



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

25  
—YEARS—  
BLIADHNA



Join In  
Gabh Pàirt



# Scottish Parliament 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Regional Programme of Community Engagement

Final Report  
June 2025



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## Aims and purpose

In 2024 the Scottish Parliament reached its 25th anniversary. To celebrate this the Presiding Officer, Alison Johnstone MSP, decided to visit communities in each of the eight Parliamentary regions along with the local MSPs. The visits were supported by community participation specialists from the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT).

We chose locations that the Parliament had not visited much or at all in the past. We drew on the creativity of the people we were visiting to design the days together, in ways that suited them and that they would enjoy. We made sure that it wasn't just about people hearing from the Parliament. People were able to tell and show MSPs what they are proud of in their communities and what they have achieved together - as well as their challenges.

The results were friendly and welcoming, they included people who might not ever have been involved with the Parliament and each one was unique. We visited community gardens, had coffee in community cafes, danced and drummed, went on bike rides and ate birthday cake. We met over 900 people from all over Scotland and learned what they thought of the Parliament and what they hoped for from us.

Full details of the programme can be found on our [Website here](#). You can view for each regional visit: the reports, videos, and Visual Notes.

We evaluated each event and this report is a summary of what we did and what we learned.

I think the sentiments that the Parliament really is the peoples' parliament. Sometimes parliaments can feel a bit closed off and "elite". The event really showed young people that they are important as people and residents of Scotland.

**Community organisation**

Enthusiasm and community were the key words for me of the day. And our community know that parliament is accessible to them, and would like to be involved more, including Parliament engaging more with communities 🙏

**Community organisation**

Thank you so much for the wonderful opportunity to participate in the 25th Anniversary Regional Event! Both my son and I thoroughly enjoyed the event, and it was a pleasure to be a part of it.

