
The Reference Guide series aims to provide initial frameworks of understanding rather than deliver in-depth political science.

The Holyrood guide is designed to support policy engagement workshops for early careers researchers.

It includes:

KEY PRINCIPLES SHAPING THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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HOLYROOD – V - WESTMINSTER

PUBLIC AFFAIRS MONITORING REPORT

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KEY PRINCIPLES SHAPING THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

accessible & participative – accountable - equal opportunity - power sharing

The Scottish Parliament was shaped by four founding principles. The Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament, established after the positive outcome of the Scottish devolution referendum, adopted four key principles:

- That Parliament should be **accessible, open and responsive and engender a participative approach** to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation;

- That the Scottish Government should be **accountable to the Parliament** – and that both should be **accountable to the Scottish people**;

- That Parliament – in its operation and appointments recognise the need to promote **equal opportunities** for all;

- That Parliament should embody and reflect the **sharing of power** between the people of Scotland, the legislators and the Scottish Government.

These principles set the tone for engagement

For an excellent overview of the Parliament refer to [How the Scottish Parliament works](#)

If you are interested in the historical development of the Parliament, refer to [‘Shaping Scotland’s Parliament’ (Report of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament, 1998)](#)
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Much of the theory of the founding principles has been translated into practice which defines the Scottish Parliament as a modern institution, transparent – and with clear pathways to engagement.

- Unlike Westminster, the Scottish Parliament operates in **normal business hours** and has adopted a **regular programme** of activity. The business of Parliament - in Chamber, Committees, and Cross Party Groups – is carried out on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Visit the Parliament’s [Calendar of Events](#).

- Parliamentary business is typically accessible to the public by attendance, live tv feed, or through downloadable podcasts. Watch [Parliament TV](#).

- Plain English is used in parliamentary proceedings and publications; the Parliament’s web site is delivered in both English and Gaelic.

- Parliament actively encourages the public to influence its work and legislation through evidence-taking and the public petition system.

- **Scottish Parliament Committees** have a much stronger role than their Westminster counterparts. They provide the balance and measure of accountability in the unicameral situation. They have the power to **initiate legislation** and to **scrutinise and amend Scottish Governmental proposals**. Their **inquiries** can focus beyond legislative scrutiny on issues of public concern – and may also be made in response to Scottish Government consultation.

- The system of **Parliamentary Questions and Motions** enables MSPs to question and engage the Scottish Government in debate.

- The **Parliamentary Bureau**, chaired by the **Presiding Officer**, organises the Parliament’s **programme of business**. The process is transparent in nature – and, with cross party membership, represents power sharing.

- **Cross-Party Groups** (CPGs) are another example of the accessible and participative ethos of the Parliament. CPGs provide an opportunity for Members of all parties, outside organisations and members of the public to meet and discuss a shared interest in a particular cause or subject.

- **Members of the Scottish Parliament** are elected, every five years, under the **Additional Member System**. Of the 129 elected Members, **73** are Constituency MSPs and **56** are List or Regional MSPs. The eight regions each return 7 MSPs each. This form of proportional representation preserves the constituency connection while more broadly recognising the will of the electorate.

- One effect of the Additional Member System has been to create a more sophisticated approach by the electorate. Smaller parties such as the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party achieved seats – as did a number of independents. The influence of the backbench was increased and an alliance of independents managed to achieve representation on the Parliamentary Bureau.
MSPs

- MSPs, whether elected on a constituency or list basis, have equal status – and all have a duty to represent the interests of their constituents. Unless there is a special arrangement they should not address constituent matters outside of their own constituencies or regions.

- Constituents may seek support from any one of their constituency or regional MSPs. However, unless the constituent objects, a Regional MSP should advise the Constituency MSP of any approach.

- The political interests of MSPs are clearly identifiable through Ministerial Office, Shadow Cabinet or Spokesperson status, membership of Parliamentary Committees, and membership of Cross Party Groups. They are also obviously reflected in Parliamentary Questions and Motions initiated.

- Serving as Presiding Officer or as a Scottish Government Minister does not disbar an MSP from normal constituency work.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The Scottish Government is formed by the party (or parties) with the majority of seats in Parliament. Members of the Scottish Parliament elect the First Minister (formal appointment by the Queen); the First Minister then appoints the ministers to their portfolios, and also the law officers.

The two Scottish Law Officers, the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General, form part of the Scottish Government, advising the Government on legal matters and representing its interests in court; both are appointed by the Queen on the First Minister’s recommendation and with the approval of Parliament.

Since 1999 the Scottish Government (formerly the ‘Scottish Executive’) exercised the power to introduce Bills, administer laws on devolved matters, and propose how the Scottish Budget is allocated.

Devolved matters include: health; education and training; local government; social work; housing; planning; tourism, economic development and financial assistance to industry; some aspects of transport, including the Scottish road network, bus policy and ports and harbours; law and home affairs, including most aspects of criminal and civil law, the prosecution system and the courts; the Police and Fire services; the environment; natural and built heritage; agriculture, forestry and fishing; sport and the arts; statistics, public registers and records.

The activity of the Scottish Government is most easily monitored by its own media releases and statements; its calls for consultation; and its publications.

For clarity refer to: “The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government – what is the difference?”
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT COMMITTEES

Scottish Parliament Committees may: **scrutinise the work of the Scottish Government; deliberate on legislative proposals; and conduct enquiries and publish reports.** They can also make their own proposals for legislation in the form of committee bills.

The Committees can invite Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers and other individuals or organisations with an interest in a particular subject to give evidence at a meeting. Witnesses will be invited to speak and can be questioned by committee members.

Three kinds of committee exist within the Scottish Parliament:

**Mandatory committees** (remits determined by parliamentary rules) including: Equal Opportunities; European and External Relations; Finance; Public Audit; Public Petitions; Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments; and Subordinate Legislation.

**Subject committees** (generally reflecting Government portfolios) including: Economy, Energy & Tourism; Education & Culture; Health & Sport; Infrastructure & Capital Investment; Justice; Local Government & Regeneration; and Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment.

**ad hoc committees considering particular issues or legislation** – eg the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee

Current Committees are listed here ➤

There is a high level of transparency within the Committee system:

- Journalists have allocated seating in committee meetings that are held in public;
- Members of the public can attend all committee meetings held in public;
- Parliament’s broadcasting staff record the committee meetings that are held in public (meetings **webcast live** on Parliament website).

**Essential reading:**

“Scottish Parliament committees – what are they and what do they do?”

“Appearing before a Scottish Parliament committee”
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The terms of the Scotland Act clearly define the devolved issues for which the Scottish Parliament has responsibility, and the reserved matters which the UK Government remains responsible for. Conflict between the parliaments and governments has arisen through demands for additional power, policy differences, and overlap in responsibilities. Major policy differences to date have occurred over tuition fees and the funding provision for the care of the elderly.

The UK Parliament’s reserved matters include:

- benefits and social security
- the Constitution
- benefits and social security
- defence and national security
- employment
- fiscal and economic affairs
- foreign policy
- immigration
- nuclear energy, oil, coal, gas and electricity
- some aspects of transport, including national road and rail safety
- trade and industry

Refer to: “Holyrood and Westminster – who does what?”

PUBLIC AFFAIRS MONITORING REPORT

- The Public Affairs Team regularly produces a Monitoring Report - designed to reflect University research interests and business, highlighting areas of engagement – or potential engagement, and generally inform stakeholder relations.

- The Report has details of relevant activity in the Scottish Parliament, its Committees and Cross Party Groups, and includes references to Parliamentary Questions, Answers and Motions.

- Access the Public Affairs Monitoring Report here