

Public participation inquiry

What is the inquiry about?

In spring 2022 the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee launched an inquiry into how people's voices are heard in the work of the Parliament.

We want to hear from people across Scotland particularly when we develop new laws or policies that affect them.

This is important because just now we know that the Scottish Parliament doesn't hear from some groups or communities. We want to make sure that the views and opinions of everyone in Scotland are included in the work of the Parliament.

Our inquiry started with us consulting with people across Scotland. This booklet shares the key points from what people told us.

At the end of the inquiry we will suggest improvements that can be made, based on what people have told us.

What people told us

Although people with protected characteristics are under-represented in the work of the Scottish Parliament, people said those with a low income are most likely to be under-represented.

People from disadvantaged backgrounds don't feel that engaging with the Scottish Parliament is worthwhile.

People often struggle to engage in the work of the Scottish Parliament as they don't feel representatives reflect them, or their communities' needs and concerns.

Education has a vital role to play in breaking down barriers to participation in the democratic process.

Cross-party groups are integral to the involvement of minority groups and those with protected characteristics in the work of the Scottish Parliament. Cross-party groups are groups of Members of the Scottish Parliament and other people who are interested in a subject or issue.

The Scottish Parliament needs to do more to tell people about its engagement and participation work, as those we reach are positive about the experience.

Strengthening trust in politics and politicians is essential to successfully involving people in the work of the Scottish Parliament

Breaking down barriers to participation will improve the diversity of participation and opinions in the work of the Scottish Parliament.

People less likely to engage

We knew that certain types of people, who are protected by the Equality Act 2010, might be less likely to speak to the Scottish Parliament – people from ethnic minorities, with disabilities, or who might be discriminated against because of their age, sex/gender, religion, or sexuality.

People also told us that many people who aren't protected might not speak to us. These included people on low incomes, who are unemployed, who live in rural areas, who didn't go to university, or who don't have English as their first language, among others.

- I am minority ethnic and work part time on minimum wage. My lack of confidence in English is holding me back.
- I am gay and find there is little support on the island I live on.
- I left school at 16 and worked until retirement. I struggle with using the internet.
- I have settled status, but my poor mental health makes finding work difficult.
- I have autism and live alone in a small rural village. I feel like I have no support.

Intersectionality

Many people said if people have more than one of these characteristics that might mean they're less likely to speak to us, they may be even less likely to engage.

Money: People linked money and income closely to education levels, employment status, time, and age. If you have more money, you may find it easier to overcome other barriers.

Time: This is linked to money when it comes to employment types and childcare, but people also said if they were very busy, they had to feel taking part was worth their time.

Incentive: People need an incentive to take part – to feel like it's worth it. To do this they need to trust us and the process. Having more education might mean you understand your role more, but some people also thought well-off people might feel their voice is more likely to be heard.

Education: People need to understand political systems to see where they fit in and to know how to be involved. This starts at school. A lot of people said that they didn't know what the Parliament does for them, and a lot of people said that our language is intimidating. Politicians and Parliament staff need to learn more about the types of people they are engaging with.

Trust: A lot of people have lost trust in politics and politicians because they don't feel heard or represented. The media plays a part, but some people have engaged with

us and not seen their voice have an impact on policy, so they have lost trust.

Fear/intimidation: People need to feel safe taking part and that they are not at risk of intimidation or bullying (including online). Some people aren't comfortable in a 'formal' environment.

Representation: People will trust us more if they see more people like themselves represented in our work – people from minority groups, but also people from low-income or deprived backgrounds, people from rural areas, and children/young people. We could tell people more about our work with these groups.

Resource: People thought more resource was needed to tackle all the other barriers. This means more time and money to help people to be involved and have their voice heard. This could be targeted at education, at support services and the voluntary sector, and at the Parliament's engagement services, for instance helping to cover people's costs when they participate.

About this information

The views shared here come from lots of different activities and represent the views of more than 460 people and organisations.

Between May and July 2022 we had an open public survey. This had 305 responses from people of all ages from across Scotland, covering 25 local authorities.

Around 17% of these people said that they had never been involved in the work of the Scottish Parliament before.

We shared the survey in various languages, and invited people to submit in the language they felt most comfortable with. We had one response in Polish, one person used Gaelic, and four responses were from British Sign Language (BSL) users.

We also had a survey which looked for more detail on ways of increasing engagement. That had 35 responses from a mixture of organisations and individuals, including academics.

We heard from 119 people in 10 focus group sessions. People from many places and backgrounds spoke to us, including people from minority ethnic and immigrant backgrounds, people with physical and learning disabilities, people from low-income backgrounds, and people living in rural and island locations.

We also invited people to send us submissions by email, and four people/organisations did this.

Find out more

If you would like to find out more about our work and how you can share your views, please contact us.

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You can write to us in any language.