**Participant**

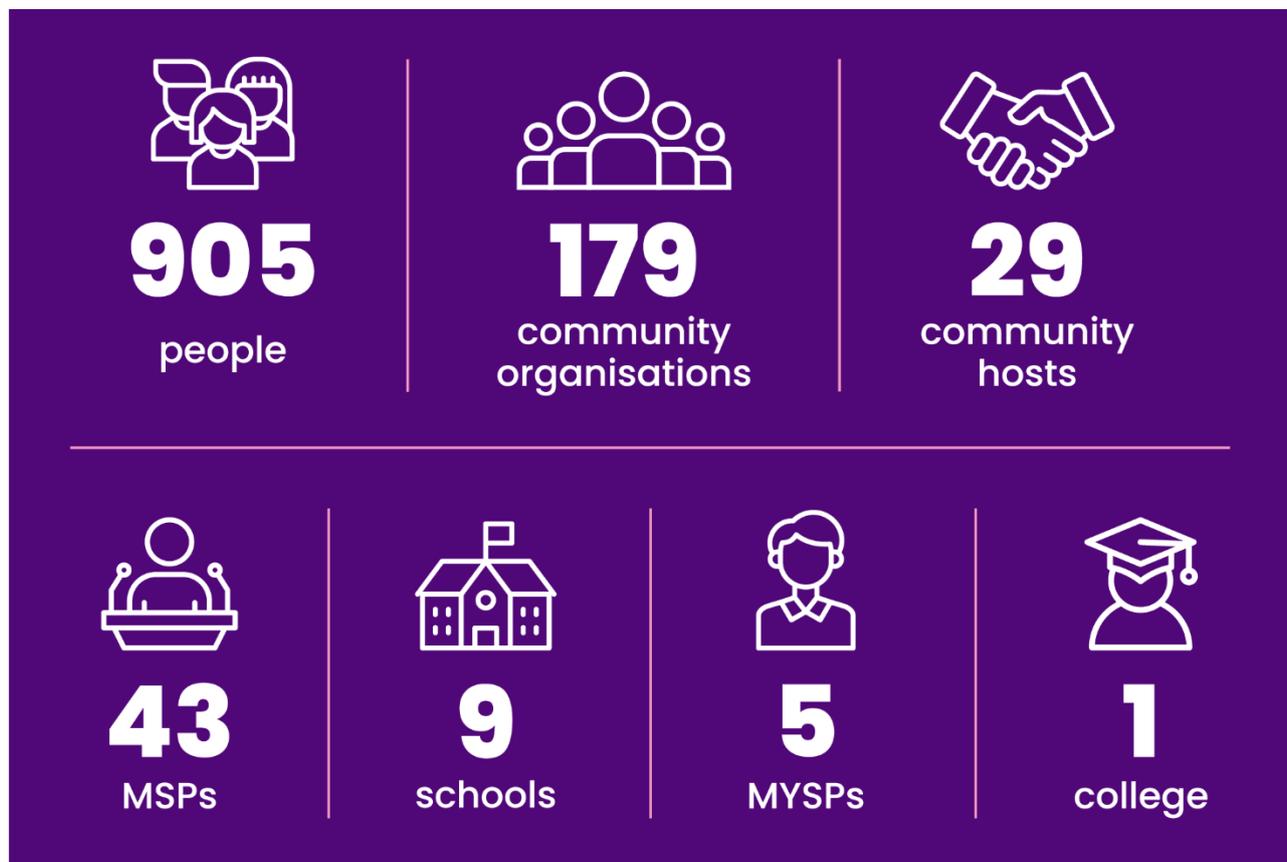
## How we did it

The Participation and Communities Team aims to use the principles of a community development approach in how we work with communities and people across Scotland.

For the regional programme this meant we worked in partnership with local groups and organisations and asked what they wanted to get out of the programme, who should be involved, and how we should do it. We collaborated in all our planning, using local knowledge and relationships to advise and develop activities and events together to suit local people who were invited to take part in a conversation about the past, present and future role of the Scottish Parliament.



## Who took part



We aimed to hear from identified priority groups - people who do not usually engage with the Parliament; those on a low income, from a minority ethnic group or who have a disability, in order to learn how we can improve how we involve them in our work. We also heard from a range of other people including older people, children and young people, New Scots and those living in rural and urban environments.

Participants involved were local people, volunteers, service users, staff and often were all these things and not just one.

We sought to work with local grass roots organisations, 'community anchors' or 'community leaders' who were either embedded within the local community or who had developed an approach to working with and had a relationship with specific communities.

Children and young people attended events and were core partners for two of the eight events. As participants they came from youth groups, schools (primary and secondary) and the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs). In Alloa and Sauchie, Fife and Lomond Youth Led Local Action Group were one of four community partners and hosts for the day. For the event in Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire Youth Council were the sole community partner (supported by West Dunbartonshire Council Youth Empowerment Team). Together we co-produced the design and delivery of the event.

## What happened

**20**

**Engagement  
events**

**8**

**Parliamentary  
regions**

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**New  
resources  
created**

Posters, a graphic timeline,  
a sticky wall, paper people.  
Lots of friendly staff.

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**Event  
activities**

A visual notetaker at each visit,  
marketplaces with community  
stalls, creative presentations,  
a DJ and a disco, a stained-glass  
window, a piper, drums, guitar  
and harps

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**Visits  
took  
place**

To see examples of community  
initiatives – the Chatty Late Café,  
Wimpy Park, The Pavilion in Mayfield,  
the Bike Project in Shetland – 2 gardens,  
a community café, 3 hubs, community  
pantries, a community resource

The format of the events evolved over the course of the year according to our learning, with feedback from participants, community hosts, staff and MSPs.

In planning the events we aimed to be flexible, open to feedback, friendly, inclusive, and informal. We didn't always get it right.

We heard that people appreciated the opportunity to meet Members of Parliament in a relaxed and informal environment where they, for example, could have a relaxed one-to-one chat.

We learned that people wanted to celebrate and show off their community and thank individuals, groups, volunteers and neighbours for their hard work and contribution. In all the visits there was a desire to celebrate that strength of community, and we saw the warmth, passion and drive of those participating. In each place we met people who are an inspiration and a leader in their community.

