, analytical focus shifts to how chairs interpret their
Beliefs and	role. This identifies a spectrum on which chairs are placed, with
practices	committee-orientated catalysts at one end and leadership-orientated
-	chieftains at the other end.
	This covers some of the key dilemmas that chairs face in enacting their
Negotiating	role. These dilemmas, including leading committees, developing norms
dilemmas	and values, and representing Parliament, dispose chairs to become
	catalysts or chieftains.
Summanı: In a	sum and achoing the previous chapter, these concepts show that committee

Table 5.1. Analysing committee chairs

Summary: In sum, and echoing the previous chapter, these concepts show that committee scrutiny depends not on committees' formal powers but also the everyday practices and interpretations of its members. This is especially pronounced for the chair of a committee, who will have to make choices about their committee or leadership orientation, their ability to develop performance teams or a group ethos, and their ability to represent Parliament in different ways. In order to fulfil their role, chairs often adopt either adopt the role of catalyst, which is more orientated towards the committee and its members, or the role of chieftain, in which the chair's strategic priorities prevail.

performance styles at opposing ends of a spectrum along which chairs enact their role. This introduces committee-orientated catalysts, on the one hand, and leadership-orientated chieftains, on the other. These two roles have become especially important because of the influence that chairs have over committee proceedings more generally. In order to understand these two roles, I examine (in the third section) how chairs negotiate their beliefs about their role with reference to *dilemmas* they face in enacting their role. Here, I focus on three particular challenges: (i) chairs' approaches to leading committees; (ii) their role in building norms and values or performance 'teams'; and (iii) the choices that chairs make to represent their committee beyond the committee corridor. In negotiating these three factors, chairs have to make choices about the kind of chair that they would like to be, which usually involves being pushed either towards a committee-orientated approach (catalysts) or a leadership-orientated approach (chieftains). In sum, this reveals that, just like committee members, chairs push and pull committees in different directions. However, and crucially, chairs have significantly more influence than committee members (as we will see below), and so how they push and pull matters for scrutiny processes as a whole.

5.1. Situating chairs: from selection to election

This first section echoes some issues raised in Chapter 1, but here, specifically, presents an opportunity to reflect on the historical development of the role or position of chair. In order to do this, this section is split into three further subsections: first, a brief overview of the development of committees with reference to chairs; second, a summary of the 2010 elections; and, third, an assessment of the changes introduced since 2010.

5.1.1. The introduction and development of committees

The system of committees introduced in 1979 was the culmination of debates throughout the 1960s and 1970s (and, indeed, longer into the past). One of the aims of creating the system of select committees was not only to enhance the scrutiny of government, but additionally to introduce a greater range of parliamentary roles in British politics and, ultimately, allow for alternative parliamentary careers to develop. The Procedure Committee's report of 1978, on which the current committee system is based, recommended:

Although it may be premature to regard select committees as providing an alternative 'career structure' for Members there are indications that some Members do regard select committee work in this light, and our structural proposals, if implemented, are likely to further that tendency. We regard this as wholly desirable, and believe that the work and responsibilities of select committees, and in particular of the chairmen [*sic*], should be recognised by the House. We recommend that consideration should be given to the payment of a modest additional salary to the chairmen of select committees, perhaps on the same level as the salaries of parliamentary undersecretaries in the Government... We believe that the extension of this principle to the chairmen of select committees would be both desirable for its own sake, and could also provide some element of a career opportunity in the House not wholly in the gift of party leaders (quoted in Maer *et. al.*, 2009).

Neither of the two proposals – an increased salary or an independent method of appointing chairs – were implemented the following year, which, though it made the introduction of committees more palatable to the government (arguably reinforcing a broader political tradition of executive dominance in British politics), meant that the incentives for an alternative career path were watered down. Though the system of committees was warmly received when it was introduced, some had reservations. For example, Nevil Johnson (1988, pp.181-2)

concluded that – though positive of the development of committee scrutiny overall – committees have not provided an alternative career structure for parliamentarians, and that chairs 'have not generally become dominating figures in Parliament, shadow ministers, or anything like that'. This may, in part, be due to the weakness in how chairs were selected. As Chapter 1 summarised, this was arranged through the whips, who were not afraid to remove critics from chairing committees (as happened, for example, when Conservative Party whips prohibited an MP from continuing to chair the Health Committee following the 1992 general election (Davies, 1992)).

Pressure to reform select committees increased after New Labour's election victory in 1997, and especially when backbench MPs believed whips were overreaching themselves (e.g. in 2001, whips were forced to reinstate two chairs after the House voted down proposals to reconvene committees without including two vocal critics of government (Kelso, 2003)). Eventually, one of the Procedure Committee's proposals from 1978 was introduced: an additional salary for chairs. These changes were agreed by the House in May 2002 and implemented in time for the 2003-04 session, which gave MPs an additional £12,500 for their work as chairs of committees (which increased annually in line with MPs' salaries), amounting to an increase of 20% in an MP's income. By 2015, a chair would receive £15,025 in addition to an MP's basic salary of £74,000 (Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, 2013, Annex B). This, in addition to other changes (introduction of core tasks and Liaison Committee evidence sessions with the prime minister, for example), arguably strengthened the select committee system (for a discussion, see Flinders, 2007). However, these changes were not universally welcomed by some MPs, including some chairs of committees. Gwyneth Dunwoody (chair of the Transport Committee between 1997 and 2008), for instance, feared that an increased salary would make chairships another 'office of patronage' given that whips still appointed committee members (HC Deb 14 May 2002, c662). This finally changed in 2010 following the introduction of the Wright reforms (see Chapter 1 for a summary and Russell (2011) for a discussion). These reforms introduced direct elections for select committee chairs by the whole House for the first time.

Committee	Name	Party	Gender	Age**	Election Year	Years of Service**	Cttee expertise in policy area?	Cttee expertise in different area?	Ministerial exp. in policy area?	Ministerial exp. in different area?	Previous career related expertise?	*Not MP for five years **At time of election as chair What happened in 2015?
Business, Innovation and Skills	Adrian Bailey	L	М	64	2000	10	~	~				Lost chair election
Communities and Local Government	Clive Betts	L	М	60	1992	18	~	~		~	~	Re-elected as chair
Culture, Media and Sport	John Whittingdale	С	Μ	50	1992	13	~	~	~	~		Became secretary of state
Defence (2010-14)	James Arbuthnot	С	Μ	57	1987	18	~	~	~	~		Stood down
Defence (2014-15)	Rory Stewart	С	Μ	41	2010	4	~	~			~	Became junior minister
Education	Graham Stuart	С	М	48	2005	5	~	~				Lost (different) chair election
Energy and Climate Change	Tim Yeo	С	М	65	1983	27	~		~	~		Deselected
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Anne McIntosh	С	F	60	1997	13	~		~	~		Deselected
Environmental Audit	Joan Walley	L	F	61	1987	23	~	~				Stood down
European Scrutiny Committee	William Cash	С	Μ	70	1984	26	~	~		~		Re-selected
Foreign Affairs	Richard Ottaway	С	Μ	64	1983*	23	~	~		~	~	Stood down
Health (2010-14)	Stephen Dorrell	С	Μ	58	1979	31		~	~	~		Stood down
Health (2014-15)	Sarah Wollaston	С	F	52	2010	4	~				~	Re-elected as chair
Home Affairs	Keith Vaz	L	Μ	54	1987	20	~	~		~		Re-elected as chair
International Development	Malcolm Bruce	LD	Μ	65	1983	22	~	~		~		Stood down
Justice	Alan Beith	LD	Μ	67	1973	37	~	~	~	~		Stood down
Northern Ireland Affairs	Laurence Robertson	С	М	52	1997	13		~	~	~		Re-elected as chair
Political and Constitutional Reform	Graham Allen	L	М	57	1987	23	~	~		~		Committee not re-constituted
Public Accounts	Margaret Hodge	L	М	65	1994	16				~		Chose not to run for chair
Public Administration	Bernard Jenkin	С	М	51	1992	18		~		~		Re-elected as chair
Science and Technology	Andrew Miller	L	М	61	1992	17	~	~				Stood down
Scottish Affairs	Ian Davidson	L	М	59	1992	18	~	~			~	Lost seat
Transport	Louise Ellman	L	F	64	1997	13	~					Re-elected as chair
Treasury	Andrew Tyrie	С	М	53	1997	13	~	~	~		~	Re-elected as chair
Welsh Affairs	David TC Davies	С	М	40	2005	5	~	~				Re-elected as chair
Work and Pensions	Anne Begg	L	F	54	1997	13	~	~				Lost seat

Table 5.2. Select committee chairs, 2010-15

5.1.2. Trends in electing chairs

The process of directly electing chairs in 2010 was conducted swiftly. Chairs were allocated to parties on 23 May 2010 (this allocation is informally decided by the usual channels but approved by the whole House (see HC SO No. 122B(2)-(5)), and nominations closed two weeks later, on o8 June. Voting took place the next day. This arguably limited the opportunities for debates between candidates or to conduct committee-specific hustings. The results were announced on 10 June (see Table 5.2). Of 23 positions, seven of these were uncontested.¹⁶ Propensity to stand for election may be reduced by an incumbency factor – of these seven cases, four were contested by a chair seeking re-election (just over half). Indeed, though this particular election was contested, one interviewee told me that he did not stand for election as chair of the Defence Committee because James Arbuthnot was 'entitled' to a second term and, 'I didn't feel it would be justified my opposing him' (Interview C-04). Elections in the 2015 parliament seem to reinforce this view, in which eight incumbents were seeking re-election for 12 unopposed posts (two thirds). In 2010, two incumbents faced challengers: James Arbuthnot for Defence (three challengers); and Keith Vaz for Home Affairs (one challenger). Both incumbents were reelected. In 2015, three incumbents faced challengers: Adrian Bailey for Business, Innovation and Skills (two challengers); Keith Vaz for Home Affairs (one challenger); and, Sarah Wollaston for Health (one challenger). In this case, Adrian Bailey lost to Iain Wright, while the others won re-election. In 2010, 56 candidates put themselves forward for 23 chairships (or 49 MPs for 16 contested posts), while 57 stood in 2015 for an equivalent number of chairships (or 47 MPs for 13 contested posts). In 2014, there were also two by-elections: for Defence, in which eight candidates stood; and for Health, in which five candidates stood. The election of chairs of committees in 2015 had a small change in that there was a week between the close of nominations and election day, which formalised a period in which candidates were able to gather support, campaign amongst their colleagues, and even circulate election literature. Though unsuccessful in

¹⁶ 24 chairs were elected on 10 June 2010 but, as pointed out in Chapter 3, the focus of this thesis excludes domestic and internal committees (thereby excluding the twenty-fourth chair elected, i.e. the chair of the Procedure Committee). The chair of the European Scrutiny Committee is not elected by the House, and the chair of the Liaison Committee is chosen after these elections take place.

his bid, Barry Gardiner's leaflet seems the most memorable, where he circulated tree leaves with 'Leave Environmental Audit For Barry Gardiner' written on them (other literature, written on standard paper, was distributed by Huw Irranca-Davies, Bob Neill and Phillip Lee). The UK Parliament website also published a statement for each candidate that sought a chairship (UK Parliament, 2015b). These trends in 2015 indicate that the system introduced in 2010 has been consolidated and is possibly becoming more established and sophisticated.¹⁷ The competition for positions also demonstrates that these are sought-after positons that increasingly carry respect and influence amongst MPs and possibly by the media (e.g. White, 2016). In order to assess this, it is worth reflecting on chairs' own assessments of directly electing chairs.

5.1.3. Assessing the impact of electing chairs

Every chair that I interviewed welcomed the Wright reforms, particularly with regards to their election. One interviewee, who had been chair of a departmental select committee both before and after the Wright reforms noted that it has *'raised the status of committees very significantly and given them more autonomy and independence'* (Interview C-01; see also Interview C-07). This was echoed by another chair, who described the change as *'huge'* (Interview C-04).¹⁸ Indeed, wider assessments by the Institute for Government (White, 2015c), the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (PCRC, 2013) and the Liaison Committee (Liaison Committee, 2012a) conclude that elections to committees have had an important impact in this respect. In particular, the election of chairs seems to have increased respect and prestige not only amongst fellow backbench MPs, but also among government ministers and, perhaps most importantly, outside Parliament through increased coverage of committees in the media (Dunleavy and Muir, 2013).¹⁹ The conception of greater independence, mixed with an electoral process that reaches all sides of the House, means that,

¹⁷ Most recently, there was a by-election for the chair of the Environmental Audit Committee after Irranca-Davies stepped down in January 2016. Four contenders put themselves forward, and Mary Creagh was elected to chair the committee the following month.

¹⁸ That said, another interviewee thought that 'huge' was a bit of an overstatement (Interview C-10).

¹⁹ Initially, I was of the view that elections gave committee chairs a sense of 'legitimacy', but this was rebuked by chairs themselves who said that they hoped they had been legitimate in their role before 2010, despite interference from whips (e.g. Interview C-05).

increasingly, chairs conceive of themselves as playing a 'House role'. One clerk noted:

The chair, if he's giving a talk to outside groups, will start with, "The big change in 2010 was: I am elected by the whole House, I represent he whole House...". They all do this (Interview S-03).

This was reinforced through interviews with chairs themselves. One chair:

I just get the sense that all of the elected committee chairs have been empowered by that [being elected]. That they feel they've got a House role. That they've been endorsed by people across the House, not just from their own side. And I think that's given us greater licence to speak up and out (Interview C-05).

It was echoed by another chair who said that being elected by peers means that it 'enhances their status in Parliament' (Interview C-07). A further chair noted that he is obliged to the House as a whole for his election, and not his committee, as he would have been previously. In his view, this has strengthened the leadership role of chairs *vis-à-vis* committee members (Interview C-04). Indeed, the election of chairs has arguably had an unforeseen effect on their relationships with MPs in that it has changed the lines of accountability. Chairs are now in theory, if not in practice, accountable to their committee colleagues in a different way because their source of legitimacy comes from the whole House, who will have campaigned on specific platforms and been elected before the rest of the membership is known. Even if a committee did not like its chair and sought to remove them through a vote of no confidence, this would arguably override the legitimacy of the House (though this has not been put to the test yet) (Interview S-05). This is a key difference to the old system of appointing the select committee membership, from which the chair is subsequently chosen. While this does not necessarily reduce the accountability of the chair to the committee, it does change its nature.²⁰ Ultimately, it means that committee chairs are more likely to be able to 'follow their own agenda without much reference back to the committee' (Interview S-04, FWD 36.9.9). This allows chairs to take the initiative, such as calling for evidence or inquiries without

²⁰ This is particularly the case for opposition chairs, who do not have a majority on their committee but who do have the endorsement of the House. The full effects of this deserves much further scholarly attention, but unfortunately reaches beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis.

necessarily getting approval from the committee. This has arguably been accentuated because, in 2010, the large turnover in MPs meant that there were far higher numbers of inexperienced members serving on committees. This is likely to have had an impact on the ability of chairs to lead committee proceedings, especially because committee members were also elected much later than chairs.

In one important respect with regards to chairs, however, the Wright Committee did not succeed in changing the balance of power: the allocation of chairs, which remains in the hands of party whips. A number of MPs pointed out that this is something that still needs to be addressed (e.g. Interview M-o2). One chair believed that if whips did not like someone's chairship of a particular committee, they could offer that committee to the opposing party (Interview C-o6). This horse-trading by the usual channels could have significant consequences. Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West (in South Wales), explained that this remaining power affected the chairship elections of the Welsh Affairs Committee, in which 32 of 40 Welsh representatives were denied the chance to lead the committee because it was allocated to the Conservative Party (Flynn, 2012, p.34). While interviewees gossiped about whips a little, ultimately none of us knew the secret of how whips allocated chairs or how to fairly resolve the issues (e.g. Interview S-09). This opens a question about the role of the whips more widely, and we can only say at this stage that the lid on the black box of the whips remains closed.

This section reveals that, since 1979, the role of chairs has changed. Over time, chairs have become more respected figures in the House of Commons. This was accentuated in the early 2000s through reforms to chairships and the role of committees more generally. However, the election of chairs in 2010 changed the dynamic and appeal of committees, who are now perceived as more independent from partisan influences than at any point in the past (though, clearly, the usual channels are still influential). This gives chairs, as an above interviewee put it, a greater licence to speak freely and adopt a wider '*House role*' to represent Parliament (an underlying theme for this chapter). This touches on how individual chairs interpret their role on select committees, to which discussion now turns.

5.2. How do chairs interpret their role?

As with ordinary committee members, a starting point in my interviews with chairs was to ask them to identify how they would interpret parliamentary scrutiny and why it was an important part of their role more generally as an MP. There is broad agreement by chairs across parties that effective scrutiny is important to ensure that governments are held to account and their policies made more robust. One chair noted that it was about making sure that 'the government is getting it right' by offering them information and evidence from a different perspective (Interview C-05). Another chair argued that 'the country is better governed if effective scrutiny takes place' (Interview C-01), echoing Robin Cook's comment in 2001 that 'good scrutiny makes for good government' (Modernisation Committee, 2001, para 2). Andrew Tyrie, chair of the Treasury Committee since 2010 (and Liaison Committee since 2015), calls it 'government by explanation' (Tyrie, 2011, 2015). These are widely shared and unsurprising beliefs and, in that sense, do not offer anything distinctively new to how we understand select committees. However, our knowledge beyond this, and understanding precisely how chairs contribute to sentiments of 'good' scrutiny, is less well known. This was a focus for both my interviews with chairs and my observations during fieldwork, and forms the central focus of this chapter. Before examining how chairs interpret and enact their role, it is worth briefly summarising why MPs chose to run for chair in the first place.

5.2.1. Becoming chair

Most chairs – similarly to many committee members (see Chapter 4) – were extremely interested in their policy area. This often sparked their involvement in select committee work. One chair, for instance, explained: *'I've always loved select committee work because I think you can really get your teeth into something*' (Interview C-05). Policy interest, and the added hope of making a policy difference, drove MPs to aim for a chairship. One chair commented that:

Well, I've been interested, obviously, in [XX] policy for the best part of a quarter of a century now, so ... I knew that in the parliament that was going to be elected in 2010, I wanted to be active outside the Commons as well as inside

it. So, I wasn't likely to be ... so I wasn't wanting to be a minister. But I wanted to play a part in policy development and the select committee chair provided an opportunity to do that (Interview C-10).

Another chair said:

As soon as I saw the Coalition chose not to go for [the committee], whoosh, I'm in and made it, nominated myself. There was no, you know, dream job for me. Thoroughly enjoyed it (Interview C-03).

Both quotes reveal not only the interest of the chair in a policy area, but also allude to the lingering effects of the usual channels in allocating chairs and the partisan nature of politics, which has prevented some MPs from becoming chairs earlier in their career. Two further chairs (one Labour and one Conservative) expressed this explicitly:

I've never really particularly been interested in being a minister and I, you know, as I said, I loved the select committee work and I've really enjoyed it and I had dropped a hint to the whips in previous parliaments and – because it was in the gift of the whips. So when it wasn't in the gift of the whips and even before the [general] election as I knew it was going to be elected, well, if I get through then that's what I want to do. And I was lucky enough to win. ... So, yeah, taken out of the hands of the whips, I suspect I might not have got it ... had it not been for the open election (Interview C-05).

MG: Do you think you would have become chair if the whips still had control of committees? I: No. MG: No, okay. That's interesting. I: I'm pretty well certain! [laughter] MG: Just thought I'd ask. I: Well, if I was the whips, I wouldn't have made me chair. ... More because they have their own, they might have done it for the fairest reasons, but more likely, they would have chosen someone who had served in shadow ministerial office and they felt, you know, deserved something ... (Interview C-06).

Taken together with the previous section, this indicates quite strongly that becoming a chair of a select committee can be a route to an alternative parliamentary career, something which only became possible because it was no longer determined by the usual channels (interviewees echoed this: Interview C-07, Interview C-06). Once elected as chair, MPs have the opportunity to fashion their role as they wish, which has a considerable impact on the committee's work as a whole.

Being chair has an impact on other parliamentary activity. Indeed, as earlier discussions about assessments of the Wright reforms and the motivations to become a chair have both shown, the role of chair has become increasingly representative and outward-facing. It has also increased the workload for chairs, who have fundamentally changed their parliamentary role. One high-profile chair remarked:

It's my role in Parliament. It's completely my role in Parliament. Sadly. I mean the thing I miss is I don't have time to spend in the chamber and where I would like (Interview C-08).

Another chair echoed that he spent far less time in the chamber because of the amount of work that chairs have to do (Interview C-03). A further chair put it like this:

Today I've had a select committee meeting. I've had lunch with [a] journalist talking about the select committee. I've got you talking about the select committee. I've got somebody coming in from a [charity] talking about the select committee, and I've got something else on, after that. I've got Liaison Committee, which I'm only on because I'm chair of the select committee (Interview C-05).

She accepted that this had an impact on her other roles: 'something's had to give and I don't do nearly as much in the constituency because I, you know, even at weekends I've got so much reading to do' (this was also echoed in Interview C-02). However, other chairs played down the extent to which the role of being chair had an impact on their constituency role. Some acknowledged that there has been an impact, but the trade-off has not been between their select committee and their constituency, but between the committee and other engagements in Westminster (such as speaking in debates, all-party parliamentary groups, etc.) (Interview C-09, Interview C-07). It may also be affected if the chair's seat is regarded as 'safe' or 'marginal' by their party. One chair, who did not believe that his constituency work was affected, said that: 'I work, pretty much, what most people would consider a normal working week on my [committee] role', and his other activities are on top of that (Interview C-06). This shows that even if chairs separate their activities or seek to balance them in some way, the effect is a greater commitment to a specific policy area (Interview C-07). It raises questions about the pressures that chairs, and MPs more generally, may have to overcome in order to be able to commit to their role (as discussed in Chapter 4). For one chair, this involved three breakfast meetings in a single week, for example (Interview C-05). That is not to suggest that chairs do not find their work rewarding. One chair, for example, remarked that her position is a privileged one, and that the most rewarding part of her job is being able to contribute to better policy-making in her field (Interview C-02).

As a consequence of the changing role of chair, there have been debates about committee resources. One chair said that, 'some additional resources are needed to assist chairs because the demands placed upon them now, because they are elected, are much, much greater' (Interview C-01). He went on to describe his outward-facing role and that the House of Commons Service is currently stretched in this area. This is a view that has been echoed by other interviewees, as well as the Liaison Committee more generally (Liaison Committee, 2012a). It indicates a wider shift in attitude and purpose of committees and their work. My committee's chair, for instance, has been frustrated through the lack of resources, and wished to see the role of the committee expand further to allow it to commission and undertake its own primary research, and possibly work more closely with think tanks and professional groups to undertake and commission more original research (FWD 21.5.8). Another clerk noted how his chair wanted to be able to consult a panel of experts on a range of issues relevant to his policy area (Interview S-03). The key point to take from this is that, for most MPs that take on this position, the role of chair encapsulates their wider role in Parliament. However, this still leaves us with questions as to how chairs interpret their role and what chairs actually do with their role.

5.2.2. Identifying performance styles: catalysts versus chieftains

With the exception of best practice guidelines published by the Liaison Committee (2012a, paras 94-100), there is no job specification for the role of chair, nor any written set of criteria that chairs should exhibit. This means that the position of chair is, at least in theory, very much open to interpretation for the office-holder. One chair explained that, as a result, he learnt about his role

by reflecting on how other chairs, including his predecessor, behaved. He saw what worked and what did not work for them, and changed his role accordingly (his comments were made after the audio recorder was turned off - comments noted in FWD 53.12.14). A committee member similarly noted that his chair had changed over time (becoming less dismissive and more respectful of parliamentary processes) (Interview M-08). This indicates that socialisation processes do play a role in how chairs (indeed, parliamentary actors more widely) interpret their role (Rush and Giddings, 2011). Similar to the previous chapter, I weave together individual beliefs and everyday practices to identify performance styles that chairs adopt. However, different to the previous chapter, I do not examine a number of discrete performance styles, but rather indicate that there is a spectrum along which chairs choose to sit, ranging from committeeorientated catalysts, on the one hand, and leadership-orientated chieftains, on the other. In this sub-section, I very briefly summarise the two ends of the spectrum. In the next section, I examine the consequences of adopting those roles in negotiating dilemmas.

Turning first to committee-orientated interpretations, one chair explained his role as a 'catalyst' (Interview C-10). By this, he meant that he was to act as a facilitator for discussions within the committee and to steer the committee to find cross-party agreement. This interpretation arguably maintains a traditional, committee-orientated view of the role of chair, in which they approach their role in tandem with the wider interests of the committee and make sure that other members of the committee play a key role in scrutinising the government. One chair, for instance, said that it is part of her role to 'spot the different skills that people have and allow them to flourish' (Interview C-05). Thus, chairs lead inquiries by allowing committee members to develop lines of questioning and fostering a group ethos throughout agenda-setting, evidence-gathering and report-writing stages of inquiries. This gives committee members a sense of ownership over the committee's agenda. This type of performance style was arguably often adopted by the chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, Adrian Bailey; Work and Pensions Committee, Dame Anne Begg; and Health Committee, Stephen Dorrell.

On the other side of the spectrum, other chairs adopt a more leadership-focused approach to their role, such as this one:

I see myself as in a guardianship role on behalf of the committee as a whole and on behalf of Parliament, and it's very important that what I do is on behalf of the whole committee and on behalf of Parliament and can be, and I'm accountable to them. Within that, however, it's, there is a strong leadership role to be a source of ideas and to stimulate thinking about what the committee's programme should be ... And within that framework, it is occasionally right for the select committee chairman [sic] to use that position to say, you know, to ... raise the profile of a particular issue or events as part of the accountability process (Interview C-04).

These are – to caricature – select committee *chieftains*, in that they believe more strongly in their own strategic priorities, as the above quote seeks to illustrate. A strong leadership-orientated chair does not necessarily lead to a less inclusive committee or more divisions over committee reports. This was noticeable on the committee for which I worked, for example, where the chair and some members – who had very particular and fundamental disagreements – were able to carry on working with one another (humour acted as an important social lubricant), even though the chair often exhibited a chieftain performance style. Chieftains are more likely to be interested in setting their committee reports. Contra catalysts, chieftains do not give committee members ownership over the committee, but *input* to the committee agenda. This type of performance was arguably often adopted by the chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Keith Vaz; Public Administration Select Committee, Bernard Jenkin; and Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Graham Allen.

These two performance styles – catalyst and chieftain – are not fixed, monolithic or even ideal-types. Given that each chair has their own individual beliefs and ways of working, it is impossible to reduce all 24 to these two overarching choices. Most chairs probably exhibit a range of qualities among both types of chair. The distinction between catalysts and chieftains serves as a crude, heuristic device in order to render explicit some of the ways in which chairs can interpret their role along a broader spectrum. They may do so for the duration of a parliament, or chairs may operate as a chieftain in relation to one inquiry but as a catalyst in relation to a different inquiry. Neither choice is right or wrong,

	Catalysts	Chieftains			
Leading inquiries	Ideas about inquiries nestled within an agenda that is more likely to be driven by MPs	Strong ideas about inquiries and is likely to fit MPs' views within strategic priorities of chair			
	More likely to allow Members to develop lines of questioning	More likely to be interested in leading questions put to witnesses			
	More likely to foster cross-party consensus throughout all stages of an inquiry	More likely to seek trade-offs within and between inquiries to ensure consensus			
Norms and values	Committee-orientated view	Leadership-orientated view			
Representing Parliament	More likely to seek to develop the policy-influencing role of the committee	More likely to seek to develop the media-influencing role of the committee			
Possible examples	Adrian Bailey (BIS), Anne Begg (WPC), Stephen Dorrell (Health)	Keith Vaz (HAC), Bernard Jenkin (PASC), Graham Allen (PCRC)			

Table 5.3. Catalysts and chieftains

though they may lead to a different focus of scrutiny, and will make an impact in agenda-setting, evidence-gathering and report-writing. This reinforces the central argument of this thesis that scrutiny is fragile and dependent on everyday behaviour of MPs and other parliamentary actors. It also indicates that chairs face a number of choices in enacting their role. We can think of these as a distinct set of dilemmas that chairs face, which goes beyond those that were covered in Chapter 4. These are summarised in Table 5.3. It is worth examining these in detail because it is in adjudicating or negotiating these dilemmas that chairs shape their approach to the role.

