

## **Commission on Parliamentary Reform**

### **Call for written views**

#### **Joint submission by the Trade Union Side in the Scottish Parliament**

##### **Introduction**

The Trade Union Side (TUS) in the Scottish Parliament would like to thank the Commission for inviting evidence on the prospect of further parliamentary reform. The TUS is represented in the Parliament by three unions:

- Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)
- Prospect
- First Division Association (FDA)

The TUS represents more than 200 SPS staff, working in every office of the Parliament. In order to inform this submission, the unions canvassed their respective members for views on the prospect of further parliamentary reform. This submission is informed by those views, which we hope will aid the Commission in its deliberations. Key concerns raised by members on the questions posed in the call for views can be summarised as follows:

##### **Engagement**

TUS members are committed to helping the Parliament engage with Scotland's people, institutions and organisations, with the aim of enhancing parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Government and ultimately improving outcomes from legislation, policy and other measures scrutinised.

However, concerns have been raised that engagement can sometimes be seen as an end in itself. This can lead to a box-ticking culture, which can be frustrating and time consuming for SPS staff, and lead to disappointment and disillusionment for those who take the time to engage with the Parliament but then see little, or no, results from their input. Given limited resources, enhanced engagement activity should be focussed on improving the Parliament's core scrutiny functions.

It is also important to realise that increasing engagement places additional burdens on staff across the organisation – not just outreach. Developing meaningful engagement strategies, engaging and collecting views and the analysis of responses is time consuming and complex. The TUS asks that any increase in engagement should be accompanied by a requisite increase in resources, which includes staffing, training and the digital resources needed for such work.

The issue of digital engagement is a particular concern. Given the growing importance of social media as an engagement tool, and pressures on staff working in these areas to be available on-demand, it seems clear that additional staff with adequate resources and training in use of web and social media are required.

##### **Distinct identity**

The TUS has no comment on this matter.

##### **Checks and Balances**

Ultimately, it will be SPS staff who support MSPs in developing and implementing any new or amended checks and balances. TUS members are committed to this task, as we were to dealing with the 2014 independence referendum, the implications of the Scotland Acts 2012 and 2016, the devolution of further powers, the EU referendum and implications of Brexit and the change to parliamentary sitting times - all of this on top of the day-to-day operation of the Scottish Parliament.

In its [2015-16 Annual Audit Report](#) on the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) Audit Scotland also commented on the recent constitutional and structural changes in the Parliament

stating that these changes will put additional pressure on the SPCB to ensure that they continue to deliver the current standard of support to the Scottish Parliament.

This large and increasing workload has also been delivered successfully despite a reducing number of staff.

The number of full-time equivalent staff at the [end of March 2010](#) was 516, which has fallen to 478 in 2017 – a reduction of 7.4%. This period also saw TUS members experience a significant real-terms pay cut, due to public sector pay restraint, which was combined with UK-wide changes to pension contribution rates.

Increasing workloads, and their implications, were the number one concern of TUS members when considering the prospect of further parliamentary reform. As outlined above, TUS members have a track record of delivering change during challenging circumstances. However, this comes with associated costs – longer working hours, stress, disruption to family and personal life and a lessening of opportunities for training and development – all of which have implications for the quality and long term sustainability of service delivery.

TUS members are also committed to excellence in service delivery. However, there is now widespread concern that workloads have reached the point where service delivery is being compromised. There simply isn't the opportunity to deliver new checks and balances without additional staff, new and upgraded IT systems and the time for staff to pursue training and development and to drive service innovation.

The TUS asks that the Commission clearly identify what additional financial, staff and IT resources will be required to deliver each of its recommendations and that the SPCB commits to fully fund these requirements before it proceeds with implementation.

The TUS would be happy to meet with the Commission to discuss any of the issues raised in the submission.

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