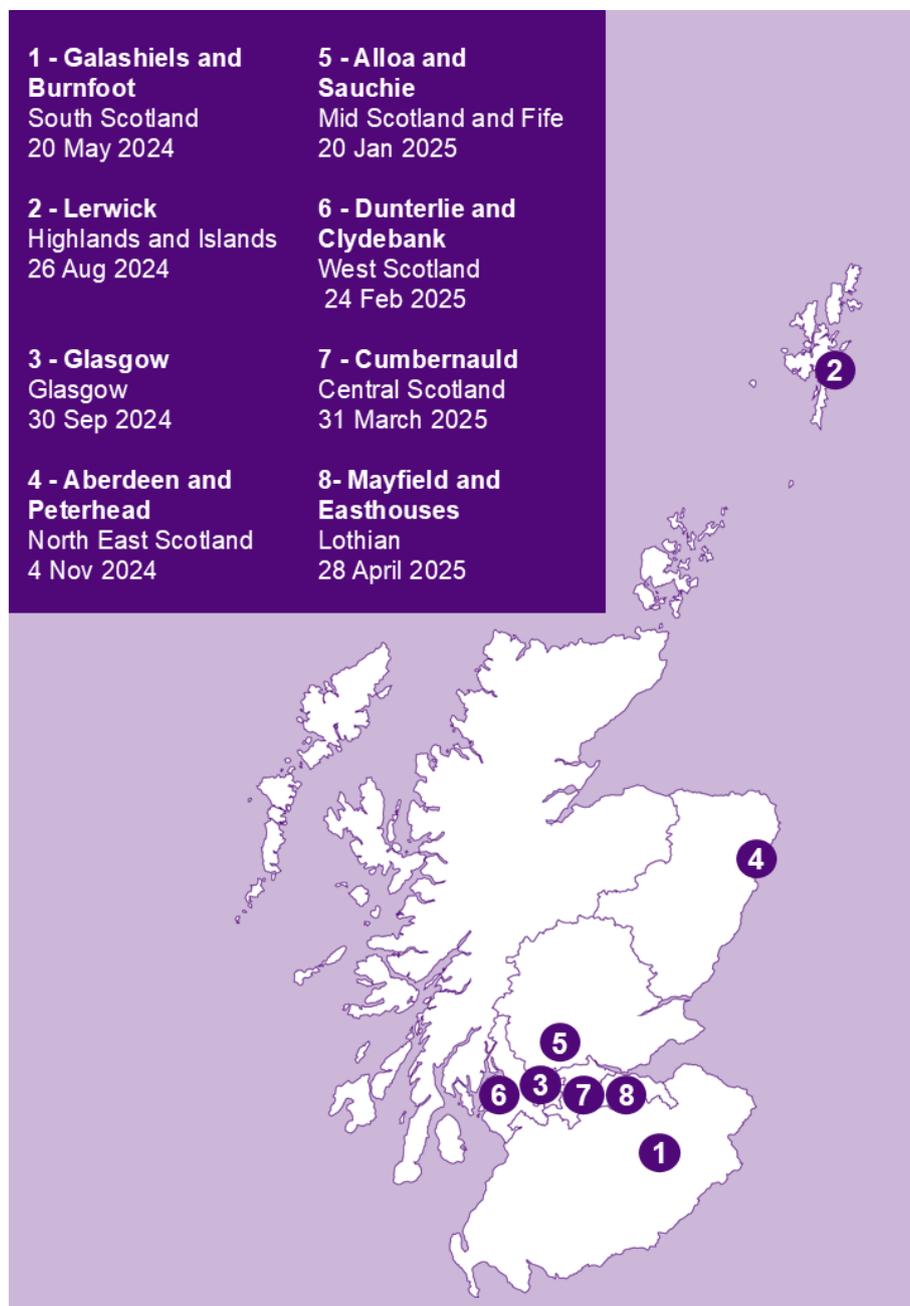
We saw that trust and relationships were the key to strong communities. And that the Parliament must develop this to meaningfully involve people.

Each event and visit was unique and every one was inspiring and moving. We were privileged to take part in celebrations with people around Scotland and to learn from them.

## Where we went

The programme visited each of the eight Scottish parliamentary regions.

- Galashiels and Burnfoot, South Scotland region, 20 May 2024
- Lerwick, Highlands and Islands region, 26 August 2024
- Glasgow, Glasgow region, 30 September 2024
- Aberdeen and Peterhead, North East Scotland region, 4 November 2024
- Alloa and Sauchie, Mid Scotland and Fife region, 20 January 2025
- Dunterlie and Clydebank, West Scotland region, 24 February 2025
- Cumbernauld, Central Scotland region, 31 March 2025
- Mayfield and Easthouses, Lothian region, 28 April 2025



# Key approaches to the regional programme

In our approach for the regional programme, we tested ways to involve people.

We:

- Aimed to use the principles of a community development approach.
- We attempted to recognise the strengths, resources and capabilities of individuals, communities and organisations.
- Met in person in the community delivering events which were co-designed and with participants' needs first. We aimed to be friendly, informal and inclusive and sought to address power imbalances in communication.
- Tried to create an environment where people felt that we were genuinely working and learning together.
- Tried to show people that we work together as an institution (both MSPs and staff) and that it is friendly, welcoming and caring.
- Collaborated with a neighbourhood or a community to hear their priorities, consider what they need from us and seek to address them in a national context.
- We developed resources and a format for the events which were approachable, informal and tactile or user friendly - not corporate and official.
- We did warm up and scoping visits to support participants.
- Considered individual and group needs and tried to put measures in place to meet those needs.
- Briefed MSPs in advance of the events on the aim, format and their role.
- Recruited extra help from other Parliament staff when we realised that a key factor in engagement was personal interactions and having friendly welcoming and informative staff.