5.3. Negotiating dilemmas

The previous section alluded to a tension between adopting a leadership role versus promoting the interests of individual MPs on their respective committee. These choices are perennial dilemmas that chairs face when they interpret and enact their scrutiny role. Here, I consider three dilemmas. First, the extent of involvement in leading inquiries, whilst simultaneously allowing individual committee members to flourish. Committee inquiries form the bulk of a committee's day-to-day work (what one clerk called *'the bread and butter'* of

committees (FWD 45.10.3)). Second, the role of chair in setting the tone of a committee as either committee- or leadership-orientated. This feeds into questions over a committee to be able to develop a performance team (covered in detail in Chapter 7). And third, looking beyond the committee corridor, the level of attention paid to either the media or the policy network within which committees are situated. These aspects of the role, when taken together, give us a clear picture of what chairs do on an everyday basis, and crucially the dilemmas they face in enacting those interpretations. Each of these tensions do not represent direct or exclusive choices, in that chairs will attempt to overcome each tension through a combination of leadership and inclusivity (a sense of inclusive or broad-tent leadership). But everyday behaviour can be telling in that, ultimately, they still have to make choices about the types of inquiry that a committee pursues, the way that questions are allocated before evidence sessions, and the nature of the committee ethos fostered over five years. In negotiating these dilemmas, chairs develop dispositions about the kind of performance style on which they come to rely in future (though this possibly depends on political issues of the day, the standing of the committee generally, or the focus and topic of the inquiry). This indicates, then, that responses to these dilemmas are fundamental to understanding how MPs interpret their role as either a catalyst or a chieftain.

5.3.1. Leading inquiries

Discussions with interviewees, observations from fieldwork and analysis above show that the chair is key in forming and promoting the agenda of the committee's work and the wider policy area. There are three specific ways in which chairs have a role to play when it comes to undertaking committee inquiries.

First, chairs play a key role in deciding the focus of inquiries. Few chairs would admit that they are overly controlling or dominating in terms of setting the agenda (knowingly or unknowingly) but, and perhaps unavoidably, most chairs were clearly leading committees in one way or another. Chairs are in daily contact with the policy area associated with their role, which means that they are more likely to be knowledgeable about their policy area and are instinctively able to see the strategic and political implications of the key issues within it. While committee members have specific interests that they wish to pursue (especially given the variety of performance styles that they have), chairs keep an eve on the overall picture. For example, the weekly agenda for committee meetings will be drafted by clerks in consultation with the chair (and only minimal involvement from MPs). On my committee, it was not uncommon for staff to ask the chair about his aims and objectives for a particular inquiry in a more informal setting, before asking the committee more widely at a formal meeting (FWD 2.1.16). As one clerk put it, while MPs can dip in and out of committee work depending on their interests, 'it's only the chair that is interested in everything we do' (Interview S-02; see also Interview S-05). This is reinforced through frequent contact between the chair and committee staff. While only some will meet weekly to discuss the agenda or more widely the committee's work, almost every chair and clerk explained that email or telephone contact with their counterpart is daily (e.g. Interview S-11, FWD 6.2.23, FWD 12.3.7). In any case, discussions are not limited to specific inquiries, but can also include - to give examples from my fieldwork – briefing over how to handle certain witnesses (FWD 54.12.7), a Freedom of Information request (FWD 39.9.15), and potential committee visits and their remit (FWD 9.3.10). These are small, quotidian examples, but they are important because such everyday meetings demonstrate that, first, chairs become immersed in their work and, second, that clerks' first port of call regarding work is the chair (see next chapter for more on the role of staff) and therefore a key gatekeeper. The extent to which the chair is seen to dominate an inquiry programme varies greatly and depends on the chair's interpretation as a catalyst or chieftain. While a catalyst is likely to seek a wide discussion about possible inquiries, chieftains are likely to, at best, place members' ideas in wider context of the chair's priorities or, at worst, drop the idea unceremoniously (FWD 10.3.9).

A second element of the chair's role with regards to inquiries is their role in conducting meetings and leading evidence sessions, which are possibly most visibly associated not only with chairs but a committee's work more widely. Chairs will frame oral evidence sessions in a particular way in order to place the event in a larger context of the inquiry. During this 'back stage' planning period, usually in the form of a private meeting of the committee before a public

evidence session, the chair will establish the strategic priorities for the committee. For example, I observed my chair begin by saying, 'What I want to establish from these witnesses...' (or variations thereupon) on frequent occasions (e.g. FWD 19.5.20, FWD 42.10.6). Additionally, the chair will allocate themes for questioning. Based on observations from the 2010 parliament (and followed-up in interviews), chairs do this in one of at least three ways. In some committees, questions are distributed according to themes, with one or two MPs leading on these. In others, the chair allocates a certain amount of time to individuals to allow committee members to pursue lines of questioning. And finally, in a minority of other cases, the chair does not allocate questions and members can freely 'jump in'. In all three cases, the aim is to allow both chair and individual members to pursue issues that interest them while also robustly scrutinising the witnesses in front of them in line with the committee's inquiry. Irrespective of how this happens, the chair plays a vital role in managing the process and is therefore more prepared than individual members. One chair explained: 'I prepare for every hearing. They [committee members] prepare for some. I get my brain round everything just in case because I feel as chair I've *got to*' (Interview C-08). This indicates the strong position of the chair *vis-à-vis* members. In one committee meeting I observed, the chair allocated themes for questions and added, 'I can just chip in and do whatever ... 'cos I'm chairman', followed by a light chuckle from another member. It was a joke, but more than a hint of truth lay behind it (FWD 10.3.15). Chairs frequently get involved and ask follow-up questions, in part because members' skill in questioning (or even paying attention) cannot always be guaranteed (FWD 2.1.14, FWD 46.1.19, FWD 58.13.17). One clerk explained that occasionally an MP may ask a question with an interesting reply or an evasive answer from a witness, but will do nothing to follow things up. This raises a dilemma for chairs because, if the chair intervenes too often, this could consequently alienate members, who are seen to be undermined (Interview S-03). Once again, this depends on the role interpretation from chairs as either catalysts or chieftains.

A third and final element in leading inquiries involves bringing the evidence together and building cross-party support for the inquiry's conclusions (this topic is considered in detail in Chapter 7). A number of interviewees have pointed out that split reports have far less impact or resonance with the House of Commons (e.g. Interview S-03). One chair pointed out:

The ... added value of a select committee, really, is its cross-party nature. And so, there's not much point in seeking to align a committee for a point of view that leads to a split or an argument within the committee. The whole point of being chair of a committee is to try to ... steer the committee in a way that you as chair think is right but reflects a cross-party view within the committee (Interview C-10).

This indicates, once again, the balancing role of chair, who will have to both attempt to promote the values of the chair but also to do it in such a way as to ensure cross-party support. There are three specific phases over the course of an inquiry during which a chair can make a choice as to whether they wish to adopt a catalyst or chieftain role. First, chairs are influential in setting the agenda and focus of an inquiry (and, indeed, through deciding which inquiries to hold (or not hold) in the first place). They can choose to either include committee members in this process and give them *ownership* over the agenda (catalysts), or reflect the strategic priorities of chairs themselves and give committee members *input* into the agenda (chieftains). Second, during evidence-gathering, chairs can choose how to enact a scrutiny performance as one where members are proactively involved (catalysts) or, as one committee member put it, the chair is 'the star with a few supporters' (Interview M-06) (chieftains). Third, chairs are crucial to develop consensus on committees, and, once again, chairs may choose to build consensus over the course of an inquiry (catalysts) or compromise towards the end to ensure a unanimous report (chieftains). These three phases are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. This dilemma of leading an inquiry is in part shaped by wider committee norms and values that emerge over time, or the sense of a group ethos or performance team that the committee is able to establish. This leads us to consider the next dilemma.

5.3.2. Developing norms and values

Most interviewees agreed that the chair's individual approach to committee work is a crucial ingredient to setting the tone of a committee, as these two quotes show: *I think the ethos kind of reflects, you know, the ethos of these committees kind of reflects now, for better or for worse, it reflects the chair's method of working* (Interview S-04).

I think the chair sets the tone and that's true of most committees (Interview S-11).

One MP who has served on the same select committee for three parliaments noted the wide-ranging impact of chairs:

Well, [DB72] as chair was a very aggressive, theatrical person and we ended up, I think, choosing more controversial areas because [DB72] liked controversy. Whereas [NU52] is a kind of technocrat. ... She'd hate me for saying that because that's unfair, but there isn't, if you wanted to separate out why they were different, that would be ... So it, that's what's difficult to convey, really, about committees (Interview M-21).

This quote makes three important points: first, it links the chair's approach and style to the priorities of a committee's inquiries; second, it illustrates that the style and tone of committees is shaped by chairs; and, third, these styles cannot be easily pinned down, in part because each chair develops their own particular way of working that makes generalisation difficult. Chairs are particularly important in developing these styles or ways of working because they are the most permanent actor on a select committee. While chairs are usually in post for the duration of a parliament, or up to two parliaments if they are re-elected for a second term, staff move to different positions more often for career development reasons. Similarly, members' commitment to their committees can vary (as Chapter 4 indicated). The general stability of the chair thereby means their particular style of working is most likely to become instilled over time through the committee's everyday behaviour and forms the biggest influence in sustaining a committee tradition (see Chapter 7). This is important here because it suggests that the choice made by the chair to adopt either a catalyst position or chieftain perspective is significant.

While the approach taken by the chair will have wide-ranging impacts for the rest of the committee, they also remain a single MP amongst usually ten further colleagues and six members of staff. Relationships between MPs, staff and chair are an important aspect to understanding a committee ethos or practice. Some committees have adopted or elected a vice chair, usually a senior or respected

backbencher of the opposing party to the chair, to help build cross-party support. However, interviewees regarded the effectiveness of committee relationships as the chair's responsibility (e.g. Interview M-16). Indeed, when I asked one chair to interpret her role, this is one of the first things she mentioned:

[Being chair] means taking a leadership role in respect of committee members and for me that means helping to actually build an inclusive committee, one where we look at things in an informed, non-tribal basis, where every member's able to be, or feel fully part of the scrutiny process that we're doing (Interview C-02).

Another chair explained that relationships matter because this will enable the committee to *'hunt as a pack'*, and therefore strengthen the ability of the committee to scrutinise government (Interview C-05). These sentiments are widely shared among chairs. However, the extent to which chairs are able to foster this depends in some part on the performance style that chairs wish to adopt. On my committee, this has occasionally caused a clash between the chair – in chieftain mode – and committee members, particularly ones that adopted a lone wolf performance during questioning (e.g. FWD 15.4.1, FWD 16.4.28).

The significant point to take from this discussion is that select committees are strongly influenced by personalities, and this often throws up a dilemma for chairs in how they enact their role and, more widely, how to undertake scrutiny. This is arguably not acknowledged in academic research very often, as Chapter 1 has identified. Committees are shaped by the personal approach of each chair and the relationship that they have with their members. With scrutiny of government dependent on this factor, it indicates that there is potential for volatility in the effectiveness of scrutiny and undertaking inquiries. The extent to which this is overcome, and an effective committee performance team is established, depends in part on the chair's role as either catalyst or chieftain and what they perceive to be an effective committee team (I also examine norms and values more closely in Chapter 7).

5.2.3. Representing Parliament

The previous two sub-sections have revealed that the chair is a crucial and pervasive actor in select committee inquiries and, indeed, developing the wider

committee approach to scrutiny. However, the breadth and depth of the knowledge that most chairs gain as a result of their daily and often intense involvement in their policy area, as well as the unique position of influence that they find themselves (in terms of access to ministers, civil servants and policy advocates), means that chairs are increasingly in demand beyond the committee corridor, by stakeholders, professional groups and the media. One chair named this the 'representative role', in which he has 'a relentless round of meetings' with charities, trade unions, relevant consumer groups, and associated arm'slength bodies, as well as a perceived duty to attend public engagement events and conferences (Interview C-06). Another chair: 'what I discovered when I became chair is, everybody and their dog wants to meet you. So every organisation that's within your sphere of influence' (Interview C-05). This was similarly noticeable during my fieldwork, in which my chair was constantly in touch with other interested bodies to discuss issues relevant to the committee whether this was in terms of advice to stakeholders (FWD 9.3.10), writing an essay to a think tank (FWD 16.4.13), or commenting on a report published by an executive agency (FWD 11.3.10). This can create a dilemma because chairs are faced with two choices: adopting a media focus or a policy focus.

In terms of a media role, one chair noted that: 'in the eyes of the media, you're ... a media expert and go-to person of everything that happens in this area' (Interview C-09). Chairs are usually in control of press notices or press releases, allowing them to stamp their perspective on an issue within the committee's remit. Whilst some MPs have voiced their discontent over this (Interview M-02), other interviewees have pointed out the difficulties in trying to manage a media strategy by committee (Interview S-05). This is becoming increasingly important because of the growing demand placed on chairs to respond quickly to issues as they arise on a more frequent basis (e.g. Interview C-03). Particularly since 2010, journalists have taken a greater interest in the work of select committees, as Patrick Dunleavy and Dominic Muir (2013) have pointed out in their research (see also Kubala, 2011). Hannah White (2015b, pp.14-22), in her study of select committees, points towards the chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Keith Vaz, as an example of a committee focused more on the media (with the chair playing a vocal role). In part, MPs believed that government would not be influenced by the committee's work unless pressure was exerted by media coverage, but in part

it was also about maximising media coverage so that the public are aware of the committee's activities. Whilst not every committee adopted such a strategy between 2010 and 2015 (at least not explicitly), the importance of a media role cannot be understated and seems to be changing the focus of attention for some committees since their independence has been strengthened in 2010. Indeed, it is part of received wisdom that greater media coverage is axiomatically a good thing to ensure that a committee has influence on the policy process (and deserves further scholarly attention).

However, and by contrast, the representative role can be thought of in a different way, namely through building and maintaining policy connections that situate the committee in a wider policy network. One MP commented in my interview that his chair had an extensive and 'excellent network' in the relevant policy area, which allowed the committee to undertake more high-profile evidence sessions with witnesses that would otherwise have been difficult to persuade to appear in front of the select committee (Interview M-11). In this way, the activity of the chair in relation to the policy network in which they find themselves plays an important role in inquiries, which may have an effect on who gives evidence to a committee (both in written submissions and oral evidence) (see Chapter 8), who might assist the committee as a specialist adviser, or, indeed, who might read the final report. One committee member noted that this approach is equally effective (if not more so) than a media-focused role (Interview M-01) in ensuring that a committee has influence with key stakeholders. The contrast between the two approaches is not clear-cut. For example, some chieftains (such as Andrew Tyrie) adopt that role precisely because of their knowledge and involvement with a policy network. However, there does seem to be a link because media-focused chairs (such as Margaret Hodge or Keith Vaz) are, according to clerks, making it more difficult for some committees to persuade policy experts to give oral evidence (e.g. Interview S-04), or indeed to provide written evidence in some cases. This indicates that there may be a trade-off between a media-focused role and a policy-focused role.

These three dilemmas, once negotiated, indicate that chairs are pervasive actors in many processes of select committee work, but crucially also develop dispositions as to a committee-orientated approach or a leadership-orientated approach. Catalysts are more likely to lead committees by trying to involve the committee, fostering a group ethos, and making policy influence a priority; chieftains, meanwhile, are more interested in their strategic priorities as chairs, inculcate a more compromise-based ethos amongst members, and believe media influence to be more important.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has not been revolutionary in the sense that it has not made a comprehensive assessment of each chair and labelled them as a catalyst or a chieftain. Nor has it sought to demonstrate the chair's policy impact on the executive. Rather, this chapter has been more modest in identifying and giving a general overview of the role of chairs, using insights from fieldwork and interviews with just under half of select committee chairs. Looking at the issue through the prism of individual beliefs, everyday practices and dilemmas has been a useful analytical framework to gauge how chairs have interpreted the broad contours of their role and sought to react to a distinct set of problems and day-to-day issues that they face in enacting their role. The first section looked at the situated agency of chairs, and demonstrated that the idea of select committee services is increasingly viewed as an alternative career route in the House of Commons with growing prestige. The second section has focused on the *individual beliefs* of committee chairs to identify and summarise how these parliamentary actors interpret their role and seek to enact it. This indicated that there are a spectrum of roles, with two ends: on one side, catalysts, or committee-orientated chairs; on the other side, chieftains, or leadershiporientated chairs. This is not to argue that there are only two distinct types, but rather that there is a spectrum along which most chairs sit. This reinforces the view, set out in the previous chapter, that to be an MP is an interpretive endeavour, and that there is no single role that chairs can adopt when pursuing scrutiny through select committee work. The third and final section has shifted focus to how chairs enact those interpretations by looking at how they respond to *dilemmas*. These dilemmas, which included how to conduct inquiries, how to build effective performance teams or committee relationships, and how to enact the representative role, create dispositions that reinforce chairs as either adopting a more committee-orientated approach or a more leadershiporientated approach. As discussed in earlier chapters, this focus on dilemmas has been less to show the distinct effect of a dilemma on webs of beliefs over time, but rather to illustrate the perennial or continuous dilemmas that chairs face and how this affects their interpretations.

At its broadest level, this chapter has sought to open a debate about leadership in the House of Commons, generally, and select committees, specifically. This is important because the literature on select committees has generally not focused on the input side of committee work (but as noted, with notable exceptions). As such, this chapter been able to offer a novel way to conceive of chairs' roles in committees. That said, there are many further fruitful avenues of research that need to be explored. This includes the leadership skills of committee chairs, the extent of training that they receive, the policy impact of different interpretations of their role, an empirical analysis of where different chairs sit along the spectrum identified here, and so on. It is arguably difficult to pin down the role of chair specifically in this chapter and doctoral research project because they play such a significant role in many areas of scrutiny and therefore feature prominently in all chapters. Indeed, this wider and perhaps simplest of all conclusions indicates that the process of scrutiny is heavily influenced and perhaps even determined by the chair. This makes a significant and original contribution to the literature on select committees, and indicates that the role of chair is crucial to better understanding the policy impact of committees.

Scrutiny in the House depends on the chair in many respects. However, that is not to say that other actors do not have a role to play – as Chapter 4 clearly demonstrates. Indeed, another actor also deserves detailed attention: the role of staff to support committees.

Chapter 6: Staff

embers of staff in the House of Commons Service number approximately 2,000, who considerably outnumber the elected representatives that they exist to serve (House of Commons Commission, 2015).²¹ Of those, there are roughly 200 or so House staff in the Committee Office that provide permanent select committee support. Yet, our knowledge of their role in supporting Members of Parliament is remarkably thin (Rogers and Walters, 2015, pp.56-62, pp.318-19; Ryle, 1981). That is despite the fact that clerks play a crucial role in scrutiny of the House of Commons, who help to identify and invite witnesses for select committee inquiries, who are present at every evidence session to take notes and analyse information that the witnesses are giving committees, and who write briefing material and draft reports for members and chairs of committees. Thus, they deserve our attention, and so in this chapter I turn my attention to how they interpret their role and, in doing so, support elected representatives in scrutinising the executive. As with the previous two chapters, this analysis is borne out in three parts (summarised in Table 6.1). First, I situate select committee staff in their administrative setting or environment (i.e. the Committee Office). This reveals a sense of organisational complexity and a persistence of silos. This hints at some dilemmas that the organisation faces, which subsequent sections summarise in more detail. Second, I explore how staff interpret their role as clerks by turning to their individual beliefs and everyday practices. Unlike the previous two chapters, I do not identify more than one performance style. In part this is

²¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I use 'staff' and 'clerks' interchangeably.

Table 0.1. Marysing committee star		
	In the first section, committee staff are placed in their organisational	
Situated	context by briefly examining the landscape of the House of Commons	
agency	administration. This indicates organisational complexity and hints that	
	staff face a range of pressures.	
Beliefs and practices	Here, analysis focuses on how staff interpret their role. This identifies a predominant performance style of 'clerkliness', characterised by being hidden, unparalleled service and passionate impartiality.	
	This covers some of the key dilemmas that staff face in enacting their role.	
Negotiating	These dilemmas include the level of inquiry support that staff can give, the	
dilemmas	type of advice they can offer, and how to manage relationships between	
	Members.	
Summary: In sum, these concepts indicate that staff play a key role in supporting		
committees to develop effective scrutiny of the executive. Staff are more restricted in being		
able to perform their role in the sense that there is, arguably, less of a diversity in		

Table 6.1. Analysing committee staff

Summary: In sum, these concepts indicate that staff play a key role in supporting committees to develop effective scrutiny of the executive. Staff are more restricted in being able to perform their role in the sense that there is, arguably, less of a diversity in performance styles available to them. This chapter attempts to open the debate on staff by examining some of the things that staff do to support committee members and their chairs. This reveals that staff are faced with a perennial dilemma: supporting a specific group of MPs, on the one hand, while also supporting the institution of Parliament in broader terms, on the other.

because, whilst MPs have the freedom to interpret their role as they wish, clerks do not have similar levels of luxury. Though meanings may be contested, staff have stricter guidelines in terms of how they ought to behave and relate to elected representatives. This means that their performance styles are limited, and often interpreted within three predominant everyday practices in the House, including: (i) a sense of being hidden, (ii) a desire to offer unparalleled service to Parliament, and (iii) a commitment to passionate impartiality. These weave together what may be termed a performance style of 'clerkliness', which, though arguably ephemeral and difficult to pin down, explains the behaviour of staff in committees and their relationships to MPs.²² This then turns our attention to the third section, in which I examine how staff negotiate dilemmas in a wider context of serving committee members and chairs. This shows that clerks undertake the majority of inquiry work but, in doing so, they face a number of dilemmas in the sense that: first, staff resources are limited, so clerks cannot offer unlimited support; second, committee members and chairs want frank and candid advice, yet clerks have to act politically impartial; and third, staff seek to ensure that MPs build effective relationships with one another, but they are occasionally seen as 'the chair's creature', which creates a tension with members. These everyday dilemmas must be couched within a larger dilemma that staff

²² Staff may have more performance styles than this. However, and with regret, my original research project did not focus on an analysis of the diverse roles that staff play.

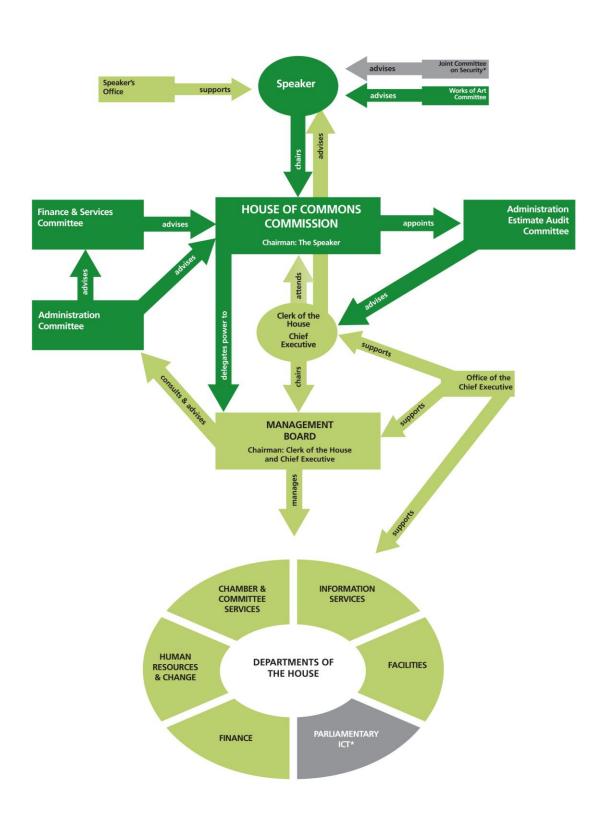
face, between serving a particular committee of MPs, on the one hand, whilst serving the institution of Parliament as a whole, on the other. In order to overcome this, clerks aim to act as amplifiers for MPs' interests and develop nuanced political antennae. Staff play a crucial role in committee scrutiny, which is not often acknowledged; this chapter seeks to acknowledge their contribution to scrutiny.

6.1. Situating staff: the House of Commons administration

Figure 6.1 (taken from the UK Parliament website) illustrates the complexity of the organisation in which staff and MPs operated during the 2010 parliament.²³ The House of Commons Commission is at the centre of the administration, responsible for the House's finances and its principal employer. It was established in 1978, following a review from the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir Edmund Compton, and a report from a committee of MPs under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Bottomley (Ryle, 1981, pp.508-9). The Commission a cross-party committee of MPs (including the Speaker, leader of the House, shadow leader of the House (or another MP appointed by the official opposition), and three backbench MPs). Though they are formally in control of the House of Commons Service, its delivery was delegated to a Management Board, which is made up of five heads of department and three external advisers. Though reforms have taken place since fieldwork was conducted, between 2010 and 2015 these departments included: the Department of Chamber and Committee Services (DCCS), Information Services, Facilities, Human Resources and Change, and Finance. The Committee Office lies within the DCCS, which 'provides secretariat, advice, research and administrative services for each of the House's Departmental Select Committees and most other Select Committees', as well as support for the House's governance bodies (including the Commission) (House of Commons Management Board, 2014). To fulfil those functions, small teams of parliamentary staff serve specific select committees (with some pooled resources through a Scrutiny Unit and a Web and Publications Unit). These staff teams

²³ This discussion refers to arrangements during the period of fieldwork, i.e. between 2010 and 2015. Since then, administrative reforms have been made which may affect the validity of this section in the post-2015 environment – but something which goes beyond this study. This section describes the House of Commons administration as accurate during fieldwork only.





usually include: a clerk of the committee, responsible for the committee overall; a second clerk, who will lead on some inquiries and provide support to the clerk of the committee; one or two committee specialists, who are usually subjectspecific experts with one- to two-year contracts (sometimes committees employ inquiry managers as well as or instead of specialists); one or two committee assistants to provide predominantly administrative support; and finally, a media officer, shared between usually three or four committees. This is a typical structure that can be found across most committees, though there are some variations. For example, the Justice Committee usually has one or more legal specialists, and the Treasury Committee has senior economists and a range of secondees from other economic or financial organisations (Tyrie, 2015). Additionally, committees can appoint specialist advisers from outside the House of Commons to provide expertise and advice to committees on an *ad hoc* basis.

Select committee teams are grouped together as part of 'colour groups' or units to coordinate and share practices between committees, which in turn are governed through the DCCS. Working for a particular select committee, however, can feel far removed from overarching governance structures (they made little impact to a lowly research assistant in any case). For example, though colour group meetings offer an opportunity for feedback through regular meetings and monthly summary reports, they have not broken down an impression amongst some staff that each committee is its own independent (and possibly remote) island, particularly because participation in these meetings is limited to first and second clerks. Consequently, each committee works in a perceptively siloed atmosphere. One interviewee lamented that committees 'don't really talk' (Interview S-02). A new member of staff was disappointed that she had not been introduced to staff in neighbouring offices, something with which I could identify over the course of fieldwork (FWD 41.10.4). The consequences of this 'siloed mentality' is that it can prevent the sharing of ideas, resources and expertise. One clerk acknowledged that there is a wide range of expertise in the Commons, and to draw on it for a particular inquiry, he sought the advice of the House of Commons Library, staff at the Science and Technology Committee, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and a number of others (Interview S-10). But creating a permanent network where these different elements work together on a more consistent basis has been difficult. There are a

range of reasons for this, but it brings out the importance of the pressures of everyday practices and the role of competing beliefs. First, staff face the issue of managing short time scales from week to week. For example, if committee members request an inquiry on Tuesday, they will expect briefings by the following week; but, to allow members to read these briefings in time, they must be completed well in advance of the next meeting. Consequently, clerks usually only have two to three days to research and write terms of reference or scoping notes (Interview S-10). Furthermore, each committee has their own 'circulation day' to which staff and committee members are committed, which arguably reinforces the focus on short-term deadlines. Staff need to be juggling diverse priorities all of the time, demonstrating the important role that the everyday plays in committee work. Second, staff need to adjudicate between competing beliefs and interpretations of scrutiny (as discussed in Chapter 4). All committees are run by their committee members, and particularly the chairing MP, which often means that there are not only 24 chairs with 24 different views on how to run their committee, but also a plethora of interpretations from serving committee members. One clerk argued that this diversity is a good thing because 'you want a thousand flowers to bloom', especially as the basic principles of the administrative system are the same for all committees (Interview S-09). Irrespective of the normative value of the diversity, it certainly has an effect in terms of the support that staff can offer because it, once again, indicates a need to juggle competing views. A third possible factor that has an effect on the environment of staff is a cultural legacy that one clerk described in the following way: 'there are people who are in senior management positions but they're not your boss, they're your colleague and you have a huge amount of autonomy to run your show the way that you want to run it' (Interview S-10), which he argues contributes to a 'leadership problem'. This implies that there is a dilemma that the Committee Office faces: how can the Office offer leadership to staff and expertise and support to members without damaging the autonomy of clerks or the principle that committees must be member-driven, especially in the context of growing demands for resources from MPs at a time of budget restraints? This is, arguably, an unresolved tension exacerbated not only by austerity, but also because of a wider agenda of managerial reform supported by the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow (illustrated most clearly by the 2014 disagreements to appoint a new Clerk of the House of Commons)

(Governance Committee, 2014). Though these issues are arguably far removed from select committee clerks and their everyday work, this tension or dilemma has a practical effect on clerks in that they have to negotiate similar tensions when advising chairs on procedure and when allocating team resources in their daily working environment. Additionally, it implies that traditional interpretations of the role of staff in the House of Commons are arguably being challenged, whilst also raising questions about the training and socialisation of staff (though these latter questions go goes beyond the purview of this chapter).²⁴

This section shows that the *situated agency* of clerks has a direct impact on their everyday work, and consequently on scrutiny. In drawing out this setting or environment in which staff work, it reinforces the role of ideas and beliefs at the micro-level of parliamentary scrutiny. In order to tease out some of the underlying issues mentioned above, the remainder of this chapter considers how staff interpret their role by looking at their *individual beliefs* and *performance styles* or practices (second section) and how they subsequently negotiate everyday *dilemmas* in enacting their role (third section).

