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**Public Petitions Committee**

# **Review of the Petitions Process**



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# Public Petitions Committee

To consider public petitions addressed to the Parliament in accordance with these Rules and, in particular, to—

- a. decide in a case of dispute whether a petition is admissible;
- b. decide what action should be taken upon an admissible public petition; and
- c. keep under review the operation of the petitions system.



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**David Torrance**  
Scottish National Party



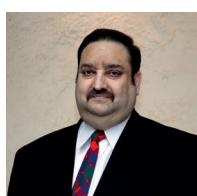
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**Note: The membership of the Committee changed during the period covered by this report, as follows:**

Michael McMahon joined the Committee on 2 September 2015, replacing John Pentland (Scottish Labour, Motherwell and Wishaw) and became Convener on 22 September 2015.



# Introduction

1. Since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999, the public petitions process has been a key part of fulfilling the Parliament's founding principles and enabling the people of Scotland to put matters of concern onto the agenda of the Parliament.
2. Maintaining a 'watching brief' on the operation of the process, and making changes when considered necessary, is a core part of the remit of the Public Petitions Committee. Reviews of the process have been carried out by the Committee throughout the four sessions of the Parliament to date.
3. To continue the work on reviewing the process, in May 2015 the current Committee commissioned research from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). The purpose of the research was to provide—
  - a review of progress on the commitments made in 2009;
  - a comparative assessment of processes and performance indicators with reference to petitions processes in other parliaments;
  - an analysis of the socio-economic demographics of petitioners, to better understand the extent of public participation and social inclusiveness; and
  - a summary of petitioners' expectations and experiences of the petitions process, and perceptions of the Scottish Parliament, more generally.
4. The report on the research is published as Annexe A to this report. The Committee was pleased to note from the report that people's experiences of the process have been positive. However, the Committee recognises that there are still areas where the petitions process can be further developed to enhance the experience of petitioners and wider awareness and understanding of the petitions process.
5. This report sets out the Committee's initial responses to the findings of the research and the areas where further action is recommended. In the remainder of this session of the Parliament, the Committee intends to seek views from other MSPs and stakeholder groups to ensure that the petitions process can continue to meet the expectations of petitioners and fulfil the ambitions of the Parliament.

## **The Committee's response to the review**

6. The research sets out a number of areas on which it is suggested that the Committee could take action. This report responds to those recommendations under two broad headings: engagement and transparency.

### **Engagement**

7. The Committee's engagement activities in this session have included external meetings, petitions workshops and the launch of a Twitter account.

### **Frequency of external meetings**

8. The research notes that one of the recommendations of the 2009 review of the petitions process was that the Committee should meet outside Edinburgh with greater frequency.
9. The Committee has held three external meetings this session, two of which formed part of the 'Parliament Days' initiative. Each of these meetings has involved consideration of at least one petition brought forward by a local person or which raises an issue relevant to local circumstances. The Committee considers that this local relevance was an important factor in encouraging people to attend the meeting and engage with the Committee.
10. In advance of these meetings, petitions workshops were held in the area where the Committee was due to meet. The purpose and outcomes of these workshops varied, some were specifically intended to generate new petitions for the Committee to consider at an external meeting while others were more 'promotional' and sought to highlight the existence of the petitions process and the role of the Committee.
11. The Committee considers that there is great value in external meetings and recognises that the practice of including local petitions on the agenda has played an important role in attracting audiences and enabling engagement with the Committee's work. However, the Committee also considers that there would be merit in having external meetings that focus not solely on geographical communities but also take account of communities of interest or where the focus of the meeting is a petition of general public interest.

### **Quality of engagement**

12. The research refers to comments received from people, including a petitioner, who attended the Committee's external meeting in Inveraray on 7 September 2015. These comments indicated an interest not just in attending and observing the Committee's meeting, but in participating and contributing to the meeting. The Committee recognises the importance of a participative element to external



meetings and the need for the timing, location and format of external meetings to enable that active participation.

13. Ways in which this could be achieved that have been considered by the Committee include holding meetings at times of the day that are more likely to enable working people to attend, holding a Q&A session prior to an evidence session and using the comments made to inform the questioning of witnesses or by holding roundtable evidence sessions at which people are able to make comments on the record.

### **Use of social media**

14. The primary social media channel used by committees of the Parliament is Twitter. The Committee's Twitter account started in January 2013 and is used to provide information on the consideration of and decisions about petitions. The research contains a number of figures comparing the activities of all committee Twitter accounts. However, the metrics used focus on engagement with information that is pushed out, rather than on measuring two-way communication.
15. Developing this two-way engagement, particularly with petitioners, is an area the Committee intends to try to develop in the remainder of Session 4, including asking petitioners to provide information about their own social media use and, as a result, increase the ability to mention or tag petitioners and more directly highlight relevant content to interested audiences.
16. This more systematic approach to asking petitioners whether they would be willing to provide their user names can be complemented by other ways of developing the content of tweets.
17. Additionally, the Committee intends to recommend in its legacy paper that other social media channels, such as Facebook and YouTube, should be considered as options to promote the petitions process in general or to highlight and seek views on particular petitions.
18. The research also refers to the blog that was created in Session 3 to provide information about the work of the previous Public Petitions Committee. The Committee does not have information available, such as number of views, to enable it to determine whether the blog had a positive effect on engagement with the work of the Committee. There does, however, appear to have been only limited engagement by way of comments made on the blog posts. The Committee is not persuaded that re-launching the blog would support the development of engagement with the petitions process.

### **Petitioner diversity**

19. One of the findings of the research is that the demographic profile of petitioners has not altered to any great degree since Christopher Carman's 2006 research. Actions have been taken by the Petitions Committee since that research to focus

on targeting specific groups, such as younger people. However, it appears that these actions have not resulted in any overall shift in the profile of petitioners.

20. To try and understand why certain demographics are underrepresented, the Committee considers that there would be merit in undertaking some engagement work that is, in the first instance, focused on asking people for their views about the system and whether it presents, or is seen to present, a barrier to their participation. Potential or perceived barriers could include people having the skills to access what may be seen as a digital only system or having confidence in their ability to present a written petition.
21. The Committee intends to hold a pilot of this type of engagement event early in 2016. The outcomes of that event would be used to inform its legacy paper.
22. The Committee also considers that the delivery of workshops could be expanded so that they do not necessarily link to an external meeting but can target particular groups/geographical areas that are known to be underrepresented as petitioners. This could be done either directly or through relevant civic organisations and charities. Ways to capture the data that would allow the Committee to identify the particular areas to target this type of engagement work are considered in the 'Transparency' section.
23. The Committee is also of the view that other avenues of promoting or advertising the petitions process should be explored such as, for example, in members' newsletters to constituents or other Parliamentary publications. The Committee will also seek to promote the petitions process through its own newsletters.

## **Transparency**

### **Petition proposals**

24. The question of transparency around proposals that are received and do not go on to be lodged as petitions is also commented upon in the research, which includes an analysis of petitions proposals in Session 4. This analysis shows that the percentage of proposals that do not go on to be lodged as petitions is similar to that in other jurisdictions. However, to date the Parliament's petitions system has not routinely captured statistical information in a way that would allow such analysis to be available as a matter of routine.
25. Both the National Assembly for Wales and the UK Parliament publish information about proposals that are received but do not go on to be lodged as petitions. The information that is published includes the title of the proposal, the summary of what the proposal calls for and the reasons why it has not been lodged as a petition.
26. The Committee intends to recommend that the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee establishes a system for recording and publishing information about

proposals that do not go on to be lodged as petitions. The legacy paper will also set out the Committee's view on the best way to publish this information.

## **Data**

27. Identifying people who are underrepresented among petitioners requires data to be captured in a way that is readily usable. While some data about petitioners, primarily to do with location, is routinely captured in the petitions system, other demographic information has been captured only in specific pieces of work, such as the recent research.
28. The Committee intends to consider ways in which relevant demographic data could be sought from petitioners on an ongoing basis. As with other elements of this report, this is a matter that the Committee intends to address in its legacy paper.

## **Consideration of petitions**

29. While the research found that all aspects of the petitions process were regarded positively by petitioners, two elements were regarded as less satisfactory than others: consideration of petitions by the Committee and the opportunity to present additional evidence.
30. The Committee places a great deal of importance on the views of petitioners throughout its consideration of petitions and whenever information is sought from the Scottish Government or other bodies, petitioners are given the opportunity to submit written evidence that addresses that information and to request further actions that the Committee could take.
31. The Committee will also consider requests from petitioners to give additional oral evidence. However, the opportunity to give additional evidence will always need to be balanced against the opportunity for the Committee to hear from petitioners on the first occasion that a petition is considered.
32. The Committee will continue to reflect on ways in which its consideration of petitions, and the information it takes into account in taking decisions on petitions, can be clearly communicated to assist petitioners and others with an interest in the petitions system to understand how decisions are reached.

## Conclusions

33. The Committee welcomes the research on the petitions process and the recommendations made for areas of further development. The Committee will, in the remainder of this session, consider the ways in which those developments can be delivered. In doing so the Committee will reflect on its own experience, the views of other MSPs and what we are told by petitioners and other stakeholders.
34. The conclusion of this work will be set out in the Committee's legacy paper to assist our successor committee to support a strong petitions process that allows the voices of the public to be heard.

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# **SPICe Briefing**

## **A review of the public petitions process, 2009-2015**

**20 October 2015**

**Gareth D. James**

This briefing provides a review of the public petitions process, to update the Parliament and the Public Petitions Committee on the performance of the system since the last review in 2009. It includes:

- a review of progress on the commitments made in the Committee's 2009 inquiry into the public petitions process;
- a comparison of processes and performance metrics with reference to other public petitions systems in parliaments in the UK, Europe and elsewhere;
- a note on the socio-economic characteristics of petitioners; and
- a summary of petitioners' expectations, experiences and perceptions of the public petitions process and the Scottish Parliament, more generally.

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# Annexe A: A review of the public petitions process, 2009-2015

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the Scottish Parliament was re-established in 1999, it was with high hopes of a “new sort of democracy... closer to the Scottish people and more in tune with their needs” (Scottish Office, 1998). In particular, the Consultative Steering Group envisaged:

“an open, accessible Parliament; a Parliament where power is shared with the people; where people are encouraged to participate in the policy making process which affects all our lives; an accountable, visible Parliament; and a Parliament which promotes equal opportunities for all” (Ibid.)

The public petitions process was to be one of the main mechanisms for achieving this, and there have since been several reviews of the process, including the Committee’s own inquiry in 2009.

This briefing has been commissioned to review the Committee’s progress on commitments made in 2009; to compare the Scottish petitions system with processes in other parliaments; to examine the socio-economic characteristics of petitioners; and to summarise petitioners’ expectations and experiences of the petitions process. To this end, the briefing uses a range of methods – document analysis, a self-completion questionnaire, interviews with petitioners, and personal observations – that together provide a comprehensive update on previous reviews undertaken by the Committee and others.

For example, previous reviews have found that the public petitions process tends to work well, but that petitioners do not represent a broad cross-section of Scottish society (Carman, 2006; Ipsos MORI & Carman, 2009). Other studies of petitions processes in other parliaments tend to produce similar results, especially when it comes to the socio-economic characteristics of petitioners (Lindner & Riehm, 2009; 2011; Bochel, 2012). The analysis used in this briefing corroborates the findings of these earlier studies, showing that petitioners, in Scotland as in other countries, are mostly older, well-educated, middle-class men.

Participation in politics, more generally, has been in decline in the UK since the 1970s; at least in terms of traditional measures i.e. party membership, electoral turnout, etc. (Wilks-Heeg, et al., 2012). However, the evidence also appears to show high levels of “non-traditional” participation and a growing interest in forms of direct and participatory democracy, such as e-petitions (Ibid). It is yet to be seen what kind of lasting impact the recent Independence referendum (and votes for 16 and 17 year olds, for example) will have on peoples’ desires for more participatory democracy in Scotland. If there is a lasting enthusiasm for “getting involved”, then there may be opportunities for the Committee to tap into this.

However, other studies have shown that the public's desire "to be heard" and "to act" are not necessarily synonymous, nor are these desires felt evenly across social categories (McHugh, 2006). McHugh writes:

"While the desire to 'have a say' is felt fairly evenly across all age groups, there are clear differences according to social class and educational attainment. Although 82% of respondents in the AB social category wanted a voice in how the country is run, that figure fell to 53% of those in category DE. Similarly, 78% of people in possession of an A-level or a higher qualification wanted to have a say, compared to just 48% with no formal qualification." (2006, p. 548).

It seems that, beyond signing petitions, only a small fraction of the public is willing to become involved, in any serious way, in the political decision-making process (McHugh, 2006; Ipsos MORI & Carman, 2009). Therefore, the findings of this briefing should also be considered within this context; that is to say that the current system might already be attracting those who *want* to take part.

Beyond this, the briefing shows that the Committee has met many of the commitments made in its report on the inquiry into the public petitions process in 2009, although some caveats apply. For example, it (that is, the Committee) has continued to hold external meetings (although the frequency of these meetings appears to have declined); it has continued to engage people in question and answer sessions following these meetings (although petitioners express a desire for more meaningful engagement during the actual consideration of petitions); it has produced a range of promotional materials and embraced social media (although the petitions blog is no longer updated and the Twitter account could be used more effectively<sup>1</sup>); it has introduced efficiencies in the process, including re-designing the e-petition site (although there are parts of the site that could be further updated); and it has conducted in-depth inquiries and held debates on the issues brought forward by petitioners (but, again, the frequency of these debates appears to have declined).

The process itself remains relatively simple when compared to processes in other parliaments in the UK, Europe and elsewhere. The stipulation, for example, in other parliaments, that petitions must include the names and (email) addresses of so many supporters or obtain a set number of signatures before they are certified (Canada) or become eligible for a government response/debate (UK), raises a barrier to participation that does not exist in Scotland. However, aggregate level data shows a much higher percentage of "inadmissible" petitions in Scotland than in Wales and Ireland; but a more detailed analysis shows that this data does not tell the full story. The briefing makes some suggestions on how to improve transparency in the decision-making process by adopting some practices from other parliaments.

The final section of the briefing summarises petitioners' expectations and experiences of the petitions process based on interviews with a small group of

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<sup>1</sup> This might include linking-up to other social media platforms and using free content management tools like paper.li to collate weekly newsletters; retweeting others' posts and asking for retweets in return; promoting selected posts for a fee; increasing follower-base by taking a more pro-active approach to following others; and using hashtags more effectively to reach out to people beyond existing list of followers, especially those with an interest in specific policy areas, e.g. #Health #Scotland.



petitioners and questionnaire responses. It shows that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the overall process, although satisfaction with key stages in the process varies. Petitioners appear to be most satisfied with the help they receive from the clerks, while they are least satisfied with the level of consideration given to petitions by the Committee and the number opportunities available for providing additional evidence to the Committee. That is not to say that the majority of petitioners are dissatisfied by the Committee's response to petitions (in fact the data shows the opposite); instead, it is simply that petitioners' experiences with the Committee rank low when compared with other stages in the process. Again, the briefing offers some explanation for this.

Therefore, while the briefing stops short of making direct recommendations, it does draw attention to several issues that the Public Petitions Committee might want to consider further. These include:

- the decline in the frequency of external meetings and the number of PPC-specific debates held in the Chamber in recent years;
- the quality of public engagement at (external) meetings and ways in which this might be improved;
- the effective use of social media, both for communication and engagement, and minor issues with the e-petition site;
- the high rate of “inadmissible” petitions and suggested measures to increase transparency in the decision-making process;
- the extent of participation and social inclusiveness in the process, and whether strategies could, or should, be designed to increase levels of participation among under-represented groups; and
- the concerns of some petitioners about issues of fairness, due consideration and (im)partiality in the scrutiny of petitions.

However, despite these issues, the overall petitions process appears to work well. Interviews revealed that petitioners often just want to be heard, and when they are, they consider that their petition has been, in some way, “successful”. In addition, all of the petitioners interviewed for this briefing were left with a positive impression of the Scottish Parliament, more generally; and, while they cannot be said to be representative of all petitioners, their comments at least provide some encouraging signs that the petitions process is helping to meet the Parliament's stated goal of being more open and accessible to the people of Scotland.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This briefing provides an update on earlier research carried out by Christopher Carman and Ipsos MORI in 2006 and 2008/9. Following these earlier reviews, the Public Petitions Committee (the PPC) conducted its own [inquiry into the public petitions process](#) in 2009, and made a series of commitments designed to improve awareness of, access to and participation in the public petitions process. It also undertook to make further improvements in terms of efficiency and scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> The PPC has since agreed to review its work and has commissioned this briefing paper which provides:

- a review of progress on the commitments made in 2009;
- a comparative assessment of processes and performance indicators with reference to petitions processes in other parliaments;
- an analysis of the socio-economic demographics of petitioners, to better understand the extent of public participation and social inclusiveness; and
- a summary of petitioners' expectations and experiences of the petitions process, and perceptions of the Scottish Parliament, more generally.

The following sections deal with each of these objectives in turn.

## 2. A REVIEW OF PROGRESS SINCE 2009

In its report on the inquiry into the public petitions process, the PPC made a series of commitments designed to improve awareness, access, participation, efficiency and scrutiny (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c). This part of the briefing offers a review of progress to date. Information has been drawn from the PPC's annual reports (2009-2015), newsletters (2013-2015), personal observations and informal discussions with former and current committee members and clerks, and is organised around the broad themes identified above.

*"The Committee commits to undertake a further series of external meetings in various parts of Scotland, including one further external meeting in 2009 and three external meetings during 2010. It is our intention to meet, where possible, in locations where no other committee of Parliament has visited." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 30).*

### IMPROVING AWARENESS, ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

#### Undertaking further external meetings

There are three commitments worth mentioning here. First of all, the Committee agreed to a series of external meetings in 2009/10. During this period, the PPC met in Dumbarton, Duns, Glasgow, Fraserburgh, Alness, Anstruther and the Isle of Arran. In each case, with the exception of Glasgow, the PPC was the first committee of the Scottish Parliament to meet in these areas (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions

<sup>2</sup> The full list of commitments can be found in Annex A.

