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A MEANS TO AN END AND AN END IN ITSELF: SELECT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP, PARLIAMENTARY ROLES AND PARLIAMENTARY CAREERS, 1979-PRESENT

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A Means to an End and an End in Itself: Select Committee Membership, Parliamentary Roles and Parliamentary Careers, 1979-Present

Abstract

Committees are important vehicles for parliamentary careers both as means to a (ministerial) end and as an end in themselves. This article explores the relationship between select committee membership and parliamentary career by analysing committee membership and frontbench appointments for the 2130 MPs first elected since 1979. We focus on two of Donald Searing's four informal backbench roles – Policy Advocates and Parliament Men and Women – and three of the four formal leadership roles – Whips, Junior Ministers and Ministers. The membership patterns of select committees suggest that MPs approach this aspect of their parliamentary work in different ways concomitant with the roles of Generalist and Specialist Policy Advocates and Good House of Commons Men and Women. The membership patterns also suggest that different groups of MPs – by party, gender and ethnicity – often (choose or are forced to) approach committee work in different ways. We also find membership of some committees is more strongly associated with leadership roles than others.

Key Words

House of Commons, Parliament, Political Careers, Legislative Committees, Select Committees, UK

Legislative careers and the impact of committee membership on career pathways have long been a focus of academic study[1]. In the UK, the focus has been on both select committee membership as means to a (ministerial) end and as an end in itself. Regarding the former, committee membership may constitute a stepping-stone along a parliamentary career because, as Pansardi and Vercesi state, membership allows MPs "to gain visibility and expertise on a particular policy area" (2017, p. 62). Beloff and Peele (1985) report that MPs often see committee service as a means towards political advancement and Jogerst (1991) states that two-thirds of committee members see their position as a stepping stone along their parliamentary career (both cited in O'Brien 2012). Yet, it is also recognised, with regard to the latter, that committee membership, especially as chair of a committee, could also be a career destination, especially for those otherwise frustrated with their backbench role (Jogerst 1991). Indeed, the Wright Committee, charged with, among other things, reforming the committee system in the wake of the expenses scandal, reported that it was 'crucial to create a parliamentary career path focussed on select committee work' (2009, p. paragraph 19; see also Le Roux 2014)[2].

This article seeks to contribute to the literature on parliamentary careers by examining the membership patterns of select committees of the 2130 MPs elected for the first time since 1979 and until the present. We explore what part committees play in the different parliamentary career pathways open to MPs by focusing on two of Donald Searing's (1994; 1995) informal backbench roles – policy advocates; and parliament men and women – and three of Searing's formal leadership roles – Whip; Junior Minister; and Minister. We find that the membership patterns of select committees suggest that some MPs approach this aspect of

[1] For legislative careers in general, see, for example, Hibbing (1999); Mackenzie and Kousser (2014); and Matthews (1984). For the (gendered) role of committee membership on career pathways, see, for example, Dogan (1979) on France; Pansardi and Vercesi (2017) on Italy; Kaiser and Fischer (2009) and Manow (2013) on Germany; Crisp et al. (2009) on South America; and Moncrief and Thompson (1992) on the USA.

[2] Although there is, as yet, little or no evidence that the Wright Reforms have made select committee membership a more attractive career path than previously (Bates et al. 2017).

their parliamentary work in different ways concomitant with the roles of Generalist and Specialist Policy Advocates and Good House of Commons Men and Women. The membership patterns also suggest that different groups of MPs – by party, gender and ethnicity – often (choose or are forced to) approach committee work in different ways. With regard to career pathways, there is evidence that some committees are more likely to be stepping stones to a (more senior) government or opposition role than others. However, these committees are not necessarily the most high-profile or prestigious which suggests that there are multiple and perhaps unexpected potential committee pathways to the frontbench for another of Searing's informal backbench roles – Ministerial Aspirants.

The article contains five sections. In the first and second, we provide a brief overview of the select committee system and then discuss the literature on parliamentary roles, particularly that of Donald Searing, from which our research questions are derived. We provide details of our data and our methods in the third section before outlining our results in the fourth section. We conclude by discussing what our results mean for the strategies of those who occupy another of Searing's informal roles, that of Ministerial Aspirant, as well as whether our results suggest revisions to Searing's typology are necessary, at least for the UK case.

1. The select committee system in the House of Commons

While select committees have been around in some form since Tudor times, it was not until 1979 that the modern system was established (Maer et al. 2009, p. 2). Since then, there have been three main types of select committee: *departmental select committees*, whose job is to scrutinise their corresponding department (e.g. the Health Select Committee scrutinises the Department of Health, the Treasury Select Committee scrutinises the Treasury, etc.); *administrative/domestic select committees*, such as the Procedure Select Committee and the Backbench Business Select Committee, which focus on matters internal to the running of the House of Commons; and *other scrutiny select committees*, such as the Public Accounts Select

Committee and the Arms Export Controls Select Committee, which deal with specific aspects of government activity or issues which cut across government departments[3].

