

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

Consultation event jointly hosted with Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association

Thursday 16 February 2017

We asked: How can the Scottish Parliament engage more effectively with ethnic minority groups?

You said:

The following were raised in the two discussion groups—

- There is a need to increase awareness of MSPs and the Scottish Parliament. Suggestions included—
 - Events to ‘promote’ the Parliament should be held around Scotland, attended by local MSPs;
 - Local Scottish Parliament ‘champions’, employed by the Parliament and based in communities around Scotland, should work with community groups to increase awareness of the Parliament and its role;
 - A ‘marketing campaign’ should be launched, promoting an identifiable image/profile around Scotland and supported by a long term and on-going presence in supermarkets, large screens in town centres and local newspapers;
 - Teaching children about the Scottish Parliament and its role as part of the school curriculum;
 - Further and higher education institutions should provide more support and information to foreign students about the political system in Scotland. It was highlighted that not all foreign students will arrive with an awareness of the role and different responsibilities of the UK and Scottish parliaments and local authorities;
 - Providing a wider education programme for community groups would be valuable and well used. Many of those present belonged to such groups and expressed an interest in inviting speakers to talk about the Scottish Parliament; and
 - A newsletter, providing more detailed information to the current e-bulletin, [*This week in the Scottish Parliament*](#), should be produced.
- The Parliament’s decision making process should be more transparent so the public can understand the reasons why a decision has been taken. It was felt this was particularly important where a community gave evidence and supported a different decision;
- Where the Scottish Parliament does want to engage with local communities, small scale consultation events were thought to be a useful format;
- Special provision should not be made for ethnic minorities to be elected to the Scottish Parliament. There was a very strong feeling that, when elected to the Scottish Parliament, all MSPs – regardless of their background – should represent all constituents equally and, therefore, the ethnicity of MSPs should not be important. One participant argued that, to have MSPs elected by virtue of their ethnicity would be to make the process “exclusive rather than inclusive”; and

- Information needs to be provided other than via the internet and social media to prevent those without access to the internet being excluded.

The following points were raised about the Scottish Parliament in general—

- The relevance of the Scottish Parliament to local communities given the public's key concerns tend to relate to issues which are the responsibility of local authorities. One participant argued "Scotland is made up of local communities";
- The accountability of MSPs who fail to respond to correspondence; and
- Having heard that a petition to the Scottish Parliament only needs to be supported by one signature, some expressed concern about the impact on resources if lots of individuals chose to lodge a petition and how representative the views of one signatory might be in terms of wider public opinion.