## What we learned

People told us what was working well:

- They valued having a Parliament in Scotland that was accessible to them.
- There is pride in the Scottish Parliament.
- The Parliament offers hope for a better future.
- MSPs are approachable and accessible and listen to lived experience.
- The Scottish Parliament is the voice of the people.

An unexpected outcome was the impact of involving volunteers from across wider Scottish Parliament teams (not just participation and engagement staff). They commented that they felt the programme was a valuable learning opportunity for them and participants alike.

Staff learned about:

- Understanding public needs and barriers.
- The power of informal, open conversations.
- Importance of being in the community.
- Collaboration and cross-team learning.
- Practical suggestions for future engagement.

I wanted to say thanks for yesterday. That's one of the most worthwhile days I've had at Parliament. Sometimes in IT, it can feel like I'm stuck in a wee bubble. So especially at the Willowacre Trust, seeing and hearing from people who were so genuinely excited we were there was amazing. I also think there are lessons in it for me and my team in how people use tech to engage with Parliament. How accessible is the website, or how easy it is to give evidence remotely – do people even know that they can etc.

**Scottish Parliament Staff Volunteer**

We learned that there are five key areas that we can improve on to involve people in the work of Parliament.

- **Increase Community Engagement** – people said they want to see the Parliament in communities and have more opportunities to meet MSPs. They want to get involved in ways that are in-person, informal, friendly and in community settings.
- **Improve Parliamentary Awareness** – the people we met often said they didn't understand the role of Parliament, and its relevance to them and their lives, or how they could get involved.
- **Build Confidence and Capacity** – people said they don't feel confident to get involved, for example that the Parliament wasn't 'for them' or 'for people like them'. And when they did, they didn't feel that they were listened to, or that they would be judged.
- **Improve Accessibility** – people told us that when they had accessed information about the Parliament, they had found that it could be inaccessible, with alienating language and jargon, and that reports were too long. They said that there needed to be information and opportunities in a wider range of formats.
- **Increase Diversity** – people told us that they felt that Parliament was not a place for them and that it needs to take more proactive steps to include a wider range of people. They did not see people like them represented in Parliament.



## Next steps

The Participation and Communities Team (PACT) have developed a draft Communities Approach which proposes to take actions in each of the areas above over a 12-month period.

The outputs and learning from this one-year action plan will be incorporated into a wider organisational Communities Strategy and the Scottish Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy.

PACT will review the delivery of the action plan after 12 months and publish this on the PACT webpage along with an update on how the findings will help inform these wider strategies.

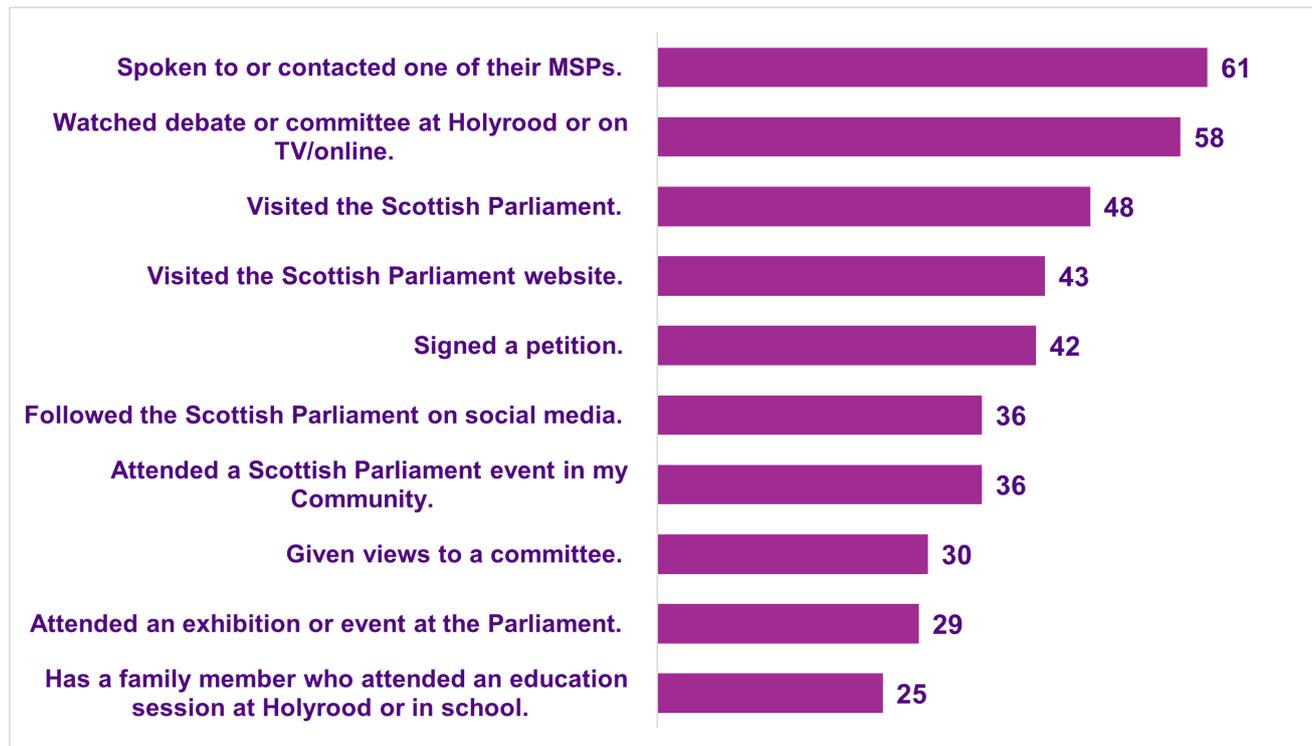
We will incorporate learning and feedback from the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Regional Programme in our Communities Conference and finalise how we measure our actions across the next year.