In comparison with systems in other legislatures, the committee system in the UK can, in many ways, be considered a 'deviant' case (Mattson and Strøm 1995, p. 260-7). Select committees are predominantly investigative committees and do not have a formalised role either in initiating, scrutinising or amending legislation[4]. The House of Commons Standing Order 152 states that the purpose of departmental select committees is "to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the principal government departments… and associated public bodies" (House of Commons 2017, p. 193). Since 2002, this rather broad outline of their role has been supplemented by a list of ten core tasks drawn up by the Liaison Committee[5] with the overall aim of holding "Ministers and Departments to account for their policy and decision-making and [supporting] the House in its control of the supply of public money and scrutiny of legislation"[6].

2. Parliamentary roles and select committees

While there is much debate about how to conceptualise 'roles', Rudy Andeweg argues that all conceptualisations suggest that roles imply interactions between individuals and that a role is connected to, but not synonymous with, a particular position (2014, p. 268). While there are a number of different approaches to roles in legislatures (see Andeweg (2014); Blomgren and Rozenberg (2012); Strøm 1997; and Wahlke (1962), see also Geddes (2019) on 'styles' performed by MPs within select committees), the most famous (and most appropriate here

[3]The membership of some of these 'other scrutiny' committees are composed of members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords

[4] At Westminster, the legislative and deliberative tasks are divided up between public bill committees, ad hoc draft bill scrutiny committees, joint committees involving members of both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, and occasionally select committees themselves. Select committees can also (and sometimes do) undertake pre- and post-legislative scrutiny of Bills (see, for example, Goodwin and Bates (2016) and Norton (2019).

[5] The Liaison Committee is a committee made up of all the chairs of departmental select committees.

[6]https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/liaison-committee/core-tasks/

given our focus on the UK case) remains Donal Searing's typology of eight political roles in the UK House of Commons (1994; see also 1987, 1995 and Norton 1997).

Searing's typology is made up of four formal, leadership positional roles and four informal, backbench preference roles. The leadership roles, which are much better defined than the backbench roles having many familiar specific duties and responsibilities assigned to them, are Parliamentary Private Secretaries, Whips, Junior Ministers and Ministers (Searing 1995, p. 427). The backbench roles are Policy Advocates, Ministerial Aspirants, Constituency Members and Parliament Men[7]. We focus here on the first and last listed. Given the focus of select committees described above, there is a sound *prima facie* case that select committee membership allows MPs to fulfil the role of Policy Advocates, in the cases of departmental and other scrutiny select committees, and Parliament People, especially in the case of domestic/administrative select committees[8]. Indeed (and as discussed below), it is in relation to those two backbench roles that Searing mentions committees. The role of select committee membership in the strategies and careers of Ministerial Aspirants is less clear, and the link between the two activities must be demonstrated rather than assumed.

According to Searing (1995, p. 419), the paramount aim of Policy Advocates is to influence government policy. There are two main sub-types of Policy Advocates: *generalists*, who have interests in many general goals, comprise about a third of policy advocates, and whose principal goals are "to make the government defend itself publicly and to test the mettle of individual ministers" (Searing 1995, p. 420); and *specialists*, who have interests in a few policy areas, who are the principal subtype of Policy Advocates, and who have "a dogged devotion to effective influence" (Searing 1995, p. 421). The latter, according to Searing, gravitate towards participating in select committees because the committees "create an

[7] And presumably if not then, then certainly now, Parliament Women too so, henceforth, Parliament People.

[8] As discussed below, select committee membership also allows MPs to fulfil the role of Ministerial Aspirant but, as Andeweg notes (2014: 277-8), this is reliant upon them performing the other informal roles actively and so is not a direct focus of our research.

incentive to keep up with one's subject. They also provide an unusual opportunity to grill ministers and civil servants" (Searing 1995, p. 421).

Parliament People are concerned with the perpetuation and the esteem of Parliament (Searing 1995, p. 425). While Parliament People can perform their role in different ways, of most concern here is the sub-type Club People and, in particular, the variety of Club People that are Good House of Commons People "who help keep the ship afloat" (Searing 1995, p. 427). Similarly to Specialist Policy Advocates, Good House of Commons People also gravitate towards select committees, albeit of a different type. The select committees mentioned by Searing (1995, p. 427) in relation to Good House of Commons People are House of Commons (Services), Procedure and Broadcasting – all domestic/administrative select committees which focus on internal aspects of Parliament, rather than the departmental and other scrutiny select committees that focus on government policy, administration and expenditure.

Drawing on the above discussion of these formal and informal roles, we derive the following three research questions:

1. Can Generalist and Specialist Policy Advocates and Good House of Commons People be identified in membership patterns of select committees?
2. Does membership of (certain) select committees increase the likelihood of achieving a formal leadership role?
3. Are there different select committee pathways for different groups of MPs (by party, gender and/or ethnicity) and how do they impact the possibility of achieving a formal leadership role?

3. Data and methods

Information about MPs was accessed from Parliament's data platform data.parliament.uk[9]. This system includes details of periods of time that people have served as MPs, and for which political party, and information relating to specific jobs that they have held within government or within the official opposition. It also records details of their membership of a wide range of Parliamentary committees, including Select Committees. Unfortunately, the data platform does not include information about the position of parliamentary private secretary and so we were only able to gather information on three of the four formal leadership roles: Whips; Junior Ministers; and Ministers.

