



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

A Parliament for All:

Report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit

Pàrlamaid do na h-Uile:

Aithisg Sgrùdadh Gnè-mhothachail na Pàrlamaid

March 2023

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Executive Summary

The concept of a 'Gender Sensitive Parliament' is recognised internationally and resulted from research that showed women's representation in Parliaments was not reflective of their representation in society and that they were denied real power in those Parliaments.

The Scottish Parliament has carried out what is known as a 'gender sensitive audit' of its rules, practices and culture and this report makes a number of recommendations to address the issues highlighted by this audit.

Change is needed but it is not going to happen overnight or without political commitment, so there are a mixture of short, medium and longer term recommendations. It is also important to note that assessing a Parliament for its 'gender sensitivity' is not a one-off event. Progress needs to be monitored, data needs to be analysed on an on-going basis, and further changes made.

Key recommendation

Our key recommendation to make sure this report is not an end in itself but a catalyst for change is:

Recommendation 1

To create and resource a Scottish Parliament Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, tasked by the Presiding Office to oversee the delivery of the report's recommendations and the Parliament's progress towards gender sensitivity, including through commissioning further research where appropriate (and as detailed in later recommendations). This Group will provide the ongoing ownership of the recommendations to ensure not only that these recommendations are implemented, but that there is continuous review, revision and improvement. This will involve monitoring, assessing and enhancing the recommendations through an intersectional lens.

Gender Sensitising Procedures and Processes

We have made recommendations designed to ensure the appropriate embedding of 'gender sensitivity'.

Recommendation 2

The Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to consolidate the various internationally recognised Gender Sensitive Parliament guidelines, standards and criteria (in particular those from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) to guide and support the work of the Group in ensuring the Parliament makes progress towards becoming gender sensitive.

Recommendation 3

The Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to commission further research into the following areas:

- To consider whether, in addition to what Standing Orders and policies already allow for and further to the recommendations made here, anything else requires to be done to replicate maternity/paternity/parental leave provisions for MSPs and to examine whether there are further measures that could make the Parliament more 'family friendly'
- Examine MSP job-share, drawing on international practices, and recent developments in this direction in Wales
- In recognition of the need to look at issues on an intersectional basis, there should be a disability audit of the parliamentary estate

Recommendation 4

To secure political buy-in to accelerate efforts towards enhancing gender sensitivity in the Parliament, the Parliamentary Bureau should propose the scheduling of a parliamentary debate on this Audit report. In addition, there could be endorsement through a public statement which is supported by all party leaders (akin to what was done with the zero-tolerance statement on sexual harassment).

Recommendation 5

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is asked to consider whether, in light of its experience of operating under its expanded remit, it is able to give sufficient prominence to the equalities aspect of its remit and if not, whether it will consider proposing the establishment of a sub-committee.

Equal Representation

The following recommendations are designed to ensure equal representation, recognising the distinct roles of the Parliament and political parties.

Recommendation 6

The Equalities Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee to consider holding an evidence session on MSP candidate diversity. Such a session could be with the party leader and/or individual(s) who have responsibility for selection procedures for each party, and take place following an election, mid-session, and one year prior to an election. The evidence session could:

- Detail and account for the diversity of its candidates and elected MSPs; (NB. Diversity here refers to protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act. Parties are strongly encouraged to also include data referring to Parental Status (motherhood and fatherhood))
- Detail the formal rules of party recruitment/selection procedures for elected office and internal party positions
- Outline a plan of action to improve the representativeness of both candidates and MSPs at the subsequent election.

Recommendation 7

The SPCB should produce a video package, similar to what was produced in the previous Parliamentary session, to assist parties in appealing to underrepresented groups. In doing this, improvements made as a result of this Audit should be highlighted.

Recommendation 8

The SPCB and Members should continue to participate in internship schemes and the SPCB should also produce a video package to highlight the different jobs there are within the Parliament (both working for parties and for the Parliament itself) and work with community groups and organisations to publicise this.

Recommendation 9

SPICe to update and extend existing MSP¹/Candidate Diversity data, analysis and information

- Issue diversity data monitoring form to all MSPs and repeat this at the start of each session
- Explore the presentation of publicly accessible, longitudinal and intersectional diversity data on MSPs, ensuring the gathering, collation and any publication of

¹ Currently MSP data shows number of men and number of women only

such information and complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data

Recommendation 10

SPICe to explore the creation and presentation of new MSP/Candidate diversity data (ensuring it complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data)

- To include information from the fielding of a 'parents and carers' in parliament survey (see [Annex B](#) as an example of such a survey)
- To include information identified in any new disability audit (see recommendation that the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group commission a disability audit of the Parliament).

Recommendation 11

SPICe to introduce the collection and analysis of MSP 'exit' data (ensuring it complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data)

- To hold interviews with MSPs who have announced they are voluntarily standing down from the Parliament
- To survey all MSPs no longer in Parliament following each Holyrood election.
- To present to the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to review the main themes arising from this work

Equal Participation

We are recommending a mixture of data collection and rule changes to ensure equal participation in parliamentary business

Recommendation 12

SPICe to track and report on the gender balance, in respect of:

- Committee membership
- Convenerships
- Party spokespeople
- Cross-party Groups

Recommendation 13

The Business Team to work towards tracking and systematically monitoring and publishing intersectional chamber participation data

- Questions (by type, including FMQs)
- Debates
- Statements
- Interventions

Recommendation 14

The SPPA committee to consider these statistics (from Recommendation 13) biennially, and develop new rules and/or conventions to rebalance participation, where there is evidence of inequalities of participation

Recommendation 15

The Business Team to collect and publish data on the predictability of decision and sitting times and to analyse the causes and consequences of any unpredictability for (i) MSPs; (ii) Staff; and (iii) visitors, including any changes linked to remote/hybrid participation.

Recommendation 16

The Parliamentary Bureau to review decision and sitting time data (in Sept 2023), and determine what changes will be made to limit unpredictability of sitting times and maximise inclusion and wellbeing.

Recommendation 17

If there continue to be issues regarding predictability and family friendliness, following the review by the Parliamentary Bureau, the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, as part of its monitoring role, could consider whether further work may need to be done (including proposing that the SPPA committee investigate formal rule change).

Recommendation 18

The SPPA Committee to propose amendments to Standing Orders to specify there should be a minimum of 40% women, for

- SPCB

- Parliamentary Bureau
- Committee Convenerships.

Recommendation 19

The SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a rule that there should be no single sex committees and to consider and agree, when ruling out such parliamentary committees, whether the rule should refer to: (i) a 40% minimum for women; (ii) a minimum % based on the numbers of women 'available' for committees (ie, excluding Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, party leaders and Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers or (ii) the overall number of women in the Scottish Parliament.

Recommendation 20

Following agreement of recommendation 19, the SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a rule that where parties either elect or appoint more than one member to a committee the party's membership must be mixed.

Recommendation 21

The SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a formal quota for Presiding Officer/DPOs - at least one man and one woman. This recognises existing experience, and by formalising an existing Scottish Parliament norm, protects and further legitimises this for the future.

Parliamentary culture

We have made a series of recommendations designed to deliver a more inclusive culture which is needed if change is to be made and sustained.

Recommendation 22

When the trial period of a proxy voting scheme, agreed to by the Parliament is concluded, the SPPA Committee should propose a permanent Standing Order rule to introduce a proxy voting scheme for (i) parental leave; (ii) illness; (iii) caring/bereavement leave; (iv) on same grounds as remote voting.

A proxy voting scheme should recognise that it is (i) up to parents to determine whether they wish to use a proxy vote or to use remote voting when on parental leave, as the

former enables them to take leave that more closely resembles the form of parental leave available in other workplaces; and (ii) that it is for the MSP to determine who the proxy goes to.

Recommendation 23

The SPCB to add an explicit statement to the Members Expenses scheme regarding parental leave as a basis for claims to additional expenses. The scheme currently allows reimbursement for additional staff to cover 'long-term leave', but does not directly reference parental leave; such a revision should also address the question of MSPs' leave as fathers/second parents.

Recommendation 24

The SPCB/SPPA Committee/Bureau as appropriate in consultation, with party leaders, to agree that MSPs taking parental leave will, on their return to parliament, be expected to be able to continue in their pre-leave Committee and party leadership posts and that there should be no expectation that MSPs taking parental leave will resign from bodies such as the SPCB. In relation to the SPCB, Standing Orders should be changed to allow for an 'acting' SPCB member along similar lines to the rule change that allowed for acting Conveners.

Recommendation 25

The Presiding Officer should, at the start of each Parliamentary session, restate the Parliament's commitment to zero tolerance of sexist behaviour and sexual harassment, as contained in the Sexual Harassment and Sexist Behaviour Policy.

Recommendation 26

The SPPA Committee to consider whether complaints against MSPs related to bullying and harassment should be referred to an independent panel rather than to the SPPA Committee following investigation by the Ethical Standards Commissioner.

Recommendation 27

The Presiding Officer's guidance to MSPs should be revised to make explicit reference to avoiding discriminatory language in relation to someone's personal characteristics.

Recommendation 28

The SPCB, working with the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, and a group of MSPs from historically under-represented/marginalised groups and external experts, should update CPD provisions and enhance induction to include issues raised by this Gender Sensitive Audit; sexual harassment/bullying and social media violence; and buddying schemes

Recommendation 29

The Presiding Officer or their Deputy to set up and convene a Women's Forum open to all women MSPs. The purpose would be for women to discuss issues of mutual interest and to provide a support network. The Forum would also be part of the overall embedding of work of this Board by feeding in its views on progress to the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group

Recommendation 30

SPICe to survey MSPs on their experience of:

- Committee membership, Convenership, and Party leadership opportunities
- New MSP socialization
- Gender and diversity inappropriate behaviour, including microaggressions
- Perceptions of gender sensitivity and inclusion, including childcare provision

Gender Equality Mainstreaming

A gender sensitive parliament is not just about who participates, but also how they participate and with what outcomes. We have made recommendations designed to embed gender mainstreaming throughout the work of the Parliament. These should only be seen as the start of this process and there is a lot more work to do.

Recommendation 31

SPICe and Committee office should commission the following pieces of qualitative research (e.g., academic fellowship) to assist in looking at where specific improvements need to be made:

- to investigate equalities knowledge/skills of MSPs and barriers to improvements including access to guidance, expertise and training, accountability, and capacity issues.

- to examine the gender sensitivity of legislation (using examples from this Parliamentary session) and make recommendations for improvement

Recommendation 32

That the Conveners Group takes responsibility for progressing, regularly reviewing and revising and improving as appropriate, the mainstreaming agenda as part of its Participation, Diversity and Inclusion strategic priority.

Recommendation 33

That the Conveners Group, working with gender experts external to the Parliament, provides a set of principles and 'best practice' guide/s for gender equality policy making, budgeting and scrutiny (drawing on international best practice), and makes this available to all MSPs and clerks of committees, and revises the Guidance on Committees to extend information and best practice guidelines on gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. This could be supplemented by training on these specific issues as core competencies for Committees. Such guidance should encourage Committees to use existing powers to appoint experts to support their work.

Recommendation 34

SPICe and Committee Office should publish annually committee witness diversity data.

Introduction

1. In February 2022, the Presiding Officer, Alison Johnstone MSP, announced that the Scottish Parliament would conduct a 'Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit'. This Audit would look at the participation and representation of women MSPs, and examine the ways in which, and extent to which, Parliament's representation, advocacy, and scrutiny work reflects wider societal inequalities.

Gender Sensitive Parliament Audits: An International Democratic Standard

2. A 2001 Report by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)² established that, across Commonwealth parliaments, women lacked representation equal to their presence in the wider population and that women MPs were denied 'real' power within their parliaments. The CPA Report stressed the importance of national and international 'political commitment' to gender sensitive parliaments change.
3. In the 2010s, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) undertook extensive research on gender sensitive parliaments that gained significant international traction.³ The IPU developed a framework and self-assessment toolkit that parliaments could use to determine their 'gender sensitivity'. It also collated good practices from a range of diverse parliaments. The IPU works with seven criteria for a gender sensitive parliament:
 - Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures
 - Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context
 - Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work
 - Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of Members – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities
 - Acknowledges and builds on the contributions made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality

² Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (2001) *Gender Sensitising Commonwealth Parliaments*. For discussion of this document, <https://www.cpahq.org/media/s20j1lws/cwp-gender-sensitizing-guidelines.pdf>

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011) *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*. Geneva: IPU; Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012) *Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments*. Geneva: IPU. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit*. Geneva: IPU.

- Encourages political parties to take a pro-active role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality
 - Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.
4. Today, the concept of a gender sensitive parliament has become an international democratic standard. Most recently in October 2022, the IPU reconfirmed its commitment. The ‘Kigali Declaration’ outlines renewed goals for the next decade.⁴ This intervention builds on other recent interventions including: the CPA’s 2020 GSP Standards; the UN Women’s 2020 GSP Covid Primer; as well as regional guidelines, tools, and frameworks by organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).⁵ An audit operates to determine how ‘gender sensitive’ a Parliament is in terms of its composition, its ways of working, and its outputs.
 5. In undertaking its audit and making more than 30 recommendations in this Report, the Scottish Parliament is joining a growing group of parliaments from around the world evaluating their gender sensitivity, and more importantly still, developing programmes of institutional reform, and providing political leadership and the means to bring about change.

Why a Gender Sensitive Parliament Matters

6. Achieving a ‘gender sensitive parliament’ is about more than making sure there is equality in the Parliament. It is about making sure women share opportunities for substantive participation within the institution once elected, and that gender equality is prioritised and mainstreamed across the work and outcomes of the Parliament.
7. A recent review of the last 20 years of work by international organisations, makes clear the importance and interrelationship between these three goals. A gender sensitive parliament can be best defined as one that ‘values and

⁴ IPU Member Parliaments commit to accelerating gender equality: <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2022-10/ipu-member-parliaments-commit-accelerating-gender-equality> [Accessed 19 November 2022]

⁵ CPA (2020) *Gender Sensitising Parliament Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change*. London: CPA; UN Women (2020) *A Primer for Parliamentary Action: Gender-Sensitive Responses to Covid-19*; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2021) *Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region*. Warsaw: OSCE/ODHIR; EIGE (2019) *Gender equality in national parliaments across the EU and the European Parliament*. Vilnius: EIGE

prioritises gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives.⁶

8. Parliaments are unique institutions. They are both places of democracy and places of work. To deliver the best outcomes for both under-represented groups and for society as a whole, women must be fairly represented, be able to fully participate in parliament, and be centrally involved in decision-making; and equalities must be embedded throughout a parliament’s internal processes of representation, advocacy and scrutiny.
9. Like other high-profile organisations, parliaments can – and should - be role model institutions. When all citizens see themselves included in their parliaments, and when diverse interests are heard and listened to by elected representatives, greater connections between the represented and representatives can be made, leading to better decision making.
10. A Parliament that in its make-up reflects the wider society, can be considered as ‘truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in all its functions’.⁷ Equally, good decision-making, and the processes and the structures that support these, require the mainstreaming of gender equality. Parliaments that are gender sensitive are more equal and effective, and have greater political legitimacy.

The Scottish Parliament’s Record

11. Scotland has a record that bears international comparison: arguments for equal representation were central to wider debates over devolution and embedded into institutional ‘blueprints’ for the new Scottish Parliament, including policies to ensure family-friendliness⁸, an enshrined commitment to equal opportunities, and to mainstreaming equality – including gender equality – across all areas of work, including legislation and policy-making. Of the 129 MSPs elected to the Scottish Parliament for the first time in 1999, 48 were women (37%).

⁶ Childs, S. and Palmieri, S. (2023) ‘Gender Sensitive Parliaments: Feminizing Formal Political Institutions’, in Sawyer, M., Banaszak, L. A., True, J. and J. Kantola (eds) *Handbook of Feminist Governance*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

⁷ http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf

⁸ Language around inclusion in Parliament varies, with some preferring to use broader terms such as ‘people-friendly’ or ‘life friendly’ versus ‘family friendly’. While this report address wider issues of accessibility and inclusion, throughout, it continues to, alongside this, use the language of ‘family friendliness’, reflecting both the specific historical and political context of the Scottish Parliament, as well as the particular issues faced by those with caring responsibilities

12. In advance of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, and amidst wider UK and indeed global concerns about the health of representative democracy and its core institutions, a stocktake of Holyrood's gender sensitivity across all its dimensions is timely. In the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliament elections women made up 37% and 40% of the Parliament respectively – surpassing Westminster at that time, but falling behind Wales. In 2007 the percentage of women reduced to 33%, before increasing slightly once again in 2011 and 2016 to 35%. Of those elected to the Scottish Parliament in 2021, 45%⁹ were women which is the highest figure since devolution. It is important that this progress is maintained and built on.
13. Adopting an intersectional lens however, reinforces caution about overly optimistic or simplistic projections. It was not until 2021 that any women of colour were elected to Holyrood and that we had our first permanent wheelchair user. Similarly, analyses of the mainstreaming of equal opportunities over time highlight a parliamentary track record of taking equal opportunities seriously; whilst also highlighting ongoing challenges to institutionalising a mainstreaming approach, including scope and capacity¹⁰.

The Scottish Parliament Gender Sensitive Parliament Review, Approach and Framework

14. Like other parliaments around the world, the Scottish Parliament is open to reforms that would make it a more representative and more effective institution. The most diverse Scottish Parliament ever provided the best opportunity to date to gather a wider range of views on the gender sensitivity of the Parliament from MSPs with different backgrounds.
15. In spring 2022, the Presiding Officer established a Board to oversee the Audit and to make recommendations for improvement. The Board is chaired by the Presiding Officer and comprises representatives from each political party, academics and experts in the field, and parliamentary officials.
16. The purpose of the Audit was to look at how the Parliament's structures, operations and policies could help promote gender equality in women's participation, and enhance political representation of women and women's interests, in all their diversity. On the basis of the Audit's findings, the Board would make recommendations for sustained improvement.

⁹ Following a resignation, this figure is now 46%

¹⁰ Mackay, F. (2009) 'Travelling the Distance? Equal Opportunities and the Scottish Parliament' in C. Jeffery and J. Mitchell (eds) *The Scottish Parliament 1999-2009: The First Decade*. Hansard Society/Luath Press.

Intersectionality

17. It is hugely important for any gender sensitive parliament review to adopt an intersectional lens. Women are not a homogenous group, but one differentiated by intersecting identities and different experiences. The power of a traditional audit which is largely backward looking and based on the experiences of those already elected, risks missing the experiences of, for example, women of colour or disabled women who are currently under-represented in the Parliament.
18. The commissioned research was designed to examine differences between and within groups, paying particular attention wherever possible to protected characteristics and other inequalities. The Board additionally held an expert evidence session about these issues with a number of key stakeholders at a stand-alone meeting in autumn 2022. A briefing note covering the main themes from the meeting is attached as [Annex D](#).
19. The discussion reinforced the importance of adopting an intersectional lens with regard to all dimensions of a gender sensitive parliament. In particular, it stressed the necessity of recognising that research with current MSPs cannot fully capture the views and experiences of those outwith parliament seeking (or not) to pursue a political career and that barriers are generally increased for those at the intersection of particular protected characteristics.
20. It is clear then that more work needs to be done to fully understand the intersectional barriers to minoritised women's greater participation and representation in Parliament and what is needed to ensure the Parliament's culture, structures, operations and policies work to secure fair and equitable outcomes for all women. This will mean monitoring, assessing and enhancing the success of the recommendations set out in this report through an intersectional lens and making any appropriate changes and additions as required.

A Four-Part Framework

21. The structural framework for the 2022 Scottish Parliament Gender Sensitive Audit was developed and informed by the international frameworks referenced earlier. It looked at four distinct, but inter-related themes:
 1. How do we promote, and what steps do we take, to have equal representation in the Parliament?
 2. How we do promote, and what steps do we take, to have equality in participation in the Parliament?

3. How can the overall culture and policies of the Parliament help with gender equality?
 4. How do we promote, and what steps do we take, to ensure gender equality is mainstreamed into scrutiny and other work?
22. Following an open tendering process, the Board commissioned Dr Fiona McKay, from Robert Gordon University to conduct the Audit and we would like to thank Dr McKay for her commitment and hard work in producing her thorough Audit. It can be found at [Annex C](#).
23. Dr McKay analysed the number and positions of women parliamentarians; the extent of women's participation in parliamentary business; the details of parliamentary policies and procedures and their impact; the role of women in political parties; and how gender is mainstreamed into parliamentary processes and outputs. She also explored women's experiences, attitudes, and opinions of the Parliament through a number of formal semi-structured interviews with women who are either current or former Members. Wherever possible, where data was available, Dr McKay's analysis was conducted through an intersectional lens.
24. Given the purpose of the Audit was to look at how the Parliament's structures, operations and policies can promote gender equality in representation and the participation of women Members, and the Parliament's attention to gender equality, the focus was on Members and not on SPCB staff and the Parliament as an employer. Nor was the Audit designed to look at public participation and engagement. The Parliament is already undertaking work in these areas.^{11 12}
25. Similarly, the focus of the Audit is on reforms that will deliver more diversity amongst MSPs, and enhance the political representation of women. How different groups of women get into politics in the first place is hugely important and there is extensive research - globally and in Scotland and the UK - identifying the barriers to women seeking elected office.¹³ Both party-specific and non-partisan initiatives (such as Elect Her, previously known as the Parliament Project, and 50:50 Parliament) provide practical support to women who wish to pursue a political career.
26. The Audit and this report acknowledges the critical role of parties as key 'gatekeepers' to political office, but both focus on how the Parliament, as an institution, can encourage and support a greater diversity amongst MSPs

¹¹ [Equality diversity and inclusion | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

¹² [Public Engagement Strategy \(parliament.scot\)](#)

¹³ See for example, Kenny, M. and Mackay, F. (2020) 'Women, Gender and Politics in Scotland' in M. Keating (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Scottish Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Childs, S. (2008) *Women and British Party Politics*. London: Routledge; Kittilson, M.C. (2006) *Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

through its ways of working and culture. Changes in parliamentary practices and infrastructure, in turn, may have positive impacts on the supply of candidates from under-represented groups seeking selection by political parties.

Reforming Institutions: Understanding Change

27. Changes in a parliament's formal rules and procedures are often necessary to bring about attitudinal and behavioural change. But it is also important to recognise that, at the same time, formal rule change does not automatically change cultures and ways of working. Finding out whether there has been a change in culture over time requires research and survey work and it also requires monitoring, maintenance and adjustment of new gender sensitive parliament rules and reforms over time.

28. This report:

- suggests reforms that address the findings of the Audit in terms of participation, representation, and parliamentary outcomes
- identifies who should be responsible for particular reforms and recommendations;
- outlines areas for ongoing data collection, research and monitoring; and
- provides for new processes to ensure that this report does not remain on the shelf, but is a living document driving institutional change in the short-, medium- and longer-term.

Main Audit Findings

The Audit highlighted that:

- There have been fluctuations over time in the number of women in leadership and decision-making roles - for example on the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB), in the Parliamentary Bureau and in committee convenerships. This suggests that equal representation of women and men is not embedded within the Parliament, nor is it guaranteed going forward.
- The number of women and men on committees does not always reflect the balance of women and men in the Parliament. Men tend to be over-represented in a number of mandatory committees, such as those dealing with Finance, Audit, Standards and Procedures and Delegated Powers. The one mandatory committee where women tend to be over-represented is the committee responsible for Equalities (currently the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee).
- Data collected over a four month period showed the level of participation by women in parliamentary business in the Chamber is broadly equivalent to the percentage of women in the Parliament. However, women tend to make fewer contributions during First Minister's Questions (FMQs) and are less likely to intervene in debates.
- Further analysis of interventions shows that men are more likely to have their interventions accepted (both by other men and by women). More information is set out below.
- There is a desire for further support for Members, building on existing induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes particularly around parliamentary norms and culture.
- While there appear to be positive shifts in terms of attitudes towards women in politics, women MSPs still encounter sexism in what is said to them and how they are perceived
- There were mixed attitudes about the sitting patterns and the policies of the Parliament being 'family-friendly'. The retention of hybrid and remote systems was seen as increasing flexibility and access, including for those with caring responsibilities.
- There is good work being done by Members and parliamentary staff in mainstreaming equalities in scrutiny but the extent to which it is fully embedded and reviewed appears to be more ad hoc, and there may be scope to make improvements.
- Having more equal representation of Members across all committees can help with this, as can ensuring more diversity of witnesses appearing before

committees. A lot of good work has been done to increase witness diversity but this can be further developed.

- Data – and better data – need continually to be collected, monitored and reviewed. Ensuring more publicly available and accessible data ensures more accountability

MSP Interventions

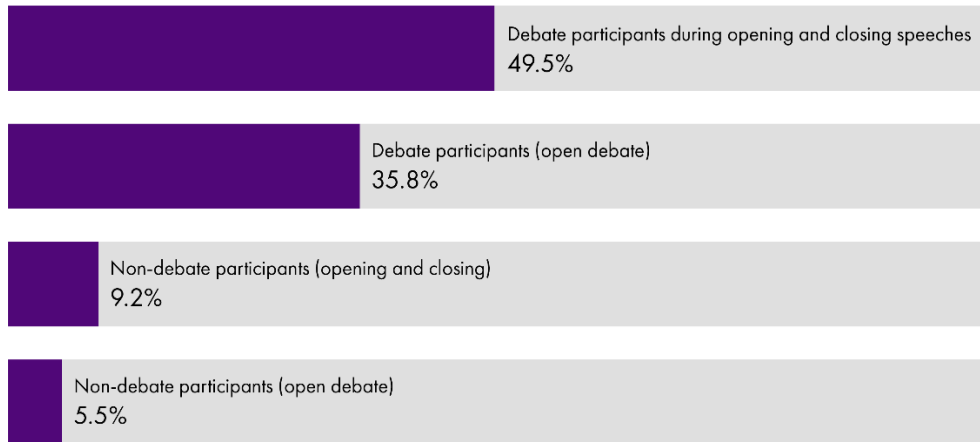
29. In a separate exercise over a six-week period between April and June 2022 “real-time” data was captured on the number of attempted interventions, the number of interventions accepted and not accepted and the gender split of data.

