

Scottish Parliament Annual Report 2003

12 May 2002 to 31 March 2003

Contents

- [Foreword by Sir David Steel, the Presiding Officer](#)
- [The Chamber](#)
- [Meeting of the Parliament in Aberdeen](#)
- [Foreword by George Reid, Convener of the Conveners Group](#)
- [Committee highlights](#)
- [Public Petitions](#)
- [Other activities](#)
- [Our place in the world](#)
- [Holyrood](#)
- [Committee activity](#)
- [Partner libraries](#)



The Scottish
Parliament

Foreword by Sir David Steel, the Presiding Officer

“In a very short time we have become part and parcel of everyday life here in Scotland and I look forward to watching the continued strengthening of the Parliament’s relationship with the people.”

We have just completed the fourth and final year of this, our first parliamentary session. This annual report reflects on the work and the achievements of the Parliament during this past year.

It has been of continuing satisfaction to see the growing number of individuals and groups only too willing to come to the Parliament to help us in our work. For example, since 1999, we have welcomed more than 5,000 people to Edinburgh to give evidence to our committees. The committees have also visited many areas around Scotland, listening to local communities’ views on issues that affect their daily lives.

The highlight of this final year was undoubtedly the meeting of the Parliament in Aberdeen in May 2002, when Her Majesty the Queen addressed us. The positive reaction of the people of Aberdeen and the North East both during and following our temporary move there was quite overwhelming, as was the interest in our proceedings.

As Presiding Officer, I am involved in representing the Parliament beyond our shores, and in welcoming our many visitors from other countries who want to see Europe’s youngest parliament in action. The impact we have is far-reaching and it is no surprise to learn that our modern, innovative and open practices have been adopted elsewhere. This report looks at some of these visits and the relationships we are building in the UK, Europe and beyond.

On a personal note, it is a great privilege to have presided over the Parliament for its first four years and to have witnessed the progress we have made as an institution year on year since 1999. In a very short time we have become part and parcel of everyday life here in Scotland and I look forward to watching the continued strengthening of the Parliament’s relationship with the people of Scotland.

I commend this report to you and I hope that it will give you a flavour of the contribution the Parliament makes to a better Scotland.



Sir David Steel

The Chamber

It is in the Chamber that the main business of the Scottish Parliament is debated and legislation passed. Each week in session, MSPs have the opportunity to examine and explore current political issues. Scottish Ministers and the First Minister are quizzed during Question Time.

Throughout the year business in the Chamber covers a diverse and wide range of important subjects from education, health and transport to local government services. These represent a small sample of the Parliament's responsibilities, which impact on all walks of Scottish life.

The Parliamentary Bureau proposes the agenda for each meeting in what we call "the business motion". Once approved, the business motion is published in the business bulletin and forms a rolling business programme for the coming two weeks.

The Bureau is chaired by the Presiding Officer and includes the MSPs who are the business managers or representatives of the major parties.

Ministers in the Scottish Executive, political parties, committees and individual members can put forward business for the Parliament to consider. Debates are chosen in proportion to the number of MSPs representing each political party.

The Labour/Liberal Democrat Executive therefore got the most debating time this year, followed by the SNP and then the Conservatives and others.

During the year, there have been high profile debates on:

- Pay for fire fighters and fire control staff;
- Public-private partnerships;
- Action to recruit, retain and value nurses;
- Drugs Courts;
- The future of air transport;
- Windfarms;
- The fishing industry;
- Conflict with Iraq.

Time for Reflection

Time for Reflection is normally the first item of business in the Chamber each week. It gives people with a wide range of faiths and beliefs the chance to share their thoughts with us. Many religious groups have taken part including representatives from the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, and Jewish and Muslim communities.

Special dates are marked. For example, Diana Wolfson, the former head teacher of the Jewish Primary School in Glasgow, gave Time for Reflection on National Holocaust Memorial Day, and the Rev Patricia Johnston of the Scottish Churches China Group spoke during the Chinese New Year. A compilation of all contributions over the first session has now been published.