The means of accessing this data was using the Parliamentary Data API reader created by Hawkins (2019), developed as a library in the R system for statistics. This is known as *pdpr* – Parliamentary Data Platform R. There is also a version for Python. Once installed, this library provides a relatively straightforward means of retrieving a wealth of data about MPs and their careers stored on Parliament's data platform.

As an example of the information included, in Table 1 we display a somewhat simplified view of the record for one MP, Dr Mo Mowlam. In practice it takes a number of steps to extract and sort this information to reach this point, but the general pattern is accurate. This table with nine substantive roles illustrates the three terms spent as Labour MP for Redcar (1987-1992, 1992-1997, 1997-2001). Dr Mowlam spent a period on the Public Accounts Committee during her first two years as an MP; a series of Shadow roles in opposition during her second term as an MP; and, a couple of roles in government in her third term, including a short but historic time at Northern Ireland. One limitation of the extracted information is that only primary roles are shown – for instance, Dr Mowlam was also Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities from 18 July 1992 – 21 October 1993, during which the system lists

[9] See http://data.parliament.uk/membersdataplatform/memberquery.aspx.

her roles as BIS and National Heritage. She was also Minister for the Cabinet Office at the same time as being listed for Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Table 1 here

Data was extracted on the 25 January 2019, and thus reflects information relevant up until that point. Commons memberships were taken to end at the dissolution of each Parliament, rather than on the date of the general election at which an MP may have been defeated. Information was taken for 1979 or later, although there is some information available before this date. MPs were only included if they were elected for the first time in 1979 or later. This is to provide a cohort who worked under a more modern era of committees, and it is also believed that older data is somewhat less reliable (Hawkins, 2016).

Reflecting the fact that select committee names have changed over time because of changes in the configuration of government departments, the select committees were, if necessary, grouped into families to allow for comparisons over time. The family tree for select committees can be found in Table 2.

We identify a number of relevant outcomes from the data. These include whether people serve on select committee as members, as Chair, on which committees they serve, and whether they held a formal role either as part of the government or in opposition. We include a set of independent variables to make comparisons between MPs. These comprise the party for which the member was first elected, their gender, BME status and their cohort of entry (by Parliament). We employ descriptive methods to provide results, as this is a relatively new field and with few results on which to base more complex analysis at this stage.

Table 2 here

4. Results

4.1 Description of MPs Experience

Table 3 shows the proportions of MPs who went on to hold either a government or opposition role, or to join Parliamentary committees of various kinds, and whether they have been chair of such committees. Among those elected since 1979, more than two thirds (69 per cent) have spent at least some time on a departmental select committee, compared with about one third becoming a frontbench representative, either in government or in opposition. The proportion of MPs experience serving on a domestic/administrative committee was 38% and for other scrutiny committees, 36%. Peter Allen's (2012) analysis of the 1997 cohort of new MPs, tracked until 2010, found that 36.3% remained backbenchers and did not attain a political office, with a further 13.6% reaching PPS but no higher. Hence, 49.9% did not attain a ministerial role among that group. We calculated the equivalent (and comparable) figure for all MPs elected since 1992, of which 50.8% did not obtain a frontbench job (excluding PPS).

Membership of select committees has been somewhat higher among women (79%) than among men (67%). However, this may be partly reflecting a secular increase in the proportion of female MPs over time, with those elected to Parliament after 1982 being more likely to take on such work. The chance of serving on a select committee has also been higher among the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, compared to the rates found among MPs of the smaller political parties. However, only about half the proportion of women (8%) compared to men (15%) had undertaken the role of a committee chair.

A small number of MPs (N=68) are from a black or minority ethnic background (BME). This does not seem to have affected their occupancy of particular roles – proportionately more BME MPs have held an opposition job in comparison to non-BME MPs, which may indicate their distribution tending to be Labour rather than Conservative. However, there was a rather large difference in the proportion who had ever been a Committee chair – just 4% of this group compared with 14% for the non-BME MPs as we classified them.

Table 3 here

We may also look at how long people tend to remain on select committees after they have joined (Table 4). The median duration is a little under two years for each type of committee. About a quarter barely make it past their first anniversary, while, for the longest-serving quarter of those starting on a select committee (of these kinds), their spells last around four years or more.

