

Influencing the UK Parliament

A guide for environmental scientists

January 2025



the-ies.org

The Institution
of Environmental
Sciences

Contents

4	Understanding the UK Parliament
7	Identifying a parliamentary champion
9	Raising issues in Parliament
11	Giving evidence to Parliament
13	Appendix 1: UK Parliament decision making bodies

Acknowledgements

Authors: Ellie Savage

Design: Bea Gilbert & Lucy Rowland

Acknowledgements: Gillon Dobie produced an early version of this report in 2011 while interning at the Institution of Environmental Sciences.

About the Institution of Environmental Sciences

The Institution of Environmental Sciences (the IES) is at the forefront of uniting the environmental sciences around a shared goal: to work with speed, vision and expertise to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges, together.

As the global professional membership body for environmental scientists, we support a diverse network of professionals all over the world – and at every stage of their education and careers – to connect, develop, progress and inspire.

Registered charity no. 277611

Front Cover

© Photocreo Bednarek | Adobe Stock

p. 10

© lukasz_kochanek | Adobe Stock

p. 12

© demerzel21 | Adobe Stock

Understanding the UK Parliament

There are many voices seeking to influence environmental policy in the UK. The IES is committed to supporting its members to engage impactfully with decision makers on issues affecting science, scientists and the natural world.

One of the most effective ways this can be achieved is through influencing Parliament.

The IES has put together this guide to inform members of the various routes to influencing the UK Parliament. See our papers on [Cross-departmental environmental policy](#) and [Evidence-informed policy](#) for more information about influencing government policy.

If you want any more information about influencing policy, or have insights which you think would be valuable to share with peers, please do get in touch.

Contact IES Policy Lead Joseph Lewis (joseph@the-ies.org) for further information.

What is the UK Parliament?

The UK Parliament is the supreme legislative body of the United Kingdom,

composed of two houses; the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It is responsible for making and passing laws, scrutinising the government, and representing the interests of the public.

House of Commons

The House of Commons is the primary legislative chamber. It is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected by the public to represent a constituency.

House of Lords

The House of Lords is the second chamber of Parliament and is made up of appointed members, including life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers.

Select committees

Select committees are cross-party groups responsible for the scrutiny of a wide variety of areas from specialist topics to Government departments.

Several committees in both the House of Commons and House of Lords have

relevance to environmental matters (see Appendix 1 for a list of the most relevant current select committees).

Most Commons select committees are responsible for the scrutiny of government departments. Their role is to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the relevant government department and its associated public bodies. Lords select committees are concerned with specialist subjects such as education, science, or economic affairs.

There are also Public Bill Committees responsible for scrutinising the content of Public Bills. They have a formal role in discussing individual pieces of legislation and debating possible amendments

Select committees typically conduct work through inquiries into specific issues, which are often highly influential.

This process includes gathering evidence, which may be through a formal 'call for evidence' that external experts and the public can submit to. Committees can also hold evidence sessions where witnesses, including ministers, officials and experts are called to provide evidence and answer questions (see 'Giving Evidence to Parliament').

After collecting and analysing evidence, the committee produces a report, which often includes recommendations for the government or relevant organisations.

The Government is expected to respond to these reports, although it is not legally required to act on them. Select committee reports are also usually debated in

Parliament, giving parliamentarians the opportunity to discuss the committee's findings and the government's response.

APPGs

All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are crossparty interest groups, incorporating MPs and members of the House of Lords. Unlike select committees they are informal, having no official status within Parliament.

APPGs focus on particular areas or issues, and there are many APPGs that are concerned with the environment. APPGs are able to raise awareness for a particular issue and coordinate with other individuals and organisations outside of Parliament.

Secretariat functions are often provided by an aligned external organisation (such as a business, charity or think tank).

POST

The **Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology** (POST) is a research unit attached to Parliament. POST has a role in supporting evidence and knowledge transfer for parliamentary purposes.

POST publishes peer-reviewed research and provides Parliament with access to experts. In particular, its POSTnote briefing papers are an influential source of concise and well-researched evidence for policy makers.