6.2. How do staff interpret their role?

In a guide to MPs that serve on select committees, it is described that the clerk of a committee is 'to make committees as effective as they can be in performing the tasks given to committees by the House' (DCCS, 2015, p.3). Their responsibilities are summarised in the following way by DCCS: organise oral evidence sessions; provide briefing and suggested questions; issue calls for written evidence; draft final inquiry reports; draft amendments where desired; draft press notices; maintain the committee's webpages; and make travel and accommodation arrangements *(ibid.*, 2015, p.10). This is arguably only the tip of the iceberg as to what it means to be a clerk and how staff themselves interpret and highlight different aspects of their role. While in previous chapters it has been possible to

²⁴ As noted earlier, some changes have occurred since fieldwork has taken place. One specific example is the introduction of co-location or shared office space, which has arguably overcome some of the problems regarding committee silos and inter-institutional boundaries.

identify different performance styles that committee members or chairs adopt to enact their role, this does not quite work as well with regards to select committee staff (perhaps clerks more widely) because, though staff still interpret their role in different ways, clerks are arguably restricted in how they perform their role. This is because staff have been given a far clearer role specification than either committee members or committee chairs. So, unlike members and chairs, staff predominantly behave through the prism of a predominant performance style (in the singular), which pervades clerkly support to elected representatives. I tentatively term this 'clerkliness' as an overarching performance style, and it is made up of three aspects that are explored in turn: being hidden, unparalleled service, and passionate impartiality.

6.2.1. Being hidden

The guarded or cautious culture in the House of Commons administration was striking from the beginning of fieldwork and noticeable throughout my studies. This was made clear to me, as Chapter 3 indicated, by the careful type of access I was able to attain in undertaking research, and the cautious approach necessary to draw on my observations (both of which are fully justified). To work in Parliament, every member of staff must sign a confidentiality agreement, which immediately establishes the importance attached to privacy or confidentiality in the Palace of Westminster. It is perhaps for this reason that so little has been written about the administration of the House of Commons, as one respondent pointed out at the end of his interview with me:

I've always thought there's a lot of scope for people to look on the inside and try and think about what's going on. We obviously don't like to lift the lid very often, but you know ... the cat's out of the bag! (Interview S-05)

This refers to a wider tradition in the Committee Office of being hidden, something which others also implied. For instance, when I commented on the lack of research on staff in the House of Commons, one clerk replied that, *'that's as it should be. ... we're not the main show'*. He went on:

Even if we do the heavy lifting behind the scenes, there is that sense that this is a member-led endeavour, not one that is driven by the staff and so it's only right that when you ask that question, the staff are not visible. There'd be something wrong if we were visible (Interview S-10). All my interviewees demonstrated this commitment to hiddenness by the mere fact that they insisted (justifiably, of course) on anonymity in their interview responses. Almost all other informal conversations with clerks were off-therecord and not to be cited.

This culture is not something that is unique to Parliament's relationship to outsiders, but something that characterises everyday life for staff in the Palace of Westminster. With regards to clerks' relationship to MPs in committees, this manifests itself in a range of ways. The most discernible sign of their invisibility is physically in committee meetings. At this front stage performance of scrutiny, the leading clerk assigned to a particular inquiry will usually sit to the left of the chair in meetings in order to provide administrative support during private or public hearings. But other staff will sit at the side of the room, almost out of view. They are, literally, at the edges of a select committee performance. Additionally, clerks do not often have microphones in these large committee spaces, nor name cards to identify them (each MP has one for their seat). Though there are clear reasons for this when public sessions are underway (clerks are forbidden to speak), it is curious that in private meetings members can be heard through microphones, but clerks face a greater difficulty (FWD 38.9.12).

The most interesting facet of being hidden, however, is the way in which clerks enact their role to ensure that their own preconceptions or beliefs do not become visible. Some clerks in the Committee Office referred to this as their '*clerkly poker face*' (FWD 10.3.36). It is noticeable whenever a clerk is in the presence of an MP. In meetings with the chair, for instance, political assessments are often met with polite smiles or neutral looks (FWD 49.11.11). On one occasion, a clerk described to me how, after briefing a new member of a committee, she sat through the MP giving her political opinions on a range of matters about which the clerk couldn't do anything but nod politely (even though she privately agreed with a number of those assessments) (FWD 26.6.3). Clerks joked when they accidentally dropped their clerkly poker face (FWD 14.4.37), which often made me feel slightly guilty as I failed to do so on a regular basis (FWD 38.9.10). This does not mean, of course, that clerks are, therefore, some sort of empty vessels without their own assessments of situations. Their views are more frank 'back stage', in the privacy of the office. Indeed, this space is crucial. Staff are able to relieve their frustrations from a highly pressured and fast-paced working environment, whether this is a committee member not submitting amendments in advance of considering a draft report (FWD 2.1.29) or the chair asking for advice on matters that had nothing to do with the committee's remit (FWD 33.8.12) (to name just two examples). It is also a place where, as Erving Goffman (1990, pp.114-5) pointed out, performances are rehearsed. In the case of the office, this meant that weekly team meetings allowed clerks to touch base and discuss issues concerning the committee in frank and open terms. It would give clerks an opportunity to de-brief after an evidence session: What worked? What do committee members think? In what direction is an inquiry going? In this way, though committee offices are still a *stage*, they offer very different kinds of performance, in which clerks use their office as a setting in which to rehearse their roles and an opportunity to improve future evidence sessions.

The key point of this discussion is to demonstrate that there is a front stage and a back stage for clerks, as there is for other actors and, importantly, that clerks adopt a particular types of performance in different settings. This is characterised by a sense of ambiguity or secrecy through their clerkly poker face within a wider tradition of hiddenness. Being hidden is important for clerks because even a minor discrepancy in their performance, especially when in the company of MPs (but more generally on the front stage), could damage their equitable and impartial service that the House of Commons administration seeks to provide. Clerks rely on being trusted by MPs, and giving overt political opinions would otherwise damage their credibility. Thus, this facet of the clerkly tradition, and its enactment through everyday practices, is pivotal in order to explain how the scrutiny process in the House of Commons remains largely member-driven, despite the fact that there are opportunities for the process to become staff-driven (which does sometimes happen). They seek to offer unswerving support to committee members, to which we now turn.

6.2.2. Unparalleled service

After a particularly difficult day, where the chair had made a complete *volte face* over an inquiry, the clerk sighed and said: '*We live to serve*' (FWD 37.9.6). The

timetable needed to be redrawn, new witnesses potentially invited, and other work put on hold. That moment arguably encapsulates what it means to be a clerk in the House of Commons. To ensure that members remain in the driving seat of inquiries, clerks need to be willing to accept that they are at the mercy of their elected masters, who are prone to change their minds on a frequent basis. One clerk accepted that when MPs '*change their minds and muck about*', it is staff who will '*take some of the brunt if things go wrong*' (Interview S-03). Clerks have got used to volatile behaviour. For example, during another interview, a clerk noted that our meeting may be cut short because the chair had emailed earlier that day to request a meeting '*mid-morning*' (Interview S-07).

Clerks' working environments are unpredictable, yet they try to be as responsive to the wishes of their elected masters as they can. One MP called it a 'largely unspoken' symbiotic relationship, in that she felt clerks picked up the norms, values, ways of working, approaches and nuances of members without needing to be told about them (Interview M-23). In that sense, the support that clerks offer goes beyond administrative or procedural advice. It is about, 'making members feel like they're getting what they wanted and making them understand the services that are available to them and the value that we can add' (Interview S-10). I encountered many examples of this in my fieldwork observations, from administrative preferences (preparing written briefings and knowing which of their members wanted to use electronic versions (i.e. iPads) or which preferred paper copies) (FWD 21.5.35) to the way briefings and reports were written (on my committee, two MPs noted their dislike of Americanisms, and another hated adverbs) (FWD 51.12.13). One clerk, who recently moved from one committee to another, explained that she had to learn to write draft reports in the 'chair's voice':

I've got to get used to a new chair's voice ... you slip into their voice in a way. ... You know, that, it's not ... what you hear, it's just you are supposed to, you're writing a chair's draft, so you are supposed to write in their voice (Interview S-08).

This attentiveness to members is found in other examples: staff will note appearances of 'their' MPs on the floor of debates (FWD 58.13.17); they are there at committee sponsored debates, assiduously taking notes and helping the chair with their closing remarks (FWD 49.11.18, FWD 49.11.33); or they will watch 'their' Question Time to flag up any issues raised in the chamber that's relevant for the committee (FWD 11.3.6). Without such levels of commitment, the member-driven process in select committees would not be maintained. That said, one of the reasons that this symbiotic or largely unspoken relationship remains 'unspoken' has practical causes: there is simply a lack of contact with committee members, often due to their competing diary pressures (see Chapter 4). This is additionally compounded by the fact that membership of committees, and attendance at meetings, can be sporadic. Even though the role of chair is pivotal to ensure that the committee maintains strategic and stable in the face of these challenges, the role of staff in providing a sense of continuity and, consequently, an institutional memory cannot be understated.

This persistence of the public service ethos is illustrated in another way, namely through career development. Axiomatically, clerks wish to develop their own careers, but this is part of a wider tradition in which clerks frequently adapt to different subjects and build up a knowledge base fairly quickly (Interview S-07, Interview S-11). I noticed, for example, that clerks on my committee would specifically ask to write certain briefing material for members or lead certain inquiries in part to develop their own expertise or knowledge in a particular area (FWD 19.5.30). More generally staff commented that they enjoyed working on multiple work streams (FWD 24.6.21). Staff were regularly involved in other parts of the House of Commons Service, working for the Library, clerking Westminster Hall debates, or going on division duty (counting votes in the division lobbies when the House is sitting). Though all this is part of the job of clerk (indeed, a possible motivation to become a clerk in the first place), this needs to be placed in a wider context of administrative structures that emphasise a culture in which staff can turn their hand to different parts of the House of Commons Service to ensure a seamless service to Members. Through a policy of circulation, clerks shift in their job in order to understand and experience all aspects of their work in Parliament. As clerk of a committee, they would usually remain in post for up to five years. In this way, clerks become deep sources of an institutional memory of Parliament as a whole, sustaining many of its traditions. This is embedded further with a commitment to serve through things like a regular and voluntary 'Monday seminar', in which early career clerks get together to share best practices in handling certain types of events or situations,

find out about different topics (e.g., clerking at the Table Office or the effect of the Wright reforms), and test one another on their procedural knowledge (FWD 1.1.12, FWD 18.5.21, FWD 36.9.9, FWD 41.10.6). Some clerks also attend conferences and lectures (for example, the Study of Parliament Group is a joint academic-practitioner endeavour with an annual two day conference) to learn about their workplace, something which is arguably not generalisable to many other professions. Clerks aim to build a generalist knowledge of Parliament and serve in a variety of capacities. This is sustained by a belief in loyalty to the institution of Parliament. One member of staff, for example, commented that she could not work for the government or the state (i.e. as civil servant) because she loved the impartiality of her current job (FWD 33.8.9).

6.2.3. Passionate impartiality

The two sub-sections above are closely interwoven and may come into tension with one another, which arguably plays out in this third aspect of clerkliness. The Committee Office is committed to a passionate sense of impartiality (i.e. linking a sense of unparalleled service to being hidden), which is not about neutrality or indifference, but a conscious attempt to sustain the member-driven process (by acting, for example, as amplifiers for MPs' interests) and to ensure that parliamentary scrutiny of the executive is as effective as possible. For example, during my fieldwork one clerk was worried about the limited direction of an inquiry, but acknowledged that the chair is not concerned by this and therefore the inquiry must be made as effective as possible within the parameters that the chair had set (FWD 8.2.3). Amplifying MPs' work is not necessarily specific to select committee work: a clerk at the Table Office joked that supporting backbench MPs is the 'most entertaining bit' of being a clerk, especially if it causes a debate or discussion in the main chamber (FWD 1.1.18). This indicates that there is a wider sense of trying to create a level playing field. In interviews, clerks would appeal to a sense of fairness in adjudicating competing ideas and interests of members:

I think you've got to have a good sense of fairness between the different members, so that the minority get their say as well as the majority ... Judgement and balance. I mean you've got to be very, all fair to all sides and appear not to be too partisan (Interview S-09). There can be occasions when ... political inclinations of members of the committee can conflict with principles of trying to give everybody a fair hearing. ... and that can apply to all members of the committee across the political spectrum (Interview S-04).

This sense of fairness is very important for clerks because it helps to build cordial and effective working relationships to members (see Chapter 7). As noted in earlier chapters, during my fieldwork, one member would disagree with the chair on a frequent basis (often passionately). Usually disagreements were in private, but occasionally this would spill over into public evidence sessions, which worried clerks because it breached a 'fundamental principle' not to disagree in public. This had consequences for the committee's ability to work effectively, and clerks suggested that the chair work harder to rebuild bridges (FWD 14.4.7-14.4.10, FWD 16.4.5, FWD 2.1.16). It is important for clerks that MPs work well together because it helps to ensure that there is ample opportunity for consensus to develop, something that clerks believe is key to ensure that committees are effective in their scrutiny of government (e.g. Interview S-04, Interview S-05, Interview S-07). In that sense, clerks are not indifferent about what happens in Parliament; they are passionate defenders of the institution, and believe that they play a role in scrutinising the executive by offering equitable and fair service to all committee members irrespective of the political views that MPs wish to push forward. This point is crucial: staff retain the confidence and trust of elected Members through their impartial service and refusal to give overt political advice (a point to which we return in the next section). Clerks aim to build consensus on committees through ensuring a seamless service irrespective of political views (Chapter 7 covers committee relationships in more detail).

It is rare that the impartiality of clerks has been questioned in my interviews with MPs or during fieldwork. When it does happen, it is met with dismay on the part of clerks. On one occasion, for example, an MP was upset that his questions in a public evidence session were not publicised using the committee's Twitter account, while other MPs' questions had been explicitly referenced. The cause of this was that the MP had adopted a performance of scrutiny that resembled that of a constituency champion and party helper by asking explicitly party political questions that the clerk did not judge to be part of the committee's inquiry. However, the clerk was horrified when the MP believed that this was a concerted

Being hidden	Parliament remains a secretive place because staff are only able to carry out their role if they are trusted by Members. This means that staff adopt a clerkly poker face to hide their views and ensure impartial service.
Unparalleled service	The public service ethos amongst select committee staff is total and unswerving. Clerks are willing to go to great lengths to support Members in all sorts of ways, while also trying to constantly learn and improve their role.
Passionate impartiality	Clerks combine their impartiality with their public service ethos to promote a sense of passionate impartiality. Staff are not indifferent about their role, but passionate defenders of the institution of Parliament.

Table 6.2. Clerkliness

attempt to limit his contribution to the committee, leading to re-evaluation to the way that staff manage the committee's Twitter profile (FWD 47.11.12, FWD 47.11.21). This hints at some of the dilemmas staff face in enacting their role.

Being hidden, unparalleled service and passionate impartiality are crucial beliefs that inform clerks' behaviour and, when taken together, indicate the existence of a wider performance style of clerkliness within the Committee Office (summarised in Table 6.2). MPs need to be able to trust clerks to offer high quality and impartial support, which is only made possible through this approach of clerkliness. This matters because it indicates that staff and MPs, though they have similar aims in furthering the scrutiny capacity of Parliament, do so in contrasting ways. These point towards a tension that is at the heart of what it means to being a clerk. They are asked to passionately serve a committee whilst also, simultaneously, act impartially in accordance with parliamentary procedure to ensure service to the House of Commons overall. This tension is a recurring theme in this chapter, and it is played out in the Palace on a daily basis.

6.3. Negotiating dilemmas

When I asked one clerk what he considered his most important role, he said that this was '*nebulous*' but broadly identified it with '*meeting the requirements of the committee and balancing, keeping the members happy, doing what they want*' (Interview S-03). This immediately suggests a sense of flexibility for staff, but it also presents clerks with perennial dilemmas in ensuring effective scrutiny in the House of Commons because staff attempt to both serve an individual group of MPs as well as the institution of Parliament more generally. In order to demonstrate this, I examine three dilemmas that clerks negotiate in order to undertake their role: offering adequate inquiry support; giving committee members and chairs advice that is impartial; and, managing relationships between Members more generally.

6.3.1. Inquiry support

Clerks are arguably placed in a position of leadership because they are in charge of a small team of permanent staff to help support a select committee. Most interviewees acknowledged this. One clerk identified two key parts in his interpretation of his role:

I think ... managing the team is extremely important, and carrying out the wishes of the committee and trying to make sure that the briefing of the reports that are produced reflect their wishes is the second main part of the job (Interview S-04).

Another clerk believed the management role was as important, if not more so, than the advisory role (below) commonly associated with House of Commons staff:

I think it's essentially manager of the staff team and it's the primary, the official role is the primary procedural adviser to the committee but that, I think, understates it to a large extent. It's the manager of the team and the sort of prime interface between the team and the committee so the prime mediator between [what] the committee wants and the team is able to provide (Interview S-06).

He went on to say that this means managing the demands placed on the team, and the nature of their work.²⁵ This is important in order to manage expectations as to what the committee can and can't do, revealing a potentially difficult balancing act (Interview S-06). It means that responsibility for committee support rests with the clerk:

I was the, you know, ultimately, on the staff side, the buck stops with the clerk. ... Nothing should happen in the committee that the clerk isn't aware of,

²⁵ To give one minor example: over the course of fieldwork, clerks in my committee tried to encourage the pooling of our collective expertise by '*asking the room*' about problems/issues that we faced, instead of emailing one another. This will grow the institutional memory, and help to develop the knowledge of the group (FWD 24.6.16).

hasn't authorised in some way or isn't part of, even if you're not directly responsible for it. There should be nothing happening which you haven't had sight of or thought about or done yourself (Interview S-05).

For instance, over the course of my stay in Parliament, there was one occasion where briefing material in advance of an evidence session was labelled too sparse by the chair of my committee. It was the clerk that took responsibility, even though a different member of staff had written the brief; it was part of the clerk's role to make sure that everything was of a consistently high quality (FWD 47.11.20). This means that the clerk of a committee is often playing a 'quality assurance role' (Interview S-11). For example, the clerk would read briefing material and comment on the suggested lines for questioning, often with a view of cutting these down because otherwise, 'staff will want to bring everything in', which might affect committee members' ability to question (Interview S-03). This is a proactive attempt to make sure that the process of questioning remains member-driven, not staff-driven. On a daily basis, members of the team would discuss their progress with the clerk to make sure they were on track. Questions that began, 'Where are we with...?', or discussions that closed with, 'Going forward...', were pervasive in my office (FWD 18.5.6). These were important and useful tools to make sure that the unpredictability of the team's tasks were manageable, especially given the wide range of tasks that might be involved.

This management role has consequences for the committee's inquiries, as one clerk pointed out:

If we don't get things right at the beginning, if we don't identify what the key political choices that face the government are on any particular issue, we very often head off in the wrong direction and by the time you've taken the wrong oral evidence and asked the wrong questions, you can't get it back. So I think that provision of leadership to the team and helping to shape and helping to draw out of the team what the issues are and what the narrative around an inquiry is is really quite important (Interview S-10).

Of course, responsibility for inquiries rests with members that populate committees, not support staff. However, as detailed in previous chapters, the multiple pressures that MPs face on a daily basis means that they become somewhat reliant on staff to ensure that the specific details in scoping notes, witness lists and briefing material are appropriate for them. MPs need to place significant trust in clerks, which they can only do due to the good reputation of clerks (in part sustained by the performance style of clerkliness (see above)) (Interview S-06). Mistakes in briefings are rare, but when they do happen, MPs have called these 'absolutely unforgivable' (Interview M-23). Staff need to know the subject area incredibly well, but crucially, they also need to understand what it is that members want from their committee. This highlights a potential dilemma for staff in that they need to balance what a committee can and cannot do. In that sense, staff must have well-developed and highly nuanced political antennae to ensure that they can be responsive to the wishes of their political masters and set the right priorities. One clerk said that he is most likely to 'take on the more complex bits of work or the things that are politically more sensitive' (Interview S-05). Most MPs take briefing material seriously, and generally praise them, which is a testament to the high quality and general thoroughness of clerks. One MP said that he will always cover his section of the brief before 'doing my own thing' because 'clearly the clerks put a lot of effort into figuring out how we're going to get a report that covers the areas that are needed' (Interview M-17, echoed in Interview C-06). Clerks usually write the first draft of a report. They will need to consider the evidence brought before them, and additionally consider a possible way in which the report will get consensus amongst members. This, too, requires astute political antennae. As one MP noted:

I mean a good committee clerk will also understand the politics in the team and will, in the drafting of reports need to know what the committee is likely to find acceptable in a way that it's working and ... not seek to introduce elements in there which might upset the chair or might be okay to the chair but upset members and get them to turn on the chair. So a degree of political sensitivity is necessary (Interview C-09).

This discussion shows that clerks offer foundational support for select committees, and they themselves acknowledge that they do the vast majority of work. They provide MPs with oral and written briefings to allow elected representatives to fulfil their work as scrutinisers, act as access points to identify and invite witnesses to give evidence, and act as team leaders for inquiries. Though some may interpret a clerk's role in terms of gate-keeping or agendasetting, this would imply something too influential, and which most clerks would seek to prevent. Rather, clerks attempt to act as amplifiers for MPs' interests (even if they disagree with MPs' assessments). If clerks played a more leading or veto-playing role, it would be more likely that MPs would ignore briefing material in questioning witnesses and may not agree to a report or ask for significant re-drafting. In order to make these judgements, the individual beliefs of clerks are of paramount importance, as well as the specific situation they find themselves. This illustrates the dilemma between supporting committee members and their wishes, while also keeping an eye on the inquiry as a whole and, indeed, keeping in mind their service to the House as a whole. To manage this, clerks rely on their political antennae. These develop over time, and are played out in the type and extent of advice that clerks give to Members.

6.3.2. Advisory role of clerks

The clerk of a committee acts as its principal adviser on procedure, something which most clerks mentioned in their interpretation of the role either explicitly or implicitly. Clerks are generally not subject specialists (with some exceptions), but typically get appointed to committees for four to five years, though this ranges. This makes them generalists on subjects, but specialists in running committees; their advice predominantly focuses on procedural matters, or ostensibly more general matters of concern for the committee. This is not a criticism and, in any case, arguably important because it means that clerks are focused on ensuring that subject areas are clearly and effectively communicated to committee members and the chairs, who are also unlikely to be subjectspecialists. Nonetheless, one clerk noted: 'you can only do the job well if you get up to speed on the subject area very quickly' (Interview S-11). During my fieldwork, to take just a few examples, advice ranged from how to make a formal amendment in considering a draft report (FWD 53.12.5), to whether a secretary of state has behaved unconstitutionally (and what the committee could do as a result) (FWD 52.12.3), to discussing the central conclusion of an inquiry's report (FWD 49.11.11), and to making a point of order in the main chamber regarding the committee's work (FWD 19.5.30). This makes the advisory role quite broad and arguably difficult to pin down. As one clerk put it:

I will be the committee's chief adviser on what they could and couldn't do and what they should and shouldn't do. I was the chair's chief, sort of, go to person for anything that she wanted done (Interview S-05).

However, he also noted that he is not '*there just to facilitate any sort of conduct*', in the sense that there are rules of the House that should not be contravened. This demonstrates that there are limits to the advice that clerks are prepared to give, creating a '*tricky*' balancing act or dilemma. This tension is implicit in the following quote, where I asked a clerk to interpret his role:

The job of the clerks of all select committees is essentially similar. It is to try to carry out the wishes of the committee in terms of the work that it wants to undertake within the committee's terms of reference and in accordance with the procedures and practices of the House (Interview S-04, emphasis added).

I asked clerks if this consequently meant that they see themselves as stewards of a committee, rather than servants. Most clerks did not think so (e.g. Interview S-02). The quoted clerk, above, accepted this distinction *could* be made in the abstract, but did not believe it was applicable in practice:

We can think of ourselves, I suppose, as stewards of the continuing or Platonic ideal of each committee but in fact, in practice we are largely the servants of committees, of actual committees as they are operating on a day-to-day basis (Interview S-04).

Because of this, giving advice is far from easy, which is felt most acutely on an everyday level. On one occasion, this was borne out on my committee. It came in the form of social media (specifically Twitter). A committee member had tweeted that his committee would be agreeing a report later that day. Though seemingly harmless, the clerks alerted the chair that this disclosed private business, something that breached the principle that deliberations amongst committee members should remain private. When the chair brought up this contravention of parliamentary procedure at an otherwise uneventful committee meeting, the member in question refused to accept that he had breached procedure, looking directly at the clerk. Staff remained silent – it was not their place to confront or respond to the MP. The chair followed the MP's line of sight, and realised that the member was confronting the clerk, not the chair. At this point he intervened, saying that 'it is the duty of clerks to remind us of the rules' and that it is an 'absolute requirement' to follow them. The MP reneged, but noted that he would ask the Speaker to look into the matter (FWD 2.1.9). Later that day, at a staff meeting, clerks concluded that a guidance note about the use of Twitter was needed (FWD 2.1.19). This particular case demonstrates that the role of staff is

advisory only – they could not enforce the rule by reprimanding the committee member or imposing sanctions. They looked to the chair to speak to and deal with the matter; staff themselves did not get involved.²⁶ A wider observation is that, in committee meetings, clerks try not get involved when MPs are in discussion; they limit themselves to outlining possible options that the committee could (not *should*) follow in line with procedure (FWD 52.12.3). This reinforces the member-driven nature of the select committee system, and a conscious attempt by staff to limit their influence. In a similar vein, clerks rarely give political advice, unless it directly impacts on the work of the committee. On a few occasions, my chair would go on a tangent in a team meeting with staff to give his view of a political situation, possibly part of a sense-making process for him, but which was often met with a cautious response from staff who would direct him back to the agenda (FWD 49.11.11). Though just one example (of many more), this Twitter exchange also reveals the extent to which a tension between loyalty to the House and to MPs is played out in the everyday life of the House of Commons. In general, MPs accept that clerks' loyalty is to the House (e.g. Interview M-09). They also accept and follow their advice on most occasions, but this does not guarantee that they always will do so (Interview S-05). This creates a difficult balancing act for clerks, who need to act as a buckle between MPs' wishes, on the one hand, and parliamentary procedure, on the other.

Because of the effect of everyday events, one clerk found it difficult to summarise her role. She noted: '*A lot of the time it feels like I am dealing with stuff as it happens*', and went on to say that, '*there's an awful lot of spontaneous stuff that you can't plan for that seem to make up large chunks of your day*' (Interview S-07). This unpredictability manifests itself in many ways. The chair could ask for advice at a moment's notice, which consequently would require staff to drop everything else they had planned to get the advice to the chair in time (FWD 11.3.10). This feeds into a wider point about the unpredictability of the role of clerk and that staff are frequently at the mercy of their elected masters. This brings us to the relationship between clerks and MPs.

²⁶ Another factor, though beyond the remit of this chapter, is that there is a wider tension between new technology and the way that this affects Parliament, something which the Speaker of the House sought to investigate (see Digital Democracy Commission, 2015).

