

**Commission on Parliamentary Reform**  
**National Parents Forum of Scotland event**  
**28 January 2017**

**We asked: What engagement have you had with the Scottish Parliament?**

**You said:**

Watched a Scottish Parliament debate (online or TV):	21
Provided your views in writing or in person to a Committee:	8
Visited the Scottish Parliament:	14
Contacted your MSP:	17
Total attending this session	26

The following matters were raised in discussions:

- some commented that regional MSPs engage with their constituents differently to constituency MSPs and that the workloads could be different;
- there should be guidelines for MSPs on how quickly they respond to constituents queries given for some people contacting their MSP will come after other avenues have been exhausted;
- Overall the Parliament had done well at engaging people but that there were a number of areas where it could do better:

**Question time**

- It was questioned why there are standard opening questions for FMQs rather than just going to the party leaders – it is artificial and, as it is the same question every week, is a waste of time:
  - some asked why the backbenches couldn't just ask any question
  - some thought that the follow up questions were not really relevant to the opening party leader questions
  - more time could be given to the detail of the issue if the staged opening question wasn't asked.

**Committees**

- Some commented that some Committees had agreed witnesses before the written evidence had been received – this looks bad and as though the Committee isn't really interested in hearing from those who provide written evidence
- some welcomed the fact that Committees were set up to avoid the combative UK Parliament approach

- However one of those who had experience of giving evidence at Committee was not impressed that some MSPs on the Committee had been so keen to press their political point that their exchanges with the witnesses were described as 'vicious'
- another commented that sometimes it was not clear that Committee members fully understood the subject under discussion as evidenced by their follow up questions
- whilst some of those giving evidence may represent the views of a larger organisation it was felt that this should not mean that they should be subject to unpleasant questioning in Committee. Witnesses shouldn't be going in scared
- In that regard it was commented that the political nature of some of the exchanges meant that those giving evidence could feel it was a waste of time.
- Some commented that at Stage 3 people can propose changes but the timetable meant that there wasn't time to consider them fully and they were not really debated before being voted on.
- There was some discussion about how easy it was for constituents to contact MSPs that were also Ministers such as the First Minister given this means they receive lots of emails etc