Committee, 2009b, p. para. 35; 2010a, p. para. 29). The subsequent election in 2011 led to a change in the Committee's membership and direction, and, perhaps as a result, the frequency of external meetings appears to have declined in subsequent years.

However, the Parliament Day initiative, launched in November 2012, has provided the PPC with opportunities to take its work into local communities throughout Scotland. In March 2013, for example, the PPC held a formal meeting in Stornoway as part of the 2nd Parliament Day, which was preceded by workshops for community groups from across Barra, Benbecula, Harris and Lewis. As a result of one of these workshops, Barra Youth Council submitted a petition calling for the installation of Wi-Fi on all CalMac ferries in the Western Isles, and, in response, CalMac launched a project to deliver Wi-Fi services.<sup>3</sup> In November 2014, the PPC also held workshops in Stranraer and Dumfries, ahead of the 8th Parliament Day, which took place in Dumfries in February 2015. The PPC also participated in the Parliament's Community Conference and held a formal meeting at Easterbrook Hall on 23 February 2015. At this meeting, it took evidence on three petitions from residents of Dumfries and Galloway.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, the PPC held a workshop in Oban on 24 August 2015, ahead of a formal meeting in Inveraray on 7 September 2015. However, the workshop was poorly attended, which may be due, in some part, to a lack of awareness. One attendee, an individual from Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service (LAAS), said "I found out through Carol [a colleague], otherwise I wouldn't have had a clue. That was a question for me – how does everybody else know this is on?" Another attendee said, "The local branch of the SNP publicised it really well, to try to get people along, but as you can see that hasn't happened today". Turnout may also have been low, at least in part, due to the fact that the Cabinet held an external meeting in Oban on the same day, and the Oban Youth Café also held a meeting on political participation.

*"We also commit to encouraging two-way dialogue with the people who come to these meetings and to investigate other ways in which we can involve them in the meetings themselves." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 31).*

Secondly, the Committee agreed to encourage two-way dialogue and investigate ways of improving participation at these meetings. At both the Oban workshop and Inveraray meeting, the PPC invited questions from members of the public. These Q&A sessions followed the 'roving mic' strategy mentioned in the 2009 report. At the meeting in Inveraray, the Q&A session took place after the Convener had concluded formal business, and the audience was encouraged to ask questions on the petitions process, the work of the PPC and how to engage with Parliament.

Douglas Philand (who brought forward

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Parliament, *Parliament Days*, available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/56702.aspx> [Accessed 27 July 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Parliament, *Parliament Days*, available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/83815.aspx> [Accessed 27 July 2015].

[PE01540](#) and attended the meeting in Inveraray where the Committee took evidence on his petition from the Minister, Derek Mackay MSP) said, “I think it’s a very good process” and “It was great to have the Minister coming to our local area”. However, he added “One thing that I’d say, just after today, is that the petitioner should have the right to respond or ask further questions”. When pressed on what he meant, Mr Philand replied, “I suppose like our MSP, Mike Russell, was like today. He was able to ask some questions, he was able to contribute. Should the petitioner be allowed to do that or not? I think it would be valuable to be really further engaged in the live process that’s going on” (D. Philand, 7 September 2015).

Others agreed. Alan Reid, Member of Parliament (MP) for Argyll and Bute from 2001 to May 2015, said:

“The question and answer session about the Committee was fine, but I think if people had been asked for questions or comments on what people said, I think that could have improved the knowledge of the Committee on that subject. I think it should be managed at the Convener’s discretion. If there’s time left after the formal business, rather than just the informal session simply being questions about the Committee’s business, it could simply be open to the Convener to say, “Does anybody from the audience have any comments to make about what was said today?” Obviously, the Convener is an experienced MSP, I’m sure he could handle a rowdy audience... I think that could be added on, rather than a question and answer session about the Committee’s business... I think comments on the session from the public would a) satisfy the public and b) improve the Committee’s knowledge of the subject.” (A. Reid, 7 September 2015).

*“... we will... see whether we could run a ‘young peoples petitions’ meeting where we invite only young people to bring forward petitions which we then discuss at a Committee meeting solely for that purpose. We will also consider the scope for similar meetings that might focus on petitions from disability groups, equalities organisations etc.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 33).*

With that observation, Mr. Reid added that “The Scottish Parliament definitely does it [deals with petitions] much better [than the UK Parliament]” and “...it’s good that they [the Committee] came out and saw the area, and brought the Minister, himself, and asked him some searching questions” (Ibid.).

Third, the 2009 report included a commitment to meetings for specific demographics, i.e. young people, disability groups, equality organisations, etc. In many of the cases noted above, external meetings were held in schools and colleges to increase awareness and participation among young people. The PPC has also met jointly with the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) on a number of occasions.<sup>5</sup> In October 2010, for example, as part of the SYP conference, the PPC held a meeting at which it considered three

<sup>5</sup> Informal discussion with a former clerk to the Petitions Committee, 29 July 2015.

petitions – [PE01367](#), [PE01368](#) and [PE01369](#) – brought forward by young people (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2011a, pp. para. 6-8). At its meeting on 19 February 2013, the PPC again considered PE01367; and, the following month, it met jointly with the SYP to consider three new petitions calling for young peoples’ hospital wings ([PE01471](#)), a Scottish living wage recognition scheme ([PE01467](#)), and a young carers grant ([PE01470](#)). The Committee has also engaged with young people in its consideration of PE01098 and PE01223, on school bus safety, and [PE01393](#) on tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2013, p. para. 11).

In 2009/10, the PPC also worked with the Parliament’s Education and Community Partnership Team (now Outreach Services) on “a number of initiatives”, one of which resulted in a petition by Multi Ethnic Aberdeen Limited on improving NHS translation and interpretation services ([PE01288](#)) (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2010a, p. para. 27). However, the Committee’s 2011 legacy paper reads:

“... [we said] we would consider holding similar themed meetings [to those held with young people] which might focus on petitions from disability groups, equalities organisations, etc. We didn’t have time to put in place arrangements for a similar meeting but it is an idea which we remain committed to.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2011b, p. para. 38)

At the time of writing it appears that no such meeting has taken place, and informal inquiries conducted by SPICe reveal a general consensus that more could be done to reach out to these groups.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, important to be clear about “target audiences”. The demographic analysis used later helps to shed some light on those who do (not) participate in the petitions process, which may assist the Committee in deciding which groups it might want to target, if any.

*“... we will produce a poster and a bookmark which publicise the public petitions process and point people in the direction of where to get more information... we will consider whether the posters should be produced in different styles, formats and languages appropriate to different audiences.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 59).*

## **Producing new promotional material**

The 2009 report also committed to producing a range of new (“traditional”) promotional materials, including a new leaflet in multiple languages, a poster, a bookmark, and a new BSL version of the promotional video.

Accordingly, information under the broad heading ‘*Petitioning the Scottish Parliament: Making your voice heard*’ was produced, including a DVD explaining the petitions process; a BSL video; a simplified Q&A style leaflet in English and Gaelic; and a podcast version of this

<sup>6</sup> Informal discussion with the Clerk to the Petitions Committee and Outreach Services, 17 August 2015.

*“We will therefore take forward the production of a new leaflet, to be made available in various languages and formats: Gaelic, Arabic, Traditional Chinese, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Polish, easy read, large print and Braille.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 55).*

*“We will also take forward the production of a new BSL version of the video to be launched later this year. This will be done in consultation with the Scottish Council on Deafness and other agencies to ensure that what is produced fully meets the needs of deaf and deafblind people.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 108).*

leaflet in Arabic, Bengali, Gaelic, Polish, Punjabi, Simplified Chinese/Mandarin, Traditional Chinese/Cantonese and Urdu (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2010a, p. para. 20). The leaflet and podcasts are available as part of the Parliament’s ‘[Get Involved](#)’ series. A [short animated video](#) on how to submit a petition is available on YouTube, and another short video containing [interviews with former petitioners](#) can be found on the Parliament’s website.

Figure 1, below, summarises the three top responses to the question, ‘how did you find out about the Scottish public petitions process? In addition, about 8% of respondents had some personal experience of the system, which includes those who have petitioned the Parliament in the past and those who claim to have a good general knowledge of the Scottish Parliament; 5.4% found out through “other parliamentary publications”; the same percentage of people found out through local/national newspapers; 2.7% through social media; and 0.9% via the radio. The rest answered “other”/“don’t know”.

Figure 1: How did you find out about the petitions process?



Source: SPICe, petitions questionnaire 2015 (n=112)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> “n” is equal to the number of valid responses to each question. There were 113 respondents.



In addition to gathering demographic data, the questionnaire sent to petitioners for this briefing included 10 statements about the petitions process and asked petitioners to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each. Some of these results are relevant here and are therefore presented in Figures 2 and 3, below. The data shows that the vast majority of respondents found it easy to access information in a format suited to their needs.

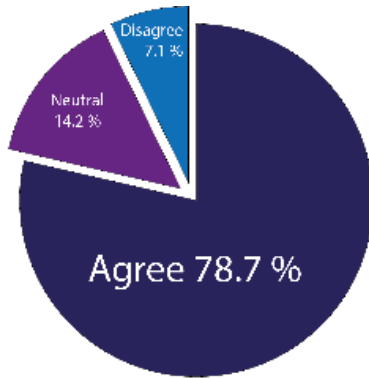
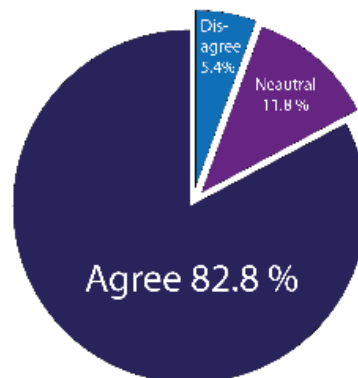


Figure 2:

"I found it easy to access information on how to submit a petition" (n=113)

Figure 3:

"Information on how to submit a petition was available in a format suited to my needs" (n=112)



Source: SPICe, petitions questionnaire 2015.

*"Given the benefits that we see this can bring to petitioners, we are launching alongside this report a facility which will allow petitioners, and us, to post videos and photographs about petitions, the petitions process and the work of the Committee. These will be hosted on the new blog page." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 112).*

## Embracing social media

The public petitions blog was launched on 16 June 2009, alongside the publication of the 2009 report. It hosted details of meetings, new and existing petitions, reports, photos, videos, audio files and links to other useful blogs and webpages. A former clerk to the Petitions Committee explained the reason for the blog:

"At the time, there were certain technical limitations in putting information up onto a webpage... it could take two to three days... So the idea of the blog was to provide us with an opportunity to put information up immediately. So whenever we had

delegations coming over, for example, we could take photographs and post them up immediately... If we tried to do that with the website it might take two or three days and who cares about a photograph of a delegation that was here two or three days ago...it's lost the impact...We could also get things up in a slightly more informal way...so the blog was good for getting information out there quickly and easily and in a fairly accessible way... to start reaching out to communities of interested people.”<sup>8</sup>

The delay in publishing content online is perhaps no longer relevant, but as one of the Gaelic Development Officers, who is responsible for administering the Parliament's Gaelic blog, added:

“It was also quite good that it [the petitions blog] was informal, because a lot of people think that Parliament is a really big, faceless thing. You would probably imagine that the Clerk to the Petitions Committee is some guy wearing a wig and a cloak... and the fact that it was quite friendly stuff, in the right tone, and approachable, meant that if you read it you would feel good about approaching the Parliament... and that's what we try to do with the Gaelic blog.

At the moment we're doing about one post per week. We're going to try doing a bank of articles that won't go out of date. We've looked at the Welsh Assembly blog, and one of the things they do is to speak to people around the Parliament who do exciting things, and that goes into the blog with a picture of the person”.<sup>9</sup>

In an interview with SPICe, Lorraine Cleaver, petitioner, also said:

“I think maybe they [the PPC/clerks] could put more online about why people are on the Petitions Committee, because I think we all go in there [to committee meetings] and think “who are these people and what are their interests?”...are they told they've got to take a turn on the Petitions Committee? Because essentially for the next two or three years these people are kind of controlling whether this [petition] gets passed or closed down... and you don't really know anything about why they're there” (L. Cleaver, 22 September 2015).

The petitions blog could have provided a useful platform to continue communicating and engaging, informally, with petitioners, but it has not been updated since May 2011.

However, in 2013, the PPC launched its own Twitter account. Figures 4-9, below, show some of the key measures of performance – in terms of reach and impact – for the PPC Twitter account in comparison to other committees of the Scottish Parliament. The data, which has been taken from the Web and Social Media Team's Monthly and Quarterly Reports, 2012-15, shows that:

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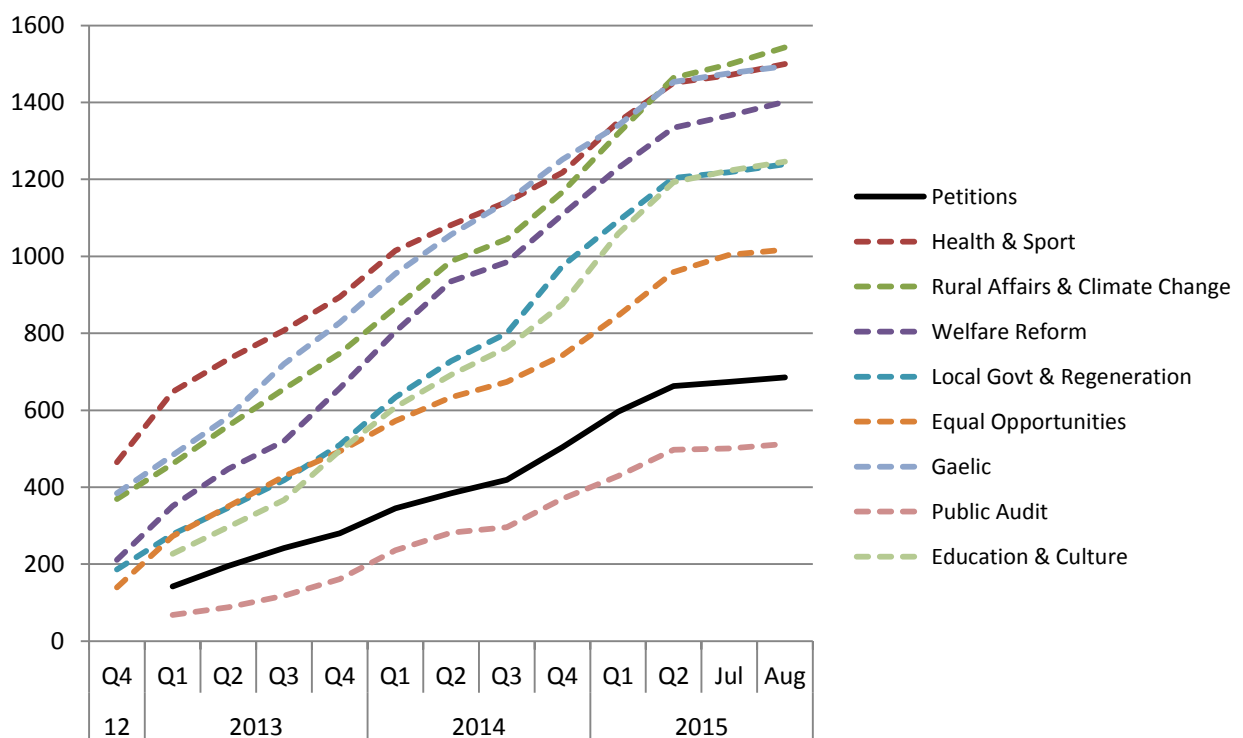
<sup>8</sup> Informal discussion with former Clerk to the PPC and Gaelic Development Office, 27 August 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

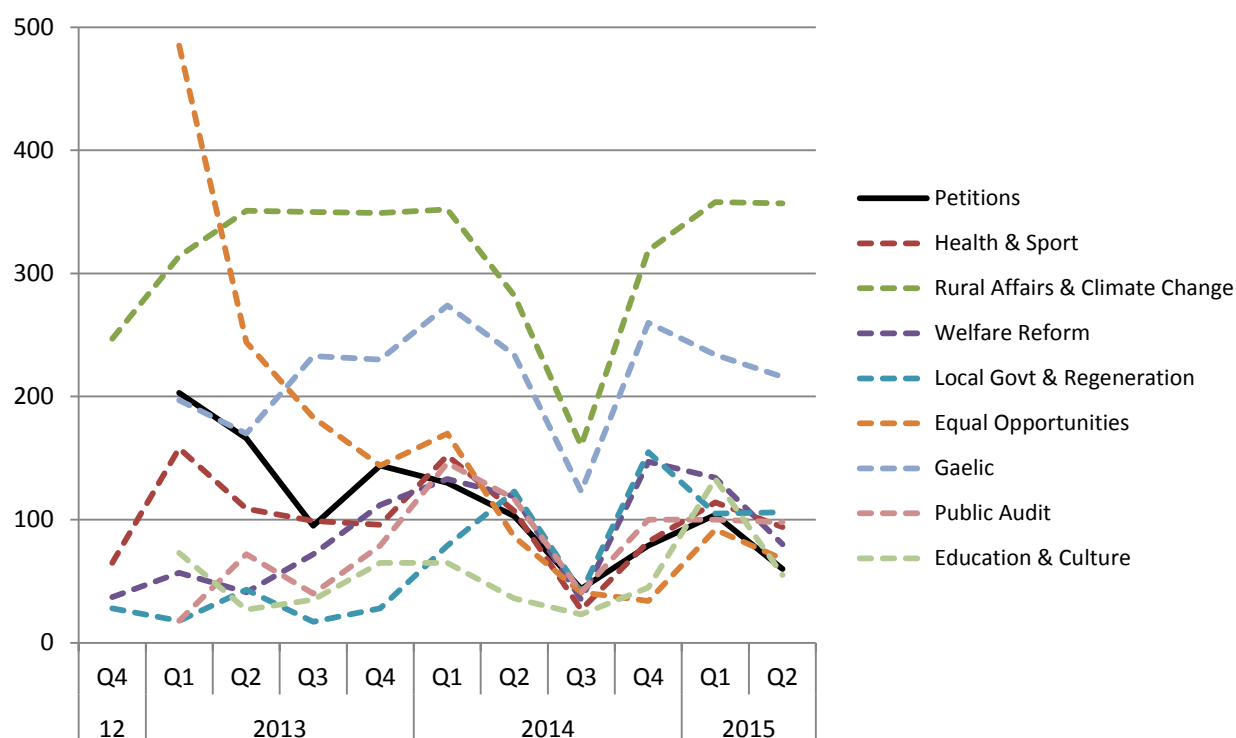


- the number of people following the PPC on Twitter has steadily increased since it was launched, but it has also been overtaken by other committees which started on Twitter at a similar time and from a similar base (Figure 4);
- the number of “tweets” per month is similar to most other committees (except the RACCE and Gaelic accounts), but the overall trend is downwards (Figure 5);
- the number of “retweets” per month is consistently much lower than most other committees and has remained flat over the period under consideration (Figure 6);
- the tweet-to-retweet ratio, however, shows a clear upward trend that might be indicative of increasingly relevant and effective content (Figure 7);
- the number of “click-throughs” is again low relative to other committees (but total numbers are still quite impressive) (Figure 8); and,
- the tweet-to-click ratio – data for which is only available for 2014 – is erratic (but the same is true for most other committees), with peaks likely linked to petitions that capture the public interest, such as [PE01500](#) on making the golden eagle the national bird for Scotland and [PE01506](#) on renaming Glasgow Prestwick Airport to Robert Burns International Airport, both of which were lodged in January 2014 (Figure 9).

