



# How to Lobby the Scottish Parliament

[votesat16.org.uk](http://votesat16.org.uk)

Created by the Scotland Act 1998, the Scottish Parliament is the devolved law making body in Scotland. Its first elections were held in May 1999. Accountable to the people of Scotland, the Scottish Parliament operates as a self-contained, fully functioning Parliament in its own right, with the power to pass laws on certain issues without the consent of the Westminster Parliament. Its creation gives Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) the chance to examine and debate the work of the Scottish Executive, to make new laws, to debate issues of importance to Scotland and to raise or lower taxes.

## What powers do they have?

The Scottish Parliament has the authority to pass primary legislation on 'devolved' matters, which include education, health, agriculture and justice as well as having limited tax-varying powers. It also performs the important role of holding the Scottish Government to account, providing protection against any abuse of power. The UK Parliament at Westminster retains overall authority for non-devolved domestic issues and foreign policy.

## What is the make-up of the Parliament?

The Scottish Parliament is made up of 129 MSPs, with 73 representing constituencies and 56 representing one of eight regions in Scotland (seven MSPs for each region). MSPs are elected by the Additional Member System (AMS) which is a form of proportional representation. Constituency MSPs win their seats on a first past the post basis, with Parliament being 'topped up' by regional MSPs who are elected from party lists using the modified d'Hondt method of voting. Every person in Scotland is represented by one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.

## Relationship with the UK Parliament

Scotland remains part of the UK and MPs from Scottish constituencies continue to have seats in the House of Commons. The country is still bound by laws passed in Westminster. The Secretary of State for Scotland represents Scotland in the UK Government's cabinet as well as in the UK Parliament. Their job is to make sure that the interests of Scotland are fully considered when policy is developed.

## The Scottish Executive

The party with the largest number of MSPs will usually form the Scottish Government, which acts as the executive arm of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government makes policy on devolved matters and introduces new bills to the Scottish Parliament as well as running other public bodies. It is comprised of three main ministerial positions:

- The First Minister, who is the head of the Scottish Government and is formally appointed by the Queen;
- Two Scottish Law Officers; the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General, who advise the Scottish Government on legal matters and represent its interests in court;
- Scottish Ministers, who are appointed by the First Minister. Each Minister has responsibility for a specific area, e.g. Justice, Health, Education, and it is their job to introduce policy and legislation in their specific area.



## How does it represent me?

- MSPs are elected for one unfixed term of office and they are allowed to re-stand as many times as they wish.
- Your MSP is there to represent your views and concerns, regardless of whether you voted for them.
- MSPs come from all walks of life. Many come from a business or legal background, but many others are trade unionists, farmers, journalists, youth workers, teachers or even actors.

## How can I influence my MSP?

- MSPs pay a great deal of attention to their postbag, so just writing to them expressing your concerns and encouraging others to do the same can have a massive effect, especially if it is regarding a local issue.
- If you want to do more than write a letter, try to set up a meeting with your local MSP, or an MSP on a committee that will be working on the bill that you are interested in. This face-to-face contact may help you to put your point across, and help the MSP to better understand your views.
- MSPs usually run weekly 'surgeries' where you can visit them to discuss
- any issues and concerns that you have. They tend to be advertised in
- local newspapers and usually happen on a Saturday or weekday
- evening, taking place in a public building such as a library or a more
- relaxed place like a supermarket or pub.
- You can invite your MSP to discuss the issues with your group. If funds allow, you could arrange to visit them at the Scottish Parliament.
- Nearly all MSPs are members of political parties and tend to stick to their party's policy. It is worth finding out what the overall party position is on an issue before talking to your MP. Remember that they may not necessarily support the party view, unless they are a Minister and then must follow the party's policy.
- MSPs are sometimes more open to influence by their constituents when a free vote takes place. This is used when particularly personal or moral issues are being debated (such as abortion or the death penalty) and MPs are not pressurised to vote one way or the other by their party. If the law that concerns you relates to this kind of issue and your MSP doesn't have strong personal view about it, your arguments could have a significant effect on how they vote.

## How can I influence other MSPs?

The Scottish Parliament has a number of committees which can be helpful when you have a specific concern. They have an important role to play in ensuring public participation in the law making process, as well as considering and investigating the work of the executive.

If you are interested in a certain issue, in addition to finding out who your local MSP is, find out the names of the MSPs that make up a committee relevant to your issue. Each committee is chaired by a convenor and is made up of between five and 15 MSPs who are selected according to the balance of political parties in the Scottish Parliament.



All committees are potentially useful and all are approachable. Contact details for the clerk of each committee can be found on the Scottish Parliament website when Parliament is in session. Committees which may be useful to your cause include the Public Petitions Committee, the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Lifelong Learning Committee, the Local Government and Communities Committee, and the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee.

## How do I contact my MSP?

Go directly to: [www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/msp/msphome/default.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/msp/msphome/default.aspx) to search for the details of your local MSP.

If you wish to speak to a Scottish Parliamentary office directly, you can call the main switchboard on 0131 348 5000 and ask for the office you require.

You can write to your MSP at the following address:

{Their Name} MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

## Where can I get further information?

For further information you can visit the Scottish Parliament's official website, [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk) or call the Public Information Service on 0800 0927500.

