House of Commons Liaison Committee:
The effectiveness and influence of the select committee system inquiry

Written evidence submitted by the Association of Charitable Foundations

April 2019

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This response is submitted by the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) – the membership body for UK foundations and grant-making charities.
- 1.2. The purpose of this response is to highlight the contribution that charitable foundations can make in engaging with select committees.
- 1.3. We recommend that:
  - 1.3.1. Select committees actively seek to engage foundations in evidence gathering.
  - 1.3.2. Select committees draw on foundations’ wealth of experience and expertise.
  - 1.3.3. Select committees use research produced by foundations as evidence.
  - 1.3.4. Select committees consider foundations as a conduit to engaging with a diverse range of beneficiaries and organisations that may otherwise not be aware of or included in select committee inquiries.
  - 1.3.5. Awareness is raised among foundations and among select committees of the value of working together, whatever shape that may take.
  - 1.3.6. Select committees engage with ACF’s Members’ Policy Forum to bring in these vital insights and inform evidence-based policy-making.
- 1.4. This response includes case studies of how foundations can engage with select committees:
  - 1.4.1. Funding research on the impact of select committees.
  - 1.4.2. Contributing evidence to select committee inquiries.
  - 1.4.3. Funding projects that support select committee inquiries.

2. ACF’s response

2.1. The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) is the membership body for UK foundations and grant-making charities. Driven by a belief that foundations are a vital source for social good, our mission is to support them to be ambitious and effective in the way that they use their resources. Our 380 members collectively hold assets of around £50bn and give over £2.5bn annually.

2.2. Our evidence primarily responds to the questions under the heading Witnesses, evidence, and select committee powers. These are:

- Are committees getting the right evidence? What barriers are there to select committees getting the information they need?
• What is it like to give evidence either oral or written evidence to a committee? Is the experience appropriate for the different sorts of people and organisations committees invite to appear?
• What more can be done to encourage witness diversity and wider public engagement?
• Do select committees have the right resources to get the job done? Do they have access to the expert advice and commissioned research they need? How might they collaborate more effectively with the publicly-funded and charitable sector research bodies?

2.3. The purpose of this response is to highlight the contribution that charitable foundations can make in engaging with select committees. We recommend that select committees actively seek to engage foundations in evidence gathering.

2.4. There is no legal definition of a foundation in the UK, but the term is often used to describe charities with a private, independent and sustainable income that fulfil their purposes by funding or otherwise supporting individuals or other organisations. Like other charities, they support a wide range of charitable causes, such as access to the arts, scientific discovery, social justice and heritage.

2.5. Foundations have a distinct ‘helicopter’ view of civil society and the impact of the policy environment within their fields, as well as insight into the reality on the ground. Foundations have long-standing experience and expertise across a broad range of issues, are unbound by political or market cycles and, as charities themselves, they are strictly non-partisan. Foundations also have specialist knowledge about funding practices and mechanisms for supporting civil society. We recommend that select committees draw on this wealth of experience and expertise. Foundations’ proximity to the causes they fund combined with their independence and longevity mean they can make a unique contribution to the evidence base and to policy-making.

2.6. There are a number of ways that select committees might engage with foundations. Many foundations undertake or commission research to achieve their charitable purposes. This research, often carried out in collaboration with think-tanks or charities on the ground, can identify needs and gaps in policy or provision, develop new approaches and ways of working, and spot trends that may otherwise be missed. Foundations also frequently and routinely undertake research to evaluate their programmes and impact, and are often eager to share their learning. Foundations’ independence allows them to support unpopular causes and work in areas that the state may not be able to reach. This makes their research and insight invaluable, and we recommend that select committees engage with it as evidence. It would also help to broaden the range of witnesses with whom the committees engage, as they may find new issues or actors working in these ‘unpopular’ areas.