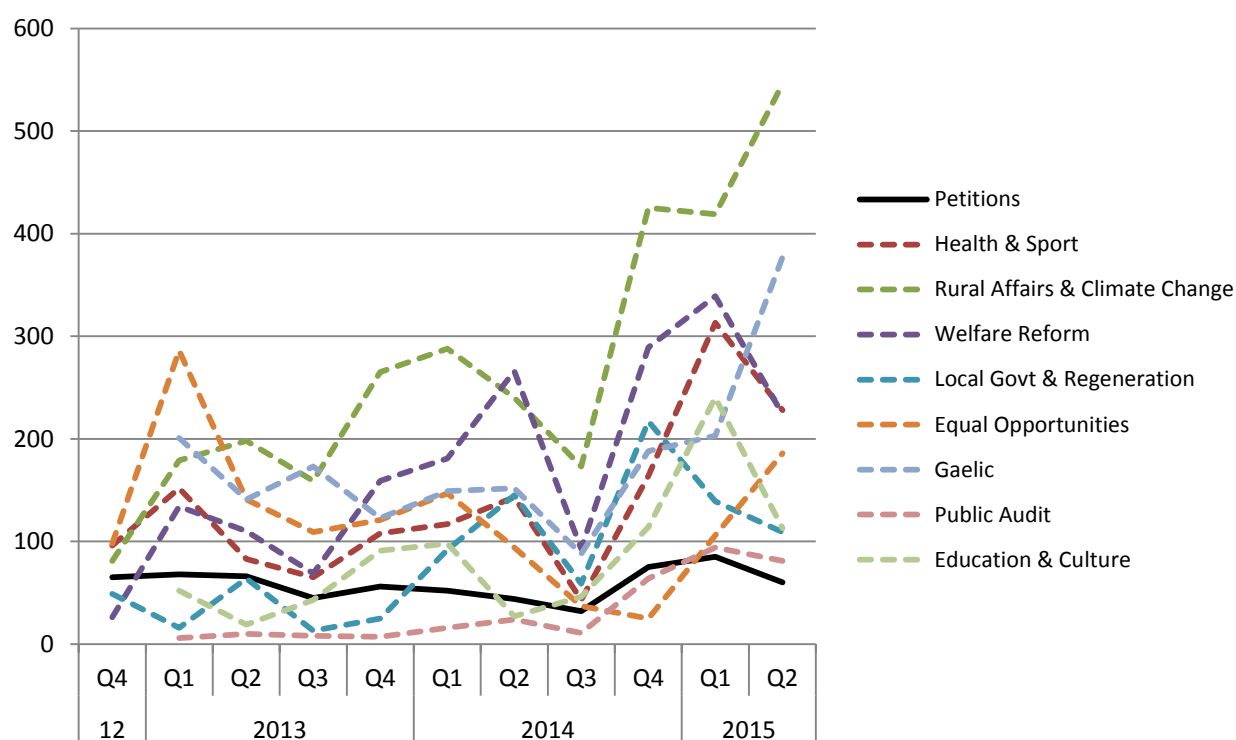
**Figure 4: Number of followers at end of each quarter per committee, 2012-2015.**



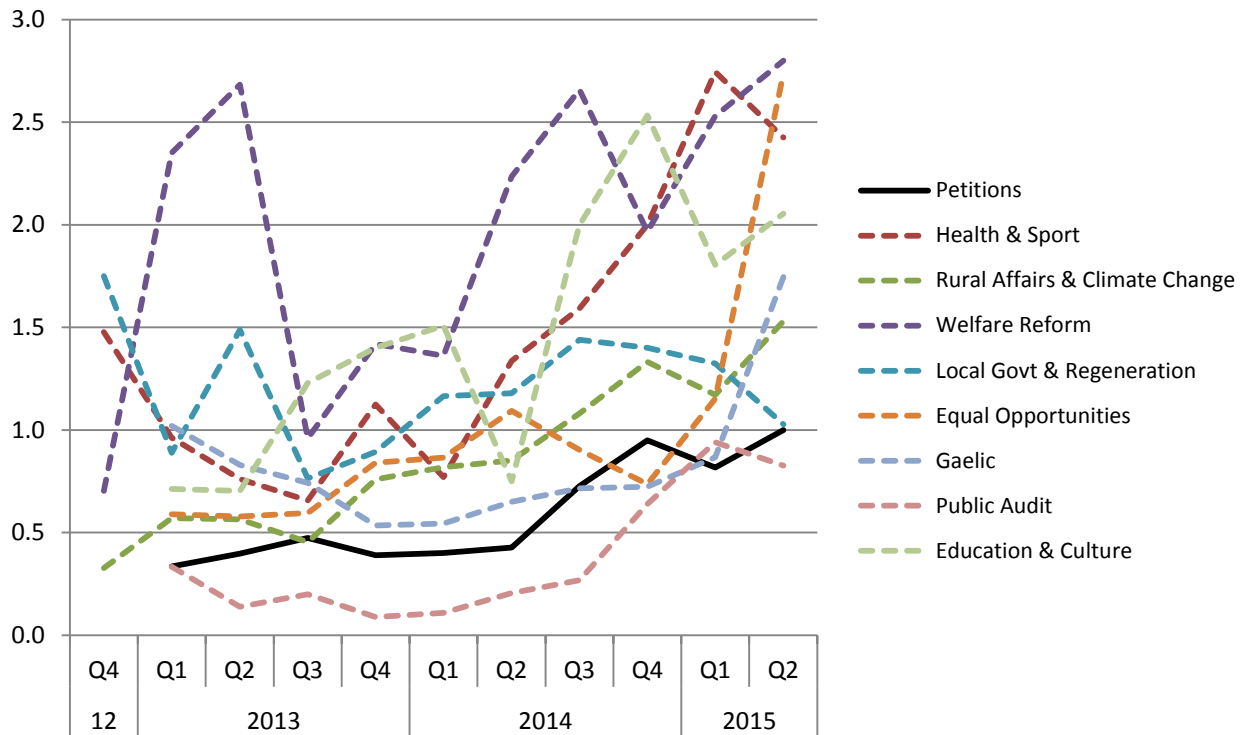
**Figure 5: Number of tweets per committee per quarter, 2012-2015.**



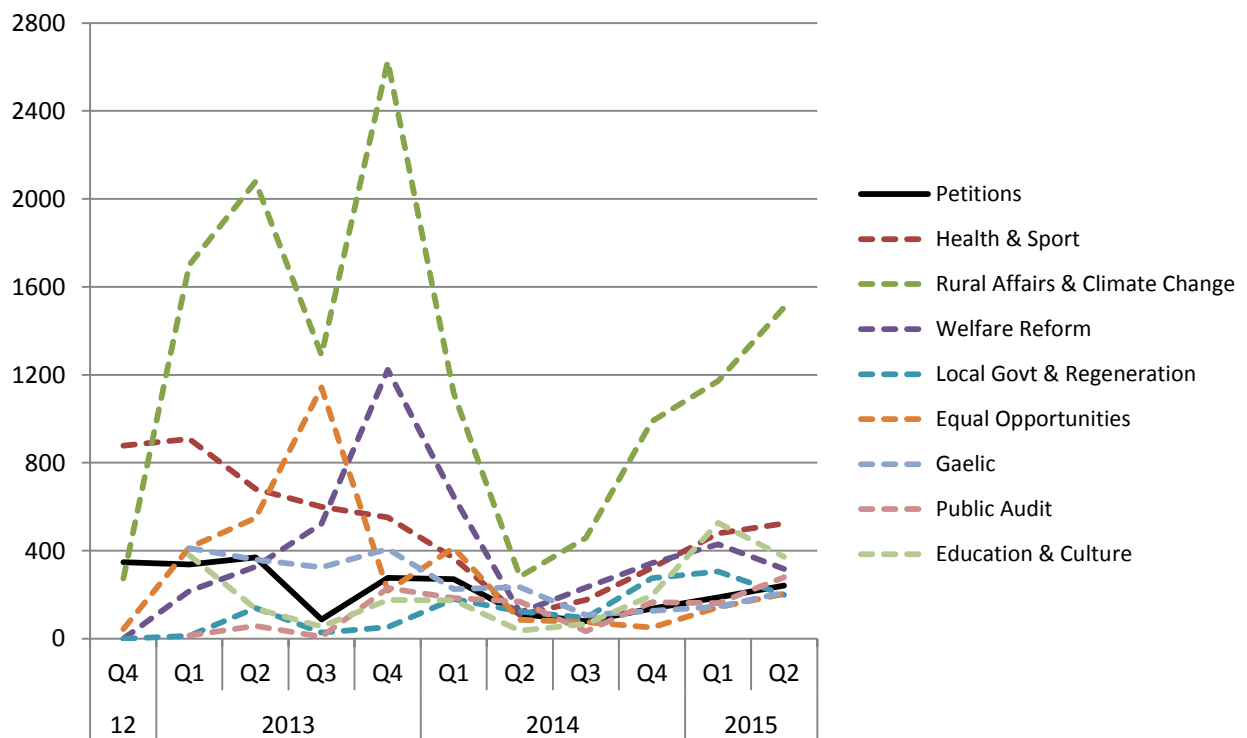
**Figure 6: Number of retweets per committee per quarter, 2012-2015**

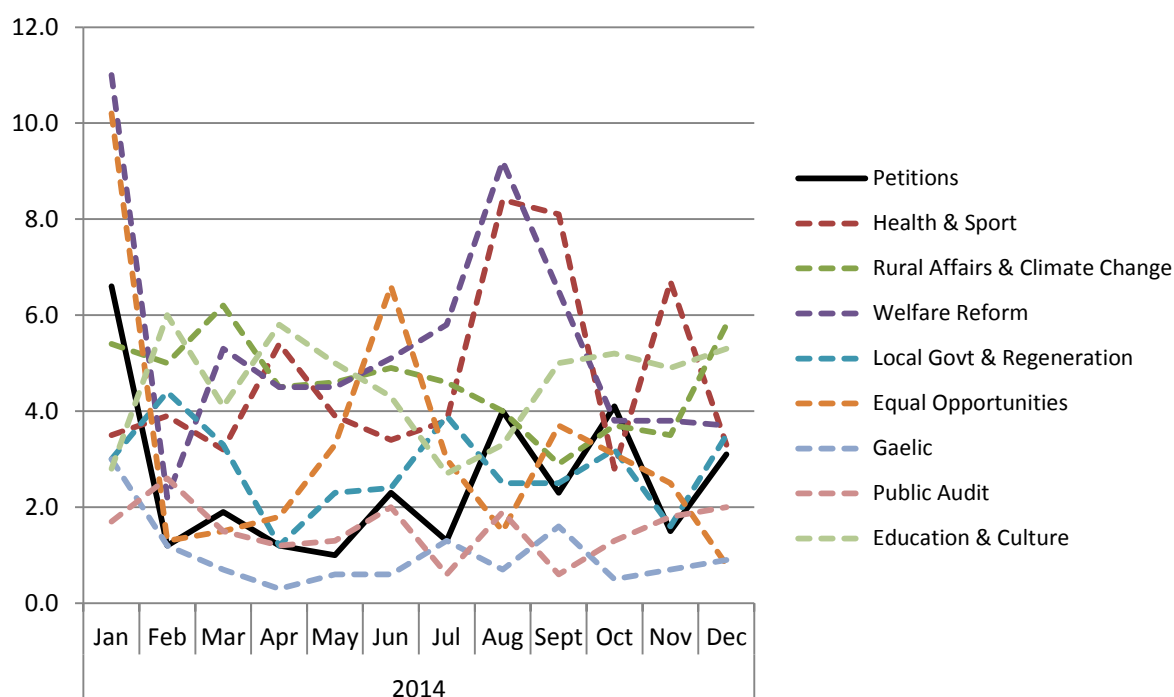


**Figure 7: Tweet-to-retweet ratios, 2012-2015**



**Figure 8: Number of link “click-throughs” per committee per quarter, 2012-15**



**Figure 9: Tweet-to-click ratios, 2014 only**

To increase the reach of content on social media the Committee has, in the past, promoted certain posts for a small fee. For example:

“A post advertising PPC workshops and external meetings in Dumfries and Stranraer achieved a reach of over 20,000. The post was promoted for £50 to people based within 50 miles of both Stranraer and Dumfries.” (Scottish Parliament Web and Social Media Team, 2014d).

The same report also reads:

“The video of Parliament nominating Nicola Sturgeon for First Minister reached over 25,000 people, and was also promoted (to a general audience) for £50. In November we issued a post (and again promoted for £50) when the Devo Committee’s online survey on voting for 16-17 year olds was launched, which achieved a reach of over 35,000.” (ibid.).

A similar, targeted approach may assist the PPC in making better use of social media tools, helping it to reach out to specific target groups and further its goal of increasing awareness of, access to and participation in the public petitions process. It may also be possible to link different social media platforms more effectively than before, to provide more opportunities for (potential) petitioners to engage. Finally, while social media can be a useful tool for disseminating information, it is not an end in itself; instead its use should continue to complement more “traditional” methods of communication (Ipsos MORI & Carman, 2009), and its impact should continue to be monitored in order to ensure that it is achieving the desired outcome.

*“We will therefore look to further promote the option for petitioners and others to talk to us about their petition via videoconference” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 126).*

*“[On the text messaging service] We will therefore put in place the facilities to launch this later this year. Again we are trying to increase the options available to people” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 129).*

## IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND SCRUTINY

In addition to recommendations aimed at improving awareness of, access to and participation in the petitions process, the 2009 report made a series of commitments designed to further improve efficiency and scrutiny. On the former, the 2009 report includes efficiencies to be gained from “new” technologies, redesigning the e-petition system and revising certain procedures. On the latter, the report committed to encouraging greater clarity from respondents (including ministers), conducting in-depth inquiries and competing for debating time in the Chamber.

### **Videoconferencing and text messaging facilities**

With the aim of facilitating the submission of evidence and providing additional options for people to support petitions, the Committee agreed to promote the option for

submitting evidence via videoconference. It also agreed to a text messaging service that would allow people to support a petition from their mobile phone. **Some examples of occasions when the PPC has taken evidence via videoconference are shown in Table 1, below.**

**Table 1: Examples of videoconferencing**

Date	PE#	Participants
<a href="#">11/09</a>	<a href="#">PE01274</a>	The French Blood Transfusion Service
<a href="#">29/06/10</a>	<a href="#">PE01335</a>	Maggie Tervit (petitioner)
<a href="#">18/02/14</a>	<a href="#">PE01453</a>	Mark Drakeford AM, Minister for Health and Social Services, and Pat Vernon, Head of Policy for Organ and Tissue Donation (Welsh Government)
<a href="#">28/10/14</a>	<a href="#">PE01531</a>	Ashley Husband Powton (petitioner)
<a href="#">24/02/15</a>	<a href="#">PE01517</a>	Adam Slater, Mazie Slater Katz and Freeman LLC (personal injury lawyers from the USA).

Source: Various Committee Minutes and Reports, 2009-2015.

The commitment to introduce a text messaging service, however, does not appear to have been implemented, and if it has, there has been little or no use of the facility.<sup>10</sup>

*“We have revised the template to be completed by each petitioner to invite more information from them about the background to the petition e.g. what action do they wish taken, by whom, when, what questions do they wish us to ask, [and so on].” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 143).*

we did not have web 2.0, social networking sites and blogs – we have moved on. The committee has an opportunity to move on with that, make the system more exciting and perhaps attract more people that way”

(Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009d, p. Col. 1691).

*“We do not believe the current e-petition system is fully fit for purpose (demonstrated in 2008 when the server broke due to demand) and that the necessary improvements to it must be made. We therefore invite the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body to indicate in what way it will support the redevelopment, as a priority, of the e-petition system.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 149).*

feel there needs to be more awareness training on the comments facility. This is one of the facilities that really makes the system better than others

## Redesigning the e-petition system

At its meeting on 21 April 2009, the PPC heard evidence from Professor Ann Macintosh, the designer of the original e-petition system, who said:

“It [the e-petition system] is boring. It is slow and boring, and it has mistakes in it. I am talking not just about e-petitions, but the whole content management system... The website is not alive any more. Nobody is going to sit and wait while the screen takes that long to refresh itself. When we first considered the e-petitioning system,

(Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009d, p. Col. 1691).

The new e-petition system – which also introduced a revised template – was launched alongside the Parliament’s new website in 2013. It now has over 2,400 registered users and the facility to link-up with social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, enabling users to generate publicity and gather signatures online.

