



Summary of academic engagement
programme activity

2024



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



**Academic
Engagement**
Com-pàirteachadh
Acadaimigeach

About academic engagement

The Scottish Parliament scrutinises the Scottish Government, makes new laws on devolved matters and debates the issues of the day. Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), their staff and parliament staff need access to relevant and timely evidence to be able to perform this scrutiny function effectively. They draw on many sources, including academic expertise.

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) manages a [programme of activities](#) for individual academics and higher education institutions that encourages collaboration between academia and the work of Parliament.

Our programme for academic engagement aims to strengthen links with Scotland's universities. It also aims to better understand what is happening in academia and vice versa.

January – March 2024

SPICe presented to the UK Universities Climate Network to highlight opportunities for researchers to engage in climate scrutiny work of the Scottish Parliament in January 2024.

In January 2024, we issued a call to our SPAN ([Scottish Parliament Academia Network](#)) members to identify academics with expertise on natural capital finance to support the scrutiny work of the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee.

In February 2024, we hosted a European Crucible event. The European Crucible is a leadership and development programme for early/mid-career researchers that offers opportunities to build new multidisciplinary research collaborations between Scotland and Europe. The second day of this event was hosted in the Scottish Parliament and was specifically for alumni based in Scotland. The programme on that day included sessions on the role of research in the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament; new themes affecting research and policy; two interactive exercises – one on engaging with the Scottish Government, one on committee evidence; and two panel discussions – one on academia and policy engagement, and an expert panel on Evidence, Policy & Practice in Government & Parliament.

SPICe hosted a seminar for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) on 18 January: From Pit to Reuse: exploring the environmental impact of resource extraction and circular economy solutions. In this seminar, Professor Mark Tibbett, Professor of Soil Ecology, University of Reading, and Stephen Haskew, Group Director of Sustainability at Circular Computing, explored the impacts of resource extraction and practical solutions to reducing the consumption of mined materials.

Dr Lorna Cole, an Agricultural Ecologist at SAC Consulting, part of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), published a SPICe Spotlight Guest Blog on [What is 'sustainable and regenerative agriculture'?](#) The blog looked to answer: what is regenerative agriculture and how might Scotland become a 'global leader' in these practices?

As part of the Parliament's [Academic Fellowship Scheme](#), Dr Ruth Lightbody, Glasgow Caledonian University, explored how the Scottish Parliament can use guiding principles and a practice framework to support its journey towards increasing citizen participation in its work through deliberative approaches. More information can be found on her guest blog: [Connecting deliberative practices in Parliament with participation and community engagement.](#)

In February 2024, Dr Emily Ottley, from the University of Winchester, completed a piece of commissioned research on [International Comparison of Abortion Safe Access Zones Legislation: Literature Review](#). The research was commissioned to inform the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's scrutiny of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill.

April – June 2024

During April 2024, Chirsty McFadyen, University of Strathclyde, Dr Laura Robertson, Poverty Alliance, and Emma Congreve, University of Strathclyde, undertook research to find out the “[additional costs of disability in Scotland: understanding the available data and how this relates to personal experiences of disability](#)”. The researchers reported their findings to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee in March 2024. In addition to their briefing, Chirsty McFadyen and Dr Laura Robertson published a SPICe Spotlight Guest Blog on the [additional costs of disability](#).

During April and May, SPICe hosted two seminars on Natural Capital Finance which explored why organisations are investing in natural capital. It looked at what corporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) strategies for net zero look like, and what actions are being taken in addition to investing in carbon offsetting. Yvonne Edwards, the University of Edinburgh's Forest, Peat and Rural Land Manager attended to explain their approach to carbon management and outline how they plan to reduce and manage greenhouse gas emissions in the coming years.

A second seminar held in May, explored and critiqued some of the potential impacts of changing investment approaches and of new investors in Scottish land; and what the impacts are on land markets, local communities, food production, and on Scotland's GHG emissions reduction and net zero targets. Dr Jill Robbie, Senior Lecturer at Glasgow University's School of Law, and Dr Naomi Beingessner, Social Researcher in Transformative Land Management at the James Hutton Institute, spoke about their research and provided wider observations.

Starting in early April, Karri Heikkinen a PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy UCL, undertook a 12-week [UKRI-funded policy internship](#) with SPICe. Karri wrote a briefing on [Artificial Intelligence and Healthcare in Scotland](#), as well as publishing the following three blogs:

- [Artificial intelligence: how it works and what it can do](#)
- [Artificial intelligence: how might it be used in healthcare?](#)
- [Artificial intelligence in healthcare: social and ethical challenges.](#)

In April 2024 we issued invitations to our SPAN colleagues to identify academics with expertise in the following areas to support committee scrutiny work and respond to enquiries from MSPs:

- tertiary education funding systems
- sustainable construction
- links between education and climate change.

July – September 2024

In August 2024, Hannah Randolph, economist at the University of Strathclyde's Fraser of Allander Institute, conducted analyses on patterns of economic inactivity due to ill health in Scotland. In particular, she explored the link between inactivity and health inequalities, and access to healthcare via NHS waiting times. Her [accompanying blog](#) and [briefing](#) provide more information.

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has advanced rapidly in the last few years. As a result, we are now starting to see AI being used in healthcare. In September, SPICe hosted a seminar featuring Dr Clarisse de Vries, University of Glasgow, JD Blackwood, AI Lead for NHS Forth Valley and the Chief Technology Officer for an AI company called Bering. They explored the emerging use of AI in the Scottish healthcare system.

