SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT (SYP)

Background to SYP

Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is democratically elected to represent Scotland’s youth. We listen to young people, recognise the issues that are most important to them, and ensure that their voices are heard.

In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

**Democracy** – All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 14-25. Our democratic structure, and the scale of direct participation across Scotland, gives us strength and sets us apart from other organisations.

**Inclusion** – We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice, it doesn’t matter who we are or where we come from. We celebrate our diversity.

**Political independence** – We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

**Passion** – We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about the key issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.

Introduction and Context of Response

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Bill. Scotland’s constitutional future is of great interest to young people, and have a broad range of views on what it might look like.

One of the statements included in the SYP’s ‘Change the Picture’ Youth Manifesto is that “A referendum should be held on Scotland’s constitutional future, with the options of no change, more powers for the Scottish Parliament or full independence.” This is based entirely on the views of young people – almost 43,000 responses from young people were received in a mass consultation, ‘Picture the Change’ which directly asked young people whether they agreed with the proposed manifesto statements. 66% of young people consulted agreed with the statement, which is now firmly in the Manifesto and together with the other statements included within collectively forms the basis of SYP’s policy and campaigning work. More information on ‘Change the Picture’ can be found at www.syp.org.uk/our-manifesto-W21page-82-
This statement followed on from our response to ‘A National Conversation’, which was shaped by the views of our MSYPs at our June 2009 National Sitting in Edinburgh. In a debate amongst our membership, a wide range of topics were suggested as potential areas that could be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. These are explored later in the document. Formal votes were held revealing a majority in favour of a referendum being held to allow Scotland’s citizens the opportunity to have their say, with a ‘mini-referendum’ amongst the MSYPs showing a clear majority for increased powers for the Scottish Parliament (68%), but that the Scottish Government should not negotiate for Scotland to be an independent state (57%).

Reflecting developments since that event, to further inform our response, we conducted an online survey – ‘Have your say on Scotland’s future!’ from 19th August – 1st September. 65 responses were received from MSYPs and other young people, with the demographic breakdown closely mirroring both SYP’s membership and Scotland’s young people as a whole. This response is based on the views expressed by the survey respondents, our previous consultation work on constitutional issues and ‘Change the Picture’, our youth manifesto shaped by mass consultation with the young people of Scotland.

Financial Responsibilities

Reflecting the focus on fiscal devolution in the Scotland Bill, we explored whether respondents felt that additional financial responsibilities should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. An overwhelming majority (75.4%) felt that in general, the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for raising more of the money to pay for the public services it has control over, with 18.5% opposed.

Expanding on their preference, one respondent commented they supported greater fiscal responsibility “not through any ‘Scotland spends, England [subsidises]’ nonsense, just because it would give Scotland the ability to do what it wanted when it comes to finance.” Another felt that this issue required to be addressed as “there is a balance that needs to be struck between money-raising power from both Westminster and [Holyrood].”

We presented respondents with a range of options for taxes and levies that could either be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, partly devolved with the UK and Scottish Parliaments sharing responsibility, or stay reserved to the UK Parliament. The options were taken from proposals from the Scotland Bill, the Commission on Scottish Devolution (Calman Commission) or by the Scottish Government. The results were as follows:

---

1 SYP National Conversation Response (Video) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8vMfbp7mLk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8vMfbp7mLk)
2 ‘Have your say on Scotland’s future!’ survey – Scottish Youth Parliament, September 2011
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Amongst the respondents there was broad support for a range of taxation powers and fiscal responsibilities, with only Air Passenger Duty failing to gain majority support amongst respondents. Support was particularly strong for devolving excise duties on alcohol and tobacco, perhaps reflecting devolved responsibilities for health and high-profile action in the Scottish Parliament to address Scotland’s relationship with alcohol and tobacco.

Aggregates Levy also attracted strong support, with less than a fifth of respondents supporting it remaining as a reserved responsibility with its status as arguably the lowest-profile of the options accounting for the slightly higher proportion of respondents stating that they were ‘not sure’.

**Devolution of Additional Powers**

The Calman Commission recommended further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament, some of which have been included in the Scotland Bill. They also recommended ‘re-reserving’ a number of powers, one of which (food content and labelling) is included in the Scotland Bill proposals. Moves towards devolution of certain broadcasting powers were mentioned in both the Calman Commission’s report and have been promoted by the Scottish Government.

We explored respondents’ views on whether responsibility in these areas should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament or reserved to Westminster, with the following outcome:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Devolved</th>
<th>Reserved</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Air weapons</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of drugs</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink driving limits</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed limits</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections to the Scottish Parliament</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food content and labelling</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our debate at the SYP’s National Sitting in June 2009 saw a number of suggestions for powers that could be devolved to the Scottish Parliament which we included in our response to the National Conversation. We explored respondents’ views on whether powers in the following areas should be devolved to Holyrood.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Devolved</th>
<th>Reserved</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy regulations</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunities legislation</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The storage of nuclear weapons</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Civil Service</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion regulations</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betting and gaming regulations</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of the storage of nuclear weapons, all the proposals for powers that could be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, were supported by a majority of respondents. Support was extremely strong for devolution of elections, equal opportunities, drink-driving and speed limits and energy regulations. Overall, the feeling amongst respondents was that the powers of the Scottish Parliament should be substantially enhanced.