In response to a recent request from SPICe, Professor Ann Macintosh provided a brief update on her assessment of the current e-petitions system, saying:

“I am still very interested in the e-petitioning process and I do feel it has greatly improved since 2009.

However it can only really improve if any enhancements go hand in hand with training in the community. I still

<sup>10</sup> Informal discussion with the Clerk to the Petitions Committee, 11 September 2015.

as it allows people to tell their own stories. Also, what I would like to improve, or even put in place, is more deliberation within this section – but I know this is hard.

There are a few niggles, for example you can't easily see what a petition is about without clicking on it as each one starts with "Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make..."; surely this could be said in one place for many petitions.

I like the availability of the social media links to allow people to share the petition but maybe these should be removed, or their use qualified once a petition is lodged..." (Personal communication, 31 July 2015).

The PPC believes that 'The new facility is easier to use, more integrated with the Parliament's other systems and processes and provides better security protections' (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2013, p. para. 12). It seems that petitioners agree, with the majority of respondents stating that the e-petitions system is clear and straight forward, as shown in Figure 10 below.

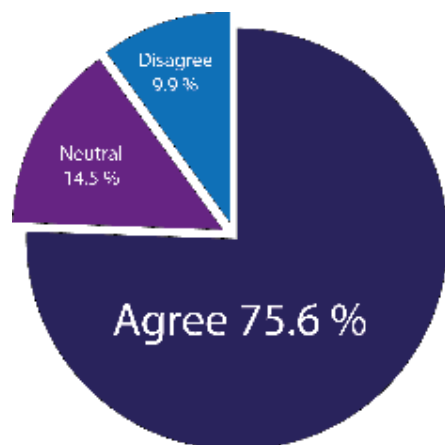


Figure 10:

"The registration and submission of e-petitions is clear and straight forward" (n=111)

Source: SPICe petitions questionnaire, 2015

*"We will formally alert the Scottish Government of new petitions lodged." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 152).*

### Procedural issues

The 2009 report also identified some areas where there were potential efficiency gains to be made in the processing of petitions, including alerting the Scottish Government to all new petitions, allowing more time for petitioners to respond to evidence, and closing petitions where there is no communication from a petitioner.



*“We will ensure that the petitioner is given the same, if not more, time as public bodies in which to respond to the Committee.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 155).*

*“In future, if we receive no communication from a petitioner on two successive occasions, we will consider the petitioner is content with the responses received and we will move to close the petition on that basis.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 166).*

In response to informal inquiries by SPICe, the clerks have confirmed that they do alert the Scottish Government of all new petitions when lodged, to make sure the Government is aware of all petitions and in an attempt to speed-up the process when it comes to responses from the Government.

In addition, petitioners are currently given four weeks to respond to written submissions from the Government and other relevant bodies. Figures 11 and 12, below, summarise questionnaire responses to statements concerning communications with the clerks, including the time given to respond to written evidence from the Government and other relevant bodies.

The recommendation that a petition be closed when no communication is received from the petitioner on two successive occasions, however, appears to have been used only in very few cases in recent years (in fact in some cases the petition has remained open even when communication with the petitioner has ceased).<sup>11</sup>

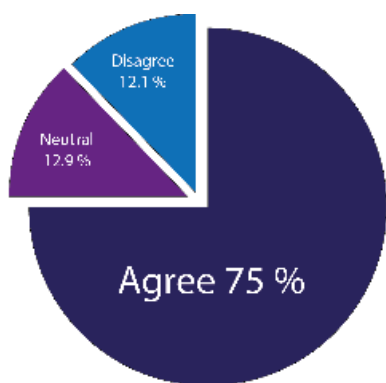
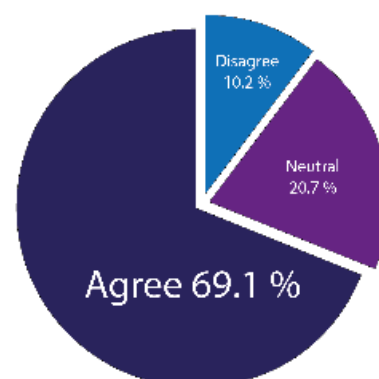


Figure 11:

“I was kept informed on the progress of my petition throughout the process” (n=108)

Figure 12:  
“I was given enough time to respond to written submissions from other bodies (e.g. the Scottish Government)” (n=107)



Source: SPICe, petitions questionnaire 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Informal discussion with the Clerk to the Petitions Committee, 11 September 2015.



## Further improving scrutiny: written questions, in-depth inquiries and debates

The final broad theme identified in the 2009 report is that of further improving scrutiny in the petitions process. Scrutiny can have wide benefits for the business of government and democracy, such as improving the Government's evidence base for decision-making, or providing a different perspective on available evidence. Scrutiny also generates openness and transparency in the democratic process, which contributes to public confidence in government decision-making (White, 2015a; 2015b). The PPC performs its scrutiny role by writing to the Government and other relevant bodies; inviting ministers to give evidence; conducting in-depth inquiries; and debating the subject of petitions in the Chamber. The following commitments made in the 2009 report are therefore relevant.

*"We will also encourage greater clarity and more specifics from respondents." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 156).*

First of all, the Committee agreed to encourage greater clarity from respondents. Presumably, this includes the Scottish Government and individual ministers. At the recent workshop in Oban, for example, Jackson Carlaw MSP, explained:

"...we will sometimes think that the best thing to do is to take further evidence, perhaps from Government Ministers...all of the members have a well-established track record of being very direct with ministers in seeking to establish answers to the questions in hand... It is certainly not the case that ministers come along to the Committee thinking that "at the end of the day, I'll be alright"... they can actually find that some of their own colleagues are pretty frustrated with the way in which progress has not materialised on a particular issue... So it [the PPC] has quite a strong role in interrogating and investigating an issue which the political parties might never have touched upon directly with ministers as a result of an individual bringing that issue to the Scottish Parliament for consideration."

One example of a particularly robust line of questioning is the Committee's meeting of 9 December 2014, at which the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, gave evidence on [PE01458](#) which calls for a register of interests for the judiciary (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2014a). The same was true at a recent meeting on 6 October 2015, during which witnesses gave evidence on the issue of trans-vaginal mesh device implants ([PE01517](#)), and the Cabinet Secretary was moved to apologise to women who had

*"We will also continue to consider ways to fully investigate the issues behind the petition, be that through a detailed inquiry and report... or hosting a debate of key, interested parties... Where appropriate, we will undertake further in-depth inquiries." (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 163).*

suffered complications as a result of these procedures (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2015a, p. Col. 36).

In addition, the Committee agree to further in-depth inquiries and debates on the issues brought forward by petitioners (see above). The PPC has conducted 3 in-depth inquiries since 2009, including:

- an inquiry into the provision, on the NHS, of cancer treatment drugs and whether there is equity across NHS boards of the appropriateness, effectiveness and availability of such drugs and whether there is parity between the cancer drug treatment regime and other life threatening or other terminal conditions ([PE01108](#));
- an inquiry into mandatory custodial sentences for knife crime ([PE01171](#)), which included a debate in the Chamber on 23 January 2009; and
- an inquiry into tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland ([PE01393](#)), with a remit to examine the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Scotland; the effectiveness of current measures aimed at tackling, preventing and disrupting child sexual exploitation; and to make recommendations on what needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of measures.

*“192. We also considered whether there might be scope for an annual public petitions debate in the Chamber. This might be on the back of the Committee’s annual report and would provide an opportunity for Committee members and other MSPs to draw attention to the work of the Committee... It could also act as a forum for Scottish Government ministers to respond to particular petitions... [and] to generate discussion with ministers on particular petitions and assist in moving some petitions further forward than through the exchange of letters as we do at present.” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c, para. 192).*

In each case, the PPC wrote to the Government and other relevant bodies. In the case of PE01108, the inquiry resulted in revised guidance being issued to NHS boards. In the case of PE01171, the petition was referred to the Justice Committee to be considered during scrutiny of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, and was closed on the grounds that the Government did not support *mandatory* sentences for knife crime. In the last case, PE01393, the inquiry resulted in a “Strategic National Action Plan”, outlined by the relevant Minister in a letter to the PPC dated 11 November 2014.

On the commitment to hold regular debates, it should be noted that committees of the Scottish Parliament have to bid for time to discuss and debate committee business in the Chamber. Table 2, below, provides examples of PPC-specific debates held in the Chamber between October 2008 and October 2014.

As the PPC’s 2009 report states, an annual debate would “add further weight to the importance the Parliament gives to the

petitioning process generally as well as recognising the issues that petitioners bring forward... [This would be] A good demonstration of our sharing power founding principle” (Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2009c). While debates have been held in the Chamber in every year from 2008 to 2014, there appear to have been no PPC-specific debates this year.

**Table 2: Debates on petitions held in the Chamber since October 2008**

Date	PE#	Subject
<a href="#">01/10/08</a>	<a href="#">PE01108</a>	PPC’s report/Govt. response
<a href="#">09/09/09</a>	----	Report on inquiry into PPP
<a href="#">13/01/10</a>	<a href="#">PE01150</a>	Community Prisons
<a href="#">23/02/11</a>	----	The work of the PPC
<a href="#">07/03/12</a>	<a href="#">PE01408</a>	Diagnosis and treatment of Pernicious Anaemia & B12 Deficiency
<a href="#">07/05/13</a>	<a href="#">PE01441</a>	Flood insurance problems
<a href="#">28/01/14</a>	----	Tackling child sexual exploitation
<a href="#">01/05/14</a>	<a href="#">PE01453</a>	Organ donation
<a href="#">09/10/14</a>	<a href="#">PE01458</a>	Register of interests for members of Scotland’s Judiciary

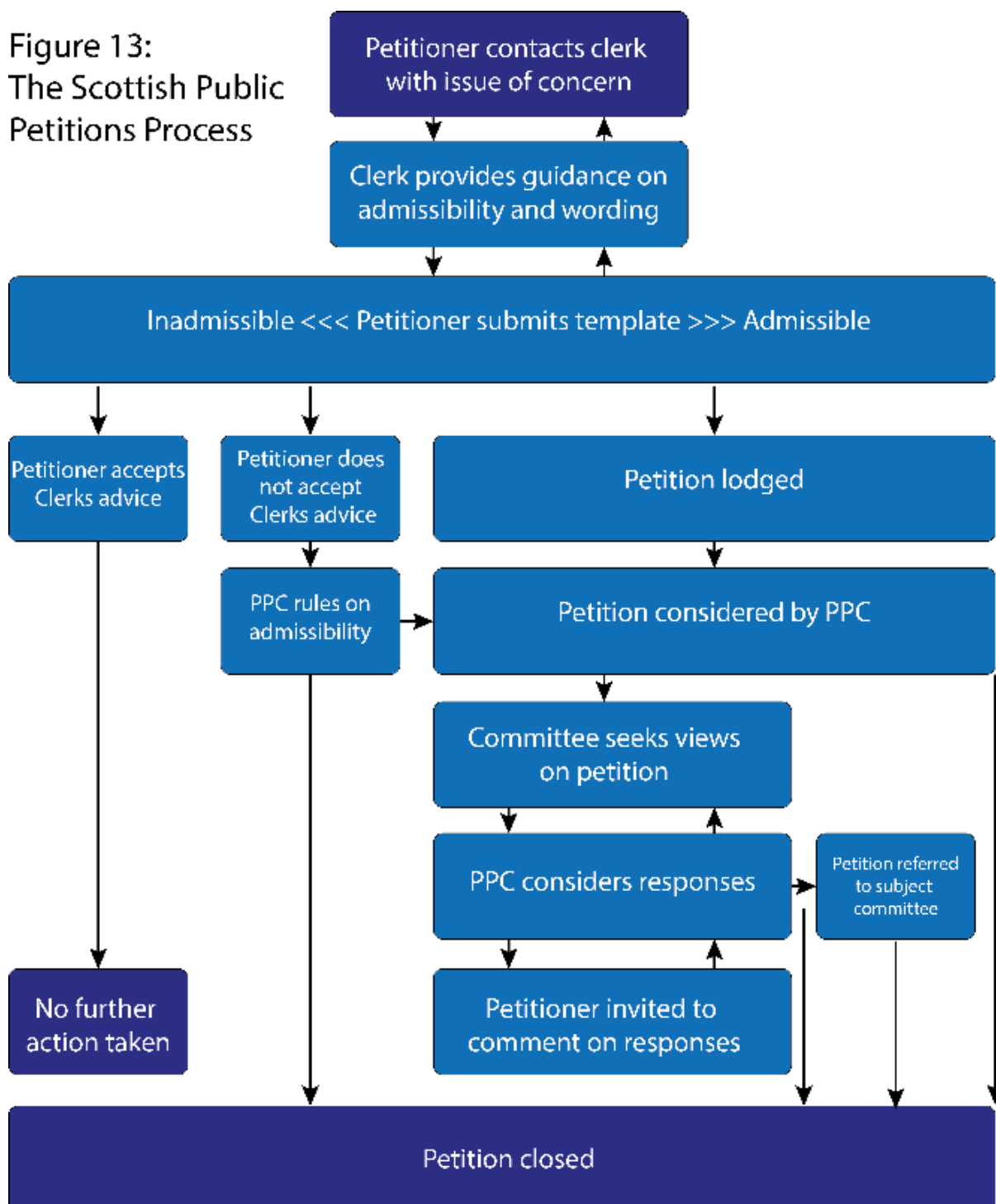
Source: Minutes of Chamber Proceedings, 2008-2015.

### 3. BENCHMARKING THE SCOTTISH PETITIONS PROCESS

This section examines both the process and performance of the Scottish public petitions system in comparison to other parliaments in the UK, Europe and elsewhere.

First, however, Figure 13 summarises the Scottish public petitions process. As with all models of this kind, this is a simplification of the process, which inevitably results in some loss of detail and nuance. For the same reason, these models do not always reveal the subtle differences that might account for variations in performance, such as the numbers of petitions deemed (in)admissible. Therefore, in addition to presenting models for select petitions processes, this section draws out some of the broad similarities and differences that exist between each of the systems under consideration, including Wales, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Canada and Australia.

Figure 13:  
The Scottish Public  
Petitions Process



Source: Adapted from Carman (2006, p. 8).

## COMPARING PROCESSES

### National Assembly for Wales

The Welsh petitions process was launched in 2007 and is broadly similar to that in Scotland, so it is not necessary to reproduce a flowchart in this case. In Wales, petitioners can submit either written petitions or e-petitions, and the petition must call on the Assembly to do something that is within its power. Once a petition is deemed

admissible, the Clerk will contact the lead petitioner for more background information and the petition team will prepare briefing notes to provide policy and legal context.

Like in Scotland, the Committee may request further information from the petitioner, the Government, individual ministers, or other relevant organisations, either in writing or in person. It may also choose to refer the petition to another committee, carry out its own inquiry, or make site visits.

However, unlike in Scotland, petitions submitted by individuals must collect 10 signatures, whereas petitions submitted by organisations, or unincorporated associations or groups, do not require signatures. Petitioners are also not expected to demonstrate the steps they have taken to resolve their issue prior to submitting a petition to the Assembly. Also, and of key importance given the high percentage of seemingly “inadmissible” petitions in Scotland, the Welsh clerks publish a list of inadmissible petitions online (although this appears only to be updated annually).<sup>12</sup> In addition, the list of inadmissible petitions is signed-off by the Presiding Officer. Together, these measures add an additional level of transparency and authority to decisions on (in)admissibility.

## **House of Commons (UK)**

The House of Commons launched its new “collaborative” e-petition system in June 2015 following a review by the House of Commons Procedure Committee (2014). Under the new system, petitions are addressed to the House of Commons rather than the Government, as was previously the case. As part of its inquiry, the Procedure Committee looked at the Scottish system, but decided that it was inappropriate to exactly replicate the system given the obvious difference in scale.

Similar to Scotland, petitions to the House of Commons are (once again) considered by a dedicated Petitions Committee.<sup>13</sup> Like its Scottish and Welsh counterparts, it can request written submissions and/or oral evidence from petitioners, the Government, ministers, and other relevant organisations; refer a petition to another committee; and put petitions forward for debate.

However, unlike in Scotland, the petitioner must be a British citizen or UK resident. E-petitions must also include the email addresses of five supporters before being checked and published online. Admissibility is judged according to a [list of standards](#) and rejected petitions are published online along with an explanatory note. Admissible petitions remain open to collect signatures for a fixed period of 6 months. If a petition reaches 10,000 signatures it becomes eligible for a response from the Government, and if it reaches 100,000 signatures it becomes eligible for debate in the Commons. However, there is no automatic right to a debate; it is ultimately for the Back Bench Business Committee to decide if and when a debate will be scheduled. Written petitions continue to be received, but these must be presented on the floor of the House by a Member.