6.3.3. Managing relationships

It will have become clear by this point that disentangling the role of clerks and their everyday practices from their relationship to and demands placed on them by MPs is a difficult one.²⁷ As Chapter 5 sought to demonstrate, the tone of a committee is set by the chair, something with which most staff (and indeed committee members themselves) agreed. This indicates that the relationship between clerks and chairs is crucial, specific arrangements of which are defined by the chair. One clerk noted that he met with a chair every week without fail, irrespective of how long or short the agenda; but, when placed with another committee, the chair did not wish to meet with the clerk at all (the clerk had to guess what the chair wanted on the committee agenda) (Interview S-10). On my committee, we had meetings on a weekly basis. These meetings serve the important purpose of touching base and understanding the wishes of the chair. He would indicate these in general terms, and staff would go on to implement those where possible. It was not uncommon for the chair to close meetings by commenting things like, 'you've got the gist' (FWD 9.3.10), or, 'can you flesh out what we've discussed?' (FWD 16.4.18). This indicates that chairs often set out a general direction, and leave it to clerks to implement their wishes. This is a vital opportunity for clerks, who will be able to ask him about the direction of a report (FWD 34.8.7), the central themes that they noticed in the evidence hearings (FWD 39.9.3-39.9.17), or to give advice on handling certain witnesses (FWD 54.12.7). Even if clerks and chairs did not meet formally, all clerks I spoke to mentioned that they were in contact with the chair - through email, telephone calls or text messages - most days a week (including out-of-hours). This relationship matters, as one chair commented:

The ability of the clerks to develop a strong personable relationship with the chairman is absolutely vital. The relationship is so much more productive if it's enjoyable, open, trusting and, you know, a degree of full and free exchange of views and ideas about, without fear or favour (Interview C-04).

²⁷ There is a lot to be said about different the relationships between clerks and ministerial departments, different sections of the House of Commons Service, and between clerks and 'outside' actors (such as witnesses and specialist advisers). Though these will be discussed in a little more depth in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, far more empirical research is possible on this topic.

Generally, staff work towards the chair, reinforced by the increasingly proactive role that chairs play in committee work compared to members. Clerks commented that this has increased since the election of chairs in 2010 following the Wright reforms because of a rise in their confidence (FWD 6.2.19, FWD 36.9.9). Though this is arguably anecdotal evidence, this perception demonstrates the importance of beliefs in shaping clerks' relationship to MPs in Parliament, irrespective of quantitative evaluations of chairs' time commitments to their role (see also: Monk, 2010). One clerk noted:

Increasingly chairs are seen as people who comment on issues around the committees remit, not just on current inquiries and are often in demand to talk at conferences and do media appearances and things (Interview S-09).

In other words, the demand on the Committee Office and on clerks has grown. Clerks need to be on hand to support their chair with writing speeches and giving briefings to on topics in advance of not only committee activity, but of committee-*related* activity (Interview S-03). One chair expected staff to be available at all times (Interview C-09). Not only has this increased the demand of advice, but also affected the type of advice that they may, at times, be asked for. One clerk noted that his chair is keen on a panel of external advisers to which he could turn for policy advice (Interview S-03). This was echoed by chairs: one interviewee mentioned the need for an adviser for writing and reflecting on reports (Interview C-04); another that she needed a researcher to support her as chair but was '*peeved*' that this was not possible (Interview C-08).

Some clerks are worried about the consequent perception with their relationship to the other members, creating a dilemma. One clerk said that MPs, 'don't quite appreciate the role of the clerk and they see the clerk as maybe being the chair's creature' (Interview S-03). Clerks see themselves, something made very clear throughout interviews and fieldwork observations, as servants of the committee (and the House) as a whole. However, one clerk acknowledged that an equal level of service is not possible in practice: 'I'm working for them [committee members] as much as for the chair, in theory, but in practice that's not really how it works' (Interview S-07). Clerks mentioned in interviews that they would like to work more closely with members, but accepted that this was made difficult due to the competing demands on an MP's time (Interview S-10, Interview S-04). The level of contact and involvement between members and chairs is so different on an everyday level that there are only limited opportunities for a closer relationship to develop with members (Interview S-07). As demonstrated in previous chapters, a chair is involved in almost all aspects of their committee's work; a committee member is usually (though not always) interested in only specific inquiries or projects. That said, this tension or dilemma is rarely stress-tested because most MPs accept that chairs and clerks are likely to have a close working relationship (e.g. Interview M-17, Interview C-07).

This discussion has revealed that the typical role that staff play in supporting MPs goes far beyond the formal idea of providing procedural advice with which clerks are commonly associated. They play a key managerial role in order to sustain the work of a select committee and to push forward multiple inquiries; they are the bedrock for an inquiry's work. In order to make sure that staff perform this role effectively, they build a significant skill in identifying the needs and wishes of members. They develop political antennae, something which is crucial in an environment where MPs disagree with one another on a regular basis and often in fervent terms. Without these antennae, committee work would be impossible because members would not be able to carry out inquiry work or support an inquiry's conclusions. In other words, staff try to limit any staff-driven aspect of their work to keep scrutiny member-driven. Part of this requires staff to act as amplifiers for members' interests, which has been demonstrated above through scoping inquiries according to members' interests, identifying and inviting witnesses from which MPs want to hear, and drafting reports in a way that will build a sense of consensus. These are no easy tasks, and often throw up dilemmas for staff. This is something that this section has sought to explore by showing that inquiry support is often a balancing act between different committee interests; that giving advice to members requires political antennae, deftness and tact, as well as impartiality; and that ensuring effective working relationships between committee members, chairs and staff relies on being able to support members in a range of ways. These three dilemmas are ultimately part of a perennial issue that staff face over supporting an individual group of MPs whilst similarly offering service to the institution of Parliament as a whole. This leads us to a wider discussion about the role of staff in select committees.

Concluding remarks

Clerks are the hidden servants of scrutiny in the House of Commons; they exist to give unwavering support to select committees behind the scenes. The first section has, importantly, indicated the broad setting or situated agency in which clerks operate. This has revealed a shortcoming in that the House of Commons Service appears siloed by some staff and possibly without clear managerial leadership that would inculcate systematic and effective scrutiny envisaged by parliamentary reformers (though this deserves far more scholarly attention). The second section of this chapter explored how staff themselves interpret their role, and identified a performance style of clerkliness. This is made up of three facets: being hidden, unparalleled service and passionate impartiality. In doing so, this has indicated that there are a number of dilemmas that staff face, which were then explored in the third section. Staff exist both to serve Members of Parliament and to safeguard the reputation of the House of Commons by following parliamentary procedure. This dilemma is played out in the Palace of Westminster on a daily basis, in which staff have to use their beliefs and practices to adjudicate between service to a particular group of MPs and to the institution as a whole. Alongside formal roles that staff play, they also act as amplifiers for MPs' interests, develop astute political antennae, and manage relationships on committees to foster consensus.

This chapter has sought to open a perspective on scrutiny by a group of actors from which we know very little. In part, it is a testament of their success at 'being hidden' that ensured that staff are not centre-stage actors in scrutiny processes. And yet, this chapter has sought to indicate that we can learn a lot about scrutiny from understanding the role that staff play in that process because of the crucial things that they do as part of the scrutiny process in the House of Commons. In this sense, this chapter seeks to open a debate about the role of clerks in ensuring effective scrutiny and clearly, overall, this chapter indicates that clerks do play a pivotal role with which the literature on Parliament and parliamentary studies has arguably not engaged in great depth. However, it also reveals the complexity of developing systematic scrutiny in the House of Commons, which is affected by other actors in significant ways. As revealed in Chapter 4, MPs adopt a variety of roles, whose commitment to scrutiny is consequently unpredictable, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, it is chairs that bring coherent to this system by developing a role of catalyst or chieftain in scrutiny activity. This chapter brings Part II to a close by showing how committee staff supplement the work of elected representatives and the crucial role they play behind the scenes. To do so, each chapter has explored the three parliamentary actors in isolation from one another. It falls to Part III to shed light on how these three actors enable select committees to enact or perform their scrutiny role by looking in more detail at, first, how these actors create performance teams and work together to create consensual committee reports, second, how committee members, chairs and staff contribute to the evidence-gathering process before, finally, placing the findings from this thesis in their wider context of parliamentary studies.

Part III: Scrutiny Landscapes

I always say: never run away with the idea that the House of Commons is an organisation because it isn't. It's an organism and organisms are reactive, cussed, unpredictable.

- Sir Robert Rogers (now Lord Lisvane)²⁸

Having identified the beliefs that guide committee members, chairs and staff in their scrutiny activity, and located these in wider performance styles, this section of the analysis focuses more broadly on scrutiny practices to bring together aforementioned insights. To do so, the first chapter of Part III identifies the importance of the relationships between parliamentary actors and the wider 'webs' of scrutiny that emerge at the Palace of Westminster. The second chapter then covers a specific 'scene' or 'performance' of scrutiny, namely the evidence-gathering process. The final chapter – or 'curtain call' – summarises the insights gained from this research and places this thesis in the wider context of parliamentary studies.

²⁸ Quoted in Civil Service World (2015).

Chapter 7: Relationships

• arlier chapters have examined the importance of the contested nature of the term 'scrutiny' – a central thread of this PhD – by looking at how committee members, chairs and staff interpret this concept and how they enact their role associated with it. However, each of these chapters has looked at those interpretations in isolation from one another. Here, I build on preceding chapters by turning from individual interpretations of scrutiny to the way in which these affect the development of relationships within and between select committees to inform the wider scrutiny landscape and create what Goffman (1990, pp.83-108) referred to as 'performance teams' (see also Chapter 2). Relationships are fundamental to understanding scrutiny, if only to better appreciate how, in our adversarial system of politics where government and opposition offer diametrically contrasting world views, it is possible for select committees to write and agree consensual reports between backbench MPs of both sides of the House. In order to examine this issue, this chapter proceeds in three sections. First, at the *micro-level*, I examine why relationships matter to MPs and what factors affect their individual relationships. In simple terms, committee scrutiny cannot be undertaken in isolation, and requires members from across the party spectrum to work together. Relationships are affected by MPs' philosophical outlooks, their personalities, how they approach scrutiny, and through daily interactions (everyday practices). Second, I broaden out to the meso-level to explore how interactions between committee members instil committee norms and values (which I term committee traditions). This examines not the importance of individual beliefs and practices but the importance of individual beliefs in relation to others' beliefs and practices. This

focuses on the concept of performance teams, and considers how norms and values help committees create collective scrutiny performances and, in doing so, construct consensus over the course of an inquiry. Third, the chapter broadens out yet further to the macro-level, where I consider relationships between and beyond committees. Formally, relationships are institutionalised through the Liaison Committee, but informally there is both collaboration and competition that affects the wider scrutiny landscape. Indeed, these wider informal dynamics and everyday practices affect the ideal of systematic and coherent scrutiny in the House of Commons. This brings us to the central argument of this chapter: ultimately, the idea of systematic scrutiny depends on a fragile, though sometimes also very dense and effective, web of scrutiny in the House of Commons. As earlier chapters have demonstrated, each parliamentary actor, and therefore each committee, pushes and pulls scrutiny in different directions. So while the select committee system is placed on a formal footing through Standing Orders, much of their work depends on informal dynamics: how scrutiny is interpreted by committees, relationships between committee members, and committee 'customs and practices' or 'norms and values' (or, indeed, committee *traditions*). This creates a *web* of scrutiny, something which ties together many elements from previous empirical chapters on individual beliefs and everyday practices. To understand this better, it is worth starting at a more basic level by explaining the importance of relationships in the first place.

7.1. The importance of relationships: making scrutiny work

In this section, I begin with a discussion on why relationships matter, before then looking at how individual relationships are affected by MPs' approaches to scrutiny, their philosophical outlooks and personalities, and everyday interaction across the parliamentary estate.

7.1.1. Why do relationships matter?

As previous chapters have already indicated, interviewees believed that one of the real positives of select committee work is the ability to overcome partisan considerations to establish cross-party agreement on issues of policy concern. For example, one chair noted that the 'added value of a select committee, really, is its cross-party nature' (Interview C-10). A committee member, similarly, noted that without cross-party consensus, you 'create a potential for a partisan minority' and are consequently denied the label of 'the powerful all-party parliamentary ... select committee' (Interview M-06). Thus, consensus is a foundational element of committee work, with some arguing that those 'that split on party political lines are a waste of time' because 'the government can ignore them' (Interview M-21). In order to achieve consensus, committees depend on good working relationships between Members of Parliament. Generally, most MPs noted the pivotal importance of this to making scrutiny happen and to achieve a consensual report. For example:

Having a good personal relationship with members is very important insofar, shall we say, it acts as a way of restraining any sort of excesses in debate in committee, yeah, if you genuinely get on fairly well as a group of people (Interview C-09).

If you're not collegiate, this doesn't work. This place doesn't work. ... A lot of this place works on: you support your colleagues (Interview M-09).

The key component within the committees is actually having that degree of common working together and understand the respect for each other ... (Interview M-20)

They [relationships] are quite important that you feel some, kind of, comfortable with each other and there's sort of trust and it's, you know, it's all private ... (Interview M-18)

As the latter two quotes show, MPs rely on a sense of trust and respect for one another as they conduct committee inquiries (things like leaking information is considered '*poisonous*' for committee relationships (Interview M-16, Interview M-17, Interview M-21)). Another MP thought of relationships in rational choice terms, using the concept of logrolling (Butler, 2012, pp.66-74) to explain why relationships matter:

Because you've helped somebody out, they'll help you out later. And most of the time, most of us don't have very strong views on subjects where we're not specialists, you know? So if you do something on one area for a person, they'll usually help you out on another area where they don't have especially strong views (Interview M-17).

These comments do not, by and large, refer to formal relationships between committee members (or between members and their chair) but informal interactions which are often more fluid. This matters particularly in select committee work because of the lack of formal rules, accepted or widely known conventions, or a guidance role from party whips (in contrast to public bill committees or, indeed, the main chamber).²⁹ Therefore, relationships between committee members are more organic and arguably affected not by conventions set by *Erskine May*, but by (i) their interpretation of scrutiny, (ii) the philosophical outlooks of members, and (iii) the personalities of MPs. The first of these was covered in Chapter 4; the latter two warrant brief comment.

7.1.2. Members and their outlooks

One MP told me with pride that he told the whips to 'sod off' (Interview M-14) when they asked him about committee work, which broadly feeds into the belief among committee members that partisan influences should not, where possible, affect committee scrutiny.³⁰ This is necessary to establish cross-party agreement. One MP, for example, believed that committees are at their most effective 'when most members are prepared to leave party badges at the door' (Interview M-22). Though this may well be true in theory, this is not entirely possible in practice all of the time. This is because elected representatives remain deeply political people. During fieldwork, my clerk occasionally commented that representatives often behave in a 'politician mode' (FWD 20.5.12), and once questioned whether they were ever able to think outside of this frame (FWD 26.6.3). Though this clearly echoes the role of a party helper identified in Chapter 4, this is a little different in that it refers more broadly to the philosophical outlook of MPs. It is summarised best in the following quote:

They're political people and they have deeply-held views about the world which aren't left at the door. ... Some of my Tory members of my committee were very partisan, Conservative, quite right-wing and their view was the free market should be left to it, in all sorts of areas, and any smack of regulation was wrong in principle. And the Labour people generally have the opposite view

²⁹ In the main chamber, there are a range of widely accepted courtesies and conventions, which are very well-understood by elected Members, but less often in committee rooms.
³⁰ The role of whips remains elusive, however, and something to which I return in Chapter 9. Andrew Tyrie has pointed out, for example, that they still play a role (Tyrie, 2015, p.14).

and I think ... it'd be naïve to think ... that as politicians they would suddenly just abandon that. That is their mind set (Interview S-05).

It was similarly acknowledged by MPs: 'our viewpoint on an issue is coveted by our view on, you know, the world rather than anything that's strictly party political' (Interview M-18; echoed also in Interview M-10). Their outlooks can affect committee work. One clerk noted, for example, that the addition of a very left-wing MP to his committee, someone 'very assiduous and quite clear in his line', has 'ruffled a few feathers' and possibly made the committee 'less consensual' (Interview S-04). It is not necessarily specific party political issues that lead to acrimony, but the underlying philosophy and approach to political issues. For example, on my committee, two MPs would bitterly disagree over a range of issues as a result of their diametrically opposing belief about the purpose of politics (FWD 15.4.1, FWD 16.4.28). The effects of different philosophical outlooks does not need to be negative, though, because – to take a final example - one clerk explained how two MPs who were on opposing wings of their respective parties (one being a right-wing Conservative MP and the other being a left-wing Labour MP) got on very well because they, first, both had traditional ideas about their particular policy issue, and second, found common ground over their desire to leave the European Union (Interview S-02, FWD 42.10.4).

Linked to the philosophical outlook of MPs are their personalities more generally, which have been rarely acknowledged in the literature on select committees (perhaps due to the traditionally institutionalist approach that most scholars adopt). They are an important additional factor to building consensus, as these interviewees point out:

The committee's work depends very much on the personality of the chairs. And we have brilliant chairs and we have disastrous chairs (Interview M-02).

MG: ... *I've been trying to work out what drives the relationships in Parliament between MPs on committees.*

I: Oh, *very* complicated. *Very* personal. *I* mean ... *I* suspect it's the leadership, it's the chairman that determines how a committee functions. The chairman – and *I* hope *I* am – is open and reasonable and places his trust or her trust in members of the committee and the staff ... (Interview C-04).

Over the top of it [political relationships], you have to also layer a healthy dose of personality. And some of them, no matter how ideologically barking they might be, are really lovable people who just get on with everybody and others have plenty of decent and intelligent things to say but are such awfully horrible people to deal with that nobody likes them ... and so ... you have to look at all of these other things. And it does contribute to, you know, what makes a committee successful (Interview S-10).

This point is crucial, not least because of its implication about the success of a committee, but also because it goes to the heart of explaining the way in which simple, everyday relationships affect scrutiny. One chair argued that relationships are not built from a shared political philosophy or being in the same political party, but: *'in reality, most of it's down to personality and how people treat each other'* (Interview C-01). To take a specific example, one chair noted his positive relationship to the vice chair of his committee, which was fostered through a shared interest in football (though, as in politics, they support different teams) (Interview C-09). More generally, a committee member noted:

You can have friends in other political parties and people in your own party you barely say hello to and that's the nature of the way this place is. So you have personal friendships and you have political acquaintances. I have exceptionally good friends in the Liberal Democrats as well as them being party colleagues. I have friends in the Conservative Party and the Labour Party who I'm not politically in tune with at all (Interview M-15).

This feeds more widely into the concept of friendship. Though easily dismissed as non-political or unimportant, this can make an impact. It is something that was discussed in terms of dilemmas in Chapter 4, such as seeing past a friend's antagonistic behaviour (e.g. FWD 42.10.4) or willing to join a committee because of friendship with other serving MPs (e.g. Interview M-12). Friendships can, therefore, have real effects in motivating scrutiny behaviour or, as the following quote shows, to overcome stereotypes of their political adversaries:

I mean I'm really impressed with [SB16]. I thought he was a, you know, a sort of Scottish fossil to start with, and worried where he's coming from, but he's really, really ... and he is also very supportive. He's always been loyal and supportive (Interview C-04).

Friendships act as ways to build greater solidarity and enhance the cross-party scrutiny conducted by committees – indeed, it is dependent on this respect, trust and support for one another.³¹

This discussion reveals that personal dynamics and philosophical outlooks affect relationships, which, in turn, affect inquiry processes. They may or may not lead to a consensual report, something which is fundamental for effective scrutiny. These relationships are also affected through other routine, quotidian and everyday behaviour in the House of Commons, which deserves attention.

7.1.3. Building relationships in the everyday

Relationships are shaped not only by the approach to scrutiny, philosophical outlooks and personalities of members (*individual beliefs*) but also through daily interaction in the House of Commons. Some of these practices were explored in earlier chapters, but it is worth directly focusing on their manifestation here. It happens most clearly in the margins of meetings: before an evidence-session begins, MPs will chat and gossip; afterwards, it is possible to overhear Members (and staff) say things like, '*can I grab you for a moment?*', which will lead to impromptu discussions and decision-making (e.g. FWD 1.1.20, FWD 2.1.2, FWD 2.1.16, FWD 2.1.17). Not just meeting spaces, but also division lobbies: '*I had a meeting in the margins of a vote with two other members of the* [XX] *Committee where we decided on the morning's work and how we should take it forward*' (Interview M-06).³² This 'rubbing shoulders' between committee members happens throughout the parliamentary estate:

I ... will bump into [JC06] when we're both buying a coffee and I'll say, you know, "What do you think of that? I think we ought to be doing more or less", or "Why the hell are we doing this?". And we'll spend 15 minutes with a coffee

³¹ Unfortunately, it goes beyond the reach of this doctoral thesis to offer a more detailed analysis of friendships in Parliament, but this clearly deserves further attention in future research. There are few studies that have attempted to explore friendships in British politics (with one recent notable exception by Sarah Childs (2014)).

³² Division lobbies are not only a useful space to speak with committee colleagues, but allows backbench MPs an opportunity to speak with their frontbench counterparts, something which happened regularly during my fieldwork between my chair and frontbench politicians (FWD 59.13.4, FWD 19.5.10, FWD 49.11.11, FWD 57.13.7). It is perhaps for this reason that there has been significant resistance amongst so many Members of Parliament to change the way that voting takes place in the main chamber.

at Portcullis just nattering about it. You know, that kind of thing (Interview M-06).

If we bump into each [other] we'll say, "What did you think about what so-andso said?" and "Could you believe this?" or I might ask, I might say, "I really want to get this witness in, is that something that you think that's a good idea or would you support me in that" (Interview M-23).

Similarly, a committee chair remarked that he would '*bump into them* [committee members] *all the time*', and would make sure he used those opportunities to share concerns and discuss the committee's work in advance of meetings (Interview C-04). It may not seem significant, but this raises interesting questions about the nature of space and spatial arrangements for the Palace of Westminster. The organisation of space, whether the design and layout of meeting rooms, debating chambers or the Palace as a whole, affects the everyday nature of scrutiny. One clerk captured this extremely well:

The changes in the geography of the estate have reduced the opportunities for us to come across Members. So Millbank used to be a shared space between Members and staff. So we were falling over them in the canteen and, you know, you were rubbing shoulders with them all. If you go back far enough, we were dining in the dining rooms in the evening because the House sat late and everybody was there and you were rubbing shoulders with them. ... there was just more opportunity for those sorts of contacts to happen.

He added: 'I think unless we find ways of developing those relationships then that whole dynamic starts to change and change in a way that's possibly unhelpful', by which he meant that just looking at formal processes ignores 'the organic thing that is going on and those relationships that actually go towards making the whole thing successful as an endeavour' (Interview S-10). Indeed, this is especially important given the pressure on time that both staff and MPs face. ³³ 'Rubbing shoulders' allows parliamentary actors to understand one another better, build relationships and therefore improve their ability to scrutinise the executive. This also returns us to the theoretical precepts outlined in Chapter 2, and especially the importance of *space* to enact parliamentary performances. It is in different settings that actors enact their role, and these different stages or settings are crucial aspects to better understand not only the

³³ This feeds into a broader debate about the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster, currently being considered by the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster in Parliament.

performance of individual actors but the broader performance of a 'team' of performers (Goffman, 1990, pp.83-108). Indeed, it is through these informal relationships and everyday practices that MPs build webs of scrutiny at the *meso-level* (within committees) and at the *macro-level* (between and beyond committees), to which discussion now turns.

7.2. Developing committee traditions

During an interview, a committee member remarked:

The chair of the select committee gets a great deal of status but as with any committee, the chair is only as good as the committee that they have working with them (Interview M-09).

This quote indicates the important and admittedly quite basic fact that a select committee is made up of (usually) 11 Members of Parliament, each of whom will have interpreted their scrutiny role in a different (perhaps competing) way, but who nonetheless make a distinctive contribution to inquiry work. Additionally, committee members bring with them their philosophical outlooks and personalities, as covered above. When this is taken into account and placed in the context of an adversarial British political culture, it seems quite remarkable that MPs are able to come together as committees and produce reports with unanimous agreement.³⁴ This section explores this issue in detail by looking precisely at how committee members relate to one another to develop committee traditions, build performance teams and to construct consensus. This requires: (i) summarising the norms and values in committees; (ii) examining the development of relationships over the course of an inquiry to construct consensus; and (iii) analysing some of the key factors that affect a committee's ability to build effective working relationships.

³⁴ This was echoed by both newly-appointed (Interview M-01) and long-serving (Interview M-07) committee members.

7.2.1. Norms and values

One interviewee believed that 'norms of civility' govern not only select committee behaviour but all of Parliament (e.g. courtesies and conventions in the main chamber, etc.). He believed that these norms and values are all around Parliament and a key factor in sustaining partnership and collaboration. Though he noted quite simple examples – politeness in opening and closing doors for one another, or passing water to one another during meetings - these micropractices foster an atmosphere of collegiality that overcomes the harsh realities of adversarial politics (Interview M-11). Another interviewee noted similar dynamics by calling evidence sessions 'a kind of dance which is imperceptible' (also noting that this process is '*very difficult*' to describe, much to my dismay) (Interview M-16). Some of these norms of civility are broadly shared by committee members, such as a general agreement (or 'good manners') not to 'steal somebody else's thunder' (Interview M-15) nor 'wanting to pinch somebody else's question so they don't have anything credible to say' during an evidence session (Interview M-18) (echoing the importance of ownership over committee work, noted in Chapter 5 (see also below)). Another value, often used to carry committees over subjects where there is disagreement between committee members, is the use of humour – particularly during private sessions (e.g. FWD 3.1.12). It means that members can discuss difficult subjects without letting this affect them personally whilst simultaneously keeping the committee collegiate. Taken together, norms and values (or beliefs and practices) come together to create what might be termed a 'committee tradition' of ideas and values (a web of beliefs). In terms of everyday behaviour, it also creates a 'working consensus', in that all participants agree to honour the performance of others and what others regard as important (Goffman, 1990, pp.20-1), which ultimately leads to an overall performance by a performance *team* (see also Chapter 2).

Beyond these '*norms of civility*', each committee arguably has their own '*feel*' to it (Interview S-02, FWD 29.7.8), which reinforces a committee's distinct tradition or web of beliefs. Three examples suffice to make the point. First, on my committee, MPs would not generally interrupt one another during evidence sessions; on other committees, I noticed that there was a lot more free-flow or jumping in to ask follow-up questions (irrespective of whether the chair had asked the individual to come in or not). Second, the physical movement of members and staff. On some committees, members will not move from their seat during public evidence sessions, but instead pass notes to one another or send emails to confer about what a witness had said or to negotiate the next line of inquiry; in other committees, members would freely move to sit next each other in order to discuss a point as a session is underway (indicating ownership of space). A third and final example, seating arrangements. On some committees, members sit according to party line; in others they do not. In one particular committee, a clerk told me that if an MP's seat is taken by someone else, then *'things are said'* (Interview S-03). This may seem inconsequential, but the use of space has physical and symbolic effects. Physically, it means that members from different parties quite literally contact one another and talk directly to each other (or, if they sit along party lines, they do not). Symbolically, it reveals the extent to which a committee is cross-party in its process of undertaking committee work. One chair, for example, noted that he tries to make sure the committee doesn't sit by party in order to 'act as one' (Interview C-06).

These three everyday behaviours are routine and quotidian in every sense of the word and, though they may appear mundane or insignificant, they matter in developing an overall relationship of trust, respect and sense of team amongst the committee. Committees themselves are conscious of this. One member, for example, described how getting to know one another and going to training sessions allows committees to overcome an otherwise adversarial spirit:

I mean that's useful sometimes to ... just to get to know each other a bit better because there's a danger of becoming quite competitive ... in terms of, "I'm going to get my say" and "I've got this brilliant question I want to ask and I'm going to get it in regardless" ... (Interview M-03).

As noted in other chapters, there is an active attempt, particularly by chairs, to *'hunt as a pack'*:

I think it's really important that select committees hunt as a pack. ... I think the most effective [questioning] is when you use the talents that different people have and I've also – to try and get the committee to gel – we had an away day. We only went across the river, but we still had an away day and that was to try and get them hunting and thinking together (Interview C-05).

