Petitioning the Scottish Parliament: Making your voice heard

This short question and answer leaflet explains how the Scottish Parliament’s public petitions process works and how you can make your voice heard.
What is a petition?

A petition is a way for you to raise an issue with your Parliament. It is a request for action which sets out what you want the Parliament to do and why.

Pretty much yes. Did you know that –

- you only need 1 signature to lodge your petition
- MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) cannot lodge petitions
- there is no age limit
- petitions can be submitted in any language (e.g. British Sign Language, Braille). The Parliament can arrange for a translation or interpreting.

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing talks to petitioner Tina McGeever at a committee meeting.

Front cover image: Ryan McLaughlin who petitioned the Scottish Parliament on vitamin D supplementation.

The ability of common folk to bring their concerns to the Parliament through the petitions system is democracy in action. You aren’t always going to get what you want but at least the Scottish Parliament has to look at your petition.

(interviewee when asked what they thought about the petitions process)
Great! But what can I petition the Scottish Parliament about?

Well, first of all, the petition should relate to an issue that is within the Scottish Parliament’s responsibility. These are known as devolved issues and a list of these is given below –

- agriculture, forestry and fishing
- education and lifelong learning
- environment and climate change
- enterprise
- Gaelic
- health
- housing
- law and home affairs
- local government
- natural and built heritage
- planning
- police and fire services
- social work
- sport and the arts
- statistics and public records
- tourism and economic development
- transport and infrastructure

Next, you need to think about whether the issue you want to raise is actually something the Parliament can do something about. Petitions should be relevant at a national level, not just a personal or local matter. If the petition relates to a more local matter, maybe a school closure, then that could be taken up at a local level (with your council perhaps).

Dyce Academy pupils talk about their petition on Fairtrade food in schools.
It isn’t! There are staff in the Parliament whose job it is to assist petitioners, give advice about the process and how to word the petition itself. There is also an easy to complete template for submitting your petition. If you want advice, see the contact details on page 6.

Well, the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) is made up of 7 MSPs and its role is to consider every admissible petition lodged with the Parliament. So if your petition is admissible it will be looked at by the committee. The committee might invite you to come to a formal meeting to discuss your petition in person.

Once the PPC has considered the petition it decides what to do next. On most occasions it will write to the Scottish Government and other bodies such as local councils, health boards, police forces, etc (depending on what the petition deals with). The committee will decide the most appropriate bodies to contact and write to them with a series of questions relating to your petition. When the responses come in they are sent to you asking for your comments. You have the opportunity to say what you think. Then the petition and all the written responses go back before the committee. The committee will keep bringing the petition back to consider progress and what further action to take.
I thought the petitions process was really valuable and I would recommend everyone to do it.  
(Berwickshire High School pupil Janie Orr)

David Stewart MSP, Convener of the Public Petitions Committee, speaking at a conference.

Fine, but does petitioning lead to anything?

Yes it does. Petitions have brought about changes in the law, in government policy, the production of revised guidelines on an issue, a change in a decision. Even just raising awareness of the issue in the Parliament can be a success.

John Muir, who submitted a petition on tackling knife crime
Where do I find out more?

For more information about petitioning the Scottish Parliament, why not visit our website? From here you can access information about –

- lodging a petition
- tracking current petitions
- closed petitions
- the work of the Public Petitions Committee

You can access further information about petitioning the Scottish Parliament at –
www.scottish.parliament.uk/petitions

Address
The Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Telephone
0131 348 5254
18001 0131 348 5254

Text Relay
petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Email

Why not visit the Scottish Parliament website for more information about your Parliament and how it works? –
www.scottish.parliament.uk

“I felt backed up by the committee, that someone was in my corner fighting for me.”
(Petitioner Lynn Merrifield)
Languages and formats

This leaflet is available in a range of formats including Braille, audio and large print. Please contact Public Information for copies.

Tha a’ bhileag seo ri faighinn ann an grunn chruthan is chànanan. Cuir fios gu Seirbhis Fiosrachaidh a’ Phoibail airson lethbhreacan.

Languages and formats

Osoby chcące zaangażować się w działalność Parlamentu Szkockiego i pragnące otrzymać tłumaczenia dokumentów lub pomoc tłumacza ustnego, prosimy o kontakt z działem Public Information. Korespondencję można nadsyłać w dowolnym języku.

Public Information

如欲索取文件的中文翻譯本，或要求取得口譯員的協助，以參與蘇格蘭議會的工作，請聯絡供資訊部門（Public Information）；用任何語文寫信給我們均可。

Public Information

اسکالش پارلیمنٹ کے کام میں حضور کے لئے کے لیے اگر آپ کو ٹرانس لیشن (ترجمہ) یا انٹرپرینر (مترجم) کی خدمات درکار

یہ تو در سیم بمیانی بمقام پبلک انفارمیشن (دفتر معلومات عامیہ) سے رابطہ کریں۔ آپ بھی مین کسی بھی زبان میں لکھے

سکتے ہیں۔
Public Information

Public Information can help you find out about the business, membership and procedures of the Scottish Parliament.

Address
Public Information
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Telephone 0800 092 7500
0131 348 5000

Fòn 0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

Textphone users can contact us on 0800 092 7100. We also welcome calls using the Text Relay service.

Visitor Services

Visitor Services can help you book tickets, arrange a guided tour or a group visit.

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The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Email sp.bookings@scottish.parliament.uk
Website www.scottish.parliament.uk

To book a place in the crèche, please phone 0131 348 6192 or email creche@scottish.parliament.uk