



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Your Parliament at Work



What happens in the Scottish Parliament?

The Scottish Parliament is the place where Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) represent you on the issues that matter to you. Their work includes taking part in debates, considering proposals for laws, carrying out inquiries and questioning members of the Scottish Government.

What is the Scottish Government?

The Scottish Government is a separate organisation from the Scottish Parliament and is based in different buildings. It is usually formed by the largest political party or group of parties represented in the Parliament.

The head of the Scottish Government is the **First Minister**, who chooses:

- **Cabinet Secretaries**, who are responsible for specific policy areas
- **Ministers**, who work with the Cabinet Secretaries
- **Law Officers**, who are the chief legal advisers to the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government's job is to run the country and set policy on matters for which the Scottish Parliament has responsibility (known as devolved matters).

MSPs have a responsibility to check that the Scottish Government is acting in your best interest.

Get informed

The Scottish Parliament is responsible for a range of policy areas, including health, education and justice. Other matters, such as immigration, can be dealt with only by the UK Parliament. Find out more in the [How the Parliament Works](#) section of our website.



How do your MSPs work for you in the Scottish Parliament?

Motions and debates

MSPs can submit parliamentary motions to raise awareness of an issue or propose a course of action. Some of these motions form the subject of debates in the Chamber. During debates, the Presiding Officer – who is in charge of meetings in the Chamber – aims to give every MSP who wants to speak a fair chance to contribute.

Most debates cover matters of national concern, but there are also Members' business debates, which allow MSPs to discuss a local issue in detail.

Questions

MSPs ask questions of the Scottish Government to seek information and hold it to account for its actions. There are two types of question:

○ Written questions

These are a good way for MSPs to get detailed information.

○ Oral questions

MSPs ask these questions in the Chamber, for example, at First Minister's Questions. The text of oral questions is published in advance, but members of the Scottish Government do not know what additional questions will be asked. This allows the MSPs to challenge the Scottish Government more directly.

Get involved

MSPs ask questions and speak in debates on your behalf. If there is an issue you would like raised, you can find out who your MSPs are and how to contact them using the [postcode search](#) on our website.

Get informed

The written record of what is said in all debates and oral question time sessions (known as the Official Report) and the text of all written questions and answers are available in the [Parliamentary Business](#) section of our website.



Committee inquiries

MSPs regularly come together in small groups called committees to look at what the Scottish Government has done in a particular subject area and what could be improved. Committees have a key role to play in holding the Scottish Government to account.

An inquiry is a way for a committee to look in depth at a particular issue. During an inquiry, a committee can call for views, hold participation events, go on fact-finding visits, and question members of the Scottish Government and other individuals and organisations.

Get involved

Your participation is a key part of the inquiry process. You can:

- give your views in writing or take part in events and online surveys
- submit a petition to the Public Petitions Committee, which can lead to an inquiry or a debate in the Chamber
- follow and interact with committees on Twitter
- attend a committee meeting (most are held in public) or watch online

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Get informed

Each committee has its own pages on our website, with details of what it is doing and how to get involved:
parliament.scot/committees

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Legislation

Most of the proposals for new laws (known as bills) come from the Scottish Government. Individual MSPs and committees can also introduce bills, which might be on an issue identified by you as needing attention.

MSPs then:

- decide whether or not a bill is necessary
- examine how each bill could be improved
- decide whether or not it should become law

All MSPs can take part in debates on bills in the Chamber, propose changes (known as amendments) to bills and take part in the decision on whether or not to pass a bill. They also do important work through committees, looking in depth at what is proposed, how it will be achieved and proposed amendments.

Get involved

Your input can make a real difference to legislation. You can:

- give your views when a committee issues a call for evidence on a bill
- contact MSPs to suggest changes to bills in progress.



Get informed

You can follow current bills going through the Parliament on the [Bills](#) page on our website.



The budget

As your representatives, MSPs have a responsibility to check that your money is being spent wisely by the Scottish Government.

Each autumn, the Scottish Government sets out its spending and taxation proposals for the next financial year in the draft budget. MSPs examine this in committees and in the Chamber. The Parliament can propose changes to the draft budget, provided these do not increase total spending.

The Scottish Government then introduces a Budget Bill in January. This bill cannot become law unless MSPs agree to it.

Get involved

You can have a say in public spending and taxation by giving your views on the draft budget to committees.

Get informed

The Scottish Parliament will be getting more tax powers in the near future.



Current tax powers:

-  Business rates
-  Council tax
-  Land and buildings transaction tax
-  Landfill tax
-  Scottish rate of income tax

New tax powers to come:

-  More income tax powers from 2017/18
-  Air passenger duty
-  Aggregates levy

Keep up to date with Parliament business

- Sign up to our [newsletter](#) 'This Week in the Scottish Parliament'.
- Look at the [Business Bulletin](#) for details of parliamentary business, including Chamber and committee meetings.
- Read the [Official Report](#).
- Watch [Parliament TV](#) or our YouTube channel.
- Follow the Scottish Parliament and committees on Twitter.
- Book tickets to watch Chamber or committee meetings through Visitor Services:



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Public Information

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