

Commission on Parliamentary Reform
Consultation event in the Scottish Borders

Monday 27 February 2017

Note of the discussion

The Chair of the Commission welcomed the group and introduced the format of the evening.

Video

A video produced by pupils from Galashiels Academy was shown. The people interviewed had mixed experiences of, and views about, the Scottish Parliament. Comments included:

“The Parliament doesn’t speak to young people, or to individuals [professionals such as teachers], about the concerns in their lives”

“There should be more done at an earlier stage in schools on parliament and politics in Scotland”

challenge

The pupils went on to present the results of their ‘# challenge’, to select 5 # suggestions for the Scottish Parliament to adopt. Following the presentation, the overall group voted on their favourite.

#SP4ME – intended to be “short and on trend” (Most votes)

#AuldCountryNewVoice – mix of traditional and new

#NolinScotland – everyone has a vote

#OurChange – people power

#OurVoiceOurScotland – not just one voice in Scotland

Snap Chat filter

The Commission then heard a presentation on a snap chat filter for the Scottish Parliament.

Snap chat works by using GPS in a mobile phone to identify a location and, when taking a photograph using Snap Chat, people can select a snap chat filter for the relevant location. The filter can be words or pictures which are layered on top of the photo.

The group argued that, by using a Scottish Parliament filter, they can start a discussion with their family and friends about why they are at the Parliament and generate more interest.

As well as the filter presented by the group, it was also suggested a filter could be produced using the Scottish Parliament tartan.

Discussion groups

We asked: does your age make a difference when engaging with the Scottish Parliament?

You said:

The following comments were made:

- Age shouldn't matter but it can be difficult to get your voice heard if you are young;
- different issues affect different ages of young people – which affects the extent to which voices are heard;
- the extension of the vote to 16-17 year olds means there is now more reason to listen to young people and this has helped get their voices heard;
- It is important that young people's voices are heard as the big decisions will impact on them the most (they will live with the outcomes longer than older people);
- It is not just teenagers that should be involved – there was a discussion about the extent to which those aged 25-40 don't vote and the extent to which their voices are heard;
- Some suggested that, having grown up with the Parliament, it wasn't thought of as "as exciting" as it is for those who had to fight for the Parliament to be established;
- Some suggested that they were more likely to try and resolve their own issues than go to Westminster. It was more likely that some young people would approach the Scottish Parliament given it had power of the areas that affected young people;
- The building at the Scottish Parliament helped as it meant the Parliament felt new;
- It was also commented that the Scottish Parliament felt cherished given how long it took to get it (it was "a monumental decision");
- The Commission's role was to keep it fresh, vibrant and modern so that in 100 years it doesn't feel old.

We asked: does distance from Edinburgh make a difference when engaging with the Scottish Parliament?

(participants were asked to stick post it notes on a line from 1 to 10 (where 1 was the most distant) to show how near or close people feel to the Parliament. On a scale 1-10, everyone posted a note between 1 – 5)

You said:

The following comments were made:

- Involving people directly in events can make them feel more connected to the Scottish Parliament;
- Some young people may not feel comfortable approaching MSPs whose political views differ from their own;
- The Scottish Parliament getting out of Edinburgh, such as travelling to Galashiels, was important in giving opportunities for more direct involvement

and giving people a voice. Plus, they can see the Parliament working, such as during the passage of a Bill;

- Parliament is not just a building – it is a “HQ for Scotland”;
- That feeling or experiencing the Scottish Parliament through events, exhibitions or debates meant they felt closer to it;
- an example was given of the Community Empowerment Act which wasn’t seen as being embedded in Schools or its powers raised with people from a young age; Would welcome more expertise to understand what it means for communities – this approach might help people to know how they can get involved;
- The Parliament isn’t representative of ethnic minorities – ‘ doesn’t represent me’ – so don’t know what it does day to day;
- It was commented that politicians today seem to want your vote more than your opinion and that populist approaches of some parties could be off putting to young people.

We asked: what would make you feel closer to the Parliament?

(participants were asked to note a comment on a post it note and attach it to the line used for the previous exercise.)

You said:

The following comments were provided:

- A physical presence
- Face to face speaking to MSPs
- Emphasise the importance of decisions in our lives
- Less jargon
- Things like this event in schools
- Curriculum restructure of course specific subjects e.g. Modern Studies
- To not just use people for votes
- More representation
- More opportunity for young people
- Knowledge
- MSPs coming into school – never met mine
- Empowerment – let young people know and learn

We asked: does the language used in Parliament make a difference to how well you can engage?

You said:

The following comments were made:

- the group discussed the language used in the Parliament – whilst some of the terms like debate were recognisable others like surgery were not seen as parliamentary terms;
- political language on documents could be a barrier;
- The one place people go to for information about the Parliament was Google – Newspapers were good for bringing information to you but were not good if you wanted to learn more (when you would use Google); another source of information was YouTube;
- Some suggested it was better to speak to a relevant MSP (such as a member of the Education Committee if your issue related to education) than to send in views through social media or emails;
- barrier can be knowing who you can speak to;
- sending an email was seen, like writing a letter, as being no longer relevant and you may not get a response;
- it was suggested that more could be done to get Parliament into schools such as more visits from MSPs, surgeries in Schools; using Student Councils (and their elections);
- Scottish Parliament website was confusing as it took too long to find things – it needed to be simplified (too many links or tabs) and wasn't easy to navigate;
- most did not know their constituency MSP or regional MSPs and they were elusive to meet with;
- it was more accessible to meet with the Parliament in the local area ("our house") than to travel to the Parliament ("their house")
- It was commented that Scottish students don't learn about the Scottish Parliament early enough in the school curriculum – unless you take modern studies you are as likely to learn about the political systems of other countries so more should be taught about the SP and at an earlier age.

Final questions

1. Formal Parliamentary language would put me off getting involved in the Parliament? **11 out of 16 agreed**

2. People who have grown up with the Parliament are more likely to be involved in it than those who haven't? **3 out of 16 agreed**

3. The Parliament is too far away from the Borders for me to get involved with it? **No-one agreed**