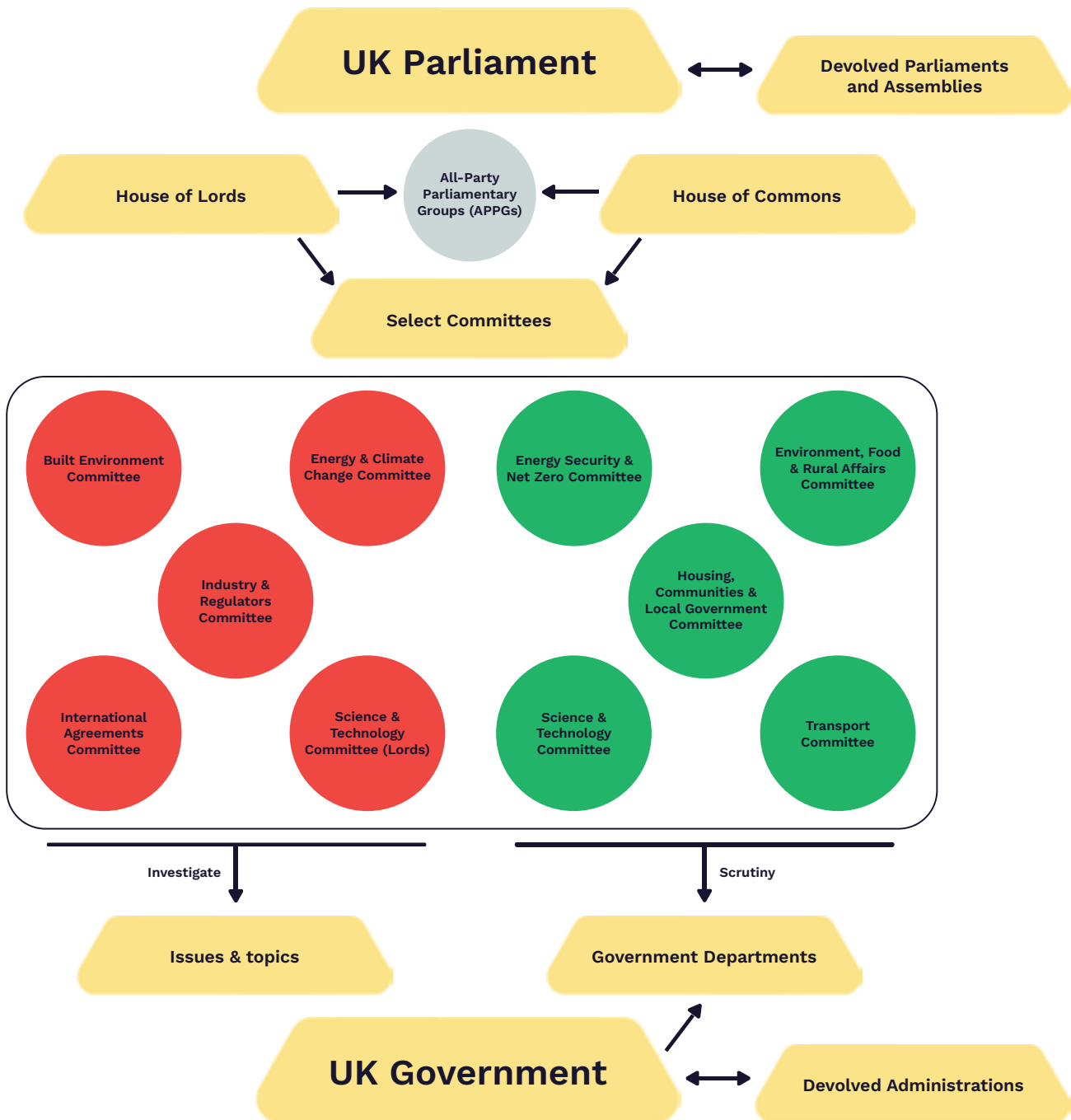


Figure 1: Interactions and scrutiny between UK Parliament and UK Government including some commonly relevant Parliamentary Committees

Identifying a parliamentary champion

There are a variety of ways in which an individual can influence Parliament. The most effective route is often to work with an MP or a Lord.

This will enable you to have greater influence and engage in a greater range of activities, such as tabling a parliamentary question or applying for a debate.

There is also the possibility to engage directly with Parliament, through select committees and APPGs (see engaging with select committees for more information).