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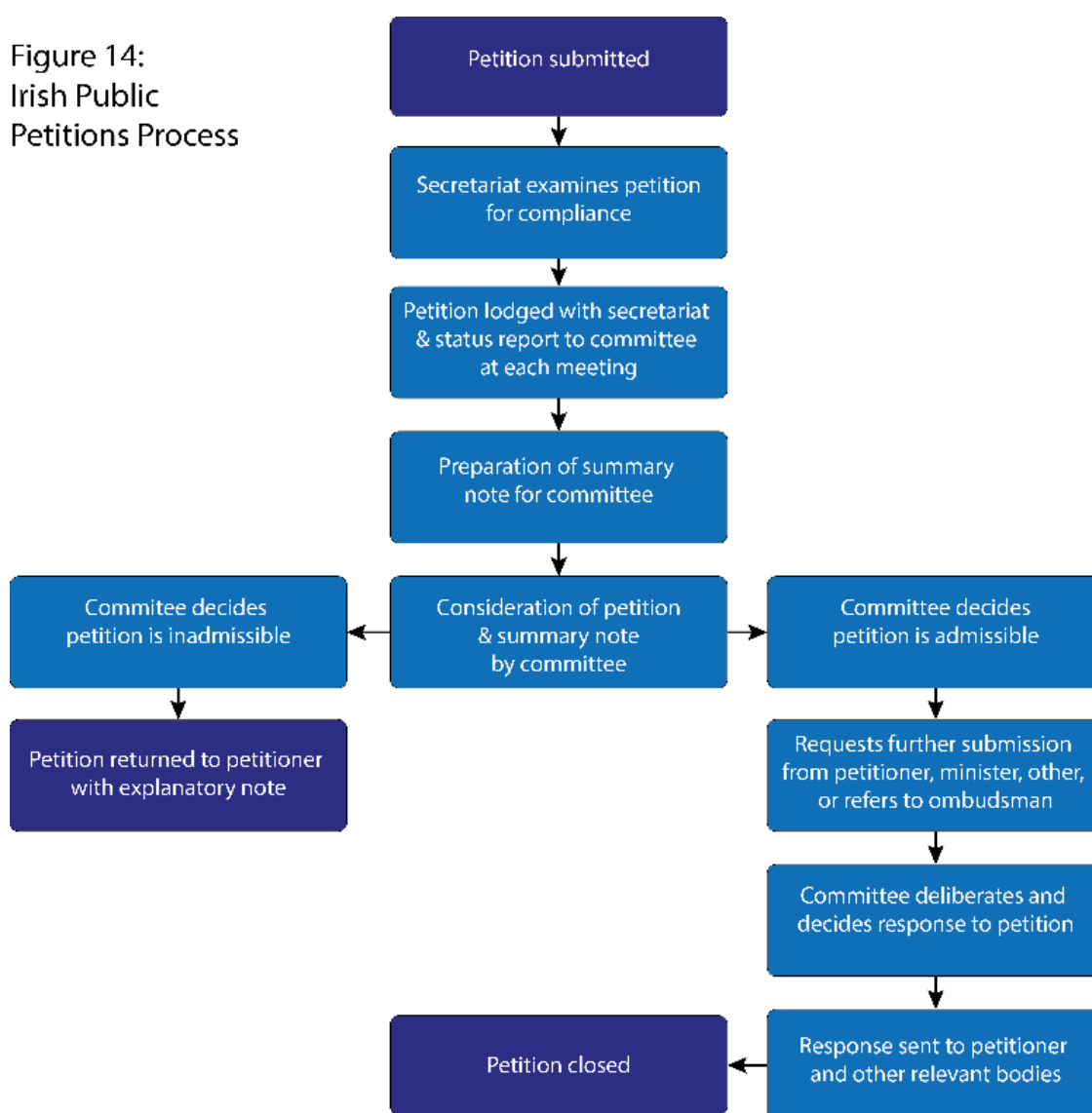
<sup>12</sup> Most recently in October 2014. Welsh clerks are currently reviewing their own processes and an updated list is forthcoming (Personal communication, Deputy Clerk of Petitions, Welsh Assembly, 11 September 2015).

<sup>13</sup> The House of Commons previously had a Petitions Committee, but it was disbanded in 1974.

## Houses of the Oireachtas (Ireland)

The Irish system, launched in September 2012, is again similar, in many respects, to Scotland and Wales. Like in Scotland, petitions need only one signature and petitioners are asked to demonstrate the steps they have taken to resolve the issue raised in their petition. The Committee, in this case, has many of the same powers as its Scottish and Welsh counterparts. Once it has considered the petition, the Committee usually produces a report which is sent to the Government with recommendations and a request that the report be debated by the Parliament. Admissibility criteria are again broadly similar to the Scottish system, and are covered by Standing Order 165C(1). The process is outlined in Figure 14, below.

Figure 14:  
Irish Public  
Petitions Process



Source: Secretariat to Joint sub-Committee, Ireland.

The primary difference between the Scottish and Irish systems is that the Irish Petitions Committee is a Joint sub-Committee consisting of 15 TDs (members of the lower house) and 5 Senators (from the upper house), from all parties. In addition to receiving and processing petitions on behalf of the House, the Committee also engages with the Ombudsman and is responsible for the oversight of public service

delivery. Another key difference is that inadmissible petitions are published online, although, unlike in the UK and Wales, this is not accompanied by an explanatory note (the petitioner, however, is given an explanation). Likewise, details of the Committee's decisions, minutes of meetings and other relevant documents do not appear alongside petitions online. To date, there have also been no external meetings of the Committee and the Committee does not appear to have any investigative role, which also distinguishes it from the Scottish system.

### Deutscher Bundestag (Germany)

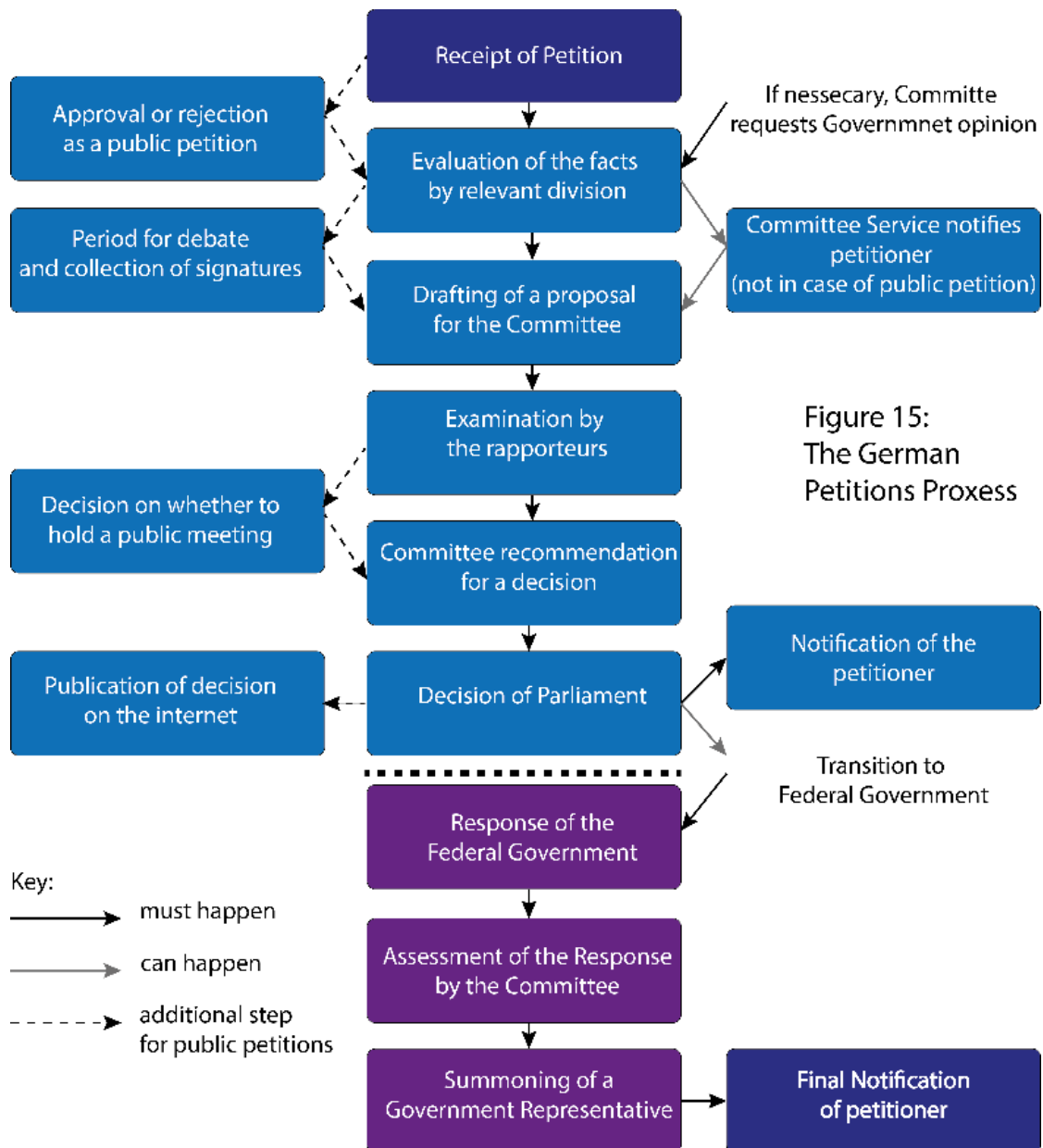


Figure 15:  
The German  
Petitions Process

Source: Secretariat to German Petitions Committee.

Similar to the UK system, the German petitions system operates on a scale that is much larger than in Scotland. In 2014, for example, a total of 15,325 petitions were



presented to the Petitions Committee, of which 5,667 (37%) were submitted electronically (German Bundestag, 2014). The German system also differentiates between “public” petitions – those that present issues of general interest – and individual petitions and complaints. In Scotland, individual complaints are inadmissible, but in Germany both public and individual petitions are considered by the Committee. However, only the former are published online, and the procedures for dealing with each type of petition differ, as shown in Figure 15, above.

## **House of Commons (Canada)**

At the time of writing the Canadian House of Commons accepts only written petitions. Under the current system, petitioners prepare a draft petition on an issue that is within the authority of the Federal Government. This draft must contain the handwritten signatures and addresses of at least 25 Canadian citizens or residents of Canada. Once the signatures have been collected, the petitioner must enlist the support of a Member of Parliament, usually his/her own constituency MP, who will then forward the petition to the Clerk of Petitions. The Clerk checks the petition and certifies that it meets the requirements. Once a petition is certified, it is returned to the Member who then presents it to the House during Routine Proceedings. Alternatively, the Member may choose to file the petition directly with the Clerk in the Chamber. The Government is then required to provide a written response to every petition within 45 calendar days or at the first opportunity thereafter if the House is adjourned. If a petition remains without a response at the time of expiry, it is referred to a standing committee to be chosen by the Member who presented the petition. No such referral has taken place in the recent past.<sup>14</sup>

This year, the Canadian House of Commons decided to establish an e-petitions system and a new website is scheduled to be launched at the start of the next Parliament, later this year or early next year (House of Commons, Canada, 2015). The e-petitions process will be similar in parts to the paper process, but petitions will be prepared on the website using the template provided. To proceed, petitioners will then have to identify 5 other individuals who support the petition, which is also the case in the UK. However, petitioners will still be required to ask a Member of Parliament to sponsor the petition. Under the proposed system, the Clerk of Petitions will then check the petition, and, if all requirements have been satisfied, it will then be published online and remain open for 120 days to gather signatures. To be certified, the petition will have to attract at least 500 valid signatures during this period. Certified petitions will then be sent to the sponsoring Member who will present it to the House, following the same procedure outlined above for paper petitions. Again, the Government will be required to respond within 45 days; but under the new system responses will be published online, and the petitioner, supporters, signatories and sponsor will all be notified by email.

With the requirement for an MP’s support and at least 500 signatures, the system is very similar, in many respects, to the UK system. However, there is no mechanism to trigger a debate on a petition – written or electronic – either in the Chamber or in a committee.

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<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, Deputy Principal Clerk, House of Commons, Canada, 25 September 2015.



## **House of Representatives (Australia)**

Like in Canada, the Australian House of Representatives only accepts written petitions. The petition must be addressed to the House of Representatives; refer to a matter on which the House has the power to act; state the reasons for petitioning the House; and contain a request for action by the House. In addition, the prayer of the petition must not contain any alterations and must not exceed 250 words. Every petition must contain the signature, full name and address of the principle petitioner and supporters' signatures must be handwritten.

A petition can then be sent directly to the Standing Committee on Petitions, or may be submitted to the House via a Member. The Committee's main function is to act as a gatekeeper of the petitioning rules of the House and to ensure that all petitions meeting the requirements are presented and receive a response from the House. The Committee fulfils this function by ensuring that all admissible petitions which have not been sponsored by a particular Member are presented by the Chair of the Committee on the next sitting Monday.

Discussion of a petition is only permitted at the time of presentation. A motion to refer the petition to a particular committee may be moved, but this has not occurred since the establishment of the Petitions Committee. In most cases, a petition is referred to the relevant Minister for a response. The Minister is then expected to respond within 90 days by lodging a written response with the Committee. There is no expectation that a minister's response will provide a resolution. As the Committee's function is essentially gatekeeping, rather than investigatory, it does not formally follow-up what happens to petitions after the response is received. The Chair of the Committee also acts as a conduit to the House by presenting a copy of Ministerial Responses. The terms of petitions and responses are also printed in Hansard and published on the House's website.

The Committee also conducts public hearings (or 'roundtable meetings') with petitioners and/or public servants with expertise in the policy area. These hearings are usually held for petitions which have received a Ministerial Response. In addition to hearings held at Parliament House in Canberra, the Committee has travelled to Sydney, the Central Coast NSW, Gippsland region in Victoria, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. The hearings are not of an investigative nature and the Committee has no power to make recommendations to the Government, or to follow-up matters with the Executive.

In October 2009, the Committee published a report on e-petitions, which looked at the experiences of other parliaments, primarily Scotland and Queensland. It recommended that 'Implementation of a system similar to that of the Queensland Parliament [i.e. one that allows only written petitions] represents the most effective solution, at present, for the House of Representatives' (House of Representative, Australia, 2009, p. 70). However, the report also acknowledged the strengths of the Scottish system, noting that it 'places a greater emphasis on engagement, than is observed in other parliaments' (Ibid. p. 17). It therefore concluded that its system should be designed in such a way as to allow for future developments that would allow for greater public ownership and engagement.

## COMPARING PERFORMANCE METRICS

Performance can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, the demographic analysis used in the next section offers some insights into the performance of the Scottish petitions process in terms of its social inclusiveness; while the final section provides a qualitative assessment of the process based on feedback from petitioners. This section, on the other hand, presents basic performance metrics (i.e. numbers of petitions submitted, numbers deemed inadmissible, etc.). However, it should be noted that not all of the systems outlined above are directly comparable. While we can correct for differences in scale, to some extent, we cannot do the same for significant variations in parliamentary procedures. For these reasons (and where there is insufficient data) some cases are excluded from the analysis that follows.

The first indicator worth considering is the number of petitions received by each parliament on an annual basis. Table 3 shows the total number of petitions received by each of the parliaments discussed above, for the years 2012/13 to 2014/15. The data clearly shows the difference in scale between each system.

**Table 3: Total number of petitions received (admissible and inadmissible) 2012-2015**

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Scottish Parliament	166	173	185
National Assembly for Wales	140	132	115
Houses of the Oireachtas (Ireland) <sup>15</sup>	54	53	36
Deutscher Bundestag (Germany) <sup>16</sup>	526	426	436
House of Commons (Canada) <sup>17</sup>	3,996	3,956	3,291
House of Representatives (Australia) <sup>18</sup>	125	79	101

Source: Data obtained from respective clerking teams.

Secondly, to correct for the difference in scale, Figure 16 reports this data on a “per million of the population” basis. Some cases are excluded and some caveats apply. Australia and the UK are excluded because the former only record “certified” petitions, while the latter is only newly established and so sufficient data does not exist for a meaningful comparison. Since its establishment in June 2015, the UK e-petition site has received over 2,000 petitions. It should also be noted that Germany is included only because we can distinguish between truly “public” petitions and the

<sup>15</sup> There were some inconsistencies in the data obtained from the clerks in Ireland, so this was cross-checked with the e-petitions site. The data used draws on both sources and may therefore contain some error.

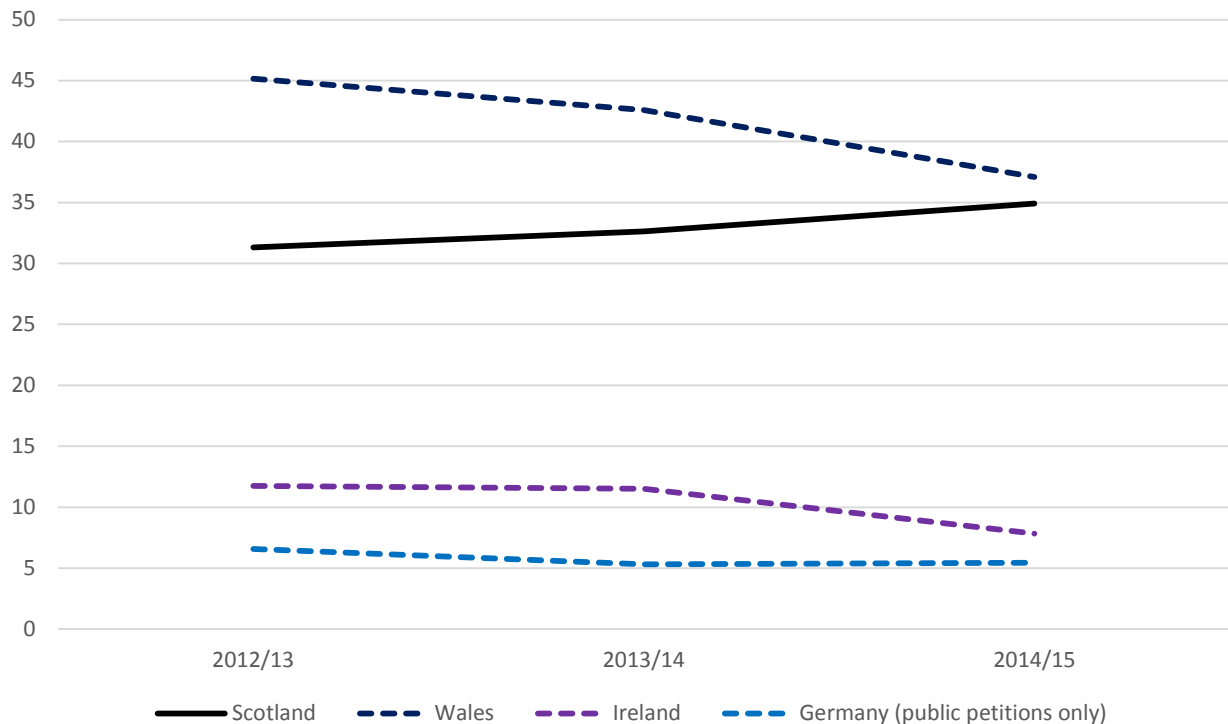
<sup>16</sup> Public petitions only. If all petitions included the figures would be 15,724, 14,800 and 15,325, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> It is not clear if these are all “public” petitions, or if the system is similar to that in Germany.