2.7. As well as producing formal research or evaluation reports, foundations are proximate to the organisations, beneficiaries and issues that they support. They collect ‘evidence’ in the form of applications from potential grantees and monitoring reports from organisations they have supported, which identify needs, solutions and a picture of what works, which further adds to foundations’ value in engaging with select committees. With foundations and select committees working more closely together, this can provide a further platform for foundations to support grantees to give evidence; from signposting inquiries that may be relevant, to convening evidence-gathering or a submission, to funding capacity or leadership skills that may help grantees that otherwise might not engage to take part in the inquiry processes. We recommend that select committees consider foundations as a conduit to engaging with a diverse range of beneficiaries and organisations that may otherwise not be aware of or included in select committee inquiries.
2.8. Below we set out case studies of ways foundations have engaged with select committees:

2.8.1. Funding research on the impact of select committees
The Nuffield Foundation commissioned a collaborative project between the Constitution Unit and House of Commons Select Committee staff to examine the impact of House of Commons Select Committees. Among other findings, the report concluded: that “around 40% of recommendations are accepted by government, and a similar proportion go on to be implemented”; that additional types of influence include “contribution to wider debate, drawing together evidence, spotlighting issues and changing ministerial priorities, brokering (improving transparency within and between departments), accountability, exposure, and generating fear”; and that “[s]elect committees are most influential when they are strategic, timely or persistent”. This type of engagement with a foundation allowed for a review to be undertaken that was independent and involved a number of partners across sectors.

2.8.2. Contributing evidence to select committee inquiries
Barrow Cadbury Trust contributed oral and written evidence to the Justice Committee’s inquiry into the treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system. The Trust has significant expertise in the field of criminal justice and established the Transition to Adulthood Alliance, a coalition of 12 criminal justice, health and youth organisations. On publishing the final report, it was commented in the press release that “[m]uch of the recent research in this area derives from a substantial programme supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, which has established and supported the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A)”. This type of engagement brought a wealth of expertise and experience and led to a number of recommendations that were influential in developing policy in the field.

2.8.3. Funding projects that support select committee inquiries
The National Conversation on Immigration aimed to hear views across the UK on future migration policy. Funded by Jo Cox Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and Barrow Cadbury Trust, and led by HOPE Not Hate and British Future, the project collaborated with the Home Affairs Committee’s immigration inquiry: “[f]indings from the National Conversation have fed directly into our inquiry to provide us with a clearer picture of public attitudes on immigration and the common ground on which people can agree”. This type of engagement enabled the Committee to take evidence from a broader and more diverse audience.

2.9. In addition to those cited above, a common way for foundations to engage with select committees is by providing funding and support to other organisations with the specific intention of supporting their engagement with an inquiry.

2.10. The examples above show that several foundations are already taking up the opportunities presented by select committees as a lever to effect change. But there may be a lack of awareness of the impact that engaging with select committees can have in influencing policy. This may be a barrier to select committees accessing a broad range of evidence and information. Encouraging more

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3. http://nationalconversation.uk/
foundations to feed into these processes would be valuable in ensuring diverse perspectives and robust evidence are heard and utilised by select committees. It is also important that not only do select committees and foundations engage with one another, but also that they both know how to do so effectively. **We recommend raising awareness among foundations and among select committees of the value of working together, whatever shape that may take.**

2.11. As the membership body for UK foundations, ACF can help to facilitate engagement with foundations. We recently launched a new Members’ Policy Forum, a network comprising almost 200 individuals with an expressed interest in the policy environment. One aim of the Members’ Policy Forum is to make it easier and more convenient for parliamentary and government departments and charity regulators to engage with foundations by offering policy-makers a single point of contact when seeking valuable insights on a wide variety of issues. **We recommend that select committees engage with this Forum of ACF’s to bring in these vital insights and inform evidence-based policy-making.**

3. **Concluding remarks**

3.1. We are grateful to the Liaison Committee for this opportunity to submit evidence to inform its inquiry. We hope that our recommendations are considered, and would be delighted to discuss further how these may be implemented, with ACF acting as a facilitator, convenor, and expert on foundation practice.

3.2. If you would like to discuss this response further, please contact **policy@acf.org.uk**