Interventions by type

30. In the period observed, there were 293 interventions made, with more interventions requests made during opening and closing speeches at 172 (58.7%) than during the open debate with 121 (41.3%). Opening and closing speakers tend to be spokespeople for the relevant subject area or Scottish Government ministers who are either setting out the propositions to be debated or responding to the debate. By far the majority of interventions came from Members who were speaking in a debate at 250 (85.3%). By contrast, only 43 (14.7%) intervention attempts were made by Members who were present in the Chamber but were not listed by their parties as ‘active’ participants in the debate. The debates that took place during the sample period were a variety of: Scottish government debates (including debates on legislation introduced by the Scottish Government), opposition debates and committee debates.

31. This is shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1, Interventions by type of speaker

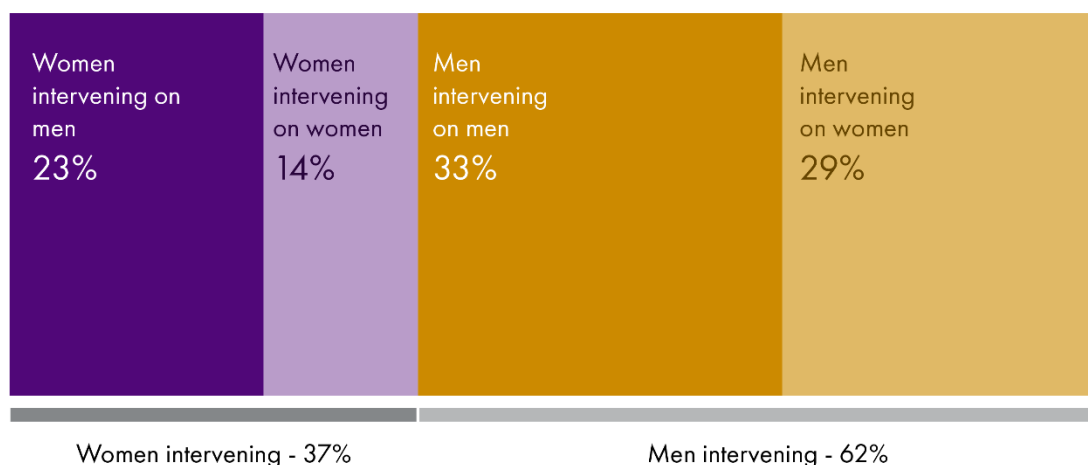


*Figures may not sum due to rounding

Interventions by women and men

32. Of the 293 interventions, 110 were made by women (37.5%) and 183 were made by men (62.5%). This shows that women are making fewer interventions compared to the overall representation in the Parliament (45%).
33. Figure 2 below splits this down further, showing that of the interventions made by men, 33% were interventions made on other men and 29% were made on women's contributions. The split for women was that 14% of their interventions were on other women with the remaining 23% being interventions on men's contributions.

Figure 2, Interventions by Women and Men



* Figures may not sum due to rounding

34. Breaking this down further to those which are accepted and not accepted, Table 1 shows interventions accepted and not accepted by gender.

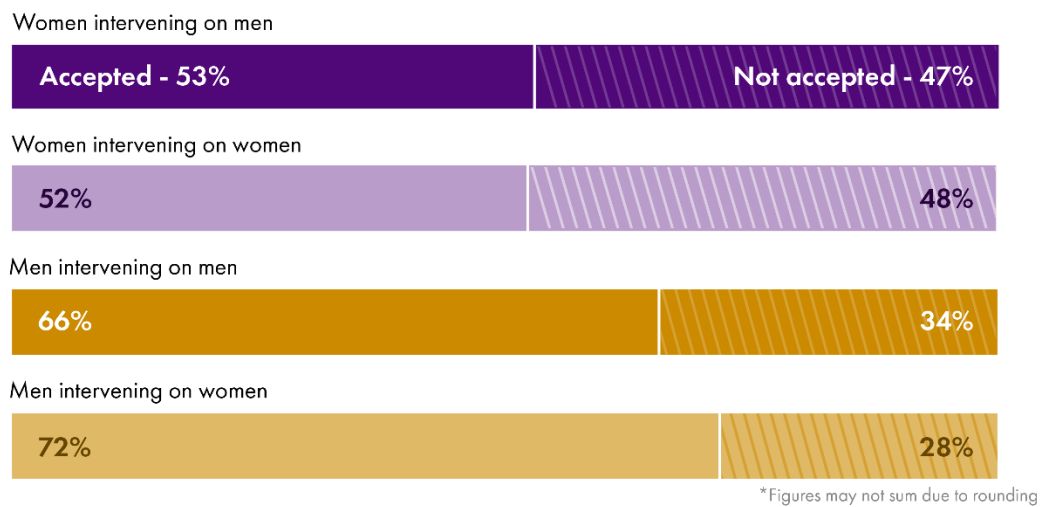
Table 1, Interventions of Women and Men Members

	Number of interventions	Not accepted	Not accepted (%)	Accepted	Accepted (%)
Women intervening on men	68	32	47.1%	36	53.7%
Women intervening on women	42	20	47.6%	22	52.4%
Total women's interventions	110	52	47.3%	58	52.7%
Men intervening on men	98	33	33.7%	65	66.3%
Men intervening on women	85	24	28.2%	61	71.8%
Total men's interventions	183	57	31.1%	126	68.9%

35. Table 1 above shows that men are more likely to have their interventions accepted (68.9%), than women (52.7%). This finding applies to women – who are more likely to accept men’s interventions (71.8% acceptance rate) than interventions by women (52.4% acceptance rate). It also applies to men – who are more likely to accept men’s interventions (66.3% acceptance rate) than interventions by women (53.7% acceptance rate).

36. This is further illustrated by the following Figure:

Figure 3: Accepted and Not Accepted Interventions



Recommendations

Background

37. This report's recommendations are informed by the Audit's research and findings, and guided by international best practice and lesson learning. The report's recommendations are one part of the process of gender sensitising the Scottish Parliament, not the end.
38. Each recommendation is cross-referenced to one of the four gender sensitive parliament dimensions as set out in Dr McKay's Audit. This will aid overall monitoring of implementation and outcomes in the future.
- Equal Representation (D1)
 - Equality in Participation in Parliament (D2)
 - Culture and Policies in Parliament (D3)
 - Gender Equality Mainstreaming (D4)
39. A fifth dimension has been added, critical to gender sensitising the institution, i.e., through leadership, oversight, and accountability.
- Gender Sensitising Procedures and Processes (D5)
40. Recommendations are also linked to named, lead responsible actors to ensure implementation. These may be individuals and/or internal groups or bodies.
41. It is, of course, for those who have been identified to take forward the recommendations, and ultimately the Parliament as an institution, to determine the scope, priorities, and timing of the implementation of the report's recommendations. Accordingly, this report does not rank reforms in any order of priority, seeing them more as mutually-reinforcing. Indeed, some recommendations provide for more than one potential solution, and leaves it to others to determine the most appropriate intervention.
42. There are a mixture of short, medium and longer-term recommendations. We also acknowledge that refinement and/or revisions of these recommendations may be needed over time, not least as new data and experiences come to light, or new issues emerge. Similarly, we recognise because it was not feasible to undertake a full audit within the timescales and with the available data, that some recommendations require additional research. This underlines once again, the need for continuous work on the gender sensitive parliament agenda to ensure sustained progress.

Dimension 5, Gender Sensitising Procedures and Processes

Overarching Recommendation (D5)

43. Experience shows that gender sensitive parliament reforms rarely ‘just happen’. A gender sensitive audit is only ever the first step to take on the path to substantive, corrective reforms. Once recommendations are published, the key to successfully gender sensitising a parliament lies in there being ongoing ownership of the recommendations to ensure they are implemented and built on. This principle is critical and follows international best practice.
44. It is, therefore, not only important to set out recommendations for change, but also to set out how that agenda is going to be implemented and what processes and bodies will be put in place to instigate institutional change.
45. A number of different actors, individuals, groups, and bodies, have responsibility for taking forward the recommendations, for example, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee, the Parliamentary Bureau and the SPCB.
46. In the same way as the Audit’s cross-party board was set up by the Presiding Officer to undertake research and develop recommendations, it is necessary for there to be a new body to oversee the implementation of this report’s recommendations. This new group of cross party MSPs will provide leadership and monitor progress over time, and ensure that further changes are taken forward where necessary, always learning from global best practice such as that captured by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
47. The first, and overarching, recommendation derived from the 2022 Gender Sensitive Audit of the Scottish Parliament is for the creation of an Advisory Group that would take overall ownership of the Audit and this report, overseeing the delivery of the report’s recommendations and thus the Parliament’s progress towards gender sensitivity. This recommendation follows international best practice. Additionally, the Board is aware of the recommendation to the Parliament from the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls to set up an equality focused review body. The recommendation below, together with recommendations on mainstreaming later in this report, would fulfil a similar purpose.

Recommendation 1

To create and resource a Scottish Parliament Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, tasked by the Presiding Office to oversee the delivery of the report’s recommendations and the Parliament’s progress towards gender

sensitivity, including through commissioning further research where appropriate (and as detailed in later recommendations). This Group will provide the ongoing ownership of the recommendations to ensure not only that these recommendations are implemented, but that there is continuous review, revision and improvement. This will involve monitoring, assessing and enhancing the recommendations through an intersectional lens.

48. This Advisory Group should be composed of MSPs from across the parties, who are committed to gender equality within the Parliament and should include one or more external gender equality and gender and parliament advisors, with expertise across participation, representation, institutional change, and mainstreaming.

49. There are a number of different parliamentary bodies which will have responsibility for the recommendations in the report and there are a number of recommendations that the Parliament as a whole must agree to (such as changes to the Standing Orders). The Advisory Group would not cut across the decision-making role of the appropriate bodies. Its role will be to have oversight across all of the recommendations in this report, to monitor progress and to provide a challenge function to the relevant decision-makers. The Advisory Group should put together an implementation plan with designed-in review and reporting points.

Individual Recommendations (D5)

50. The following recommendations are also the responsibility of the Advisory Group and reinforce its key role in ensuring the development of a medium- and longer-term agenda.

Recommendation 2

The Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to consolidate the various internationally recognised Gender Sensitive Parliament guidelines, standards and criteria (in particular those from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association)¹⁴ to guide and support the work of the Group in ensuring the Parliament makes progress towards becoming gender sensitive.

¹⁴ Examples include:

[CPA 2020 guidelines](#), CPA 2022 field guide, IPU Kigali Declaration 2022, [IPU plan of action](#), [IPU toolkit](#), [IPU best practices](#), [OSCE ODHIR 2022](#)

Recommendation 3

The Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to commission further research into the following areas:

- To consider, in addition to what Standing Orders and policies already allow for and further to recommendations made here, whether anything else requires to be done to replicate maternity/paternity/parental leave provisions for MSPs and to examine whether there are further measures that could make the Parliament more ‘family friendly’¹⁵
- To examine MSP job-share, drawing on international practices, and recent developments in this direction in Wales
- In recognition of the need to look at issues on an intersectional basis, commission a disability audit of the parliamentary estate

51. If the establishment of a Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, as set out above, is key to the Parliament implementing the necessary changes, it is also critical there is demonstrable political buy-in from parliamentary and party leaders, and MSPs to the report’s recommendations.

Recommendation 4

To secure political buy-in to accelerate efforts towards enhancing gender sensitivity in the Parliament, the Parliamentary Bureau should propose the scheduling of a parliamentary debate on this Audit report. In addition, there could be endorsement through a public statement which is supported by all party leaders (akin to what was done with the zero-tolerance statement on sexual harassment).

52. Since its inception, the Parliament has recognised the importance of equalities and it is one of the reasons why, under Standing Orders, a committee must be established to consider equalities issues. It was later modified at the Committee’s own instigation in March 2020 to include human rights (human rights having been incorporated into the remit of the Equalities Committee in session 5 but not having been required under Standing Orders). Following a proposal by the Bureau, in the current session of the Parliament, the Committee’s remit now also includes ‘civil justice’.

53. While equalities should be mainstreamed into the work of all committees (and further recommendations are made later in this report), the Equalities Committee will always have a specific and enhanced role to play. This is made even more important in light of the Gender Sensitive Audit.

¹⁵ Language around inclusion in Parliament varies, with some preferring to use broader terms such as ‘people-friendly’ or ‘life friendly’ versus ‘family friendly’. While this report address wider issues of accessibility and inclusion, throughout, it continues to, alongside this, use the language of ‘family friendliness’, reflecting both the specific historical and political context of the Scottish Parliament, as well as the particular issues faced by those with caring responsibilities

54. The Board is acutely aware that it is for committees themselves to determine their work programme, but it also recognises the size of the committee's remit and whether it is possible to focus to the same extent as previously on equalities issues.

Recommendation 5

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is asked to consider whether, in light of its experience of operating under its expanded remit, it is able to give sufficient prominence to the equalities aspect of its remit and if not, whether it will consider proposing the establishment of a sub-committee

Dimension 1: Equal Representation

55. Political parties in Scotland have adopted different policies to increase the number of women candidates. While the Audit points to the critical role of political parties in enabling or constraining women's access to political office, the focus in the following recommendations is on what Parliament can do, as an institution, to directly encourage more diverse representation.

56. The next recommendation is designed to aide transparency and understanding of party selection processes and representation outcomes.

Recommendation 6

The Equalities Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee to consider holding an evidence session on MSP candidate diversity. Such a session could be with the party leader and/or individual(s) who have responsibility for selection procedures for each party, and take place following an election, mid-session, and one year prior to an election. The evidence session could:

- Detail and account for the diversity of its candidates and elected MSPs; (NB. Diversity here refers to protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act. Parties are strongly encouraged to also include data referring to Parental Status (motherhood and fatherhood))
- Detail the formal rules of party recruitment/selection procedures for elected office and internal party positions
- Outline a plan of action to improve the representativeness of both candidates and MSPs at the subsequent election.

57. In the previous Parliamentary session, the Parliament produced a video highlighting the diversity of politicians and demystifying its practices and procedures. This was done to support people from a variety of backgrounds to consider selection as a parliamentary candidate; showing that different kinds of people are qualified for political office. The aim was for the parties to use

the video to appeal to underrepresented groups before candidate lists were finalised. This initiative should be ongoing to ensure that the public can see changes in representation in the Scottish Parliament, and should involve consultation with expert civil society organisations in order to maximise its reach to under-represented groups.

Recommendation 7

The SPCB should produce a video package, similar to what was produced in the previous Parliamentary session, to assist parties in appealing to underrepresented groups. In doing this, improvements made as a result of this Audit should be highlighted.

58. To help people think about politics and the Parliament as a career, it is important to let people both see what it might be like to work in the Parliament and to gain some real experience of the Parliament. Holyrood has taken part in an internship programme for people with disabilities with Inclusion Scotland, where interns were placed both with Members and within the Parliamentary staff group, which we recommend should continue. Members also participate in a parliamentary internship programme managed by the John Smith Centre.¹⁶ All current internship programmes should provide for gender-balanced cohorts.

Recommendation 8

The SPCB and Members should continue to participate in internship schemes and the SPCB should also produce a video package to highlight the different jobs there are within the Parliament (both working for parties and for the Parliament itself) and work with community groups and organisations to publicise this.

59. It is also important for the Parliament to collect and publish data on the diversity of its elected representatives. This allows progress, or stagnation and fallback, to be monitored over time, providing transparency and an evidence base to show whether further reforms and interventions are needed. This would be accompanied by a communications plan to ensure that Members understand the importance of participation in this voluntary diversity data collection intervention, and are supported to do so.

¹⁶ As an employer, the Parliament took part in a pilot internship programme also run by the John Smith Centre focussed specifically on those from minority ethnic backgrounds

Recommendation 9

SPICe to update and extend existing MSP¹⁷/Candidate Diversity data, analysis and information

- Issue diversity data monitoring form to all MSPs and repeat this at the start of each session
- Explore the presentation of publicly accessible, longitudinal and intersectional diversity data on MSPs, ensuring the gathering, collation and any publication of such information and complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data

Recommendation 10

SPICe to explore the creation and presentation of new MSP/Candidate diversity data (ensuring it complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data)

- To include information from the fielding of a 'parents and carers' in Parliament survey (see [Annex B](#) as an example of such a survey)
- To include information identified in any new disability audit (see recommendation that the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group commission a disability audit of the Parliament).

60. Both quantitative data and qualitative data are critical to providing the fullest and highest quality knowledge about a parliament. For example, while top line quantitative data can confirm progression towards equal representation, it is important also to look at how this is being achieved, what the experiences of Members are, and how this might vary for different groups of women and/or other under-represented groups. Even if there are equal numbers of women and men at any one point in time, it is necessary to establish whether women and men, and which women and men, seek re-election at the same rates, which MSPs have shorter or longer parliamentary careers, and why this might be the case.

Recommendation 11

SPICe to introduce the collection and analysis of MSP 'exit' data (ensuring it complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data)

- To hold interviews with MSPs who have announced they are voluntarily standing down from the Parliament

¹⁷ Currently MSP data shows number of men and number of women only

- To survey all MSPs no longer in Parliament following each Holyrood election.
- To present to the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group to review the main themes arising from this work

Dimension 2: Equality in Participation in Parliament

61. Dr McKay's Audit identified gendered inequalities of participation across a range of parliamentary activities and leadership roles. The associated recommendations are a combination of data collection, monitoring, and rule changes. Data collection and crucially publication are necessary to monitor progress over time, ensure transparency, and to provide an evidence base to determine whether subsequent reforms and interventions might be needed, particularly in respect of currently under-represented groups.

Data collection and review - participation

Recommendation 12

SPICE to track and report on the gender balance, in respect of:

- Committee membership
- Convenerships
- Party spokespeople
- Cross-party Groups

Recommendation 13

The Business Team to work towards tracking and systematically monitoring and publishing intersectional chamber participation data

- Questions (by type, including FMQs)
- Debates
- Statements
- Interventions

Recommendation 14

The SPPA committee to consider these statistics biennially and develop new rules and/or conventions to rebalance participation, where there is evidence of inequalities of participation

Data collection and review – Parliamentary sitting times

62. In parliaments around the world, Members, in common with many other workplaces, often find it difficult to balance their roles with caring responsibilities. The job of an elected politician requires undertaking parliamentary duties alongside constituency and party duties. These different facets of Members' working lives impact on the amount and predictability of working hours and this can be compounded by geographical considerations leading to either long commutes or having to spend days away from family.
63. The Audit highlighted feedback from MSPs who said that the unpredictability of changes to parliamentary business and the moving of decision time had a disproportionate impact on those with caring responsibilities. It is acknowledged that there will be times when Parliament needs to sit for longer to fulfil its scrutiny role, or to sit at short notice due an emergency of some kind.
64. The following recommendations are aimed at collecting and analysing the necessary data to determine whether it is possible to maintain a better work-life balance for MSPs, and to ensure that, when in the Parliament, MSPs can work as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Recommendation 15

The Business Team to collect and publish data on the predictability of decision and sitting times and to analyse the causes and consequences of any unpredictability for (i) MSPs; (ii) Staff; and (iii) visitors, including any changes linked to remote/hybrid participation

Recommendation 16

The Parliamentary Bureau to review decision and sitting time data (in Sept 2023), and determine what changes will be made to limit unpredictability of sitting times and maximise inclusion and well-being

Recommendation 17

If there continue to be issues regarding predictability and family friendliness¹⁸, following the review by the Parliamentary Bureau, the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, as part of its monitoring role, could consider whether

¹⁸ Language around inclusion in Parliament varies, with some preferring to use broader terms such as 'people-friendly' or 'life friendly' versus 'family friendly'. While this report address wider issues of accessibility and inclusion, throughout, it continues to, alongside this, use the language of 'family friendliness', reflecting both the specific historical and political context of the Scottish Parliament, as well as the particular issues faced by those with caring responsibilities

further work may need to be done (including proposing that the SPPA committee investigate formal rule change).

Rule changes to ensure parity on Parliamentary bodies (D2)

65. The recommendations below are designed to address gender balance, particularly in relation to committees and convenerships through formal rule change that, at a minimum, rule out no single-sex committees. Such rule changes would need to be proposed by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee (SPPA Committee) and agreed to by the Parliament and thus, recommendations 18 to 21 are addressed to the SPPA Committee. Given the numerical inequality between women and men in the Scottish Parliament, these recommendations provide for the SPPA Committee to consider the precise make up of any new formal rules and we recognise there are practical issues that will need to be considered, such as how parties will work together to achieve this and making sure women don't have an increased workload as an unintended consequence. Where a 50:50 balance is considered impossible at this time, we recommend that the SPPA Committee adopt the next most ambitious figure or percentage from those set out in the following recommendations.

Recommendation 18

The SPPA Committee to propose amendments to Standing Orders to specify there should be a minimum of 40% women, for

- SPCB
- Parliamentary Bureau
- Committee Convenerships.

Recommendation 19

The SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a rule that there should be no single sex committees and to consider and agree, when ruling out such parliamentary committees, whether the rule should refer to: (i) a 40% minimum for women; (ii) a minimum % based on the numbers of women 'available' for committees (ie, excluding Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, party leaders and Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers or (ii) the overall number of women in the Scottish Parliament.

Recommendation 20

Following agreement of recommendation 19, the SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a rule that where parties either elect or appoint more than one member to a committee the party's membership must be mixed.

Recommendation 21

The SPPA Committee to propose the introduction of a formal quota for Presiding Officer/DPOs - at least one man and one woman. This recognises existing experience, and by formalising an existing Scottish Parliament norm, protects and further legitimises this for the future.

Dimension 3: Culture and Policies in Parliament

Policies and ways of working

66. As outlined above, balancing work and caring responsibilities is a particular area of concern for many MSPs. The SPPA Committee's report published on 7 July 2022 confirmed hybrid arrangements for Chamber and Committees, allowing both Members and witnesses to participate remotely. This continuation of Covid practices gives a welcome element of flexibility for Members.
67. The SPPA Committee's 2022 report also recommended that there should be a pilot scheme trialling proxy voting and Parliament agreed to this on 6 December 2022. This is in addition to the remote voting provision, which has already been introduced. While remote voting provides a certain amount of flexibility in that Members do not have to be present in the Chamber to vote, proxy voting allows Members to replicate aspects of parental leave in that there is no expectation they will be available to vote in such circumstances.
68. The SPPA Committee consulted on how such a scheme would function with a view to proposing a temporary rule which would provide for a scheme that would permit Members, in certain defined circumstances including parental leave and illness, to nominate a proxy.
69. The Committee suggested that such a scheme should be allowed to run for a period of around 12 months, and that any permanent rule changes to provide for proxy voting should only be considered following a full evaluation of the scheme.

70. The Board welcomes this and the recommendations below endorse that position and set out suggestions for the way in which a permanent proxy voting scheme might operate in the future.

Recommendation 22

When the trial period of a proxy voting scheme, agreed to by the Parliament is concluded, the SPPA Committee should propose a permanent Standing Order rule to introduce a proxy voting scheme for (i) parental leave; (ii) illness; (iii) caring/bereavement leave; (iv) on same grounds as remote voting.

A proxy voting scheme should recognise that it is (i) up to parents to determine whether they wish to use a proxy vote or to use remote voting when on parental leave, as the former enables them to take leave that more closely resembles the form of parental leave available in other workplaces; and (ii) that it is for the MSP to determine who the proxy goes to.

71. It should also be noted that at present there is no legal right to parental leave of any kind for people in elected public office. Therefore, the most practical and immediate way of addressing this is by putting together a package of recommendations which go some way towards replicating the principles and provisions of parental leave. There is already a provision in Standing Orders to appoint an Acting Convener where a Convener is likely to be absent for an extended period of maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave.

72. These are further recommendations which, taken together with those above, will help to replicate the principles and provisions of parental leave.

Recommendation 23

The SPCB to add an explicit statement to the Members Expenses scheme regarding parental leave as a basis for claims to additional expenses. The scheme currently allows reimbursement for additional staff to cover 'long-term leave', but does not directly reference parental leave; such a revision should also address the question of MSPs' leave as fathers/second parents.

Recommendation 24

The SPCB/SPPA Committee/Bureau as appropriate in consultation, with party leaders, to agree that MSPs taking parental leave will, on their return to Parliament, be expected to be able to continue in their pre-leave Committee and party leadership posts and that there should be no expectation that MSPs taking parental leave will resign from bodies such as the SPCB. In relation to the SPCB, Standing Orders should be changed to allow for an 'acting' SPCB member along similar lines to the rule change that allowed for acting Conveners.

Culture of respect

73. Dr McKay's Audit documented experiences of 'everyday sexism' embedded in the interactions and behaviour of members, particularly toward newer women, and those at the intersection of multiple protected characteristics.

Recommendations 25-28 will help make the parliamentary culture as inclusive as possible, through a combination of formal rule change, training and capacity building, the provision of support, and additional data gathering.

74. In 2018 the Parliament set up a Joint Working Group to look at how to tackle sexual harassment and sexist behaviour in the Parliament. This led to a new policy that applies to everyone who works in or for the Parliament, and to changes to the MSP Code of Conduct. All party leaders also signed up to a statement of zero tolerance of sexual harassment and sexist behaviour.

Recommendation 25

The Presiding Officer should, at the start of each parliamentary session, restate the Parliament's commitment to zero tolerance of sexist behaviour and sexual harassment, as contained in the Sexual Harassment and Sexist Behaviour Policy.

75. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2020 Gender Sensitive Parliament work provided a 'checklist for parliamentary change'. One of its questions is whether there is 'an independent grievance scheme for those experiencing gendered inappropriate behaviour?'

76. In its report, the Joint Working Group on Sexual Harassment and Sexist Behaviour raised the possibility for complaints of such behaviour to be considered by an independent body rather than the SPPA Committee. This was raised as a matter of principle rather than as a result of any issues with the way in which the SPPA committee has dealt with complaints. Although, when implementing changes arising from the Joint Working Group's recommendations, the previous SPPA Committee did not propose that such complaints should be referred to anyone other than that Committee, it is suggested that the current Committee may wish to look at this again.

Recommendation 26

The SPPA Committee to consider whether complaints against MSPs related to bullying and harassment should be referred to an independent panel rather than to the SPPA Committee following investigation by the Ethical Standards Commissioner.

77. The Presiding Officer issues Guidance on Conduct and this is specifically referenced in the MSP Code of Conduct. Currently, the Guidance, reflecting

Standing Orders, says that Members should treat each other with courtesy and respect.

Recommendation 27

The Presiding Officer's guidance to MSPs should be revised to make explicit reference to avoiding discriminatory language in relation to someone's personal characteristics. (draft revision attached at [Annex A](#)).

78. As set out in the report's introduction, formal rule changes and new policies, while extremely important, do not automatically change the prevailing culture and behaviours. Awareness raising and training is also key to highlighting issues and bringing about cultural change.

Recommendation 28

The SPCB, working with the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, and a group of MSPs from historically under-represented/marginalised groups and external experts, should update CPD provisions and enhance induction to include issues raised by this Gender Sensitive Audit; sexual harassment/bullying and social media violence; and buddying schemes

79. When the Parliament first set up awareness raising sessions on sexual harassment and sexist behaviour, they were aimed at all Members. All members should similarly be expected to attend any training and induction sessions arising from recommendation 28 and view this as core training. It is important that the message is not about what women need to do to deal with issues or protect themselves, but what everyone can do to change the culture.

80. Over and above revised codes of conduct and additional training for all MSPs, it is important for there to be a space within the Scottish Parliament for women from all parties to come together to discuss their diverse experiences as MSPs. Creating such an institution would bring the Scottish Parliament into line with international best practice.

Recommendation 29

The Presiding Officer or their Deputy to set up and convene a Women's Forum open to all women MSPs. The purpose would be for women to discuss issues of mutual interest and to provide a support network. The Forum would also be part of the overall embedding of work of this Board by feeding in its views on progress to the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group.

81. Effecting cultural change is not easy and requires continual monitoring over the medium and longer-term. To track whether the culture within the

Parliament is changing, there must be further surveys of Members. This would be carried out initially in 2023 and then once every parliamentary session.

Recommendation 30

SPICe to survey MSPs on their experience of:

- Committee membership, Convenership, and Party leadership opportunities
- New MSP socialization
- Diversity inappropriate behaviour, including microaggressions
- Perceptions of gender sensitivity and inclusion, including childcare provision

Dimension 4: Gender Equality Mainstreaming

82. Crucially and as highlighted above, a gender sensitive parliament is not just about who participates, but also how they participate, and with what outcomes.¹⁹ Good decision-making requires that gender mainstreaming be embedded throughout the work of the Parliament. In examining whether gender equality is sufficiently mainstreamed into Parliament's advocacy, representation, and scrutiny work, the Audit concluded that this was often ad hoc, when it should be embedded and regularly reviewed. The Scottish Parliament experience reflects international trends, which suggest that gender sensitivity in relation to scrutiny and legislation remain limited in parliaments around the world,²⁰ in large part as a consequence of insufficient allocation and prioritisation of resources (whether that is expertise or overall capacity), lack of data and leadership.

83. Gender mainstreaming is necessary to correct systemic gender bias in how laws and policies are designed, delivered and the outcomes they achieve. In practical terms, gender mainstreaming requires embedding consideration of gender into the systems and functions of parliament, including scrutinising and assessing the impact of legislation, policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes.

84. As a minimum, parliaments require: (1) an institutional commitment to the principle and practice of gender mainstreaming; (2) an appropriate and internal body for oversight; (3) in-house training and skills development in gender competence and analysis for members and staff; (4) the formalisation of relationships with external gender experts; and (5) the provision of sex-

¹⁹ [Realising Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE regions \(2021\)](#)

²⁰ [Realising Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE regions \(2021\)](#)

disaggregated and diversity-sensitive data to analyse laws, budgets and policies.²¹

85. Using this as a guide, and in recognition that there was not sufficient time within the Audit to do the necessary research required regarding gender equality representation, advocacy, and scrutiny, the following recommendations are proposed. Together they will provide for a better research base, and further infrastructure through which additional recommendations regarding gender mainstreaming should be delivered. All new research should engage with existing national and international expertise, as appropriate.

Recommendation 31

SPICe and Committee office should commission the following pieces of qualitative research (e.g., academic fellowship) to assist in looking at where specific improvements need to be made:

- to investigate equalities knowledge/skills of MSPs and barriers to improvements including access to guidance, expertise and training, accountability, and capacity issues.
- to examine the gender sensitivity of legislation (using examples from this parliamentary session) and make recommendations for improvement

Recommendation 32

That the Conveners Group takes responsibility for progressing, regularly reviewing and revising and improving as appropriate the mainstreaming agenda as part of its Participation, Diversity and Inclusion strategic priority.

Recommendation 33

That the Conveners Group, working with gender experts external to the Parliament, provides a set of principles and 'best practice' guide/s for gender equality policy making, budgeting and scrutiny (drawing on international best practice), and makes this available to all MSPs and clerks of committees and revises the Guidance on Committees to extend information and best practice guidelines on gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. This could be supplemented by training on these specific issues as core competencies for Committees. Such guidance should encourage Committees to use existing powers to appoint experts to support their work.

²¹ [Realising Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE regions\(2021\)](#)

86. Evidence is fundamental to parliamentary scrutiny, and to the Parliament's engagement with the wider public. Historically, parliamentary committees have tended to rely on the 'usual suspects' when inviting witnesses.²² It is therefore essential to track over time the diversity of those invited and those who present evidence to Committees. Diversity of witnesses is also important symbolically and substantively, in terms of the Parliament's engagement and connection with the public more broadly, and in terms of the quality of parliamentary outputs.

Recommendation 34

SPICe and Committee Office should publish annually committee witness diversity data.

²² Marc Geddes (2018) Committee Hearings of the UK Parliament: Who gives Evidence and does this Matter? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71, 2: 283–304.

Annex A: Draft revision to PO's Guidance

Guidance issued by the Presiding Officer on conduct

[Suggested revisions to the Guidance shown in bold]

11. The Parliament's Standing Orders state that Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner and shall respect the authority of the Presiding Officer. In addition, Members shall conduct themselves in an orderly manner and, in particular, shall not conduct themselves in a way which would constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court.

12. As a central principle underpinning this revised code of conduct, the Presiding Officers expect Members to adhere to the expectations outlined above both during proceedings held in the Chamber and committees as well as in their role as an elected representative to the Scottish Parliament.

13. It is ultimately a matter for the Presiding Officer to rule on issues of Members' conduct in the chamber. However, the following has been issued previously by way of specific guidance — Conduct in the Chamber

14. To maintain courtesy and respect, Members should not behave in a way which interferes with the proper conduct of business in the Chamber. This includes—

- *General courteous and respectful behaviour* – Members must conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner. **Members should not behave in a way that is contrary to the values of the Parliament. In particular, they must not behave in a way that is, or can be perceived to be, demeaning, discriminatory or harassing towards another Member based on that Member's protected characteristics²³. Members should at all times be mindful of the impact of their behaviour on others.**

~~General Courtesy and~~ **[delete 'general courtesy as covered above]** *Noise levels*
Members must conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner **[delete this sentence as covered above]**. Please pay attention to the impact of your entry and exit from the Chamber, particularly at Decision Time and Time for Reflection, and to noise levels more generally. During debates and questions, the Presiding Officers will give a certain amount of latitude in the interests of encouraging debate and avoiding excessive formality. However, that does not mean that the Presiding Officers condone behaviour that prevents other Members or the visiting public from following a debate. Do not cross the well of the Chamber. Please do not turn you back on the Chair as this has an impact on the sightlines of the Presiding Officers.

²³ Members should have reference to this [information](#) for explanation of characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 and definitions and examples of discriminatory and harassing behaviour.

• *Use of language and behaviour* [~~delete 'behaviour' as covered above~~] – Members shall at all times ensure that their choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected by the general public. It is for the Presiding Officers to make judgements on these matters and all Members must respect the decisions of the Chair. The Parliament's Standing Orders provide for sanctions in relation to these matters.

Whilst debate can be robust and challenging, Members must not use language that is demeaning, discriminatory or harassing towards another Member based on that Member's protected characteristics.

Members should refer to other Members by their full name, refrain from the use of 'nicknames' and speak through the Chair, i.e. do not refer to other Members in the second person, e.g. "you".

• *Questions* – when your name is selected for a question, please make every effort to submit the question to the Chamber Desk in advance of the relevant deadline. If you are unable to do so, please email the Presiding Officers and Chamber Desk providing an explanation. Please also make sure that you present yourself on time to participate fully in the questioning of Ministers. A failure to adhere to these points is not only a discourtesy to the Parliament but it also means that a fellow Member may miss out on the opportunity to ask a question.

• *Attendance in the Chamber* – as a courtesy to your fellow Members, if you wish to participate in a debate, you should attend the whole debate but, as a minimum, Members should be present during the opening and closing speeches and should remain in the Chamber to hear the two speeches following their contribution. It is particularly important that closing speakers are able to reflect upon all of the contributions made during a debate.

• *Use of digital devices* – Members may use digital devices in the Chamber for the purpose of engaging in and commenting on parliamentary business (including through social media). When doing so, Members must bear in mind their responsibility under the Code of Conduct to conduct themselves at all times with courtesy and respect. As communications through social media are not part of the parliamentary proceedings, the Presiding Officers should not be expected to rule on anything said on social media during meetings of the Parliament. Digital devices should not be used to take photographs, to record proceedings or to make telephone calls and all devices should be switched to silent mode.

• *Use of printed material* – Members should not read newspapers or magazines, except where Members wish to quote from articles in debate. Conduct in committee meetings 15. The above guidance relating to conduct in the Chamber is applicable in formal and informal meetings of the parliamentary committees at the discretion of the convener of the committee

Annex B: House of Commons Parent Survey

PARENTHOOD IN THE 2022 HOUSE OF COMMONS: SIX-QUESTION SURVEY

With the support of Mr Speaker and ..., I am requesting your cooperation in completing and returning this short, six-question survey. This survey has previously been sent out to all MPs in the 2010 and the 2017 Parliaments. These provided for the first time systematic data on MPs' parental status and is the only source of such data.

The first two surveys established:

- The headline difference between men and women MPs' parental status was quite staggering in the 2013 House of Commons: 45% of women MPs compared to 28% of men MPs had no children.
- By 2017 the gender gap had narrowed, although not disappeared: 39% of women MPs compared to 30% of men MPs have no children.
- In respect the number of children, in 2013 and 2017, respectively, men had 1.9 children compared to women's 1.2, and 2.4 compared to 2.0 children.
- The age of the eldest child when the MP first entered parliament was 12 and 16, and 11 and 15, men and women, 2013 and 2017 respectively.
- In the 2010 and after cohorts of MPs, the difference between men and women's parental status had disappeared: of MPs elected between 2010 and 2015, 32% of men and 34% of women have no children, and of MPs elected in 2017 43% of men and 39% of women have no children.
-

No information with your name or constituency in *any* form will be stored, so the data will not be traceable back to any individual MP. The survey form is destroyed as soon as the data is inputted into the data file.

A briefing based on the survey will be presented to Mr Speaker, circulated to all MPs and subject to acceptance, the House Magazine and an academic outlet.

1. Do you have children (biological, adopted or step children) who spend or spent 50% or more of their time in your household?	Yes, or No If yes, how many?	(please feel free to add any additional information about your family structure here)
2. In what year(s) were your children born?	1. 2. 3.	4. 5. 6.
3. Do you have children (biological, adopted or step children) who spend or spent less than 50% of their time in your household?	Yes, or No If yes, how many?	-
4. In what year(s) were these children that spend less than 50% of their time in your household born?	1. 2. 3.	4. 5. 6.
5. In what year did you first enter Parliament?		-
6. What is your date of birth?		-
7. What is your gender?		-
8. What is your party?		-

Annex C: Gender Sensitive Audit Report

Scottish Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit Report

**Dr Fiona McKay
Robert Gordon University**

**Report prepared for the Scottish Parliament Gender
Sensitive Audit Oversight Board 16 July 2022**

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1. Introduction

Sensitivity to gender is an essential component of modern parliamentary politics. The process of gendering can be enacted and embedded through institutions and structures. This is significant in regard to representative democracies, whereby the nature of those elected as representatives sends signals about who is seen as making up “the public” and, in turn, impacts on how effectively different groups in society are represented.

After the return of Scotland’s most diverse parliament in May 2021 (Peace 2021), it is imperative to continue to monitor the progress of gender equality in the Scottish Parliament. As suggested in previous research (Kenny, Mackay and Murtagh, 2016), and as Peace (2021) also outlines, progress towards gender equality cannot be taken for granted, particularly if viewed through an intersectional lens. The purpose of this audit, therefore, is to look at how the Scottish Parliament’s structures, operations and policies can help it achieve gender equality and how to transform the wider culture and outputs of the institution, assessing the degree to which it is “gender-sensitive”.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a Gender Sensitive Parliament (GSP)¹ is a political institution that responds to the ‘needs and interests’ of both women and men in terms of its ‘structures, operations, methods and work’. It has removed the ‘barriers to women’s full participation’ and offers ‘a positive example or model to society at large’. In other words, a GSP ‘values and prioritises gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives’ (Childs and Palmieri 2021). The IPU outlines seven criteria in its toolkit that defines a GSP:

1. Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
2. Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
4. Fosters an internal culture that respects women’s rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities.

¹ The concept of a “gender sensitive parliament” was originated in the Commonwealth Parliamentarians Association (CPA)’s 2001 Kuala Lumpur Report: “Gender-Sensitizing Commonwealth Parliaments”¹ with goals to improve women’s representation and gender equality. The IPU has since undertaken extensive research in this area and, in 2016, it developed a self-assessment toolkit that parliaments could use to assess their ‘gender sensitivity’. The structure and line of inquiry in this audit were developed using the framework designed by the IPU.

5. Acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.²

A comprehensive audit was not feasible within the timescale of this project established under the Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship scheme. However this snapshot highlights key themes and areas of focus arising from the research and is informed by the GSP framework. As such, there are some areas which have not been explored fully and it may be fruitful, if not necessary, to explore these further.

The focus of this audit is on Members. It does not include SPCB staff and the Parliament as an employer, nor does it include public participation and engagement. The Parliament has already done work on diversity and inclusion as an employer and on widening access to the Parliament. The issue of widening access and ensuring we create opportunities for a more diverse range of people to engage with the Parliament is specifically covered by the SPCB's Public Engagement Strategy.

2. Gender and parliaments

Previous studies have investigated gender inequalities in parliaments at the global, European, UK, and devolved levels, and have been carried out by a range of actors including academics, INGOs, governments, Third Sector organisations, and other civil society organisations. These have continually drawn attention to the structural marginalisation of women in electoral politics compared to their proportion as representation in the population. The latest figures from the IPU shows that the average percentage for women's political participation in national parliaments (Lower House) is 26.4%³. Global figures for women executive government positions are even lower.⁴ According to UN Women, at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years, while gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077.⁵ With the understanding that women's empowerment and parity of representation and participation is an essential component

² [gender-toolkit-e \(3\).pdf](#)

³ [Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁴ As of 01 September 2021, there were only 26 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries, while only 21 per cent of government ministers were women, with only 14 countries having achieved 50 per cent or more women in cabinets.

⁵ [Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

of human development and human rights, the advancement of women in parliaments should be an area of universal concern.

Research in this area have focused on the descriptive representation of women in parliaments (their numerical representation), substantive representation (how women's interests are acted on) and symbolic representation, such as how they appear in the media and other forms of communication. In this way, issues relating to male dominance in political institutions are often located in broader societal, political and discursive contexts. Much work has been done on these areas in different international and national contexts, with some key studies detailed in a literature review compiled for this report (see Appendix 1).

As a form of multi-level government, the devolved administration of Scotland places it in an unusual position in the context of global rankings, as it is not included formally in these, unlike the United Kingdom (which was ranked 45th of 186 ranked places with 34.7% of its MPs women, as of June 15, 2022). As a case study, it is often compared favourably to its Westminster counterpart in terms of equality of representation (e.g. Mackay, 2003; 2004) and has generally had higher proportions of women members. Yet this does not capture the nuance of the trajectory of gender equality in the parliament thus far. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 allows it to be considered as part of the body of research which looks at the gendered innovations – and constraints – of new institutions, tracking progress over time. Initially, the creation of the parliament was celebrated for offering a more inclusive and “consensual” form of politics (see for example Brown 1999).

Mackay (2014), however, outlines how the “nestedness” of a new institution within its wider environment, means that institutional innovation isn't always guaranteed, with embedded norms hampering wider constitutional change. Assumptions that newer institutions will always be pioneering may be somewhat misplaced and doesn't remove them from further scrutiny. Subsequent research of the Parliament has therefore concentrated on tracking different patterns over time to continually assess the role of women and gender equality after an ambitious start. For example, in a recent overview, Kenny and Mackay (2020) give a detailed and multi-faceted analysis of the progress for women's representation in post-devolution Scotland, reflecting on the often-uneven trajectory this has taken. More research, therefore, is needed to further explore how far the Scottish Parliament can be considered gender-sensitive, prioritising gender equality.

3. Approach and methodology

Assessing how “gender sensitive” the Parliament involves a mixed-method approach collating quantitative and qualitative data. This will be directed towards meeting two objectives:

- Mapping women’s role in the Scottish Parliament by undertaking an analysis of the number and positions of women parliamentarians; the extent of women’s participation in parliamentary business; the details of parliamentary policies and procedures and their impact; the role of women in political parties; and how gender is mainstreamed into parliamentary processes and outputs.
- Exploring women’s experiences, attitudes and opinions of the Scottish Parliament through a number of formal semi-structured interviews with women who are either current or former members.

As such, both objectives intersect and contribute to answering questions based around the four main themes outlined above. Data obtained to map women’s roles in the Scottish Parliament was drawn from several places, including the Parliament’s standing orders, reports and procedural guidance, which are publicly available on its website, internal documents, and specifically collated information from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe).

Qualitative data is drawn from interviews with 11 current members and two former members. Interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing software, with one telephone interview. Nine of the interviews took place during an onsite visit by the researcher to the Scottish Parliament during the week commencing 23 May 2022, with three taking place the following two weeks. The spread of interviews captures the experiences of women from the five main parties, a range of backgrounds, experiences (from junior to senior positions), parliamentary roles and time served as an elected member. Discussions also took place with a range of clerks and parliamentary staff.

Due to the sensitive nature of the report and the expectation of anonymity, no further details are given of the interview respondents to protect their identities. Their comments have been relayed in the report as contributing to the main themes and are not directly quoted.

The area of focus of this audit, as established by the Board, is around four main themes and this guides the main body of the report:

1. How do we promote and what steps do we take to have equal representation in the Parliament?

2. How do we promote and what steps do we take to have equality in participation in the Parliament?
3. How can the overall culture and the policies of the Parliament help with gender equality?
4. How do we promote and what steps do we take to ensure gender equality is mainstreamed into scrutiny and other work?

4. Representation in the Parliament

Included in this section is the tracking of data which can be considered in relation to the descriptive representation of women in the Scottish Parliament. This data shows proportionate figures of women's various roles in Parliament as well as some general trends over time. Also included in this is information about how and when women are selected to these roles. While it is for political parties to determine the importance of achieving gender equality and how they do so through their own selection procedures, it is also important for this audit to provide detail in some areas of descriptive representation based on party selection, such as party leaders and proportion of women elected for each party, as these areas also have an impact on other areas of selection within parliament, as well as being symbolically significant.

The figures for each session include those from the start and end of the period (see Appendix 2). This is important as, while some figures at the start of sessions remain relatively stable, such as the election of members to the Parliament, others – such as committee membership – can shift substantially during a session. In this regard, while figures for the start of sessions may be symbolically important for the representation of women, trends may not follow throughout a session.

SNAPSHOT: Representation in the parliament

Snapshot	Rules/practices	Key actors
The proportion of women MSPs is currently 45%. This proportion varies across parties, ranging from approx. 25% to 57%. Trends over time suggest that women's representation can slip when mechanisms are not implemented.	This is decided at party level, with variation in the use of voluntary quotas, including all women shortlists (AWS) Measures to increase number of women candidates and MSPs are voluntary	Parties are responsible for selection,
Diversity of party leadership is variable over time, with previous	Leadership contests are subject to the	Party leaders or leadership positions

<p>trends showing more diverse leadership.</p>	<p>preferences of party and members</p>	<p>within the parliament (these may sometimes, but not always, be the same person)</p> <p>The degree of involvement of party members depends on the individual party rules</p>
<p>There is generally a good proportion of women in leadership positions in current parliament roles, such as committees, conveners, SPCB, Bureau. There have been fluctuations over time which suggest that equal representation is not an embedded norm, nor guaranteed.</p> <p>There are also variations during sessions which may not consider the implications of gender balance.</p> <p>There is also suggestion of a gender imbalance in mandatory committees.</p>	<p>Some standing orders contain reference to being “mindful of gender balance” though this is not formalised with specific guidance to minimum thresholds</p>	<p>Parties are allocated positions on committees based on proportion of seats or a version of D’Hondt.</p> <p>Business managers who sit on the Bureau are determined by Parties</p> <p>SPCB members are elected by the Parliament</p> <p>Party managers will choose who sits on different committees and groups</p>
<p>Monitoring of candidates and elected members is variable. There is data available of the gender of members, but no formal diversity data across the parties is publicly available.</p>	<p>UK Government legislation: Section 106 of the UK Equality Act requires parties to publish diversity data on candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly,</p>	<p>Parties are responsible for providing candidate and member data. There is no legal requirement though there has been pressure from academics and activists/pledges from parties</p>

	though this is not enacted	SPICe is responsible for collating/publishing such data as is available
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Number of MSPs

The total number of elected women MSPs following the election on 06 May 2021 was 58 out of 129 elected Members, making up 45% of the total membership. The number of women MSPs is therefore at the highest point since the introduction of the Parliament in 1999. This, however, has not been a straight trajectory, with figures, before now, reaching a peak at Session 2, falling for Session 3 and only rising gradually for Sessions 4 and Session 5 (see Figure 1)

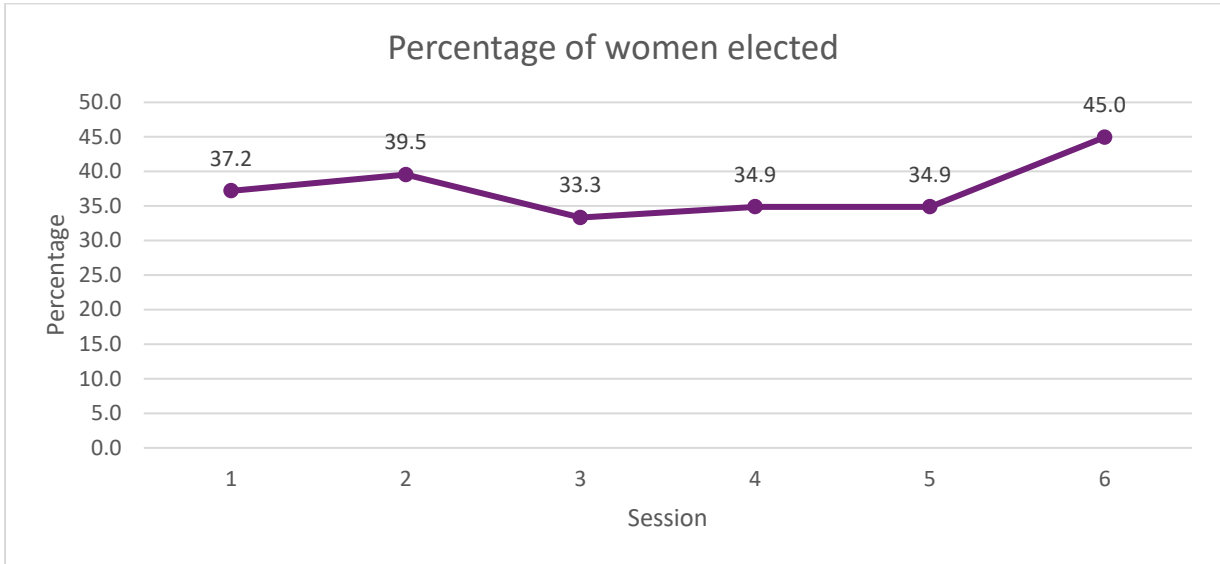


Figure 1: Percentage of women elected to the Scottish Parliament

The selection of prospective parliamentary candidates rests with political parties. There has been extensive focus on the mechanisms, such as quotas, used to increase the participation and representation of more diverse candidates. More detail about this, and in a Scottish context, is included in the literature review (see Appendix 1).

Turning to the number of women elected, by viewing the figures numerically, but also as a proportion of those elected in each party, allows for more direct comparisons that account for the differences in size across parties. Therefore, while the Scottish Green Party has a relatively low amount of women elected, this is the highest proportion of its elected party members (57.1%) of all the parties. This is followed by the SNP at 34

elected (53.1%) and Scottish Labour with 10 women elected (45.5%), while the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party only reached a quarter of their elected members (25.8%) being women at eight, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats achieving the same proportion (25.0%), with one woman elected for the party. This can be seen in Table 1.