Typically the first point of call is to identify and contact your constituency MP. Although some MPs may have UK-wide responsibilities, their primary job is to represent their constituents.

Alternatively, you can contact another MP or a Lord who is supportive of your issue.

Your constituency MP

You can find the MP for your constituency on the [UK Parliament website](#). Their UK Parliament webpage will provide you with key basic information, including their political party, past election results and contact details.

It also includes information that can help you get a picture of their interests, including:

- Government and/or opposition roles
- Membership of parliamentary committees
- APPG officer roles
- Early Day Motions your MP has supported
- Written and oral parliamentary questions your MP has tabled

Other useful resources when researching your MP include:

- [Hansard](#)
- [House of Commons Data Dashboard](#)
- Your MP's website
- Your MP's social media

Your MP's voting record may seem like a good way to understand their positions on key issues, but most MPs always vote in line with their party, so this can be misleading.

Finding a supportive MP or Lord

You can also contact other MPs or Lords who have a particular interest in your issue.

In order to identify supportive MPs or Lords, consider:

- Who has spoken in support of your issue in Parliament?
- Who has spoken in support of your issue in the media?
- Who sits on relevant committees?
- Who sits on relevant APPGs?

Box 1. Using Hansard

Hansard is the official record of the UK Parliament, including debate contributions and parliamentary questions. You can search key words connected to your topics.

You can also filter contributions by a particular MP or Lord by adding 'spokenby:firstname.lastname' in the search bar. For example, 'spokenby:keirstarmer' would filter only contributions by Keir Starmer.

You can search for Lords on the UK Parliament website, which also allows you to filter by policy interest (click show more options).

You can request information on different MPs or Lords' interests or advice on who to contact through the [House of Commons Enquiry Service](#) and [House of Lords Enquiry Service](#).

Getting in contact

Contact details for MPs and Lords are on their UK Parliament webpage, as well as how they wish to be addressed (title and name). Parliament has put together a guide for [addressing members of the Lords](#).

An initial email should:

- Introduce yourself and the issue you are writing to them about
- Welcome any steps taken by the MP or Lord in that area
- Highlight key points and evidence
- Ask them to take a specific action

Depending on how formal the communication is, you may want to attach a letter to your email. Either way, try to make your writing clear and concise. The more you can personalise your communication the more impactful it is likely to be.

This stage may be an appropriate opportunity to request a meeting to discuss the issue further, including how it is perceived in Parliament.

At this meeting, or in your initial letter, you can also ask them to take action for you in Parliament (see raising issues in Parliament section below).

Raising issues in Parliament

Once you have established dialogue with your constituency MP, other relevant MP or Lord, there are several ways they can help you influence Parliament.

Parliamentary Questions

Parliamentary Questions (PQs) are used by parliamentarians to seek information or to press for action. They oblige Government Ministers to explain and defend the work, policy, decisions and actions of their Departments. There are different types of PQs; oral, written and urgent.

Oral questions are where an MP or Lord meets a Minister face to face during parliamentary question time. Although lacking sufficient time for depth or debate, they do promote the issue to the House, media and wider public. The House of Commons has a **rotating schedule for departmental oral questions**. In the Lords, oral questions are the first item of business every day.

Written questions are used by parliamentarians to attempt to extract more detailed information from the Government than would be available from an oral question or to press for action. Large numbers of written questions are submitted

daily by MPs on behalf of their constituents or organisations.

Parliamentary Debates

There are various types of debates that take place in Parliament. Some allow a general debate on a subject, whereas others require parliamentarians to focus and vote on specific pieces of legislation.

Most debates are initiated by the Government or opposition parties. However, some debates can be initiated by backbench MPs or Lords, such as Westminster Hall Debates and Adjournment debates in the House of Commons.

You can ask MPs or Lords to speak in a debate in support of your issue. You could also ask them to apply for a debate to discuss your issue. This can be a good way to keep an issue in the spotlight and show crossparty support. Debates at which Government Ministers have to attend and respond can be particularly useful.

Public Bills

Public Bills are published by the Government. They often come from manifesto commitments or the

Government's legislative program as set out in the King's Speech at the start of each Parliament. Bills go through a process of scrutiny in both Houses (they can start in either) before they can become law (Acts of Parliament). Government's legislative program as set out in the King's Speech at the start of each Parliament. Bills go through a process of scrutiny in both Houses (they can start in either) before they can become law (Acts of Parliament).