Table 4 here

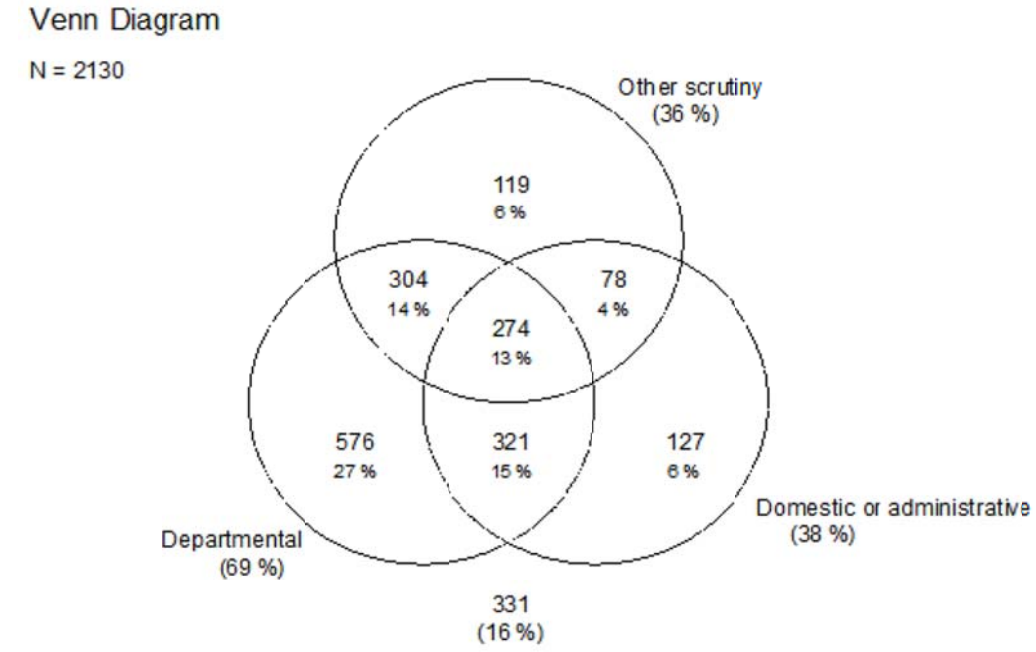
The number of different committees on which individual MPs have served is shown in Table 5. In most cases, where people have experience of committees, it tends to be with one or two. In the case of departmental select committees, however, a small but significant proportion of MPs had served on three or more.

Table 5 here

In Figure 1 we show the overlaps between those holding roles on the different kinds of committees in which we are interested. The upper panel reports on membership of any duration, whilst the lower panel only counts a membership if it was of at least two years' duration – representing a little less than the upper half of time served. There is considerable overlap between those participating in the different kinds of select committees; those involved in one kind of committee are often involved in other kinds. So, for example, of the 1475 MPs who have served on a departmental select committee, only 576 (or 39%) of those had only served on this kind of committee. Among those who had been on a domestic or administrative committee, again this was an exclusive outcome for only 16% of them, as it was for only 15% of those who had ever been on other scrutiny committees. It was rather frequent to have experience of two or more, or even all three, types of committee on which we focus. When we restrict attention to spells of at least two years' duration – a little above

the median duration – there remains a strong degree of overlap between serving on different types of committees.

a) of any duration.



b) Of more than two years on any given committee

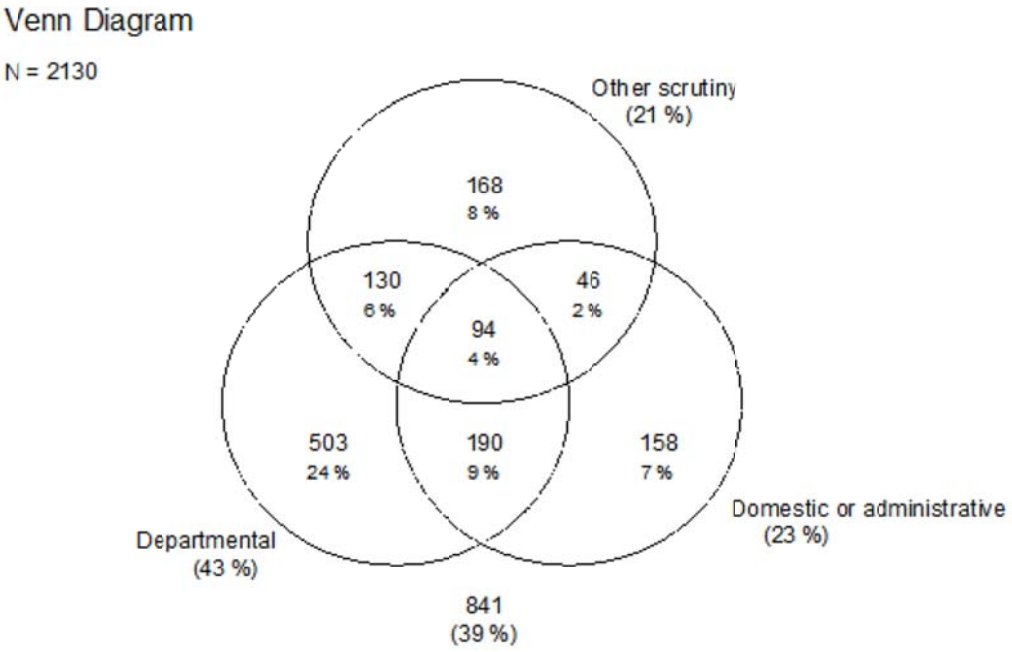


Figure 1: Experience of different kinds of committees

4.2 Identifying MPs fulfilling backbench roles (RQ1)

Our first research question concerned whether it was possible to identify different types of MPs, and in particular Generalist and Specialist Policy Advocates and Good House of Commons People. The analysis in section 4.1 identifies some of the difficulties in arriving at any particularly 'crisp' divisions, as there is a considerable degree of overlap of different kinds of memberships of committees. Moreover, while Searing, as noted above, states that Specialist Policy Advocates gravitate towards select committees, 79% of MPs elected since 1979 have sat on either a departmental and/or other scrutiny committee. Select committee membership has become a normal part of the life of a backbench MP, whatever their career aspirations and inclinations towards particular backbench roles. Based on the original ideas behind the typology and our exploration of the distribution of the data, we may define those fulfilling those backbench roles as follows:

