

DR HANNAH WHITE**More effective scrutiny: evidence to the Commission on Parliamentary Reform**

Biography: Dr Hannah White is Director of Research at the Institute for Government and leads the Institute's work on Parliament and on Brexit. Her research and experience is focused on the House of Commons and Lords. Hannah has more than 10 years' experience in the House of Commons and the civil service.

Key areas of focus:

1. Structural and behavioural factors affect the effectiveness of scrutiny

Structural factors include the size and composition of committees, their membership and how it is selected, their powers and remit. Behavioural factors include the attitude of members and the government to scrutiny, including the extent to which it is seen as appropriate to whip business in committees.

2. The skills and experience of those engaged in scrutiny shape its effectiveness

Skills and experience of those involved in scrutiny includes the background of members and whether they have held particular portfolios in Government or outside of it. It can also cover the skills of those working for the committee, and whether the committee has access to a range of qualitative and quantitative research.

3. Evaluation of committee impact improves scrutiny over time

Evaluation of impact should include assessing whether or not the committee achieved the aims it set out to achieve, as well as gathering feedback from key audiences such as ministers, business and civil society. Evaluation should aim to uncover what worked well but also what challenges the committee faced and how to improve in future inquiries.

4. The benefits of elected Chairs for effective scrutiny

The benefits of allowing members to elect committee chairs include: breaking the link between committee activity and party positions; encouraging a sense of independence among Chairs; electing Chairs with an appropriate range of experiences, skills and networks.

5. The role of specialised resource and Units in effective scrutiny

In Westminster specialist units, such as the Financial Scrutiny Unit, have been established to provide committees with expertise. The Scrutiny Unit works with individual committees to encourage them to engage with complex financial data and identify potential avenues for investigation; for example, highlighting areas where there is little transparency on how public money is spent.