We will regularly update our stakeholders through our PACT newsletter, the PACT Annual Report and provide a summary at our next annual communities initiative.



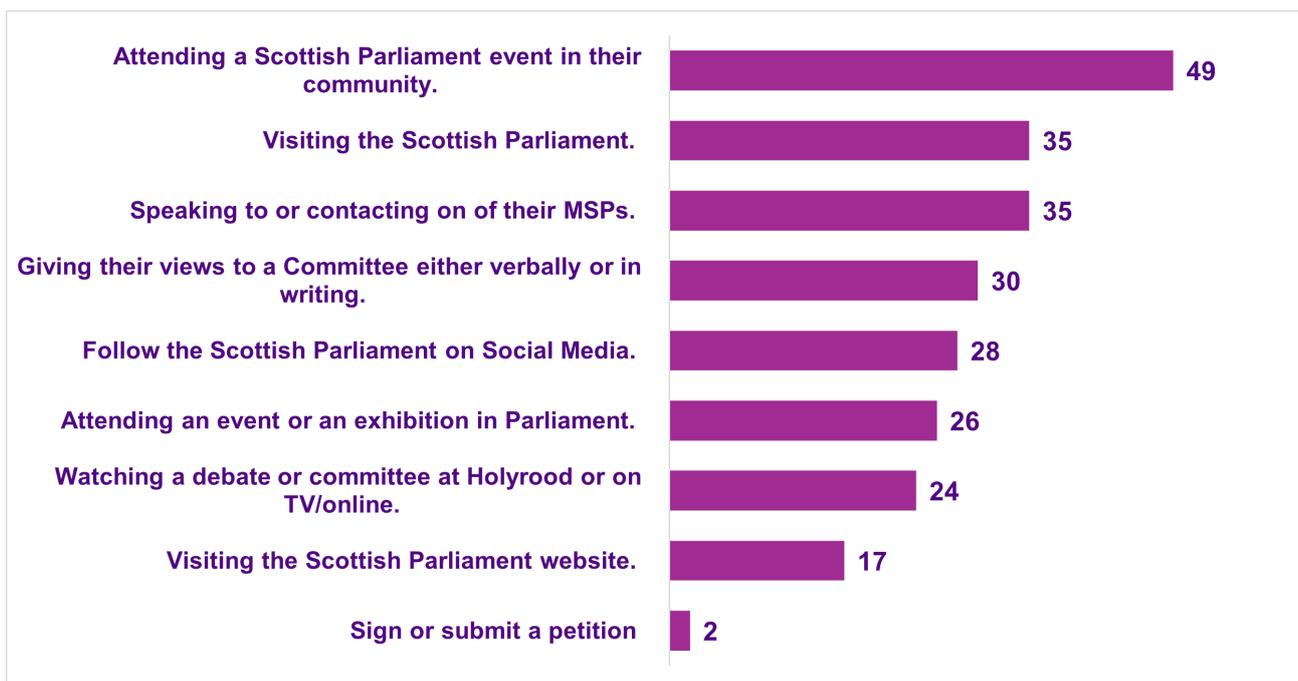
## How had people had been involved in Parliament before?

