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Should OxCAN promote Parliamentary Petitions? Yes, Ox can!

The following is an opinion piece by OxCAN member, Dr Quintin Rayer urging OxCAN members to propose Parliamentary petitions.



Photo by Marcin Nowak on Unsplash

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Being situated in the United Kingdom, the University of Oxford is very fortunate to reside within a long-established Parliamentary Democracy, as are many alumni. Indeed the UK scored 8.52 in the 2019 Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (<https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>), ranking it 14th out of the 166 countries analysed.

Along with this top-decile democratic performance, UK citizens enjoy access to the UK Parliament's very own petitions website (<https://petition.parliament.uk/>). Any British citizen or UK resident can start, or support, a petition. Petitions can be signed on-line, and if a petition gets 10,000 signatures, the government will respond; at 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for debate in Parliament.

Why not propose Parliamentary petitions?

Collectively OxCAN members have access to a pool of skills that is both deep and broad. In an area like Parliamentary petitions, members are collectively well-equipped to evaluate current petitions and recommend them to other alumni. An organisation like OxCAN could take the further step to propose petitions. These could be carefully designed to capture a 'sweet spot' of significant climate benefit while also likely to have broad public appeal.

Parliamentary petitions are interesting for other reasons. Firstly, petitions need to be well thought out, but not necessarily 'legally watertight'. Such petitions are proposals for government or Parliament to consider, so governmental and political mechanisms can resolve the minutiae. Secondly, apparent failure can still be a success. If a petition passes the 10,000, or particularly the 100,000 mark – the issue will have been raised and debated much more widely. The wider circulation of ideas can still be an important catalyst for change.

Sensitive intervention points

Recent work by the Oxford Martin School (<https://www.postcarbontransition.net/>) considered sensitive intervention points for post-carbon transitions, noting the significance of amplifiers for climate initiatives. Through a combination of OxCAN skills, alumni numbers, and UK Parliamentary petitions, this may represent a sensitive intervention opportunity of its own, for OxCAN members.

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