In August 2024, we issued a call to SPAN colleagues to identify academics with expertise about how issues within the remit of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee relate to climate change. Responses were drawn on to inform two [blogs](#). In September 2024, we used this mechanism to identify academics with expertise on the application of criminal justice approaches in relation to prostitution.

In September, we also hosted a live [webinar](#) on how academics can engage with the Scottish Parliament and published guidance on [how researchers can submit written evidence](#) to the Scottish Parliament.

October – December 2024

During early October, SPICe hosted an 'Ask the Experts' seminar on Scotland's Changing Electricity System. In this seminar, Professor Keith Bell, University of Strathclyde, and Dr Simon Gill, The Energy Landscape, answered questions from MSPs, their staff and Parliament staff on the current plans and what the future might look like.

Later the same month, on the back of the Scottish Government announcement that it would conduct a review of abortion law in Scotland, SPICe hosted a seminar on Scottish Abortion Law. Dr Catriona McMillan, Lecturer in Medical Law and Ethics at the University of Edinburgh, provided an overview of current abortion law in Scotland and potential considerations for future law reform.

One of the roles of the Scottish Parliament is scrutinising the Scottish Government's part in intergovernmental activity. The UK's exit from the European Union (EU) has made intergovernmental work even more important to understand as arrangements put in place following the EU exit. During early November, SPICe hosted a seminar with Dr Coree Brown Swan, University of Stirling, which provided an opportunity for MSPs, their staff and Parliament staff to hear more about these arrangements and how they may affect developments in devolved policy areas.

As part of the Scottish Parliament Fellowship Scheme, Gemma Davies, Professor of Law at Durham University, and Helena Farrand Carrapico, Professor of International Relations and European Politics at Northumbria University, undertook research on criminal justice and policing after Brexit. The research examined the impact of the current legal and political (Scottish-EU) landscape on the criminal justice system. Their research was presented to the Criminal Justice Committee and is available on the Parliament's website: [Research on the impact of the UK's exit from membership of the EU on law enforcement and judicial cooperation in Scotland.](#)

During 2024, Dr Tom Caygill, Senior Lecturer in Politics at Nottingham Trent University, conducted several pieces of research on post-legislative scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament. Post-legislative scrutiny looks at how a new law has worked in practice since it came into force. In October 2024, he published a SPICe briefing: [Post-Legislative Scrutiny in The Scottish Parliament: a reflection of Session 5.](#) followed up by a [blog](#) in November. Dr Caygill's fellowship was extended to June 2025 to allow him to extend his research to include post-legislative scrutiny in Session 6.

In November 2024, we hosted a symposium with colleagues at the University of Glasgow's Centre for Public Policy aimed at exploring how research evidence can strengthen climate scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament.

Finally, on Friday 22 November, we hosted our annual SPAN meeting and lunch. This brought together Parliament staff with around 40 knowledge exchange practitioners, plus those who hold either strategic research impact roles and/or public engagement roles. The meeting included workshops on diversifying academics engaging with parliament; how we successfully evidence engagement; and how academic and the Parliament can better support successful applications to engage.

Fellows appointed in 2024

Fellow	Project scope
Dr Joy Edwards-Hicks University of Edinburgh	Ageing research and policy
Dr David Meir and Dr David Scott University of the West of Scotland and Abertay University	Barriers to physical activity
Dr Katie Dow Principal Social Scientist Environment Agency	Links between health, social care and climate change
Dr Dan Fisher University of Glasgow	Scotland's response to the integration of Ukrainian refugees
Dr Elizabeth Lawson Newcastle University	Water policy challenges in rural Scotland
Dr Seemab Farooqi University of Dundee	Employability funding allocation in Scotland
Dr Cara Broadley Glasgow School of Art	Applying participatory action research and/or arts-based methodologies to the Parliament's committee scrutiny process
Dr Clementine Hill O'Connor University of Glasgow	Lived experience as part of the Scottish parliamentary process

2024 seminar speakers from academia

Seminars are designed to enable MSPs, their staff and parliament staff access to external expertise, including academics, to improve parliamentary scrutiny by developing understanding and awareness of issues and encouraging engagement and debate among parliamentarians. SPICe seminars are held under the Chatham House Rule to create a trusted environment for open discussion of policy issues.

Speaker	Policy topic
Professor Mark Tibbett University of Reading	From Pit to Reuse - circular economy solutions
Allison Catalano and Christy McFadyen University of Strathclyde's Fraser of Allander Institute	The declining disability employment gap
Yvonne Edwards and Scott Davidson University of Edinburgh	Why are companies investing in natural capital?
Dr Ruth Lightbody and Dr Adam Chalmers Glasgow Caledonian University and Edinburgh University	Building the foundations of the Scottish Parliament's participation blueprint
Dr Jill Robbie and Dr Naomi Beingessner Glasgow University and James Hutton Institute	What are the impacts of investment in natural capital?
Dr Clarisse de Vries University of Glasgow	Artificial Intelligence and healthcare in Scotland
Professor Keith Bell University of Strathclyde	Scotland's changing electricity system
Dr Catriona McMillan University of Edinburgh School of Law	Abortion Law
Dr Coree Brown Swan Stirling University	Scottish Government's part in intergovernmental activity