Another chair spoke of a '*common sense of moral purpose*' (Interview C-o6). The extent of this team spirit amongst the group and the wider committee traditions that underpin them will have practical effects on scrutiny. For example, a number of MPs said that they would be far less willing to attend meetings without a sense of partnership amongst them (e.g. Interview M-01, Interview M-10; for information on attendance between 2010 and 2015, see Appendix F). It is worth quoting the following exchange from an interview between myself and a newly-appointed MP to a select committee with comparatively fairly low attendance over the 2010 parliament:

MG: What were your expectations when you first joined?

I: Well I thought we'd have a full committee for a start. I mean, I can't believe we only had four people there. I mean that really shocked me. ... I don't know whether this happens with other select committees?

MG: As far as I know, some have higher attendance. I think it depends, though, on who the witnesses and-

I: Yeah, I don't think that's right. I mean, you know, there may be times when I can't attend the select committee. I've now got the idea in my head that you don't have to turn up – which is not a good thing. I personally think you should make every effort to attend every single session ... (Interview M-04).

This quote illustrates the importance of committee norms and values, not only in fostering a sense of common purpose, but also of the role of socialisation to which we return later. A committee needs a sense of belonging, and this culture is built up through everyday actions – including the basic act of attending evidence sessions. So, without full committee backing and support, inquiries may lose attendance, have poor preparation and questioning, or even break down in the consideration of reports altogether. One clerk observed:

You try and build up an esprit de corps by - the chair will say a lot about that. But also, it depends if you ever – all you need is a couple of very disruptive members and the whole thing begins to fall apart in terms of relationships (Interview S-03).

Thus, individual members of the committee play a key role in sustaining a performance team among a committee. The interviewee also noted the role of chair. Chairs will indeed be pivotal throughout this process given the way in which they interpret and enact their role, something which returns to themes of Chapter 5 and the dilemma they face in getting this right. One long-serving committee member believed that this was a recent development:

I think it's ... interesting in terms of the development of the select committee of more recent years the extent to which the committee becomes a cohesive whole – not necessarily agreeing with each other on things but actually understanding where people are coming from and how the committee as a whole can best make progress.

Adding, later in the interview:

I think actually the current structure of select committees is far, far better than it's ever been before – but not for the obvious reasons, but for the rather more subtle reasons that we've been discussing. So, it's not that the select committees have suddenly been given a magic, you know, House of Representatives type wand ... It's that the dynamics of those select committees and the extent to which they can actually interact with their department change (Interview M-07).

Something similar was echoed by a committee chair, too (Interview C-03). This is possibly less often acknowledged when scholars think of the impact of select committee reforms (perhaps due to our often formal, institutionalist lens), but does not reduce the point: the atmosphere and relationships that make scrutiny work has changed as a result of the 2010 reforms and, in doing so, arguably made scrutiny more consensual, more cross-party and plausibly more effective as a result (admittedly, this remains a hypothesis at this stage, though widely supported by interviews). To examine specifically how norms and values (or '*norms of civility*') might affect committee work, it is worth exploring the impact of relationships between members over the course of an inquiry in constructing consensus, something which we identified earlier as of pivotal importance for committees.

7.2.2. Inquiry processes: constructing consensus

It is possible to identify a range of steps from an idea for an inquiry to the 'end point' (though it could be argued that scrutiny is always on-going), which have been described well in Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters' *How Parliament Works* (2015, pp.319-27). Over the course of fieldwork, I identified 11 steps, which have been summarised in Table 7.1. However, for the purposes of this

Theme	Step	Description
Agenda- setting	(1) Inquiry idea and agreement	A committee will often begin with an informal discussion about ideas for inquiries, which are subsequently agreed by the committee.
	(2) Terms of reference	Committee staff will write draft terms to establish boundaries for the inquiry, which are then discussed, amended and agreed by the committee.
Evidence- gathering	(3) Written evidence	Terms of reference will be published along with an open call for evidence by the public (some groups and individuals may be invited to submit evidence).
	(4) Oral evidence	This stage is closed in that witnesses need to be invited to attend and give evidence to committees (see Chapter 7 for a discussion).
	(5) Committee visit	Some committees may choose to supplement their investigations with a committee visit, which can range from domestic visits to international expeditions.
Report- writing	(6) Heads of report	Once all evidence has been collected, staff analyse the material and identify key themes, which are then discussed by committee members and the chair.
	(7) Chair's first draft	With the heads of report in mind, staff will write a draft report that will then be considered by the chair, which will then be sent out to the committee members.
	(8) Report consideration	Members are invited to submit amendments that will be discussed informally and formally by the committee. Usually, committees seek to agree to a report unanimously at this point.
Policy- informing	(9) Publication of report	Once a report has been agreed, it will be published. Embargoed copies may be sent to witnesses, relevant civil servants/departments, and occasionally the media and other interested bodies.
	(10) Government response	The government is expected to respond to the committee's report within two months, particularly with regards to the committee's recommendations.
	(11) Parliamentary debate	This is an optional step, in which some committees may choose to debate the report on the floor of the House or at Westminster Hall.

 Table 7.1. Inquiry processes

section, it is worth going through three parts that broadly cover inquiry processes: agenda-setting; evidence-gathering; and report-writing.

Turning first to agenda-setting, this is the earliest opportunity at which point committee members seek to build common purpose and consensus. The variety of involvement is dependent upon committee members and affected by the chair's approach. During fieldwork, there were anecdotal reports that particular chairs drove their committee's agenda, for example, and one clerk explained (off-the-record) that the agenda of her committee was set entirely by the chair. Whilst these are obvious examples of chairs acting as chieftains, other committees are less driven by their chair. One chair explained:

Periodically, we have a session devoted to what inquiries shall we have. We'll bat them around and again at least 50% of the inquiries are suggested by other members of the committee (Interview C-09).

He went on to summarise the current inquiries of the committee, listing individual members associated with it (other interviewees from the same committee confirmed this). Another chair explained:

The committee decides, not me, about future inquiry. I mean, I may make suggestions, the clerk makes suggestions, [policy stakeholder] makes suggestions. We've always said to bodies, if you've got any ideas of what we should be looking at, you know, don't wait for us to call the inquiry and give evidence – tell us what we should be inquiring into! In the end it's our decision, nobody else's decision. It's a committee decision (Interview C-07).

This committee decision likely requires cross-party support and involvement from members across the political spectrum to be successful. This balancing act between divergent interests and views from committee members means that, according to some, the focus of inquiries is likely to be different from other areas of parliamentary work, notably the adversarial atmosphere of the main chamber:

We work best when we're concentrating on perhaps less ... exposed areas where there is a degree of consensus, like [XX]. ... These are all wonderfully interesting areas of our work where there is a lot of non-partisan discussion and disagreement but it's generally, I regard that as the meat and drink of the committee's work (Interview C-04).

I did consciously avoid the areas of overt partisan debate on the floor of the House because at the end of the day this is a group of party politicians and they, they're interested in [the committee's policy area], and yes they can develop their own view independent of their party, but if there's a high octane electorally significant debate going on, then that's much more difficult. So, trying to avoid the partisan but not necessarily avoiding the important is rather easier than you might imagine (Interview C-10).

A question remains as to whether committees consequently avoid contentious issues and topics. Though interviewee responses were inconclusive, many explained that the way in which any inquiry was *framed* was crucial to getting the right evidence, and later for the ability of committee members to agree to a

report, indicating any topic could conceivably be covered (e.g. Interview M-07, Interview M-10, Interview C-02, Interview S-09). A key theme associated with this is the idea that members must feel a sense of ownership over the agenda in order to support an inquiry. One chair, for example, indicated that it is important that members have a shared concern for effectiveness within the committee's remit, even if they come from a different political perspective (Interview C-08). This may involve some horse-trading or '*give-and-take*', as these two interviewees explained:

I think you want to have a lot of behind-the-scenes chat and negotiation with different members and some of them [chairs] are good at that, you know, being able to say, "Well, look, you know, I know you don't much like this inquiry, but I'd be really keen if you could turn up, and we'll do your inquiry choice next". A lot more give-and-take like that (Interview S-05).

There is a sort of culture that you don't ... contradict aggressively because everyone gets their turn at it. So therefore you're not going to kill somebody's pet idea for an inquiry because it might be yours next week that you'll try at it. So there is a sort of give-and-take – which works, usually, but if somebody keeps saying, "we must, we must" ... that really irritates (Interview S-03).

The sense of ownership implied in both quotes is something that acts as an undercurrent that binds committees together, something to which we return below (this also echoes themes from Chapter 5). The latter interviewee also explained other 'irritations' during evidence-taking:

If the chair constantly interrupted everyone's questions – I've seen that – drive the members to distraction. Or other members, you get a good riff of a question going and suddenly another member will just butt in in the middle of it and that ruins it. You can see them – absolutely seething. And if that's repeated, that's a problem (Interview S-03).

This brings us to the second theme of the inquiry process. Though evidencegathering will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, it is worth stating here how relationships contribute to this process. Interviewees noted that public sessions are often 'pretty polite' (Interview C-06), and depend on good personal dynamics or 'personal chemistry' because 'if you've got that basic goodwill, it's much easier to sort of rein somebody in or to accept in good humour that they need to shut up' (Interview C-09). Personal chemistry or goodwill can be established in the margins of meetings, where members will chat and gossip, learn about one another, share ideas, make jokes and caricature each other (e.g. FWD 2.1.2, FWD 3.1.12, FWD 52.12.3). At a deeper level, a range of interviewees explained that it is committee visits that are best at establishing goodwill because they *'pull people together'* as part of a *'common experience'* (Interview M-21). For example:

The relationship on a select committee, I think, is crucial. ... there will be occasions when you go away on visits. ... So you're travelling with these people. You're having breakfast, midday and evening meals with these people. You're going to the same briefing sessions. You are there as British MPs, you are not there as a Lib Dem MP. Yes, you are a Lib Dem MP, but you're not there as a Lib Dem MP, you're there as an MP on a select committee (Interview M-15).

When you travel together and you go for dinner together the night before, then, you know ... you start to learn about people's, their family and things like that. So you see them real and ... you can sympathise with them and the difficulties with their childcare and the travel and the constituents, you know. So there is a lot that we do share and that ... building of the relationship, I think, is really important (Interview C-05).

Travel and intense period together tends to bring you together and create a sort of personal bond that ... might not otherwise be there, that's very helpful, you know (Interview C-06).

Given that MPs are under time pressure almost all of the time, visits can be especially important ways to build meaningful relationships between committee members without interruption (though it also makes it complicated and difficult to arrange in the first place). This does not necessarily mean that MPs will like each other more or agree with one another politically; rather, it builds a greater sense of respect between members and a sense of understanding in that they know where their colleagues are coming from in their approach to scrutiny (Interview M-21, Interview C-03 (FWD 43.10.16)). Additionally, of course, the depth of understanding gained from a field visit can be pivotal for committee work itself. For example, one chair of a committee noted that *'visits confront people with the facts'*, and went on to give a specific example of an inquiry where a visit had *'significant influence'* on committee members' views, which consequently ensured consensus for the inquiry's final report. He gave another example:

There was a classic occasion when ... my committee, we tried to, we were struggling to agree a report on a difficult issue and benefited greatly from

being stuck in airport for a long time because of fog and a great many disagreements were resolved in the time we had (Interview C-01).

Thus, the evidence-gathering process, particularly visits, are important in terms of constructing consensus.

Once all the evidence for an inquiry has been collected, it usually falls to staff to write a draft report (one chair explained that '*you can't write by committee*' (Interview C-03)). This commonly follows a discussion by the committee of so-called 'heads of report'. For some committees, this is a detailed process in order to identify '*where the sticking points might be*' (Interview S-11). Other committees do not discuss a heads of report in detail, which suggests different norms and values have been established by the group (Interview S-08, Interview S-10). In any case, from these heads of report staff will write a first draft to be considered by the chair, who will similarly identify '*pinch points*' (Interview C-05) ahead of report consideration by the committee as a whole. At that stage, committee members' relationships are pivotal for select committees because they will have a direct impact on the extent of consensus for a report. One MP:

You either respect or disrespect people at the end of that. People come out with their views. They compromise, don't compromise. They can articulate their views as they mean. Whatever. You get to know people in that process. It's a combination of outside the committee and inside the committee that does that (Interview M-21).

It is here that the dynamics identified in the previous section, and in the preceding paragraphs, come into play. Committee members are very likely to give an input into a draft report as this is the key output in the scrutiny process to which an MP's name is attached. Most will seek to do so by submitting amendments either formally or informally. Their amendments can be informed by a range of things, but are likely to be shaped at least in part by the scrutiny role that they habitually adopt (see Chapter 4). Based on observations from fieldwork and conversations in interviews, the vast majority of amendments or changes are based on informal discussions between members. Crucial to this process is the wording of a report:

Before it came to a formal vote on it, it would [be] discussed by the committee. And there'd be a bit of negotiation, "Would you be happy with this alternative wording for the amendment" and try and get everyone to agree on it (Interview M-22).

These amendments do not necessarily need to be significant changes in a committee's view, but could be a change of emphasis or *'little nuances'*:

It might be something that's bothering us but as a committee we might have it in there, "we're concerned that", and they'll [the opposing party] change it to, "we note that" you know? So we still say it's happening and something needs to happen, but they've just, it's softening of language quite often is the way we get exactly the same recommendation out, but we just don't say it in as adversarial a way (Interview M-10).

One interviewee weaved this together with themes raised earlier about MPs' ability to respect covered in earlier sections of this chapter:

I mean today we had a dispute about a sentence ... and someone was making a point about a sentence that doesn't reflect the actual position, of how's it going to look outside. And I said, "Well, here's, we can make this in terms of wording", "Yeah, that's fine" ... so that's, I think a ... the ability to respect each other, that people realise I make a suggestion, I'm not trying to trip people out, I'm actually genuinely trying to find a way through (Interview M-20).

Certain recommendations or conclusions may be excluded from the final report to get consensus (Interview C-01), and one committee member recalled one report that wasn't published because the committee was not able to get consensus (Interview M-21). More difficult discussions are often carried over with humour and laughter to lighten the atmosphere, as described in the previous sub-section (FWD 52.12.3, FWD 53.12.5). Each committee will develop their own way of considering reports, but all will be affected by committee norms and values that emerged over time. One clerk described the difference between one committee, where consideration of reports can '*last several hours and stretch over several days*', and another, where '*reports pretty much go through in about five minutes*' (Interview S-10). Explaining the achievement of consensus cannot be done purely on the weight of evidence, though this is crucial. Rather, committee traditions (let alone strategic political considerations) play their part in affecting the way in which the committee sets its agenda, gathers evidence, and then considers a report. A crucial dynamic that has been implied throughout this sub-section is the sense of ownership that committee members have as part of the inquiry process. This was noted throughout interviews:

Members must feel that the report is partly theirs (Interview C-09).

You're giving something to each member which allows them to say, "This is my work on the committee" and therefore, you know, they can get buy-in to it (Interview M-20).

The select committee work is often what they enjoy the most ... because they feel that, amongst other things, it gives them the feeling that they're actually having some effect on the real world (Interview C-01).

The role of chair is crucial in fostering this sense of ownership: '*I'm very keen that kind of group responsibility should come about and makes it more likely they're going to turn up*' (Interview C-06). This was echoed by other interviewees (e.g. Interview S-09, Interview C-05). It was something that was noticeable during fieldwork, too, where my committee was not able to agree to a report because it was perceived ownerless (sometimes also referred to as 'orphaned' inquiries):

The member that wanted it is [BB51] ... he's left. The other member that was interested, [MR43], he's left. The chair has had no interest in it from the start and ... it's not his core interest. So ... it's a bit lost (Interview S-08).

When it came to report consideration, each committee member gave their take on the issue, but divergent opinions persisted because of philosophical differences between members. Essentially, arguments revolved around political principles of the role of the state that replicated traditional Conservative (less interventionist), Labour (more interventionist) and Liberal Democrat (middleway) positions. Without the collective buy-in from all members, agreement was not possible and a report was never published (FWD 52.12.3). This additionally echoes themes from earlier sections about the effect of philosophical outlooks on committee work, but also raises a dilemma about the changing membership of select committees. This turns our discussion from the emergence of performance teams to how they are affected over the course of a parliament. Here, it is worth exploring the specific example of changing membership.

7.2.3. The dilemma of changing membership

Whilst one MP noted that he switched select committee because of a vacancy opening that was more relevant to his constituency and another that he wanted to try something new, the main reason for changing membership of committees comes from frontbench reshuffles (of both the government and opposition side) (Interview M-08, Interview M-17, Interview S-09). The average length of membership between 2010 and 2015 was 32 months, or just over two and a half vears (which varied between committees and members (see Appendix F)). This means that there is 'always a bit of movement' (Interview M-03). One committee chair believed that this was 'extremely frustrating' because it affected the political balance and descriptive representation of his committee, and required building relationships with new members all over again (his committee had comparatively high turnover) (Interview C-01). Other chairs noted that this was 'quite a problem' for similar reasons, additionally noting that you can lose talented members (especially if they have attended committee training sessions) (Interview C-05, Interview C-09). As a result of changing membership, then, new members join an established committee who could question existing practices. For example, one clerk pointed out that new members on his committee questioned a previous agreement between members and the chair that press notices and the media would be the chair's responsibility, which created tension amongst newer committee members that wanted input to this (Interview S-05). More generally, it suggests that new members' beliefs and practices could be 'completely at odds with the norms that that group has already established', as this clerk recounts:

I've seen on a handful of occasions, members walk in, take no notice at all of the norms that the group has, and start to force divisions on reports and ... it really upsets people because you have years of unanimity and consensus is blown away because some upstart's walked in and started, you know, voted on things when you've never had to vote on anything before.

Put slightly differently, new members' ideas and beliefs affect the pre-existing web of beliefs of the committee and potentially 'throw committees off balance' (Interview S-10). Indeed, one MP said that it was 'psychologically disruptive because you don't know who's going to be in the room when you walk in' (Interview M-23). Therefore, changing membership can affect committees not

only in the sense that MPs would adopt the role of learner (as Chapter 4 revealed), but also because the norms and values established by the group are questioned. This, consequently, affects inquiry processes and a committee's ability to construct consensus.

Other interviewees have pointed out that there are positive aspects to changing membership, too, in that new members can offer fresh ideas, experiences and purpose to committee work (e.g. Interview M-15, Interview M-18, Interview S-08). On balance, does this mean that changing membership matters? One interviewee argued that, though change of membership does have an effect, this is 'at the margins' (Interview S-05). Other interviewees echoed those thoughts, too. The reason for this arguably stems from the committee's norms and values, developed by 'a reasonable core of people who ... are kind of consistent attenders or participants' (Interview M-01). For example, one committee member noted that newer members would be 'absorbed' into the committee tradition rather than 'overturning it' (Interview M-07). Another committee member:

If you get one or two new people onto the group, you would bring them in and absorb them. But if it gets destabilised too much, then it can kind of really changes (Interview M-16).

This indicates the importance of socialisation in select committees, something recognised not only by interviewees, but other academic research (Rush and Giddings, 2011, pp.152-9). One committee member gave the example of his colleagues early in the 2010 parliament, where MPs from the 2010 intake were elected to his committee but who, initially, saw their role in party political terms that led to 'really quite difficult scenes' because 'there was a bloc effectively seeing itself as having a different job from either the chair or the other members'. He went on, however, to say that 'that all quite surprisingly changed around and actually the committee as it is now is a very cohesive committee'. He explained that this was because of a change of understanding about roles:

This was going to be a committee report and that you were a member of a committee as opposed to a sort of visitor on behalf of a bloc and that your function was not remotely the same as you would expect it to be on the floor of the House, but no one said that – it just was a kind of, it came to be.

He explained that this 'came to be' because, first, the chair was 'very patient and inclusive', who tried to 'include everybody in all the discussions' and, second, other long-serving committee members were 'prepared to work together on that [consensus] and other people started to fall in behind them' (Interview M-07). This particular example highlights the crucial importance of socialisation, but also that committees are able to overcome the potential dilemma of changing membership through these processes. Taking this into account with other themes raised in this section, it demonstrates that committee scrutiny is driven forward in many respects through everyday practices and committee traditions that develop over time. It also highlights the distinctive role of the chair, who will provide the consistency in approach and style over the course of their five year tenure. One clerk went further and suggested that changing membership empowers the chair: 'I think it probably strengthens the chair in a sense that there's nobody else who can challenge her knowledge or expertise or background' (Interview S-05). This is an important point, and returns us to a theme covered in Chapter 5 about the role of the chair in driving forward not only the strategic priorities of the committee, but also in influencing the norms and values of the committee. Given the importance of the chair in fostering committee norms and values, this raises interesting questions about chairs' relationships with one another to understand the sense of team that they do (or do not) develop across Parliament. This matters because of its influence in shaping the idea of a 'systematic' basis of scrutiny on which the select committee system is based. This shifts our analysis from the *meso-level* to the *macro-level*.

7.3. Webs of scrutiny

The broad aim of this section is to open a discussion about the institutional framework in which select committees are placed and to examine the extent to which wider webs of scrutiny, as opposed to the individual beliefs and practices of chairs (and committee members), make a difference to the scrutiny landscape in the House of Commons. Unsurprisingly, the Liaison Committee plays a key role in this as it is made up of chairs of all permanent select committees (Rogers and Walters, 2015, pp.307-8). Since the early 2000s, the Liaison Committee has campaigned to make the committee system (in particular) and parliamentary

scrutiny (more generally) more effective in the House of Commons. This has included important reports, such as Shifting the Balance (2000) and, more recently, Select Committee Effectiveness, Resources and Power (2012a). The Liaison Committee therefore presents an important opportunity for committees. and particularly committee chairs, to wield influence on a more systematic basis, especially given that the Liaison Committee holds regular evidence sessions with the prime minister (for a discussion on evidence sessions with the prime minister, see Kelso et. al., 2016). However, the committee itself has not been particularly forthcoming about its potential as a resource for leadership. There are arguably two reasons for this. First, there is a structural problem in that the committee has a membership of over 30 people. This makes it difficult to not only come to agreements, but also organise meetings and give each member the opportunity to contribute to the committee's work. This is reinforced further by the committee chair's double burden in acting simultaneously as chair of the Liaison Committee and as chair of a departmental or cross-cutting select committee (at least since 2010). This means that the chair will have much less time to devote exclusively to Liaison Committee matters. Second, something covered in previous chapters, each select committee (and particularly their chair) has priorities that push and pull it in a different direction. This is reinforced by the way in which most committees seek to guard their own terrain or remit (see below) (similar themes were raised by the Institute for Government (White, 2015c)). These two factors can be illustrated by observing the Liaison Committee whilst the prime minister gives evidence: not all committee members are asked to attend because there is not enough space for each (members are rotated); each member that does attend is asked to lead on a particular theme (with unusually little interaction between committee members); and, seating arrangements for each member have to be carefully choreographed according to political party, theme that they are covering and their likelihood of attending the session (among other things) to prevent discord (FWD 19.5.33-19.5.40, FWD 30.5.2). The Liaison Committee is arguably not to be seen as a cohesive entity that can act with one voice, in contrast to other committees, which inhibits the committee from viewing itself in a leadership role on a regular or consistent basis.

This isn't to say that the Liaison Committee does not influence individual committees. Committees are affected through 'core tasks' that have been developed by the Liaison Committee and create a formal framework through which select committees undertake parliamentary scrutiny (see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for a summary of these tasks). However, core tasks do not seem to be significant for committee members:

Nobody [MPs] *even knows what the core tasks are by the Liaison Committee* (Interview S-08).

They're useful from our [staff] point of view. Quite a few of them are staffdriven. And the member involvement is limited, which worries me ... (Interview S-03).

Another clerk pointed out that his chair was not keen on being forced to undertake certain inquiries or evidence sessions because it would allow others (particularly the government) to put things on her agenda (Interview S-05). Though it is not possible to offer an evaluation of core tasks at this stage, it is worth noting that, throughout my fieldwork, core tasks were rarely mentioned by either staff or elected representatives. So while core tasks may be a useful device to frame committee work generally and to give a semblance of coherence, they are not things that matter on an everyday basis. On an everyday basis, it is individual committees that innovate and develop new ideas and practices. Occasionally, committees' agendas may coalesce and find their way to the attention of the Liaison Committee (such as the development of preappointment scrutiny as a core task for committees (see Flinders and Geddes, 2014)).

The above, formal framework in which committees are placed is supplemented through a range of *informal* relationships between committees. These relationships are often characterised by a competitive environment between committees, and especially their chairs. For example:

There's a certain amount of jostling for the limelight, you know, to be top committee ... yes, I mean it's a, and there's healthy competition and perhaps one or two chairs are too obviously competitive to get into the limelight. I hope I'm not one of them [laughter] (Interview C-04).

As a result, committees have to, as one member put it, '*tread quite carefully so as not to tread on another select committee's toes*' (Interview M-19). A chair used similar language: '*I think that we try and* [be] *quite sensitive to when they think we're treading on their toes*' (Interview C-02). This was equally noted in fieldwork observations. On a couple of occasions, my committee's chair complained that another committee should get '*off our patch*' (FWD 52.12.3, FWD 57.13.7). If my chair veered into the remit of another committee, the clerk would strongly recommend that the chair contact his respective counterpart (FWD 39.9.7). Indeed, where committees do encroach on one another's work, it fell to the relevant chairs to resolve tensions by agreeing boundaries (Interview M-01).³⁵

This competitive view is not universally shared, of course, with one committee member calling this sense of rivalry '*childish*' (Interview M-18). A chair also did not think it was much of a problem, though added that he sometimes would get '*a bit annoyed*' because one or two committee members have got their own strong views and the other committee would not be '*appropriate*' to look into the issue (Interview C-01). Likewise, another chair noted that it was '*not a problem*', adding that a bigger problem is the time and capacity restrictions that committees collectively face. He went on to say that his committees from doing so (Interview C-06). This was echoed by another chair, who believed that joint committees are '*fairly cumbersome*' to organise and often '*too big*' (Interview C-07). Indeed, a committee member, citing experience from the Committee on Arms Export Controls (a joint committee), believed that:

It's quite difficult to make that work when you have a whole lot of people who are already quite busy, who are coming from very different perspectives and very different approaches to something and you're to sit down in a committee room and get them all to agree on something and, so, I think it's quite a difficult thing to pull off (Interview M-19).

³⁵ In broad terms, interviewees noted competition between: the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee and the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Committee; Public Accounts Committee and Defence Committee; BIS Committee and Education Committee; and Public Accounts Committee and Treasury Committee (amongst others). Interviewees that noted competition between committees include: Interview M-01, Interview M-10, Interview M-11, Interview M-17, Interview M-19, Interview C-01, Interview C-02, Interview C-04, Interview C-07, Interview C-08.

Level	Relationship	Summary
Micro-level	MP-to-MP	Relationships matter because this allows MPs to build trust and respect, which are often affected by their approach to scrutiny, philosophical outlooks, personalities and everyday behaviour.
Meso-level	Within committees	MPs form performance teams within committees, which sustain norms and values and subsequently aid in constructing consensus (in part also through developing committee traditions).
Macro-level	Between committees	While formal mechanisms exist to bring committees together (principally the Liaison Committee), committees often see themselves in competition with one another and rely on informal dynamics

Table 7.2. Relationships at different levels of analysis³⁶

Though this structural limitation is indeed a big constraint, the competitive environment arguably also militates against further collaboration. In short, it seems that there is little will to collaborate between committees on a more frequent basis.

Through informal relationships, committees establish a reputation against one another and, in doing so, a 'pecking order' (Interview S-10). Whilst on the whole this often reflects government departments (especially the great offices of state: HM Treasury, Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office), the chair's personal standing often affects the informal hierarchy amongst committees and the extent to which committees are regarded as important in the House more generally. One clerk, for example, noted the shifting reputation of the Public Accounts Committee: seen as a 'very senior' committee before 1979, it 'lost a lot of its significance with departmental committees coming in', but has been 'regalvanised by a new and very active chair' to do things that are 'interesting to the public' (Interview S-04). It is perhaps unsurprising that the Public Accounts Committee is consequently seen as a competitor for many other committees. This informal standing matters because, as one MP pointed out, it serves as an indication of how seriously a committee should be taken by not only other committees and colleagues within the House, but more widely the public and potential witnesses (Interview M-11). Perhaps most importantly, this reveals the importance of *informal* relationships and practices, which play a key role in embedding scrutiny in the House of Commons. This has been a theme that runs

³⁶ Note: 'micro-level' here is not to be confused with micro-level behaviour, which takes place individually, within committees and between committees.

throughout the chapter (summarised in Table 7.2), and so it is now worth turning to broader conclusions.

