

Commission on Parliamentary Reform
Consultation event Voluntary Action, East Renfrewshire
Wednesday 15 March 2017
Note of meeting

We asked: How could the Scottish Parliament engage better?

You said:

People can be confused about who to contact for help (MSP/MP/Councillor) and don't know how to get involved. Things that would help include:

- More education in the community
- More education in schools, especially with voting age at 16.
- More education in special needs schools
- Information needs to be accessible and relevant to peoples' lives
- Can't start early enough – nursery education

People don't always know what is happening in Parliament or that they can have a say:

- Use Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) to get the message out about how to get involved
- Promote positive examples of local outcomes to encourage more engagement
- The website is difficult to search – use topic headings rather than Committee heading to flag up issues

We have had mixed experiences being involved in consultations and inquiries. In the main these have been positive and we have seen outcomes however some suggestions are:

- Short notice is sometimes given when invited to give evidence. More time to prepare would allow wider participation and more comprehensive evidence
- Consultations and inquiries tend to meet other people's criteria. More should be done to ask people what they need before the process starts.
- Face to face discussion is important
- More use of technology, such as Skype, would allow wider participation in committee inquiries.
- Feedback should always be given – some experienced no feedback after meeting with committees
- Easy read versions of consultation documents don't always match the full version completely and so may limit ability to respond fully.
- Careful consideration has to be given to the language used in the documents, such as technical jargon.

Other suggestions:

- A dedicated TV or radio channel would inform those that don't have internet access
- Something small and easy to read – pocket sized booklet – would be useful.
- Hold a 'regional parliament' (each year?) to allow people to meet all their MSPs and raise issues particular to their region.
- Develop high quality interactive games that will appeal to young people. Use the games industry in Dundee?
- Consider setting up a Disabled People's Assembly (similar to Older Peoples Assembly)
- First Minister's Questions generate interest but too much time is given to party leaders. More backbench questions should be allowed.
- Political parties need to get involved in engagement
- Not convinced by idea of community champions. Can see their value but would depend how this is set up whether useful. Need to avoid individuals acting as gatekeepers or personalities putting people off getting involved.