

# Embedding Public Participation in the Work of the Scottish Parliament

1. The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee has spent over a year looking at how the public can engage with the Parliament. It has heard from experts and consulted people inside the Parliament and outside. It has looked at “citizens’ assemblies” run by the Scottish Government and learned about how they work in Ireland, Paris and Brussels.
2. The committee set up its own “Citizens’ Panel” – a group of 19 people from across Scotland who were asked: “How can the Scottish Parliament ensure that diverse voices and communities from all parts of Scotland influence our work?” The Panel met over two weekends in late 2022, and came up with 17 recommendations.
3. The Committee has concluded that the Parliament should use Citizens’ Panels more regularly to help committees with scrutiny work. It accepts these panels are not suitable for every topic and can be expensive, but they give ordinary people a voice and can help achieve consensus on difficult issues.
4. As a first step, the Committee wants the Parliament to run two further panels. One should review a bit of legislation that has been in effect for a few years, to see how well it is working. Another should look at a current topic of interest. The Committee expects to be involved in setting these Panels up, and then in reviewing how well they have worked. At the end of this process, it expects to recommend a model that the Parliament can use after the 2026 election.
5. The Committee has come up with some principles for the future use of “deliberative democracy” (including Citizens’ Panels). These include making sure the method used each time is in proportion to the topic, and that the Parliament is transparent about how it works. The people who take part should be given support, made to feel in control, and given feedback on how their ideas are taken forwards.
6. The Committee recommends setting up a separate Citizens’ Panel (or “people’s panel”) for each topic, rather than having the same panel looking at multiple topics. It suggests panels of about 20-30 people. It doesn’t think panels should include MSPs – though it thinks that MSPs might be invited to join some of the discussions.
7. Panel members should be selected at random, with the aim of getting a group of people who reflect Scottish society. That means, for example, having an equal number of men and women, a range of ages and people with different levels of education. They should be given the support and information they need, and should be paid for taking part.

8. Each time a Panel is set up to help a committee with an inquiry, the committee's report should be debated in the Parliament Chamber, with Panel members invited to watch from the public gallery.
9. As well as considering how future Citizens' Panels might work, the Committee has considered other ways that people can find out what the Parliament is doing, and how to get involved. Some of the ideas it looked at came from the recommendations made by its own Citizens' Panel.
10. The Committee agrees with the Panel about the need to reduce the barriers to participation. The Committee points to the work that Parliament staff are already doing, and recommends further things they should look at. These include:
  - paying people back if they have to take time off work or pay for childcare in order to engage
  - translating information into other languages, or making it easier to read
  - making it easier for people to engage in the evenings or at weekends, or by using online tools
  - considering a review of citizenship education in schools.
11. The Committee has also considered three recommendations (made by the Panel) for changes to how the Parliament works.
12. The first was to review the rules on MSPs' behaviour. The Committee doesn't recommend setting up a Citizens' Panel to do this, but thinks it could be looked at by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, which already has a role in considering the conduct of MSPs.
13. The second suggestion was to give the Parliament's Presiding Officer more power to make sure that Scottish Government Ministers give adequate answers to questions. The Committee recognises that this could make the Presiding Officer's job more difficult and more political. But it also thinks that not answering questions properly is discourteous, shows a lack of respect and undermines public trust. So it suggests that this issue, too, is considered by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.
14. The third idea was to schedule time in the Chamber each week when members of the public would be able to ask Ministers questions. The Committee does not support this idea, but is willing for it to be looked at if there is support for it across the political parties.