Parties	Number of Women	% of elected party members
Scottish Conservative and Unionist	8	25.8
Scottish Green Party⁶	4	57.1
Scottish Labour	10	45.5
Scottish Liberal Democrats	1	25.0
Scottish National Party	34	53.1

Table 1: Percentage of women in parties

With this session there was not only an increase in overall numbers of women, but also diversity of women. This included a number of “firsts” including the first women of colour elected to the Parliament, including first Muslim woman and first Sikh woman elected, as well as the first permanent wheelchair user.⁷

Though the increase in diversity is to be welcomed, there is little publicly available data on the diversity of candidate and elected members. Currently, the public can filter by “male” and “female” on the Scottish Parliament website, though there appears to be no further list of diversity data of candidates or elected members, other than what is personally declared. There is legislation that supports this via Section 106 of the UK Equality Act, but it is not enacted. Parties have pledged recently to be more proactive on the issue,⁸ but this can be something that can be implemented more rigorously, or with sanctions applied if withheld.

While many members spoke of supply side barriers for women – such as ensuring women are enabled to access politics and to be ready and resourced to stand for election – this is only part of the story. Members duly noted the advocacy work which had been done by the Third Sector in supporting women to enter politics, this is an area where political parties and the Parliament can be changed to be more open to women’s participation.

⁶ These figures are based on state of the parties following the election of the Presiding Officer on 13 May 2021. Elected as a member of the Scottish Green Party, Alison Johnstone took voluntary suspension from the party following her election to the post.

⁷ [A record-breaking election, but what next? | Centre on Constitutional Change](#)

⁸ [Our Vision & Background | Equal Representation in Politics](#); <https://inclusionScotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Access-to-Politics-Charter-non-graphics-Large-Print.docx.pdf>

Women in leadership positions in the Scottish Parliament

Parties

Currently, of the five parties, two have women in leadership positions (The Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party). As of the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, four of the five main parties have had women in leadership roles (see Table 2).

Parties	Number of Women Leaders	% of leaders (as of 1999)
Scottish Conservative and Unionist	2	40.0
Scottish Green Party⁹	6	66.7
Scottish Labour	3	30.0
Scottish Liberal Democrats	0	0.0
Scottish National Party	1	33.3

Table 2: Percentage of women in party leadership positions

These figures should be interpreted with a degree of caution, however, as they do not reflect the time these women have served in party leadership positions, which could be further explored.

There have been periods in the past when a diversity of leadership has been celebrated, including when three of the main parties had women in leadership roles,¹⁰ and also at one point four party leaders who identified as LGB.¹¹

Party spokespersons

Spokespersons are people chosen by their parties to act as a representative on a specified area of policy. Parties not in government with frontbench teams can appoint Shadow Cabinet ministers, as well as spokespersons for other portfolio areas. Parties can choose how these spokespersons are referred to. Table 3 and Table 4 shows the proportion of spokespeople allocated for each opposition party, which broadly maps onto the proportion of women members for each party.

⁹ The Scottish Green party have, as of system of co-convenership/co-leadership as of 2004, which includes a male and female member.

¹⁰ [Scotland's 3 major political leaders are women | International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics \(iknowpolitics.org\)](#)

¹¹ [The tartan rainbow: why it's great to be gay in Scotland | Scottish politics | The Guardian](#)

Party (30 June 2021)	Male Spokesperson	%	Female Spokesperson	%	Total Spokespersons
Scottish Labour	9	47%	10	53%	19
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	17	71%	7	29%	24
Scottish Liberal Democrats	3	75%	1	25%	4
Scottish Green Party	3	43%	4	57%	7
TOTAL	32	59%	22	41%	54

Table 3: Proportion of party spokesperson, by gender, start of Session 6

Party (30 March 2022)	Male Spokesperson	%	Female Spokesperson	%	Total Spokespersons
Scottish Labour	9	50%	9	50%	18
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	17	74%	6	26%	23
Scottish Liberal Democrats	3	75%	1	25%	4
Scottish Green Party	3	43%	4	57%	7
TOTAL	32	62%	20	38%	52

Table 4: Proportion of party spokesperson, by gender, present stage of data collection for Session 6

The Cabinet and Ministers

The Cabinet is the main decision-making body of the Scottish Government. It is made up of the First Minister, all cabinet secretaries, Minister for Parliamentary Business and Permanent Secretary. The Lord Advocate may also attend in his or her role as the Scottish Government’s principal legal adviser. The current gender balance of the First Minister and cabinet secretaries is 50% men and 50% women.

The current terminology is for cabinet secretaries (formerly ministers) who sit in the cabinet together with 17 ministers (formerly junior ministers) who do not. Currently the Scottish Law Officers (Lord Advocate and Solicitor General for Scotland) are both women. Ministers and Scottish Law Officers are appointed by the First Minister. Resultingly, there are 15 women (52%) (including ministers and Law Officers) in the Scottish Government, and 14 men (48%).

There has been a steady increase of women occupying cabinet roles across the six sessions (see Table 5), although the overall size of the cabinet has changed over time providing more or less opportunities for gender parity. As parity across all parliamentary bodies and internal structures, which includes Cabinets, is a goal of a GSP, this suggests that a norm is being established in this area as good practice, suggesting a “concrete floor” of women’s cabinet inclusion. This should, however, be considered with caution if no formal guidance is established, whether this may be embedded going forward, monitoring reshuffles and new Governments.

Cabinet by Session	Number of Women (Start of Session)	Percentage of Women (Start of session)	Number of Women (End of Session)	Percentage of Women (End of session)
1	6	30.0	6	30.0
2	6	31.6	7	38.9
3	5	31.3	5	31.3
4	6	33.3	10	43.5
5	10	45.5	14	53.8
6	12	48.0	13	48.1

Table 5: Proportion of women in cabinet positions

Alongside the First Minister, women hold the following positions: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills; Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy; Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands; Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice Housing and Local Government.

As some ministerial titles have several subjects combined, and shift over time, it is somewhat difficult to map these specifically, however, looking to the portfolios of the ministerial positions, there are some emerging trends over time (see Appendix 3). Overwhelmingly, the proportion of men who have had Cabinet-level roles is dominant (69% to 30% women), and men overwhelmingly dominate in positions around subject areas like Finance and Justice - with women dominating in 'softer' areas like communities and equalities (80%). Men also dominate in Education, though, and marginally overtake women to the post in Health too (though posts with 'social' in them, such as social justice, social security, have had marginally more women in them).

What this suggests is that even though there may be a move to embed parity in senior government and/or Cabinet posts, these have historically been overwhelmingly dominated by men, particularly in very senior spending department positions. There may be more scope for more formal monitoring and guidance of portfolios as well as representation of the Government, going forward.

Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers

As of May 03, 2022, the current elected Presiding Officer (PO) is a woman. For the six parliamentary sessions, there have been four men (66.7%) and two women (33.3%) (including the current PO).

The PO is elected by Parliament. Generally, individuals will indicate their intention to occupy the position of PO. Members may nominate a candidate for appointment by submitting a written nomination to the Clerk. The nomination is only valid if seconded by another member.

The PO is obliged to resign from their party and remain politically neutral and impartial in their role. Their responsibilities include: chairing meetings attended by all MSPs in the debating chamber; selecting the questions asked at the weekly First Minister's Question Time; chairing Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body meetings; chairing Parliamentary Bureau meetings; and representing the Scottish Parliament at home and abroad.

Alongside the PO, two deputy Presiding Officers (DPOs) are elected. The DPOs retain their party allegiance. Members may nominate a candidate for appointment by submitting a written nomination to the Clerk. The nomination is only valid if seconded by another member. Where there are two elected deputy Presiding Officers who represent the same political party, a member representing that party is not eligible for nomination as a candidate for appointment as Presiding Officer. Voting takes place over multiple rounds where the last place candidate is eliminated before another vote being taken.

There is currently gender balance split of deputy Presiding Officers (DPOs), with one man and one woman. Of the 12 DPOs across the six sessions, there has been a gender balance of men and women, with six male DPOs (50%) and six female DPOs (50%). There is currently no guidance in the Standing Orders for there to be a woman to be included in the three elected positions of PO and DPOs or for a gender balance of DPOs. This contrasts to standing orders in the House of Commons, which outlines that at least one man and at least one woman must be elected across the four posts of Speaker and Deputy Speakers,¹² thus there is scope for implementing more formal guidance similar to this.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) is the administrative body of the Parliament which provides support to MSPs to enable them to carry out their parliamentary duties. This includes making decisions on budgets, staffing, accommodation and security. The SPCB is chaired by the Presiding Officer and includes at least four elected members, each of whom takes responsibility for a specific portfolio. The nomination of members is only valid if seconded by another member. Members may also be appointed by the PO if the office is vacant and remains so after 28 days.

The gender split of the current SPCB (including the PO) is one man (20%) and four women (80%). The number of women in SPCB has been increasing slowly since the first session until Session 4, before falling to no women members at the start of Session 5. As of Session 6, there are four members (See Table 6).

¹² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmstords/1020/body.html>

SPCB by Session	Number of Women (Start of session)	Percentage of Women (Start of session)	Number of Women (End of session)	Percentage of Women (End of session)
1	0	0.0	0	0.0
2	0	0.0	1	20.0
3	1	20.0	1	20.0
4	2	40.0	2	40.0
5	0	0.0	1	16.7
6	4	80.0	4	80.0

Table 6: Proportion of women members on the SPCB

There is guidance in the Standing Orders that gender balance must be considered by members and the PO (where the PO has to appoint someone to an unfilled vacancy): “members intending to make such a nomination must have regard to gender balance in the nominations of individuals for elections for membership of the Parliamentary corporation” and “the Presiding Officer must have regard to gender balance in the membership of the Parliamentary corporation [if required to appoint someone to an unfilled vacancy].” This was introduced in 2017 following concerns raised about the absence of women in Session 5.¹³

This suggests that in the absence of formal rules, there have been wide fluctuations in regard of gender balance, including a (recent) session where no women were appointed. This demonstrates that gender balance is not an embedded norm or assumption in this regard. There is scope, therefore, for introducing a stronger recommendation of a minimum number/proportion of membership. There is also further scope for more information in regard to how these positions are appointed.

The Parliamentary Bureau

The Bureau proposes the Parliament’s business programme, alterations to the daily business list, and proposes the establishment, remit, membership and duration of any committee or sub-committee. It is made up of the Presiding Officer; a representative of each political party represented by five or more members of the Parliament, or a representative of groupings of five or more members. These are nominated by the party leader.

The current membership of the Bureau (including the PO) is 60% men and 40% women, including the PO. Like the SPCB, previous membership has fluctuated, though there has

¹³ [POAG Report.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#)

been a general increase of women's membership, this has remained at 40% or below for any women, including no women members in Session 5 (See Table 7).

Parliamentary Bureau by Session	Number of Women (Start of Session)	Percentage of Women (Start of Session)	Number of Women (End of Session)	Percentage of Women (End of Session)
1	0	0.0	2	40.0
2	2	28.6	2	28.6
3	1	20.0	0	0.0
4	2	40.0	2	33.3
5	0	0.0	0	0.0
6	1	20.0	2	40.0

Table 7: Proportion of women members on the Bureau

As with the SPCB, guidance is given in the standing orders that the leaders of each party and also any groups must consult each other and have regard to gender balance in the membership of the Parliamentary Bureau in making nominations to the PO. This was also introduced in 2017 following concerns raised about the lack of gender balance in Session 5. As with the SPCB, this illustrates the fluctuations which can take place without formal guidance, so there is scope for introducing a stronger recommendation to ensure parity of membership.

Committees

There are three types of committees: mandatory committees, subject committees and forms of ad hoc bill committees. The mandatory and subject committees must have at least five but not more than 15 members. For each session, seven mandatory committees must be established. At present, these are: Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments; Finance and Public Administration; Public Audit; Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture; Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice; Citizen Participation and Public Petitions; Delegated Powers and Law Reform.

In total, there are 121 committee members, with a split of 69 (57%) men and 52 (43%) women. Overall, the proportion of women committee members has followed the same trends and is roughly equivalent to the proportion of women MSPs (See Figure 2).¹⁴

¹⁴ These figures don't include private bill committees.

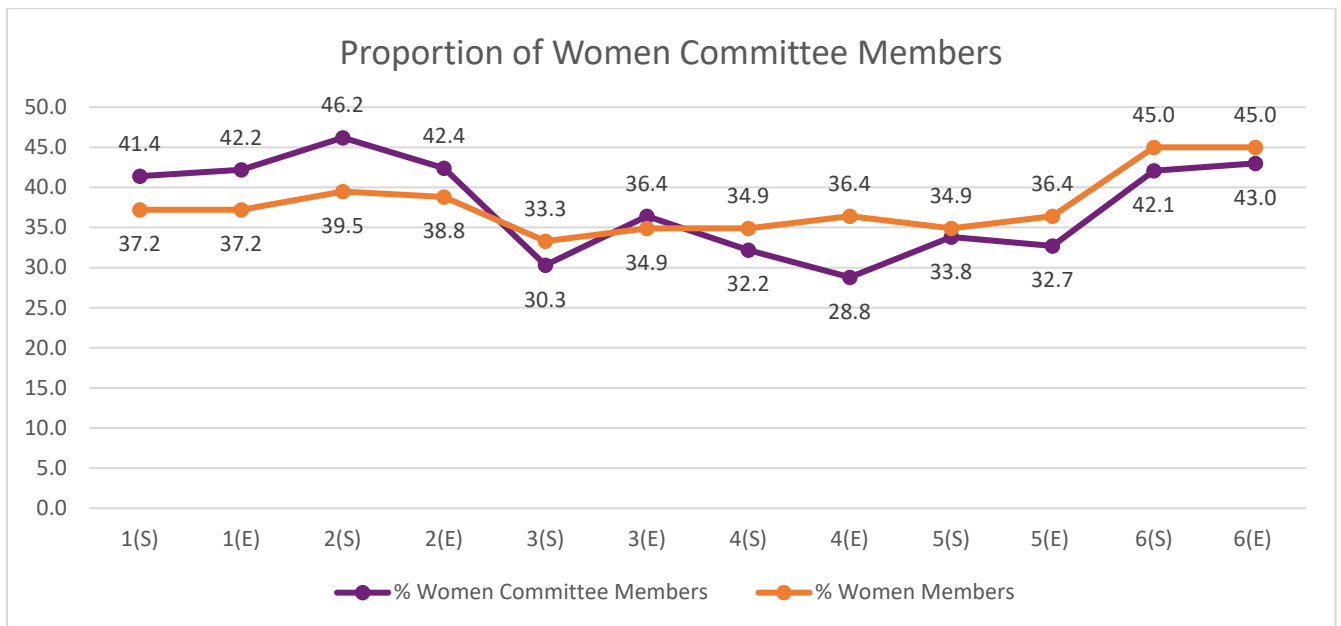


Figure 2: Proportion of woman as committee members against women MSPs

According to parliamentary procedural guidance, the number of seats for each party on each committee is decided on a roughly proportional basis. Political parties, by means of party managers, choose which of their MSPs they would like to represent them on a committee, with each business manager advising the Bureau which members of their party are to take up the committee places. MSPs may signal an interest in a specific committee, but this may not always be considered. Other factors may be seniority of the member and whether they are considered for a cabinet role.

There is guidance in the Standing Orders that “in proposing membership, the Bureau must have regard to the balance of the parties within the Parliament and to the qualifications and experience of any member expressing an interest in a particular committee” (Rule 6.3.4). There is no reference to gender or gender balance in the Standing Orders or parliamentary procedural guides. There is scope, therefore, for more transparency around internal party rule regarding the allocation of committees.

It is important to note that committee membership does fluctuate during individual sessions due to various factors, such as reshuffles. Even though there has been a general increase of women in committee membership, apart from Session 3 and Session 6 so far, each session has seen a decrease in the proportion of women members of committee seats across sessions (see Table 8). This suggests that gender balance may be more of a consideration at the start of sessions, rather than throughout, so more mechanisms could be put in place to ensure gender balance is considered in any reshuffling.

Committees by Session	Number of Women (Start of session)	Percentage of Women (Start of session)	Number of Women (End of session)	Percentage of Women (End of session)	Difference pp
1	67	41.4	57	42.2	0.9
2	61	46.2	56	42.4	-3.8
3	37	30.3	43	36.4	6.1
4	39	32.2	38	28.8	-3.4
5	45	33.8	48	32.7	-1.2
6	48	42.1	52	43.0	0.9

Table 8: Proportion of women committee members across sessions

Looking to trends in committee membership of the current sessions, men are over-represented in five of the mandatory committees: Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments; Finance; Public Audit; Public Petitions; Delegated Powers and Law Reform. There is relative balance in Europe and External Relations (if marginally in favour of men), and a relative over-representation of women on the Equalities and Human Rights and Civil Justice committees (see Appendix 4).

Though it can be difficult to track gendered trends of committee membership over time due to the merging of some subject areas with others, there is a trend of generally men being over-represented in the mandatory committees in all but iterations of the Equal Opportunities Committee. This is significant in terms of the distribution of power across these committees, as well as the signalling that equalities work is the “domain” of women. As addressed in criteria five of the GSP framework, a GSP institution “acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality”.

In terms of subject committees, Health tends to be over-represented by women over the six sessions, particularly when merged with Social Care, while it tends towards more gender balance and over-representation of men when previously merged with Sport. There are also indications that women tend to be over-represented in Social Justice-related areas. Other trends suggest an over-representation of men currently in Education, but these have fluctuated across sessions (see Appendix 5 for committee and convener data).

This suggests that there is more scope to understand the processes by which parties assign committee roles. There is also room here for more formal rules about levels of representation in membership, such as a minimum threshold of 40% men and women, and having this data easily accessible for monitoring purposes.

Conveners

In the current session, there are 16 conveners, with a split of nine men (56%) and seven women (44%). There are more pronounced differences between the proportion of women conveners as a proportion of women overall over time (see Figure 3).

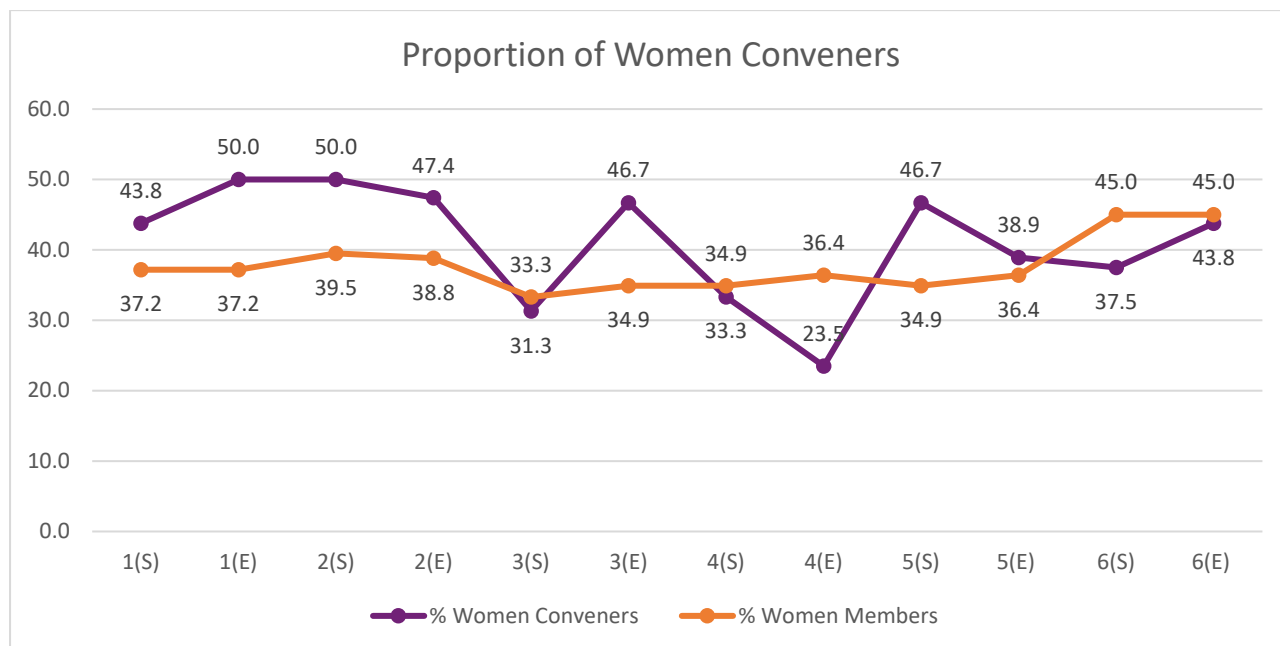


Figure 3: Proportion of women conveners

Conveners and deputy conveners are allocated to parties based on the “d’Hondt” method. Convenerships are allocated to parties using this system in rounds, based on a party’s numerical strength. Parties will select convenerships based on preference. Anecdotally, there may be hierarchies of preference and more prestige of certain committees. There is therefore more scope to understand the processes by which parties assign these positions.

As shown in Table 9, Table 8a convenership can also shift during a session, which can also shift the gender balance of the members of the Conveners Group. As the table shows, this has fluctuated over time.

Conveners by Session	Number of Women (Start of Session)	Percentage of Women (Start of Session)	Number of Women (End of Session)	Percentage of Women (End of Session)	Difference pp
1	7	43.8	9	50.0	6.3
2	8	50.0	9	47.4	-2.6
3	5	31.3	7	46.7	15.4
4	5	33.3	4	23.5	-9.8
5	7	46.7	7	38.9	-7.8
6	6	37.5	7	43.8	6.3

Table 9: Proportion of women conveners across sessions

Similar to the committees, there is no formal guidance in the Standing Orders in regard of gender and gender balance in the allocation of convenerships and deputy convenerships. In this case, more formal guidance would be beneficial to ensure parity of representation of conveners, such as a minimum 40% threshold of woman members, particularly with regard of the make-up of the Conveners Group (see below).

There has been recent guidance which does make convenerships more flexible for those with caring responsibilities: as of 2017, a standing order was introduced to allow an acting convener to be chosen for a committee where the convener is on an extended period of maternity, paternity, parental, adoption or shared parental leave, allowing them to retain their position. This means they can still receive all committee papers (including private papers) so they can keep up to date with committee business. However, they cannot participate in committee meetings or any other business of the committee at the same time as the acting convener because that would alter the number and political composition of members of the committee. This was done as a result of the PO writing on behalf of the Bureau to the SPPA committee.¹⁵

Conveners Group

The Conveners Group is made up of all the conveners of mandatory or subject committees and is chaired by the Presiding Officer or a Deputy Presiding Officer. This group holds an important function by acting as the conduits of communication between the committees and other parts of the parliament, like the Parliamentary Bureau and SPCB, discuss issues affecting committees and appraises how committees are working.

The group is significant as it holds significant institutional power and influence in the parliament, so is therefore an important arena to ensure women are duly represented. As advised in the GSP framework, a gendered lens should be applied to encourage the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions.

There is scope for integrating more formal guidance on the gender balance of conveners. Moreover, there may be further opportunities for the sharing of information among conveners with cross-cutting subject and policy areas with a gendered lens, as well as integrating a more consistent mainstreaming approach which can be cascaded to committees (see section on Mainstreaming).

¹⁵ [20170130 PresidingOfficer_re Acting Conveners.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#)

Monitoring

The breakdown of women and men current MSPs is provided in fact sheets by SPICe. These include numbers of MSPs at the start of the current session and cumulative numbers across the session, monitoring any changes. SPICe also provides a Fact Sheet of “Firsts” for women in the Scottish Parliament, for example, the first woman Presiding Officer.¹⁶

Further gender monitoring is contained within SPICe Scottish Parliament Statistics Annual reports¹⁷ and include a breakdown of MSPs by Gender and Ethnic Group and Committee Conveners and Deputy Conveners by Gender and Party.

5. Participation in the parliament

This section looks at the different areas an MSP may participate in through their work in parliament. A significant part of an MSP’s role is contributing to Chamber Business, including Questions, Debates, Statements, and First Minister’s Questions (FMQs). They also undertake closer scrutiny work in committees. A further element of their role is constituency work and other areas of outreach, though this is beyond the scope of this project.

SNAPSHOT: Participation in the parliament

Snapshot	Rules/practices	Key actors
There has been a recognition of the increased adversarial and at times toxic nature of engagement in the Chamber. This may create barriers for women feeling comfortable and fully participating.	Standing orders, Code of Conduct.	Bureau and PO. Party responsibility.
Trends suggest women may be less likely to contribute in Chamber Business in certain contexts	Standing orders, Code of Conduct.	Members, PO, Parties

¹⁶ This includes the first female Member to be nominated for the post of First Minister, the first female MSP elected as Presiding Officer, the first female MSP to be elected to the post of First Minister, the first female Member in Holyrood or Westminster, and the youngest politician at 29, to deliver a Scottish Budget, the first female Muslim MSP elected to the Scottish Parliament and the first female Sikh MSP elected to the Scottish Parliament, as well as the first woman and the first non-Advocate to hold the post of Solicitor General, and the first woman and the first non-Advocate to hold the post of Lord Advocate [scottish-parliament-firsts-updated-16-september-2021.pdf](#)

¹⁷ [Scottish Parliament Statistics - About the Parliament : Scottish Parliament](#)

There is a recognition for further support in the socialization of new members

Induction/orientation procedures

SPCB, parties

Conduct of members

When discussing the conduct of the parliament, members often discussed this in a comparative sense to Westminster. Similar to the findings of Malley (2012), there was a sense that Holyrood was a much more informal and consensual institution. There was however, also like Malley (2012), a perception that conduct in the Chamber was more adversarial in its style, than consensual as had been anticipated when the parliament was established.

