



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Witness Diversity

Guidance for organisations



Why the Scottish Parliament values diversity



“Diversity and inclusion are key principles for the Scottish Parliament’s success as set out in the 2017 Commission on Parliamentary Reform¹ which recommended the Parliament proactively promote diversity and better reflect the range of voices and experiences found across Scotland.

Committees engage with the people of Scotland in many ways but one of the most crucial and most visible ways is public questioning of witnesses in meetings that anyone in Scotland can watch. Getting a range of views helps MSPs to become better informed about policy issues, to scrutinise and question government policy, to make recommendations and to build stronger links with the people the Parliament represents.

It’s crucial that Parliament’s scrutiny of policy and the legislation Members pass is informed by a wide range of experiences, needs and views – especially from those most directly affected by the policy in question. What’s more, having people at the table with different backgrounds and perspectives makes for a more dynamic conversation and greater challenge and testing of policy proposals.

We are all too aware that neither Parliament itself nor the witnesses we hear from week after week reflect the diversity of Scottish society. Those watching from outside may see this and feel that participation in democracy is not for “people like me”. Parliament is not alone in facing these challenges, but we have a crucial role in leading the way, demonstrating that people from all backgrounds and experiences can contribute their views and expertise to public life.

Increasing the diversity of committee witnesses is one part of a much wider strategy to create a Parliament which is welcoming to people from all walks of life as a place to work, visit and engage with. We look forward to working in partnership with you and hope that this guidance is a starting point to encourage and support you to make progress towards a stronger Parliament for all of us.”

Susan Duffy
Head of Committees and Outreach

¹ Commission on Parliamentary reform - <https://parliamentaryreform.scot/>

What is witness diversity?

To help our committee witnesses reflect Scottish society, we encourage organisations to carefully consider 'witness diversity' when choosing a committee witness.

Witness diversity refers to a group of witnesses whose composition aims to be reflective of Scottish society, combining views of those who differ both in terms of protected characteristics and underlying attributes adding considerable value to the quality of scrutiny in committees.

Protected characteristics e.g.

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Underlying attributes e.g.

- Socio-economic status
- Values
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Occupational background
- Range of industry experience
- Lived experience

Selecting a committee witness

You may assume the committee will want to hear from a senior member of staff or someone who regularly gives evidence. However, this is not always the case. Committees benefit from hearing a broader range of views from a diverse range of people. You may wish to consider whether there is someone within your organisation, or the stakeholders you engage with, who might have equal or more appropriate skills, knowledge or experience to provide information to the committee.



Your organisation has been invited to give evidence on the impact of a Benefits Scheme. Who would you consider selecting as a witness?

- **Your CEO or senior member of staff?** They would have a good general knowledge of the area. They could give an overview and talk about the financial impact of the new scheme. They may also feel more confident talking to a committee.
- **A policy practitioner?** They may be able to explain some of the complex policy issues to the committee in more detail.
- **A frontline worker or person with lived experience?** They would be able to speak with authority about the impact and effect of the new benefits Scheme on the public.

What has more weight in this instance? Has the committee given you enough information to decide? Are there any practical difficulties in sending one of them to attend? Don't hesitate to ask the committee clerks for more information or to accommodate any additional practical or support needs your witness may have so you can make a more informed decision.

What to consider before selecting a witness

<p>Information requested</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of information has been requested? • Is the committee looking for information on how your organisation is run, data or research you may have or your staff and service users' experience of an issue? • Do you have enough background information to inform your choice of an appropriate witness?
<p>Most appropriate witness</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the most appropriate witness for the evidence session? For example, is it a senior member of staff, a policy expert, a practitioner, a frontline worker directly in contact with people affected by an issue, someone with lived experience your organisation supports? • If there are multiple people within the organisation who have the appropriate knowledge or experience, could you select someone who is part of an underrepresented group? You may want to talk to the clerks about a particular underrepresented voice in the committee you are attending. • Do you have concern about selecting a witness with no experience of attending evidence sessions? What could you do to support and equip them to sit before a committee and feel confident to represent your organisation? For example, you could invite them to consult the Guide for witnesses or watch previous evidence sessions on the Scottish Parliament website.
<p>Practicalities</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any practical difficulties preventing a potential witness from giving evidence before a committee? Are there issues around how far from the Parliament they live and work, timings due to shift work, caring responsibilities, accessibility, concerns around sharing sensitive and personal experiences? <p>If so, the committee clerks can discuss with you how best to accommodate the person's needs and requirements and consider alternatives such as video conferencing or using our on-site creche.</p>

Contact details for the relevant committee clerks can be found on the committees' [respective pages](#) on our website. Alternatively, you can call the main switchboard on 0800 092 7500 or 0131 348 5000 (0131 348 5395 for Gaelic) and ask to speak to a clerk in the relevant committee.

What we will do to encourage and facilitate witness diversity

We recognise our role as committees in encouraging witness diversity. As such, where possible, we aim to follow these principles:

<p>Value Diversity</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value diversity and the benefits it brings to committee scrutiny and stimulating wider participation in the democratic system more generally. Recognising diversity is not a tick box exercise but part of our wider commitment to mainstream equal opportunities and human rights issues into the work of the Scottish Parliament.
<p>Notice</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give adequate notice of the date and time of the committee meeting so organisations have time to choose the most appropriate witness, and witnesses have time to prepare the information requested and make practical arrangements.
<p>Clarity</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide clarity on the aim of the evidence session, the type of evidence required and where appropriate the type of witness sought and other witnesses invited. Consequently, organisations can choose the best person to put forward and have an indication of the type of information they should prepare.
<p>Accessibility</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make committee meetings accessible for all. We aim to provide a range of alternative formats for documents, assistance to access and navigate the building as well as alternative means of communication when required. Organisations can contact the relevant committee clerk at any time to address accessibility concerns.
<p>Support</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide additional support where witnesses are potentially vulnerable or lacking confidence. This can be done either through providing additional resources about committee meetings and how they are run, organising familiarisation visits before witnesses attend a committee meeting or making adjustments or alternative arrangements. For example, video conferencing or considering a more informal setting to meet. Please contact the relevant clerks to discuss how best to accommodate your chosen witness.



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Our Guide for witnesses is available on our website: www.parliament.scot/witnesses

Previous evidence sessions for current committees can be accessed in our video archive here: <https://www.scottishparliament.tv/>