Some of these were to give the Scottish Parliament the power to tackle particularly Scottish problems within the UK, with one respondent commenting “some of these affect the whole of the UK and therefore we should all be treated the same. However Scotland does have different problems such as alcohol abuse, and maybe that power should be devolved to Scotland to see if they are better [equipped] with knowledge to handle the situation.” Others favoured specific issues in the hope that particular policy outcomes would be achieved, with one respondent favouring a “zero-tolerance” approach to drink-driving and another a “nuclear-free Scotland” as two examples of this. A number of other respondents stated their desire for an independent Scotland, with one commenting “once you’ve devolved all these, we’d be as well picking independence.”

**Borrowing Powers and the Crown Estate**

We asked respondents for their views on two of the Scottish Government’s proposed additions to the Scotland Bill – additional borrowing powers for the Scottish Parliament and revenue from Crown Estate land in Scotland.

Both proposals were supported by a comfortable majority of respondents, with 62.5% supporting borrowing powers being devolved (25% were opposed). Devolution of Crown Estate income was supported by 64.1%, with 26.6% against the proposal.8

---

6 ‘Have your say on Scotland’s future!’ survey – Scottish Youth Parliament, September 2011
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Several respondents commented on the potential of the additional financial provisions. One stated that “ownership of the Crown Estate should be transferred to a Scottish Government trust” with another commenting that “the Scottish Parliament should have full control of all of our [national] assets of which Crown Estate is one large and lucrative one, currently managed by a quango in London.”

Some respondents were more cautious and favoured a more restricted approach. One was of the opinion that “borrowing powers are a dangerous area, as they can lead to large deficits. I would only support those under strict limitations (balanced budgets for instance).”

**Welfare and Benefits**

Some of the discussions related to the fiscal responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament relate to potential devolution of certain welfare and benefits payments, where they are directly connected to Holyrood’s devolved responsibilities. Recognising that this is a complex area, and in many cases subject to ongoing UK Government reforms, we opted to explore respondents’ opinions on the general principles of the devolution of welfare and benefits.

Where welfare and benefits payments relate to areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, the majority of respondents (61.5%) were in favour of devolving control of them to the Scottish Parliament. 20% favoured them remaining reserved to the UK Parliament, with a mechanism set up to allow formal Scottish Government input, with 18.5% supporting them remaining entirely reserved.

Comments largely focussed on particular areas of welfare and social security that respondents felt should remain reserved, with the pension age a specific area that was raised.

**Representation in Europe**

As part of its proposals to amend the Scotland Bill, the Scottish Government has highlighted strengthening Scotland’s voice in Europe as a priority. We asked respondents what nature of input the Scottish Government should have when the topics discussed at EU meetings relate directly to areas of devolved responsibility.

Almost three quarters of respondents (73.8%) stated that the Scottish Government should always attend, along with UK Ministers. There were small pockets of support for other options, with 7.7% feeling that the Scottish Government should attend when it requests to do so; 6.2% that it should only attend by agreement of the UK Government, 6.2% that they should not attend but should be able to formally feed in their views for UK Ministers to input; and 3.1% that they should never attend.

---

9 'Have your say on Scotland’s future!’ survey – Scottish Youth Parliament, September 2011
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Conclusion and Recommendations

In general, there was strong support for substantial devolution to the Scottish Parliament. Commenting on their views on these in general a number of respondents stated their support for an independent Scotland, with others supporting remaining in the United Kingdom, but with a Scottish Parliament that has power over particular areas of concern to them, with areas of equal opportunities law mentioned as specific cases. Others favoured an approach of maximum devolution, remarking on the differences between voting patterns and political support in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

From the SYP’s consultation work with young people on constitutional issues, the idea of a Scottish Parliament with greatly enhanced powers has consistently attracted extremely strong support. We also look forward to a referendum being held in this Parliamentary term to allow Scotland’s citizens the opportunity to decide whether they desire an independent Scotland, substantial devolution, or the status quo. We recommend devolution of several powers not included in the Scotland Bill, which could potentially shape part of an option in the referendum if it is felt that their devolution would be a step too far without a specific mandate from the Scottish people.

The Scottish Youth Parliament recommends:

- The Scottish Parliament should be responsible for raising more of the money to pay for the public services it has control over
- Specifically, the following taxes and fiscal responsibilities should be considered for devolution - Corporation Tax, Tobacco Excise Duty, Alcohol Excise Duty, Aggregates Levy and Income Tax
- The Scottish Parliament should gain additional borrowing powers
- Control over the income from Crown Estate lands in Scotland should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament
- We recommend the power to legislate in the following areas should be considered for devolution to the Scottish Parliament – air weapons, firearms, misuse of drugs, drink driving limits, speed limits, elections to the Scottish Parliament, energy regulations, equal opportunities legislation, the Civil Service, abortion regulations, betting and gaming regulations and broadcasting
- Control over food content and labelling should remain devolved
- Welfare and benefits relating to areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament
- A referendum should be held on Scotland’s constitutional future, with the options of no change, more powers for the Scottish Parliament or full independence.

Scottish Youth Parliament
9 September 2011