

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

15th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
25 October 2023

PE1990: Introduce a Scottish Parliament question session for young people

Lodged	29 November 2022
Petitioner	Jordon Anderson
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to request the introduction of a monthly chamber session to allow young people to put questions to the First Minister and her cabinet.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1990

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [8 March 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to key stakeholders and delegated authority to the Convener to agree the final list of stakeholders.
2. SPICe has provided the following suggested list of possible stakeholders:
 - Scottish Youth Parliament
 - Children’s Parliament
 - National Union of Students
 - Who Cares? Scotland
 - Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities
 - Intercultural Youth Scotland
3. However, since the petition was last considered, the Committee has published its report, [Embedding Citizen Participation into the Work of the Parliament](#), which includes a response to the recommendations made by the Citizens’ Panel, including one very similar to that of the petition:

“Recommendation 14: Schedule specific time in the debating Chamber for individual public questions to be asked.”

4. The Committee considered this recommendation and concluded that:

“We do not support the recommendation for a question time which is part of formal Parliamentary business, as we think it raises too many difficulties both of practice and principle ... Having said all that, we would be willing to see the idea further explored, if there is cross-party support for doing so.”

5. The Committee’s full conclusion from the report is included at **Annexe D**.
6. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee’s last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
7. The Committee has received a written submission from the petitioner which is included at **Annexe C**.
8. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
9. The Scottish Government’s initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition’s webpage](#).
10. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 15 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1990: Introduce a Scottish Parliament question session for young people

Petitioner

Jordon Anderson

Date Lodged:

29/11/22

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to request the introduction of a monthly chamber session to allow young people to put questions to the First Minister and her cabinet.

Previous action

I have written to my MSP Jackie Dunbar to raise the issue and ask for her views. She has since responded and mentioned that Cabinet Ministers are really busy, which may prevent them from meeting with young people. However, I have seen a young person's First Ministers Question Time done in the past, so I think my petition still has a standing ground.

Background information

The Government have a very good track record of saying they care a lot about Children & Young People. However, during the course of the pandemic we have seen this to be far from true. Thousands of children and young people still live in poverty and hundreds are walking the streets due to homelessness - the list goes on! The least the Scottish Government can do is give young people the chance to put questions to them.

Young People are the future! In 15/20 years from now, young people will be running the country and making the decisions. Right now the political landscape has many significant priorities. We need certainty. Our MSPs can't give us time, so how do we ensure our voices are heard? We shouldn't have to hide behind a 3rd party organisation to be heard!

We have seen FMQ's done before by so there is no reason why the Government and organisations cannot partner up and do this type of thing again.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1990 on 8 March 2023

The Convener: PE1990, lodged by Jordon Anderson, calls on the Scottish Government to request the introduction of a monthly chamber session to allow young people to put questions to the First Minister and her—or, I suppose, in due course, his—Cabinet. The petitioner states that children and young people should not have to hide behind a third-party organisation to be heard.

The SPICe briefing provides details of the working in partnership agreement between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament. That agreement includes a commitment from the Scottish Parliament to host a sitting of the Scottish Youth Parliament every two years, although the last such sitting was in 2018 and, regrettably, a sitting that was scheduled to take place in 2022 fell on the same weekend as the death of Her Majesty the Queen, which led to its postponement. The next session is scheduled for 2024.

The Scottish Government's response outlines ways in which children and young people are engaged with, including an annual meeting with Cabinet ministers.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

I am mindful that we are doing our own inquiry into deliberative democracy and citizen engagement. I am also aware that there is a Children's Parliament and a Youth Parliament, which are elected bodies for which anybody who is eligible can stand. I feel that there are opportunities there. I wonder whether the committee, as part of our work, could consider whether, rather than the Youth Parliament just sitting in Holyrood every second year, something more formal, by way of a joint session, could take place between members of the Scottish Parliament and members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and be of benefit.

We are at an early stage. What further considerations or suggestions might colleagues have?

David Torrance: To be fully engaged with citizen participation, it would be good for the committee to see how we could engage with the youth of today and how we could do it more. As I see it, doing it every two years is a paper exercise, and I would like it if the Scottish Youth Parliament could meet with us far more regularly.

The Convener: I will turn to the clerks: have we written to the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament in relation to our inquiry into deliberative democracy, and have we received any submissions from them?

Alanis McQuillen (Clerk): We have engaged with the Scottish Youth Parliament quite extensively as part of the process, but we have not done that in writing—we have taken direct evidence.

The Convener: Right. Have they come forward with any recommendations to us for anything that we might want to consider doing?

Alanis McQuillen: They have fed into the recent consultation on the panel's recommendations, but I could not say which feedback was specifically related to the Youth Parliament.

The Convener: All right. I am happy to keep the petition open for us to take it into account in our consideration.