- ***Specialist Policy Advocate***: has been on a departmental and/or other scrutiny select committee for at least two years. Has only been on one or two departmental and/or other scrutiny committees.
- ***Generalist Policy Advocate***: has been on two or more departmental and/or other scrutiny committees, but for <2 years in each case.
- ***Good House of Commons People***. Not a policy specialist/generalist, but has served on a Domestic/Admin committee for at least two years.

If we adopt these criteria, then the makeup of all MPs in our analysis gives us around 3 in 10 as policy specialists (29%), 12% as a policy generalist and 14% as a good House of Commons person. The remaining 44% not meeting any of these thresholds. It is possible,

however, that these typological groupings were narrowly conceived among a 'snapshot' of MPs, and we need to further consider the implications of having longitudinal data where people may move between these statuses over time and where MPs pursue specialist policy advocacy within leadership, as well as backbench roles.

Table 6 shows membership of departmental select committees for those MPs who can be classified as fulfilling the specialist or generalist policy advocate role as defined above. As can be seen, there is a wide variation among committees with some, for example, the Communities and Local Government (and forerunners) and the Justice select committees having comparatively fewer specialist and comparatively more generalist policy advocates, and the opposite being the case for Scottish Affairs, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs among others.

Table 6 here

4.3 Links between committees and leadership (RQ2)

The Searing typology envisaged MPs having different orientations regarding their careers and outlook. They might perform one or more backbench roles (Policy Advocates, Ministerial Aspirants, Constituency Members and Parliament 'People') and also the formal, leadership roles of Parliamentary Private Secretary, Whip, Junior Minister and Minister. Our data for the leadership roles does not identify PPSs but does break down the other roles. Opposition roles for all parties are listed in the data, but they are not broken down into the four levels of leadership role identified for the main opposition party and, of course, in government. As we showed in Figure 1, however, there is a degree of overlap of roles, and hence at any given time MPs may be in one role rather than another. It is not clear how best to operationalise the concepts of Searing (1994) in the presence of panel data showing change through time. Nevertheless, we seek to offer some description of the trajectories of different groups, and the

highest statuses achieved are shown in Figure 2. The results are broken down by being a member of either the Labour or Conservative parties, though there was little difference between them.

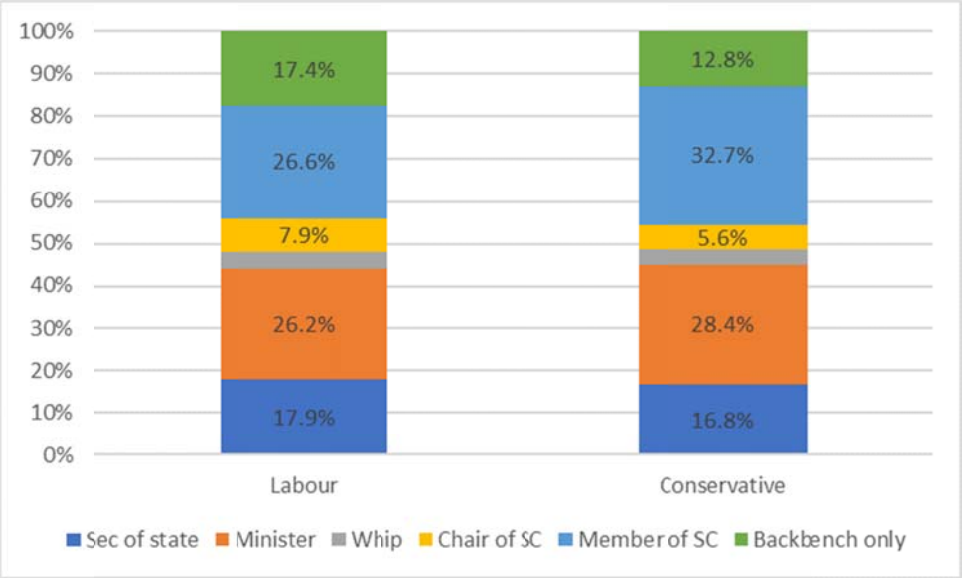


Figure 2: Highest status achieved during MP career (To date)

We now look at those MPs who had served on a particular committee, and then at whether (a) they ever worked in a frontbench capacity for that policy field (or family tree of departments), or, if not, (b) if they ever served in another frontbench capacity, or (c) did not achieve a subsequent frontbench role. Results are shown in Table 6. Note that the time ordering was taken into account – this does not capture ministers who later joined select committees, it is those with a select committee role prior to a 'promotion' to a frontbench role. Any apparent link between the prestige of a department and the chances of joining it having served on the relevant select committee, was quite weak. The best 'stepping stone' select committees seem to be Communities and Local Government (and forerunners), Work and Pensions (and forerunners), and the Treasury (and forerunners). The Welsh Affairs select committee was also quite effective, particularly for those later working on Welsh matters within opposition or government. Notably, both the Defence and Foreign Affairs select

committees were least likely to lead on to a frontbench role, and particularly not with regard to (shadowing) the concomitant departments.

