

Public Participation

Our experience is that the Scottish Parliament and government are more open to contact with the public than Westminster. We appreciate that. While we believe it is well intentioned our experience is that interaction with the public and representative bodies is often not as productive as it might be. For example, public access to Cross Party Groups is welcome, but very few MSPs attend and then often only briefly. Too often the meetings become just a series of reports from the various public groups. That is useful in networking and disseminating knowledge, but there is usually no impression that the MSPs will take the issues forward to government for consideration or action. There should be a more systematic procedure of reporting which MSPs will progress particular issues -perhaps in conjunction with the body that raised them - and a commitment that they will report back on whether policies or suggestions will be adopted or implemented.

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Perception of the Parliament

Public perception of the Parliament is coloured by the adversarial nature of the Party system. If one says black the other feels obliged to say white. It is probably inevitable in our election process, but it gives the impression that inter-party point scoring over-rides the commitment to working together for the common good of citizens. Improving appropriate public participation in policy formation and implementation would help to improve that. There are many non-political representative groups who could be involved in relevant parliamentary discussions to help keep them objective.

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MSPs and Ministers

We too often have the impression that citizens and their representatives are seen as a nuisance or distraction from the business of the Parliament and that contact is quite grudging allocated to meetings with them. We appreciate that MSPs have parliamentary jobs to do but nevertheless they should understand that their prime function is to represent all of the people of Scotland and not just their own constituents or their party. They should make an effort to prioritise their contact with the public.