Conduct in the Chamber and committees is informed by Standing Orders 7.3.1. and 7.3.2 whereby members are required to conduct themselves in a “orderly” as well as “courteous and respectful” manner at all times. While there was a recognition that there was a need for robust debate, at times this was seen to go beyond acceptable behaviour into a more “yah-boo” style politics. According to more established members, there was an impression of some slippage of this over time, which could bear further analysis of some form.

At times, this also had an impact and influence on the behaviour of newer members fully participating in making or taking interventions. The noise level of the Chamber was also a concern, which can have an impact on members with specific accessibility requirements

There were also reports of gendered language and interactions, at times, in both the Chamber and committees, which could be perceived as sexist, such as talking over women, reformulating and repeating the same questions, and making patronising comments. There were reports of instances of problematic comments and attitudes to women of different backgrounds and characteristics, such as at the intersections of age, race, disability (including hidden disabilities), neurodiversity, or class. This was attributed to the overall structural dominance of a masculine culture of the parliament – though members made a distinction that this applied to members and not parliamentary staff.

Though members did not describe this behaviour as bullying or harassment, they did acknowledge that it could be considered more “everyday” and routine sexism embedded in the parliamentary norms and culture.

Contributions in the Chamber

There are a number of different types of question and question times with different criteria/rules for selection. Members asking 'General questions' and 'Portfolio Questions' are selected on a random basis from those who have put their names forward.

Members cannot be selected for more than one portfolio in any week. Neither can they be selected for general questions in a week where they have a portfolio question

The PO selects questions for FMQs. Party leaders ask questions as do other members. The number of questions a party leader can ask, and the distribution of other questions, is based on proportional representation. The Presiding Officer considers the following criteria when selecting FMQs:

- Questions should be topical and suitable for supplementary questions;
- A reasonable political balance between the parties is maintained over time;
- Other than for party leaders, diary questions are avoided;
- There should be no duplication with questions already lodged or business to be debated in the chamber in the same week;
- Members' record of selection for FMQ¹⁸

The Presiding Officer may decide to call questions of a local or urgent nature following one of the party leaders' questions. Topical questions are also selected by the PO. In making a selection, the Presiding Officer will consider:

- whether the subject has arisen since the Parliament last sat or there have been significant developments to a subject that has already been discussed;
- whether a question is, in fact, topical;
- duplication of questions already lodged or business to be debated in the chamber in the same week;
- duplication of oral questions answered in the last seven days;
- whether questions on the same issue have been lodged by a number of members¹⁹

This is also dependent on which members who choose to participate.

¹⁸ [Guidance on Parliamentary Questions](#)

¹⁹ [Guidance on Parliamentary Questions](#)

SPICe has compiled data representing contributions from women members in the Chamber from 31 August 2021 – 29 December 2021, inclusive (extended from 07 October 2021).²⁰ This includes:

- Female contributions to Debates and Statements; FMQs; and Topical Questions (and contributions for all three areas of business)
- Female interventions in Debates
- Female contributions by subject category
- Female interventions by subject category

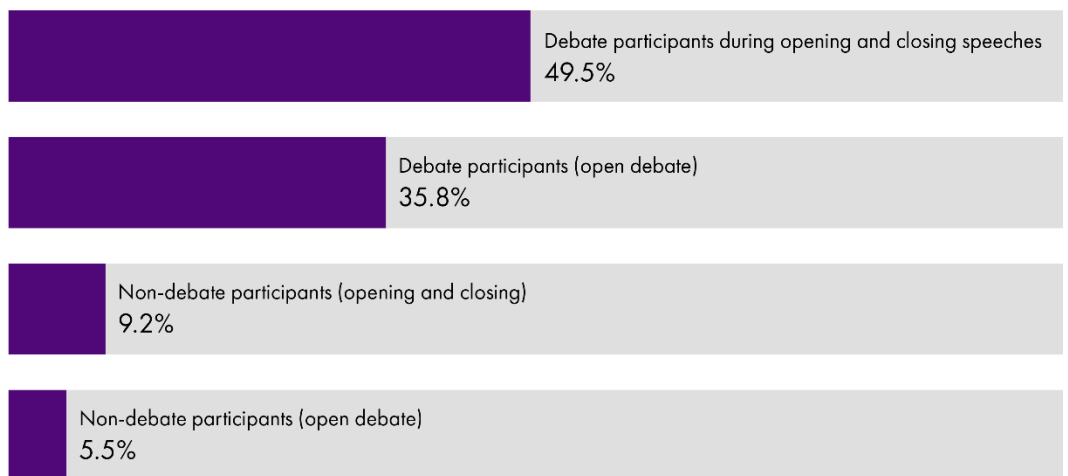
These figures suggest that relative to their proportion in parliament overall, women members tend to make fewer contributions during First Minister's Questions (40%) and make fewer interventions in debates (31%) (see Appendix 6). The total number of interventions made by women in the chamber, when sorted by subject matter (see Appendices 6 and 7) also suggest trends in preference of contributions by female members, though this hasn't been controlled for party spokespersons, which could skew the data. The data on interventions was taken from the Official Report, so therefore only captures interventions that were accepted.

In a separate exercise over a six-week period between April and June 2022 "real-time" data was captured on the number of attempted interventions, the number of interventions accepted and not accepted, and the gender split of data. This data in the first instance shows that men are more likely to make an intervention (63%) compared to women (37%).

In the period observed, there were 293 interventions made, with more interventions requests made during opening and closing speeches at 172 (58.7%) than during the open debate with 121 (41.3%). Opening and closing speakers will tend to be spokespeople for the relevant subject area or Scottish Government ministers who are either setting out the propositions to be debated or responding to the debate. By far the majority of interventions came from members who were speaking in a debate at 250 (85.3%). By contrast, only 43 (14.7%) intervention attempts were made by members who were present in the Chamber but were not listed by their parties as 'active' participants in the debate. The debates that took place during the sample period were a

²⁰ These figures were manually collated by using the Official Report. This was done in order to select contributions based on substance/significance, and easily identify interventions. Contributions from the First Minister, Ministers, Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers have not been counted. As the initial speakers in debates may be party spokespersons, this may skew the findings as these speakers are determined by their role and are potentially more likely to contribute. The subject headings used to categorise the topics are those used in SPICe for its products/enquiries.

variety of: Scottish government debates (including debates on legislation introduced by the Scottish Government), opposition debates and committee debates.



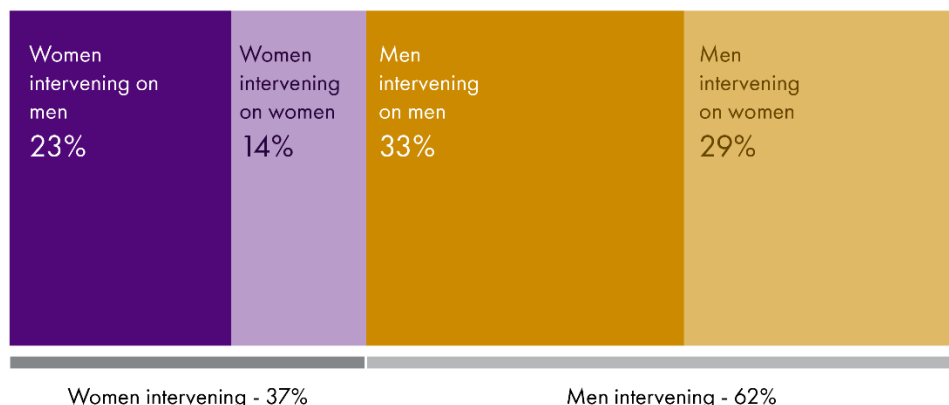
*Figures may not sum due to rounding

Figure 4: types of speakers

Interventions by gender

Of the 293 interventions, 110 were made by women (37.5%) and 183 were made by men (62.5%). This shows the women are making fewer interventions compared to the overall representation in the Parliament (45%).

Figure 5 below splits this down further, showing that of the interventions made by men, 34% were interventions made on other men and 29% were made on women’s contributions. The split for women was that 14% of their interventions were on other women with the remaining 23% being interventions on men’s contributions.



*Figures may not sum due to rounding

Figure 5: Interventions broken down by gender

Breaking this down further to those which are accepted and not accepted, the table below shows interventions accepted and not accepted by gender.

	Number of interventions	Not accepted	Percentage not accepted	Accepted	Percentage accepted
Women intervening on men	68	32	47.1%	36	53.7%
Women intervening on women	42	20	47.6%	22	52.4%
Total women's interventions	110	52	47.3%	58	52.7%
Men intervening on men	98	33	33.7%	65	66.3%
Men intervening on women	85	24	28.2%	61	71.8%
Total men's interventions	183	57	31.1%	126	68.9%

Table 10: Interventions of men and women members

The table above shows that men are more likely to have their interventions accepted (68.9%), than women (52.7%). This finding applies to women – who are more likely to accept men’s interventions (71.8% acceptance rate) than interventions by women (52.4% acceptance rate). It also applies to men – who are more likely to accept men’s interventions (66.3% acceptance rate) than interventions by women (53.7% acceptance rate).

This is further illustrated by the following figure

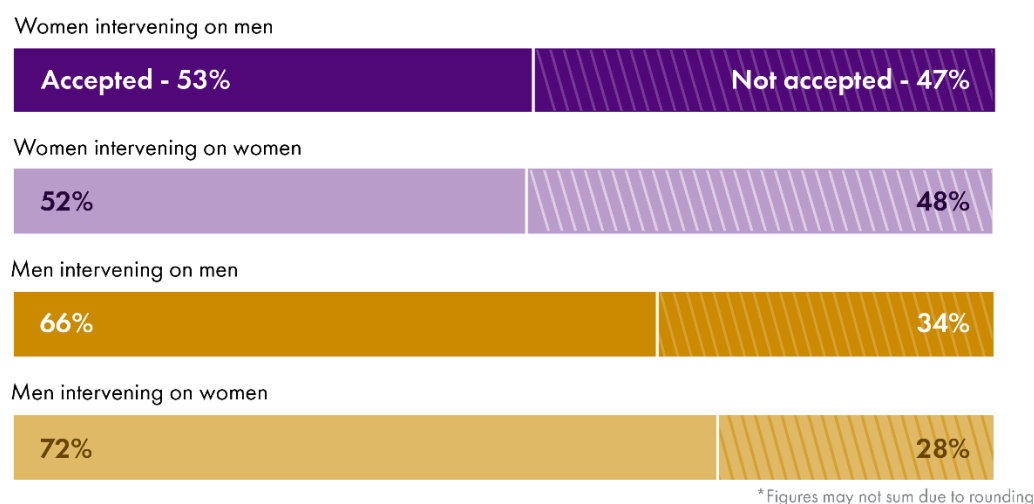


Figure 6: Accepted and not accepted interventions

New member socialization

Inductions/orientations were first introduced by the parliament in Session 5, and this was welcomed by members. This was re-introduced in Session 6 and included orientation sessions spread over three days. This includes information on being a parliamentarian and participating in Chamber Business, the Chamber voting system and virtual/hybrid meetings, Standards, GDPR, Employment, Equalities and Diversity Responsibilities, a practice session for new Members on participating in Chamber Business, and the SPCB’s Culture of Respect policy, Introduction to Legislation, Introduction to SPICe. Various Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses were also offered post-summer recess, though it’s not clear how many new members have since undertaken them.

While new members reported that the induction/orientation sessions were useful, a trend was that they still felt ill-equipped for fully participating in parliament business, particularly Chamber Business. It is important to note that the start of Session 6 was still impacted by restrictions related to COVID-19, and members did recognise this, though they still felt that the induction/orientation sessions was too-much-too-soon and suffered from ‘information overload’. Members reported the inductions to be more process-related, rather than about the day-to-day interactions, norms and culture of the parliament. In this respect, they said they were more reliant on party support and membership to understand this more, with variations across groups reported in relation to feelings of belonging and inclusivity.

Significantly, this may act as a barrier to women from more diverse backgrounds feeling comfortable and confident in participating fully, particularly if they have not entered politics through more ‘traditional’ routes, such as local government or as parliamentary staff. More information on the culture and behaviours of the parliament may be

beneficial - whether public facing or internally accessible – which may increase feelings of inclusivity as well as efficacy in the role for different groups of women.

Differences in feelings of inclusivity and confidence were evident in more established members, therefore it would be useful to too include follow up interviews with newer members at the end of the session to see how their attitudes may have shifted, particularly in regard of those from different backgrounds.

Further to this, suggestions were made in regard of continued support for members once they had been elected, for example conduct and expectations in the employment and management of staff. Again, this could be achieved through more party and parliamentary support as a way to combat the “leaky pipeline” of women who may choose to leave parliamentary politics, such as further Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The IPU offers guidance around this area with the suggestion of providing “gender-awareness training seminars for all members of parliament and ensure that induction for new members is gender-sensitive. This could take the form of mentoring for new women parliamentarians, pairing women with experienced parliamentarians (men or women) or presentations by senior women parliamentarians on strategies to cope in the parliamentary environment.”²¹ There is also scope for further analysis about the retention rates of women and number of terms served, particularly if looked at in a comparative context with male colleagues.

6. Culture and policies in the parliament

This section addresses the overall culture and policies of the Scottish Parliament, including work patterns, institutional behaviours and norms, and facilities. As outlined in the IPU framework, a GSP “fosters an internal culture that respects women’s rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities.” This has been a guiding framework for the themes addressed in this section, which have also intersected with the response of MSPs involved in the project.

SNAPSHOT: Culture in the parliament

Snapshot	Rules/practices	Key actors
There were mixed attitudes about the working patterns and policies of Parliament being family friendly, though this is an area which could bear further scrutiny.	Standing orders SPCB policies	Parliamentary Bureau Presiding Officer SPCB

²¹ [en - gender-action-plan-web \(1\).pdf](#)

The retention of hybrid and remote systems would increase flexibility and access for different groups, including those with caring responsibilities.	Standing orders	Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Parliamentary Bureau, Presiding Officer SPCB
There has been work done around tackling sexual harassment in the workplace, but this could be followed up with more focus on low reporting rates and further monitoring.	Standing orders, Code of Conduct.	SPCB
Other areas of institutional infrastructure, such as accessibility, security and support with social media security, are being developed	Corporate policy	SPCB

Sitting patterns

The initial consultation of the parliament presented to the Secretary of State for Scotland in December 1998, stated that the following principles should govern the working pattern of the Scottish parliament:

- “the sitting pattern of the Parliament should be ‘family friendly’;
- the arrangements for the operation of the Parliament should be equally attractive to men and women; and
- the Parliament should meet during normal business hours on a regular, programmed basis”²²

A parliamentary year is a period beginning on the date of the first meeting of the Parliament following a general election, and on each subsequent anniversary of that date within that session. It is normally of 12 months. Recess is a period when the Parliament is not dissolved but is not meeting for a particular length of time.²³ The dates of recesses are decided by the Parliament on a motion from the Parliamentary

²² [Shaping Scotland's Parliament](#)

²³ [dates-of-recess-dissolution-and-parliamentary-years-updated-19-november-2021.pdf](#)

Bureau that has regard to Scottish school holidays: “In considering dates of any Parliamentary recess, the Parliamentary Bureau shall have regard to the dates when schools in any part of Scotland are to be on holiday” (rule 2.3). Currently, projected dates are given up to January 2024. There was consensus among members interviewed that recess dates tended to be family-friendly, by coinciding largely with school holidays, which coincides with findings from Allen, Cutts and Winn (2016).

Parliamentary business is conducted over three days (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) with constituency work on Mondays and Fridays. Committees meet on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings and the Chamber meets on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons and from 11.30am on Thursdays, including First Minister Questions at 12pm. Decision time usually happens at 5pm on the days the Parliament meets.

Prior to 2012, Chamber meetings were on Wednesday afternoons and on Thursdays, while committees met all day on Tuesdays and on Wednesday mornings. This was changed after a consultation “to be more responsive and agile in responding to the major issues of the day and holding the Government to account”.²⁴ Members interviewed who were sitting during this session (4) said that the previous arrangement was more flexible for those with caring responsibilities and for those in more remote constituencies as it allowed them to arrange their committee work so they may only need to spend one night away from their home constituency.

There were mixed attitudes about the working patterns of Parliament being family friendly. For some, there is a sense of inevitability around this due to the nature of the role itself. Many said that they found this manageable either because they had older children or no children and/or caring responsibilities but recognised it would be off-putting for women with younger families. This has been something which was given due prominence in the Scottish media, after several women MSPs stood down at the end of Session 5 citing the incompatibility of the role with family life.²⁵

Members also said that the unpredictability of the changes to parliamentary business and the moving of decision time had disproportionate impact on those with caring responsibilities. There were some suggestions that there had been an increase in the frequency to changes, which may be a future area of focus. Furthermore, there may be scope, then, for the Parliament to review whether some changes which have been implemented, such as changes to sitting patterns, have been barriers to meeting its goal of being a “family-friendly” institution.

²⁴ [Parliament returns to new three-day sitting pattern - News & Parliament TV : Scottish Parliament](#)

²⁵ [A family-friendly Parliament? \(shorthandstories.com\)](#)

Flexible working

All of the members supported the use of hybrid and remote working, highlighting the gains which had been facilitated by the period of virtual working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many considered the benefits this would bring in terms of more constituency time and the flexibility this would offer women with specific needs and/or characteristics e.g. those with caring responsibilities, those who may be neurodivergent, or have other anticipatory needs.

From some, this was tempered with caution, with either a focus on the importance of *being seen* to be in parliament as an elected representative, or anticipated backlash from others when there may be a perception of those choosing remote working options as lacking in commitment. This is very much in line with other research, such as Challender and Deane (2021), who find that in the absence of wider transformation, there is still an enduring focus on “the good parliamentarian” being associated with physical presenteeism.

Maternity, paternity and parental leave

There is at present no legal right to parental leave of any kind for people in elected public office. Members are seen as “holders of public office” and are not contracted employees of either the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament. As such, Member do not automatically qualify for statutory or contractual parental leave.

Policies for parental leave exist at a party level and are implemented on a voluntary basis. Unlike the UK Parliament, which has a proxy voting scheme for new mothers, new fathers and adoptive parents,²⁶ there are no such arrangements in the Scottish Parliament. This is currently being considered by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee as part of its work programme, alongside the used of virtual and hybrid formats.²⁷

There is provision to claim additional expenses for engaging an additional temporary member of staff in relation to the long-term absence of a member.²⁸ This covers any kind of long-term absence where there could be an impact on constituents or the work of the office, and though this does not explicitly reference parental leave, it could be applied in this instance (though would not cover shorter leave, such as paternity leave).

Balancing work and caring responsibilities

²⁶ [july-2021-proxy-voting-scheme.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

²⁷ [Work programme | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

²⁸ [Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme \(parliament.scot\)](#)

A free creche has previously been run in the parliament, though it has been closed since October 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When running previously, it ran from 8am to 6pm on business days and 9am to 5pm on non-business days. It provided care for children from six weeks up to five years, with spaces booked up to two weeks in advance.²⁹ The maximum single stay in the creche was four hours per day.

There has been commentary in the wider media about this provision being designed more for “visitors and witnesses”³⁰ and only used in “emergencies” for parliamentary staff, and this was also recognised by some of the interviewed members. In regard of external childcare, previously members (and all SPS) had been entitled to a tax-free childcare vouchers scheme. This was government-backed but was closed to new entrants in 2018 and has now been replaced by the tax-free childcare scheme operated by the HMRC. Looking to extending further support for external childcare provision may be an area for focus going forward.

There are two family rooms that are available for breast feeding purposes: the creche baby changing room and the baby changing/nursing parents’ room. There is no formal mention of breastfeeding in the Code of Conduct or Standing Orders, however the previous presiding officer in Session 5 – in response to a letter from the then-convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) committee – said that he would allow this in the chamber.³¹ This may benefit from more formal integration into parliamentary procedures.

Sexual harassment and discrimination?

Information about the Scottish Parliament’s Sexual Harassment Policy, related information and FAQs is contained within its “Culture of Respect” policies.³² Guidance on the general conduct of MSPs is written into the Code of Conduct. Further information on bullying and harassment, including protected characteristic harassment, and sexual harassment can be found in the Code of Conduct Guidance document.³³

In 2017, an independent, confidential survey was conducted to assess the extent to which sexist behaviour and sexual harassment is present in the Parliament, following high-profile reports of sexual harassment.³⁴ This was completed by more than 1000 people including MSPs, their staff and Scottish Parliament staff. Among the key findings was that a fifth (20%) had experienced sexual harassment or sexist behaviour while

²⁹ [Crèche Policy - About the Parliament : Scottish Parliament](#)

³⁰ [MSP mums want Holyrood to be more family friendly - BBC News](#)

³¹ [Reform Commission recommendation-childcare provision for MSPs \(parliament.scot\)](#)

³² [Culture of Respect - About the Parliament : Scottish Parliament](#)

³³ [Guidance on Code of Conduct \(parliament.scot\)](#)

³⁴ [10130 Sexual Harassment Sexist Behaviour Survey - Final Report 260218.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#)

working the Parliament, which was broken down by gender to 30% women and 6% men. The survey also highlighted a lack of confidence in reporting procedures, as well as a recognition that perpetrators tended to be male and in positions of authority.³⁵

A joint working group including representatives from each political party, senior parliament officials and an external expert, was established to progress the work arising from the results of the staff survey. It made several recommendations around education, training, conduct of MSPs, improved reporting procedures, further reviews and new monitoring mechanisms.³⁶

A programme of training for everyone who works in or for the Parliament was delivered between October 2018 and March 2019. A new policy on Sexual Harassment and an Independent Support Service to provide advice and advocacy support was established in March 2019. As complaints against Members are covered by the MSP Code of Conduct, the group also made recommendations that were taken forward by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee who made changes to the Code.

Previously, MSPs' behaviour towards their own staff was not covered by the Code, and it was mainly regulated by employment law. Revisions were submitted to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to apply to wider staff dynamics: "Members must not behave in a manner towards those individuals in 7.5 or any individuals they are in contact with in their capacity as MSPs that involves bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment), or any other inappropriate behaviour" (7.6).³⁷ These were agreed by the Parliament on 10 December 2019 and came into effect on 07 January 2020.

Further changes include the implementation of the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Act 2021, which places MSPs' staff on the same footing as other staff working at the Parliament by bringing complaints about historic sexual harassment, as well as the removal of the default one-year time limit.³⁸

In the qualitative interviews, members did not report any incidents of sexual harassment, but did report an awareness of different power dynamics of members and staff which would be conducive to an abuse of power. The numbers of complaints recorded by the Independent Support Service have been monitored and, since 2020, have been reported on a quarterly basis. There have been no such complaints nor has the SPPA committee dealt with any complaints of sexual harassment since the new

³⁵ [10130 Sexual Harassment Sexist Behaviour Survey - Final Report 260218.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#)

³⁶ [Joint Working Group Final Harassment Report December 2018 2 \(parliament.scot\)](#)

³⁷ [Section 7: General conduct of MSPs | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

³⁸ [Scottish Parliamentary Standards \(Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process\) Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

policy and procedures were put in place. There has also been little use of the Independent Support Service helpline.

The joint working group recommended there should be a review of the measures put in place after a year of their operation. This did not happen due to lack of capacity and resources as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. There have been some internal reviews through surveys of parliament staff and any actions needed as a result of this work will be looked at as part of a programme of work focussing more broadly on dignity and mutual respect. Any dignity and mutual respect policies will look to build on the Sexual Harassment policy to cover all other forms of harassment and bullying. There also an intention to extend the ISS and helpline to cover both the sexual harassment and dignity and mutual respect policy.

Social media and security

A further trend among members is the impact interactions on social media have on their health and wellbeing. As reported in the Literature Review, the online harassment and abuse of women politicians has been an important area of focus in regard of the barriers to full representation and participation, with abuse and intimidation often being gendered in nature. The First Minister recently said that this was a significant barrier for women pursuing a political career.³⁹

Members reported that interactions, including misogynistic abuse and harassment directed at them was a significant issue. Many reported that they had moderated and restricted their online behaviour because of this.

Currently, the Scottish Parliament has provided training on using social media, including the use of different channels, and how to manage abusive comments. There are also new social media monitoring measures being trialled, in the form of software that would identify key words and potentially threatening language relating to members on social media platforms. Any issues of concern picked up by the service would be escalated to Police Scotland as appropriate. Members need to opt-in to this service.

Facilities

When discussing the building and associated facilities, members praised the work of parliament in supporting women of different background, including the facilitation of events. There was also praise for the openness of the building.

³⁹ [Nicola Sturgeon says social media abuse putting women off political career \(pressandjournal.co.uk\)](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/news/nicola-sturgeon-says-social-media-abuse-putting-women-off-political-career)

Members generally felt the built environment was accessible. This was to some extent less so for those with neurodiverse requirements and hidden disabilities, particularly in regard of the use of microphones in the Chamber and committees.

It appeared the parliament was very responsive to the needs of individual members; however it may be beneficial to be more proactive in anticipating the needs and reasonable adjustments of future members of more diverse backgrounds. These may include the provision of gender-neutral facilities and greater accessibility in the Chamber, for example.

Institutional discourse

Though there is a glossary for definitions of parliamentary terms,⁴⁰ there may be more expressions embedded in the day-to-day interactions in the Chamber and other contexts which may not be inclusive. In this respect, it may be desirable to update some expressions in the spirit of this, such as objecting to Members intervening from a “sedentary position”. There may be further terms which may have a gendered dimension, so implementing gender-neutral language where appropriate may be a matter of further consideration.

7. Mainstreaming in the Parliament

One of the key principles in the founding of the Scottish Parliament was that “equal opportunities should be mainstreamed into the work of the Parliament, and through the demands of and scrutiny by the Parliament, into the work of the Executive”.⁴¹ Within the “Shaping Scotland’s Parliament” report, the definition of mainstreaming, according to the Equal Opportunities Commission, was given as “the integration of equal opportunities into all policy development, legislation, implementation, evaluation and review practices” and this extends to all protected characteristics, not just gender. This section looks at the Scottish Parliament’s scrutiny role and how gender is taken into account when carrying out this work.

