

## Guidance for researchers: submitting written evidence to the Scottish Parliament

### Terminology

**Committees:** [Committees](#) are small groups of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) from different political parties who look at specific subjects such as health, education and justice. Each committee has a remit which says what areas it is responsible for. Committees can look at anything in their remit.

Committees:

- look at the work of the Scottish Government, including plans for how money is spent (Scottish Budget)
- hold inquiries to explore a particular issue or area
- examine bills (proposed laws) and decide on amendments (changes)
- hear the views of people to help with their inquiries
- consider [petitions](#) submitted by members of the public and groups who want to raise an issue.

**Inquiries:** [Inquiries](#) are a way for committees to gather information and examine an issue. Committees choose inquiry topics for different reasons. Some are a response to a high profile event, like the delivery of a public service or project. Others consider progress in an area, for example, schools or policing.

During an inquiry a committee may:

- ask individuals and organisations for their views
- examine the views it gets
- hold evidence sessions where they question members of the public, organisations and experts
- visit organisations, companies and communities to get a deeper understanding of the inquiry topic.

At the end of an inquiry the committee typically produces a report which is published on the Parliament website. The report makes recommendations to the Scottish Government and other public bodies. The Scottish Government must respond to the committee's recommendations.

### Context

When a committee launches an inquiry or starts looking at a Bill (a proposed law), it asks individuals or organisations to submit their views. This is called a "call for views". Questions in the call for views can be either very specific or on key themes. The call for views is designed to be accessible to anyone who wishes to submit evidence, including the public, practitioners, non-governmental organisations and academics.

Responses from those with research expertise in the subject area supports Members and staff to access, and understand, relevant evidence and to draw on this as part of their work.

### **The ‘call for views’**

Calls for views are published on the Scottish Parliament consultation website: <https://yourviews.parliament.scot/> and are normally posted on the webpage of the relevant committee. They are sometimes accompanied by a news release and social media post. Often a committee will directly contact stakeholders that they think will be interested in the subject area. The call for views will set the deadline by which the committee would like to receive a response. Scottish Parliament [guidance](#) highlights that, where possible, 8-10 weeks should be allowed between the launch of any call for views and the deadline. However, there are circumstances when this period needs to be shorter for procedural, schedule or committee capacity reasons. Particularly in circumstances where a large volume of responses is anticipated, a committee may split a call for views in two – with a short, quantitative survey accompanied by a longer, more detailed questionnaire.

It is possible to search for any calls for views run since the start of the current session (May 2021). The search also enables filtering by committee, status, or title of a call for views.

### **How to prepare a response/top tips for researchers**

The call for views webpage text provides an overview of the issue that the call relates to and lists the questions for which responses are sought. It is possible to ‘save and come back later...’ rather than having to complete and submit the response in one go.

Responses to a ‘call for views’ are made via an accessible online platform called Citizen Space, a third-party digital tool used to collect and analyse written submissions. This approach helps the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) and clerks to collate and analyse responses.

#### ***Top tips***

- Focus on responding to the specific areas/questions that the call for views sets out. You do not need to respond to every question; you are welcome to respond to those where your expertise aligns most closely. If you feel an important and relevant aspect isn’t reflected in the questions asked, you can highlight this succinctly (with relevant supporting evidence) against either the most relevant question in the call or one inviting further open comment.
- Keep responses succinct. The online form does not usually have a word limit. However, given the typical number of responses received to a call for views, and pressure on staff and Members time/capacity, it is helpful to receive short and focused responses. As a guide we suggest a maximum of 3000 words.



Short sentences are welcome, and you can draft in MS Word before copying the text into the platform and then submitting.

- Include factual information you think the committee will find useful, particularly if it comes from you or your organisation's own knowledge, work, research, or experiences.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms. Members and parliamentary staff come from diverse subject backgrounds and may not be familiar with specialist terminology or abbreviations.
- Write in plain English, explaining any technical terms as required.
- Familiarise yourself with the format that other researchers adopt in responding to calls for views by reviewing published responses to closed calls for views on other topics.
- Avoid mentioning areas that are the subject of a current legal court case/where court proceedings are imminent.
- Be clear about uncertainty, and limitations or gaps in evidence.
- Include weblinks to references/sources of evidence, or expertise, that you refer to. Applying a numeric in-text citation style works well e.g. 'Our evidence [1] found that...' with the full reference/weblink for [1] included beneath the text entry in the textbox.
- The call for views will ask whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. We recommend that you opt for the latter and refer to the university you are affiliated with, recognising that academic submissions are not submitted on behalf of a university per se.

### **Consider your approach**

As a research expert you may wish to consider what role you wish to adopt when you provide a written response so that you communicate accordingly. Your aim could be to communicate your research and associated findings without discussing particular policy options or making recommendations. Alternatively, you may wish to set out a range of policy options or choices without recommending a single option. Or you may choose to advocate for a particular policy option or recommendation. It is also important to consider political neutrality and the potential implications of being seen to be politically aligned. For further discussion on these aspects see [How Should Academics Engage in Policymaking to Achieve Impact?](#)

## Reasonable adjustments

If you need an adjustment to help you share your evidence, for example, to enable submission of diagrams or tables, please get in touch with committee staff. They'll be able to advise on the mechanisms and formatting requirements associated with providing such evidence. You can find out how to contact them on the committee's webpage.

Submissions can also be provided as video or audio files. Further information about making a response in this format is available at [Submitting your views to a committee](#).

## How will the information you submit be used:

Committees will often draw on the responses received to:

- better understand the evidence associated with a particular area of work and/or particular policy proposal (and potential uncertainties/evidence gaps)
- identify questions that they wish to explore further as part of their inquiry
- identify individuals that they may wish to invite to give oral evidence to the committee (but note that, in some circumstances, the schedule requires witnesses to be identified ahead of deadlines for receiving written evidence submissions)
- help formulate recommendations for amendments (in the case of a Bill).

Your response might be referred to, or quoted in, the final report that a committee produces following an inquiry. If so, it will be referenced accordingly in the report and a hyperlink to your written response included as part of the reference. Researchers may draw on any citation and/or an invitation to give oral evidence as evidence of research impact.

## Publication of responses

In line with a principle of transparency and openness, the default position is that the Committee will publish submissions on its webpage on the Scottish Parliament website. Responses are typically published as soon as possible after the call for views closes. Your name and associated academic affiliation will be published. Contact details (e.g. your email address) provided alongside your response will not be published, but may be used by the Parliament to contact you about your response or to provide you with further information about the Committee work you are interested in. More details can be found in the privacy notice [Committees – submitting your views to a committee](#).

The Committee may, on occasion:

- accept anonymous submissions (without your name)
- accept submissions on a confidential ('not for publication') basis.

If you wish to request your views to be treated anonymously or confidentially, please contact the Committee before making your submission. The final decision on whether your views will be accepted either anonymously or as a 'not for publication response' is for the Committee to take. If the Committee turns down your request for your submission to be processed in a non-standard way, you can choose to withdraw your submission at that stage. There may be a few situations where evidence is not published or it has to be edited before publication for practical or legal reasons.

Further information about the publication of responses are available in the privacy notice [Committees – submitting your views to a committee](#).

### **Data protection**

Further details about data protection associated with submitting written evidence are set out in the following [privacy notice](#) on submitting your views to a committee.

### **Useful resources**

[How Should Academics Engage in Policymaking to Achieve Impact? Paul Cairney, Kathryn Oliver.](#)

[Writing for a Parliamentary Audience: UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, Welsh Parliament.](#)

[The Scottish Policy and Research Exchange \(SPRE\): resources to help policy makers and scholars connect.](#)