Legislation

Bills that are passed are the end product of public consultation and hours of discussion in committee and in the Chamber. In the past year 22 bills have become acts. Of these, 16 were by the Scottish Executive, three were member's bills, two were committee bills and one was a private bill. During the last weeks of the session, the Parliament added a half-day to its Chamber business schedule to make sure that as much of its legislation was passed as possible.

Several bills were passed in the final weeks of this session and were granted Royal Assent, becoming acts after the Parliament dissolved. These were the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill, the Council of the Law Society of Scotland Bill, the National Galleries of Scotland Bill, the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Bill and the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill was the longest and most heavily amended bill. The Health and Community Care Committee dealt with 1,363 amendments during stage 2 of the bill. Stage 3 took two days and involved considering a further 757 amendments.

Amendments to bills must be proposed by MSPs but can be the result of suggestions from interest groups or members of the public. Most amendments come from the Executive as it is responsible for looking into the likely impact of a bill. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Parliament on 23 January 2003. The act is an historic piece of legislation because it gives the public a statutory right to access private land. It also offers crofters the chance to buy land.

Since May 2002, the number of bills coming from non-Executive sources has continued to increase. Two bills from parliamentary committees helped by our Non-Executive Bills Unit (NEBU) have been passed. Both create Commissioners, one for Parliamentary Standards and one for Children and Young People.

Of the seven member's bills introduced since May 2002, three were supported by NEBU and were passed at stage 3: the University of St. Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill, Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill, and the Council of the Law Society of Scotland Bill. Three of the bills were rejected at stage 1: Organic Farming Targets, Prostitution Tolerance Zones and Proportional Representation (Local Government Elections). The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill got through stage 1 but there was not enough time for it to finish its passage and go on to become an act.

In addition to Executive bills and member's bills, the Parliament considers private bills, which may be introduced by an individual or organisation that is not part of the Parliament. The first private bill to be passed by the Parliament was the National Galleries of Scotland Bill in March 2003.

Full details of all bills passed are available on our website in the document *Summaries of Bills Passed by the Scottish Parliament in the First Session (SP paper no. 846)*.

Committee Debates

Committees can ask for time to discuss business such as inquiry reports in the Chamber. These debates give committees the chance to bring issues to the attention of a wider audience.

Many important reports have been debated in the Chamber. The Justice 2 Committee led a debate on its inquiry into the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's debate in the Chamber covered a range of important subjects including golf and business tourism and the impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis on the tourist industry. Other committee debates included the Finance Committee's inquiry into public-private partnerships and the Local Government Committee's inquiry into local government finance.

Bills which became Acts (22):

1. Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Executive)
2. Scottish Qualifications Authority Act 2002 (Executive)
3. University of St. Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Act 2002 (Member's)
4. Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Act 2002 (Committee)
5. Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (Executive)
6. Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (Executive)
7. Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
8. Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
9. Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
10. Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
11. Budget (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
12. Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
13. Building (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
14. Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)

15. Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
16. Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
17. Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 (Member's)
18. Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
19. National Galleries of Scotland Act 2003 (Private)
20. Council of the Law Society of Scotland Act 2003 (Member's)
21. Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 (Executive)
22. Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003 (Committee)

Of the 22 bills which became acts, three were members' bills, two were committee bills, one was a private bill, while the other 16 came from the Scottish Executive.

Parliamentary Questions

- Question Time is one of the best-attended occasions of the parliamentary week
- Each week 30 questions asked by members are chosen at random by a computer
- On average, 13 questions are answered by nine different ministers each week

The Presiding Officer chooses six topical questions for First Minister's Question Time (which immediately follows Question Time each week). Sometimes only three questions will be taken, but sometimes all six are taken. On average, five questions are answered every week. The Presiding Officer normally chooses the leaders of the two main opposition parties for the first and second questions.

Ministers supply written answers for those questions not taken during Question Time or First Minister's Question Time. We publish written questions in the business bulletin and answers in the written answers report. You can see both publications, along with the official report of proceedings, on our website.

