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Policy brief

The role and influence of the UK's Committee on Climate Change



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Headline issues

- The independent Committee on Climate Change has introduced a long-term perspective into UK climate policy, helped make targets more credible and ensured evidence-based policymaking.
- Its successes offer important lessons for other countries considering introducing independent bodies into their climate change governance frameworks.

Summary

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has had a strong influence on UK climate policy. Its analysis is used and trusted by stakeholders on all sides of the debate, and its statutory advice has generally been followed.

The CCC has made a material difference to climate policy in terms of objectives (the statutory carbon targets), process (impact on parliamentary debate) and substance (e.g. influencing new laws on energy, infrastructure, housing and water).

CCC analysis is used in Parliament to push for greater ambition.

CCC analysis often provides a technical justification to political arguments for greater accountability and more ambitious action – both on mitigation (carbon budgets, long-term emissions targets) and adaptation (flood defence spending, climate risk management).

The CCC has gained a reputation as an authoritative advisor not only on matters of climate policy, but on climate-smart public policy more generally.

Policy briefs provide analysis on topical issues, presenting specific recommendations to inform ongoing policy debates. Drawing on the Grantham Research Institute's expertise, they summarise either our research findings or the state of knowledge about a particular issue.

This policy brief has been written by **Alina Averchenkova, Sam Fankhauser and Jared Finnegan**. It summarises a longer report, *The role of independent bodies in climate governance: the UK's Committee on Climate Change* (26 pp), available at: www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/publications/

“The CCC combines analytical rigour with extensive stakeholder engagement”

Introduction

This brief provides a summary assessment of the role of the independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC) in shaping UK climate policy. The CCC is a central pillar of climate governance in the UK. It was established 10 years ago under the 2008 Climate Change Act, its creation among the most innovative institutional features of the Act (Muinzer, 2018).

Many observers see the CCC as an important contributor to the UK’s success in decoupling economic activity and greenhouse gas emissions (see Fankhauser et al., 2018). The CCC’s reputation and apparent success make it worth studying and this brief offers an introduction to its main organisational features.

If independent bodies can make a material difference to the delivery of climate change objectives, as appears to be so in the UK,

other countries may wish to include this feature.

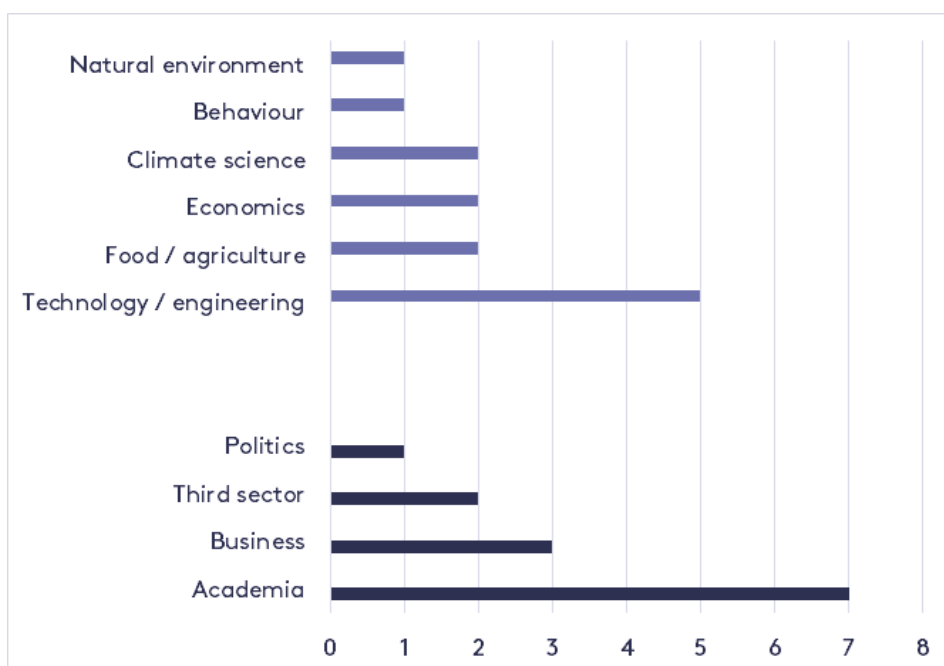
How does the Committee on Climate Change work?

