1. What makes an effective parliamentary committee, and what role does the size of the committee play in this?

The most effective parliamentary committees know what they want to achieve from the beginning of an inquiry or a session, and use this to structure and shape their work. By tailoring activities around an agreed goal (whether to influence a specific government policy, build understanding of an issue, set an agenda or hold to account), committees can ensure they are focusing on the right issue, at the right time, using the right methods. Different sorts of inquiry are good at delivering different sorts of impact so tailoring a committee’s work is crucial for ensuring it is effective.

A shared goal also means a committee is more likely to scrutinise issues in a sustained manner, reach a consensus and then speak with one voice – something that becomes more difficult, the larger the committee. Past [Institute research](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/scrutinising-brexit) has also found that larger committees can experience problems with:

* Effective questioning of witnesses. When numerous members are involved in an evidence session, questioning often becomes superficial and ‘scatter-gun’ – with less likelihood of probing lines of questioning being maintained.
* Consistency of attendance. Large committees often find that a slightly different cast list attends each meeting, so each member ends up hearing a different combination of evidence and drawing different conclusions.
* Looking inwards. Big, disparate committees can risk becoming preoccupied with sorting out internal battles, losing sight of opportunities to engage with the public.
* Practical constraints. Without an increase in resources and capacity, parliamentary teams can become stretched.

Evaluating the impact achieved after an inquiry further allows a committee to assess what went well and what didn’t, providing ideas and lessons for future work. The most effective committees will make time for this kind of reflection, taking on board past experiences from their own committee and applying lessons to future work.

1. What makes for an effective committee member? Does being a member of two, three or more different committees have an impact on this?

The Institute for Government has outlined [12 key pointers](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/being-effective-select-committee-member) to becoming an effective committee member. In addition to understanding the committee’s overall direction, effective committee members:

* Recognise the unique contribution they can make to an inquiry, play to their strengths, make the most of their knowledge and contacts and show an appropriate degree of commitment to the committee’s work.
* Are well informed, understanding the department or policy context the committee focuses on. This enables members to identify the right subjects for inquiry and the right questions to ask, as well as earning the respect of the people the committee interacts with.
* Adapt their questioning style and approach depending on the inquiry and the witnesses giving evidence.
* Remember the value of follow up, maintaining interested in a topic area and returning to the issues raised - an inquiry does not end with the publication of a report.
* Evaluate their work, looking back on inquiries to consider what went well and what could be done differently in the future.