Table 7 here

Table 8 shows the highest leadership role achieved by departmental select committee members, subject to it being after the starting date of the select committee membership[10]. The Work & Pensions, Treasury and Justice committees have the highest proportion of members who go on to become Secretaries of State (in any department), while, once again, the Foreign Affairs and Defence committees come towards the bottom of the table in terms of members who go on to achieve the most senior leadership roles.

Table 8 here

4.4 Differences by groups of MPs (RQ3)

Our descriptive analysis made clear that there are patterned group differences in the engagement of MPs with committee work. Women and members of ethnic minorities are more likely to serve on departmental select committees but somewhat less likely to secure higher committee-level roles. This may be linked to their recent increases in numbers and the strong negative association between holding a committee chair and being a more recently-elected MP. We may apply our backbench typology to such groups. As can be seen from Table 7, one of the clearest findings is that women appeared to be rather more likely to be 'policy generalists', being spread across more areas, and for relatively short periods in each case. As such they were slightly less likely to have specialised in their time as an MP so far, at least where committee work was concerend. The same was true for BME MPs, although fewer of them had experience of committees in general. The rise of policy generalists may be seen in the section dividing MPs by year of entry to Parliament. There are very few policy

[10] This table only includes Labour and Conservative MPs because of the impossibility of categorising 'party spokesperson' for MPs from the smaller parties.

generalists among those elected prior to 2000, but many more MPs fit this description thereafter. Conversely, the 2001 and later intake are less likely to be classified as Good House of Commons People.

Table 9 here

5. Conclusion

Searing's work suggests a number of functions that the Westminster select committee system might fulfil. For policy specialists, the main purpose is to develop expertise in a defined policy area with the aim of influencing policy or holding government to account in this specific policy area. The committee system functions for policy specialists as a venue for developing and deploying expertise in the formation and scrutiny of policy. For policy generalists, the aim is to use the committee system to increase the backbencher's access to government in order to challenge and hold them to account, but the specific policy area is less significant. The committee system functions for policy generalists as a venue for interaction between backbench and frontbench, allowing Parliament to maintain oversight of government policy. For both policy specialists and generalists, select committee membership might be seen as an end in itself. For those backbenchers whose primary orientation or role is as Ministerial Aspirants, select committee membership ought to be pursued principally as a means to an end. The value of select committee membership depends on whether it increases the chances of preferment. The committee system on this reading functions as a training ground wherein backbenchers might acquire the policy expertise, profile or experience of parliamentary mechanics and engagement with government work that would enhance the prospects of progressing to the frontbenches.

There is little to no evidence that committee service improves the promotion prospects of Ministerial Aspirants. Taking MPs as a whole, the committee families that have the best rate

of progression to the frontbenches are Communities and Local Government, Work and Pensions, and Treasury. Those with the lowest rates of progression include Foreign Affairs, DCMS, Defence and International Development. Narrowing the scope to the parties that have generally formed the government or official opposition throughout the period of study, we find no evidence that select committee service boosts preferment prospects. For MPs belonging to the Labour and Conservative parties, the proportion progressing to junior ministerial roles is between 26% and 28%, while the proportion that achieves the highest-ranked leadership role, Secretary of State is between 16% and 18%. As Table 8 shows, there is no committee where service on the part of Labour or Conservative members is associated with a higher rate of success in promotion to junior ministerial roles. Members who have served on the Education or Welsh Affairs committees progress to this level at the average rate. For every other committee, service is associated with a lower rate of progress to the junior ministerial level. If the ultimate goal of Ministerial Aspirants is promotion to the Cabinet, there is no committee where service is associated with a higher rate of progression to the role of Secretary of State than the average for MPs of the main two parties. For the Work and Pensions, Treasury, Justice and Transport committees, the rate of progress is no worse than for the average Labour or Conservative MP. For all other committees the rate of progress to Secretary of State roles is lower; in some cases, such as Foreign Affairs or Defence, dramatically lower.

The Ministerial Aspirant role could perhaps be sub-divided between those whose aspiration is ministerial office regardless of the brief, and those who have specialised policy interests they seek to pursue in a frontbench role. For those Ministerial Aspirants where the portfolio matters, the best ‘stepping stone’ committees are, perhaps surprisingly, the Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Affairs committees. These are not usually viewed as the most prestigious parliamentary committees, but the evidence presented here suggests that

their members progress to formal leadership roles more often than members of other committees. The proportion of those who do progress from a departmental committee to a frontbench role covering the same departmental brief is rather low. On average, only 12% of departmental committee members progress to a frontbench position in either government or opposition covering the same departmental brief[11]. The policy expertise acquired during a period of committee service seems to count for relatively little when frontbench roles are being filled.