The most common way of being involved in Parliament is through speaking with or contacting an MSP. The least is through a family member attending a Parliament education session in Parliament or at school.



## How would people like to get involved in the Parliament in the future?

The most common way people would choose to get involved with Parliament is by attending an event in their community. The lowest choice is by signing a petition.



## What are the barriers to getting involved?

- Accessibility - distance, cost, language/communication barriers, time and priorities
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of Parliament and its processes
- Lack of confidence
- Not feeling represented or included
- Not feeling listened to
- Lack of communication and engagement
- Lack of trust in the Parliament

## What are the key issues that people are concerned about?

These are listed in order of prevalence. There were regional variations. Full details can be found in each Regional Report



## **What is currently working well and what could be better in the Scottish Parliament?**

Here we have highlighted 'What Could be Better'. Fuller information on what has worked is in each regional report.

### **What could be better?**

#### **Democratic Wellbeing:**

##### **Education and Awareness**

Increase public understanding of the roles and powers of the Scottish and UK Parliaments.

Improve awareness of the petitions process and how to contact and engage with MSPs.

Promote civic education through schools and encourage more school visits to Parliament.

##### **Community Engagement**

Foster regular, meaningful engagement between MSPs and local communities.

Strengthen feedback mechanisms to ensure public input is acknowledged and acted upon.

Enhance connections between parliamentary committees and grassroots groups.

Encourage broader participation in politics and include lived experiences in decision-making.

Host more community-based parliamentary events.

##### **Cross-Party Groups**

Improve visibility and communication about cross-party collaboration.

Better integrate cross-party group work into formal parliamentary processes.

# Appendix 1: Evaluation of Programme

We evaluated each event taking feedback from participants, hosts, staff, volunteers MSPs and Scottish Parliament Staff. This is a shortened summary of the evaluations. A fuller summary is available on request.

## Participant Feedback

Participants were asked for feedback after each event using a sticky dot 'questionnaire'. Scoring was out of 4. Across all questions, there was no score lower than 3.

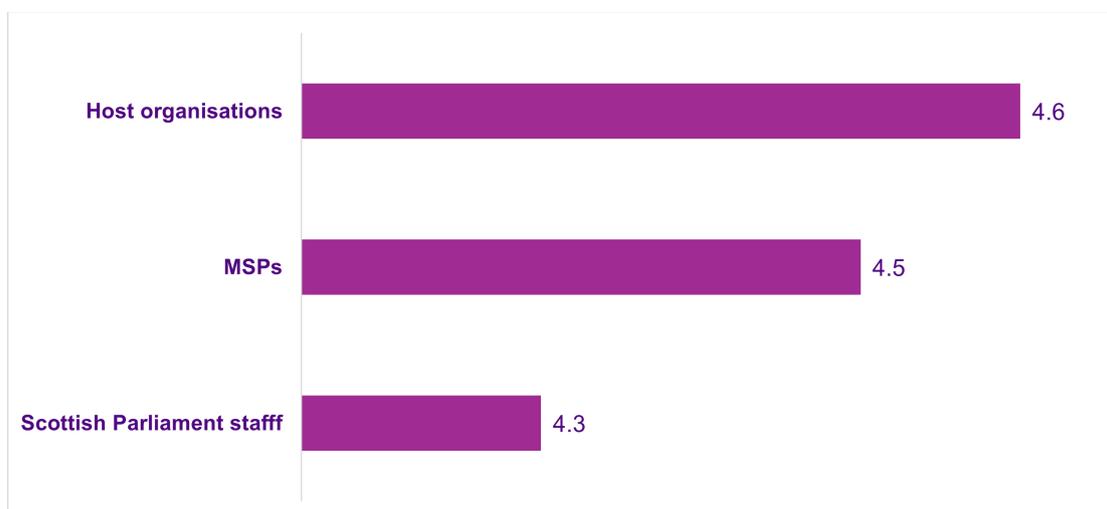


## Feedback from Host Organisations, MSPs and Scottish Parliament Staff

Host organisations, MSPs and Scottish Parliament Staff were sent an online evaluation after each event.

