

Select committee's report used parliamentary privilege unacceptably

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EDITOR—We are deeply concerned at the misrepresentation in the House of Commons Select Committee on Health's report, *The Role of the Private Sector in the NHS*, of evidence critical of the private finance initiative (PFI) given by University College London's Health Policy and Health Services Research Unit. [1](#) [2](#)

We believe that the committee's criticism of research by the unit is an unacceptable use of parliamentary privilege to attack academic scholarship. Paragraphs 65 to 69 of the report give an inaccurate account of statements made in evidence and in published research. In particular, they misrepresent evidence that the unit gave to the committee and allege that the unit's research was unsound without providing any evidence of this.

This will undoubtedly deter other researchers from acting as expert witnesses to select committees in the future, especially if their findings do not accord with prevailing government

policies.

It is important that parliamentary select committees take evidence from witnesses with a wide range of views and examine them critically and robustly in relation to government policies. Contrary to the comments made in the report, the unit's published research on public health and the private finance initiative is respected both internationally and nationally.

We call on the House of Commons Health Committee to withdraw these unsubstantiated comments and urge others who support fair reporting and use of evidence given to select committees to reinforce this request. This can be done by writing to the House of Commons Health Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA or emailing the committee at healthcom@parliament.uk

References

1. House of Commons Select Committee on Health. *The role of the private sector in the NHS*. London: Stationery Office, 2002. (HC 308-I.)
2. PFI is here to stay. *BMJ* 2002; **324**: 1178. (18 May.)