Are we content to write to key stakeholders to seek their views on the action called for in the petition in order to generate a bit of further information? Are you content for the clerks to give some consideration to who those stakeholders might be and who we might want to hear from? On that recommendation, we will write to a broader body of people, rather than us trying to second-guess who all the organisations are at the moment. Are we content to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Petitioner submission of 14 June 2023 PE1990/B: Introduce a Scottish Parliament Question session for young people

Firstly, I apologise for the delay in this submission.

Politics is an important aspect of our lives. We see it on the news every day, we see it in the heated debates with friends, but most crucially, we watch from the side lines as our MSPs and MPs fight to hold Government to account. The work of the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and the Children's Parliament have been instrumental in holding up the UNCRC and our right to be heard and listened to as young people. However, there are issues.

According to Statista in 2021, there were roughly 920,174 young people between the age of 10-24. According to the National Records of Scotland in the middle of 2021, Scotland's population was estimated to be 5,479,900. That means that in 2021, 16.8% of the population was young people aged 10-24. The relevance of this is that many big organisations like SYP and the Children's Parliament are elected and do not represent the entirety of Scotland. They represent a tiny minority of young people and often do not consult widely. Unless you have Twitter or look at their website you will not be aware of consultations/call for views etc. In the Scottish Youth Parliament's recent manifesto, they consulted with 1% of the youth population.

My petition is calling on the Parliament to introduce a Question Time Session for young people. In the committee's recent inquiry into public participation, one of the recommendations made by the citizens' panel also calls for a public session of FMQs where the public can question the First Minister and his cabinet. We have to move away from tokenisation and instead move into giving young people an equal chance. Young people are already a minority/seldom heard group, so giving 5-6 young people a chance to meet with the First Minister against the backdrop of the youth population is not fair nor equal.

More and more young people are engaged in politics. We know this because of the amount of young councillors that were elected in the last

Local Authority elections. Although my petition has a specific ask, I would hope that the committee would take into consideration how youth engagement can be embodied into the work of the Parliament. I would strongly advise the committee to reach out to MSPs who are actively engaging with young people and see what they have found.

I commend the petition to the committee and hope it will take careful consideration of the issues I suggest. I would also like to highlight that I will be asking my MSPs to support this petition and would welcome their response.

Annexe D

Extract from the Committee's report – Embedding Public Participation in the Work of the parliament

Recommendation 14

Schedule specific time in the debating Chamber for individual public questions to be asked.

We recognise that there would need to be a process to filter questions and ensure they were relevant and to determine who asked the questions and how.

Committee conclusions and responses to Panel recommendations (pg.47)

1. We do not support the recommendation for a question time which is part of formal Parliamentary business, as we think it raises too many difficulties both of practice and principle. The first practical difficulty would be in finding time in the Parliamentary week for another Question Time (in addition to those already scheduled). There would then need to be a process for selecting which members of the public would be invited to ask a question that was fair, transparent, and not open to abuse (for example, by the small minority of people who seek to disrupt proceedings, as has been seen recently during First Minister's Questions). Parliament officials would also need to vet questions in advance to ensure they are appropriately worded and relate to matters for which the Scottish Government is responsible – something that could be much harder to do with members of the public than it is with MSPs.
2. There are also significant difficulties of principle. MSPs are elected to represent their constituents and, amongst other things, hold Ministers to account; Ministers, in turn, are accountable to the Parliament. All are bound together by a complex set of expectations, rules and conventions. Members of the public stand apart from all of that – they have neither the privileges nor the responsibilities that come with elected office. To give them a direct

role in holding Ministers to account would therefore represent a significant departure from the representative democracy model on which the Parliament was established.

3. Having said all that, we would be willing to see the idea further explored, if there is cross-party support for doing so. The Scotland Act 2016 significantly increased the Parliament's powers to amend (through legislation) the statutory basis on which it operates. This opens up options for involving the public directly in Chamber business in ways that would previously have been impossible.
4. If there is no appetite to make the legislative and procedural changes necessary to implement this Panel recommendation in full, something of its spirit could be taken forwards in other ways. It would be open to any individual MSP or party to invite members of the public to submit questions they would like to hear asked in the Chamber, to pick one, and then to ask it on behalf of the member of the public who suggested it – in just the same way that they would otherwise ask a question of their own devising. Such an approach would be fully consistent with current procedures, which say nothing about the original source of the questions that members choose to ask.
5. We also recommend that committees consider including a public question time as part of their community engagement activities. This has the advantage of introducing an element of public dialogue, rather than simply inviting members of the public to observe committee meetings. For example, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is using a deliberative approach as part of its 2024-25 pre-budget scrutiny, which involves citizens developing questions to be asked of the Scottish Government by the Committee. We appreciate the contribution that this work will make to the Parliament's collective learning of increasing deliberation and citizen voice in the scrutiny and accountability process.