Parliamentary Questions lodged from 12 May 2002 to 31 March 2003

	Lodged	Answered in Chamber	Received written answer
Question Time	1554	408	487
First Minister's Question Time	743	157	29

Ministerial Statements

Urgent matters or current news are often dealt with in ministerial statements. Time is allowed

in the Chamber for ministers to raise topical issues. Members can then ask the minister questions about what the Executive is doing about the issue. Examples of ministerial statements include the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning's statement on the publication of 'Building Better Transport', which dealt with the future of transport in Scotland. Similarly, the Minister for Education and Young People made a statement on the publication of the Executive's plan for excellence in education in Scotland and the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice made statements on the firefighters' dispute.

Members' Business

We hold Members' Business after Decision Time, at the end of each meeting. These debates give MSPs the chance to highlight issues that are unlikely to receive attention otherwise. The member whose motion is chosen leads the debate, with a minister responding.

Over the year we have held 64 Members' Business debates covering a wide range of subjects.

Often a subject is chosen which affects a particular constituency or region. Examples include VisitScotland's funding for Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board to help the area recover from the foot- and-mouth crisis; Northern Isles ferry services; Peebles Sheriff Court; Dundee Heritage Trust; A9 ð Perth to Inverness road; and the Arbroath Community Alcohol Free Environment (CAFf) Project.

Members' Business is often used to mark specific events. On 15 May 2002, Lloyd Quinan highlighted Autism Awareness Week; Kenny MacAskill's motion on 30 October 2002 noted the 50th Anniversary of the Nordic Council, while Dr Sylvia Jackson drew attention to the day marking Science and the Parliament in her motion debated on 6 November 2002.

Health issues continue to be the main area of concern. Gordon Jackson put forward a motion on epilepsy, Fergus Ewing's motion was about osteoporosis, Mary Scanlon's motion dealt with the importance of Primary Care and Bill Butler's motion was on post-natal depression.

No question is put on the motions that are debated during Members' Business.

Motion of thanks

On 27 March 2003, as we met for the last time of our first session, the First Minister lodged a motion thanking Sir David Steel for his service to the Parliament and the important and historic role he has carried out as its first Presiding Officer.

[MSPs and their work in the Chamber](#) [Diagram in Pdf format]

[Stages in the passage of a Private Bill](#) [Flow Chart in Pdf format]

Meeting of the Parliament in Aberdeen

On Thursday 13 September 2001 the Scottish Parliament agreed motion S1M-2202, to meet in the King's College Conference Centre in Aberdeen in May 2002.

Planning began almost immediately to ensure that the event would be a success.

Organising a meeting of the Parliament outside Edinburgh is a major task but having done it before in Glasgow, we were aware of what was involved and of the potential pitfalls to be avoided. For our meeting in Aberdeen however, there was a significant extra dimension, the address to the Parliament by Her Majesty the Queen.

The main purpose of meeting in Aberdeen was to carry out the agreed programme of parliamentary business. Much of our success was thanks to the excellent Chamber and office facilities provided by the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen City Council for both members and staff. These amenities were complemented by quick and reliable access to the Parliament's information technology network.

The Parliament met for three full days in Aberdeen from 28 to 30 May. Topics discussed included care for people with cancer, modernising government, alternatives to imprisonment and genetically modified crops. Several debates reflected local concerns such as the SNP's debate on Scotland's air links and the Executive's debate on the offshore oil and gas industry. Members' Business debates included topics selected by local MSPs. Richard Lochhead spoke about drug abuse in North-East Scotland and Elaine Thomson raised the issue of a transport strategy for the region.

The visit to Aberdeen was much more than simply a meeting in another chamber, however. The education service helped arrange a full schedule of visits.

More than 300 pupils and their teachers from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire schools came to see us, and more than 500 members of the public watched proceedings during the week. The Equal Opportunities Committee held a public participation event, which was attended by people from a range of organisations across the region. The webcast service from Aberdeen was very successful. We received messages from all over the world about the visit of Her Majesty the Queen. The Parliament staff worked well with representatives of the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council and Grampian Police to both plan the visit and during our time in Aberdeen.