### How effective was the engagement event?

Responses were provided on a scale of 1 to 5. Across all three groups, there was an average score of 4.5

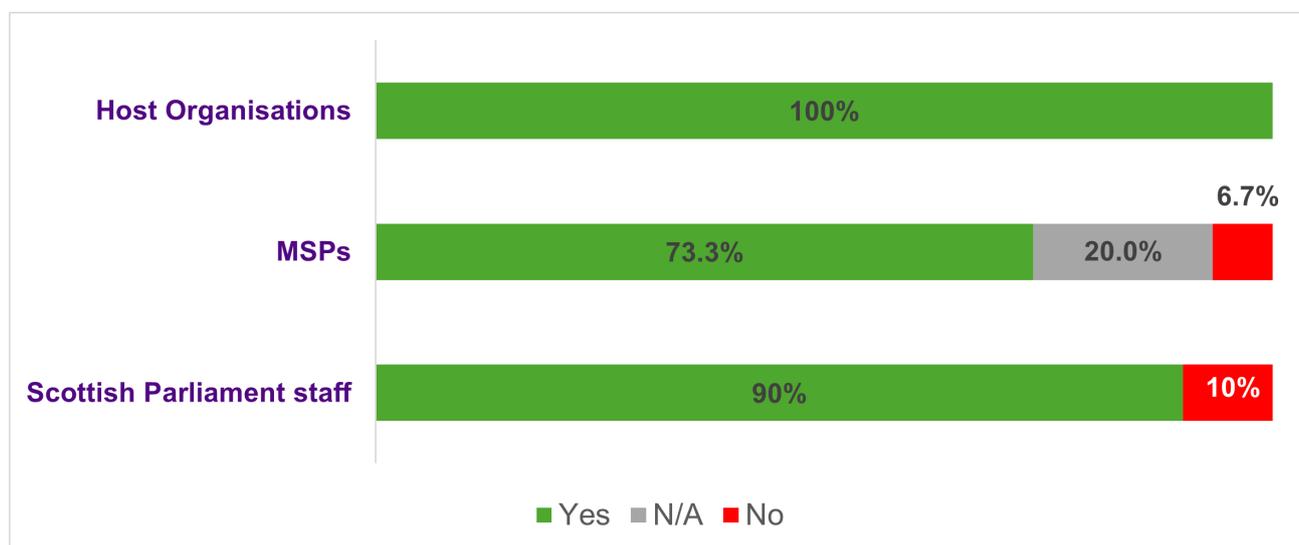


## Did the engagement event help you learn about how we can better involve people in the work of the Scottish Parliament?

Responses were gathered across three groups – Host organisations, MSPs and Scottish Parliament staff. Looking at all responses, 89% said that the event helped them learn about how we can better involved people in the work of the Parliament.

The number of responses by group has been shown below:

- Host organisations – 18 responses
- MSPs – 15 responses
- Scottish Parliament staff – 30 responses



## Did the engagement event help you learn about how we can better involve people in the work of the Scottish Parliament?

### Host Organisations

Host organisations said that they learned that clear communication, inclusive environments, and bringing Parliament into communities are key to building trust and understanding, while the event also deepened their awareness of Parliament's role and sparked ideas for future collaboration and outreach.

### MSPs

MSPs said that through the events they learned that many people are unsure how to engage with Parliament, and that regular, face-to-face outreach in local communities is essential for building understanding, trust, and meaningful public involvement.

## Scottish Parliament Staff

Staff commented that they felt the programme was a valuable learning opportunity for staff and participants alike. It demonstrated the importance of visibility, accessibility, and humility in public engagement. They learned about:

- Understanding public needs and barriers.
- The power of informal, open conversations.
- Importance of being in the community.
- Collaboration and cross-team learning.
- Practical suggestions for future engagement.

## What worked well for you with this type of engagement?

### Host Organisations

- Personal and direct interaction.
- Welcoming and informal atmosphere.
- Inclusivity and accessibility.
- Interactive and engaging activities.
- Strong organisation and support.
- Collaborative planning.
- Opportunities for learning and networking.

### MSPs

- Face-to-face interaction.
- Informal, comfortable setting.
- Community-based and inclusive.
- Broad participation and networking.
- Flexible and participant-led engagement.
- Strong communication and outreach.

### Staff

- Strong collaboration and preparation.
- Respectful, inclusive conversations.
- Community-based and accessible.
- Atmosphere and engagement.
- Direct interaction with MSPs and Parliament Staff.
- Effective tools and formats.
- Regional relevance.
- Informal, inclusive atmosphere.
- Meaningful conversations and two-way dialogue.
- Strong collaboration and co-design.
- Clear roles and preparation.