The committees to avoid as a Ministerial Aspirant with defined policy interests are also perhaps surprising. Foreign Affairs and Defence are arguably two of the most prestigious select committees, yet fewer members of these two committees progress to frontbench roles. Members of these committees are, however, among the most likely to be specialist policy advocates. Indeed, on average, it appears that those committees for which membership is less likely to lead to formal leadership roles are more likely to have specialist policy advocates as members. Members of the Culture (DCMS) and International Development committees also experience low rates of progress to frontbench roles.

Beyond the career ambitions of ministerial aspirants, our results also highlight some perhaps more serious issues, most notably the different select committee membership patterns for different groupings of MPs. One clear finding is that female and BME MPs are less likely to become specialist policy advocates within the select committee system which may explain their lack of presence on the most 'specialised' committees such as Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Notwithstanding the potential impact of cohort effects and the possibility of changes in how MPs approach membership of select committees, it is also perhaps important to note the over-

[11] Although it must be borne in mind that not every committee member belongs to a party with a realistic chance of forming a government or opposition and therefore that not every committee member has a realistic chance of progress to a ministerial or shadow ministerial role in the official opposition.

representation of white, male MPs in the Good House of Commons People category. This group of MPs is characterised by its presence on the committees that determine the internal affairs of Parliament. This may help explain, for example, the relatively slow pace of reform with regard to workplace culture within the House of Commons.

The results also may point to the need to rethink the definition of this backbench role. Searing defines a Good House of Commons Man in terms of those MPs concerned with maintaining the traditions and esteem of Parliament. However, given recent and not-so-recent events in Parliament, such as those surrounding expenses, bullying and other forms of inappropriate behaviour, maintaining (or reviving) the esteem of Parliament may be viewed, by some MPs at least, as being best achieved by replacing parliamentary traditions, rather than defending them. In which case, there is potentially the need to distinguish between traditionalist and reformist Good House of Commons People.

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Table 1 Example of simplified data record for on MP (Dr Mo Mowlam).

Start	End	Role	Description
11-Jun-87	16-Mar-92	MEMB	Redcar – Labour MP
17-Jun-87	13-Jan-89	CMTE	Public Accounts Committee
09-Apr-92	08-Apr-97	MEMB	Redcar – Labour MP
20-Jul-92	01-Jul-93	OPPN	Shadow Minister (Business, Innovation and Skills)
01-Jul-93	02-Aug-94	OPPN	Shadow Secretary of State for National Heritage
01-Aug-94	01-May-97	OPPN	Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
01-May-97	14-May-01	MEMB	Redcar – Labour MP
03-May-97	10-Oct-99	GOVT	Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
11-Oct-99	07-Jun-01	GOVT	Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Source: data extracted from the Parliamentary data platform for members of the House of Commons.

Table 2 Select committee family tree for all committees affected by the Wright reforms

Committee Family Name	Type	Select Committees included under name
Business & Forerunners	Departmental	Industry & Trade Trade & Industry Business & Enterprise Business, Innovation & Skills Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
Communities & Local Government & Forerunners	Departmental	Transport, Local Government & the Regions Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government & the Regions Communities & Local Government
Digital, Culture, Media & Sport & Forerunners	Departmental	National Heritage Culture, Media & Sport Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
Defence	Departmental	Defence
DEFRA & Forerunners	Departmental	Agriculture Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Environment Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs
Education & Forerunners	Departmental	Education, Science & Arts Education & Employment Education & Skills Children, Schools & Family Education
Energy & Climate Change & Forerunners	Departmental	Energy Energy & Climate Change
Exiting the European Union	Departmental	Exiting the European Union
Foreign Affairs	Departmental	Foreign Affairs
Health & Forerunners	Departmental	Social Services Health
Home Affairs	Departmental	Home Affairs
International Development	Departmental	International Development
International Trade	Departmental	International Trade
Justice	Departmental	Justice
Northern Ireland Affairs	Departmental	Northern Ireland Affairs
Science & Technology & Forerunners	Departmental	Education, Science & Arts Science & Technology Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills
Scottish Affairs	Departmental	Scottish Affairs
Transport & Forerunners	Departmental	Transport Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs Transport, Local Government & the Regions
Treasury & Forerunners	Departmental	Treasury Treasury & Civil Service
Welsh Affairs	Departmental	Welsh Affairs
Women & Equalities	Departmental	Women & Equalities
Work & Pensions & Forerunners	Departmental	Social Services Social Security Employment Education & Employment Work & Pensions
Backbench Business	Domestic / Administrative	Backbench Business
Petitions	Domestic / Administrative	Petitions
Procedure	Domestic / Administrative	Procedure
Standards & Privileges	Domestic / Administrative	Privileges Standards Standards in Public Life Standards & Privileges
Environmental Audit	Other Scrutiny	Environmental Audit
Public Accounts	Other Scrutiny	Public Accounts
Public Administration & Constitutional Affairs	Other Scrutiny	Constitutional Affairs Public Administration & Constitutional Affairs Public Administration Political & Constitutional Affairs Treasury & Civil Service Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Table 3 Careers of MPs first elected since 1979.

