



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# A guide to the **Scottish Parliament** for visitors with autism





**We want you to enjoy your visit to the Scottish Parliament. To help you prepare for a visit, this resource includes information about different areas of the Parliament you may visit and about the services and facilities we provide for visitors with autism.**

If you need more information about anything in this leaflet, you can contact Visitor Services. Full contact details are in the section 'Contact us'.

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# Helpful information before you arrive

## Busy and quiet periods

The Scottish Parliament is a building where lots of people work and it can be very busy and noisy, especially on days when the Parliament is meeting. Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays are sometimes quieter days, but this will depend on what exhibitions or events are taking place. You can ask Visitor Services for advice on the best time for you to visit.

It's a good idea to look at the website or phone Visitor Services on **0131 348 5200** or **0800 092 7600** to check the opening times before you visit.

## Autism Champions

Scottish Parliament Autism Champions have been trained to support visitors with autism. They promote Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) awareness throughout the parliamentary service. They are also a point of contact for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

and their staff seeking advice on visits to the Parliament by groups or individuals with ASC. Trained staff wear badges with the words 'I am autism aware'.



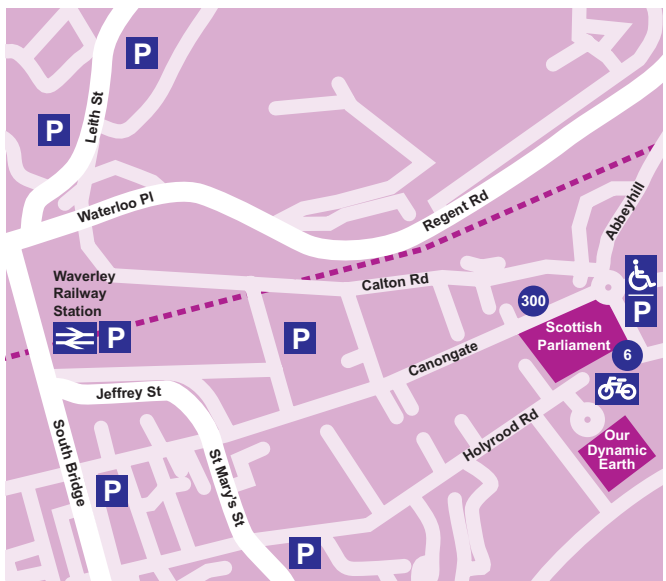
## About the Scottish Parliament building

The Scottish Parliament is a modern building, although it also includes an older building. The modern part is made up from a variety of different shaped buildings that are linked together. It's made from lots of different materials including glass, granite, concrete and wood.

## Getting to the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament is at one end of the Royal Mile across the road from the Palace of Holyroodhouse and close to the Our Dynamic Earth visitor attraction. The public entrance is on Horse Wynd.

You can travel to the Scottish Parliament by public transport, bike, walking or by car. More information about [how to find us](#) is available on our website or by contacting Visitor Services.



Rail Car Park Bike racks Buses



## During your visit

### **Around the Scottish Parliament building**

The Parliament grounds contain a mixture of paving, cut turf lawns and more natural raised areas of wild grasses and plants. The paved area includes three ponds and a number of bollards and can be very bright in sunlight.

The paved area around the public entrance is next to the road that separates the Parliament building from the Palace of Holyroodhouse and it can be very busy. As well as traffic, there may be noise in this area from journalists holding interviews, from people gathering on the benches near the ponds or, occasionally, from crowds taking part in a demonstration.

### **Arriving at the Scottish Parliament building**

There is one public entrance to the Scottish Parliament. There are signs with arrows pointing to it and there's usually a uniformed police officer standing near it too.

There is a glass and wood sliding door at the entrance which is normally open. When you go inside, you'll need to go through another door. The revolving door on the left will turn by itself when you walk into an empty section. Security staff will open the door on the right if you can't use the revolving door.



## Security checks

When you go into the building, you need to go through security checks. You may need to queue for this. The security checking area can sometimes be very busy and noisy.

If you've any of these items with you when you visit, you'll need to put them in a tray to be scanned. You can put them wherever you like in the tray.

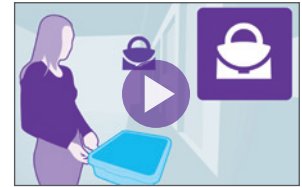


You must empty your pockets into a tray and take off your belt and coat. There are labels in the tray to show you what you need to put into it. A member of the security team will also be available to help and show you where to put your belongings. These will go through an x-ray machine and you can collect them at

the other side. You can't bring items such as knives or scissors into the building.