In her speech, Her Majesty the Queen talked of her vivid and happy memories of the warmth, honesty and humour of the Scottish people and reminded members of Donald Dewar's vision of 'keeping faith with the past, keeping step with the present and keeping our promises to posterity'. She said she valued the distinctive contribution Scotland makes to strengthening the links between the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and Europe.

Foreward by George Reid MSP Convener of the Conveners Group

As scrutineers, committees have grown in confidence and authority, undertaking nearly 40 inquiries.

Parliamentary committees continue to be central to the success of the Scottish Parliament. Committee members scrutinise legislation, carry out wide-ranging investigations, and work in partnership with the people. The following pages detail the committees' achievements during this year of the first session of Parliament.

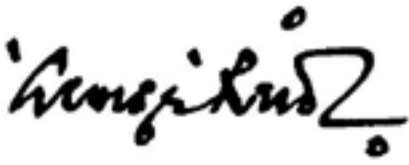
Committees have tackled the large volume of legislation before them in an open and inclusive way. On more than 1,700 occasions they have questioned and listened to witnesses from a wide spectrum of Scottish society. This has strengthened the quality and standing of legislation and demonstrated the principle of sharing democratic power in Scotland.

As scrutineers, committees have grown in confidence and authority, undertaking nearly 40 inquiries, questioning the actions and the activities of the Executive, engaging in European issues, and examining the Executive's spending plans.

This year saw another two committee bills become acts. This is significant. Committee bills are a powerful means of sharing democratic power amongst all members and ultimately the people they represent.

Committees have continued to meet throughout Scotland, involving local people in issues that affect them. There have been more than 50 visits. Full committees met in 17 locations outside Edinburgh. On another 38 occasions, reporters or small groups of members were sent to talk to people and collect evidence in Scotland's cities, towns and villages.

The following pages will give you an insight into the work being carried out in the Scottish Parliament through its committees. It has been another busy and productive year. Our committees have a strong commitment to renewing Scottish public life and I commend their report to you.



GEORGE REID MSP
Deputy Presiding Officer Convener,
Conveners Group

Committee highlights

Legislation

Committees examine legislation, question Ministers and take evidence from expert or interested groups and individuals. By doing so they address concerns, consider amendments and improve proposed laws. In addition, unlike in Westminster, committees can also propose their own legislation.

The Health and Community Care Committee considered the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill. The bill improves outdated law on the compulsory care and treatment of people with mental health problems. It also clarifies and extends their rights and safeguards. Committee members visited Parkhead Hospital, Glasgow, the Orchard Clinic, Edinburgh and the State Hospital, Carstairs, to assess mental health services. The views of service users, carers, and health professionals influenced the committee's discussions. At stage 2 the committee considered almost 1,400 amendments, more than any other bill in the Parliament so far.

The Justice 2 Committee was lead committee for the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. The bill introduces a wide-ranging set of measures to protect the public from sexual and violent offenders, safeguard victims' rights and find alternatives to imprisonment. Provisions to ban physically punishing children under the age of three were removed from the bill following concerns expressed by the committee. A move to extend the children's hearing system to 16 and 17-year-olds was also taken out. The committee visited Reliance Monitoring's electronic tagging centre in East Kilbride and Barnardo's CHOSI (Challenging Offending through Support and Intervention) project for young offenders in Motherwell to consider the potential effects of the bill.

The Justice 2 Committee was also lead committee on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. This bill is very important because it gives the public a statutory right to access private land and crofters the right to buy land. The committee considered the bill at stage 2 during 11 meetings held over 26 hours. Stage 3 took place in January 2003. It was the first time a bill was debated over two days.

The Justice 1 Committee examined the Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill, to make property law clearer.

The committee was pleased that important progress was made in developing policies on sheltered housing and the development management scheme thanks to valuable input from the Executive and other witnesses.

