Business in the Parliament

Workshop 1: Business, the Parliament and the Government: working together

Suggested questions for discussion

- In what ways do businesses engage with the institutions of Parliament and Government? Can we think of examples?
- What are the benefits for Scotland’s economy in encouraging more collaboration?
- How can Parliament and Government better communicate with the business community? And vice versa?
- The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee has at times found it a challenge to interact with businesses, particularly SMEs. How can we overcome that?
- The Scottish Government has done a lot of work on empowering communities. Should we be looking at how to empower the business community?
- When does informing the democratic process become influencing and influencing become lobbying? Are the boundaries of legitimacy clearly defined? What is the ethical and legislative framework?

Overview

This workshop will look at business awareness of the work and relevance of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government, the potential economic benefits of better collaboration, communication and interaction between the business community and those institutions, the question of supporting and encouraging business participation in the work of both, and any downside that engagement may entail.

Policy context

The Parliament’s key principles are accessibility, equality, accountability and the sharing of power between the people of Scotland, parliamentarians and the Scottish Government. Its Public Engagement Strategy for Session 5 sets out the strategic goal of “Promoting engagement and participation to support and strengthen the work of the Parliament and to enhance parliamentary democracy.”

The Commission on Parliamentary Reform, which reported in June 2017, stated one of its aims as “Becoming a leader in public engagement, experimenting with new ways to gather views and evidence and opening up more opportunities for people to become involved, where they want and how they want.”

How business interacts with government was a McKinsey Global Survey published in 2010. Why strong ties between business and government matter, a Guardian article from 2016, concludes: “Rather than pretending that this symbiotic relationship doesn't exist or, worse, that it isn't necessary, both business and government must err on the side of transparency … in our fear of allowing the relationship to go too far, we risk not allowing it to go far enough.”
The Parliament is preparing for implementation of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016, legislation making provisions for the creation of a Lobbying Register; the timing of which means this will become a live issue next year. Draft Parliamentary Guidance was made available to stakeholders on 7 September.

What the Scottish Government does

As the devolved government for Scotland, the SG has a range of responsibilities which include: health, education, justice, rural affairs, housing and the environment. Some powers are reserved to the UK government and include: immigration, the constitution, foreign policy and defence.

What the Parliament does

The main functions of the Scottish Parliament are:

- to hold the Scottish Government to account through oral and written questions, and through scrutiny of its policies in the committees;
- to make laws on devolved matters by examining, amending and voting on bills;
- to debate important topical issues; and
- to conduct inquiries and publish reports.

The difference between Government and Parliament

The relationship between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government is similar to that between the UK Parliament at Westminster and the UK Government i.e. between a legislature and an executive. The Scottish Parliament comprises all 129 elected Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). It's the law-making body for devolved matters. The Scottish Government is the government in Scotland for devolved matters and, as such, it is responsible for defining and implementing policy in these areas. It is headed by the First Minister and is made up of those MSPs who have been appointed by the First Minister as Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers.

How laws are made

For Scottish Government Bills, the legislative process begins with the formulation of policy. If it is decided that primary legislation is required to implement the policy, a Bill will need to be developed. The Government will consult widely before legislation is put before the Parliament, probably both on the policy proposals and later also on a draft Bill. Parliamentary Committees will still expect to take evidence on Bills, however, no matter how extensive the Executive's consultations have been.

The usual parliamentary process for a bill consists of three stages:

Stage 1 - consideration of the general principles of the bill by parliamentary committee(s), and a debate and decision on these by the Parliament.

Stage 2 - detailed consideration of the bill by parliamentary committee(s). Two days before a bill is considered in committee, the clerks prepare a Marshalled List of amendments, which is posted on the bill’s web page.
Stage 3 - final consideration of the bill by the Parliament and a decision on whether it should be passed or rejected.

How Parliament works and how to get involved

The Parliament’s webpage has a useful FAQ page on the workings of the Parliament and outlines how you can engage with its work, whether by:

- contacting an MSP;
- responding to a committee inquiry;
- joining a cross-party group; or
- submitting or signing a petition.

You could also speak to an MSP about amendments to a bill during its passage through the Parliament, or make your views known on an issue via a representative body such as the CBI or FSB.

Some examples of engagement

Your Parliament, Your Voice, the recent report of The Commission on Parliamentary Reform states “There are many examples of committees undertaking innovative and successful engagement activities. Two examples from session 4 give a flavour of some of the approaches. The Equal Opportunities Committee’s work into Age and Social Isolation included a ceilidh held on Islay to meet and hear people’s views on loneliness. As part of its inquiry into the decision making around whether to take children into care, the Education and Culture Committee worked with Who Cares? Scotland to facilitate the involvement of young people in care. This culminated in a conference for young people and social work and care providers to develop policy recommendations. It began with a short play from young people about their experiences of being in care”.

In June this year the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee published its No Small Change: The Economic Potential of Closing the Gender Pay Gap report, the culmination of an inquiry that drew on evidence from experts in industry, charities, trade unions, trade organisations, enterprise agencies and the public sector, as well as contributions from individuals who expressed via social media why closing the gender pay gap mattered to them.

The Business in the Parliament Conference is itself an example of engagement, this being the 11th occasion businesses and parliamentarians have gathered together in Holyrood. This is the 11th such conference since its inception in 2004 and keynote speakers since 2004 have included: the current First Minister and her two predecessors, Rosemary Eribé (ERIBÉ knitwear), Lesley Eccles (FanDuel), Jayne-Anne Gadhia (Virgin Money), Ross McEwan (RBS), Sir Tom Hunter, Rupert Soames (Aggreko), Susan Rice (Lloyds TSB Scotland), Jim McColl (Clyde Blowers), Mary Dickson (First ScotRail), Adam Crozier (Royal Mail) and Iain McMillan (CBI Scotland).

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