You have to walk through a scanner that may make a buzzing noise if you have anything metal on. If it makes a buzzing noise, security staff will have to find out what set off the alarm. To do this, a member of the security team may need to pat you down through your clothes or wave a hand-held detector over your body. It will always be someone who is the same sex as you who will do this, and you can ask to have a private search.

You can find more information about the security checks in our security video.



## Entrance corridor

When you've completed the security checks, you should go through the double doors on the right and down the wide corridor leading to the Main Hall. This corridor has a granite floor. It also has full-length windows down one side that look out onto Horse Wynd so the light can be very bright here on sunny days.



The entrance corridor



## Baggage

If you want to leave your bag while you visit, there's a baggage store desk near the doors to the Main Hall. If you leave a bag, the member of staff will give you a ticket. You need to keep this and hand it in at the desk in the Main Hall to get your bag back when you're leaving. This service is free.



Lockers are also available for visitors in the Main Hall. There is a £1 charge for using the lockers which is refunded on return of the key. Lockers are situated at various heights.

## The Main Hall

When you're at the baggage store, the doors to the Main Hall are on your left and open towards you when you get near them.

From the Main Hall you can get to the Debating Chamber and the committee rooms. You can also visit the exhibition, café and shop.

## Visitor Services

Visitor Services Staff at the Visitor Information Desk and at other locations in the Main Hall can help if you want to attend a meeting of the Parliament or go on a guided tour. They can also help if you have a question about the Parliament or need anything on your visit. If you've an appointment with an MSP or member of staff, give the staff at the Visitor Information Desk the name of the person you've arranged to meet or the event you're attending and they'll show you where to wait.



The Visitor Information Desk



## Waiting areas

If you're attending a meeting in the Parliament, you'll be asked to wait in one of the waiting areas. Please stay in the area you're directed to so that the person you're meeting or the staff for your event can find you.

Most of the waiting areas are in the Main Hall, but there's also another waiting room. The Main Hall can be a busy, noisy area on days when lots of people are visiting. If you would like to sit in a quieter area, please speak to a member of staff.



The Main Hall exhibition

## Main Hall exhibition

There is an exhibition about the Scottish Parliament and its history just off the Main Hall. This is in an area with bright colours and it includes elements with sound such as a video about the history of the Parliament. This room can be busy, especially on weekdays when school groups are visiting.

## Temporary exhibitions

The Main Hall will occasionally have temporary exhibitions on display. Some of these can be very popular so there may be a lot of people in the Main Hall when you visit.

## Chairs

There are usually seats in the Main Hall. There are also folding chairs that you can use on the guided tours. Contact Visitor Services if you want to make sure a seat is available on your visit.



The café

## Café

During your visit, you may want to visit the café, which is next to the Main Hall.

The café flooring is granite, and there is both artificial light from overhead light fittings and natural light from the windows which look into the entrance corridor and then across to the Palace of Holyroodhouse. There can be a lot of noise in this area from staff preparing hot drinks and from other visitors. Hot food is also served in the café.

The café can be busy at any time but will usually be busiest on days when there are debates in the Chamber and committee meetings.

## Toilets

The toilets are on the left when you leave the Main Hall, near the way out.

There are accessible toilets in several parts of the building including the entrance area, near the way out and near the stairs to the Debating Chamber. There are also Changing Places toilets with a hoist and changing bench on the ground floor. Staff will show you where these are.

The hand driers in the toilets are noisy, but paper towels are available in the accessible toilets.

The lights in the accessible toilets are operated manually by a switch, but the lighting in most of the toilets is based on sensors and will come on when someone enters the room.

## Shop

There is a shop in an area next to the Main Hall, near the way out of the building.

The shop is brightly lit and there is also a lot of natural daylight. It can become very busy and sometimes music will be playing.

You can buy a guide book on the building here, and the shop staff will help you with anything you need.



The shop

## Crèche

There is a free crèche on the ground floor where you can leave children aged under six while you visit the Scottish Parliament. The crèche is closed at weekends and public holidays. It's a good idea to book a place at the crèche before you come to the Parliament by emailing [creche@parliament.scot](mailto:creche@parliament.scot) or calling **0131 348 6192**.



Children playing in the crèche

The crèche playroom is a large, bright room that is well equipped for children, with a separate activity room with climbing frame, bikes, scooter, balls, etc. There's a secure door at the main entrance to the crèche which is managed by staff. Parents/carers will be asked to sign their child into the crèche and to sign them out at the end of their stay. They'll also be given a pass which they should hand to a staff member when they come to collect their child.

Children can choose from a wide range of activities including painting, water and sand, singing and parachute games. The staff will be guided by parents/carers as to how best to meet their child's needs while the child is in the crèche.