The biggest piece of legislation considered by the Local Government Committee was the Local Government in Scotland Bill. The bill aims to make local authorities more efficient and effective by securing best value contracts and meeting equal opportunities requirements. The bill to establish a Children's Commissioner in Scotland was passed in the final week of Parliament. The proposal was first introduced by members of all parties in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill creates the new post to promote awareness and understanding of the rights of children and young people.

The Standards Committee proposed a bill to establish a Standards Commissioner to investigate complaints against MSPs. The bill, passed unanimously by the Parliament, gives the Standards Commissioner extensive powers. He or she will act independently of the Parliament and committees and will have statutory rights to call witnesses and gather evidence. The Scottish Parliament is recognised as leading the way in introducing measures to improve standards in public life. Its work on the Standards Commissioner Act was examined closely at Westminster, the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff and by politicians in Belfast.

The Transport and the Environment Committee dealt with the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill to act on new European Union rules on water quality. The committee raised a number of concerns, which were agreed by the Executive and resulted in substantial improvements to the bill. As a result, Scotland's implementation of the Water Framework Directive has been commended by the European Commission.

The Rural Development Committee held four evidence sessions at stage 1 of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill and discussed 170 amendments at stage 2.

The committee also considered the Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill holding three evidence sessions at stage 1.

The Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill, which introduced a national Debt Arrangement Scheme (DAS), was examined by the Social Justice Committee. It also considered the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Bill.

This year ad hoc committees were set up to deal with two private bills. The purpose of a private bill is to allow the promoter to obtain powers or benefits in addition to or in conflict with the general law. The National Galleries of Scotland Bill Committee took evidence from heritage bodies about the proposal to extend the National Gallery. The Robin Rigg Offshore Wind Farm (Navigation and Fishing) (Scotland) Bill Committee will meet again in the next session. Private bills differ from public bills in that they can be reintroduced in the following session. The Scottish Parliament's Non-Executive Bills Unit helped the committees with these bills.

Inquiries

One of our main roles is to hold the Scottish Executive to account. As well as examining the Executive's proposals for legislation, we look at its spending plans and administrative actions. We must make sure the Executive is delivering on the demands and expectations of the Parliament and of the people in Scotland.

This year the Finance Committee's main job was to co-ordinate the Parliament's response to the Executive's spending plans. This is an important role which includes getting input from all the subject committees. Finally, a report is made to the full Parliament. The Finance Committee also examined ways of improving how we investigate the Executive's spending plans. This will open up the Executive's department to a new level of scrutiny and could bring real life rewards for the people of Scotland.

The Audit Committee looks at how public money is spent. It is determined that its work should lead to real improvements in public services for the people of Scotland. It takes great care to monitor the progress made in putting its recommendations into practice. The committee is gaining international recognition. For example, last year it was asked to take part in a study by the World Bank to find ways of improving accountability. The committee also carried out its largest inquiry to date into how the criminal justice system treats young people.

The Procedures Committee finished its four-year inquiry into how well we are applying the Consultative Steering Group's main principles of sharing power, accountability, accessibility and equal opportunities into our day-to-day work. The committee's final report makes 135 recommendations on a wide range of issues such as how to find new ways to hear the views of people in Scotland, and how to improve Parliamentary procedures. More than 100 witnesses gave evidence, 230 written submissions were received, and three meetings were held in Hawick, Paisley and Ullapool where members of the public voiced their opinions.

The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee completed its lifelong learning inquiry into higher and further education, vocational training and voluntary education. The committee's report makes various recommendations covering issues such as how to make sure people have access to a range of learning opportunities throughout their lives.

The committee published a report on its inquiry into tourism in Scotland and looked at the Executive's 2000 Tourism strategy as well as the impact of September 11 and foot-and mouth disease on the tourist industry. Research was commissioned comparing Scotland's tourist industry with elsewhere in the world. The committee also went on fact-finding visits and heard evidence from a wide range of witnesses. Among the report's recommendations was that the Parliament should do more to attract new direct air routes to and from Scotland.

The Health and Community Care Committee looked into genetically modified crops after the Parliament received a petition about the issue. The committee heard evidence from scientists, activists and health experts. It concluded that checks and public health tests needed to be improved and that more should be done to ensure that GM crops do not enter the food chain.