The CCC is an independent expert body with an annual average budget of £3.7 million. Its members do not represent particular interest groups, but were chosen for their technical expertise. The Committee is led by a high-profile chair and supported by a 30-strong secretariat with expertise in all aspects of the climate problem (Figure 1). Funding for the CCC is provided by the UK Government and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: the CCC does not have budgetary independence.

The CCC combines analytical rigour with extensive stakeholder engagement. The CCC derives its recommendations from an exploration of the technological,

Notes: The CCC has eight members, including the chair. The Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC) has six members, including the chair, who also sits on the CCC. Its current chair is an experienced politician: Lord Deben, a prominent member of the Conservative Party, and Secretary of State for the Environment from 1993–7. The other seven members of the CCC and all six members of the ASC are foremost technical experts, in the areas shown in the figure.

Figure 1. Background of CCC and ASC members (no. of members)



The Committee on Climate Change: independent advisory body



What and how?

Experts and secretariat

Annual budget approx. £3.7m, funded by government

Recommends carbon budgets

Modelling and scenario-planning

Advises on risks and opportunities from climate change

Monitors progress on emissions reduction and climate resilience

Outcomes

Independent, objective analysis

Advice on carbon targets generally followed

Long-term consistency in approach

Transparency and legitimacy

More informed decision-making

Used in Parliament to push for greater ambition

economic and behavioural changes that are possible and required, based on detailed modelling and long-term scenario planning. Analytical insight is combined with a constant and intensive dialogue with stakeholders and government counterparts to work out what is feasible in practice.

Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the CCC are set out in the Climate Change Act and include statutory duties to:

- **Recommend to Parliament appropriate emissions reduction targets.** The Climate Change Act stipulates a statutory long-term target for 2050 and a series of five-year carbon budgets, which define the path to 2050. Both sets of targets are recommended by the CCC and set by Parliament.
- **Advise the Government on the risks and opportunities from climate change and evaluate its National Adaptation**

Programme. This duty is carried out through the Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC).

- **Monitor and assess progress on reducing emissions and on climate resilience.** The CCC produces an annual progress report to Parliament, to which the Government has a statutory obligation to respond.
- **Provide on-demand advice to the UK Government and the devolved administrations** of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on specific questions of climate policy. The CCC has advised, for example, on aviation emissions, renewable energy, the climate impact of shale gas extraction and devolved climate policy.

The CCC does not have any formal powers to change the Government's approach to climate policy. Instead it relies on the political embarrassment that its assessments may cause and the threat of a judicial review brought about by environmental

“The CCC does not have formal powers to change the Government's approach – instead it relies on the political embarrassment its assessments may cause and the threat of a judicial review”

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pressure groups if it fails to meet its statutory obligations under the Climate Change Act.

A gap has opened between the legislated carbon targets and the policies in place to meet them; a more assertive stance towards the Government may be called for over the coming years to close it. The CCC’s 2018 Progress Report was an important step towards formulating clearer expectations of Government (CCC, 2018).

What has the CCC achieved to date?

The CCC’s statutory advice on carbon targets has generally been followed, albeit not always to the letter

At the recommendation of the CCC, the UK has legislated a progressive 2050 target and five carbon budgets that cover the period 2008 to 2032. They require emissions cuts of 57 per cent by 2030, on the way to a reduction of at least 80 per cent by 2050, relative to 1990. The parliamentary debates on the five carbon budgets between 2009 and 2016 drew extensively on the CCC, which was the main source of authoritative analysis – see Table 1.

For the fifth carbon budget, set in 2016 and covering the period 2028–32, Government and Parliament adopted the headline number recommended by the CCC, but they ignored a more technical recommendation to bring emissions from international shipping into the accounting framework.