The crèche has a happy atmosphere, with children encouraged to play. Sometimes babies and children can get upset and some children can find the noise distressing.





## Guided tours

There are usually guided tours of the Scottish Parliament building on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays. There are tours on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays too, if no meetings of the Parliament are taking place. Tours are free but you need to contact Visitor Services to book a place.

You can ask for a handset to hear a tour in different languages. A handset with the tour in British Sign Language is also available.

A tour group may include up to 20 people and tours will last for one hour. The tour will normally use stairs to get to the different parts of the building but let your guide know if you would prefer to use a lift.

The tour will visit different parts of the building, with different flooring, lighting and noise levels. It will go through some areas that are narrow and enclosed, but also brighter, very open areas, and these contrasting spaces may be quite close to each other. The route of the tour may vary depending on what's happening in the building when you visit.

On the standard Parliament tour, your guide will describe what happens in the different areas of the building and talk about the history and design of the building. We also have a range of other tours on history, art and literature. These tend to be more interactive or conversational and may go into parts of the building that are not included on the standard Parliament tour.



A guided tour group in the Garden Lobby





### Public gallery of the Debating Chamber

On days when the Parliament is meeting, you can watch the MSPs in the Debating Chamber from the public gallery, but you first need to get a ticket from Visitor Services. It's advisable to book in advance, and it's essential to do so for First Minister's Questions, which normally takes place on Thursdays. Bookings open one week in advance.

The public gallery has wheelchair spaces.

The Debating Chamber has cameras filming the debates and visitors in the public gallery may also be filmed. The level of natural daylight in the Debating Chamber can change rapidly throughout the day. A number of special lights are also required to create the consistent lighting conditions we need to film proceedings to a high standard.

There are uniformed security staff in the Debating Chamber and there may also be uniformed police officers.

All visitors to the public gallery have to follow a **code of conduct**. You must switch your mobile phone to silent before going into the public gallery and you're expected to be quiet during meetings of the Parliament. If you're attending First Minister's Questions, you're expected to stay seated for the whole 30 minutes. You may leave other debates quietly whenever you wish.

The gavel is banged at the start and end of the meeting. The Presiding Officer may also bang the gavel during a meeting if the MSPs are being very noisy or disruptive.





During meetings of the Parliament, MSPs can become very passionate about the subject that is being discussed, and they will sometimes raise their voices. They may also occasionally bang on their desks or clap their hands. The Presiding Officer is responsible for maintaining order in the Debating Chamber and will intervene – possibly by banging the gavel – to remind MSPs to behave respectfully if they are noisy or disruptive.

At times when MSPs aren't meeting in the Debating Chamber, visitors can normally go and have a look at it from the public gallery.



A meeting of the Parliament in the Debating Chamber

## Attending a committee meeting

If you've been invited to give evidence at a committee meeting, you need go to the Visitor Information Desk in the Main Hall first, where staff will give you a witness pass and ask you to sit in a designated waiting area. You'll be collected by a member of the committee staff team when it's time to go to the committee room.

There are six committee rooms at the Scottish Parliament: two on the ground floor, two on the first floor and two on the fourth floor. All the rooms have lots of spotlights, and the rooms on the fourth floor also have lots of natural light.



A committee meeting in a committee room

Seating for members of the public is at the back of each room, close to the doors used by the public. The MSPs who are members of the committee and people who are giving evidence to the committee sit at the table. There are cameras in the room to record the meeting. Meetings held in public are broadcast on the internal television system and webcast live on the Parliament website. The archived video will be posted later on the Parliament website and on YouTube.

All visitors to committees have to follow a **code of conduct**. You have to switch off your mobile phone, enter and leave the room quietly and sit quietly when you're attending the meeting. However, you don't have to stay for the whole meeting – you can leave whenever you want.



## Education Centre

You'll be in this room if you're visiting the Scottish Parliament through the Education Service and taking part in an education workshop. It's located at the foot of the public stairs and next to the exhibition area. The floor is granite and there are windows round part of the room. Some of the windows look out into the Main Hall and some look outside to the area leading to the delivery yard. There's also a large sky light window, but lighting is mainly provided by spotlight-style lights around the room.

Chairs will usually be set out in short rows facing the white board at the front. This is an interactive board which the member of staff taking your visit will use during your workshop.



The Chat Room

This room can be quite dark and it can be very busy outside the room with other visitors to the building passing by.

## Chat Room

The Chat Room is located next to the public café in the Main Hall. If you're visiting the Parliament through the Education Service, staff will take you here to meet your Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). The room is usually set up with four long rows of seats; these face a screen which is sometimes used for presentations. You might also use this room as a place to eat your lunch if you come on a visit through the Education Service.