The Health and Community Care Committee continued to push for compensation for people who contracted hepatitis C through NHS treatment. The Executive agreed, but certain problems still have to be sorted out with the UK Government.

The Transport and the Environment Committee held an inquiry into the future of railways. The committee heard from industry representatives and made various recommendations about improving the service. The Committee was also able to influence the new Scottish rail passenger franchise, a blueprint for 21st century passenger rail services in Scotland.

The Justice 1 Committee held an inquiry into the future of Scotland's prisons. The wide-ranging investigation focused on, among other issues, how many prisoners each prison can hold and privatisation. The committee recommended that HMP Peterhead should stay open and that more work should be done on the potential costs of providing more prison places. On 5 September 2002, The Minister for Justice, Jim Wallace, announced that HMP Peterhead would remain open. He also revealed that two new prisons will be built instead of the three originally planned.

The Justice 2 Committee finished its examination of the Procurator Fiscal Service and its role in Scotland's criminal justice system. The inquiry looked at the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to see whether the department can meet the needs of Scotland's criminal justice system, while still being sensitive to the needs of victims and witnesses. The committee heard evidence from a wide range of groups including the police, voluntary organisations and victims of crime. Committee members also visited large and small Procurator Fiscal offices throughout Scotland.

The Local Government Committee examined the issues of electoral reform in local elections and payment of councillors. As part of the Renewing Local Democracy Inquiry, the committee held events in Paisley, Inverness and Glasgow where members of the public were able to air their concerns. The committee recommended looking into reducing the voting age to 16 in local elections.

The Education, Culture and Sport Committee conducted a wide-ranging and in-depth inquiry into the Purposes of Education in Scotland.

In carrying out our work we are guided by our founding principles of sharing power, accountability, openness and promoting equal opportunities. To help us achieve our aims of making Scottish society more equal, the Equal Opportunities Committee considers all Scottish Executive bills.

In January 2003 the Rural Development Committee published its report into how to ensure that rural communities prosper. As part of this Integrated Rural Development Inquiry, the committee held meetings in Lochgilphead and Huntly. Four MSPs also visited the island of Colonsay.

The committee also carried out two shorter inquiries into fisheries. The first looked at the

Common Fisheries Policy. The second inquiry was into the European Union's decision to cut fishing quotas for cod. During this inquiry the committee took evidence from Elliot Morley MP, the UK Minister with responsibility for fisheries. This was only the second time that a Scottish parliamentary committee had taken evidence from a UK minister. In September, the Social Justice Committee published its report on social inclusion. The report included the results of a consultation exercise with interested organisations, a civic participation event and a number of meetings with the Communities Against Poverty Network.

Innovation

To carry out our work successfully, it is important that we fully understand the concerns and priorities of the Scottish people. Our committees use a variety of methods to listen to people and take business forward. Formal and informal meetings, seminars and conventions, fact-finding visits and public participation events take place frequently throughout Scotland.

The **Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee** continues to find new ways to hear the views of people across Scotland. When committee members met in Shetland in June 2002, they visited a local secondary school where they spoke to pupils about the work of the Parliament.

The **Rural Development Committee** gave the public the chance to talk about their concerns during informal discussions which took place before and after committee meetings. We believe that this is a valuable way of improving openness and accessibility.

To mark the European Year of Disabled People, the **Equal Opportunities Committee** met to discuss issues of concern to disabled people in Scotland. As well as the formal event, relevant organisations and individuals were invited to smaller "networking" sessions to give those taking part a chance to discuss the issues more fully.

During Carers Week 2002, the Equal Opportunities Committee, the **Social Justice Committee** and the Health and Community Care Committee met Carers Scotland at an informal meeting and networking session hosted by the Social Justice Committee.

The **Local Government Committee** held three civic participation events as part of its inquiry into local democracy. More than 100 people from local community councils, panels and voluntary organisations came along to the half-day events in Paisley and Inverness. After the formal committee meeting, participants were given the chance to air their views on relevant issues. Representatives from the voluntary and community sectors and ethnic minority groups were among the people who attended the all-day event in Glasgow.