Concluding remarks

The scrutiny landscape, specifically the select committee system, is sustained by everyday practices of committee members, chairs and staff. Micro-level behaviour may seem dull, mundane or routine. However, it is precisely these everyday behaviours that entrench scrutiny not only along the committee corridor but throughout the parliamentary estate. This chapter has sought to show this by clarifying why relationships matter and looking at the factors that affect those relationships at an individual level. At this micro-level, it is clear that scrutiny of government is not affected only through formal, institutional relationships between the House of Commons and ministerial departments, but interpretations of scrutiny, philosophical outlooks, personalities of MPs and daily interaction. In the second section, analysis broadened to a meso-level to look at the way in which informal relationships and everyday practices develop and give sustenance to norms and values that form within a committee, something which may be termed a performance team. MPs' ideas about what it means to be a good committee or effective committee become part of a wider committee approach. Each committee develops their own way of working and their own unique approach to scrutiny as a result, something strongly influenced by the members, chair and staff (as Part II was at pains to point out). These norms and values also exert their influence on the practices of MPs through socialisation processes, and in doing so prevent established norms from changing too much as a consequence of committee turnover. In the third section, the macro-level analysis situated chairs' relationships in a formal (Liaison Committee) and informal (competition between committees) setting. Taking this analysis one step further, it indicates that, though we may think of scrutiny as systematic given that the select committee system has become a permanent and formal part of British parliamentary politics, scrutiny processes in the House of Commons depend on informal relationships and everyday practices. In other words, when we talk of systematic scrutiny, this often refers to webs of scrutiny. These webs of scrutiny are built through individual interpretations of, and

beliefs about, scrutiny, and relationships between a variety of actors throughout the parliamentary estate who push and pull in a range of different directions. This argument is central to understanding committees in the House of Commons. The broad thrust of this chapter has not been an empirical analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of these relationships, performance teams or committee traditions in terms of scrutiny or policy impact, but rather serves as an illustration of the importance of everyday practices to better understand behaviour along the committee corridor in the Palace of Westminster. To see the effect of some of these ideas, the final empirical chapter takes a detailed look at the evidence-gathering process in the House of Commons.

Chapter 8: Evidence

ow that the complexity, diversity and crucial importance of how parliamentary actors interpret their select committee roles has been examined in sufficient detail, we can shift focus to the consequences of those interpretations on scrutiny itself. Specifically in this chapter, I turn to one of the most well-known aspects of committee work: gathering evidence. Oral evidence hearings, above all, have received widespread attention over the 2010 parliament (perhaps in part through the growth of televising committee proceedings and the expansion of news channels (e.g. BBC Parliament)): in July 2011, for example, an already intense and high-profile hearing was dramatically interrupted after Rupert Murdoch, chief executive of News Corporation, was assaulted with a foam pie (the afternoon, with two other witnesses, lasted close to five hours) (Plunkett and Martinson, 2011); later that year, in November 2011, members of the Public Accounts Committee were unhappy with a civil servant's answers to questions and subsequently forced him to swear an oath to tell the truth as part of the committee's investigations (Public Accounts Committee, 2011, Ev 44); and, in February 2013, Mark Carney appeared before the Treasury Committee for close to four hours in advance of taking up his post as governor of the Bank of England, having also submitted a 30-page document as written evidence before his pre-appointment hearing (Treasury Committee, 2013). These three examples of sustained, detailed scrutiny made headline news, and while they illustrate how the approach of committees has changed since they were established in 1979, these examples are arguably only the tip of the iceberg. Evidence is taken by most committees on a routine, everyday basis. Although this process is one of the most central aspects of committee work, this has not,

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on the whole, received significant analysis in British parliamentary studies. There are some exceptions (Berry and Kippin, 2014; Halpin et. al., 2012; Pedersen et. al., 2015; Rumbul, 2016), and the aim of this chapter is to build on the small pre-existing literature to open a debate about how evidence-gathering is affected by some of the themes raised in earlier chapters. It would be too ambitious an attempt to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the evidence-gathering process; rather, my aim here is to provide a specific snapshot to illustrate the importance of individual beliefs and everyday practices in affecting scrutiny. In order to do this, the chapter is broken into three sections, which correspond with each of the main questions that govern this chapter's focus. First, why does evidence matter? This section focuses on the beliefs that actors have about evidence, which is important on at least three levels: for MPs to build policy expertise and support their arguments; for committees to engage in robust and detailed scrutiny; and for Parliament to engage with the public. Second, who gives evidence to committees? This section looks at the actions and practices of committees, specifically the evidence base by looking at oral evidence from one parliamentary session (Session 2013-14). This reveals that witnesses are not reflective of the UK that Parliament seeks to represent (raising important questions about issues of democratic engagement). Third, what factors affect the evidence-gathering process? This question looks at the causes of why evidence draws from a limited pool of individuals through *dilemmas*. Committees are driven by short-term and multiple demands from committee members and chairs, which is exacerbated by the variety of roles that MPs seek to perform in select committees and, as a result, pushes and pulls committee scrutiny in different directions. It reminds us that we must not only look at the formal process by which the legislature holds the executive to account, but also the beliefs, practices and dilemmas that sustain scrutiny. This chapter, then, opens a debate about the coherence of the evidence-taking process and more generally posits some of the consequences from themes raised in earlier chapters.

8.1. Why does evidence matter?

Evidence underpins the select committee system, and it arguably does so on at least three distinct levels: on an individual level, it helps MPs to gain expertise

Individual level	Building expertise	Evidence allows committee members, chairs and staff to learn about policy issues and gain policy-relevant expertise
Committee level	Scrutiny	Evidence gathered by committees allows them to scrutinise government policy and make evidence-based recommendations
Parliamentary level	Public engagement	Engaging directly with the public ensures that Parliament sustains the link between representatives and the represented

Table 8.1. Why does evidence matter?

and use evidence to support political arguments; on a committee level, it informs scrutiny processes; and on a parliamentary level, it is a method by which the link between Parliament and public is sustained between general elections. Each will be briefly discussed in turn (see Table 8.1 for a summary).

The first factor relates to the individual level of MPs to build policy-related expertise and to use evidence to enact their scrutiny role, which thereby links closely to themes raised in Chapter 4. Policy learning through gathering evidence from stakeholders, academics, service users and executive actors allows MPs to, as one chair put it, 'really get your teeth into something' (Interview C-05). Another MP said that being on a select committee is key for access and finding out information because it offers MPs 'a chance to get in-depth access in a particular area' (Interview M-03). He explained that, while Members of Parliament generally have good access to a range of individuals and groups by virtue of the position they hold, it is only through select committee membership that access to reticent individuals is likely to be ensured (though, as we discuss below, not guaranteed). More broadly, while for some MPs joining a committee involves learning about something new and different to their previous employment background, others use this opportunity to deepen their preexisting knowledge (and likely use it to advocate for change). One MP, for example, described it as 'a good education to me, having come in as a new MP' (Interview M-20). Indeed, in the absence of systematic and professional training for MPs, becoming an effective Member of Parliament depends on practising scrutiny activity in committee rooms at private and public evidence sessions to pick up not only effective questioning techniques, but also to hear and develop different lines of support and weakness for different party positions, to support the constituency's case, and so on (Coghill et. al., 2008). In recent years, some (not all) select committees have given training to their committee members,

usually by experienced QCs or journalists (Interview S-08). Thus, evidence has an individual-level purpose.

This policy learning is not limited to the individual level and, perhaps particularly important from a chair's point of view, it is essential for the committee as a whole to better understand policy issues. One chair:

It's very important that the committee and the staff of the committee are genuinely learning through the process of the inquiry, who are not just going through a ritual in order to stick the pig at the end of it. There is a genuine intellectual exploration of the issues, of the surfacing of the information in order to advance the debate about whatever it is we're scrutinising (Interview C-04).

Similarly, another chair:

I think we're there to do a genuine ... I think our committee is actually there to try and find solutions and to sort of build a solution, and build awareness and understanding and to identify gaps that there are that need to be addressed (Interview C-02).

This leads us to the second factor regarding the importance of evidence: a way by which committees examine to what extent government policy is working, with the ultimate aim of enhancing or improving existing policy. A key theme from interviews and fieldwork suggests that scrutiny should be underpinned by an evidence-led approach (often relating this to a legalistic perspective) (Interview M-16, Interview M-20). For example:

I think we act like a jury. Of course we have our own party political affiliations, that's why we got elected here in the first place, but as with the jury and a court case, we really should only consider all the facts before us, the evidence before us (Interview M-15).

This interpretation of evidence means that the scrutiny focus is on empirical cases. This isn't to say that the politics is taken out of inquiries, nor that evidence cannot be used for political purposes (particularly given the plausible view that 'evidence' is not neutral (see Chapter 2)). But the majority of committee members that I observed and interviewed do not view their scrutiny role in a *party* political way; rather, they seek to give greater credence to witnesses and

the views of others rather than themselves or, at the very least, try to do so. For example, one MP was frustrated with a colleague after an oral evidence session:

The line of inquiry was more aggressive and attacking [the minister] and actually less ... it was not eliciting information, it was, you know, letting us know what [the committee member] thought as opposed to asking what the minister thought. I suppose that's a danger with all the politicians, they want to let you know what they're thinking, including me (Interview M-04).

More generally:

The problem is, you know, ... it's easy to forget that these inquiries are not about what you think. Actually, what you think, you should do that somewhere else (Interview M-16).

As these quotes show, even if MPs *intend* to approach evidence impartially, by virtue of their question style or topic that they cover, they may adopt a party helper role or act as a lone wolf (see Chapter 4).

Broadening out one step further brings us to the parliamentary level. The link between representatives and represented is established through free and fair elections but, as Cristina Leston-Bandeira (2012, 2013) points out, the relationship between citizen and representative needs to be sustained between elections to maintain the link between Parliament and public. Parliamentary committees are a crucial mechanism by which this link can be sustained. In recent years, select committee engagement strategies have become increasingly important for MPs as an attempt to rebuild trust in politics, especially after the MPs' Expenses Scandal in 2009 (Kelso, 2009a), and because members of the public generally respond positively to select committee scrutiny (Hansard Society, 2014, pp.27-39). In a sign of changing times, select committees adopted a new 'core task' (Task 10) to guide their committee work in 2012: 'To assist the House of Commons in better engaging with the public by ensuring that the work of the committee is accessible to the public' (Liaison Committee, 2012a, paras 16-20). Most recently, the Liaison Committee commissioned a compelling piece of research into building public engagement by Matthew Flinders et. al. (Liaison Committee, 2015), which concluded that, while there has been 'a significant shift within the select committee system to taking public engagement seriously', the authors note that 'this shift has not been systematic' and may require 'a deeper cultural change at Westminster' (para 3). These findings are echoed in interviews for this PhD, too, in that public engagement was not often mentioned by interviewees. That said, awareness was shown by some:

I mean, you know, what we're looking at the moment, [XX] ... A lot of people are very unhappy about that and they may continue to be unhappy but at least the committee's given them an opportunity to say what they think and shows that, you know, Parliament is taking notice of it. So that's, you know, responding to our stakeholders or whatever is a good thing to think about (Interview S-11).

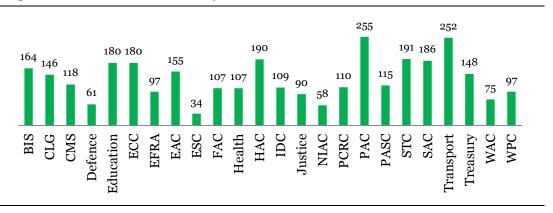
We've done quite a lot of public meetings ... we've gone out of our way to try and engage with people that wouldn't normally engage with Parliament or with politics but are at the sharp end of suffering the consequences of government policy ... and that's quite difficult to get people in that are willing to speak on those things. And that's why we'll do it in a car and going out to them, to their communities. Making it accessible. ... so we're trying to break down some barriers of public engagement and things (Interview C-05).

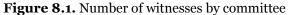
This link between Parliament and public by way of select committee inquiries has been acknowledged more widely in the literature on Parliament and public engagement, which matters because it gives the public a route to potentially impact parliamentary proceedings beyond placing an x on a ballot paper once every five years (e.g. Marsh, 2016).

Generally, this discussion indicates that evidence matters to select committees for three key reasons: first, MPs note the policy expertise gained from committee service (individual level); second, committees use evidence to establish the basis for policy evaluation and detailed scrutiny (committee level); and third, the evidence-gathering process acts as a crucial mechanism to link the public directly to Parliament and the policy-making process (parliamentary level). Given this importance of evidence, it raises a crucial issue about the spectrum of evidence taken by the House of Commons. In exploring this a little further, we can better understand from whom MPs learn, how they scrutinise government, and in what way the representative link is sustained. Thus, our discussion turns from *why* evidence matters to *who* gives evidence; or, from *individual beliefs* to actions and *practices*.

7.2. Who gives evidence?

In recent years, some research has been conducted to look more closely at the relationship between witnesses and select committees. Darren Halpin et. al. (2012), for example, look at interest groups at the Scottish Parliament, who find that there is a core of participants who are heavily engaged in evidencegathering processes (both in terms of written evidence and oral hearings), which raises a subsequent question about 'usual suspects' in parliamentary proceedings. Elsewhere, Rebecca Rumbul (2016) examines the gender balance of witnesses at the National Assembly of Wales, finding that witnesses are overwhelmingly male and evidence sessions are conducted in a gendered atmosphere. This similarly questions the representativeness of the legislature's evidence base. Both of these sub-national examples are complemented by a national (though thus far isolated) report published by Richard Berry and Sean Kippin (2014). Their research focuses on evidence taken by Parliament (including House of Commons committees, House of Lords committees, and joint committees) between October and November 2013. Their report echoes the sub-national findings from Halpin et. al. and Rumbul, in that the authors found not only a startling gender disparity (only 24.7% of all witnesses were women), but additionally that trade associations were arguably over-represented due to their frequent appearances in oral evidence. Aside from this research, there has been one further, international, study. This research, by Helene Helboe Pedersen et. al. (2015), compared the effect of institutional arrangements and other factors to giving evidence in the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands. This found that it is not necessarily structural state-society relations that solely affect the relationship between legislature and public, but the institutional arrangements, too (such as the open or closed nature of evidence hearings). Broadly, these four studies collectively indicate that those who give evidence to parliamentary select committees do not reflect the wider public. However, aside from these aforementioned studies, there has been little further published research on the relationship between witnesses and select committees. Given the importance of evidence in scrutiny covered above, this is perhaps a little surprising. This chapter seeks to build on some of the previous findings by exploring the witness base on which committees draw. The research conducted here is limited in that it looks at 24 select committees (excluding the





Liaison Committee) from the House of Commons from 08 May 2013 to 14 May 2014 (Session 2013-14), and looks at oral evidence hearings only (excluding written submissions and other forms of engagement). However, this alone amounted to 1,238 committee sessions, featuring 3,225 witnesses, which is more extensive than the only other national study on witnesses (Berry and Kippin's report features 583 witnesses).

The overall figures for committee activity are illustrated in Figure 8.1, which shows that the Public Accounts Committee had the most witnesses (255), closely followed by the Transport Committee (252); meanwhile, the European Scrutiny Committee (ESC) had the fewest (34 witnesses). The ESC is arguably an anomalous case because it examines draft European Union legislation. The Liaison Committee has been excluded because it is neither a departmental nor cross-cutting committee with few evidence sessions that would otherwise skew the overall findings. On average, each committee heard evidence from 134 witnesses. In a similar vein to Berry and Kippin, I break down this data by analysing: (i) organisational affiliations; (ii) geographical breakdown; and, (iii) the gender balance (summary data is available in Appendix G).

8.2.1. Organisational affiliation

Figure 8.2 gives an overview of the organisations that gave evidence, which is examined by committee in Figure 8.3 (Appendix H explains these categories). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the single biggest category of witness is 'government and civil service', which makes up 36.0% of all witnesses over the parliamentary session. This category was broken down further (see Figure 8.4). This reminds

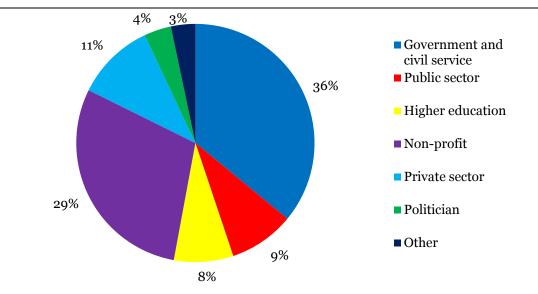


Figure 8.2. Organisational distribution of witnesses

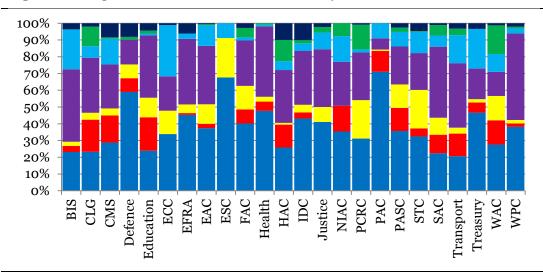


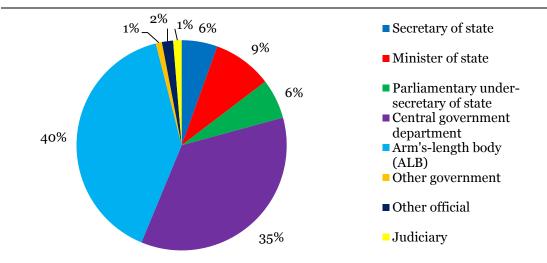
Figure 8.3. Organisational distribution of witnesses by committee

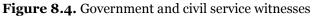
us that public service delivery is both complex and fragmented, but also – and more importantly – that public officials appear in front of select committees on a regular basis (ALBs were the single-biggest sub-category over Session 2013-14). Though change over time is not shown here, these findings reinforce the trend indicated by other research that public servants have become public-facing figures (exemplified by Margaret Hodge's (mistaken) claim to a civil servant in 2011 that he is accountable to Parliament and not accountable to the relevant departmental minister (Public Accounts Committee, 2011, Ev 39-40)) (Grube, 2014).

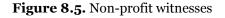
Chapter 8: Evidence

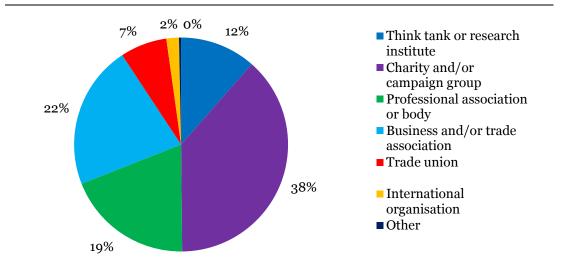
Figure 8.5 shows the distribution of non-profit organisations, indicating the importance placed on charities and/or campaign groups, business and/or trade associations, and professional associations. Interestingly, trade unions made up only 7.1% of non-profit witnesses, which is small in comparison to business and/or trade associations (21.7%). This reinforces the comment made by Berry and Kippin (2014) that trade associations feature frequently at public evidence sessions and who might be considered as over-represented. Generally, the non-profit sector played a role in most committees, but especially the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (perhaps unsurprising given the remit of the committee) and the Work and Pensions Committee. Turning to the private sector, Figure 8.6 analyses the sub-categories in more detail, and reveals that prominence is given to multi-national businesses and large/national businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses made up only 18.0% of private sector witnesses.

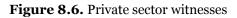
The higher education sector made up 8.1% of all witnesses, predominantly universities and research groups. Generally, university-led research groups were subsumed into their university categories (such as the Glasgow Media Group into the University of Glasgow or the Institute of Education into University College London). The higher education category was examined in more detail by looking at institutional affiliations. These affiliations were used as a proxy to illustrate the nature of the types of universities that gave evidence. So, University Alliance tend to be business-engaged universities; Million Plus represents newer universities; Russell Group universities are perceived to be traditional researchintensive institutions; and Oxbridge (though part of the Russell Group) represent the two most elite universities in the UK. Of course, these affiliations are not without problems because many universities did not fit into an affiliated group and were therefore labelled 'non-affiliated'. With this caveat in mind, the data is visualised in Figure 8.7 and Figure 8.8 (all higher education witnesses and only university witnesses, respectively). These figures show a predominance of Russell Group universities: excluding Oxbridge, this group makes up 52.3% of all higher education witnesses; looking at only university witnesses, and including Oxbridge, this rises to 75.6%. This is not necessarily surprising because these universities tend to be perceived as successful research institutes (either through research audits or through reputation). Table 8.2 shows the top

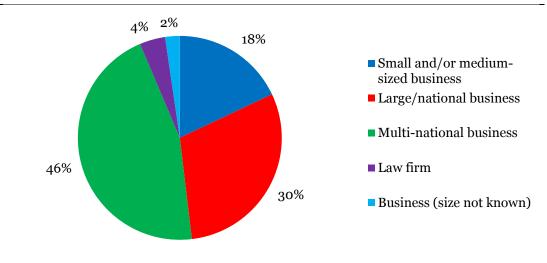












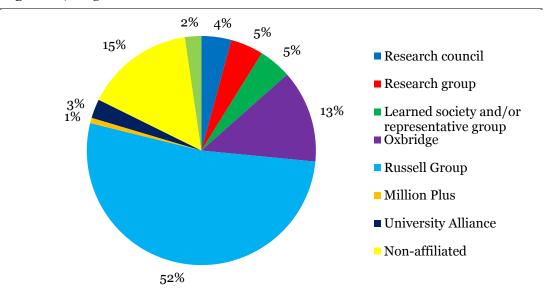
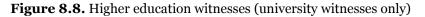


Figure 8.7. Higher education witnesses (all witnesses)



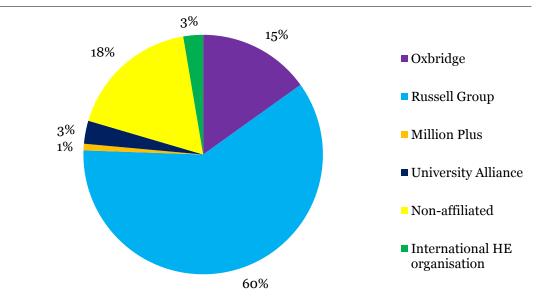


Table 8.2. Most frequent higher education witnesses

1	University College London (26)		
2	University of Oxford (24)		
3	London School of Economics (19)		
4	King's College London (17)		
5	University of Glasgow (12)		
6	University of Cambridge (10)		
7	University of Edinburgh (7)		
=7	University of Manchester (7)		
9	University of York (6)		
=10	University of Stirling (5)		
=10	Cardiff University (5)		
=10	Imperial College London (5)		
=10	University of Birmingham (5)		

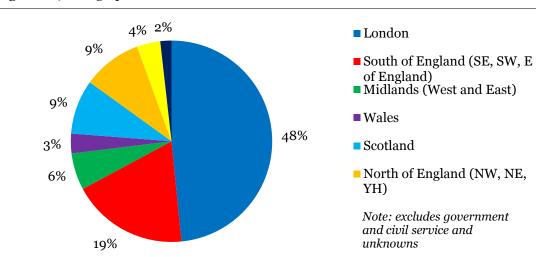
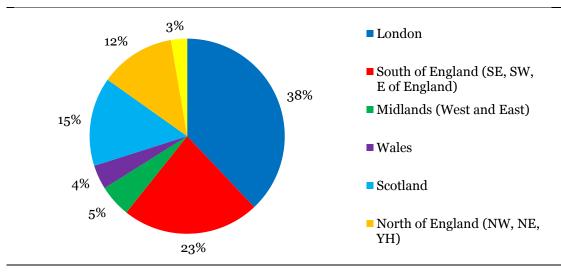




Figure 8.10. Geographical distribution of witnesses (academic witnesses only)



10 universities that gave evidence to committees. Four of the top five are based in London and the South East, a trend which is reinforced more generally by Figure 8.10 that breaks down universities by geographical region. This arguably raises a question about the diversity of universities' representation in Parliament, especially when taken together with the lack of representation from non-Russell Group universities (though note, of course, that non-affiliated universities make up 18.3% of university witnesses).

8.2.2. Geographical location

This dataset makes an attempt not only to give an insight into the organisational affiliation of witnesses, but also their location. This is important because it

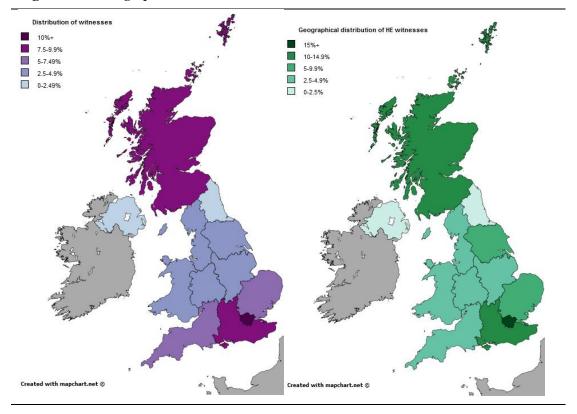


Figure 8.11. Geographical distribution of witnesses in the UK

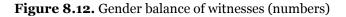
allows us an insight into the geographical range, particularly shedding light on the *reach* of select committee evidence-gathering. Additionally, it indicates the accessibility for witnesses to give evidence from different parts of the country. However, this data is gathered with difficulty for three reasons. First, location is not generally listed in oral evidence records (universities are an obvious exception). Second, the main office or primary location of an organisation might not be the same work location for witnesses (for example, staff may work from home, live in a different region and commute to work, work at a different office to listed headquarters of organisations, and so on). And third, some witnesses might travel regularly or might be in London over the course of an inquiry and therefore this would not impede their availability to attend. As a result, a large number of witnesses' location is labelled as 'not known'. These findings should therefore be treated with caution.

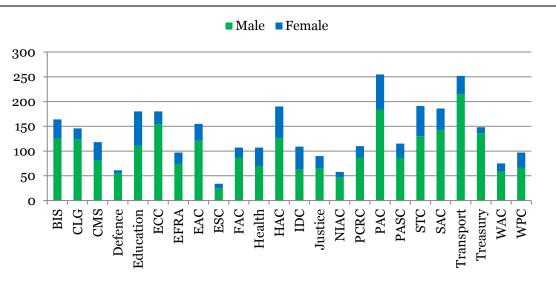
Despite the above limitations, a large amount of information is available online through publicly available records (particularly for high profile and public figures). This reveals, even when government and civil service witnesses are excluded, that London dominates, making up close to half of all witnesses (48.4%), followed by the South of England (18.7%) (see Figure 8.9). The others take up a much smaller proportion, with the North of England and Scotland representing close to 9% each, and the Midlands reaching 5.9%. Over the 2013-14 parliamentary session, more witnesses seem to come from abroad than from Wales (3.8% against 3.2%, respectively). This trend is replicated for geographical distribution of universities, where data is most reliable. This shows (see Figure 8.10) a predominance of universities in London and the South of England, which together make up more than half of all university witnesses. Two caveats must be attached to these findings. First, a range of committees were exploring the potential impact of the Scotlish independence referendum during Session 2013-14. This could explain why Scotland had a higher number of witnesses than might otherwise be expected given other trends. Second, devolved legislatures have their own evidence-gathering processes and policy competences, which means that witnesses might be drawn to legislatures in those areas.

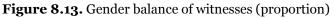
8.2.3. Gender balance

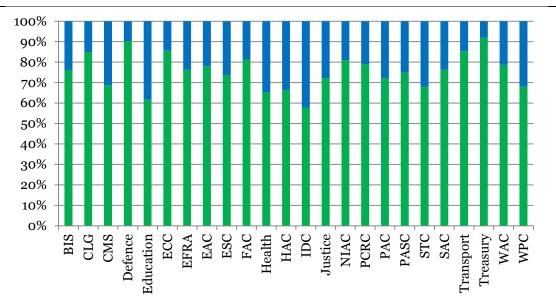
A key headline raised from Berry and Kippin's research project is the low number of women that gave oral evidence: of 583 witnesses, 24.7% were women (or 144); of all Commons witnesses they counted (391), 23.5% were women (or 92). They also looked specifically at the organisational and committee breakdown, all of which reveal a strong disparity that favours men over women (with only one exception, a temporary committee to scrutinise the Mental Capacity Act 2005) (Berry and Kippin, 2014, pp.10-13). This led to a range of individuals, including academics, a chair of a select committee, and staff from non-profit organisations, to call for action (Democratic Audit, 2014). More recent research by Rumbul (2016, pp.70-1) echoed these findings for the National Assembly for Wales: over a 12 year period, only 27% of witnesses were women.

