



Consultation on Public Participation at the Scottish Parliament

About JustCitizens

JustCitizens is a migrant advisory panel hosted by JustRight Scotland and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

We are a collective of migrants living in Scotland from diverse backgrounds, including with experience of the UK asylum system and surviving in the UK with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Our aim is to build a fairer and more equal vision of citizenship and belonging, for people living in Scotland.

About JustRight Scotland

JustRight Scotland is a registered charity (SO305962) established by an experienced group of human rights lawyers. We use the law to defend and extend people's rights, working collaboratively with non-lawyers across Scotland towards the shared aims of increasing access to justice and reducing inequality.

Our Response

JustCitizens are submitting a response to this consultation in order to highlight how the Scottish Parliament engagement with communities across Scotland can improve drawing on our experiences living as, and supporting, migrants in Scotland.

We give consent for this response to be published along with other consultation responses.

For further information, please contact JustCitizens at:
mariam@justrightscotland.org.uk

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JustCitizens is a project of JustRight Scotland, a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC047818) which provides legal services through its limited liability partnership, JustRight Scotland LLP which trades as JustRight Scotland (SO305962)

Room 1, 1st Floor, Libertas House, 39 St Vincent Place, Glasgow, G1 2ER

W ▶ <https://justcitizens.scot>
T ▶ @justcitizens

Create a system to notify people about engagement activities

Question 1. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens welcome this recommendation, however, we do not think that this should be built from scratch. We think it may be useful for MSPs to reach out to local organisations, centres, and community spaces to ask what works best for the communities they work with.

The current website can be very confusing and hard to navigate without guidance or support.

The Scottish Parliament can also make use of established communications channels to send important information out.

Consultations like this one could be included in newsletters of organisations that do participatory work, so there is a regular and consistent system of information-sharing being built.

Engagement activities promoted by the Scottish Parliament should also be brought in local places like schools, libraries, sport clubs and religious spaces.

Ensure that community engagement by MSPs doesn't exclude people that are outwith community groups, including by using evenings, weekends and online services.

Question 2. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens think that the Scottish Parliament should look at ways to reach people who are not part of organised groups.

MSPs could start by using local libraries to host informal events where people can go and ask questions that are not attached to a specific political agenda, but that focus more on the work of the Scottish Parliament and ways for people to engage.

Local libraries are great places to reach people from the community, they are often open until late in the evening, have space for kids and are not affiliated with one political party or ideology.

Bring the Parliament to the people

Question 3. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens believe that there should be wider education on how the Scottish Parliament works, its mechanisms and ways to engage. Children should learn from a really young age that the Scottish Parliament exists to represent its citizens and it belongs to them.

We also think that it would be beneficial for MSPs to find more ways to hear from people, without relying solely on office appointments.

There could be a travelling exhibit that showcases the work of the Scottish Parliament in smaller communities, where people can ask questions and there are

interactive ways to participate for children and young people.

To reach people effectively, there must be good lines of communication and there needs to be an effort to meet people where they are. This does not mean creating entirely new means of connection; but rather building on already existing venues, exhibitions, and community spaces to increase the likelihood of engagement.

Raise awareness of Parliamentary business in plain and transparent language including visual media.

Question 4. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens believe that the Scottish Parliament could find ways to discuss its work in more inclusive and efficient ways.

Instead of promoting their own political agenda, MSPs should use social media to explain what they do, to promote engagement and to ask questions to citizens directly.

SPICe could also produce short videos to summarise their briefings.

Many people may not understand the different sectors of governance that exist in Scotland; this is especially the case for people with language barriers or groups that are socially ostracised. One way to increase engagement is to break down complex concepts into understandable terminology without being condescending to the groups one is trying to reach. This must be done without taking away from the complexity of legislation and political components, giving people the opportunity to access the full picture, rather than small snippets.

News programmes tailored for kids can also help in raising awareness of Parliamentary business.

Create opportunities for people to use and share their lived experience to engage on issues that they care about.

Question 5. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

We welcome this recommendation but want to ensure that this is done in a way that is not exploitative.

Fair compensation is still not a common practice and it places a burden on people who are willing to participate. It should be established at the beginning of any new projects that include lived experience that individuals must be paid for their time and skills.

We also want to highlight that lived experience matters whether individuals belong to a panel or not. Opportunities should not just be extended to people only if they are part of organised panels; these opportunities need to be accessible to a wide range of people.

Participation should be conducted in line with trauma-informed practice, accessibility standards, and respect for people's time.

Remove barriers to participation

Question 6. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens believe this is hugely important to increase engagement.

Most civil servants, local representatives, MSPs and work the standard 9-5. This does not equate to flexibility and understanding that different people have different circumstances.

Maybe there should be an attempt to create more flexible work times, after-hour events where people can ask questions in accessible community spaces such as libraries, churches, mosques, or community halls. One thing that must also be highlighted is creating accessible circumstances for carers to get involved and engaged with political matters. Hosting events somewhere with childcare available, or some provisions by Parliament may make this possible.

Bring the Parliament to the people

Question 7. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

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We also think that it would be beneficial for MSPs to find more ways to hear from people, without relying solely on office appointments.

There could be a travelling exhibit that showcases the work of the Scottish Parliament in smaller communities, where people can ask questions and there are interactive ways to participate for children and young people.

To reach people effectively, there must be good lines of communication and there needs to be an effort to meet people where they are. This does not mean creating entirely new means of connection; but rather building on already existing venues, exhibitions, and community spaces to increase the likelihood of engagement.

Create a system such as a webpage where people can register and be notified about opportunities to engage

Question 8. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens welcome this recommendation, however, we do not think that this should be built from scratch. We think it may be useful for MSPs to reach out to local organisations, centres, and community spaces to ask what works best for the communities they work with.

The current website can be very confusing and hard to navigate without guidance or support.

The Scottish Parliament can also make use of established communications channels to send important information out.

Consultations like this one could be included in newsletters of organisations that do participatory work, so there is a regular and consistent system of information-sharing being built.

Engagement activities promoted by the Scottish Parliament should also be brought in local places like schools, libraries, sport clubs and religious spaces.

Give Presiding Officer power compel MSPs to answer questions

Question 9. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens think that this recommendation should be given priority.

Ensuring there will be an answer when a question is asked, means that people across Scotland can understand without filters what is working and what is not working, and with time this will create a culture of trust towards MSPs and the role of the Scottish Parliament.

If a question requires more time and resources to be answered, then a written answer within an established time-limit should be provided.

This system will encourage individuals to ask questions through their elected representatives, which means they will pay more attention to Parliamentary Business.

Schedule specific time in the debating Chamber for individual public questions to be asked.

Question 10. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens considers this a priority that should be seriously considered as an option.

Current rules to ask questions in the Chamber make it incredibly complicated for individuals to ask questions and it discourages them from engagement.

This would need to be accessible and inclusive, and also designed in a way that fosters constructive communication between members of the public and MSPs.

Inquiry into curriculum and C&YP's awareness of Parliament

Question 11. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens believe that children and young people should learn about the different levels of governance from an early age.

That can be a way to foster a culture in which people feel they belong in places of power, such as the Scottish Parliament, and that they can play an active role in how decisions are taken on their behalf.

Highlight real life stories of engagement to improve trust

Question 12. What action do we need to take to deliver this recommendation?

Response

JustCitizens welcomes this recommendation and we believe it would be incredibly powerful and insightful to get to hear directly from MSPs about their work, their real challenges and achievements.

But also they could discuss how they decided to work for the Scottish Parliament and highlight different paths that young people could take if they were interested in a similar career path.