



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Your Scottish Parliament



# What is the Scottish Parliament?

The Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 to debate issues and make laws for Scotland. It is made up of 129 elected representatives, who are known as Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSPs.



## What can the Scottish Parliament decide?

The Scottish Parliament has power to make laws on a range of issues that are known as **devolved** matters. Some issues remain the responsibility of the UK Parliament alone. These are known as **reserved** matters.

### Devolved matters include:

-  Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
-  Education and training
-  Environment
-  Health and social services
-  Housing
-  Land use planning
-  Law and order
-  Local government
-  Sport and the arts
-  Some forms of taxation
-  Many aspects of transport

### Reserved matters include:

-  Benefits and social security
-  Broadcasting
-  Constitution
-  Defence
-  Employment
-  Equal opportunities
-  Foreign policy
-  Immigration
-  Trade and industry

Further powers are being transferred to the Scottish Parliament through the Scotland Act 2016 in areas such as taxation, welfare and elections to the Scottish Parliament.

## How does the Parliament make laws?

The Scottish Parliament makes laws by passing bills. Bills can be introduced by the Scottish Government, MSPs who aren't members of the Scottish Government, committees, and organisations or individuals who are not MSPs. They normally follow a three-stage process.

### The stages of a bill



#### Stage 1

Parliamentary committees consider the general principles (the overall purpose) of the bill and normally ask members of the public for their input.

The Parliament then debates and reaches a decision on the general principles of the bill in the Chamber.

#### Stage 2

A parliamentary committee considers the bill in detail and decides on proposed changes (amendments).



#### Stage 3

The Parliament can consider further amendments to the bill. Then the Parliament decides whether to pass or reject the bill.

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### What happens next?

After a bill has been passed, there is normally a four-week period during which it can be challenged if it is believed to be outside the law-making powers of the Scottish Parliament. If it is not challenged, it will be submitted for Royal Assent from the monarch.

Once a bill has received Royal Assent, it becomes an Act of the Scottish Parliament. However, it may not all come into force straightaway.

### Did you know?

The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are separate organisations. The Scottish Parliament makes laws on devolved matters and holds the Scottish Government to account. The Scottish Government implements laws and develops policy on devolved matters.



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## MSPs

### How are MSPs elected?

At a Scottish Parliament election, each voter has two votes – one for their constituency and one for their region. There are 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs in total. MSPs are elected using the Additional Member System, which is a form of proportional representation.

Each person in Scotland is normally represented by one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs. They all have the same status and you can contact any of the eight who represent you.

### Scottish Parliament election results 2021 by party

Scottish National Party

64

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

31

Scottish Labour

22

Scottish Green Party

8

Scottish Liberal Democrats

4

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### What do MSPs do?

MSPs work in the local areas they represent. They also attend debates and committee meetings in the Scottish Parliament.

In representing you, MSPs can:

- lodge a motion to get support for an issue
- speak in a debate
- introduce a bill to change the law
- ask a question of Scottish Government Ministers
- refer matters to, or ask questions of, another person or organisation

### Who represents me?

To find out who represents you, you can use the **postcode search** on our website or contact Public Information.



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## What happens in the Debating Chamber?

All MSPs can take part in meetings in the Debating Chamber. As well as discussions on proposals for new laws, Chamber business can include:

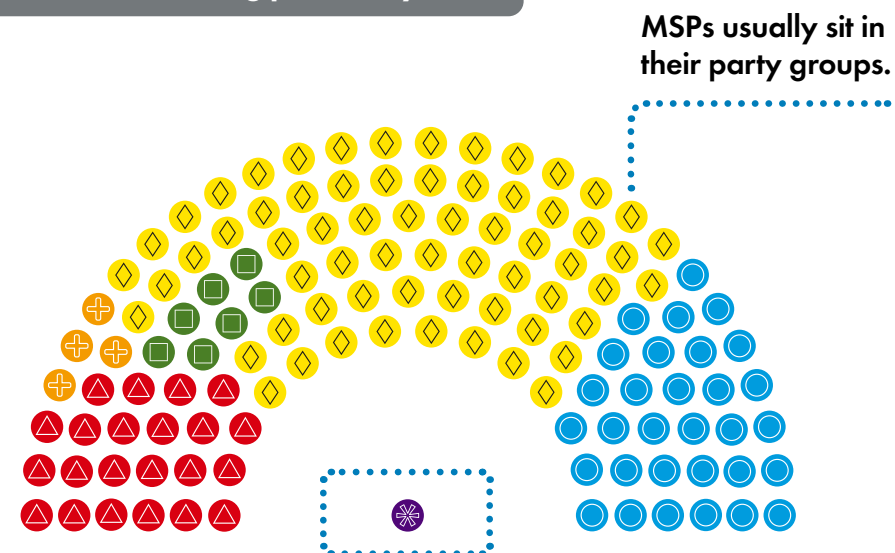
- **Debates**  
These are discussions between MSPs, normally based on a motion.
- **First Minister's Questions**  
This is when MSPs question the First Minister.
- **Question Times**  
These are sessions when MSPs question Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers.
- **Ministerial statements**  
These are used by Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers to inform the Parliament about urgent matters or to make announcements on policy.
- **Decision Time**  
This is when MSPs decide on the motions discussed that day, often by voting.

### What is the role of the Presiding Officer in the Chamber?

The Presiding Officer, supported by two Deputy Presiding Officers, chairs meetings in the Debating Chamber. When chairing meetings, the Presiding Officers must act impartially.

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MSP Chamber seating plan, May 2021



The Presiding Officer (or a Deputy Presiding Officer)

Scottish National Party



Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party



Scottish Labour



Scottish Green Party



Scottish Liberal Democrats



## What do committees do?

Committees are small groups of MSPs who look at specific subjects such as health, the economy or justice. They play a central role in the work of the Scottish Parliament because, unlike the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament is a single-chamber parliament.

The work of committees includes:

### ○ Legislation

Committees can consider and amend proposals for new laws. They can also propose new laws themselves.

### ○ Inquiries

Committees can investigate any area that is within their remit and publish recommendations.

### ○ Petitions

Committees can consider and report on petitions that have been submitted by members of the public and groups who wish to raise an issue.

## How do committees work?

- Each committee is chaired by a convener and most committees have around seven MSPs as members. Members reflect the balance of the various political parties and groupings in the Scottish Parliament.
- Committees invite members of the public to give their views on the issues they are considering. They can also invite any person to attend a meeting as a witness. Witnesses give evidence related to the business of the committee.



# Public Information

For more information on the Scottish Parliament, its membership, business or procedures, please contact us.



[parliament.scot](https://parliament.scot)



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