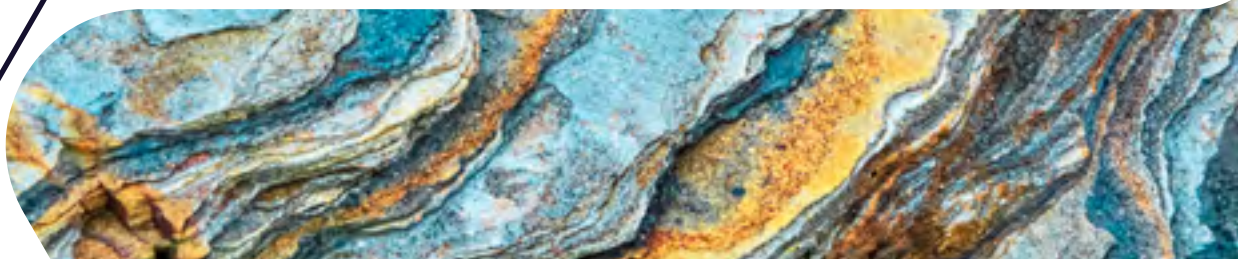
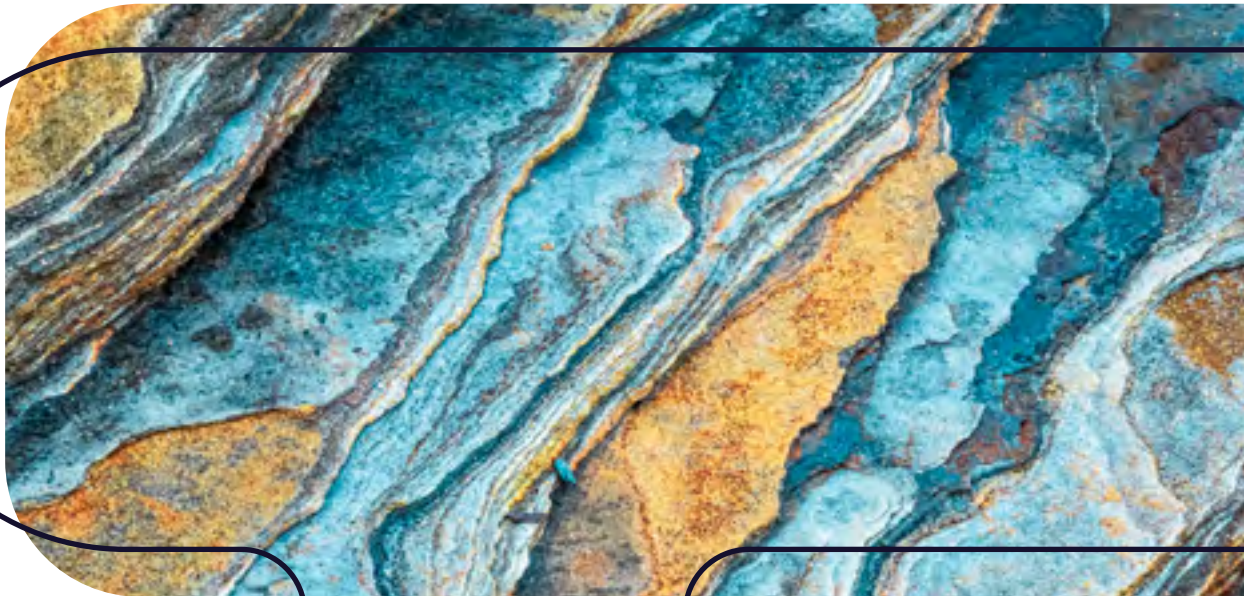
Engaging with the lead government department prior to a Bill being published as to the content of a Bill can be very effective. When the Bill is going through Parliament you can ask your parliamentary champion to speak at debates on the Bill (called readings) or suggest amendments. Bills that stir up wide interest on a topic

can also be used as an opportunity to highlight relevant issues.

Private Bills

Private Bills are published by backbench MPs or Lords. The most notable type are Private Members' Bills. While they rarely become law or influence Government legislation, there have been some notable exceptions (e.g. Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006).