The Public Petitions Committee leads the way in encouraging response through the internet with the use of the e-petitioner system. You can read about this fully on page 31. Other examples of the use of technology include the **Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's** online questionnaire, which let smaller businesses take part in its tourism inquiry over the busy summer period. The questionnaires returned gave the inquiry more evidence.

The **Education, Culture and Sport Committee** carried out a wide-ranging inquiry into the role of educational and cultural policy on the languages spoken in Scotland. The report was translated into Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gaelic, Punjabi, Scots and Urdu. The **European and External Relations Committee** continues to strengthen links with other countries. To mark the start of the Danish and Greek presidencies of the European Union, the committee invited the ambassadors of these countries to the Parliament to talk about their plans. The meetings were open to the public. The committee maintains good relations with consulates in Scotland and Scotland's eight Members of the European Parliament. It also works closely with colleagues in Westminster, Wales and Northern Ireland. The committee's electronic newsletter "Europe Matters" is posted via the internet to more than 700 people across Europe.

The committee also organised two important events during the year. The Scottish Parliamentary Convention on the Future of Europe and the first meeting of NORPEC, the Network of Regional Parliamentary European Committees.

As well as finding new ways to communicate with the public, committees also look at how to improve their own work. For example, the **Finance Committee** carried out two reviews, 'Regeneration as Delivered through the Voluntary Sector' and 'Children in Poverty', which looked at how the Executive's spending plans affected more than one department. The committee recommended that more cross-cutting reviews like this should happen every year.

Background

We are gaining widespread recognition as a Parliament that listens to and acts upon public concerns. Much of that credit is thanks to the valuable work of the Public Petitions Committee (PPC). Its role is to make sure that the correct action is taken on petitions given to the Parliament.

The public petitions system gives individuals, communities, pressure groups and other organisations the chance to raise issues with the Scottish Parliament. Petitions can act to urge members to make changes.

The number of petitions submitted to the Parliament continues to increase.

When a petition is submitted, the PPC first examines the issues raised. This can involve conducting background research, hearing presentations from petitioners, and requesting written comments and oral evidence from the relevant body or bodies. A balanced judgement can then be made on whether further action is required, such as formally referring the petition to the relevant committee or other body for further examination.

Public Petitions Committee

What has the petitions system achieved?

Many of the 620 petitions submitted to date resulted in positive action, such as prompting committee inquiries and parliamentary debates. Petitions have also changed laws and influenced the views of the Scottish Executive and other public bodies. Direct outcomes include:

- the setting up of a fast-track court to speed up the compensation process for asbestosis victims;
- changes to legislation and guidance relating to the siting of telecommunications masts, processing of oil-seed rape, disposal of school playing fields, land tenure, and the spreading of untreated organic waste;
- the setting up of expert groups on the measles mumps and rubella vaccine and hepatitis C by the Scottish Executive;
- recommendations that those contracting hepatitis C after receiving contaminated blood transfusions should get compensation; and
- the creation of a management group to protect Roman remains at Cramond in Edinburgh.

Developing the petitions system

The e-petitioner system, hosted on the Parliament website, gathers signatures and encourages debate on the issues raised in a petition through its discussion forum.

At the beginning of the new parliamentary session, improved guidance on how to submit petitions will be available in a wide range of languages. In addition, the PPC's web pages have been redesigned to give additional and clearer information on the progress of petitions.

The PPC's role is to be improved in the new session. This will allow the committee to carry out more detailed investigation of petitions with the agreement of the relevant committees. The PPC will consider recent recommendations by the Parliament's Procedures Committee on how to develop the petitions system to give the public even more chance to take part in the democratic process.

Other Activities

SPICe

To do our jobs well, we must have access to accurate and up-to-date information. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), which forms part of our Research and Information Group, is a confidential and unbiased first port of call for MSPs, Parliament staff and committees. SPICe deals with just about any question, from Alzheimer's disease to the Zeebrugge ferry disaster.

