



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



Join In
Gabh Pàirt

25th Anniversary Regional Day Latha Roinneil 25mh Ceann- Bliadhna

A community conversation

Hosted by the Grampian
Regional Equality Council



Introduction

As part of our activities to mark the Parliament's 25th anniversary, we visited the North East region to meet with local people to chat about what the Parliament means to them. We were keen to get a good understanding of what their expectations are for the future and how we can better engage with local people. That's what the Parliament is here for - to improve the lives of people in Scotland. It's important that we hear from people directly.

During our visit with the Grampian Regional Equality Council at the Aberdeen Arts Centre, we had good discussions about education, disability rights, support services, and issues facing New Scots communities. We had really good, lively conversations.

The meetings have given us a much better understanding of what people expect and how we can carry these conversations on in the future to make sure the Parliament is delivering all it can for people. My thanks to everyone who took part.



Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP
Presiding Officer



Credit: Jenny Capon, More than Minutes

Scottish Parliament 25th Anniversary Regional Programme

The Presiding Officer is leading a regional programme of visits to each of the eight Scottish Parliamentary regions to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Scottish Parliament. This was the fourth visit of eight. The Scottish Parliament's Participation & Communities Team is developing a programme of community engagement in collaboration with communities. The approach is to involve communities in the development of activities and to hear from people in ways that suit them best. For the fourth regional day, we worked in partnership with the Grampian Regional Equality Council, Stella's Voice and Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action to hold events which were friendly and inclusive and involved people who may not usually engage with the Scottish Parliament. We know that not everyone can easily engage with Parliament. We're exploring ways to connect with more people, so that they can have their say in the work we do.

This report outlines the event in Aberdeen with the Grampian Regional Equality Council.

Attendees

Presiding Officer: Rt Hon Alison Johnstone

Members of the Scottish Parliament: Maggie Chapman, Liam Kerr, Michael Marra, Douglas Lumsden, Audrey Nicoll, Kevin Stewart.

Grampian Regional Equality Council: María José Pavez Larrea and Ross Mackay.

Scottish Parliament Staff: Mark Brough, Sarah Campbell, Ishani Erasmus, Vikki Little, Tom Malone, Ewan Masson, Sophia Simpson.

Graphic Notetaker: Jenny Capon from More Than Minutes.

Participants: 35 people took part, including community members and representatives of organisations advancing equalities. This included but is not all; AARC, Aberdeen Action on Disability, Aurora Autistic Consulting, Afristyle Dance Club, Diversity Bridge, Equalities Participation Network GREC, No Recourse North East Partnership.

Grampian Regional Equality Council

GREC is taking a leading role in advancing equality across North East Scotland – including Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. It works to tackle prejudice and discrimination, celebrate diversity, build positive community relations, and provide evidence to change policy and practice. Their services include support and advice for individuals and communities; translation and interpreting; counselling for adults and young people; language cafés and English classes; information campaigns; research; and celebrating the work of young people to promote equality in their schools and communities.

Format of the Event

- Grampian Regional Equality Council and the Presiding Officer and MSPs gave introductions.
- The event was marketplace style with stalls around the room with interactive activities. Each stall displayed a question.
- Question time.
- A Graphic Notetaker captured what people said.



You can [view a short video](#) from the day on X.

What we Heard

Participants were asked to name one word they think of in relation to the Scottish Parliament.



Have you ever been involved in the Scottish Parliament?

Activity	Number of people
Watched a debate or committee at Holyrood or on TV/online.	2
Visited the Scottish Parliament website.	3
Visited the Scottish Parliament.	2
Followed the Scottish Parliament on social media.	4
Spoken to or contacted one of their MSPs.	3
Attended a Scottish Parliament event in their community.	3
A family member has attended an education session at Holyrood or in school.	2
Given views to a committee.	3
Attended an exhibition or event at the Parliament.	1

What we asked

What has not worked?

- Petition for reuseable water bottles for children – as a teacher this has never materialised in schools.
- Smacking Ban is grossly misrepresented and is used to target ethnic minorities.
- New Scots Integration Strategy 2024 (newest) - where is support from the Government?

What would you like to see in the future?

- Parliament sessions in other cities/towns.
- Committees in the North East talking about ESOL support.
- An autism strategy.
- More laws to protect faith communities and ethnic minorities.
- Engaging with people by listening, empathising, two-way communication, enforcing change, and advocacy.
- Lived experience included in Parliament's work.
- Consultations – talk with organisations who work with specific groups when developing policy.

What are the key issues in your area that you feel should be addressed/prioritised?

Issues facing New Scots communities

- Scottish Government funding being 'ring fenced' - e.g. for Ukrainians – excludes others who are seeking asylum or who have refugee status.
- Lack of health provision.
- Long interview waiting times for asylum seekers.
- Deportation of Nigerians and Ghanaians without legal representation.
- Do I belong?

ESOL – English languages classes for speakers of other languages

- Lack of ESOL - class availability is limited particularly in rural areas.
- ESOL support to the third sector.

Funding for the third sector

- More support for organisations and charities who provide assistance for people with no recourse to public funds, who find themselves in unexpected financial crisis, to prevent poverty, destitution and mental health issues.

Disability rights

- Autistic rights.
- Parking for every house especially for people with limited mobility.

Additional Support for Learning in schools (particularly in Aberdeen)

- Inclusion is not working without adequate support.
- Insufficient provision for those with ASL is having a negative impact on all learners.