SNAPSHOT: Mainstreaming in the parliament

Snapshot	Rules/practices	Key actors
Gender is mainstreamed in committee work, though there is scope for more focused and consistent guidance on when and	Impact assessment tools and guidance	Clerks, SPICe, Conveners Group, Committees

⁴⁰ [Glossary - Help : Scottish Parliament](#)

⁴¹ [Shaping Scotland's Parliament](#)

how to implement gender equality mainstreaming plans across committees, and more systematic review		
There has been good focus on witness diversity, which should be subject to continued development and measures	Guidance on Committees	Committees Clerks, SPICe
Equality considerations, including gender impacts, are included as part of wider impact assessments when developing primary and secondary legislation	Public Sector Equality Duty	Government, Members, committees
Gender equality is considered as part of equalities scrutiny in the budget process. Gendered considerations are also considered in the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement	Guidance for budget scrutiny from the Finance and Public Administration Committee	Scottish Government, Finance and Public Administration Committee

Committee scrutiny

The Equal Opportunities Committee has been a mandatory committee since the first session. This was changed by standing order in Session 5 to be the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. In its current form, as of June 2021, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee focused on equal opportunities matters, human rights matters and civil justice matters including debt, evictions and family law.

The standing order outlines that “‘equal opportunities’ includes the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions”.

A sustainable development impact assessment (SDIA) tool has been created and rolled out across committees in 2022, with approval from the Conveners Group and Management Team.⁴² This has specific focus on operations, with a further tool on scrutiny not yet made available. In guidance documentation, sustainable development

⁴² [Sustainable Development Scrutiny | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

is described the way in which societies evolve and progress, and which can continue in the long term.⁴³ Though the guidance embeds diversity in its framework, with examples of exploring impact on inequality, there is no explicit gender component. There is also an Equality Impact Assessment tool available for parliamentary staff for making decisions about projects, policy or service delivery, which also make recommendations for regular reviews.⁴⁴

Though there is evidence of good work being done by members and parliamentary staff in mainstreaming gender in committee scrutiny, the extent to which gender mainstreaming is embedded and reviewed appears to be more ad hoc. There may be scope for more focused and consistent guidance on when and how to implement gender equality mainstreaming plans and targets, consistent training, how this is outlined for each committee, and more effective monitoring of these systems put in place.

Witnesses

Guidance on giving evidence to committees is contained in the parliamentary guide for committees.⁴⁵ Research was conducted by SPICe in 2018 to explore the gender diversity of witnesses, arising from a recommendation of the Session 5 Conveners' Group and commissioned by the Parliament's Committee Office.⁴⁶ Findings of this research showed an over-representation of men (two-fifths) and variance across committees, with both "supply" and "demand" factor cited as reason behind this. An action plan was produced which included regular compiling of such statistics and producing a guide for organisations on witness diversity⁴⁷.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee subsequently considered the annual stats of witness diversity in Session 5, including gender.⁴⁸ It is not clear how the recommendations have been implemented by the current Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice committee, though there are indications of good practice: e.g. the Conveners Group recently agreed to a witness diversity monitoring form that aims to record information across a range of protected characteristics. There is up-to-date guidance of the Scottish Parliament website for witnesses, including information about hybrid and virtual meetings.⁴⁹

⁴³ [Scottish Parliament Sustainable Development Impact Assessment Tool](#)

⁴⁴ [Equality Impact Assessments \(EQIAs\) - About the Parliament : Scottish Parliament](#)

⁴⁵ [Guidance on Committees - Parliamentary Business : Scottish Parliament](#)

⁴⁶ [Committee witnesses: gender and representation \(azureedge.net\)](#)

⁴⁷ [Witness diversity: guide for organisations | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁴⁸ [EHRiC Papers 20191107.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#); [Public Papers 031220.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#)

⁴⁹ [Guide for witnesses | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

There may be more scope for more formal measures to ensure continued witness diversity. A further future area of focus would be to increase the visibility and access to witness diversity data and monitoring of the impact of any recently implanted policy or changes.

Legislative scrutiny

The Equality Act brought together previously separate pieces of legislation and introduced 'protected characteristics' including: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.⁵⁰

The Act introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which places general equality duties on public authorities to assess the impact of applying a proposed new or revised policy or practice on the groups of the protected characteristics. Public authorities are required to demonstrate 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or any other prohibited conduct;
- Advance equality of opportunity; and
- Foster good relations between different groups - by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

Equality considerations, including gender impacts, are included as part of wider impact assessments when developing primary and secondary legislation. These are usually published as policy memorandum when a bill is scrutinised. It is beyond the scope of this report to gauge how far gender equality has been considered in impact assessments, though this may be an area of future research.

Budget impact scrutiny

The Finance and Public Administration Committee provides guidance to parliamentary committees for scrutiny of the budget in their areas. Current guidance is based on the Budget Review Group's 2017 review of the budget process and was last disseminated to committees in June 2021. This contains a section on integrating equalities scrutiny in the budget process. Further recommendation is also given to engage service users and service providers in evaluating the impact of previous budgets.⁵¹

As part of this guidance, committees are directed to scrutinise the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement which has been developed by the Scottish Government and

⁵⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

⁵¹ [budget-process--guidance-to-subject-committees.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](https://www.parliament.scot/budget-process--guidance-to-subject-committees.pdf)

the Equality and Budget Advisory Group and is published alongside the Budget document.⁵² This includes sections on the impact on different groups of people, split according to the 10 protected characteristics. For example, this includes detail of impact on fundings allocations/investments for violence against women and girls services and prevention work, lone parents and low-income mothers, fair work funding and Women Returners, early learning and childcare, and investment for trans people, including supporting a new working group for non-binary people.

8. Conclusions

As has been recognised by previous studies, this report illustrated that the path to gender equality in the Scottish Parliament has not been – and is not – a straightforward trajectory. Using a mixed method approach, this report brings together a range of gender-sensitive data for the first time, which includes: the number of women MPs; the number of women in leadership positions; the participation of women in parliamentary business; the culture, environment and policies of the parliament from a gender-perspective; and how Parliament mainstreams gender issues in its work.

Data show that there have been great gains in terms of women’s representation, particularly in this current session, as well as high points for women in leadership positions. However, as this report illustrates, progress can slow, or stall, if gender equality is not given due prominence. While the themes and trends identified are only a partial snapshot of the situation in the Scottish parliamentary context, it provides a foundation to further investigate areas which could improve both the descriptive and substantive representation of different groups of women, lead to gender equality, as well as greater diversity and inclusion.

While there appears to be positive shifts in terms of attitudes to women in politics, an openness to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of women, as well as more women in leadership positions, there does still appear to be evidence of more entrenched, gendered attitudes around of women’s place at the political table. According to the interviewed members, this is often seen in the “everyday sexism” embedded in the interactions and behaviour of members, particularly toward newer and less experienced women. Taking a proactive approach to help foster a more inclusive environment in these day-to-day interactions is an area of focus for the institution.

Generally, there is consensus that as more women are elected, this will lead to more of a cultural shift in the parliament. In this respect, more needs to be done in terms of the recruitment of diverse women. However, the single-axis approach of monitoring

⁵² [Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2022-2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/budget/2022-2023)

numbers only tells a partial story. In order to be a GSP, the institution needs to be attuned to diversity more broadly, as well as proactive and purposive in taking measures to advance this. Though recruitment is a concern of parties, there is scope for the parliament to introduce more formal measures in this regard. For example, in the context of the potential devolution of equality law, the introduction of legal quota systems.

A key area of focus is the role of monitoring and reviewing of diversity data, as well as forms of accessibility/transparency. There is scope to formalise additional or new processes of data collection, monitoring and plans of action around the role of women and diverse groups in the parliament. Ensuring there is more publicly available and accessible data ensures more accountability in achieving not just gender equality but also greater diversity.

It should also be said that the dominant focus in this report has been on the under-representation of women, there is a recognition of the vastly different experiences different groups of women may have, so any approach in this regard should be intersectional. Further to this, there should be attention on making such approaches sensitive to those who are non-binary as valuable members of Scottish society to ensure genuine representation of the country's diverse population.

Lastly, an area of focus should be continued support of women throughout their parliamentary career. This should aim to address the "glass ceilings" that women may experience at different stages to ensure their participation to the highest levels and most prestigious areas, as well as address the "leaky pipeline" of retention. A key part of this is to look to how formal rules may be implemented to responds to the needs and realities of MSPs to balance work and family responsibilities.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Literature review

The literature review below offers a brief overview of existing research which map onto the themes covered in this audit thus far: representation, participation, culture and mainstreaming. The report is not exhaustive and provides, where appropriate, references to international, national and Scottish-specific research.

A broad range of search terms were used to identify relevant literature in academic databases, accessed through the Robert Gordon University library search engine. Grey literature has been included, where appropriate, such as government and third sector publications and reports, with hyperlinks for reference. Further key pieces of evidence from citations in bibliographies and literature were also included.

Glossary

AWS – All-women shortlists

CPA – Commonwealth Parliamentarians Association

CWP – Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

GMMP – Global Media Monitoring Project

International IDEA – International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

IPU – Inter-parliamentary Union

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WEF – World Economic Forum

Representation in parliaments

Global monitoring

Monitoring and mapping the numbers of women elected to parliaments is a prominent focus of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) and academic research in the subject areas of women and politics. Providing empirical data in this area allows for measuring women's gains (or lack thereof) in different contexts, such as national, regional, and local parliaments, and in different leadership positions. This data is necessary to show wider progress and trends over time, which may be masked by impressions of perceived gender equality.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is a global membership organization of national parliament currently consisting of 178 Member Parliaments and 14 Associate

Members.⁵³ A significant area of focus is on gender equality,⁵⁴ with the organisation positing that there is a strong link between strong democracies and gender equality in parliaments. The IPU's work in this area focuses on three main objectives: increasing the number of women in elected parliamentary positions through well-designed quotas and parliamentary caucuses; supporting women in parliaments; and transforming parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions that deliver on women's rights. To achieve these objectives, it produces a range of data, reports and tools, such as a self-assessment toolkit for gender-sensitive parliaments.

Parline, the IPU's database, is the reference point for authoritative data on the parliaments of the world. It comprises 600+ data points from national parliaments, which provide and check the data through a network of correspondents.⁵⁵ Each month, the IPU publishes rankings of the percentage of women in national parliaments,⁵⁶ global and regional averages of women in national parliaments,⁵⁷ women speakers of national parliaments,⁵⁸ as well as historical data such as 'world firsts' (e.g. women in parliaments, women speakers, women's right to vote, women's right to stand for election).⁵⁹ The latest figures from the IPU shows that the average percentage for women's political participation in national parliaments (Lower House) is 26.4%⁶⁰. Global figures for women executive government positions are even lower.⁶¹ As of 15 June 2022, the United Kingdom was ranked 45th of 186 ranked places with 34.7% of MPs women. As a devolved parliament, Scotland is not included in this ranking, but with its current ranking of 45%, this would place it significantly higher in ranking if placed.

There are also several other membership organisations which monitor women's descriptive representation, as well as conducting research in patterns of exclusion and advocacy for gender equality in participation. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organisation with 34 member states with an exclusive mandate to support and advance democracy worldwide. Founded in 1995, it aims to develop, share and enable the use of comparative knowledge in its key impact areas of expertise: electoral processes, constitution-building, democracy assessment, and political participation and representation. Included in its strategic approach is work on *Gender Equality and*

⁵³ [About us | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁵⁴ [Gender equality \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁵⁵ [About Parline | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁵⁶ [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁵⁷ [Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁵⁸ [Women Speakers of national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁵⁹ [Historical data on women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

⁶⁰ [Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#), accessed 15 June 2022

⁶¹ As of February 2022, there were 10 women serving as Head of State and 14 serving as Head of Government, according to [Women in Politics and Public Life - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

Inclusion in Democracy of which it recommends “enabling legal, socio-cultural, political, policy and institutional measures to reverse the trends on exclusion and marginalisation.”⁶² More information on different organisations is given in the “mainstreaming” section of this literature review, below.

As well as monitoring women’s descriptive representation in the lower houses of national parliaments, there are also mechanisms to track women in leadership roles. IPU Parline provides gender-sensitive data on speakers and Secretaries General in parliaments.⁶³ The UN provides an up-to-date list of Head of State, Heads of Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs.⁶⁴ Though this includes the gender of leaders, it is not provided in a searchable context, unlike the Parline data.

Gender sensitive parliaments

Shifts in gender and political science research over the last few decades have moved to focus on the gendered division in political institutions which may contribute to a continued male dominance in politics. Feminist institutionalist approaches have explored how the norms and practices of “doing” politics can impact on women’s representation and participation, with parliaments still considered highly masculinised institutions where “male voices” and “masculinist practices” have historically predominated and may still be embedded in various ways (e.g. a lack of focus on “women’s” issues, an over-representation of men in elected positions, exclusionary norms and practices for those with caring responsibilities, more adversarial and/or aggressive behavioural norms) (See for example Lovenduski 2005, Krook and Mackay 2011, Kenny 2013, Macrae and Weiner 2017).

A variety of organisations provide tools and mechanisms to undertake gender-sensitive audits to understand the progress toward gender equality in institutions. The framework from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) stemmed from research conducted in 2008 when it conducted a survey entitled “Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments” and found that women were “overwhelmingly” the main drivers of progress in gender equality in parliament.⁶⁵ This facilitated further research into the role and responsibility of parliaments, as institutions, in driving gender equality. Subsequently in 2011, the IPU published a report of the global survey, “Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice,”⁶⁶ which was the culmination of a two-year collaborative research project gathering primary data on the

⁶² [Gender Equality and Inclusion in Democracy | International IDEA](#)

⁶³ [Secretaries General in parliament | Parline: the IPU’s Open Data Platform](#)

⁶⁴ [Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs | Department for General Assembly and Conference Management \(un.org\)](#)

⁶⁵ [Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁶⁶ [Gender-Sensitive Parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

gender sensitivity of parliaments around the world and how to effectively mainstream gender into their work. This was conducted in partnership with the UNDP Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region and with International IDEA in Latin America.

Taking account of the findings and recommendations of the 2011 Gender-sensitive Parliaments report, the key policy document, the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments, was adopted unanimously by the 127th IPU Assembly (Quebec City, October 2012).⁶⁷ Published in 2017, it establishes strategies linked over seven action areas under its definition of a gender-sensitive parliament, while acknowledging that that specific actions may need to consider the individual cultural, social and religious context of parliaments.

A toolkit was also created for parliaments to help them “evaluate how gender sensitive they are, assess their current practices and policies, identify possible areas for reform, plan for change, and establish mechanisms to monitor progress.”⁶⁸ As of 2020, 12 Parliaments were understood to have conducted a gender-sensitive audit using the IPU’s toolkit, including the United Kingdom. The toolkit document lists examples of actions taken as a result of gender self-assessment activity which includes reference to work done in Turkey, Uganda, Bangladesh and Argentina.⁶⁹

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides a toolkit for mainstreaming and implementing gender equality, which is based on 2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life (GEPL Recommendation). In this approach, the area of “parliaments” is one of four “pillars” which also includes institutional and governance frameworks, gender-sensitive practices in the judiciary, and gender-sensitive public employment systems.⁷⁰

In 2019, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) assessed the gender-sensitivity of the national parliaments of all 28 EU Member States, as well as the European Parliament. Between April and June 2019, it collected information to complete the general version of the gender-sensitive parliaments tool.⁷¹ This is an online self-assessment instrument (a questionnaire) that covers five areas, each dedicated to measuring a specific aspect of gender sensitivity in parliaments. Users are given highlighted areas that can be improved but maintains this “will not *per se* be enough to

⁶⁷ [Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁶⁸ [Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁶⁹ [Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

⁷⁰ [toolkit-for-mainstreaming-and-implementing-gender-equality.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)

⁷¹ [Gender-sensitive parliaments | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

change processes” and is instead designed to sit alongside more thorough institutional processes, referencing the IPU’s gender-sensitive parliaments work.⁷²

In 2020, the CPA produced a new set of guidelines, authored by Professor Sarah Childs, titled “CWP Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change” to highlight the importance of gender sensitising across all Parliaments in the Commonwealth.⁷³ Building on previous work of the CPA in 2001, as well as referencing the work of the OECD, EIGE and IPU, this also included a crisis response due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the potential risks to women, should a gendered approach not be taken.

Gender and the UK Parliament

Women have been able to stand for election as an MP since 1918, following the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act. Since 1918, there have been 560 female MPs.⁷⁴ Until December 2016, there had been fewer female MPs in total than there were men sitting in the House of Commons, at any one time. When Dr Caroline Johnson won the Sleaford and North Hykeham by-election on 08 December 2016, she became the 455th woman to be elected as an MP, alongside 455 male MPs in the House of Commons at that time.⁷⁵

The House of Commons Library contains several Research Briefings which outline the numerical progress and other details of women in Parliament and Government, including the number of women elected at each general election and information on women who have served in the Cabinet, as well as comparative data on the devolved legislature and international comparisons.⁷⁶ Further, Annesley, Beckwith and Franceshet (2019) explores the UK Cabinet from in a comparative context to other nations, looking to why men have been more likely than women to be appointed, why gendered patterns of appointment vary cross-nationally, and why, over time, women’s inclusion in cabinets has grown significantly. There is also research which shows the incremental stages which led to universal suffrage across the UK and summaries of key legislation relating to this.⁷⁷ Further information on women and the vote can be found on the Living Heritage pages on the parliamentary website.⁷⁸ There is also published data on current and former peers.⁷⁹

⁷² [How to use the tool | Gender-sensitive Parliaments | EIGE \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷³ [Gender-Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines \(cpahq.org\); cwp-gender-sensitizing-guidelines.pdf \(cpahq.org\)](#)

⁷⁴ [Female Members of Parliament - House of Commons Library](#), accessed 05 December 2022

⁷⁵ [As many women MPs \(ever\) as men \(now\) \(parliament.uk\)](#)

⁷⁶ [Women in Politics and Public Life - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

⁷⁷ [The History of the Parliamentary Franchise - House of Commons Library](#)

⁷⁸ [Women and the vote - UK Parliament](#)

⁷⁹ [Lords Membership: How Many Women Have Sat in the Lords? - House of Lords Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

The UK conducted its own – and first – gender-sensitive audit of both Houses in 2018, using the IPU self-assessment toolkit.⁸⁰ There had, however, already been significant work done in this area with the Good Parliament project, a comprehensive reform agenda undertaken to improve representation and inclusion in the UK Parliament, which included a gendered component.⁸¹ The “UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018” welcomed the “steady progress” that had been made to increase the proportion of woman MPs to 32% and woman peers to 26% at the time, but noted that a number of barriers remained to achieving equal female representation in the UK Parliament. These included:

- The culture of Parliament as highlighted in recent reports of bullying and harassment, and sexual harassment;
- The challenges that working in Parliament poses for family life, including the unpredictability of business and potential long hours;
- The financial impact of standing for Parliament; and
- Online threats and threats to physical security, in particular gender-based intimidation, harassment and violence against female Parliamentarians and female candidates.

The report also acknowledged the report of Dame Laura Cox into the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff,⁸² published two weeks before the audit was undertaken and included action in response to this. Among the findings of the report was the recommendation for a single, transparent process for appointing peers to select committees, as well as highlighting the lack of diversity in the Panel of Chairs. Other recommendations included further mechanisms to monitor and publish the gender breakdowns of MPs and peers; measures for integrating women’s voices into legislative and scrutiny functions; and suggested improvements to promote diversity of women in senior positions.

Recent research from Goodwin, Bates and McKay (2021) has focused on the different parliamentary career paths and policy specialisations pursued by female and male MPs as expressed through the select committee system of the UK Parliament. Here, the authors identify strong gendered patterns to the division of labour within the House of Commons, illustrating how female representatives participate differently from their male counterparts, with women much more likely than men to be assigned to committees covering lower-status, feminised policy areas than men, which they argue has ramifications for the substantive representation of women and the quality and effectiveness of committee work. Further research has also focused on the changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges/opportunities arising from this for

⁸⁰ [UK Parliament Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit Report](#)

⁸¹ [Good Parliament | Gender Research Centre | University of Bristol](#)

⁸² [dame-laura-cox-independent-inquiry-report.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

the UK and devolved legislatures, including chamber business, remote working and other impacts (Challender and Deane 2021).

Gender and the Scottish Parliament

Prior to the introduction of the Scottish Parliament, the proportion of women elected in Scotland was low. In the period between 1918 to 1992 there was 21 women MPs elected to Westminster from Scottish constituencies. Labour's approach to the 1997 UK election saw an increase in women's representation in the UK parliament to 18.2% (doubling the previous record) through the use of all-women shortlists (AWS), which somewhat normalised this approach by legislating to enable it, after previous contention within the Labour Party. Nonetheless, this only included 12 Scottish women MPs out of 72 Scottish constituencies (16.6%) (Russell, Mackay and McAllister 2002).

The new Scottish Parliament elected in 1999 drew attention for the high percentage of women elected in the first intake at 37.2%. The next election, in 2003, saw an even greater number of women elected, with 39.5% taking seats. A loss of momentum followed thereafter, however, with figures falling short of this high point over the next few parliamentary sessions. Women accounted for 33.3% of MSPs in the 2007 election, and then 34.8% in the 2011 election. At the time of the Scottish referendum in September 2014, there were 34.9% women MSPs. At the 2016 election, the percentage of women elected as MSPs was exactly the same, at 34.9%, with researchers arguing that progress slows when advocacy for women's representation is not foregrounded (Kenny, Mackay and Murtagh 2016). The total number of elected women MSPs following the election on 06 May 2021 was 58 out of 129 elected Members, making up 45% of the total membership and making it the highest point since the introduction of the Parliament in 1999.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament has allowed it to be considered as part of the body of research which looks at the innovation and constraints of new institutions. A significant area of this takes a gendered focus, looking at how constitutional change has impacted gender equality in parliaments and the role of women as political representatives. The numerical proportion of women in Holyrood has therefore been considered in numerous comparative contexts, including with the UK Parliament, the remaining devolved administrations of the UK, as well as other global institutions. Following devolution, Scotland has been favourably compared to its UK counterpart, which has been lagging behind in the proportion of female representatives (e.g. Mackay 2003, 2004), though this gap is narrowing following recent election cycles.

Several studies have focused on the interplay of factors which laid the pathway for the higher levels of women's political representation in the first sessions of the Scottish Parliament. Research from the time (e.g. Brown 1998, 1999, 2000, Breitenbach and Mackay 2001), as well as contemporary retrospective analyses (Morrison and Gibbs

2021), have emphasised the role Scottish feminists played in lobbying for the creation of a new political structure which would be more responsive to women's needs and concerns, alongside more specific political campaigns, such as Scottish Labour 50/50 for parliamentary parity (Mackay, Myers and Brown 2003) and other party and political dynamics, such as quotas, and new electoral system and institutional design (Russell, Mackay and McAllister 2002). Such studies map the nuanced conditions which laid the initial foundations of gendered institution-building in Scotland.

Subsequent research has since concentrated on tracking different patterns over time to continually assess the role of women and gender equality in the Scottish Parliament, following its ambitious start. Using UK devolution and the creation of the Scottish Parliament and as a case study, Mackay (2014) outlines how the "nestedness" of a new institution within its wider environment, as well as the "stickiness" of older formal and informal rules about gender, can hamper wider constitutional change – even newer institutions – placing them within their gendered institutional context. More recently, there has been a focused on the gender advocacy and developments in post-referendum Scotland, and the "foreboding" newness of Brexit (Ritch 2019). Kenny and Mackay (2020) have undertaken a detailed and multi-faceted analysis of the progress for women's representation and gender equality in post-devolution Scotland, reflecting on the often-uneven trajectory this has taken, as do Morrison and Gibbs (2021), who reflect on the inescapable influence of Westminster norms on Holyrood, despite feminist ambitions for greater difference.

More specific strands of both academic and Third Sector research have analysed different components of the Scottish Parliament with a gender lens. Bochdel and Berthier (2021), for example, have – in affiliation with the Scottish Parliament – examined the role and gender diversity of witnesses in committee scrutiny processes. Feminist organisation, Engender, has mapped the proportion of women in parliamentary positions, such as committees and convenerships, and other data of women in politics, such as local government, alongside wider trends of women in media and business (Engender 2020). Approaching this from an intersectional perspective has also been an area of focus, for example, the "Equal Representation in Politics" toolkit was created by 12 organisations in Scotland to push for more diverse representation in Scottish politics, including in the Scottish parliament.⁸³

⁸³ [Our Vision and Background | Equal Representation in Politics](#)

Political recruitment and practices

Women's substantive representation

Alongside the descriptive (numeric) representation of women in politics, research has focused on the substantive representation of women in politics: i.e. how women's interests are debated and acted upon by politicians and implemented in policy. Areas of focus have centred on the interconnectedness and/or at times apparent disconnect of descriptive and substantive representation. For example, in an influential text in this area, Phillips (1995) makes the distinction between the "politics of presence" and the "politics of ideas", whereby the politics of presence is described as "the proportionate representation according to characteristics such as gender or ethnicity" while the politics of ideas is "where difference has been regarded primarily as a matter of ideas, and representation has been considered more or less adequate depending on how well it reflects voters' opinions, preferences, or beliefs". She goes on to suggest that some form "politics of presence" is needed to inform the "politics of ideas" underpinning the legitimacy of democratic institutions (1995 p1).