Row Percentages

	Has ever worked in this capacity							
	Government job	**Opposition job**	**Any committee**	**Departmental select committee**	**Domestic or administrative**	**Other scrutiny**	**Committee chairs**	**Number of MPs (base N)**
All	32%	31%	85%	69%	38%	36%	13%	2,130
Men	32%	28%	84%	67%	39%	36%	15%	1,745
Women	30%	42%	91%	79%	33%	39%	8%	405
Party when first elected								
Conservative	45%	18%	89%	73%	40%	35%	14%	927
Labour	24%	37%	84%	68%	38%	39%	16%	941
LibDem	22%	60%	84%	64%	37%	46%	7%	121
SNP	-	76%	82%	58%	27%	30%	3%	66
Others	-	28%	63%	55%	11%	15%	1%	75
Year when first elected								
1979-1982	26%	12%	70%	49%	39%	17%	20%	655
1983-2000	41%	33%	91%	76%	44%	45%	17%	724
2001-	28%	46%	93%	80%	30%	45%	4%	751
Whether BME								
BME	26%	49%	88%	78%	28%	38%	4%	68
Others	32%	30%	85%	69%	38%	36%	14%	2062

Source: authors' analysis of data extracted from the Parliamentary data platform.

Table 4 Time (in years) served on different kinds of committees.

	Bottom quarter	Median	Top quarter	Number of spells
At committee level				
Departmental select	1.0	1.8	3.5	3128
Domestic/administrative	1.1	1.9	3.9	1612
Other scrutiny	1.1	1.8	3.8	1280

Table 5 Number of different committees ever served in percentages

Row Percentages

	None	1	2	3+	N MPs
At committee level					
Departmental select	31	35	19	16	2130
Domestic/administrative	62	21	8	8	2130
Other scrutiny	64	22	9	5	2130

Table 6 Different backbench roles fulfilled by MPs by membership of departmental select committees

Row percentages

Departmental select committee (and forerunners)	Specialist Policy Advocate	Generalist Policy Advocate	Other/Not classified
Business	21	20	58
CLG	8	26	67
DCMS	25	19	55
Defence	31	15	54
DEFRA	28	13	58
Education	26	16	58
Energy & Climate Change	28	14	57
Foreign Affairs	33	10	57
Health	28	21	51
Home Affairs	34	16	50
Int. Development	22	20	58
Justice	8	25	67
NI Affairs	17	9	74
Scottish Affairs	44	13	43
Transport	21	17	62
Treasury	25	19	56
Welsh Affairs	32	14	53
Work and Pensions	32	17	50

Table 7 Links between committee role and later job

Row percentages

Departmental Select Committee (and forerunners)	Got government or opposition job in that field later	Got another government or opposition job later	No such promotion	N MPs
CLG	22%	24%	53%	98
Work & Pensions	15%	30%	55%	234
Treasury	19%	23%	59%	123
Education	15%	24%	61%	157
Welsh Affairs	26%	13%	61%	109
Justice	14%	23%	64%	66
DEFRA	13%	23%	64%	222
Transport	11%	24%	65%	127
Scottish Affairs	19%	16%	65%	120
Home Affairs	7%	27%	66%	137
Health	11%	23%	67%	132
Energy & Climate Change	6%	25%	69%	77
Business	9%	19%	72%	129
NI Affairs	7%	17%	75%	81
Int. Development	7%	16%	77%	69
Defence	9%	14%	77%	105
DCMS	5%	17%	79%	84
Foreign Affairs	3%	13%	83%	89

Table 8 Routes to (shadow) ministerial office from departmental select committees for Labour and Conservative MPs

Row percentages

Departmental select committee (and forerunners)	Whip level	Junior Minister	Sec of State	No route	n MPs
Work & Pensions	3%	24%	18%	55%	217
Treasury	4%	25%	17%	54%	110
Justice	5%	17%	17%	62%	60
Transport	4%	16%	16%	65%	114
DEFRA	3%	21%	15%	61%	202
CLG	5%	25%	15%	56%	88
Health	1%	22%	13%	64%	122
Welsh Affairs	2%	26%	13%	60%	94
Home Affairs	2%	23%	12%	62%	130
Education	2%	27%	11%	59%	142
Scottish Affairs	5%	19%	10%	66%	101
Business	2%	23%	10%	66%	115
NI Affairs	5%	16%	8%	70%	61
Int. Development	3%	17%	7%	73%	60
DCMS	4%	14%	6%	75%	77
Foreign Affairs	1%	11%	6%	82%	83
Energy & Climate Change	6%	18%	6%	70%	71
Defence	3%	18%	2%	76%	93

Table 9 Backbench roles by different groups of MPs

Row percentages

	Policy specialist	Policy generalist	Good House of Commons person	Others
All	30	12	14	44
Men	31	10	15	45
Women	26	22	9	42
BME	13	27	9	51
Non-BME	30	12	14	44
Year of first entry				
1979-1982	35	2	18	46
1983-2000	35	7	18	40
2001-	20	27	6	47
Party				
Con	31	13	14	42
Lab	30	11	15	44
LibDem	35	4	17	44
SNP	11	35	0	55
Others	24	7	4	65