The Chat Room floor is granite and there's both artificial light from the overhead light fittings, which are lower at one end of the room, and natural light from the windows which look into the entrance corridor. There can be a lot of noise in this room from visitors both in the café and walking past to enter the building.

## Quiet space

A quiet space has been provided. However, this also acts as a waiting space for other visitors. If you need a quiet space, please speak to a member of staff.



## Garden meeting rooms

If you're attending a meeting with an MSP or a member of Parliament staff, it may take place in one of the meeting rooms between the public area and the Garden Lobby.

The meeting rooms have glass walls or doors on each side and vary in size. Some are small and have space for only four people, while others can hold up to 20 people. Most of the rooms have only artificial lighting. In most rooms, the lighting is based on sensors, which means that it comes on when people move about in the room but may go off if people have been sitting still for a long time.



## Garden Lobby

The Garden Lobby is a large space with lots of natural light. It's located on the private side of the building where all members of the public must be accompanied.

This is a busy area and can be very noisy. People often have meetings here, and MSPs are sometimes filmed and interviewed. There's also a coffee bar and it's next to the garden restaurant.

## Signage

There is a variety of signs in the building, some of which are lit. Staff are also available to help.



The Garden Lobby

# More information that may be helpful

## British Sign Language (BSL) and other communication support

If you want to attend a meeting in the Debating Chamber or a committee meeting and need a BSL interpreter or other support, please contact Visitor Services as soon as possible.

Some Scottish Parliament staff can use BSL and may be able to answer questions about what you can do on your visit. However, staff who know BSL may not always be available.

### Division bell

If you come on a day when the Parliament is meeting in the Debating Chamber, you may hear the division bell. This sounds 10 minutes and 5 minutes before Decision Time, which usually takes place at 5.00 pm. It may also sound at other times if MSPs have to vote on a matter. The division bell can be heard throughout the building with the exception of the Debating Chamber.



## Emergency

Messages may be played to alert visitors that an incident is being investigated or that they should leave the building.

### Evacuation message for the Main Hall



### Evacuation message for the Garden Lobby



If there's an emergency and you need to leave the building, staff will tell you what to do and where to go. Deaf Call pagers are available at the Visitor Information Desk if you're worried about not being able to hear a fire alert or evacuation message.

Contact Visitor Services if you will need assistance in the event of an emergency.

## First aid

If you need first aid, please ask a member of staff.

## Hearing loops

Many areas of the Parliament building have hearing loops, including the Visitor Information Desk, the baggage store and the public café. You can also ask for a headset to listen to meetings in the Debating Chamber or a committee room.



A meeting of the Parliament in the Debating Chamber





## Lifts

You can get a lift to all parts of the building. The lifts are all large enough for a wheelchair user to use them.

You will see that the lifts have mirrors on one wall and have bright lights.

The lift most often used by visitors going to the public gallery of the Debating Chamber or to the committee rooms is 160 centimetres wide, 140 centimetres deep and 230 centimetres high.

The lifts can take up to 13 people and can be busy when a lot of people are going to a meeting.

## Stairs

Stairs in the building have a handrail at each side, but some landings have no handrails.

## Wheelchairs

The building is fully accessible to people in wheelchairs, and there are Changing Places toilets on the ground floor. You can borrow a wheelchair from the Visitor Information Desk to use when you're at the Parliament. Contact Visitor Services in advance if you want to make sure a wheelchair is available on your visit.



Visitors using a lift

# Contact us

If you would like more information about visiting the Scottish Parliament, you can phone us on **0800 092 7600** or **0131 348 5200**, or use the Text Relay service. We also welcome calls in British Sign Language through [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#). You can also use our [live chat](#) service to ask a question online.

You can send a text message to **07786 209888** or an email to **[visit@parliament.scot](mailto:visit@parliament.scot)**

If you want to write to us, the address is:



## Visitor Services

The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

We aim to make visits as accessible as possible and you can find more information about visiting on our website at [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

You can keep up to date with what's happening in the Parliament, including information about parliamentary business, tours, events and exhibitions, by following us on social media or signing up for our free eBulletins:



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[eBulletin sign-up form](#)

There are information leaflets in the Main Hall and in other parts of the building. If you would like information in another format, please ask at the Visitor Information Desk.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Scottish Parliament. Please ask a member of staff if there is anything we can do to make your visit easier.

The Scottish Parliament has received the autism accreditation award from the National Autistic Society. We'll continue to review and improve our services for visitors with autism and would welcome your [feedback](#).



We would like to thank Autism Initiatives for their help in producing this leaflet.