The concept of "critical mass" has been used to describe how a certain threshold number of women may influence policy/legislation substantively, though this has been challenged for lacking nuance on how change is enacted (or not) in different political contexts (Childs and Krook 2006). A further complexity to this area is around considerations of what actually constitutes women's substantive representation, if this may be considered feminist, or may challenge assumptions that women will always represent the interests of other women (see for example Childs and Lovenduski 2013). More recently, gender scholarship has tended to move away from attempting to determine the mechanisms through which descriptive representation leads to substantive representation, instead taking a more "agnostic" stance - moving from questions around whether "women represent women" to that of "who claims to act for women", looking to more of a holistic approach to this (Celis *et al.* 2008).

There does, nonetheless, appear to be degree of consensus in this area of research that descriptive representation will impact in some way on women's substantive representation, insofar as "a substantial presence is needed in order that a diversity of women's perspectives can be inserted into political debate" (Mackay 2004), with a growing body of evidence which shows increasing numbers of women has led to the implementation of gender policy initiatives and policies that appeal directly to women (see for example Childs 2004, Lovenduski 2005). In the UK context, Childs (2008) explores the characteristics of women's participation and the feminisation of British party politics – post-1997 – showing how women's concerns and perspectives were integrated in political and policy. Nonetheless, further research also shows that even with (a sharp) increase in female representatives, gendered patterns of committee

membership, may still be maintained, with further measures needed to disrupt the gendered division of labour than just increasing the numbers of women representatives (Goodwin, Bates and McKay 2021).

Women's political recruitment and pathways to power: "sticky floors", "leaky pipelines", and "glass ceilings"

Research focusing on gender and political recruitment suggests there may be different trajectories and/or obstacles for women's political recruitment, including their standing for parliamentary positions, their retention when elected, and their representation in more senior parliamentary positions. Norris and Lovenduski's (1995) influential text focussing on legislative recruitment in Britain outlines the systemic, party-political and individual obstacles that have impacted on women's political recruitment in this context. They map out a framework which splits these into issues related to the supply side (issues with the number of women who are willing or able to participate in politics) and demand side (issues in their selection). Accordingly, these barriers - such as financial or economic pressures, education, (supply) or party ideology or "selectorates" (demand) - may all be subject to entrenched gendered attitudes that also hinder women's equality of participation.

Gender and political science research focused on the pathways women take to stand as parliamentary candidates or elected members may employ the useful metaphors of "sticky floors" and "leaky pipelines" to capture how women and other minorities tend to concentrate or "stick" at lower positions in institutions or "leak out" before they reach more senior positions. A key component of this is attributed to the gendered divisions of caring and paid work which have been seen as longstanding barriers to equality of participation and has been discussed extensively. In the political context, Mackay (2001) argues that the associated costs of care, by way of domestic and family duties, impinge on women's recruitment as the burden of care predominantly rests on women, while the political system obscures the central importance of caregiving itself. Childs (2016) also suggests there may be negative perceptions of politicians claiming child-related costs and a stigma attached to caring expenses.

Further research has looked to the role that "feeder" positions play as routes to parliamentary roles. There has been much focus on the pathways of celebrities into politics (e.g. see for example Street 2004 and Higgins and Drake 2006), which may also have further gendered implications, such as reinforcing women's "outsider" status to politics (van Zoonen 2005). There has, however, also been studies which show that there may be novel routes into politics for women that are not as open to men, such as beauty pageants and beauty queens (Hinojosa and Carle 2016).

The Fawcett Society and (CEDAW) suggest the limited involvement of women in the professions from which politicians are more typically recruited, such as law and

economics, can create obstacles for women's recruitment.⁸⁴ There has also been a focus on women's low representation in local government roles. Recent data, also from the Fawcett Society, showed some 8,410 female councillors were elected to local government in England in 2019, making up just 35% of councillors, with women remaining outnumbered three-to-one on 12% of councils, with 96% of councils remaining male-dominated,⁸⁵ despite it being the biggest local election for four years. Previous comparative data (2017/18) on the proportion of women councillors in UK compared to other Commonwealth countries shows the UK fares poorer than some member states, at a ranking of 17 out of 52, edging over the average of 22.3% at 28.2%⁸⁶. There has been focus on the lack of funding given to local government, including low allowances for councillors, which varies across regions, though is significantly higher in Scotland than in England.⁸⁷

At the most recent Scottish local government election in May 2022, 29% of Scottish councillors elected were women (compared to 24% in the previous local elections). Research has been undertaken by COSLA, a cross-party organisation which represents Scotland's 32 local councils, into the barriers into elected office⁸⁸ which include remuneration, working hours, working practices, and support.⁸⁹ Further research into councillor's remuneration cites responses from women who highlighted the challenges in balancing caring responsibilities with their councillor role as well as referencing several female councillors who stated that they were, or were considering, not standing for re-election in 2022 due to financial barriers.⁹⁰ Recent research has also shown that remote working practices, implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, may improve women local councillors' experiences, as well as women's political participation (Hibbs 2022).

Locating the role of women in politics has also looked to the barriers that exist in women taking on the highest levels of office, rather than being elected to the lower houses of parliaments. Figures show that there is still a structural marginalisation of women leaders globally, though there is some nuance to different national contexts which fare better than others. This concept is commonly referred to as a "glass ceiling" – a metaphorical description of the barriers women and minorities face in reaching leadership roles. Due to the relatively small number of women who have achieved

⁸⁴ General recommendation No. 23: Political and public life [INT_CEDAW_GEC_4736_E.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

⁸⁵ [New Fawcett data reveals that Women's representation in local government "at a standstill" | The Fawcett Society](#)

⁸⁶ [3801_FMNewproofed.pdf \(clgf.org.uk\)](#)

⁸⁷ [Becoming a councillor | Local Government Association](#); [The Local Governance \(Scotland\) Act 2004 \(Remuneration\) Amendment Regulations 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸⁸ [Challenging Barriers to Elected Office | COSLA](#)

⁸⁹ [GUEST POST: Women and Local Council Elections in Scotland | Engender blog | Engender](#)

⁹⁰ [Cllr-Remuneration-Survey-Results.docx \(live.com\)](#); [TIME IS RIGHT FOR A REALISTIC REMUNERATION FOR COUNCILLORS, SAYS COSLA | COSLA](#)

national leadership positions, research often focuses on comparative case studies, such as Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, and Golda Meir (Jalalzai 2008, Murray 2010). Researchers have also extended the metaphor of the glass ceiling to convey more specific challenges of women in senior political positions: for example, women may also encounter a “glass cliff” (Ryan and Haslam 2005), whereby they are drafted into leadership positions where there is greater risk of failure. Niemi (2015) suggests that, as women are often perceived as being motivated by a desire to, or are symbolic of, “cleaning-up politics” they may be drafted into head already-failing parties and are thus implicated in any subsequent failures as a result.

Further focus on this research strand looks to the strategies that can be enacted to promote women’s political participation. Lovenduski (2005) provides a framework which outlines three broad equality strategies available to increase the representation of women: equality rhetoric; equality promotion or positive action and equality guarantees or positive discrimination. Equality rhetoric is the public acceptance of women’s claims, for example embedded in campaign platforms and political discourse, such as speech and writing. Equality promotion or positive action is the attempt to bring in more women into politics by offering special training and/or financial assistance and setting targets and other measures to enable women to come forward. Equality guarantees or positive discrimination is the demand for women representatives, for example policies or quotas (discussed below) (2005 pp. 90-91). Childs (2013) establishes a framework of party regulations and practices which can be seen to engender women’s participation and representation, while also conceptualising a typology of gendered party regulation across three models: minimalist, medium and maximalist.

Research on differences between parties in the UK, across both the UK and devolved governments, may interrogate recruitment strategies in relation to descriptive representation (see for example Russell, Mackay and McAllister 2002, Kenny and Mackay 2014, 2020). While many focus on the left-leaning parties, such as Labour’s use of AWS, there have also been focus on parties of the right (Childs and Webb 2011) or address competing narratives assumption around party specific ideologies being more aligned with gender advocacy (O’Brien 2018).

A growing focus on gender and politics has been on intersectionality and increasing the recruitment of different groups of women. According to Section 106 of the UK Equality Act, UK Government legislation requires parties to publish diversity data on candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. This is rarely enacted, though Scottish parties have pledged recently to be more proactive on the issue.⁹¹ There has been growing discussion about the lack of

⁹¹ [Our Vision & Background | Equal Representation in Politics; https://inclusionScotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Access-to-Politics-Charter-non-graphics-Large-Print.docx.pdf](https://inclusionScotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Access-to-Politics-Charter-non-graphics-Large-Print.docx.pdf)

ethnic minority MSPs in the public sphere (BBC 2020) and calls for greater representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) parliamentarians (Rodger 2020) and diversity following the most recent election cycle (Peace 2021). Third sector and advocacy responses campaigned for a continued focus on diversity, such as the Centenary Action Group, which leads several campaigns to diversify the UK parliament and eradicate the barriers that prevent women from taking part in political decision-making,⁹² while the John Smith Centre undertakes research on the Gender Gap in politics⁹³ and provides a Parliamentary Internship Programme by paying students about the Living Wage for work experience with MSPs⁹⁴.

Quotas

The introduction of proportionally weighted equality strategies, such as quotas, has been seen as a possible route to remedying lower proportions of woman parliamentarians (Lovenduski 2005). These tend to take the form of either statutory or voluntary party-political quotas. According to Dahlerup (2006) there are two dimensions in the definitions of quota systems: who mandates it (e.g. in the constitution, electoral law, parties) and where they occur in the selection process (e.g. in finding those being considered for nomination, or candidate selection). The Global Database of Quotas for Women, a joint project of International IDEA, the IPUD and Stockholm University, provides a list of countries which observe different types of quotas.⁹⁵

Quotas have become more mainstream in UK politics in recent years, with the introduction of informal and formal measures. Most notably, the Labour Party has successfully employed all-women shortlists (AWS) as a party quota, with the May 1997 general election acting as a watershed moment for women's representation in the UK, with figures rising dramatically from 60 in 1992 to 119 in 1997, of which 101 were Labour MPs (Alderman and Tchikalova 2007). The party continued with this again in 2005, 2010 and 2015, though recently has announced it will cease to use these for the next general election (Rogers 2022). According to Engender (2016), prior to devolution, the issue of quotas in Scotland was framed by successful campaigning by the women's movement, across civil society, and within political parties. This led to the introduction of gender-balancing mechanisms by Scottish Labour ahead of the inaugural 1999 elections, which were credited for the relatively high levels of female representation during the parliament's first sessions (ibid). In their exploration of the political level and inter- and intra-party dynamics around the election of women to the Scottish Parliament (and Welsh Assembly) in this cycle, Russell, Mackay and McAllister (2002)

⁹² [Campaigns — Centenary Action Group](#)

⁹³ [The Gender Gap: Women and Trust - John Smith Centre](#)

⁹⁴ [Parliamentary Internship Programme - John Smith Centre](#)

⁹⁵ [Gender Quotas Database | International IDEA](#)

outline that the most significant gains were achieved by parties which made rigid policies in favour of positive action, alongside other influential factors such as the establishment of a new electoral system, institutional design, and role of woman activists (as also highlighted in the previous section).

The concept of “contagion” is referenced widely in women and politics research, whereby the representation of women in one party or institution may influence another and make gains for women’s representation, both descriptively and substantively. Kenny and Mackay (2014) examine Scotland as a case study in this context, primarily focusing on the Scottish Labour Party. Basing their analysis on elections from 1992 to 2011 (including to the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament, the European Parliament and Scottish local government), they found mixed evidence of a “contagion effect” in the use of quotas to boost women’s representation, arguing that, as of 2014, these measures had not yet “caught on” in Scottish politics.

There is currently no legislation mandating targets or quotas for political parties in Scotland, and the country cannot introduce its own statutory gender quotas, as equalities legislation is a reserved matter. In a 2016 report, the feminist organisation Engender called upon the Scottish Government and political parties for rigorous action in the use of quotas, following more “piecemeal” approaches, which they attribute to the fall in numbers since 2003. This included pressing for the case for the devolution of electoral and equalities law to the Scottish Parliament (Engender 2016).

Further campaigning in this area has been the Women 50:50 campaign, which pushed for equal representation of women in Scottish politics and policymaking. So far, it has cross-party support from four of the five party leaders in Scotland, including the present First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. It also claims to have the support of more than a third of the MSPs in the Scottish Parliament.⁹⁶ Successful campaigns have included advocating for legislation for 50:50 gender balance membership on public boards, which was implemented as an Act in 2018.⁹⁷ Information received by Women 50:50 details the different measures the first main parties took for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, with four of the five main parties using all-women shortlists (AWS).⁹⁸

Culture

Visibility and symbolic representation

⁹⁶ [Home | Women 5050](#)

⁹⁷ [Gender Representation on Public Boards Scotland Bill – Bills \(proposed laws\) – Scottish Parliament | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁹⁸ [What the parties say | Women 5050](#)

Research around women and politics has focused on the ways in which female politicians are represented in wider institutions and practices, such as the media and public discourse, which can provide insights into wider gendered attitudes, expectations and norms associated with politicians. Dahlerup and Leyenaar (2013) highlight the role mediated representations play in contributing to male dominance in politics, with the media(ted) construction of female politicians considered a form of “symbolic representation”. Primarily, research focuses on how woman politicians are represented in forms of media, such as newspapers (print and online), television broadcasts and other forms of political communication.

Much like the monitoring of the descriptive representation of women in parliaments, there have been agenda-setting projects which have also monitored the symbolic representation of women in the media. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has been conducting longitudinal, global-level research on gender in news content every five years since 1995. Consisting of “snapshots” of the news across the world on single days, the GMMP monitors how women and men are portrayed in the news. This includes a political component, reporting trends of the topic category of politics and government, as well as the visibility of men and women in the news as government employees, public servants, and officials, such as politicians, ministers, spokespersons.⁹⁹

Figures over the 20 years of the GMMP show the biggest gender gap to be around women’s inclusion in political news reporting, fluctuating throughout the periods of study and even decreasing from 19% in 2010 to 16% in 2016. This data also reveals that the media coverage of women in political roles has been consistently lower than the proportion of women representatives globally. And while recent GMMP reports have acknowledged that there have been some improvements over time for women in the news media overall, this is not mirrored in the category of Politics and Gender. This is also reflected in specific analysis of the UK’s performance in the context of the wider GMMP, with research commenting that the news media were “lagging behind” the pace of change of women occupying positions in governing structures (Ross *et al.* 2016).

Looking to patterns across different national contexts, academic studies have attempted to map the visibility of woman politicians, showing that often this can vary in different circumstances. These give a complex picture which often demonstrates the marginalisation of women (e.g. Norris 1997, Kahn 1994), or alternatively patterns of more coverage for their uniqueness (e.g. Wasburn and Wasburn 2011), when they displayed atypical behaviour which disrupted conventional gender norms (Gidengil and Everitt 2003) and more coverage of specific figures, while other woman politicians were consistently marginalised (Luenenborg *et al.* 2011).

⁹⁹ [GMMP-2020.Highlights_FINAL.pdf \(whomakesthenews.org\)](#)

Several UK studies have also turned to the visibility of woman politicians in the media, pointing to a structural marginalisation (Ross *et al.* 2013, O'Neill and Savigny 2014). Some of these have also taken a comparative focus, looking at news coverage of female politicians, and women in varying public roles, such as voters and male politicians' wives (Campbell and Childs 2010, Harmer 2015, 2016, Ross *et al.* 2013). In the Scottish context, there is also evidence of a structural marginalisation of women in political stories (Ross *et al.* 2016).

While the projects and studies above have attempted to map the visibility of woman politicians in the news media by looking at proportions of coverage, including comparative content, a further area of focus has been on the impact of the visibility of woman politicians, including positive role model effects (Atkeson 2003, Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Bühlmann and Schädel 2012) as well as measuring messages of empowerment and positive reactions to women in leadership positions, within, and across, nations (Cantrell and Bachmann 2008, Karp and Banducci 2008).

Gendered stereotypes and framing

A logical development of visibility studies which monitor numerical representation of woman politicians in the media is the framing and potential stereotyping of political figures in the media in different ways. Often studies in this area argue that the gendered framing of politicians can lead to further inequalities by sustaining existing, or creating new, stereotypes about male and female politicians (e.g. Childs 2008 and Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013).

Historically, due to the small numbers of woman politicians in positions of power, studies have concentrated on specific case studies of woman leaders, as discussed in the above section. This has allowed for global comparisons to show the nuance, but also trends and patterns, which occur in the media coverage of woman politicians (see for example Murray 2010, Campus 2013, Ross 2017). Some of the main themes across this body of research look at: the disproportionate focus on their appearance and bodies (see for example: Falk 2010, Murray 2010, Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen 2012, Campus 2013, Ross 2017), their role as mothers and as paradigmatic caring figures (Falk 2010, Murray 2010, Ross 2017, Paré and Dillaway 2013), their children and marital relationships (or lack of) (Trimble and Treiberg 2010 p. 121) and sexual orientation (Stevenson 2013, Ross 2017, van Zoonen 2006).

Older studies, such as Randall (1987), have suggested that women have historically been associated with areas of "soft" politics or portfolios, such as childcare, health and social issues. According to the Fawcett Society and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), stereotyping, including that perpetrated by the media, often confines women in political life to issues such as the environment, children

and health, and excludes them from responsibility for finance, budgetary control and conflict resolution.¹⁰⁰

Voice is also a component of how representation is analysed in academic work in this area. Studies have focused on the visibility of voices in the media, such as the amount woman politicians are quoted (Ross 2007, Adcock 2010, Macharia 2015, O'Neill, Savigny and Cann 2016), as well as the speech patterns of male and woman political figures. For example, Cameron and Shaw (2016), in their analysis of the 2015 UK General Election, found suggestions of a “different voice” ideology deployed for woman politicians, even no linguistic gender-based difference occurred, with Shaw (2020) exploring how language use constructs and maintains inequality in political institutions.

In the UK context, woman MPs have themselves reported feeling that there is a disproportionate concentration on their appearance (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1996, Ross and Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997). This theme is later echoed by O'Neill and Savigny (2014), who find that in three UK government contexts, media outlets disproportionately focused on UK woman politician's appearance and clothes compared to their male counterparts. Different frames around female politicians, as expressed above, can consolidate entrenched attitudes about women's role in politics, which is also explored in the contemporary Scottish context (McKay 2020).

Incivility and gendered harassment

Focus on the institutional culture of the UK parliamentary system has produced research which explores the complexity and gendered dynamics of both houses (Crewe 2015, Eriksen and Verge 2022), the personal, and gendered, experience of MPs (Phillips 2021), while also exposing the more arcane practices, which is argued to lead to a disillusionment and lack of trust from the public (White 2022). While strands of research in politics and public discourse have traced the feminisation of politics (Lovenduski 2005), in recent decades there has also been a recognition of an increase in the incivility, emotional performance. Higgins and Smith (2022) attribute this, in part, to the rise or resurgence of populist politics which can be associated with more masculinised behaviours and displays. Recent examples of this kind of culture are still evident at Westminster, including recent claims of an MP watching pornography on his phone in the chamber (BBC 2022), the allusions a newspaper made to the film *Basic Instinct* in regard of Westminster Labour MP, Angela Rayner, which also included disparaging comments about working-class people (Elgot and Mason 2022). In the Scottish context, former First Minister Alex Salmond has been subject to political and media scrutiny over his conduct towards women, while more recent research from Higgins and Smith (2022)

¹⁰⁰ General recommendation No. 23: Political and public life [INT CEDAW GEC 4736 E.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-treaties/instruments-treaties-in-force/recommendations/recommendation-no-23-1994)

has explored, using a Scottish case study, how incivility in political discourse can be weaponised in the enactment of embedded, gendered power relations.

Set against this is a pernicious culture of harassment and violence against women in politics, which has been traced in different contexts. In 2016 studies from the IPU on focusing on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments¹⁰¹ and a further focus on those in Europe,¹⁰² figures revealed the extent to which woman MPs had experienced psychological violence during their terms in office (85.2%), while nearly 50% had received death threats or threats of rape or beating. It also found that woman MPs under the age of 40 were more frequently subject to psychological and sexual harassment and that woman MPs active in the fight against gender inequality and violence against women were often singled out for attack.¹⁰³

In the UK, this has been a prevalent issue more significantly with the tragic deaths of political representatives, Sir David Amess and Jo Cox, showing that violence against elected officials cuts across gendered divisions. Nonetheless, evidence suggests, however, that this is an intersectional issue, with abuse aimed at different groups of women. In recent research, Collignon Campbell and Rudig, W. (2022) suggest that harassment, abuse and intimidation is getting worse for candidates in general, and with the gender gap widening, with about three in every four women experiencing some levels of fear while campaigning. Proliferous racial and gendered online abuse has been directed at MP and former Labour shadow home secretary Diane Abbott, who said she felt she was doubly targeted because she was a woman and black, while research conducted by Amnesty International found Abbott had been sent 45% of all abusive tweets sent to woman MPs in the six weeks before the 2017 general election (Elgot 2017). Abuse has also been seen in the Scottish context (Pedersen *et al.* 2014) which has at times also taken on a homophobic dimension (Davidson 2014). Anecdotal evidence also shows this may even have a further effect of deterring women from taking on political roles (Ryall 2017), which is something First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has recently spoken about, focusing on the role of social media in this context (Merson 2022).

Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming

Mainstreaming gender is a prominent aim of many international organisations. UN Women – the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment

¹⁰¹ [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

¹⁰² [Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

¹⁰³ [en_2018-issues_brief_web\(1\).pdf](#)

of women – advocates for parliaments to increase the number of women leaders and representatives.¹⁰⁴ It calls for laws and budgets to promote gender equality, as well as provides strategies, training and support for legislators in achieving gender equality and gender-related priorities. In the organisation’s annual report, it provides highlights of its initiatives during the year, a summary financial statement, and a list of its new programmes and projects. According to the organisation, at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years, while gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077.¹⁰⁵

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the lead UN agency which aims to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, integrates gender equality into its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting. On its site, the agency outlines a link between women’s leadership and equal participation, arguing that “encouraging more women leaders will help achieve greater gender equality.”¹⁰⁶

iKNOW Politics is a joint project of International IDEA, the IPU, UNDP and UN Women.¹⁰⁷ It provides information and resources across six focus areas: elections, parliaments and representatives, political parties, women’s leadership, advocacy and lobbying, and youth. This includes news, interviews, online courses and webinars, as well as links to resources from its partner institutions. It also acts as a platform to connect women globally, as well as providing links to experts in the field.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) produces an annual Global Gender Gap report, which looks at four gender-based gaps (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment) and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. It also examines the drivers of gender gaps and outlines the policies and practices needed for a gender-inclusive recovery. Data monitoring for the political empowerment sub-index includes tracking the proportion of women as elected parliament seats as well as in ministerial roles. The 2021 finds that of its four fundamental social categories, Political Empowerment is the category which remains the largest of the four gaps tracked, with only 22% closed to date, having further widened since the 2020 edition of the report by 2.4 percentage points. The report, however, also notes that widening gender gaps in Political Participation have been driven by some negative trends in some large countries which have

¹⁰⁴ [Parliaments and local governance - Women’s leadership and political participation | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](#)

¹⁰⁷ [International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics | is an interactive network of women in politics who share experiences, resources, advice and collaborate on issues of interest \(iknowpolitics.org\)](#)

counterbalanced progress in another 98 smaller countries. Globally, since the previous edition of the report, there are more women in parliaments, and two countries have elected their first female prime minister (Togo in 2020 and Belgium in 2019).¹⁰⁸

Global Partners Governance is an international development organisation which provides support to politicians, ministers, and civil servants in their efforts to strengthen their institutions. This is done through providing “associates” who have significant expertise to provide tailored advice and support to the organisations’ clients and beneficiaries. The organisation provides strategic analysis and advice, programme design and delivery, undertakes research, as well as offers online courses and training. A specific area of attention is politics, youth and gender representation, with projects focused on direct coaching and advice, as well as projects to help improve mainstreaming of gender-sensitive and equality policies. An example of this is the Winning with Women project, which was designed to identify and train potential women leaders in Lebanon and encourage them to run for office.

Also working internationally is the Commonwealth Parliamentarians Association (CPA), which brings together more than 180 Commonwealth parliaments and legislatures divided between nine geographic regions on the Commonwealth. Its aim is to work together to deepen the Commonwealth’s commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance and parliamentary practice.¹⁰⁹ It has a network of women parliamentarians – The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) – which was founded in 1989 to help increase the number of women elected representatives in parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth. It has also published guidance on gender sensitive parliaments (see next section). The objectives of the British Islands and Mediterranean region of the CWP’s Network (on which the Scottish Parliament is represented) are to:

- Build the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles
- Improve the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians, male and female, and encourage them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation
- Help parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions
- Encourage more women into politics and connect with the work of the Commonwealth
- Focus on themes of communication, advocacy and engagement
- Link with other groups and associations such as UN Women, UNDP and CSW¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ [Global Gender Gap Report 2021 | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021)

¹⁰⁹ [cpa-general-information-leaflet_2021_final.pdf \(cpahq.org\)](#)

¹¹⁰ The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women [Commission on the Status of Women | UN Women – Headquarters](#). UN Women is now the Secretariat of CSW.

- Expand the work and understanding of CWP

In the European context, the EIGE is an autonomous body of the European Union, operating within the framework of European Union policies and initiatives. It was established to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming, in all UE policies and the resulting national policies. In its founding regulation, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (EU Council) outlined that “gender equality cannot be achieved by an anti-discrimination policy alone but requires measures to promote harmonious co-existence and balanced participation by men and women within society”.¹¹¹

Pay gap reporting and gender budgeting

The gender pay gap is an area of mainstreaming that reports the difference between the average (mean or median) earnings of men and women across a workforce. This has been researched extensively in gender scholarship: Bishu and Alkadry (2017) present a comprehensive literature review of studies which investigate pay gaps across different sectors. Gender pay gap legislation in the UK – introduced in 2017 with the first publications released in April 2018 – requires employers with 250 or more employees to publish statutory calculations every year showing how large the pay gap is between their male and female employees.¹¹² Since its implementation, there has been public scrutiny of the pay gap of different organisations in Scotland and wider UK.