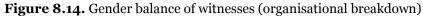
The above findings are reinforced by this dataset, which shows that, of 3,225 witnesses, 24.6% were women (792 witnesses). This almost exactly replicates the Berry and Kippin report. This is broken down by committee in Figure 8.12 and Figure 8.13, and by organisation in Figure 8.14. This reveals that the Treasury Committee called the fewest women to give evidence (less than 10%), while the

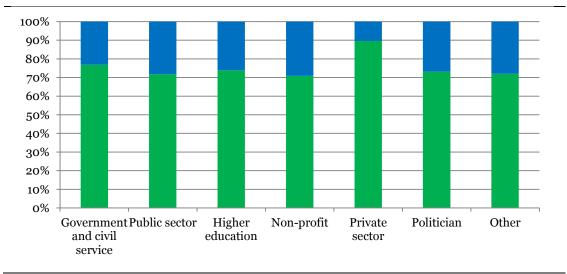












International Development Committee called the most (just over 30%). However, no committee came even close to calling an equal number of women and men to give evidence. Similarly, no organisational group called an equal number of women and men. Private sector witnesses were particularly unrepresentative, where women constituted only 10.4% of all witnesses.

8.2.4. Discussion

Although these findings represent a specific snapshot of one type of evidence in the House of Commons during one parliamentary session, this data is important in that it not only reinforces the initial findings from Berry and Kippin, but also offers slightly more depth. The data presented here questions the diversity of the evidence on which committees depend, in at least three ways. First, the organisational breakdown reveals that committees rely heavily on representative associations, particularly professional bodies, trade associations and large/multi-national companies. By comparison, trade unions, small and medium-sized businesses, and service users or members of the public made up a small proportion. Second, the location of witnesses indicates that Parliament is not listening to the public from across the country. Axiomatically, select committees are constrained in who they are able to invite for oral evidence in that they cannot choose where organisations should be based (and devolved legislatures may skew the findings, too). However, committees do have some room for manoeuvre. For example, despite the range of universities across the country, 37.8% of all academic witnesses are based in London, and four of the top five universities that gave evidence most often over 2013-14 came from London and the South East alone. Third, men vastly over-represent women in giving evidence in all areas of committee work, and anecdotal evidence also suggests that other social demographic groups are under-represented in Parliament (e.g. ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality). Perhaps one of the most worrying statistics is that, over one week, 25 November to 28 November 2013, 77 witnesses gave evidence, of which only six were women (or 7.8%). This matters because - if the role of Parliament is to reflect the public - it suggests that the institution is falling short in its task to not only reflect the population, but also engage with all sections of society to inform the policy-process. Though the topic of representation goes slightly beyond the purview of this study, this does feed into a broader point about the importance of descriptive representation (Childs, 2008; Phillips, 1995). Indeed, without descriptive representation in Parliament, it could perpetuate the perception that the House of Commons is a closed institution and does not hear from witnesses with whom the general public identify. This is particularly important given the earlier discussion about the role of evidence as a way to engage the public and link Parliament directly to the everyday lives of the citizens it seeks to represent. Instead, these three points suggest that select committees seem to rely on 'usual suspects', i.e. familiar witnesses that give evidence frequently, and individuals who are used to speaking in parliamentary or political environments. This questions the 'systematic' nature of evidence-taking and reinforces the view, made in the previous chapter, that it may be more appropriate to talk of 'webs' of scrutiny. Axiomatically, these trends are not without reasons. In order to examine these, I now wish to focus more directly on the how everyday practices affect the evidence-gathering process.

8.3. What factors affect the evidence-gathering process?

In order to examine the everyday practices of select committees with regards to the evidence-taking process, I begin with a broad and brief discussion of the modes of gathering evidence for inquiries because this provides much-needed context for the findings set out above. From this, I point to a number of committee-related dilemmas and witness-related dilemmas that affect the diversity of witness panels in scrutiny and, while they do not justify the lack of diversity, they do provide explanations and give further weight to the importance of studying everyday practices.

8.3.1. Modes of gathering evidence

This chapter has, so far, focused on the most well-known aspect of committee work: oral evidence. However, committees gather information in other ways, too. Indeed, inquiries usually begin with an *open* call for written evidence based on the terms of reference issued by a select committee. This means that any member of the public or organisation is permitted to send evidence to a select committee as part of its investigations. Though written evidence is not a prerequisite to give oral evidence, this form of engagement is a crucial way by which an individual, their research or their organisation more generally may come to the notice of committee staff, particularly if they are not part of a preexisting network or mailing list. Further research is needed to look at the role of written evidence but, based on fieldwork, it seems as though this is an important trigger for oral evidence. It may be that one reason for the narrow pool of oral evidence comes from a lack of diversity in written evidence. There is a perceived formality to this process (written evidence can be seen as legalistic, for example, to which many members of the public do not relate and therefore does not incentivise engagement), and so committees are increasingly attempting to use alternatives to both oral and written evidence.

One alternative is a committee visit (though they can be combined with oral sessions, as some committees have done). Between 2010 and 2015, committees have gone to a range of places: Newcastle (Work and Pensions Committee, 2014a), Gloucester (Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, 2014), or Edinburgh (Environmental Audit Committee, 2014). Between 2010 and 2015, committees went on 640 field visits (based on figures from sessional returns). It is perceived as a useful way to engage with the public and allows committees to gather information directly from members of the public and service users, especially (though not exclusively) for UK visits (Interview M-10). In advance of the aforementioned Work and Pensions Committee visit to Newcastle on the topic of Employment and Support Allowance, for instance, the chair Dame Anne Begg said:

We want to hear from people who have experience of making a new claim for Employment and Support Allowance or who have been through the incapacity benefit reassessment process. Their observations on how the system is working and, crucially, suggestions for how it can be improved, will help inform our ongoing inquiry (UK Parliament, 2014).

The visit was subsequently quoted in the report as part of 'the claimant experience' (Work and Pensions Committee, 2014a, paras 16-18). Evidence and information gathered from visits usually feature in committee reports, though the level may vary (in part because of procedural issues of using evidence not gathered 'formally'). This form of gathering evidence may be a reason why

members of the public do not frequently give oral evidence; they are presumed to inform inquiries informally through public engagement events (though the extent to which these are attended by those already interested in politics and embedded in the select committee's network raises the question as to whether this is true).

Committees have taken to other forms of public engagement (and quasiinformation-gathering) to overcome the perceived dilemma or need to reach new audiences. The aforementioned research for the Liaison Committee (2015) discusses this in great detail, so it is worth noting only briefly that committees have tried, among other things: inviting the public to suggest committee inquiries; using Twitter to solicit questions; and, e-consultations, web forums and internet consultations to gather information from service users and stakeholders. Importantly, these are not about disseminating reports to the public or explaining how committees work; rather, these techniques are about trying to get input from the public. Though these examples illustrate some of the ways in which committee are changing their engagement with stakeholders and the public, the research conducted by Flinders et. al. also notes that public engagement is 'uneven' and has not been 'fully embedded' into the culture of Parliament (Liaison Committee, 2015, para 91). In part, this may be because committees continue to depend on oral evidence, which other forms of information gathering are unlikely to be able to replace. This is especially the case for those types of hearings where individuals are being held to account, rather than asked to provide information or give evidence of research (especially ministers, civil servants and high profile individuals). While different modes of evidence-gathering do not justify the skewed nature of witness characteristics, this explains in part why certain types of witnesses are underrepresented at hearings. However, there are many more reasons that witness lists are affected. This brings us to some of the dilemmas that committees face.

8.3.2. Limiting the pool: agendas and networks

In general terms, witnesses for oral evidence are invited after written evidence has been submitted, discussed and analysed. Initial lists tend to be drawn up by staff based on written evidence, pre-existing (and frequently informal) policy networks, and/or advice from specialist advisers. However, the options of who a committee may invite depends on the focus of an inquiry, as this clerk explains:

Some people select themselves because they have the knowledge that you want and they've done the research or analysis or they represent, you know, different client groups or whatever (Interview S-11).

This agenda-setting stage arguably limits the pool from which committees can gather evidence because, quite simply, committees do not have a choice over these – especially for witnesses that are being held to account, rather than invited to give information or to provide evidence. For this reason, the statistics on organisations (especially government and civil service) arguably reveal as much (if not more) about the representational state of those organisations as it does about select committees. This is arguably limited even further because the policy area itself may well be quite small, or only a few individuals from which a committee can draw. As this clerk points out:

We have a few, our favourite academics who come and they'll give evidence several times a year because, you know, there's not a huge number of [XX] academics and there's not a huge number of people fascinated in many of the things we do (Interview S-02).

Due to this factor, then, committees are restricted in widening the diversity of witness panels. To put this slightly differently: the pool from which committees seek to draw evidence may not be representative itself, and so imbalances of gender or location may reflect imbalances in organisations.

8.3.3. Direction from MPs and achieving political balance

As noted, initial lists are drawn up by staff. Additionally, the chair will offer direction and MPs will make suggestions. The extent to which MPs recommend witnesses varies considerably. Many MPs commended clerks' political antennae (e.g. one member of staff: '*I knew that there are some organisations* [the chair] *just didn't like, so I'm not going to invite* [them]' (Interview S-08)), and this, in part, explains why committee members are generally not significantly involved in this process. One MP explained that he would '*not very often*' suggest names, except if witness lists were not broad enough because he wanted '*a range of views*' (Interview M-08). Another, however, noted that he would suggest names

'both formally and informally' and *'often significantly'* change the witness plans brought forward by staff (Interview M-O1). Another member:

We need to get information in a certain format to allow us to prepare the report, as you'll know, same thing the court finds, the way that you can't rely on evidence which you haven't actually taken as a committee. So that's why choosing the witnesses is key because you want to get certain, you know, flavour across, who you choose to be witnesses are going to be quite important (Interview M-20).

This indicates that the nature of evidence is still contested and political – some witnesses may be invited because they have to make an investigation appear more credible or to get things on record and thereby allow the committee to close debate into other areas where it does not wish to go (this, however, needs further research). That said, many suggestions from Members tend to be individuals that they are aware of or already know about. Thus, as one clerk put it:

So, members will make suggestions. Very often they are straight from the usual suspects list. I mean that's the biggest problem we have is there are a group of people who come often to give evidence and getting out beyond that group is a challenge.

He went on to say that this is possibly accentuated by lobby groups, who have become '*more crafty*' at getting their message in front of MPs, in order to subsequently be suggested for oral evidence (Interview S-10). This arguably presents a dilemma for staff because, though they are arguably most keenly aware of the diversity of witness panels, a broader set of witnesses would be contrary to members' wishes (therefore non-negotiable). This means that committee staff do not have the capacity to invite a perfectly representative witness panel (though it also raises questions about the diversity of MPs' networks).

A further concern for committees is the need for political balance and/or breadth. For example, one clerk noted that, to '*balance*' a lot of academics that have given oral evidence as part of an inquiry (she explains that '*academics are generally seen as left-wing*' by MPs), she has suggested policy experts from centre-right think tanks to the committee at an upcoming session (Interview S-02). Committee staff, then, see written and oral evidence submissions not only

in terms of their inherent value as a piece of research or evidence, but crucially where it sits on the political spectrum, and if it is broadly for or against a particular position that the committee may take in conclusions to its inquiry. A desire for breadth of view is shared by some chairs:

If we think there's two big organisations ... that are going to say exactly the same, which they probably will, we'll just choose one of them and try and get somebody along to say something different (Interview C-05).

Therefore, staff and chairs attempt to ensure breadth of evidence across the political spectrum. It indicates, once again, that the characteristics of those giving evidence might be affected through the belief of the political nature of evidence (let alone the ostensible quality of evidence).

8.3.4. Pressure on the timetable

Though committees face problems in *identifying* potential witnesses, there are yet further dilemmas in *organising* evidence sessions. One issue stems from the desire among committee members to frequently extend the number of committee sessions as an inquiry is taking place, which means that 'there's pressure on the timetable' (Interview S-03). One clerk explained that an inquiry where four evidence sessions were planned, 'ended up being 12 to fit people in because their ideas kept adding' (Interview S-02). This revisits the theme of multiple lovalties and time pressure that was identified in Chapter 4 (on members) and Chapter 6 (on staff) respectively. Some committees (such as the Home Affairs Committee and Public Accounts Committee) and their MPs are unmistakably reactive to the news agenda, or what another clerk described as 'ambulance chasing' (Interview S-11) (for a discussion, see White, 2015b). Consequently, inquiries are drawn up at short notice, and pre-planned sessions are moved to make room for more urgent business. Alternatively, evidence sessions result in multiple witnesses, or back-to-back sessions, to squeeze MPs' wishes into the timetable - though MPs themselves have responded by saying that multiple witnesses limits the depth of questioning that they are able to pursue (e.g. Interview M-01, Interview M-08). This clearly affects the availability of witnesses to attend. One MP acknowledged:

I remember when I put forward [XX] inquiry, I wrote a kind of five page wish list of all the people I thought would be interesting to hear from ... the clerks will go away and try and work with that wish list. But then they will come back with what's practical and also, within a very finite amount of time, when you might have only a handful of meetings or something (Interview M-19).

One member of staff:

Often we'll give the chair a witness plan, but ... with the best will in the world you never get even half the people you want on your witness plan. Because they're on holiday, they can't do it, they don't want to do [it], you know, that kind of thing. And then you're trying to find replacements (Interview S-08).

To plan a session with the right witness for the right time can therefore be difficult, and highlights the unpredictability of everyday behaviour. Committees (particularly from the view of staff) are working within short, frequently changing deadlines with demanding committee members (whose own commitments vary) and chairs (whose ideas may be different from that of the rest of the committee). It is unsurprising that committees draw heavily from London-based witnesses as a result. They have to travel the shortest distance, are likely to be available at shorter notice, and are more likely to be known in relevant policy circles.

8.3.5. The political performance of evidence

Evidence sessions easily stray from original topics into the political sphere. Over fieldwork, for example, one academic witness noted (to her surprise) that the hearing was '*very intense*' and '*very political*' despite the fact that she was trying to impart information (FWD 15.4.6). This generally reinforces points made by the aforementioned research by Flinders *et. al.*, in which witnesses indicated that questions by MPs can be much broader than the formal terms of reference, and also more political (Liaison Committee, 2015, para 77 and paras 83-85). Indeed, both through fieldwork observations and through interviews with staff, there is a growing concern that persuading witnesses to attend sessions has become more difficult in recent years because of the increasingly adversarial role adopted by some chairs in evidence hearings:

We give them a kind of really broad brush description of what the session is going to be like and try to allay any nerves that they may have ... I do that for witnesses now because there's a general nervousness amongst witnesses because all they see on the television is [EX57] and [GS63] tearing shreds off of officials and that's quite counterproductive to the vast majority of select committee work, trying to get people to come and give evidence to us, I think (Interview S-04).

This concern deserves further attention (though unfortunately goes beyond the scope of this research study) because these dilemmas are likely to impact the evidence on which committees base their scrutiny of government.

This dilemma is exacerbated further by the perceived need to have witnesses who are 'good' at giving evidence. It is worth quoting the following clerk at length:

There are people who you know are renowned experts but who are just crap witnesses. And there is an element of theatre to it, you know? ... We had a seminar the other day, it wasn't oral evidence session, but we had a seminar and we had high hopes of two people who were just so enthusiastic on the phone you thought this is going to be brilliant, they're just going to blow the committee away. And it was so boring. And they were so uninspiring and they turned into these grey technocrats with nothing to say and you're like, "Oh god!" (Interview S-10).

He noted that this '*theatrical performance*' needed to have witnesses who were '*accessible and understandable to members*' (Interview S-10). Not all witnesses are able to convey information in this way, whilst simultaneously trying to navigate the complex personal and political relationships between committee members. Committees remain risk-averse in that they are unlikely to seek oral evidence from individuals that could create divisions between committee members, arguments, or go against the agenda of the committee's original aims. So, perceived 'risky' witnesses are avoided.

More generally, we can say that witnesses are not only experts, but performers, too. They are situated within a particular kind of setting and asked to enact a particular kind of role. This requires applying the right social cues and etiquette, as well as the right form of speech and tone of voice (i.e. performing with a voice that is deemed fit for giving evidence) (as covered in Chapter 2). Not all witnesses are perceived to be suited to this environment, nor are they – perhaps – seen by some committee members or chairs as legitimate. Rumbul, in her research on evidence-gathering at the National Assembly for Wales, argues that

such political settings are gendered in such a way as to reinforce masculinity. This deserves further analysis and research, but unfortunately goes beyond the possibilities of this research project.

8.3.6. Reticent witnesses

A final dilemma that committees face is their ability to persuade reticent witnesses to attend evidence sessions. The idea of not being able to ensure attendance by witnesses may strike some readers as odd given that select committees have the formal power to send for persons, papers and records, including an official summons for an individual to attend (HC SO Nos. 121-152, particularly HC SO No. 135). However, parliamentary actors have mostly interpreted this formal power as a double-edged sword. In written evidence submitted to the Liaison Committee in 2012, the then Clerk of the House of Commons indicated that, though investigative committees have powers to punish non-attendance, the possible course of action that a committee may take could be limited due to reputational damage to Parliament through a possible legal challenge made against the Commons' decision (notwithstanding the additional difficulty of the process of punishing miscreants, which is complex) (Liaison Committee, 2012b, Ev w77-85; Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, 2013). In practice, therefore, witnesses are not 'summoned' by the Serjeant at Arms to appear at oral evidence sessions; they are 'invited' to attend by the committee to give their thoughts and views - and generally most witnesses are willing (some even enthusiastic) to do so. There have been only rare occasions when witnesses have been compelled to attend (during the 2010 parliament, for example, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee successfully summoned Rupert Murdoch and James Murdoch as part of their investigations into the role of News Corporation in the phone-hacking scandal (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012, pp.44-5)).³⁷ This means that the relationships between witnesses and select committees are mostly governed by informal means and *soft* powers of persuasion, and a process that is usually the

³⁷ Since 2015, there have been further examples that demonstrate this is an ongoing issue: Mike Ashley, founder of Sports Direct, had refused to give evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee until very recently (Armstrong, 2016; Bury, 2016); and Sir Philip Green, former owner of BHS, had initially been reticent about appearing before both BIS Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee with some heated exchanges between Green and the chairs of the committees (Butler, 2016; Davies, 2016).

Agenda of inquiry	The committee's agenda limits the choice of witnesses who are able
	to constructively contribute to an inquiry, which is potentially
	exacerbated further by a small pool of witnesses from which
	committees can draw.
Direction from MPs	Chairs and committee members' recommendations arguably
	reinforce problems of usual suspects. This dilemma is then made
	worse through the need for political balance and diversity (as
	opposed to social diversity).
Pressure on the timetable	Some committees tend to be more reactive to the political agenda,
	and therefore need witnesses to be available at short notice and/or
	flexible. Not all witnesses will be available for sessions as a result.
Political performance of evidence	There is fear from witnesses about attending because committees
	have become increasingly adversarial. Moreover, witnesses need to
	be able to make evidence accessible and understandable to
	members, and not all will thrive in this environment.
Reticent witnesses	Some witnesses are difficult to persuade to attend (sometimes as a
	result of other dilemmas), which then poses a problem as to how
	they might be persuaded to attend.

Table 8.3. Dilemmas facing committees in taking evidence

responsibility of staff (on behalf of the committee). One interviewee explained that there are a number of things staff can do to persuade a reticent witness to attend: persuade the individual of the benefit of coming both for themselves and for the committee; indicate that the committee would be unhappy if it did not hear from the individual, which may be reflected in the report; or, third, the committee could issue a press notice, in effect publicly humiliating them (Interview S-10). For example, during my fieldwork, and in my capacity as research assistant, I had one session where the office of potential witnesses (key to the inquiry) excused themselves on the grounds of being too busy. My clerk told me that I was being 'too nice', and that my invitations need to be more authoritative; a select committee hearing should not be dismissed so easily (in the end, the focus of the evidence session changed and the witness was no longer required - to my relief) (FWD 14.4.46). However, as with the formal powers described above, soft powers are not problem-free. The aforementioned interviewee believed that embarrassing reticent witnesses presents 'a real danger':

Do it once or twice, you look powerful and strong. Do it every week and you'll look like you've got no power and you can't, you're not influential because nobody wants to come and talk to you. So you don't want to look that way (Interview S-10). Crucially, this reinforces the importance of beliefs, values and practices. It suggests that committees have more limited room for manoeuvre than formal rules or procedures imply because they need to be interpreted and re-interpreted (by staff, MPs and witnesses). Furthermore, given that the full effect of not attending an evidence hearing are not known, clerks' and MPs' interpretations are their only guide in dealing with reticent or unwilling witnesses (and as mentioned previously, this is not common). In any case, and importantly for this section, it also presents staff with a dilemma in persuading reticent witnesses to appear in front of committees.

As a result of the everyday and political nature of taking evidence, committees' room for manoeuvre in inviting and organising a diverse panel is always fraught with difficulty (as summarised in Table 8.3). One clerk suggested that it is only between one fifth and one quarter of witnesses where committees have options to seek greater diversity (FWD 20.5.7). Irrespective of the accuracy of this claim, there is a question that underlies this: to what extent should the House of Commons be more proactive in promoting social diversity of its panels? This is a possible tension for committees and particularly for staff, who wish to both ensure Parliament is able to listen to a broad cross-section of society, whilst simultaneously reflecting the wishes, concerns and interests of the committee that staff are tasked to serve. Though this dilemma is explored in more detail in Chapter 6, the impact of it is seen directly and concretely here. Staff in the House of Commons are generally unwilling to call for committees to increase the diversity of their witness base because it would indicate proactive, staff-led involvement. Thus, to increase diversity of witness panels depends on the will of elected representatives that populate committees. And yet, given the other dilemmas noted above, this seems unlikely to improve at the moment.

Concluding remarks

The cumulative effect of the issues raised above is that evidence sessions are complex performances, and that they do not necessarily always lead to what might be termed 'good' or effective evidence sessions. This matters because evidence matters. Evidence is crucial for MPs to learn about key political and policy issues, it allows the committee more generally to assess government policy, and it acts as a crucial link between public and Parliament. Nonetheless, as the second section of the chapter revealed, the variety of evidence gathered by committees alone could potentially skew the representativeness of committee evidence. Axiomatically, this chapter has not comprehensively assessed who gave oral evidence beyond one parliamentary session, and so this whole topic deserves far more attention (e.g. the role of informal evidence, written evidence, the network of 'the usual suspects', the contested nature of evidence, the content of evidence, the framing and performance of evidence in oral sessions, etc.). The third section has sought to begin a discussion about this process by analysing some of reasons for why witnesses are not representative of the public. It indicates that committees face a range of dilemmas in gathering evidence from a diverse range of witnesses. This raises questions about if and how Parliament should be more responsive to these findings. These three sections, when taken together, lead to the conclusion that evidence-gathering is a complex process, and one governed by unpredictability from MPs. Though staff provide a constant through their diligence, and chairs provide overall steering capacity, evidencegathering is still dependent on wishes of MPs who have a range of competing demands and interests. It once again highlights the themes and dilemmas raised in earlier chapters. More generally, this chapter questions the extent to which scrutiny is uniform or systematic, and the extent to which evidence is diverse enough to ensure Parliament is able to effectively hold the executive to account. Given that committees are reliant on pre-existing policy networks and everyday practices, it suggests that talking of 'webs' of scrutiny is more appropriate than 'systematic' scrutiny. This brings us to some of the wider themes that have permeated this thesis as a whole, which are considered in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

he centrality of everyday practices, though increasingly acknowledged by scholars in British political science, has only recently become a research topic within the field of parliamentary and legislative studies. This thesis has sought to open a debate about the role of everyday practices along the committee corridor of the Palace of Westminster by looking at the individual beliefs, performance styles and perennial dilemmas of parliamentary actors in select committees. In this final, concluding chapter, I wish to tie together the issues raised in previous chapters. To do this, this conclusion is split into four sections. First, I summarise the contribution of each section to answering the research questions that were set out in the Introduction. I also posit some wider themes that have cut across the thesis and the implications of the findings for our understanding of Parliament. Second, I turn to the future directions of this research, and the possibilities that this thesis has opened for further study on Parliament. Third, I reflect more generally on the process that has allowed this doctoral thesis to come to fruition. Fourth and finally, I bring this thesis to a close by placing the thesis in the wider context of the role of Parliament in British politics.

9.1. Interpreting parliamentary scrutiny

Scrutiny by select committees can be understood in a variety of ways. In this PhD, I have sought to give one interpretation of how parliamentary actors

interpret committee scrutiny. A core argument flowed throughout each of my chapters, with some wider themes that cut across them. Here, I summarise the contribution of each section, the consequences of this study on parliamentary scrutiny, and the core argument of the thesis as a whole.

9.1.1. Scrutiny landscapes

Researchers of all colours and creeds tend to make assumptions about select committees in their analyses of scrutiny: for example, that MPs attend evidence sessions regularly and fully-prepared; that MPs ask robust questions and follow-up evasive responses; and that reports offer a balanced assessment of widely collected evidence. These assumptions have often been made because the majority of research on parliamentary select committees has focused predominantly on the impact of committee reports, rather than focusing on the scrutiny processes that have allowed inquiries to be undertaken and reports to be written. This PhD has sought to change that by looking precisely at what goes into making a select committee inquiry. So, rather than looking at the *output* of scrutiny, I have looked at the *input*. In order to do this, I asked three questions:

- 1. How can we understand the everyday lives of parliamentary actors?
- 2. How do political actors interpret and perform their role on select committees?
- 3. In what ways do everyday practices affect parliamentary scrutiny?

In order to answer the three research questions, the PhD was split into three parts, and each section of the thesis focused on answering each question respectively.

In Part I, I have sought to focus on the theoretical foundations of this PhD and, in doing so, answer the research question on how we can understand the everyday lives of parliamentary actors. This began by calling for greater ontological and epistemological reflection in parliamentary and legislative studies before then examining the foundations that guide this doctoral thesis. Chapter 2 identified the key concepts that were used to frame the analysis, including: beliefs, practices and performance styles, dilemmas, and webs of belief or traditions. Part I makes two important theoretical contributions. First, it draws attention to the added value of philosophical reflection within the field of parliamentary studies to ensure conceptually robust research. And second, it develops and takes forward the interpretive approach to political science as proposed by Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (2003, 2006, 2010) by supplementing it through insights from dramaturgy (particularly the work of Erving Goffman (1990)). Thus, to understand the everyday lives of parliamentary actors, we must look to how they interpret their role (*beliefs*), enact those beliefs (*practices and performance styles*) and respond to problems or contradictions between their beliefs and practices (*dilemmas*).

Theoretical reflection in Part I provides the foundations for substantive empirical sections in Part II and Part III. In the second section of this thesis, three chapters focused on answering the second research question on how political actors interpret and perform their select committee roles. I identified the complex ways in which MPs interpret scrutiny, which indicates, at its most basic, that no MP interprets the concept of scrutiny in the same way. This has consequences for the way in which they enact their role. I identified six performance styles: (i) specialists and advocates; (ii) lone wolves; (iii) constituency champions; (iv) party helpers or safety nets; (v) learners and (vi) absentees. These are not fixed roles or types that MPs adopt throughout their career, but flexible performance styles that change depending on the type of evidence session or broader political agenda of the day (amongst other things). They are also affected by a range of dilemmas that MPs face. In Chapter 5, I build on these findings by exploring the role of chair. I argue that there is a spectrum along which chairs situate themselves: at one end are committee catalysts, who are committee-orientated chairs and who usually seek to influence policy; at the other end are committee chieftains, who are leadership-orientated chairs and who usually seek to influence the media. And finally, in Chapter 6, I turn to the role of select committee staff. Here, I find that staff interpret their role in three facets: being hidden, a desire to offer unparalleled service, and a commitment to passionate impartiality. These weave together to what might be termed a performance style of 'clerkliness'. This offers a way by which clerks negotiate the overarching and perennial dilemma of preserving the institution of Parliament and its many traditions whilst simultaneously seeking to serve a specific committee of MPs (whose interests and practices occasionally challenge the prevailing norms of the institution).

Taken together, the chapters of Part II tells us that scrutiny is contested and that parliamentary actors inevitably push and pull scrutiny in different directions. This is the central finding of this thesis and the most direct answer to the second research question.

