



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government – what is the difference?



The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are separate organisations, with different remits and contact addresses.

The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government (formerly known as the Scottish Executive) were both established in 1999. Their powers and duties are set out in legislation passed by the UK Parliament. This means that they can deal only with certain matters, known as devolved matters, such as:

- health
- education
- justice
- police and fire services
- housing.

The Scottish Parliament is the law-making body in Scotland for devolved matters. It is made up of all 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). MSPs debate matters of importance to the people of Scotland, consider and vote on legislation and hold the Scottish Government to account.

The Scottish Government is in charge of deciding how the country is run for devolved matters. It formulates policy and implements laws that have been passed by the Scottish Parliament.

*i* Matters which have not been devolved, such as benefits and social security, immigration and defence, are dealt with by the UK Parliament and UK Government in London.

## What is the Scottish Parliament?

- The **Scottish Parliament** is the law-making body in Scotland for devolved matters.
- The Scottish Parliament scrutinises the work and policies of the Scottish Government.
- The Scottish Parliament is made up of 129 MSPs.
- Eight MSPs are elected to represent you: one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.
- MSPs are elected using a form of proportional representation called the Additional Member System.
- Elections to the Scottish Parliament normally take place every four years.
- MSPs elect a Presiding Officer to chair meetings of the Parliament and represent the Parliament externally.
- The Scottish Parliament is staffed by public servants, not civil servants. They serve the Parliament as a whole and must remain politically impartial.

## What is the Scottish Government?

- The **Scottish Government** is responsible for formulating and implementing policies on devolved matters in Scotland.
- In practice, the Scottish Government is formed from the party or parties holding most seats in the Scottish Parliament.
- The First Minister is the head of the Scottish Government.
- The Scottish Government is made up of Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, who are chosen by the First Minister.
- The Scottish Government introduces most of the bills that are considered by the Scottish Parliament.
- The Scottish Government proposes how the Scottish budget is allocated through the Budget Bill, which it submits to the Scottish Parliament each year for approval.
- Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers are supported by the Scottish Government directorates, which are staffed by civil servants.

## How do they fit together?



The people of Scotland elect 129 MSPs.

The MSPs elect one MSP as First Minister.

The MSP elected as First Minister can appoint Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, but only with the approval of the Parliament.

Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers are part of two separate organisations: the Scottish Government (in their ministerial role) and the Scottish Parliament (as MSPs).

*i*

In addition to a parliamentary or constituency office, a Cabinet Secretary or Minister will usually have an office within a Scottish Government building dealing with ministerial responsibilities. Parliamentary and constituency offices are completely separate from ministerial offices and have different contact details.

The Scottish Government is accountable to the Scottish Parliament; and both organisations are accountable to the people of Scotland.

## Frequently asked questions

### **Is the First Minister in charge of the Scottish Parliament?**

No, the First Minister is the Head of the Scottish Government, which is accountable to the Parliament.

### **Can I contact a Minister at the Parliament?**

Ministerial offices are located in Scottish Government buildings (see contact details on page 11). Their parliamentary offices cannot deal with ministerial matters.

### **Can I contact the Minister responsible if I have a concern about a devolved matter?**

Although you are free to contact Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, they are unable to take on individual cases. MSPs represent their constituents on all devolved matters

and you are free to contact any of the eight who represent you.

### **Do the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government share a building?**

No. The Scottish Parliament building (Holyrood) is located at the foot of Edinburgh's Royal Mile, next to the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

Scottish Government buildings are located across Scotland. The main Scottish Government buildings are St Andrew's House and Victoria Quay, in Edinburgh.

### **Is the Secretary of State for Scotland a member of the Scottish Government?**

No. The Secretary of State represents Scotland's interests on matters dealt with by the UK Government. The Scotland Office is the UK Government department which supports the Secretary of State for Scotland.

## Finding out more

### The Scottish Parliament

If you have an issue or concern you wish to raise, you can contact one of your MSPs. Each person in Scotland is normally represented by eight MSPs: one for the constituency and seven for the larger region in which they live.

MSPs represent their constituents on all devolved matters and you are free to contact any of the eight who represent you as they all have equal status.

You can find out which MSPs represent you and their contact details from our website ([www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)). Alternatively, contact Public Information for assistance (full details are at the end of this leaflet).

Public Information can also help if you have a general question about the Scottish Parliament or wish to be put through to an MSP's office.

### The Scottish Government

To find out more about the Scottish Government, its directorates or policies, visit its website ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)) or contact:

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Tel: 0300 244 4000 or 0131 244 4000

#### Email

General enquiries:  
[ceu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ceu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

To contact a Cabinet Secretary  
or Minister:  
[scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

To contact the Office of the First Minister:  
[FirstMinister@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:FirstMinister@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

For more information on the Scottish Parliament, its membership, business and procedures, **please contact us.**



Public Information  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP



0800 092 7500  
0131 348 5000  
0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

We also welcome calls using the Text Relay service.



Text the Scottish Parliament on  
07786 209888



[sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)



[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)



[@ScotParl](https://twitter.com/ScotParl)



[/scottishparliament](https://www.facebook.com/scottishparliament)



[/scottishparl](https://www.youtube.com/scottishparl)



Contact us if you need this information in another format such as Braille, large print or audio or in another language.

Please note that the Scottish Parliament is not responsible for the content of external websites.