The CCC’s advice on devolved climate change policy has also in general been followed.

Particularly in Scotland and Wales the London-based CCC has a surprisingly high standing. A Scottish climate change expert interviewed by Fankhauser et al. (2018) spoke of the “high expectations” in the Scottish government of the analytical capacity of the CCC and high profile its reports enjoy. There has been less engagement with Northern Ireland, which does not have its own climate change legislation.

The CCC has had more difficulty getting its broader policy recommendations accepted

The CCC’s annual progress reports contain a wealth of detailed recommendations on policy intervention. The progress reports are statutory documents, laid in Parliament, but the recommendations themselves do not carry any statutory weight; the Government’s only duty is to respond to the reports (see most recently Her Majesty’s Government, 2017a, b).

The CCC’s role is to comment on progress in cutting emissions and advancing climate resilience. It cannot do so without expressing a view on the policies that are in place to achieve this, but it is the Government’s prerogative to set climate policy.

Important CCC recommendations have been taken on board, for example on electricity market reform and long-term spending on low-carbon energy (the so-called levy control framework). On adaptation, the Government responded to criticism about the first Climate Change Risk

Table 1. Parliamentary responses to the CCC's main recommendations			
Issue (date)	CCC recommendation	Parliamentary decision	Advice implemented...
2050 target (2008)	Reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% from 1990 level by 2050	Legislated the 2050 target as recommended	Fully
1st, 2nd, 3rd carbon budgets (2009)	Set interim budgets that result in a 34% cut in emissions by 2020. Replace them with intended budgets equivalent to a 42% cut following a global deal	Legislated the interim budgets at the recommended level. The expected global deal did not materialise	Fully
4th carbon budget (2011)	Set a domestic action budget equivalent to a 50% cut by 2025. Change the earlier budgets to the previously recommended intended level. Legislate a tighter global offer budget after a global deal	Legislated the domestic action budget, subject to a review in the light of evolving circumstances. Earlier budgets were not changed	Partially
4th carbon budget review (2014)	There is no legal or economic basis for a change in the 4th carbon budget	Confirmed the 4th carbon budget as originally set	Fully
5th carbon budget (2016)	Set a budget that is equivalent to a 57% cut in emissions by 2030, including emissions from international shipping	Legislated a budget requiring a 57% cut, but without bringing international shipping into the framework	Partially
Source: Authors based on CCC reports			

Assessment by assigning a larger role to the ASC in subsequent risk assessments.

However, the Government's responses are frequently non-committal, offering merely to "explore" or "consult on" proposals. Some key recommendations have been consistently overlooked. For example, the CCC has repeatedly called for a more proactive approach to carbon capture and storage, a more aggressive stance on delivering low-carbon heat and a stronger policy framework on agricultural emissions. The ASC has repeatedly warned about the risks from overheating

in buildings. These calls have been largely ignored, and a gap has opened between the legislated carbon targets and the policies in place to meet them (Fankhauser et al., 2018). As a result the CCC's progress assessments have become increasingly explicit and assertive (see in particular CCC, 2018). This is an important evolution in the way the CCC reports, making it easier to monitor and judge the Government's response.

CCC analysis is used in Parliament to push for greater ambition

Most political parties in Parliament, including all the

“Some of the CCC's key recommendations have been consistently overlooked by the Government”

“Between December 2008 and May 2018 the CCC was referenced in Parliament almost five times more than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change”

major parties, have mentioned the CCC and/or ASC in their interventions since 2008 (see Figure 2). Between December 2008 and May 2018 the CCC was referenced almost five times more than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Opposition politicians mentioned the CCC particularly often.

Our analysis shows that the CCC often provides a technical justification to political arguments for greater accountability and more ambition. This is the case both on mitigation (carbon budgets, long-term emissions targets) and adaptation (flood defence spending, climate risk management).