- Local relevance and accessibility.
- Vibrant, engaging setups.
- Diverse participation.

## **What could have been done differently?**

Early events highlighted areas for improvement, such as timing, facilitation, MSP roles and clarity of materials. Feedback was actively incorporated into later events, improving delivery and engagement. These resulted in a more informal marketplace style of events where both community groups and the Parliament hosted stalls. The Parliament designed interactive stalls with questions using tactile and visual displays and invited additional staff volunteers to participate so that there was support for all the activities.

## Appendix 2: Feedback in quotes

### Participants

The MSPs actively listened to those with real issues.

Great experience.

Informative.

I enjoyed today.

Was a great chance to meet people.

### Organisations

It was lovely to meet you and the Scottish Parliament team today in Galashiels, what a great event.

Just want to say thank you for Monday! Also, thank you for your support. It was a great event, really enjoyed it. I have also had great feedback saying that it was a good networking event. I'll hopefully be in parliament soon! Would love to keep in contact!

I'm hearing from everyone that the Monday event went SO well, congratulations!! I love the big smiles captured in Sarah's photographs too! This is such a testament to your team creating an environment where everyone was comfortable and genuinely welcomed a conversation with each other, absolutely no small feat.

I've come into today to lots of very positive emails from groups so seems like everyone had a great time which I am very pleased about as I think I got a bit nervous on the day "what if nobody turns up?". Thank you so so so much for making it so special. What a lovely special event for West Dunbartonshire.

I thought the engagement team were a dream to work with and I really couldn't ask for better people to work with. I felt completely supported at all times, involved and in the loop. Couldn't fault them, only praise. I also really appreciated that they understood the pressures on community groups, for instance, change of meetings at short notice. I really couldn't fault them.

I was just about to email to thank you all for giving us this opportunity to showcase our amazing community. It truly was amazing, a small mixture of what we have to offer as grassroots community.

We realised that the Scottish Parliament really is the People's Parliament and how accessible it is to us as public and also as a community too. We will def make sure we plan visits to open discussions and just as a visitor to the shop and the building itself.

## **School**

The young people really enjoyed the event, and especially talking with their elected representatives! Thanks very much for the invitation to the event.

## **College**

Thank you both for such an informative session this morning. The students thoroughly enjoyed your presentation and are eager to meet the group from Parliament next Monday.

The students thoroughly enjoyed the experience of meeting "real life" politicians and the opportunity of having their concerns and opinions listened to. They are still talking about the visit weeks on 😊 and gained so much confidence from participating.

## **MSPs**

It's amazing. I wish we could do this every day.

We should get out and about more and do this in every local authority.

I thought the format and opportunities to meet up were excellent.

It was great to have many different organisations in one room and also it felt very inclusive with a great vibe.

Today has been amazing. I have never been to anything like this before. The woman at my table was very stiff and nervous. She eventually relaxed over lunch and we had a good conversation. She said to me at the end, 'I never thought that I could talk to a politician like this'.

It has been a fantastic day.

Today was excellent. Thanks for organising.

## Staff Volunteers

I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for the opportunity yesterday. I really enjoyed being part of one of these events. Also a big thanks to Sophia for getting the train tickets, Caroline for the lifts to and from the station at Cumbernauld, it was great to meet other colleagues who work elsewhere in the SP, but most importantly thank you all for being so friendly and welcoming throughout the whole event, it was a real pleasure meeting and working with all of you. Have a fabulous day.

Thank YOU for having me along. It was a really good day, and I really enjoyed meeting and talking to all those lovely people, especially the women at lunchtime. I'll be very happy to help out at the conference in June if you need a hand. Perhaps see you when I drop the T-shirt (washed but almost certainly not ironed!) back at your desk!

I really enjoyed myself - though I was nervous about sitting and talking during lunch with strangers, I really enjoyed that part! Would love to assist with any suitable future events, and I'll try to be better at replying!

I would definitely put my interest forward to similar initiatives, if any, in future. I enjoyed both Regional visits with your Team, and getting to know people I generally never talk too! Everyone has been amazing and supportive. I have learned a lot : )

Thank you for your feedback. It was a pleasure for me too; I enjoyed and learned a lot through my collaboration with you and your Team.

I have absolutely loved my two days travelling with the Presiding Officer and will never forget our afternoon in Shettleston. I have managed to get my anecdote down to three key points and if you bump into me and the garden lobby one day you can ask me to explain how that day at Willowacre community centre changed my entire view of what my life has been and of who I have been as I have moved through it.