Education

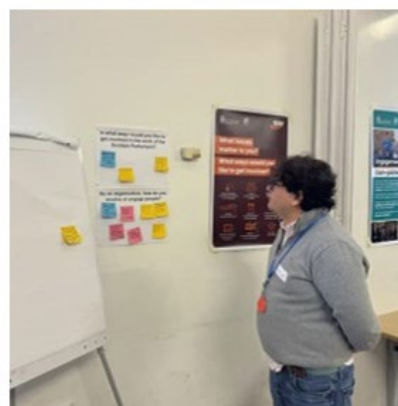
- Equal access to education.
- Teaching cultural and ethnic minority history in schools.

Other priorities:

- Helping migrant communities and making sure that they have access to the same rights as everyone else.
- Providing apprenticeship upskill roles for New Scots.
- Build more affordable housing, to reduce long waiting lists, to support vulnerable people, to prevent homelessness.
- Road repairs.
- Community service cuts.
- More effective support from police for reporting anti-social behaviour.
- Impact of removing the winter fuel payment.

What are the barriers to engaging with the Scottish Parliament?

- Lack of educational support and limited access to resources for new immigrants.
- Lack of accessibility – autistic voices spoken over by non-autistic people.
- Technicality and isolation – the minutiae of issues discussed makes me lose interest. More focus on how Scottish issues relate to the wider world would ignite my interest.
- Language barriers.
- We don't know who our local representatives are.
- Distance, transport – we would prefer MSPs to come to us.
- Not understanding the system. Can I even vote in Scottish elections?
- Difficulties in securing legal status (e.g. UK citizenship for those with settled status) leads to disengagement and feeling like I don't belong.
- Lack of civic education.
- Accessibility issues with Parliament's communications.



How would you like to get involved and raise the issues that matter to you with the Parliament?

Activity	Number of people
Giving views to a Committee either verbally or in writing.	6
Visiting the Scottish Parliament.	3
Attending a Scottish Parliament event in their community.	12
Attending an event or an exhibition in Parliament.	6
Watching a debate or committee at Holyrood or on TV/online.	4
Follow the Parliament on Social Media.	2
Speaking to or contacting on of their MSPs.	6
Visit the Scottish Parliament website.	3



If you are an organisation, how do you involve and engage people?

- Language Café – people gaining confidence in English (running groups to support people to learn skills).
- Social groups and activities.
- Service signposting sessions.
- Building partnerships with other organisations.
- Focus groups.
- Community Connectors.
- Events.
- Discussion papers.
- Reports.
- Lived experience groups help in setting our organisation's direction.
- Meeting when and where is easier for people.
- Advocacy – giving the people a chance for their voice to be heard.

Question Time

Participants from The Language Café ask the MSPs and the Presiding Officer questions.



Going Forward

The learning from the programme will be used to improve how the Parliament involves people.

We will do this by:

- Reviewing the issues raised and the outcomes from the programme with some of the participants, at the Participation and Communities Team Communities Conference in summer 2025.
- Producing a Community Engagement Strategy by autumn 2025.
- Feeding into the review of the Scottish Parliament Public Engagement Strategy in 2025/26.

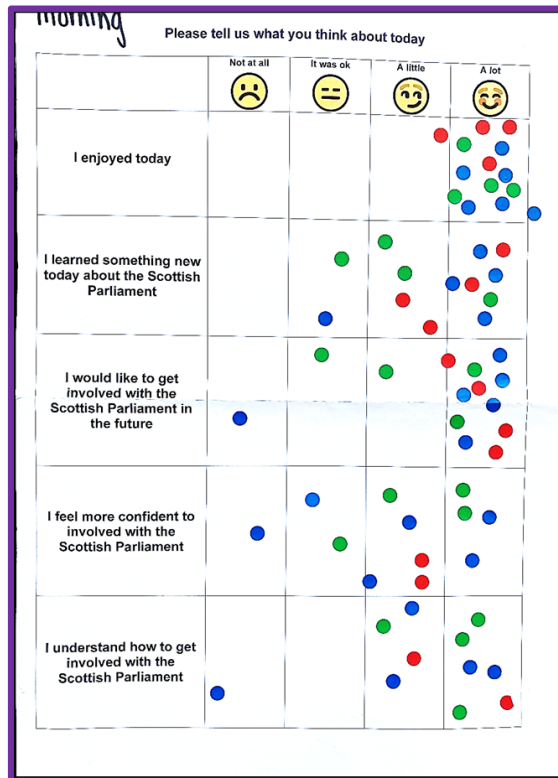
The Graphic Notes produced at each of the events will be displayed in the Parliament in 2025.

The reports, videos, graphic notes and resources from the programme can be viewed on the [Participation and Communities Team page on the Scottish Parliament website](#).



Feedback

Feedback was taken in person at the end of the event with 15 people out of the 28 completed a sticky dot evaluation.



Of the people who completed the evaluation:

- 13** enjoyed the event.
- 11** learned something new about the Parliament.
- 12** would like to get involved with the Parliament in the future.
- 9** feel more confident to get involved with the Parliament.
- 10** better understand how to to get involved with the Parliament.

Additional feedback was also received to the question “Please tell us what you think about today”.

What went well

- They listened.
- The MSPs actively listened to those with real issues.
- Interaction with them.

What could be better

- Invitations to more organisations
- Longer sessions with MSPs
- Invitation to more [organisations] and more interactions with MSPs.

Any other comments

- There was limited promotion of the event, so many key organisations were not aware of the session.

morning

Please tell us what you think about today

What went well	What could be better	Any other comments
They Listened	- Invitation to more organisations - longer session with MSPs	There was limited promotion of the event, so many key organisations
The MSPs actively listened to those with real issues	Invitation to more & more interaction with the MSPs.	were not aware of the session.
Interaction with them.		