

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

Meeting with participants on Coalition for Racial Equality and Right's political shadowing scheme, 9 March 2017

Note of meeting

We asked: What are your experiences of the Scottish Parliament and what are the main issues facing the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community in terms of participation and representation?

You said:

The following points were raised—

- Accessibility – the Scottish Parliament feels more open and accessible than the other legislatures and assemblies the participants had experienced.
- Representation – the group felt it was important the Scottish Parliament included more MSPs from a BME background. There was a strong view the make-up of the Parliament should reflect the composition of Scottish society and it is important there are voices from the community to inform debate and policy making. They also felt there was a role for the Scottish Parliament to promote the idea that anyone from any background can become a MSP, perhaps by providing more information about MSPs as 'real people' so young people can see that anyone can become a politician and that you don't have to come from a particular background.
- Parliamentary language – the group felt the language and terms used in the Scottish Parliament acted as a barrier to understanding the parliamentary process and business.
- Public awareness – some of the group felt there was a general lack of awareness about the Scottish Parliament and the role of MSPs.
- The role of political parties – the extent to which there is a role for political parties in driving the issue of greater representation of BME groups was discussed.
- Suggestions for the Commission – the following suggestions were made: operating a stand at universities' freshers' weeks to highlight the role of the Parliament and provide information to international students with no prior knowledge about the Parliament and the devolved policy areas; and providing commentary on SPTV to explain some of the language and procedure.
- Political shadowing scheme – those participants who had started/completed their placements all felt the scheme had been a useful opportunity and had changed their perception of the institution and MSPs.