In 2019, the Scottish Government released an action plan, setting out a list of actions that it would take to address drivers of the gender pay gap, until the end of its term in 2021.¹¹³ Under The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) is required to report on its Gender Pay Gap of Parliament staff before the end of March each year (using data at the snapshot date of 31 March the previous year).¹¹⁴ In its latest report, the Scottish SPCB also widened its diversity reporting to Ethnicity and Disability.¹¹⁵

A further form of scrutiny is on gender budgeting, which takes a gender perspective of different levels of governmental budgetary processes. The Council of Europe’s widely used definition of gender budgeting is that it is an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process.¹¹⁶ Polzer, Nolte and Seiwald (2021) provide a comprehensive literature review of the current discourse on gender budgeting. The EIGE provides a

¹¹¹ [EUR-Lex - 32006R1922 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹¹² [Gender pay gap reporting: guidance for employers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹³ [A fairer Scotland for women: gender pay gap action plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹¹⁴ [Diversity Pay Gap Report - About the Parliament : Scottish Parliament](#)

¹¹⁵ [Diversity Monitoring and Pay Gaps Report 2019-2020 \(parliament.scot\)](#)

¹¹⁶ [Gender budgeting \(coe.int\)](#)

gender budgeting toolkit to assist managing authorities in the European Union to apply gender budgeting tools in the processes of the European Union Funds.¹¹⁷

The Scottish Women's Budget Group is a feminist organisation which aims to influence decision-making around money so that it considers the different experiences of women and men. Its focus is on campaigning, research and training.¹¹⁸ O'Hagan (2017) provides analysis of the discursive framing of gender budgeting and progress towards implementation in the Scottish context. Engender provides regular "gender edits" of Scottish budgets, which compiles all references to women, gender, and issues with implications for gender equality which appear in the document (e.g. Engender 2021). The Scottish Government also has an Equality Budget Advisory Group (EBAG), a non-statutory advisory group, the remit of which is to help shape the Scottish Government's equality and human rights approach to the budget.

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¹¹⁷ [Gender budgeting | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu/gender-budgeting/)

¹¹⁸ [Scottish Women's Budget Group \(swbg.org.uk\)](https://www.swbg.org.uk/)

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Appendix 2

Session dates

Session	Start of Session	End of Session
Session 1	30 June 1999	31 March 2003
Session 2	30 June 2003	02 April 2007
Session 3	30 June 2007	22 March 2011
Session 4	30 June 2011	23 March 2016
Session 5	30 June 2016	04 May 2021
Session 6	30 June 2021	31 March 2021

Session 6 end data is taken part-way through the session due to the timing of this audit, so more changes may occur following this up to the end of the session.

Appendix 3

Proportion of men and woman as clustered around portfolio roles.

Subject brief	Men	%	Women	%	Total
Health	15	54%	13	46%	28
Education	15	71%	6	29%	21
Social (e.g. social security, social justice, social care)	8	47%	9	53%	17
Finance	18	90%	2	10%	20
Justice	9	64%	5	36%	14
Environment	12	60%	8	40%	20
Equalities	1	20%	4	80%	5
Communities	5	36%	9	64%	14
Culture	8	47%	9	53%	17
<u>Cabinet-level roles</u>	40	69%	18	31%	58
First Ministers	4	80%	1	20%	5
Deputy First Ministers	3	75%	1	25%	4

Appendix 4

Proportion of male and female committee members in Session 6

Committee Name (31 March 2022)	Male Members	%	Female Members	%	Gender of convener
Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee	5	83%	1	17%	Male
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee	4	57%	3	43%	Female
COVID-19 Recovery Committee	5	83%	1	17%	Female
Criminal Justice Committee	3	38%	5	63%	Female
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	5	100%	0	0%	Male
Economy and Fair Work Committee	5	56%	4	44%	Female
Education, Children and Young People Committee	9	75%	3	25%	Male
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee	3	43%	4	57%	Male
Finance and Public Administration Committee	5	71%	2	29%	Male
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee	3	30%	7	70%	Female
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee	5	56%	4	44%	Female
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee	3	43%	4	57%	Male
Public Audit Committee	4	80%	1	20%	Male
Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee	3	33%	6	67%	Male
Social Justice and Social Security Committee	4	44%	5	56%	Female
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	3	60%	2	40%	Male
Percentage of female committee conveners:	-	-	-	-	44%

Appendix 5

Committee name (30 June 1999)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Audit Committee	8	3	1	0
Education, Culture and Sport Committee	6	5	0	1
Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee	6	5	1	0
Equal Opportunities Committee	5	7	0	1
European Committee	6	6	1	0
Finance Committee	9	2	1	0
Health and Community Care Committee	5	6	0	1
Justice and Home Affairs Committee	4	7	0	1
Local Government Committee	8	3	0	1
Procedures Committee	6	1	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	2	5	1	0
Rural Affairs Committee	7	4	1	0
Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee	7	4	0	1
Standards Committee	4	3	0	1
Subordinate Legislation Committee	6	1	1	0
Transport and the Environment Committee	6	5	1	0
TOTAL	95	67	9	7

Committee name (31 March 2003)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Audit Committee	4	3	1	0

Education, Culture and Sport Committee	3	4	0	1
Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee	8	3	1	0
Equal Opportunities Committee	4	5	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	5	4	0	1
Finance Committee	6	1	1	0
Health and Community Care Committee	2	7	0	1
Justice 1 Committee	4	3	0	1
Justice 2 Committee	6	1	0	1
Local Government Committee	3	4	0	1
Procedures Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	3	4	1	0
Rural Development Committee	8	3	1	0
Social Justice Committee	2	5	0	1
Standards Committee	4	3	1	0
Subordinate Legislation Committee	6	1	0	1
Transport and the Environment Committee	5	4	1	0
TOTAL	78	57	8	9

Committee name (30 June 2003)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Audit Committee	4	3	1	0
Communities Committee	3	6	0	1
Education Committee	4	5	1	0
Enterprise and Culture Committee	7	2	1	0
Environment and Rural Development Committee	3	6	0	1

Equal Opportunities Committee	2	7	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	7	2	1	0
Finance Committee	6	3	1	0
Health Committee	3	6	0	1
Justice 1 Committee	3	4	0	1
Justice 2 Committee	3	4	0	1
Local Government and Transport Committee	7	2	1	0
Procedures Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	4	5	1	0
Standards Committee	5	2	0	1
Subordinate Legislation Committee	5	2	0	1
TOTAL	71	61	8	8

Committee name (2 April 2007)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Audit Committee	3	4	1	0
Communities Committee	5	4	0	1
Education Committee	5	4	1	0
Enterprise and Culture Committee	5	4	1	0
Environment and Rural Development Committee	5	4	0	1
Equal Opportunities Committee	2	7	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	7	2	0	1
Finance Committee	8	1	0	1
Health Committee	2	7	0	1
Justice 1 Committee	3	4	0	1
Justice 2 Committee	5	2	1	0
Local Government and Transport Committee	7	2	1	0

Procedures Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	5	4	1	0
Standards and Public Appointments Committee	4	3	1	0
Subordinate Legislation Committee	5	2	0	1
TOTAL	76	56	8	8

Committee name (30 June 2007)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Audit Committee	7	1	1	0
Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee	7	1	1	0
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee	3	5	0	1
Equal Opportunities Committee	3	5	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	6	2	0	1
Finance Committee	7	1	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	5	3	0	1
Justice Committee	6	2	1	0
Local Government and Communities Committee	7	1	1	0
Procedures Committee	4	3	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	4	5	1	0
Rural Affairs and Environment Committee	6	2	0	1
Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Scheme Committee *	4	0	1	0
Standards and Public Appointments Committee	4	3	1	0

Subordinate Legislation Committee	6	1	1	0
Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee	6	2	1	0
TOTAL	85	37	11	5

Committee name (22 March 2011)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee	6	2	1	0
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee	3	5	0	1
Equal Opportunities Committee	4	4	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	5	3	0	1
Finance Committee	7	1	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	4	4	0	1
Justice Committee	7	1	1	0
Local Government and Communities Committee	6	2	1	0
Public Audit Committee	7	1	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	5	4	0	1
Rural Affairs and Environment Committee	5	3	0	1
Scotland Bill Committee	4	2	0	1
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	4	3	1	0
Subordinate Legislation Committee	4	3	1	0
Transport, Infrastructure and	4	5	1	0

Climate Change Committee				
TOTAL	75	43	8	7

Committee name (30 June 2011)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee	7	2	1	0
Education and Culture Committee	3	6	1	0
Equal Opportunities Committee	3	4	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	3	4	0	1
Finance Committee	6	1	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	6	3	1	0
Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee	6	1	0	1
Justice Committee	7	2	0	1
Local Government and Regeneration Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Audit Committee	9	0	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	5	2	1	0
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee	5	4	1	0
Scotland Bill Committee	8	3	0	1
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	3	4	1	0
Subordinate Legislation Committee	6	1	1	0
TOTAL	82	39	10	5

Committee name (23 March 2016)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	4	1	1	0
Devolution (Further Powers) Committee	9	2	1	0
Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee	7	2	1	0
Education and Culture Committee	8	1	1	0
Equal Opportunities Committee	4	3	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	5	2	0	1
Finance Committee	4	3	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	7	2	1	0
Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee	5	2	1	0
Justice Committee	4	5	0	1
Justice Sub-Committee on Policing	2	4	0	1
Local Government and Regeneration Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Audit Committee	8	1	1	0
Public Petitions Committee	7	0	1	0
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee	7	2	1	0
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	4	3	1	0
Welfare Reform Committee	4	3	1	0
TOTAL	94	38	13	4

Committee name (30 June 2016)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	3	2	1	0
Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee	8	3	1	0
Education and Skills Committee	7	4	1	0
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee	7	4	1	0
Equal Opportunities Committee	4	3	0	1
European and External Relations Committee	6	3	0	1
Finance Committee	9	2	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	8	3	1	0
Justice Committee	7	4	0	1
Local Government and Communities Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Audit Committee	3	4	0	1
Public Petitions Committee	3	2	0	1
Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee	8	3	1	0
Social Security Committee	5	4	0	1
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	5	2	0	1
TOTAL	88	45	8	7

Committee name (4 May 2021)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints	4	5	0	1

COVID-19 Committee	6	3	1	0
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee	5	4	0	1
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	3	2	1	0
Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee	9	0	1	0
Education and Skills Committee	8	3	0	1
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee	4	3	0	1
Equalities and Human Rights Committee	3	4	0	1
Finance and Constitution Committee	10	1	1	0
Health and Sport Committee	7	2	1	0
Justice Committee	5	4	1	0
Justice Sub-Committee on Policing	3	4	1	0
Local Government and Communities Committee	5	2	1	0
Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee	5	2	0	1
Public Petitions Committee	3	2	0	1
Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee	8	2	1	0
Social Security Committee	5	4	1	0
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	6	1	1	0
TOTAL	99	48	11	7

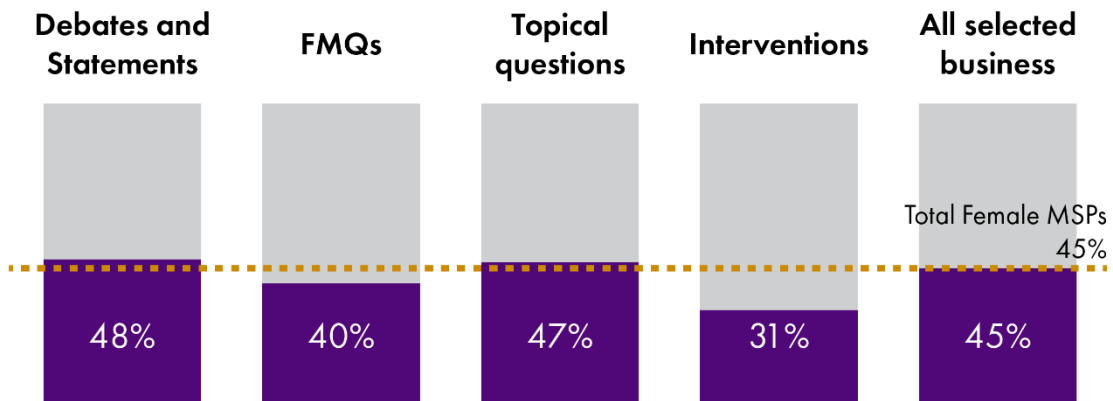
Committee name (30 June 2021)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee	4	1	1	0
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee	3	4	0	1
COVID-19 Recovery Committee	5	1	0	1
Criminal Justice Committee	3	5	0	1
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	5	0	1	0
Economy and Fair Work Committee	5	4	0	1
Education, Children and Young People Committee	6	3	1	0
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee	3	4	1	0
Finance and Public Administration Committee	5	2	1	0
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee	3	7	0	1
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee	4	3	0	1
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee	3	4	1	0
Public Audit Committee	4	1	1	0
Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee	4	5	1	0
Social Justice and Social Security Committee	4	4	1	0
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	5	0	1	0
TOTAL	66	48	10	6

Committee name (31 March 2022)	Committee Members - Male	Committee Members - Female	Committee Conveners - Male	Committee Conveners - Female
Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee	5	1	1	0
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee	4	3	0	1
COVID-19 Recovery Committee	5	1	0	1
Criminal Justice Committee	3	5	0	1
Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee	5	0	1	0
Economy and Fair Work Committee	5	4	0	1
Education, Children and Young People Committee	9	3	1	0
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee	3	4	1	0
Finance and Public Administration Committee	5	2	1	0
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee	3	7	0	1
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee	5	4	0	1
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee	3	4	1	0
Public Audit Committee	4	1	1	0
Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee	3	6	1	0
Social Justice and Social Security Committee	4	5	0	1
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee	3	2	1	0
TOTAL	69	52	9	7

Appendix 6

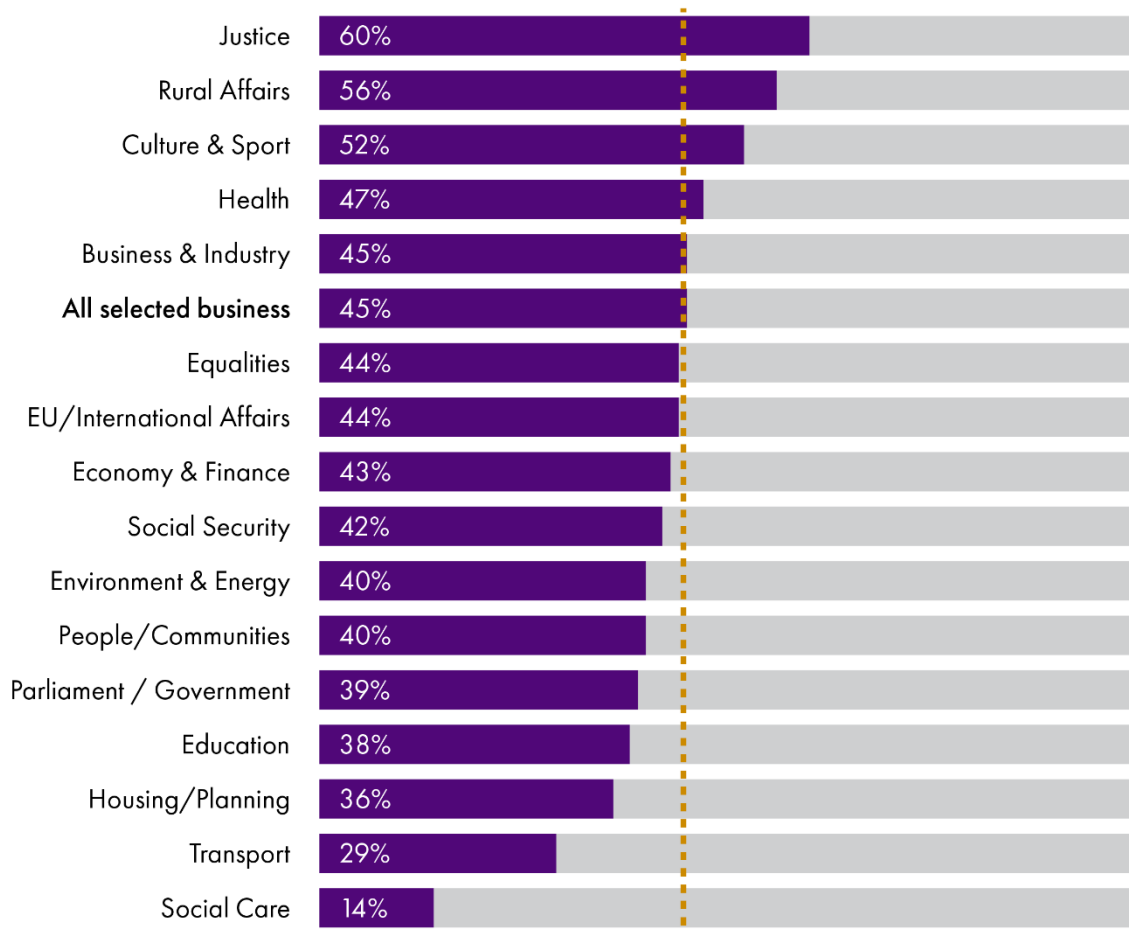
Female contributions in chamber

Post-Summer recess to the December recess 2021 | FMQs, Debates, Statements, Topical Questions and Interventions



Contributions in chamber by subject category

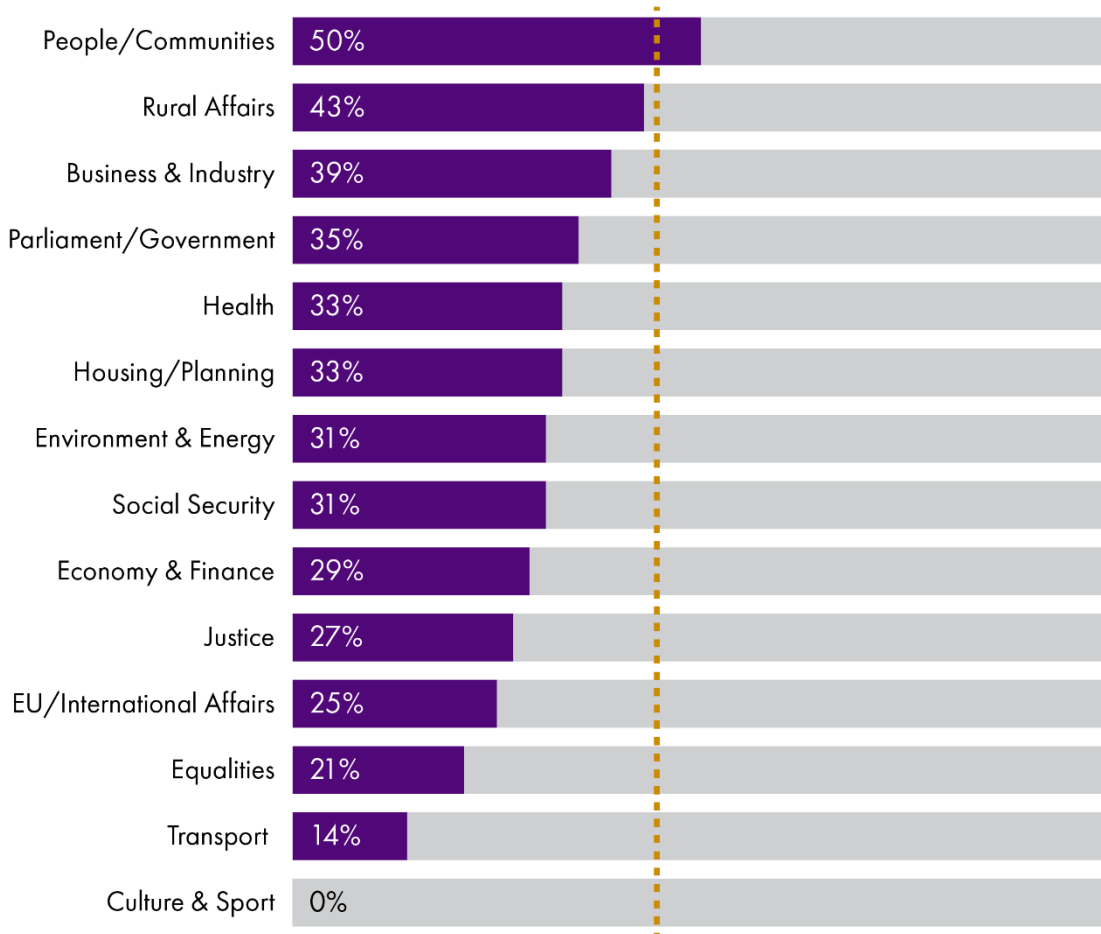
Sorted by total number of contributions



Appendix 7

Female interventions in chamber by subject category

Sorted by total number of interventions



Annex D: Note of Meeting on 7 November 2022

Gender Sensitive Audit Board

Session on intersectionality

Note of meeting on 7 November 2022

It is hugely important for a Gender Sensitive Audit to adopt an intersectional lens given women are not a homogenous group but one differentiated by intersecting identities and different experiences. While the Audit was designed from the outset to examine differences between and within groups, paying particular attention to protected characteristics and other inequalities where possible, an Audit can only capture the data and experiences of those who are or have been in the Parliament. Therefore, the purpose of this meeting was to focus specifically on the experiences of women who are most under-represented and consider their needs in considering future reform.

The key issues/questions explored during the session were:

- to find out what the participants thought about the key findings from the Audit and whether there were additional issues and barriers that women of colour, disabled women and LGBT women might face that weren't captured?
- to explore what the participants saw as the particular issues and barriers that women from different backgrounds and experience in becoming politically active in the first place
- to explore what the participants thought the perception of Parliament (not just this Parliament but parliaments and public institutions more generally) was in terms of diversity and inclusion.
- To find out whether there were any specific reforms that might address
 - women's participation and effective working within the Parliament
 - parliamentary infrastructure
 - parliamentary culture

The discussion reinforced the importance of looking at this through an intersectional lens and in particular stressed that research focusing on current MSPs cannot fully capture the views and experiences of those outwith parliament who may seek to pursue a career in politics. It also highlighted that barriers are generally increased for those at the intersection of particular protected characteristics.

The main themes/conclusions arising from the meeting can be grouped as follows:

Access to politics

As outlined above, there is a need to look at the barriers to accessing politics in the first place. Some of the main barriers are:

- Money and time (those who are most under-represented also most likely to be living in poverty and have caring responsibilities)
- Inequality in all its forms
- Lack of social care and childcare
- Language (particularly if English is not someone's first language)
- Toxic/aggressive nature of debate

While the Audit necessarily has to focus on Parliament, political parties have a key role in determining who is elected, through their selection processes. There is a sense that political parties don't think about diversity of candidates seriously enough and don't think early enough about how to create a 'pipeline' of more diverse candidates with diversity appearing to be more of an afterthought.

Could the Parliament have a role in helping create this 'pipeline' ie, by continuing/expanding existing internships (such as the internship programme with Inclusion Scotland)? Additionally, could there be orientation sessions for those whose experience of political cultures may be very different?

It was also noted that there has been a lot of work already done on barriers to accessing politics for different groups and therefore, there this can be built on rather than inadvertently 'reinventing the wheel'.

Data

There is a need to collect diversity data and such data is not being collected by parties in relation to prospective candidates.

There is also a need to think about how to ensure relatively high return rates when collecting data to give the most accurate picture and also how to protect confidentiality.

There is a need to collect data on who is participating in parliamentary business – not just in debates but who is submitting written questions, motions and amendments.

There is also a need to 'go behind' the data for example, women's representation might be at similar levels in each Parliamentary session but what is the level of retention; how long do women decide to remain as MSPs compared to men?

Participation

Having hybrid options for participating was seen as very important (not only for MSPs but for those giving evidence to Committees). The overall point was made that ensuring as much flexibility as possible at all times is what equality is all about.

It was also important to have diverse committee membership but in doing so, it was important to recognise where this might result in higher workloads for women (and

particularly for disabled women and women of colour where there are significantly fewer). This might also prevent women from having the time to pursue their own political objectives.

The data on interventions from the Audit itself and fewer women making interventions was remarked on. But the point was made that it is not only important that women are heard but are they listened to?

The Parliament was set up to be 'family friendly' but there were doubts that this was the case. Frequency of later sitting times, other parliamentary and political commitments and overall the '24/7' nature of politics presents barriers to people wanting to take part in politics in the first place, to people wanting to stay in politics and to participating in Parliamentary business. This can also impact on who works for politicians which is both an issue in terms of the advice politicians receive but also on the 'pipeline' of candidates as this can be a route into politics.

Barriers to women participating in politics more generally also apply to participation in the Parliament. Additionally, the impact of the menopause on women and attitudes towards it was mentioned as was the issue of Covid-safety as an equalities issue.

Culture

As highlighted earlier, the nature of political discourse was seen as off-putting because it was too adversarial and aggressive and with issues being increasingly politicised, people are less likely to want to 'put their head above the parapet'.

The culture of the political parties was seen as problematic; if this could be addressed it might lead to other improvements.

It was noted that there are examples of where politics is more collaborative and should this be celebrated more, within a vision of a different style of politics.

Training was perceived as providing support to women, but the point was also made about the need to train men.

There was a recognition that while it was important to make changes to rules and procedures, that in itself would not address the cultural change required to truly make a difference.

Next steps

What was very clear was the importance of this Audit and the recommendations the Board makes being seen as a first, not a last step. Any recommendations should not be seen as an outcome in themselves. Implementation, monitoring with a clear timetable and continuous improvement is key – a clear need to hold people to account on delivering the report's recommendations.