<sup>18</sup> These are petitions that have been received by the Committee, certified and then presented in the House. The Australian clerks only hold data on completed petitions formally submitted to the Committee.

number of individual complaints received, thus facilitating comparison with Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The same cannot be said for Canada which is therefore also excluded from this analysis.

**Figure 16: Total number of petitions received (per million of the population)**

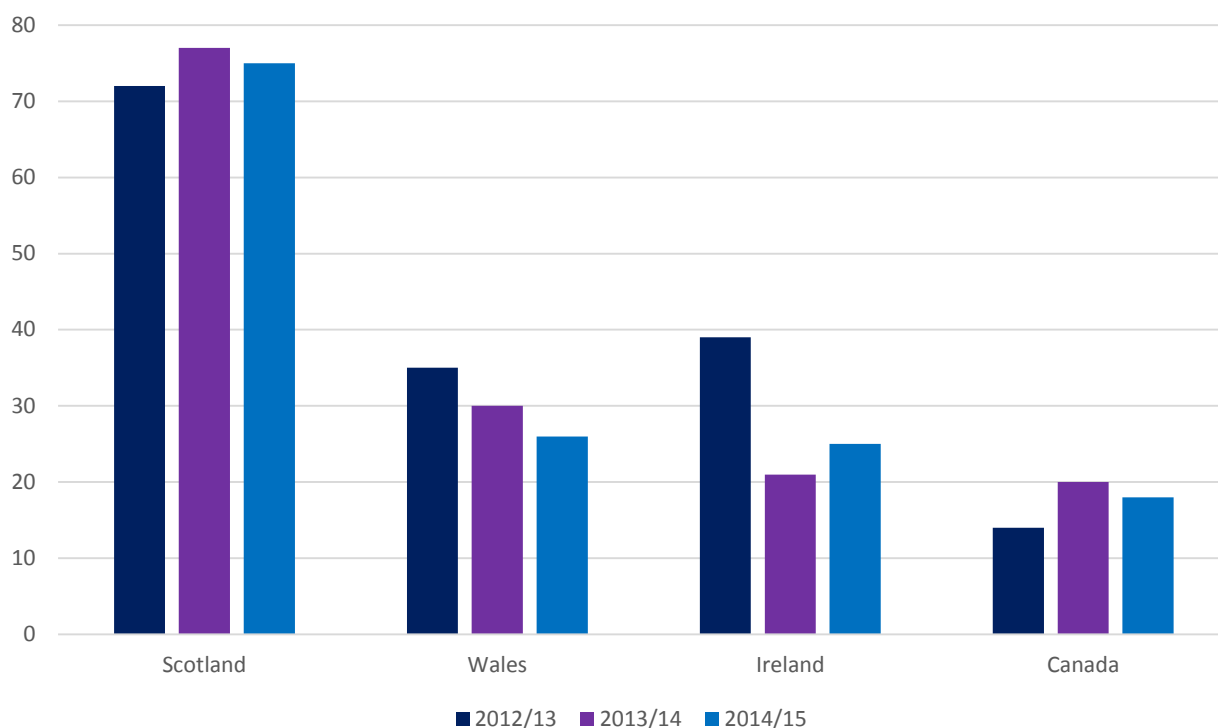


Source: Data obtained from respective clerking teams and 2011 censuses.

The data shows that the total number of petitions received (per million) by the Scottish and Welsh parliaments has converged in the past year, with both receiving about 35 petitions per million of the population in 2014/15. On this measure, both also receive more petitions than the Irish Parliament and the German Bundestag.

It is also worth discussing the percentage of petitions that are deemed (in)admissible. The analysis used here focuses only on Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Canada. As noted Australia does not record the number of rejected petitions, and in Germany any petition that is rejected as a “public” petition is still considered by the Committee as a “personal request or complaint”. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, for example, the bulk of the work of the German Petitions Committee consisted of processing personal requests and complaints, including miscalculated pensions, refusals of funding for wheelchairs and rejected visitor visas, all of which would be inadmissible under most other systems (German Bundestag, 2012; 2013; 2014). In the UK, which is again excluded because of insufficient data, about 37% of petitions have been rejected since June 2015 alone. Figure 17, below, shows that the Scottish Parliament appears to have a much higher “rejection” rate than the Welsh, Irish and Canadian parliaments.

**Figure 17: Percentage of all proposals that do not go on to be formally lodged as petitions, 2012/13-2014/15**



Source: Data obtained from respective clerking teams.

However, upon further investigation, it is clear that these figures do not tell the full story. The online petitions system sets out a number of status markings. These include:

- **Lodged:** The petition is ready for consideration, or is already under active consideration, by the Committee;
- **Action required – Petitioner:** The clerk has completed checks and has sent the petition back to the petitioner for consideration. Where there is no response from the petitioner for at least 1 year, the marker is changed to “No further action”;
- **No further action:** The petitioner has indicated that he/she does not wish to proceed or issues of admissibility have been raised by the clerk. The petition does not therefore proceed to “Open” or “Lodged” stage.

During Session 4, a total of 479 (out of 651) proposals were marked “No further action”. Table 4, below, provides a more detailed breakdown of the 479 petitions that did not go on to be formally lodged.

**Table 4: Detailed breakdown of petitions that did not go on to be formally lodged in session 4.**

Category	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Session 4
Reserved Issue	6	6	11	16	39
Operational decision	4	9	6	5	24

<b>Local matter or individual case</b>	11	18	22	17	68
<b>Otherwise not for Parliament</b>	6	13	14	29	62
<b>Withdrawn by petitioner</b>	4	7	9	4	24
<b>No response from petitioner</b>	25	54	55	62	196
<b>General enquiry/Other</b>	19	17	20	10	66
<b>Total</b>	75	124	137	143	479

Source: Data compiled by the Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee.

It is clear that a number of petition proposals received were deemed inadmissible on the grounds that they called for action that is out with the powers of the Parliament, whether it be a reserved matter or an operational or decision-making responsibility of another body, such as a local authority or health board. More striking, however, is the fact that almost 60% of the proposals that did not go on to be formally lodged in Session 4 were withdrawn by the petitioner, closed due to non-response, or related to a general enquiry only. If we discount these then the rejection rate in Scotland, on grounds of admissibility, is similar to that in other parliaments at just less than 30% in Session 4.

Minor differences between Scotland and Wales, in particular, might also be due to one or more of the following:

- In Scotland, petitioners must demonstrate the steps they have taken to resolve the issue of their petition prior to submitting it to the Parliament, which is not the case in Wales.
- In Wales, written petitions that are “broadly admissible” but not “worded correctly” are generally admissible. In Scotland, advice is given on wording for petitions that are clearly admissible to ensure that petitions are presented in the clearest terms possible. It may be that some fail to act on this advice.
- The way in which the respective clerking teams interpret and deal with “local” issues can also differ. In Wales, for example, a petition calling for the reversal of a decision to reorganise local health services would, most likely, be admissible because the Health Service is run centrally by the Welsh Government and local health boards are not democratically elected.<sup>19</sup> While the same is true of health boards in Scotland, a similar petition might be deemed inadmissible on the basis that it relates to an operational decision of another body. An exception to this would be, for example if the change had been designated as a major service change and therefore required Ministerial approval.

It is important to note that any advice given to petitioners by the clerks does not simply say that a petition is or is not admissible. Instead, the clerks explain admissibility criteria, and suggest ways of refocusing petitions or alternative methods

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with Clerk to the Petitions Committee, National Assembly for Wales.

for pursuing the issues raised. Feedback from petitioners shows that the clerks perform this role well. However, the Committee might want to consider ways in which it can make more information available on the petitions that do not go on to be formally lodged, in order to increase transparency in the decision-making process. This could involve publishing these details online in a similar way to other parliaments, specifically the UK, Wales and Ireland. This is important because, as Carman notes, 'the choices made by elected parliamentarians *and unelected committee staff* in considering petitions may have a substantial influence on the effectiveness of policies designed to (re-)engage the public with governing institutions... seemingly pedantic decisions about procedure may have much wider consequences than individual decision makers realise' (2010, p. 747, my emphasis).

## **4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF PETITIONERS**

In August 2015, a self-completion questionnaire was sent to 288 petitioners who submitted petitions to the Parliament after June 2009.<sup>20</sup> In almost all cases (249) emails were sent to petitioners with a link to the questionnaire hosted by *Smart Survey*, while the remainder (39) were sent a paper version of the questionnaire by post. In total, there were 113 usable responses, giving a usable response rate of just less than 40%. Using this data, the briefing provides an insight into the socio-economic characteristics of petitioners.

It is not possible to determine exactly the extent to which *respondents* are representative of *all petitioners* because there is insufficient data on the population of petitioners as a whole. However, because petitioners are required to provide an address when submitting a petition, we can at least check to see if the geographical distribution of respondents is representative of all petitioners. Table 19 in Annex B shows that respondents are broadly representative of all petitioners, although some areas are over-represented – Mid and West Scotland – and some are under-represented – Central Scotland. The key findings of the questionnaire are summarised overleaf.

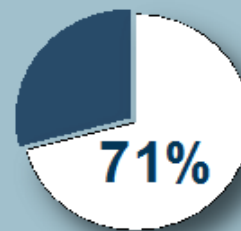
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<sup>20</sup> The clerks provided details for 318 individual petitions, but some of these were repeat petitioners while others could not be contacted by email or post. This left a group of 288 potential respondents.

First degree or higher



Aged between 45-74



## Who responded to the petition questionnaire? Key facts

62% are male



72%  
Highest NS  
Socio-economic  
class



37%  
are retired

The Average  
Questionnaire  
Respondent



Male

Aged between 45-74

First Degree or higher

White

Retired

Highest NS Socio-economic class

Living in the West of Scotland

Overall, 62% of respondents are male, and about 91% of male respondents describe themselves as white. Of this same group of men, almost 60% are educated to degree level or higher (26.6% have a postgraduate degree and 9.4% have a doctorate), about 48% are retired and 31% are employed. Using the NS-SEC self-completion method to construct socio-economic class categories<sup>21</sup>, the data show that almost 83% of male respondents fall into the highest SEC category. The data therefore show that the typical respondent is an older, well-educated, white, middle-class male.

Annex C provides a more detailed breakdown of the demographics of respondents and the corresponding statistics for the Scottish population as a whole (based on 2011 census data). In summary, the data show that:

- Women are under-represented. Just over 37% of respondents are women compared to 51.5% of the Scottish population;
- People from younger age groups are also under-represented. Those aged 18-24 years represent only about 3% of respondents compared to 10% of the population, while almost 71% are aged between 45 and 74, compared to only 36% of the population;
- Those with higher levels of education are over-represented. In total, just over 58% of respondents have a first degree or higher, compared to only 26% of the population;
- People with disabilities, however, are well-represented with 32% of respondents stating that they have a disability compared to 20% of the population; and
- While some ethnic groups do not appear at all, those that do – mostly white and Asian groups – are broadly reflective of the corresponding demographic in the population as a whole.

Finally, Figure 18 shows the geographical distribution of petitioners in comparison to the population. In most cases, the percentage of all petitions is broadly representative of the population in each electoral region, with some exceptions. First, Glasgow, Lothian and the Highlands and Islands are all over-represented; and, second, North East Scotland is notably under-represented.<sup>22</sup>

In many ways, therefore, the results of the 2015 questionnaire echo those of earlier studies (Carman, 2006; Ipsos MORI and Carman, 2009). For example, Carman (2006) found that petitioners do not represent a broad cross-section of Scottish society. Carman finds that a disproportionate number of petitions submitted between 1999 and 2006 came from older, well-educated, white middle-class men. The gender imbalance remains almost unchanged with men representing 66.6% of petitioners between 1999 and 2006 and 62% between 2009 and 2015. The percentage of petitioners educated to at least degree level remains unchanged at 58% in both studies (Ibid, p. 2). Ipsos MORI and Carman also assert that 'Individuals from lower social grades... were less likely than those belonging to higher social grades... to be aware of the petition system or to have engaged with the Scottish Parliament on any

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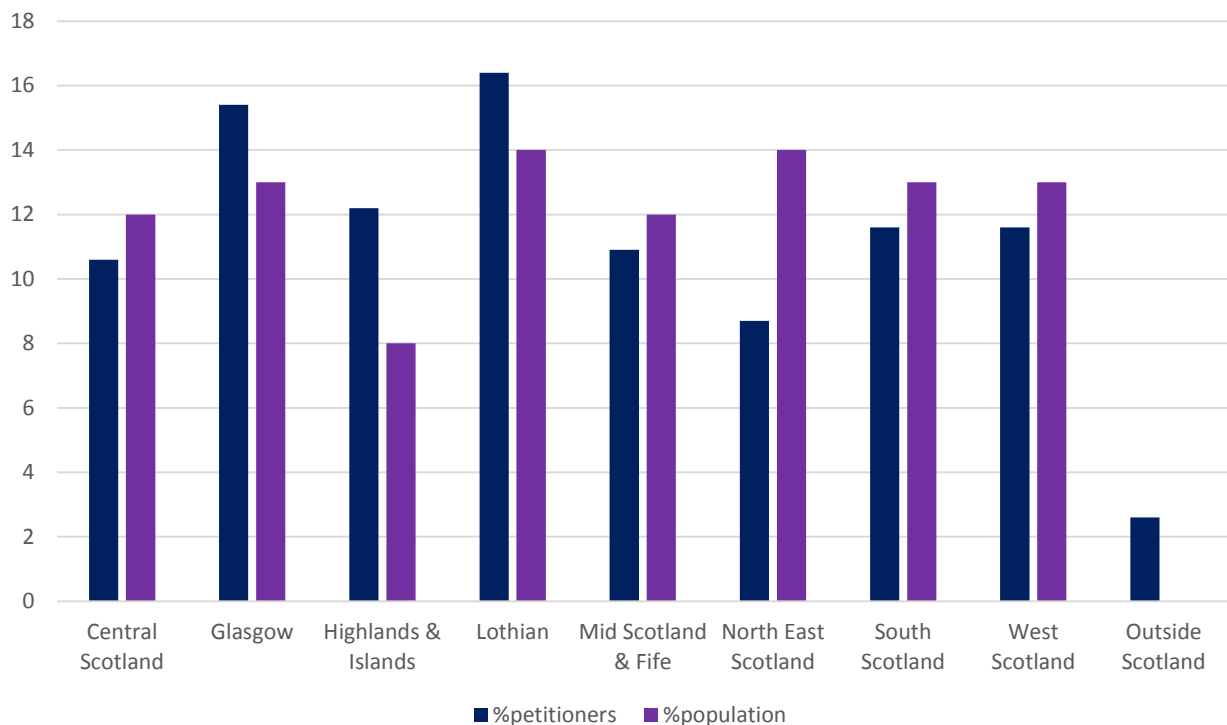
<sup>21</sup> See Annex B.

<sup>22</sup> Note again, this is for all petitioners from June 2009 to August 2015 for whom the clerks hold address details (n=311). The representativeness of respondents to the questionnaire varies and is outlined in more detail in Annex B.



level' (2009, p. 6). Likewise, the data gathered for this briefing shows that, overall, 72% of respondents come from the highest socio-economic class. The findings therefore appear to confirm assertions that political voice tends to be concentrated among those with the most resources (Pattie et al. 2003, p. 627; in Carman, 2014, p160).

**Figure 18: Geographic distribution of all petitioners by electoral region, 2009-2015**



Source: Data held by clerks (n=311) and 2011 census data.

Other similar studies offer insights into the situation in Wales and Scotland (Bochel, 2012) and Germany (Lindner & Riehm, 2011). For example, Bochel finds that 61% of petitions submitted to the Welsh Assembly between 2007 and June 2011 were brought forward by men (p. 151). She also finds that, between 1999 and June 2011, 78% of petitions to the Scottish Parliament came from men. Lindner and Riehm (2011) have shown that, in Germany, 'both [traditional and electronic] petitioner groups are predominantly composed of men who have attained higher levels of formal education' (p. 13). In addition, while the introduction of the e-petitioning site in Germany encouraged more young people to bring forward petitions (with 32.7% of all e-petitioners belonging to the 20-39 age group) the e-petitioning site has also amplified other gender and socio-economic biases. In an earlier study, Lindner and Riehm (2009) assert that 'the introduction of e-petitions systems in four cases failed to significantly mobilize non-participating or underrepresented social groups. The typical user of the German, the Scottish and the Queensland systems tends to be a middle-aged male with an above-average level of formal education' (cited in Bochel, 2012, p. 151).

## 5. PETITIONERS' EXPECTATIONS & EXPERIENCES

A series of interviews with petitioners was carried-out by SPICe in September and October 2015. These interviews were designed to capture qualitative feedback on petitioners' expectations, experiences and overall perceptions of the public petitions process. Annex B contains a more detailed note on the method used.

### EXPECTATIONS OF THE PETITIONS PROCESS

First of all, petitioners were asked about their expectations of the Scottish petitions process, including what prompted them to bring the issue to the Scottish Parliament, in particular, and what they hoped to achieve by doing so. While there was a range of responses, the vast majority felt that they had exhausted all other avenues and simply wanted their concerns to be heard by Parliament.

For example, when asked, 'What prompted you to bring this issue to the Scottish Parliament, in particular?', one petitioner exclaimed:

"Desperation! I had written to the Chief Executive of Glasgow Health Board, but I got nowhere.... I went in desperation to my MSP, and his researchers advised me to put a petition in because it is a devolved issue... he said, "still you might get somewhere if you petition", and I just didn't know where else to go with it." (L. Cleaver, 22 September 2015).

This feeling of desperation, of having exhausted all other avenues, was repeated by several of the interviewees, as the following excerpts show:

"I had failed in all other routes. Many people were saying "why don't you get a petition up?"... So I looked into that and found that the Parliament [had a petitions process]... I just felt that I had to take that route, that was the only route that I felt was available..." (J. Smith, 22 September 2015).

"I guess we are a campaign organisation, so that is our *raison d'être*, to campaign for change in the planning system, so we look for different ways that we might do that... we are not being heard through the usual channels... we feel that we really represent peoples' views but we can't be heard, so we feel the petitions process was a means of getting our voice into Holyrood and getting it discussed." (C. Symonds, 1 October 2015).