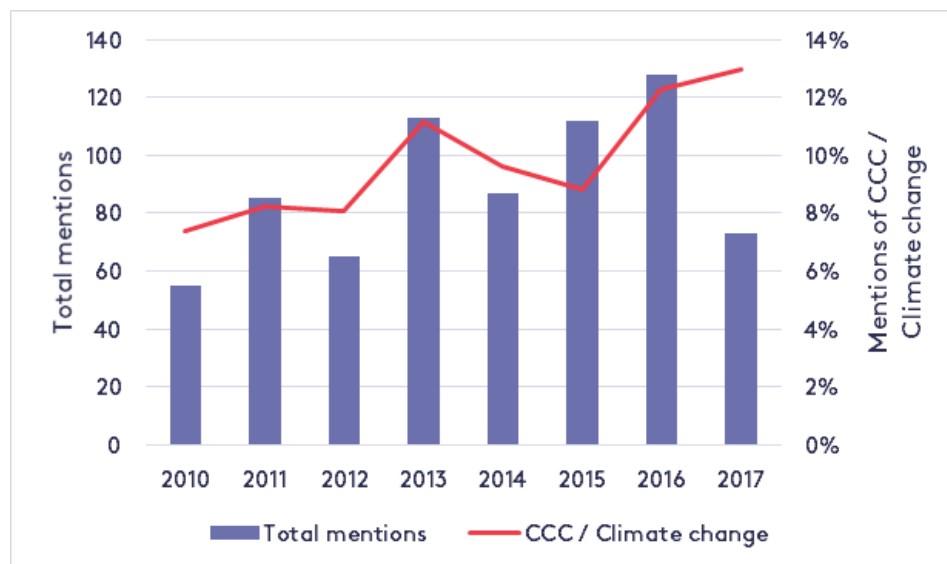
The CCC’s advice reaches beyond carbon targets

The CCC was mentioned in the parliamentary debates on 21 Government bills (Figure 3), referred to most often over the four Energy Bills passed since 2008, but also during the debates on the Infrastructure Bill (2014–15), the Water Bill (2013–14), the Civil Aviation Bill (2012) and the Housing and Planning Bill (2016). Our analysis of the flooding debate and the 2016 Energy Bill shows that the CCC has gained a reputation as an authoritative advisor not only on matters of climate policy, but on climate-smart public policy more generally. For example, the CCC was instrumental in bringing about the 2013 Electricity Market Reform.

Notes: For data availability reasons, the series only runs from March 2010 to the end of 2017. The bars represent the total absolute number of CCC mentions. The line represents a metric of CCC mentions divided by mentions of ‘climate change’. This statistic can be interpreted as measuring the extent to which the CCC is mentioned in parliamentary debates related to climate change.

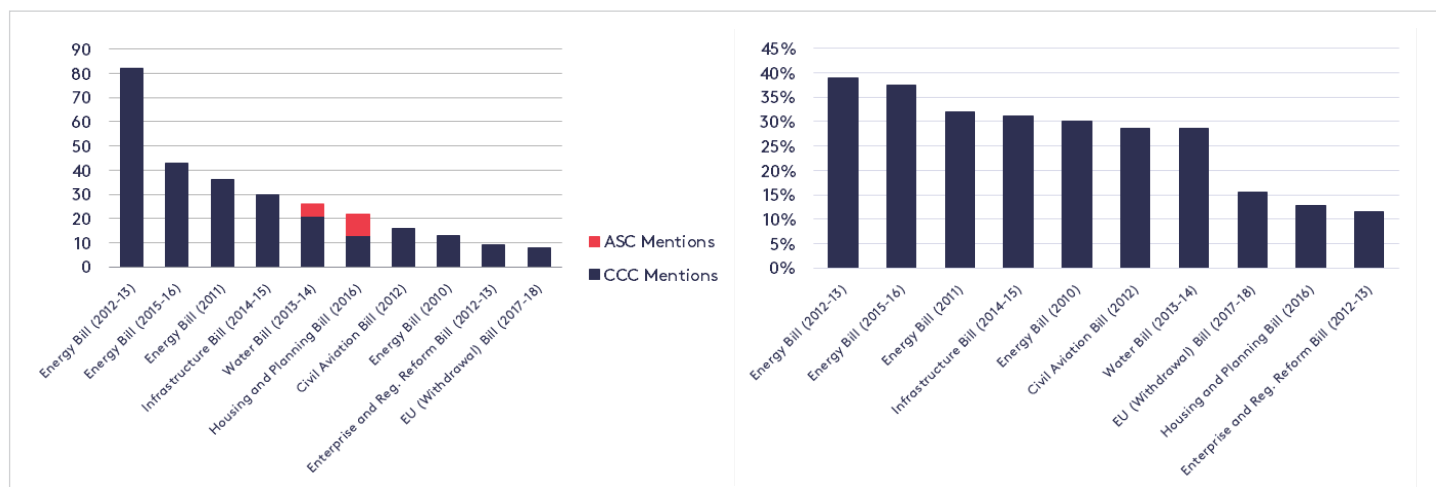
Source: Authors’ analysis of Hansard (the official, verbatim report of all parliamentary debates)