10-Minute Rule Bills are another type of Private Bill where a backbench MP is given ten minutes in the House of Commons to propose a new bill. However, in reality they are used by MPs to voice their opinions on a subject or aspect of existing legislation and have no real chance of becoming law.



Giving evidence to Parliament

Giving evidence can be one of the most powerful ways to influence Parliament, especially as an individual. If you have been asked to give evidence to Parliament, please do get in touch with the IES Policy Team for support.

Contact IES Policy Lead Joseph Lewis (joseph@the-ies.org) for more information.

Select committees

Select committees often want to hear from external experts when gathering evidence about the topic of their inquiry. This includes through written evidence (responding to a call for evidence) or oral evidence (speaking at an evidence session).

You can see what inquiries select committees are conducting on their [UK Parliament webpage](#), or look at the [list of all open inquiries](#).

There are sometimes other opportunities to engage with select committees, and they regularly recruit for specialist advisors and other roles.

To receive alerts on opportunities to engage with select committees, you can sign up to the [UK Parliament Knowledge Exchange Unit's newsletter](#).

Public Bill Committees

[Public Bill Committees](#) may choose to receive written or oral evidence when scrutinising a Bill. You can see what Public Bill Committees are receiving written evidence on the [UK Parliament website](#).

APPGs

APPGs also carry out inquiries, for which they often look to receive evidence. You should be able to find out what inquiries the APPG is conducting by looking on their website, which should also include an email contact address. You could also offer to speak to the APPG on your area of expertise or issue.

POST

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) regularly produces briefings and conducts horizon scanning on emerging issues. In both instances, POST draws on external expertise.

POST may directly approach experts for evidence, or may hold open calls for evidence to support its work. You can see opportunities to engage on the [POST webpage](#).

“Giving evidence can be one of the most powerful ways to influence Parliament, especially as an individual.”



Appendix 1: Decision making bodies

Parliamentary select committees

This is a list of the most commonly relevant parliamentary committees as of 1st January 2025.

Commons committees

- Business and Trade Committee
- Education Committee
- Energy Security and Net Zero Committee
- Environmental Audit Committee
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
- International Development Committee
- Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee
- Public Accounts Committee
- Science and Technology Committee
- Transport Committee

Lords committees

- Built Environment Committee

- Environment and Climate Change Committee
- Industry and Regulators Committee
- International Agreements Committee
- Science and Technology Committee (Lords)

Cabinet

The Cabinet is the team of the most senior ministers in the Government who are chosen by the Prime Minister to lead on specific policy areas.

Their appointment is periodical, subject to political processes, and an updated list of Cabinet members can be found on the [UK Government website](#).

As of 1st January 2025, some of the most commonly relevant Cabinet Ministers are:

- Prime Minister - Keir Starmer
- Chancellor of the Exchequer - Rachel Reeves
- Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero - Ed Miliband
- Secretary of State for Education - Bridget Phillipson

- Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Steve Reed
- Foreign Secretary - David Lammy
- Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government - Angela Rayner
- President of the Board of Trade - Jonathan Reynolds
- Secretary of State for Transport - Heidi Alexander
- Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology - Peter Kyle
- Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Victoria Atkins
- Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs - Priti Patel
- Shadow Secretary of State for International Development - Preet Kaur Gill
- Shadow Secretary of State for Transport - Gareth Bacon
- Shadow Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology - Alan Mak

Shadow Cabinet

The Shadow Cabinet is chosen by the Leader of the Opposition to lead on specific policy areas and to scrutinise their Cabinet counterparts. As with the Cabinet, their appointment is periodical and subject to change. An updated list of Shadow Cabinet members can be found at on the [UK Parliament website](#).

As of 1st January 2025, some of the most commonly relevant Shadow Cabinet Spokespeople are:

- Leader of His Majesty's Official Opposition - Kemi Badenoch
- Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer - Mel Stride
- Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Trade - Andrew Griffith
- Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero - Claire Coutinho
- Shadow Secretary of State for Education - Laura Trott

**The Institution
of Environmental
Sciences**

Institution of Environmental Sciences
6-8 Great Eastern Street
London
EC2A 3NT
+44 (0)20 3862 7484

info@the-ies.org
www.the-ies.org

Registered charity no. 277611