Petitioners were also asked, 'What did you hope to achieve?' Again, responses were varied. Some petitioners wanted changes to legislation: "I hoped to have a number of changes made to Scottish mental health legislation", said one petitioner (W. H. Watson, 21 September 2015). However, almost all interviewees stated that they simply hoped to have their voices heard.

"I didn't really think that the petition would result in the licensing of pig thyroid and a revisiting of all the testing, because that's the best case scenario. But what I was keen to do was to shed a light on the situation, and potentially get some new guidelines in Scotland, because there are

none. And, so far, that's what's happened." (L. Cleaver, 22 September 2015).

"We know that it's a long campaign. We don't expect to get equal rights for people next week, because there is a lot of resistance and a lot of people lobbying against it – you know sort of big, powerful, corporate-type people – so it was really to get the issue talked about and stimulate a conversation, that's what our target was." (C. Symonds, 1 October 2015).

"I just want to raise the issue with them, to show them that there's countries looking at this much more seriously, and I want *my* Edinburgh to do the same." (F. Birrell, 8 October 2015).

This group of petitioners were unanimous in their assertion that the primary purpose of the Scottish public petitions process should be to give "ordinary" people a voice in the decision-making process. For example, when asked what the purpose of the petitions process should be, one petitioner replied:

To give the ordinary person a voice... It's given me a voice, it's given my son a voice, and all these kiddies and families from across Scotland.... to me this has given me, my child, and the other families that I represent, a voice, a legitimate voice, because it's out there in the Parliament, it's out there, it's public information. It's given me an outlet, and, hopefully, it will bring about real change." (B. Morrison, 29 September 2015).

The questionnaire sent to petitioners also asked for their expectations prior to submitting a petition. The following list provides a sample of some of the responses obtained:

- I expected a fair hearing and that what I said would be listened to;
- A fair appraisal and an opportunity to present my case in person;
- I hoped the petition would be taken seriously by the Scottish Government;
- That a change of legislation would occur to improve the planning process;
- To raise awareness of the issue, gain support for changing the law, and change the law;
- That the petition would be supported by MSPs;
- I certainly did not expect the process before my petition was published in May to take so long or to be so arduous, time-consuming, and to take so many rewrites; and,
- That the Committee would consider the contents carefully, receive evidence and take a considered view about the issues involved.

These are just a few examples that illustrate the range of responses obtained, some of which corroborate the data obtained during interviews, and all of which are very similar to the feedback collated by the clerks in 2012.<sup>23</sup>

The next section of the briefing examines petitioners' actual experiences of the process, beginning with a summary of responses to the questionnaire in Table 5.

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<sup>23</sup> These feedback forms are available from the clerks.

**Table 5: Petitioner satisfaction with key stages of the petitions process**

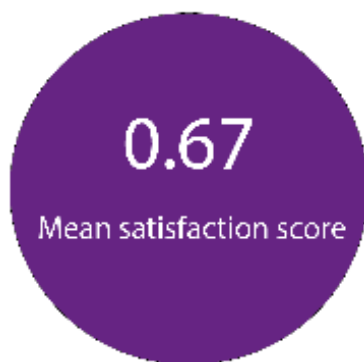
	Stro ngly Agre e	Ag ree	Neu tral	Disa gree	Stro ngly Disa gree
<b>Key stages in petitions process</b>					
I found it easy to access information on how to submit a petition to Parliament (n=113)	28.3	50. 4	14.2	4.4	2.7
The clerking team was helpful (n=112)	60.7	24. 1	8.0	1.8	5.4
The information provided by the clerks was clear, concise and easy to understand (n=113)	49.6	31. 9	7.8	8.0	2.7
Information on how to submit a petition was available in a format suited to my needs (n=111)	35.1	47. 7	11.8	3.6	1.8
The registration and submission of e-Petitions was clear and straight-forward (n=111)	26.1	49. 5	14.5	8.1	1.8
I felt that I was treated fairly throughout the process (n=111)	36.0	29. 7	12.7	12.6	9.0
I felt that my petition was given due consideration by the Committee (n=109)	31.2	28. 4	12.9	11.9	15.6
I was kept informed on the progress of my petition throughout the process (n=108)	43.5	31. 5	12.9	10.2	1.9
I was given enough time to reply to written responses from other bodies (e.g. Scottish Government) (n=107)	30.8	38. 3	20.7	3.7	6.5
I was given an opportunity to present additional evidence to the Committee in support of my petition (e.g. in person at a Committee hearing, or via videoconference) (n=108)	30.6	28. 7	12.0	11.1	17.6
Overall, I am satisfied with the petitions process (n=108)	26.9	27. 8	15.7	13.9	15.7

Source: SPICe, petitions questionnaire 2015

## EXPERIENCES OF THE PETITIONS PROCESS

Table 5, above, shows the extent to which respondents (dis)agreed with a series of statements designed to capture their experience of/satisfaction with key stages in the petitions process. In all cases the majority of responses were positive. In order to obtain a clearer understanding of how each stage compares with the others we can apply a series of weights and rank each stage by the resulting mean satisfaction score.<sup>24</sup> The results of this analysis are presented below alongside excerpts from interviews conducted with petitioners.

### “The clerking team was helpful”



The results show that respondents are most satisfied with the help that they receive from the clerks. This was also evident during interviews with petitioners, as the following excerpts illustrate:

“I was very happy with the exchanges that I had with the people who were dealing with me, the officials, the clerks... I was able to phone or to email them, and I got responses. The things I wanted to be put online were put online. I was very happy with the communication, it was very constructive. My initial petition was certainly capable of improvement. One of

the clerks – without telling me specifically how to improve it – encouraged me to resubmit, and I think the resubmitted petition was a real improvement on my first effort.” (W. H. Watson, 21 September 2015).

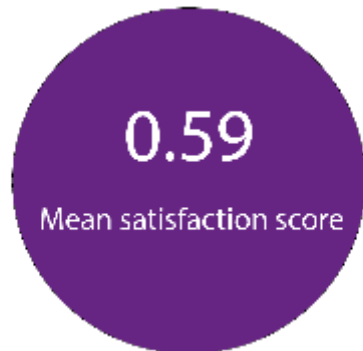
“I knew after the first letter that came from [Assistant Clerk] that I had made the right decision.” (J. Smith, 22 September 2015).

“Within a few days [the Assistant Clerk] phoned me, and I have to honest, I was very impressed with her knowledge.... She was very kind.... She said she was impressed with what I had done... but what was really nice about her was that I said “OK, let me do this”, and she’d say “no, no, that’s alright, I’ll do it for you”. That was a great help. I was very impressed. She was very kind, very supportive – not that she was on my side as such – but she was helpful in the job that she was doing.” (F. Birrell. 8 October 2015).

Similarly, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the information provided by the clerks was clear, concise and easy to understand, which ranks second in terms of mean satisfaction scores. For example, one petitioner remarked that:

<sup>24</sup> For the method used to determine the mean satisfaction score, see Annex B.

**“The information provided by clerks was clear, concise and easy to understand”**



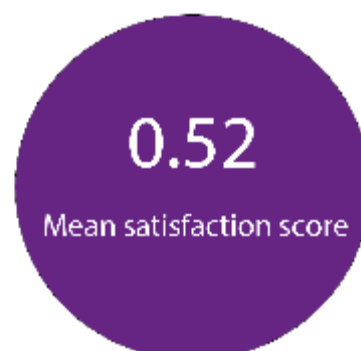
phone, and I have done, to say to [the clerks], well what about this or that... I know I can pick up the phone and they're there if I need them.” (B. Morrison, 29 September 2015).

“[The clerks] at the Parliament, they sent me written correspondence by email to say this is what happens next... I knew that the chances were that I'd be asked to go and speak at the Parliament... I knew exactly what to expect. We were told within hours of getting emails and letters that they'd put it on the petitions page... responses were sent to me in a timely manner... I know when I've got to respond... I'm aware of the deadlines... they're pretty good at keeping you up-to-date and you know what's expected because they give you the deadlines... they've been really good. I know that I can pick up the

Third, with a mean satisfaction score of 0.55, is the extent to which respondents agree that they were able to access information in a format suited to their needs, which was discussed earlier in section 2 of this briefing. This is followed, in fourth place, by respondents' satisfaction with the way they are kept informed, again by the clerks, throughout the process.

“They are very effective and efficient when it comes to communicating with me about the petitions process, about communications that have been received regarding the process, and then more recently one of the clerks actually called me to discuss where the petition had got to. It was to be considered again in September, but the proactive approach taken by the clerk was that, in view of the fact I had a Holyrood event to discuss the data issues, they asked if I'd like this [i.e. the committee hearing] to be postponed. So that's quite a proactive approach. And it's interesting, because initially my knee-jerk reaction was to say “of course not”; but actually as I talked it through with her I felt her logic was sensible, and I thought, “perhaps

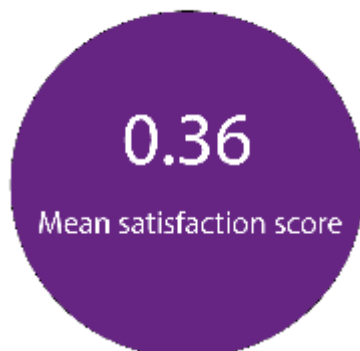
**“I was kept informed on the progress of my petition throughout the process”**



she's right", that there was value in postponing. So I suppose what I'm trying to say is that I suspect clerks are supposed to independent, and I'd never like to suggest that any of them have not been independent in any way, regarding the issue, but I think they have worked hard to make sure that the petition is given due consideration, and that's commendable. So in that respect, I'm very pleased with the way I've been supported by the clerks. I'm very encouraged." (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

Fifth and sixth, with mean satisfaction scores of 0.49 and 0.45, respectively, are a) the ease with which respondents were able to access information on the petitions process; and b) the ease with which they were able to register and submit a petition on the e-petition site. Again, both of these were discussed earlier in section 2 of the briefing. Also discussed earlier was the time given to respond to written submissions from the Scottish Government and/or other relevant bodies, which ranks seventh with a mean satisfaction score of 0.42.

**"I felt I was treated fairly, throughout the process"**

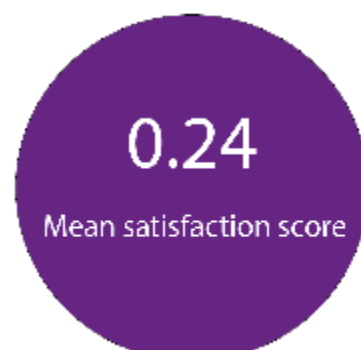


Next is the extent to which respondents felt that they were treated fairly throughout the process. This achieved a mean satisfaction score of 0.36. It is not clear from the responses in Table 5 the stage at which respondents felt they were treated more or less fairly, but given the higher satisfaction scores associated with petitioners' dealings with the clerks, it may be safe to assume that respondents do not always feel that they are treated fairly when their petition comes before the Committee. Certainly, the mean satisfaction score associated with the extent to which petitioners agree that their petition was given due consideration by the Committee is lower still, at 0.24. For example, petitioners said:

"I would have liked some evidence that the Petitions Committee had read and discussed [submissions], which possibly they had done, but there was absolutely no comment on the papers that I and supporters had submitted at the second Petition Committee [meeting], when the petition was closed." (W. H. Watson, 21 September 2015).

"I'd put a lot of work into my follow-up as you are perhaps aware, I was surprised that it wasn't debated at all. It was considered, but only in the context of the recommendation made by the civil servants which was, "yes, you should write to these people again". So I was disappointed by their lack of

**"I felt my petition was given due consideration by the Committee"**



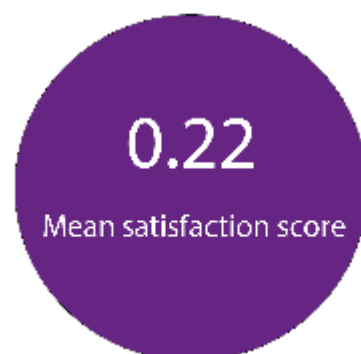


engagement on the second consideration. And I think that's backed-up slightly by the fact that they wrote again to the Chief Social Worker, whom we felt had given an inadequate response to the initial letter from the Petitions Committee, and in his subsequent response, which was equally as bland... I think he opens his letter by saying that he looked at the transcript of the last meeting of the petitions committee and was surprised that there was no discussion... so the fact that the advisor to the Chief Social Worker commented on that lack of discussion, and that I went to hear that discussion that never happened, that for me was really disappointing. I think they have an obligation as MSPs, on behalf of their constituents, to discuss these things... I'm a constituent, and so are the people I represent... and the amount of work that I put in, in my response to the responses, kind of warranted a little bit more from the Petitions Committee..." (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

Lastly, with a mean satisfaction score of 0.22, is the extent to which respondents agreed that they were given a chance to present additional evidence to the Committee; that is following the first consideration and subsequent receipt of evidence from the Scottish Government and/or other relevant bodies. Given that this was the lowest mean score (except for overall satisfaction, which is to be expected) petitioners were asked whether they thought a second chance to give evidence in person would be beneficial. The following excerpts show a mixed response to this question:

"Yes, without doubt. I think when I spoke to my petition the first time I think what I added was very illuminating to them, and I think therefore what I could add now, given the letters they've written, the responses they've had, the comments I've made, and the work I've done myself, so the engagement of other charities, for example, and the level of support that I have since gained... I don't know how aware of all of that they are, but perhaps it would be worthwhile from that point of view." (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

**"I was given an opportunity to present additional evidence"**



"I think that might be unnecessary, because I know that they are inundated with numerous petitions and they don't take evidence from all of them." (J. Macleod, 5 October 2015).

Finally, during these interviews, petitioners were asked an additional question about the organisations that the Committee chooses to write to when seeking views and further evidence on petitions. While the response was again mixed, there were clearly concerns, in some cases, about the impartiality of the organisations asked to provide their views and the efforts made to follow-up on unsatisfactory responses.



“They’ve written to the Chief Social Worker, they’ve written to the Scottish Government... perhaps if there’s anything missing at all they haven’t really, in my view, pursued an independent opinion. The Chief Social Worker works for government, the Scottish Government *is* government, and they also wrote to SCLD, which is funded by government, and there’s one other they wrote to in the beginning but it also was government... they haven’t written to anybody for a completely independent view, they’ve written to their own, if you like...” (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

And when asked whether the Committee consults broadly enough, another petitioner said:

“No! Absolutely not! We actually said “maybe you would like to go and ask....”, and we gave a list, and they went and asked the usual suspects, they went and asked the Government, they didn’t ask any of the public at all, or the bodies or groups that we recommended... and again that makes you feel that you’re just trying to get an answer from the people you want to ask... so, no, they didn’t at all and we were quite cross about that actually... You’re bringing up something new! So there’s no point asking the people who are there, giving the answers all the time... you know the point of the petition is to say that the system isn’t working, so there’s no point asking the system if it’s working... you need to ask people who are experiencing the system, at the end of the system, how it’s working, and that’s what I find frustrating.” (C. Symonds, 1 October 2015).

All of this is important, because, as Carman (2010, p. 731) asserts, ‘process evaluations far exceed outcome evaluations in influencing petitioner trust in political institutions’. In other words, as long as people are treated fairly, or *perceive* that they have been treated fairly, throughout the process, the more trust they will have for political institutions, such as the Scottish Parliament, and the more willing they will be to accept political decisions, including those of the Committee.

## **OUTCOMES & PERCEPTIONS OF THE OVERALL PROCESS**

Despite some of the criticisms voiced above, respondents tended to speak positively about the petitions process overall. In the questionnaire, 55% of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the overall process, and about 47% said that they felt their expectations had been met. The following excerpts from interview also indicate a general positive impression of the overall process.

“Well the broad petitions process worked well... certainly when I gave evidence at the very start, which was fantastic... I thought the committee were very interested, very thorough. Maybe not great that the committee members seem to have changed quite a lot... that’s not ideal, but it still doesn’t take any points away for me on how the process has gone.” (L. Cleaver, 22 September 2015).

“I like the petitions committee process. I think it’s good. I’m just a mum and it’s good that I’ve been able to come as a mother and say “I think that we need to be changing this in Scotland”, and it is good that I’m able to do that. I don’t have to be a doctor, or a headmaster or headmistress, to be

able to do that... I think it's great that an ordinary person can go to the petitions committee, and that to me is a big thing..." (B. Morrison, 29 September 2015).

Similarly, Carman found that, 'Overall, the petitions system seems to work well, with most petitioners seeing a great deal of value in being able to raise issues and voice concerns' (2006, p. 3). Ipsos MORI and Carman also found that 'Those who had some experience of petitioning tended to speak positively about the process', while those with no experience tended to be more negative, but often changed their opinion when informed about the process in more detail (2009, p. 7).

Petitioners were also asked if they felt that their petition had been "successful", and what factors were most important in judging "success".

"In my opinion, it was not a complete failure. The Minister did agree that there should be a stakeholder event. This was something proposed by another MSP, who has some knowledge of mental health issues. Now, what the stakeholder event will cover I don't know, but I think that's meant to precede the review, and with any luck there'll be more consultations. So I may have achieved something – who knows!?" (W. H. Watson, 21 September 2015).

"I think most petitions, even the ones that I watch that are closed down after two or three discussions, have to consider them some measure of success, if they've had two or three meetings where the issues have been aired. Not fully successful, obviously; but so far, and it's not closed yet, I consider it to be a massive success, because they've had a round table discussion with relevant parties..." (L. Cleaver, 22 September 2015).

"For me, we have already had some success in the petition in that the Scottish Government is committed to developing guidelines and refreshing guidelines for all children... so you could say that we've achieved something that we didn't really set out to achieve... however we're still not getting it right for the group of children we started of representing... Until we get what we need to support these children, it's not going to be successful..." (B. Morrison, 29 September 2015).