The third question, on the consequences of everyday practices on committee scrutiny, falls to Part III. I have used Chapter 7 to show how different performance styles interact to form a performance team, develop committee traditions, and affect the ability of committees to build consensus for reports. The chapter also widened to look at relationships more broadly. In Chapter 8, the thesis explored the specific impact on evidence-gathering. This revealed that the diversity of witnesses that give oral evidence has been adversely affected by dilemmas that committee members, chairs and staff face in enacting scrutiny. As a result, witnesses are concentrated from London and overwhelmingly men. The final chapter of Part III – this chapter – is an attempt to bring these insights together to better understand the consequences of everyday practices on scrutiny. The remainder of this chapter will seek to do just that by addressing some cross-cutting themes that have appeared throughout empirical chapters and explaining some of the consequences of these findings for scrutiny in the House of Commons.

9.1.2. Themes and consequences

The single most important theme or conclusion from this research project is that the concept of scrutiny is contested. This has important consequences for our understanding and study of Parliament. Notably, it tells us that we cannot look only to the output of select committee reports to understand the effectiveness of committees to hold the executive to account or to improve and enhance government policy. Committee reports are the culmination of a range of preceding processes, including agenda-setting, evidence-gathering and reportwriting. Committee members, chairs and staff push and pull these processes in different directions. As a consequence, and reinforced through fieldwork and empirical findings set out in preceding chapters, this questions the extent to which we can talk of 'systematic' scrutiny, where 'webs' of scrutiny often seems

Theme	Description
Webs of scrutiny	Scrutiny is contested, leading to a range of interpretations and performances of scrutiny. Most importantly, this means that scrutiny depends on 'webs' to push it forward.
Time pressure and multiple loyalties	Multiple loyalties empowers the chair; creates a short-termist working environment; and affect actors' ability to build effective relationships.
Wright reforms	This had five specific impacts, but in sum indicates that committees are perceived as authoritative and important actors within Parliament, which has changed the nature of undertaking inquiries.
Multiple functions of committees	Select committees not only exist to hold the executive to account, but allow MPs to structure their work, build policy expertise, practise asking questions and making arguments, represent constituents and, more broadly, serve as a link between Parliament and public.

Table 9.1. Themes in select committee scrutiny

more appropriate. These webs of scrutiny are built on relationships and networks: between chairs and committee members; between chairs of committees through the Liaison Committee (though arguably not very effectively); between MPs and policy stakeholders; between stakeholders and parliamentary staff; between staff and MPs; and, ultimately, between Parliament and public. This arguably has significant repercussions for studying select committees because this aspect of scrutiny has not been addressed in as much detail as output-focused studies. Indeed, there is potential for joining the inputside analysis pursued in this thesis with output-focused research on the effectiveness of committee reports in order to add a building block to better understand scrutiny in the House of Commons more generally.

A second theme that has cut across all empirical sections is the issue of time pressure and multiple loyalties. This has been noticeable in all empirical chapters. During fieldwork, it was evident that MPs worked hard and faced a range of tasks to ensure that they fulfilled their role as elected representatives. This thesis has not been able to comprehensively assess the range of roles that constitutes the role of elected representative, but rather focused on one small aspect of an MP's role, namely the way that they scrutinise the executive in select committees. The multiple demands placed on committee members and chairs have at least three effects. First, it empowers the chair because, though committee members may attend meetings regularly and prepare for them where possible, the chair is prepared for every session and immersed in their policy area, while members focus more specifically on only a smaller proportion of select committee scrutiny. Furthermore, chairs are more likely to remain in their position over the duration of a parliament, while the average length of service for committee members is around two and a half years. This reinforces the chair's ability to set the agenda and, consequently, empowers them vis-à-vis members. Second, multiple loyalties create a short-termist and occasionally last minute framework in which scrutiny occurs. MPs are placed in a reactive position that gives staff little time to write scoping notes or organise committee activities. As Chapter 8 has sought to show, this has an effect on evidence and the spectrum of witnesses that give evidence to committees. It additionally raises questions about the quality of inquiries more generally (unfortunately somewhat beyond the scope of this PhD). In particular, committees must consider the extent to which their reactive, short-termist approach enhances or hinders effective scrutiny. Findings from this research project indicate that the positive effects of paying attention to the media cycle may be outweighed by other factors, including their ability to adequately explore issues and ensure a diversity of witnesses in evidence-gathering. Third, multiple loyalties and time pressures weaken the ability for MPs to build effective relationships with one another. Chapter 7's focus on relationships emphasised the importance of these networks, particularly to ensure robust scrutiny in evidence sessions and also to aid in constructing consensus. As members face competing demands on their time, their ability to devote time to getting to know each other and ensure cross-party working is diminished (especially because contentious inquiries would require significant time for members to resolve differences). This possibly raises the question as to whether committees are conducting too many inquiries and overstretching their capabilities (once again indicating that committees ought to reconsider short-termist approaches). In addition to these three effects relating to Members, staff also face multiple loyalties, especially between serving the institutions of Parliament, on the one hand, and a specific group of MPs, on the other. This is exacerbated by the increasing demands placed on them by chairs, with consequences for the relationship between staff and committee members.

A third cross-cutting theme is the impact of the Wright reforms that were introduced in 2010. Though this PhD did not exclusively focus on the impact of those reforms on select committees in 2010, the time frame associated with this

PhD made it impossible not to consider its impact on scrutiny. Though it is easy to exaggerate the influence of the Wright reforms, they arguably made an impact on select committees in five ways. First, election of chairs by the whole House and election of members through party groups meant that parliamentary actors view committees with 'renewed authority and zest' (Flynn, 2012, p.74). This interpretation of a changing role of committees may not demonstrate tangible increases in policy influence, but it does indicate that committees are regarded as more important by elected representatives. This may have the effect of ensuring that frontbench colleagues pay closer attention to committees' investigations and findings (see also Monk, 2010). Second, some have noticed a changing relationship within committees. This has two elements: on the one hand, there is a growing sense in which committees see themselves as part of a 'cohesive whole' (Interview M-07) and therefore develop stronger bonds of trust and respect with one another as backbenchers (see Chapter 7, in particular); on the other hand, the relationship of accountability has changed between chairs and members, where the former are now less likely to see themselves accountable to their committee than in the past. This has strengthened the leadership role of chairs (see Chapter 5) (which possibly raises the question as to whether the Wright reforms have increased the influence of chairs at the expense of the committee overall). Third, the changing perception surrounding committees has placed greater demands on them as mechanisms to hold the executive to account. Interviewees (e.g. Interview S-06, Interview S-09, Interview C-01) and fieldwork observations have indicated that MPs, chairs in particular, are putting more of their time and energy into committee work (see also Part II). This raises the question as to whether committees are adequately resourced (Liaison Committee, 2012a). Findings from this project indicate that a blanket increase in resources is not a panacea because of the many other dilemmas that members, chairs and staff face. However, much more consideration must be made to ensure adequate training and skill development for MPs. Fourth, the media seem to be paying more attention to select committee hearings. The extent to which this is true requires more detailed analysis, but initial conclusions from some researchers (Dunleavy and Muir, 2013), and anecdotally over fieldwork, would suggest an impact from the reforms. Fifth, committees have arguably become more adversarial vis-à-vis witnesses. Perhaps this stems from a renewed sense of authority and greater

media attention, but in any case, interviewees have (anecdotally) noticed that evidence sessions have become high-profile and combative (for a case study, see Matthews and Flinders, 2015). This raises questions over the relationships between committees and their witnesses, covered in detail in Chapter 8, and in particular with respect to committees' framing of hearings and their powers over formally summoning witnesses for powerful yet reticent witnesses. In sum, the Wright reforms have changed perceptions of committees as more authoritative, with consequences for the way in which committees conduct and undertake their inquiries. These effects have not been assessed quantitatively here and so deserve further direct attention in future research.

Committees have roles that are not limited to accountability, but serve multiple functions both within the House of Commons and beyond. This is the fourth theme. *Within* the House of Commons, select committees are a way that allows members and chairs to structure their everyday parliamentary lives. Committees give elected representatives purpose and structure. Committees can also act as a training ground for newly elected MPs (perhaps even older ones). Not only do they offer ways for MPs to learn about policies, but they are also spaces in which MPs practise scrutiny activity and engage in debates with one another. For some MPs, committee hearings are a way to rehearse questions or lines of inquiry that they would be able to pursue in other, more adversarial spaces. As noted above, this raises questions about the level of support that MPs receive both generally in terms of resources, but specifically in terms of training to question witnesses effectively. Though committee training has become more widely available, MPs themselves have (as pointed out in Chapter 4) remained resistant and perhaps even ignorant of making use of these training opportunities.

Beyond the House of Commons, as noted above, select committees increasingly gain the attention of the media (Dunleavy and Muir, 2013; Kubala, 2011), which is arguably something that will increase in future years as chairs adopt an increasingly leadership-orientated style in the House of Commons to speak on behalf of policy areas. Additionally, as the chapter on evidence-taking pointed out, select committees are important beyond the House of Commons because their inquiries are a way by which Parliament can engage with the public. Clearly, Chapter 8 sends some warning signals as to the diversity of witnesses that are

called to give evidence. This indicates that this research project has not only important implications for our understanding of parliamentary select committees, but more broadly for democratic engagement between public and Parliament. The nature and importance of the relationship between public and Parliament has been analysed expertly by others elsewhere (Digital Democracy Commission, 2015; Liaison Committee, 2015; Leston-Bandeira, 2013), and so here it is worth only reiterating that it matters because it gives members of the public and service users an opportunity to directly affect select committee inquiries and, in doing so, contribute to policy-making. This PhD directly feeds into broader themes about democratic re-engagement with politics by exploring the evidence-gathering process of committees. The findings indicate that parliamentary select committees should make more attempts to gather evidence from a greater diversity of witnesses to adequately represent the British public. One specific way that this is possible is through greater use of select committee field trips and visits within the UK. This echoes some of the recommendations from research conducted for the Liaison Committee (2015). Based on this doctoral research, committee visits have at least three benefits. First, they allow MPs to gather evidence from a greater range of service users, members of the public and stakeholders. Second, it changes the perception that MPs are only interested in people coming to them, and interested only in events that occur within the 'Westminster bubble'. And third, visits help committee members, chairs and staff to build closer relationships with one another because they are exposed to each other's ideas and approaches to scrutiny. This, then, can ensure greater cross-party working, enhance the effectiveness of scrutiny and allow for more attuned staff support.

Ultimately, this discussion indicates that select committees play a much bigger role in scrutinising the executive than we may ordinarily assume. The range of roles of committees depends on the diversity of interpretations of parliamentary actors that populate those committees. This discussion posits four key themes: scrutiny is contested and dependent on webs of scrutiny; time pressures and multiple loyalties exacerbate dilemmas that committees face; the Wright reforms have changed perceptions around the role of committees; and committees are more than accountability tools for the House of Commons. In sum, this PhD makes a *theoretical* contribution by demonstrating the importance of beliefs, practices and dilemmas to study political phenomena; a number of *empirical* contributions by offering an input-based focus understanding select committees; and a number of *normative* contributions to aid public engagement with political processes. Of course, this PhD was also limited in scope in a number of ways. These may be viewed as future possibilities for further research, and these options warrant brief comment.

9.2. Future directions

The aim of this thesis was not to offer a comprehensive understanding parliamentary scrutiny in Parliament. To do this, it would have involved a variety of different scrutiny activities, a lot more parliamentary actors and relationships, and included research on the House of Lords. Crucially, in this study, my aim was to *open a debate* on how some parliamentary actors interpret their select committee work, and how those interpretations affect their everyday behaviour. In doing so, I hope to have opened avenues for future research. I summarise four of these possibilities here.

9.2.1. Adding depth to understanding scrutiny

In this doctoral research, I did not have detailed case studies (other than the committee for which I worked). However, now that the broad ideas about individual beliefs, performance styles, and dilemmas have been illustrated as part of an inductive study, there are many further opportunities to use these ideas in a more deductive sense and apply these ideas to detailed cases. This would then have the benefit of exploring the policy impact of everyday practices on scrutiny. Though ascertaining this was not one of the aims of this research, it remains a crucial way by which we can judge the effectiveness of committees overall, and so deserves further attention in future. This links input-based studies to output-based ones. To do this effectively, it will also be necessary to explore the relationships between chairs and ministers, or committees and their departments. Given that Chapter 7 highlighted the pivotal nature of 'rubbing shoulders', networks and relationships to making scrutiny happen, this idea

must be applied to frontbench and executive actors in order to fully comprehend the policy impact of committees.

Additionally, there are questions about the impact of select committee reports not only on policy but on everyday practices. There are a range of questions that I could not answer in this PhD, but were dotted around the margins of papers and draft chapters, fieldwork notes and on others' published work. Do reports just lie on shelves and gather dust? Or do committee members use those reports? What is the impact of Westminster Hall debates? How do committees affect debates in the main chamber? Are their reports frequently referenced in those debates? The point of this research project was to establish that interpretation matters and the possible ways that this can be enacted. The next stage of this research agenda is to explore further questions about the impact of interpretation on the effectiveness of scrutiny.

Finally, to add further depth to select committee scrutiny, it would be interesting to explore more closely the leadership role of chairs. Chapter 5 has only opened the debate by indicating the spectrum of roles from which chairs can draw. The weakness of that chapter has been a lack of empirical weight that illustrates those performances in action. This might well be applicable to Chapter 4, too, but it matters particularly to chairs because these are the single most important actors in select committee scrutiny.

9.2.2. Hidden servants

Chapter 6 arguably offered one of the most distinctive and original chapters of this PhD, simply because we do not know very much about the House of Commons administration. The chapter focused on a very small proportion of 2,000 members of staff that support elected representatives. The small group on which Chapter 6 focused lies within the Committee Office, yet the importance of the Office itself has not been adequately addressed. Additionally, the Committee Office is only one section of a larger House of Commons service. Attention to these diverse groups, offices and departments would give us many new insights to how the House of Commons works, and how practices and traditions within Parliament are sustained. This would open up how clerks interpret and enact their role. From this, there are opportunities to explore the impact of clerks on MPs, politicians' satisfaction of those services, and the extent to which MPs rely on staff to fulfil their roles as elected representatives. Further research into the way that the House of Commons is structured would be particularly timely given recent debates about the role of the Clerk of the House of Commons and the administrative responsibilities that they have as chief executive (Governance Committee, 2014).

9.2.3. The politics of evidence

Exploring the issue of evidence-taking has been one of the most rewarding and interesting aspects of this PhD. Indeed, despite the crucial underpinning of evidence as part of inquiries, it is perhaps surprising that the topic has not been discussed in more detail by other scholars. Parliamentary studies would benefit from greater knowledge on this topic because it gives opportunities to study the impact of select committees and, given the issues raised in the previous section, the link between Parliament and public. Some questions: on what types of evidence do MPs rely in their inquiries and from whom? Are there changing trends over time that indicate a changing pool on which committees rely in evidence-gathering? How pervasive is the problem of usual suspects? What is the nature of the policy networks on which committees rely? What kind of information do they ask for within oral evidence sessions (legal, quantitative, experiential, etc.)? What is 'good' evidence from the point of view of committee members, chairs and staff? How is evidence performed by witnesses and how does this impact inquiries? What is the effect of different types of evidence in other areas of scrutiny? Specifically, which type of evidence is cited in reports and which is ignored? What is the relationship between written and oral evidence? What proportion of those that submit written evidence are contacted or asked to give oral evidence (and why)? Is it possible to gather further information on social diversity of witnesses? Is it desirable to increase the social diversity of witnesses? Ultimately, and most importantly: how can the evidencegathering process be made more effective? The questions on this topic are seemingly endless, and serve to illustrate that this topic has many possibilities for rich empirical and policy-relevant research.

9.2.4. Interpreting parliamentary practices

Finally, this doctoral research project opens further possibilities for interpretive approaches to be applied more widely to parliamentary and legislative studies. This thesis focused on MPs in select committees, yet there are possibilities here to go beyond scrutiny and explore other areas of Parliament to see how the analytical framework can be applied. For example, to what extent can we identify performance styles in other parliamentary settings, such as the main chamber of the House of Commons or constituency offices of MPs? What about the role of other MPs, such as members of the frontbench? In addition to looking at performance *styles*, there are possibilities to look at the impact of *speech* (e.g. rhetorical capabilities of MPs and their influence in the Commons) and *space* (especially in the context of the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster (UK Parliament, 2015c)).

One of the topics that were not explored, but deserve further attention, is the role of the whips in the House of Commons. Traditionally, they are viewed as mythical sources of ensuring party discipline and often as something sinister or to fear. In this thesis, the usual channels appeared in various chapters yet their influence and role in Parliament has not been substantiated. The usual channels possibly do play a role in select committee scrutiny through, for example, deciding the chairships allocated to the main parties or being able to prevent committees from going on visits through pairing arrangements. They may also play an informal influence in the membership of select committees or exert pressure on serving members to reduce the potential damage of a committee report on government (and occasionally the opposition). However, during fieldwork, the role of the whips was almost entirely absent in that interviewees, on the whole, did not admit to being influenced by the whips (except one). Nor were they mentioned during my fieldwork. However, this was in part because interviews and fieldwork did not focus on the role of the whips, and so hints may have been missed. In any case, they are a particular group that warrant further academic attention to shed light on not only their often negative or sinister perception, but also to explain the role of the whips as necessary tools for managing business in the House of Commons. The extent to which whips themselves would want the spotlight turned on their everyday practices is another matter, however, and an unlikely future research prospect.

What this section demonstrates is that this PhD has been able to show the importance of studying beliefs, practices and dilemmas in select committees, and opened up many further questions to study Parliament in a range of ways.

9.3. Reflections on the research process

The choice of using the work of Bevir and Rhodes stems from a longstanding commitment to anti-foundationalist principles to which I have been committed for many years. Those principles could have been applied in a range of ways and the choice of using the approach of Bevir and Rhodes was certainly not the only one. So, how useful was their analytical framework? The interpretive approach by Bevir and Rhodes gave me a useful way to hook many of my research themes and ideas. However, their framework was also very broad and acted as an open canvas that was difficult to apply and pin down in practice, especially during fieldwork. The concepts remain flexible, which is both useful for applying the approach to a range of contexts, but also a weakness because it requires significant energy to deepen the analytical framework for specific contexts. Arguably the biggest weakness was the ability to cope with the importance of relationships in the House of Commons. The predominant focus of the analytical framework is on *individual* beliefs and the *individual* dilemmas that a parliamentary actor faces. This individualised approach means that networks and relationships were not something that could be easily explored using the analytical tools available. It is for this reason that, occasionally, the analytical framework and tools were not at the forefront of some empirical chapters. The concept of performance has arguably begun to broaden the reach, particularly because it places a heavier emphasis on the how performances are affected by styles and speeches of others within a broader spatial setting. Furthermore, Goffman also acknowledges the importance of performance teams. Without these amendments, it is here that the interpretive approach arguably reaches its limits. The importance of communities, networks and relationships cannot be understated, and is traditionally something central in ethnographic research (e.g. Crang and Cook, 2007). This possibly requires further theoretical reflection and refinement to enhance Bevir and Rhodes' interpretive approach.

Turning to the process of undertaking fieldwork itself, this was arguably the single biggest challenge of this PhD - yet also its biggest reward. It was exhausting because it was much more than simply studying select committees away from a desk. I had moved to a new city, began a new job, did not have a familiar network of friends around me, moved into a house with people I did not know, and had much of my family living in different cities and countries. At the same time, I was trying to study towards a PhD through observation, interviews and analysis of texts, whilst keeping up with trends in the academic literature (including attending conferences). These social effects were significant, and need to be acknowledged because they did make an impact (for a discussion, see Crang and Cook, 2007). I made mistakes, I was slow to grasp some of the demands of the research placement and, indeed, felt foolish on occasions. For example, I was unable to complete tasks on time for my clerk because I was trying to observe my surroundings as well as undertake given responsibilities, which must have frustrated the committee team (FWD 12.3.17); another time, there was an awkward situation in which the chair of my committee asked my advice on an inquiry, yet I was completely unable to offer any thoughts because all my notes were about the committee itself and not about the inquiry he was asking about (FWD 2.1.25). My chair did not ask my opinion on a committee matter again. Self-doubt over my research was noted throughout my fieldwork diary (e.g. FWD 38.9.36, FWD 38.9.40, FWD 39.9.24, FWD 42.10.23, FWD 51.12.27, FWD 52.12.1, FWD 53.12.16).

Nonetheless, I fitted in very quickly (after only a few days, a member of staff introduced me as having worked for the committee for a couple of weeks (FWD 6.2.10)). I was lucky in that I started working for my committee six days before another member of staff joined. This meant that there was someone else there who was also naturally inquisitive about the way that the select committee worked and asked a lot of questions (FWD 6.2.22). And ultimately, the fieldwork was the most fascinating part of doing this research. My research placement has been immensely valuable with far-reaching effects for this academic project on select committees. Working for the Committee Office confirmed the principle

that simply 'being there' (Rhodes et. al., 2007a) is crucial to understanding a subject matter, place, or community. I was immersed in the everyday life of people that inhabited an imposing, grand palace. I could have completed a PhD without ever setting foot in the Palace of Westminster. Would I really have understood their lives if I had not been there for a sustained period of time? On a daily basis, I was squeezed on the Victoria Line with a thousand other commuters at 7am; I ate lunch in the Palace next to (occasionally with) clerks of the House; caught up with friends in the Sports and Social Bar; rubbed shoulders with frontbench and backbench MPs as I rushed from meeting to meeting; and attended a range of events in the evenings where I had the opportunity to listen to (and meet) prominent parliamentarians - often by chance. Indeed, these chanced meetings gave them the opportunity to share their points of view, experiences and expertise - some of whom I would not have met in any other way. Working for the Committee Office offered a wealth of other practical opportunities: I was close to the Parliamentary Estate, which meant that I could listen and observe evidence sessions and proceedings as I needed; I was given a parliamentary email address that hugely increased my chances of positive replies when requesting interviews with MPs and clerks; and, with my pass, I could be flexible for MPs' diaries and meet them in most places and at most times convenient to them. All of these things helped me to break down conventional access barriers that many academics face. These barriers could otherwise have prevented me from undertaking this project.

Aside from these practical opportunities, I was able to gain remarkable insights into the way that politics worked at the heart of British political life. I learnt how select committees operate, their interpretations of their role, and their unwritten rules or 'norms' of behaviour. All of this has made a positive impact on the way that I look at Parliament and embedded new points of view for my study that I would not have thought about otherwise. For that, I'm extremely grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council and the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre for making the funds available, and to the Committee Office in the House of Commons for making the time and resources available (especially the Scrutiny Unit and the committee that I worked for). Without this opportunity, my doctoral thesis would be poorer and my understanding of British political culture more basic.

9.4. So what?

In this final section, I want to briefly think about a final question: why does all of this matter? I argue that this doctoral research matters for two key reasons: first, it shows us that ethnographic research and interpretive approaches add significant value to issues in political science; and second, it feeds into wider themes about the Parliament's role in British politics and parliamentary democracy.

The publication of *Interpreting British Governance* in 2003 by Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes opened a considerable departure for studying executive governance in the UK (see also Turnbull, 2016). Within parliamentary studies, we have also seen the growth of interpretive approaches to understanding Parliament (e.g. Crewe, 2005, 2015; Rai, 2015a, 2015b). This doctoral research has attempted to build on those trends over the past decade to demonstrate the importance of everyday practices as a way by which we can study Parliament. More generally, and directly addressing the 'so what?' issue, this PhD gives greater credence to interpretive approaches in political science. This PhD intentionally contrasts modernist empiricist approaches to political science with anti-foundationalist principles to illustrate that using interpretive approaches are not only possible in theory, but also feasible in practice. This has brought new and different insights to understanding British politics. Returning to the opening paragraph of this PhD, this has highlighted how the everyday is political. Beyond the committee corridor of the Palace of Westminster, this means that everyday practices from those delivering public services to what happens on our pavements is political. This is important because it means that we can and should look to individual beliefs, everyday practices and performance styles, dilemmas, and traditions to understand political phenomena. This focus offers nuance, texture and depth that other approaches – especially broadly comparative and quantitative approaches – might miss otherwise. Interpretive approaches offer us distinctive vantage points from which we can assess issues in political science. Indeed, given that politics is ultimately a human endeavour, it is surprising that so many studies do not look to humans to understand

politics. The interpretive approach focuses analysis precisely on how politics is made and remade by human beings with their own interpretations, beliefs, motivations, routines, habits and agendas.

Given the importance of everyday practices in Parliament, this raises interesting questions about the future of Parliament in the context of changing public debates. This takes us further beyond issues in political science to debates about British parliamentary democracy. One specific example of this is the emerging issue about restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster (UK Parliament, 2015c). This project will span many years and consume vast sums of public money. In many ways, this PhD indirectly highlights how important the restoration and renewal project will be for British democracy because it touches directly on issues of space that are so important for the performance of politics. Consequently, the restoration project will have an effect on everyday practices of parliamentarians and, therefore, MPs' ability to enact their representative role. The restoration and renewal programme offers an opportunity to not only think about everyday practices further but also - critically - to assess how we can use parliamentary spaces to ensure that Parliament is fit for the twenty-first century. Situating this PhD in this wider context means that we need to pay closer attention to everyday practices in order to support and strengthen democracy in an age of growing cynicism about politics. Indeed, to broaden from this specific example, this PhD matters because it directly contrasts with public, media and academic assertions that Parliament is irrelevant (see Introduction and Chapter 1). It illustrates the importance of parliamentary democracy in the UK. Parliamentary select committees, in particular, matter because they act as crucial sites in which MPs enact or perform politics, including scrutiny of government, partisan clashes between political parties and to represent constituents. MPs generally work hard on behalf of the public and try to make decisions according to their interpretations of the public interest (even if we strongly disagree with those interpretations). Of course, select committees are not problem-free: they do not hold many formal powers over the executive, nor do they engage with all sections of society (based on Chapter 8's findings). Nonetheless, Parliament remains the place where politics happens because this is where our laws are made and government is held to account. Ultimately, it is a crucial nodal point in which politics takes place. In this sense, this PhD has hoped to defend the importance of Parliament by showing how the institution's inhabitants interpret, enact and perform their role.

In general terms, this PhD finds that scrutiny is contested in a range of ways by a range of actors. We can only understand this by looking at the individual beliefs, everyday practices and performance styles, and dilemmas of parliamentary actors. In taking those ideas seriously, this PhD finds that parliamentary actors have their own performance styles and these are used to enact their beliefs about scrutiny. At its most simple, this PhD argues that scrutiny is *contested*, and so committee work is pushed and pulled in a variety of different directions by different parliamentary actors. There is no such thing as uniform, systematic select committee scrutiny; there exist only dense webs of scrutiny that rely upon committee members, chairs and staff to enact their roles in such ways to be conducive to holding the executive to account. These dense webs of scrutiny affect committee relationships, their ability to question witnesses in select committees, and construct consensus in writing reports. It is, ultimately, beliefs that shape political behaviour.

Notes

Appendix A: List of committees, 2010-15

Committee	Chair	Party	Size
Business, Innovation and Skills	Adrian Bailey	L	11
Communities and Local Government	Clive Betts	L	11
Culture, Media and Sport	John Whittingdale	С	11
Defence	James Arbuthnot (2010- 14); Rory Stewart (2014-15)	С	11
Education	Graham Stuart	С	11
Energy and Climate Change	Tim Yeo	С	11
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Anne McIntosh	С	11
Environmental Audit	Joan Walley	L	15
European Scrutiny Committee	William Cash	С	16
Foreign Affairs	Richard Ottaway	С	11
Health	Stephen Dorrell (2010-14); Sarah Wollaston (2014-15)	С	11
Home Affairs	Keith Vaz	L	11
International Development	Malcolm Bruce	LD	11
Justice	Alan Beith	LD	11
Northern Ireland Affairs	Laurence Robertson	С	14
Political and Constitutional Reform	Graham Allen	L	11
Public Accounts	Margaret Hodge	L	14
Public Administration	Bernard Jenkin	С	11
Science and Technology	Andrew Miller	L	11
Scottish Affairs	Ian Davidson	L	10
Transport	Louise Ellman	L	11
Treasury	Andrew Tyrie	С	11
Welsh Affairs	David TC Davies	С	12
Work and Pensions	Anne Begg	L	11

Additionally, the Liaison Committee (chaired by Alan Beith (LD)) may be included, bringing the total to 25 committees. Excluded from my study: *ad hoc* committees; sub-committees of any of the above committees; joint committees; domestic or internal committees; or, legislative committees.

Appendix B: Ethics agreement

Appendix C: House of Commons confidentiality agreement

Appendix D: Standard interview consent form

Appendix E: Interview themes and checklist

Appendix F: Summary statistics for committee members

Appendix G: Summary data for witnesses

Appendix H: Summary of witness database categories

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