Figure 2. Number of times parliamentarians mention the CCC



The figure shows that the CCC’s influence on parliamentary debates has grown over time. In 2010, about 7% of speeches related to climate change referred to the CCC (the line), increasing to 13% by 2017. The total number of mentions grew from around 55 a year in 2010 to well over 100 in 2015 and 2016 (the bars). While the absolute number of CCC mentions fell in 2017, it continues to be increasingly mentioned in climate-related debates. The drop-off may be due to reduced attention Parliament has paid to climate change since the Brexit vote.

Figure 3. Mentions of CCC and ASC in Government debates on bills (left) and share of sittings where the CCC or ASC was mentioned (right)



Note: The dates refer to the period during which the bills were debated in the two Houses of Parliament. Once the parliamentary debate is completed, a bill receives royal assent and becomes an Act of Parliament. Thus the Energy Bill 2015–2016 became the Energy Act 2016. Source: Authors’ analysis of Hansard

Summary of lessons on establishing independent climate advisory bodies

- An independent expert body can strengthen climate governance by introducing a long-term perspective, enhancing the credibility of climate targets and ensuring more evidence-based policymaking.
- To be effective, independent advisory bodies must have an appropriate status. This means having a clear statutory mandate, strong leadership, adequate resources, and sufficient powers to hold Government to account.
- Independent bodies can support policy delivery on both emissions reduction (mitigation) and climate resilience (adaptation). There is sufficient thematic overlap to entrust independent scrutiny on both of these areas to the same body.
- As the number of independent climate change committees grows around the world, there is merit in deepening and formalising international coordination between these bodies. This could build on an existing informal network among European committees.

Summary of lessons on the effectiveness of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC)

- A strong, independent CCC is essential to meeting Britain’s climate change objectives. The CCC’s analysis is used and trusted by stakeholders on all sides of the debate. In Parliament, CCC analysis is used particularly often by Opposition politicians and to make the case for greater ambition.
- The CCC has made a material difference to the way climate policy is conducted in terms of objectives (the statutory carbon targets), process (impact on parliamentary debate) and substance (e.g. influencing new laws on energy, infrastructure, housing and water).
- The basis of the CCC’s success is a careful combination of rigorous analysis and extensive stakeholder engagement, including with Parliament. However, recent budget cuts and delays in the ministerial approval of new members could put at risk the CCC’s ability to deliver its ambitious work programme over the coming years.
- The Government runs the risk of a judicial review if it does not follow the policy advice of the CCC more carefully. Important policy recommendations have been overlooked, and a gap has opened between climate targets and the policies to deliver them.

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We disclose that one of the authors (Fankhauser) was formerly a member of the CCC but before the drafting of this report.

This policy brief is intended to inform decision-makers in the public, private and third sectors. It has been reviewed internally and externally before publication. The views expressed in this brief represent those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the host institutions or funders.

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