"Well the success of a petition is measured at various stages. First, you hope it is accepted, which it was. Then, obviously, one hopes that you are invited to speak to your petition, which I was. Then you hope for a positive reception with regards to the issues that are raised, which I think I got for the most part. And then appropriate reactions from the Committee in terms of actions. I think up to that point there's no doubt that the responses I got, both around the room and in terms of actions, were what I would have hoped for, so that was a constructive outcome up to that point." (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

For the most part, then, it appears that "success" might have more to do with being heard, being treated fairly and being given due consideration, rather than being based on the outcome alone. While the evidence presented here is far from

conclusive, it does seem to corroborate Carmen's (2010) findings – quoted above – that procedure matters more than outcome.

Finally, petitioners were asked what impressions they had of the Scottish Parliament, and whether they felt more or less engaged in the politics, as a result of the petitions process. For example, when asked if he felt more engaged as a result of his experience, one petitioner replied:

“Certainly! Yes, that’s one of the best things about the Scottish Parliament – its openness. It’s closer to the community. A constituent can come in here and make an appointment with their MSP and spend time with them. The petitions process is an example of their willingness to engage with the public. So yes, the process is very good.” (J. Macleod, 5 October 2015).

Others responded:

“Without a doubt it has changed my experience. I feel far less intimidated by Parliament now. This is a building that I feel I can comfortably walk in to and I would have no hesitation bringing another petition to the attention of the Petitions Committee, unless of course this one goes really badly wrong at the end of the day. But up to this point it has been a constructive and positive process that has given me an insight into the workings of Parliament, but also to some extent the minds of the MSPs as well. As long as that positive experience continues, I would most definitely endorse it.” (A. Maxwell, 5 October 2015).

“I have always been very engaged with Parliament, but I definitely felt more enthused by Parliament. I feel it’s a very good organisation. I didn’t doubt it in the first place, but I just feel it’s a really good organisation we’ve got... I haven’t written to my MSPs on any issues for a while, but I definitely feel more confident about writing to parliamentarians. I think next year’s election, it will be really good to watch and now I know more about Parliament and the procedures, it will be interesting to see.” (C. Cromar, 30 September 2015).

Therefore, while this briefing has raised a number of concerns and issues that the Committee might want to consider further – including the frequency of external meetings and debates in the Chamber; the use of social media and minor issues with the e-petition site; the transparency of decision-making around admissibility; the extent of participation and social inclusiveness; and the concerns of some petitioners about fairness, due consideration and (im)partiality – it should also be encouraged by the overall positive feedback from petitioners, especially with regards to the work of the clerks and the way in which petitioners feel more engaged in politics as a result of the petitions process. If the point of the petitions process is to encourage more participatory democracy – in line with the key principles set out in the Consultative Steering Group’s 1998 report – then this last point, along with the sentiments expressed by the petitioners interviewed for this briefing, provides some assurance that the system appears to be working well.

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### **List of interviews<sup>25</sup>**

- Philand, D. Interview 7 September 2015
- Reid, A. Interview 7 September 2015.
- Fildes, S. Interview 21 September 2015
- Watson, H. W. Interview 21 September 2015
- Cleaver, L. Interview 22 September 2015
- Smith, J. Interview 22 September 2015
- Morrison, B. Interview 29 September 2015
- Cromar, C. Interview 30 September 2015
- Symonds, C. Interview 1 October 2015
- Maxwell, A. Interview 5 October 2015
- Macleod, J. Interview 5 October 2015
- Birrell, F. Interview 8 October 2015

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<sup>25</sup> Transcripts available from SPICe.

## **ANNEX A: FULL LIST OF COMMITMENTS MADE IN 2009**

Below is a summary of the conclusions from the Committee's inquiry into the public petitions process (2009) report—

**We—**

- commit to undertake a further series of external meetings in various parts of Scotland including one further external meeting in 2009 and three external meetings during 2010. It is also our intention to meet, where possible, in locations where no other committee of the Parliament has visited;
- commit to encouraging two-way dialogue with the people who come along to these meetings and to investigate other ways in which we can involve them in the meetings themselves. We will discuss this with our Education and Community Partnerships team here in the Parliament;
- will take forward the suggestion to see whether we could run a 'young peoples petitions' meeting where we invite only young people to bring forward petitions which we then discuss at a Committee meeting solely for that purpose. We will also consider the scope for similar meetings that might focus on petitions from disability groups, equalities organisations etc.;
- will investigate with our Education and Community Partnerships team here in the Parliament, how we can run presentations alongside our external meetings to explain more about the work of the Committee which local schoolchildren, disability, community and equalities groups and others would be encouraged to attend and participate in;
- will take forward the production of a new leaflet, to be made available in various languages and formats: Gaelic, Arabic, Traditional Chinese, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Polish, easy read, large print and Braille. We will obviously conform fully to the Scottish Parliament's language policy as it develops. We will publish this leaflet later this year;
- will circulate the leaflet to some of the individuals and organisations who came along to our external meetings asking them to peer review it;
- will widen the hard copy circulation of the leaflet;
- will invite organisations, for example schools, disability groups, equalities organisations, community councils, local councils for voluntary services and others, to provide a link from their own website to the leaflet on our web page so that people can navigate from those sites to ours. We will highlight, particularly amongst ethnic minority organisations, the fact that, in line with the Scottish Parliament's language policy a public petition may be submitted in any language and when it is the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body will arrange for it to be translated into English, so that it may be considered by the Committee and others. Similarly, we will highlight that public petitions can be submitted in any format e.g. we would make whatever arrangements were necessary to accommodate the lodging of a petition in BSL;
- will produce a poster and a bookmark which publicise the public petitions process and point people in the direction of where to get more information;
- will consider whether the posters should be produced in different styles, formats and languages appropriate to different audiences. We will publish these later this year;



- will continue the practice of contacting local media in advance of future external meetings to generate interest amongst the local population;
- will consider the scope for articles/interviews with local community radio to generate further interest in local communities;
- will put arrangements in place to further publicise, through local outlets, the existence of the public petitions process. We will give further consideration alongside our Education and Community Partnerships Team and Media Relations Office as to how and when we can best move this idea forward;
- will take forward the idea, in discussion with our Education and Community Partnership team here in the Parliament, of creating 'petition ambassadors' to work alongside, and be part of, the engagement work which we will undertake;
- would welcome the views of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body on how the Parliament's outreach strategy will specifically target groups like the Blairtumnock and Rogersfield tenants association and how this strategy will pro-actively contact groups and individuals from across all of Scotland to discuss how information about what the Parliament does, and for our own interest what the public petitions process is for, can be shared. We refer the SPCB to the research findings and the views expressed at our external meetings in this regard;
- are launching, alongside this report, our new video which provides an overview of the public petitions process;
- will invite organisations, for example schools, disability groups, equalities organisations, community councils, local councils for voluntary services and others to provide a link from their own websites to the video so that people can navigate from those sites to ours;
- will take forward the production of a new BSL version of the video to be launched later this year. This will be done in consultation with the Scottish Council on Deafness<sup>67</sup> and other agencies to ensure that what is produced fully meets the needs of deaf and deafblind people;
- are launching alongside this report a facility which will allow petitioners, and us, to post videos and photographs about petitions, the petitions process and the work of the Committee. These will be hosted on the new blog page. Through this new blog page we will host—
  - our own public petitions video
  - pod casts about public petitions)
  - footage from our meetings
  - interviews with petitioners
  - our photo sharing facility
  - a hyperlink to videos and photos which petitioners produce and post on to sites such as YouTube and Flickr
  - links to Parliament's own YouTube page, its website, the Committee's own webpage and Holyrood TV. We hope this will allow users to easily navigate around to access other information they want.
- are launching, alongside this report, our new public petitions blog;
- are launching, alongside this report, a dedicated Public Petitions Committee Wiki page;
- are launching alongside this report a pod cast interview which sets out some general facts and information about public petitions – the what, why and how. We will also produce regular pod casts outlining the work of the Committee,

our consideration of specific petitions, and other information that we hope people will want to know;

- will investigate further with our web team the facility to bookmark our webpages through [Del.icio.us](#), [Digg](#), [reddit](#) and [StumbleUpon](#);
- will look to further promote the option for petitioners and others to talk to us about their petition via videoconference;
- will put in place the facilities to allow people to text their support to a petition;
- have revised the template to be completed by each petitioner to invite more information from them about the background to the petition e.g. what action do they wish taken, by whom, when, what questions do they wish us to ask, what was the result of the action they took prior to lodging the petition;
- invite the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to indicate in what way it will support the redevelopment, as a priority, of the e-petition system;
- will provide the facility for those petitioners whom we cannot, for lack of time, invite to come along and speak to the Committee about their petition to submit an oral presentation via video;
- will formally alert the Scottish Government of new petitions when lodged;
- will ensure that the petitioner is given the same, if not more, time as public bodies in which to respond to the Committee;
- will also encourage greater clarity and more specifics from respondents;
- we will, if we receive no communication from the petitioner on two successive occasions, consider the petitioner is content with the responses received and will move to close the petition on that basis;
- will continue our practice of referring public petitions to other committees only when we consider there to be a clear benefit in doing so;
- we will undertake further in-depth inquiries;
- will continue to allow petitions on reserved matters, but which do not call upon the Parliament to legislate, to be lodged;
- we would welcome the introduction by local councils of locally based public petitioning processes;
- will discuss with the Conveners Group and the Parliamentary Bureau the scope for an annual public petitions debate in the Chamber.

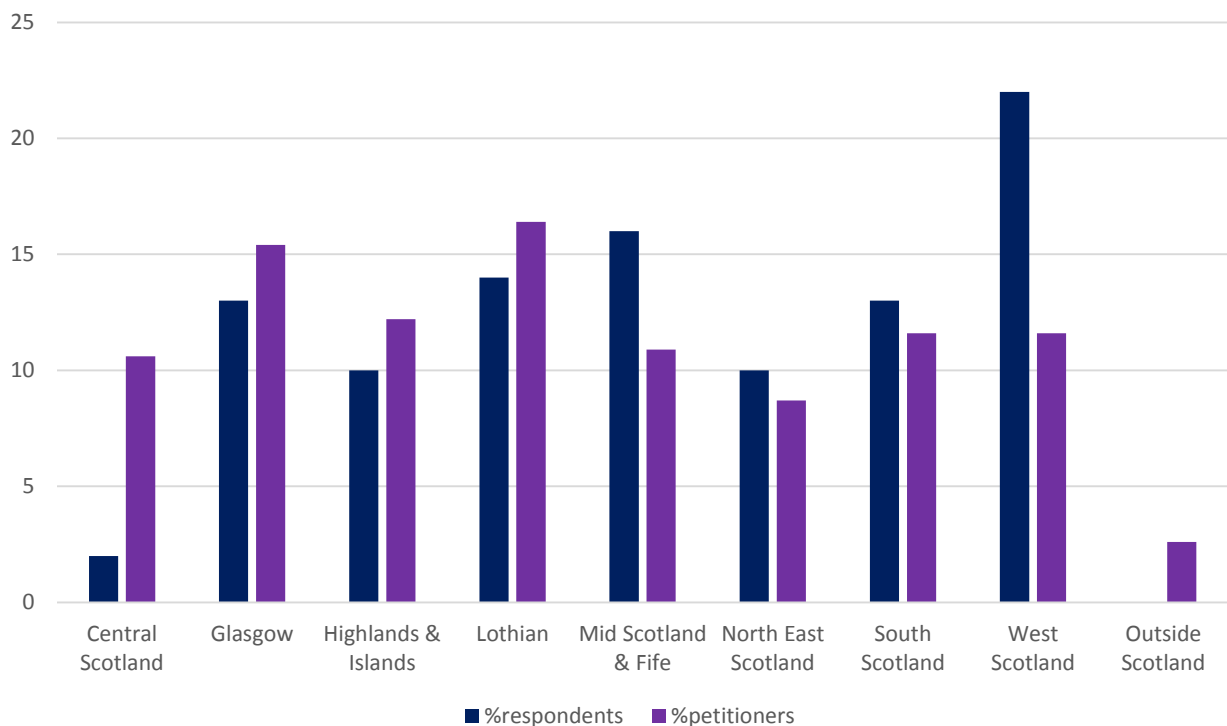
## ANNEX B: A NOTE ON METHODS USED

### THE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Representativeness of respondents

As noted in the main text, there is insufficient data on the population of petitioners as a whole to allow us to determine the exact extent to which questionnaire respondents are representative of the entire population of petitioners. Inevitably, there will be some self-selection effects. However, given that the clerks do hold address details for petitioners, we can use this to determine whether respondents are reflective of the proportion of the population of petitioners from each electoral region. Figure 19 shows the distribution of respondents and all petitioners (June 2009-August 2015) across Scotland's electoral regions. There are some notable differences: Mid Scotland & Fife and West Scotland are over-represented and Central Scotland is under-represented; but, generally, respondents to the questionnaire are broadly reflective of the overall geographic distribution of petitioners.

**Figure 19: Representativeness of questionnaire respondents**



Source: SPICe petitions questionnaire, 2015; and data obtained from clerks.

#### NS Socio-economic classification

The SEC variable used in this analysis was constructed using the NS-SEC self-coded method. A detailed description of the methods involved can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html#14>

## Mean satisfaction scores

Mean satisfaction scores were computed using the following series of weights to give an overall mean score between -1 and 1. A positive score indicates the majority is satisfied, while a negative score indicates the majority is dissatisfied.

Response	Weight applied
Strongly Agree	+1.0
Agree	+0.5
Neutral	0.0
Disagree	-0.5
Strongly Disagree	-1.0

The mean of all values for each response variable (i.e. 'the clerking team was helpful') is then calculated and each variable ranked accordingly. As noted in the main text, the resulting scores do tell us the percentage of people who were satisfied (instead this can be deduced from the data in Table 5); the scores only allow us to rank responses in order to determine the stage(s) in the petitions process with which petitioners' are more and less satisfied, relative to all other stages.

## INTERVIEWS

Interviews are useful for capturing respondents' experiences, and can be particularly useful as a follow-up to questionnaires. However, they can also be time consuming and costly. Therefore, the decision was made to interview 10 petitioners only (5 male, 5 female) from across all age groups. In the end, interviews were conducted with 6 women and 4 men, of varying ages. Eight interviews were conducted in person, and 2 over the phone.

A semi-structured interview format was used - where the same open-ended questions are asked of all interviewees; this approach facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analysed and compared, while still allowing for some flexibility. The questions followed the broad structure below, with additional follow-up questions where appropriate:

1. Tell me about your petition.
2. Why did you decide to bring the issue to the Scottish Parliament, in particular?
  - What did you hope to achieve? What were your expectations?
  - What should be the primary purpose of a public petitions process?
3. Can you tell me about your experience with the clerks?

- To what extent did you understand the expectations placed on you as the petitioner?
- 4. Can you tell me about your experience with the Committee?
  - Do you feel you were treated fairly?
  - Was your petition given due consideration?
  - Did the Committee consult broadly enough when seeking further views and evidence?
- 5. What was the outcome of your petition?
  - Do you consider it to be a “success”?
  - What factors are most important when measuring “success”?
- 6. Overall, what works well and what needs to be improved?
- 7. Finally, how has the experience made you feel about the Scottish Parliament, and politics, more generally?
  - Have you/would you consider submitting another petition?
  - Have you/would you write to your MSP?
- 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interviewees were informed about the purpose of the project, the format of the interview, and how the information they supplied would be used. They were also assured of the interviewer’s independence of the clerks, the Committee and SPICe, in order to encourage them to speak more candidly. Interviewees were also given an option on where and how interviews would take place, with some opting to come to the Parliament, others preferring to meet closer to home, and the rest opting for a telephone interview. In all cases, interviews lasted approximately 30 mins, with the exception of one group interview which lasted 1 hour.

There are many strengths to the approach, but the major limitation is the inability to generalise. This group is not representative of all petitioners or questionnaire respondents, and their feedback provides only anecdotal evidence. However, when used to complement the questionnaire feedback, this mixed-methods approach adds an extra level of depth and credibility to the analysis (Greene, 2007).

## ANNEX C: DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Demographic variable	Value	% respondents	% population
Gender	Male	61.9	48.5
	Female	37.2	51.5
	Prefer not to say	0.9	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Age group	<18 years	n/a	20
	18-24	2.7	10
	25-34	6.2	26
	35-44	12.4	
	45-54	21.2	27
	55-64	25.7	
	65-74	23.9	9
	75+	6.2	8
	Prefer not to say	1.7	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Highest educational qualification	Doctorate	5.3	26
	Postgraduate	26.5	
	First degree	26.5	
	HND	8.8	47
	(Advanced) Highers	9.7	
	Standard Grades	7.1	
	No formal qualifications	6.2	27
	Other	8	--
	Prefer not to say	1.9	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Disabled?	Yes	31.9	20
	No	62.8	80
	Prefer not to say	5.3	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Ethnic background (detailed)	White – Scottish	71.7	84
	White – Other British	16.8	7.9
	White – Gypsy/Traveller	1.8	0.1
	White - Other	2.7	1.9
	Asian – Pakistani	0.9	0.9
	Asian – Chinese	0.9	0.6
	Other	0.9	4.6
	Prefer not to say	4.3	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Ethnic background (simplified)	White	93	93.9
	Asian	1.8	1.5
	Other/Prefer not to say	5.2	4.6
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Employment status	Employed	39.8	60
	Unemployed	5.3	6
	Retired	37.2	15
	Student	3.5	10
	Voluntary worker	4.4	--
	Carer	3.5	9
	Prefer not to say	6.3	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
NS socio-economic class	1 – Highest	71.8	--
	2	7.1	--
	3	14.1	--
	4	3.5	--
	5 – Lowest	3.5	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>--</b>
Household income	<10k	11.9	--
	10-19	10.1	--
	20-29	16.5	--
	30-39	9.2	--
	40-49	4.6	--
	50-59	8.3	--
	60-69	4.6	--
	70-79	1.8	--
	80-89	0.0	--
	90-99	1.8	--
	100-149	0.9	--
	Prefer not to say	30.3	--
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>--</b>
Geographic distribution (by region)	South Scotland	13	13
	West Scotland	22	13
	Glasgow	13	13
	Mid Scotland and Fife	16	12
	Lothian	14	14
	Highlands and Islands	10	8
	North East Scotland	10	14
	Central Scotland	2	12
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: SPICe, petitions questionnaire 2015; and 2011 census data.