SPICe answered around 6,500 enquiries from MSPs last year on a variety of subjects. Answering enquiries from individual MSPs is an important part of its work, but the SPICe research team also spends a lot of time supporting our committees. SPICe has published 127 briefings, including 46 reports about bills. In addition, the team has produced in the region of 200 non-published briefings for parliamentary committees. SPICe has also commissioned and managed 10 pieces of research from external consultants on behalf of our committees.

Throughout the year the information centre has welcomed many information specialists from a number of libraries. As part of its annual conference in August 2002, the information centre hosted a day-long visit by the parliamentary section of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

Individuals or organisations with expertise in any of the devolved areas covered by the Parliament can register as a potential parliamentary adviser. The link to the Parliament's adviser database can be found on the Parliament's website. To date 335 people or organisations have registered their details on the database.

Visitors and Enquiries

Between May 2002 and April 2003, almost 24,000 people came to the Scottish Parliament Visitor Centre on George IV Bridge. The Debating Chamber remains popular, with more than 30,000 people attending a meeting there or dropping in to view the building. In addition, around 30,000 people visited the Holyrood Building Information Centre. The Public Enquiry Unit handled around 60,000 calls and responded to more than 10,000 detailed enquiries in writing.

The summer of 2002 saw the redesign of room 2 of the Scottish Parliament Visitor Centre, which allowed us to include new elements, such as a tactile map of the Chamber and an interactive quiz. We also held a series of participation events to celebrate the Parliament's temporary move to Aberdeen in May 2002.

Open Day 28 September 2002

Around 4,000 people visited the Chamber, 700 visited Holyrood and around 1,800 attended a

meet the staff' event during the Parliament's third Open Day. The event was held in association with the Cockburn Association's annual Doors Open Day.

Partner Libraries

Partner library staff throughout Scotland continue to keep up to date with parliamentary information sources. In the last year, partner library staff have been trained to use the Parliament's website.

A growing number of 'hits' on the Parliament's website over the past year have been from public libraries. This shows the important role partner library staff have in educating users about how best to find parliamentary information.

Aberdeen Central and Kincorth libraries hosted two memorable events when the Parliament relocated to Aberdeen in May 2002. Both events involved school pupils and local information providers, and were attended by MSPs and Executive ministers.

Recent months have seen the Partner Library Network improve access to its services for people in remote communities. This involved working closely with colleagues in the Parliament's other outreach services - such as the Gaelic service - ensuring that the information and learning needs of Gaelic speakers (and other specialist users) are met.

Gàidhlig / Gaelic

The Parliament's Gaelic office provides a range of services to the Gaelic community, to MSPs and to parliamentary staff. The last year has seen the expansion of the service with the creation of the new posts of Gaelic Information Officer and Gaelic Outreach Officer. In 2002-3 our work included:

- producing a wider range of documents and news releases in Gaelic;
- increasing the Gaelic content on the Parliament website, which now receives around 14,000 hits each month to the Gaelic pages;
- visiting Gaelic communities and groups throughout Scotland.

Education

Since the start of the Parliament, more than 16,000 young people have visited us from across Scotland. This year, 50% were from primary schools, 45% were from secondary schools and 5% came from further education colleges and special groups. They come to learn more about how to participate and make their views heard. They get the chance to see MSPs working in the Chamber and to ask questions about current issues. We continue to support the education community. Last year our achievements included:

- launching "Let's Do Democracy" a 20- minute video showing young people how to get involved in their Parliament;

- publishing our education pack Ð a 16-page document explaining our work;
- holding seminar days for primary and secondary school teachers.

We also added to the range of resources available on our website.

Broadcasting

Our Broadcasting Unit continues to cover proceedings in our main Chamber, committee room 1 and committee room 2. Our pictures are available to the BBC, Scottish Television, Border TV, Grampian TV, Channel 4 and Sky News.

In May 2002 the unit televised the Parliament's historic sitting in Aberdeen. Pictures included the Queen's visit as part of her Jubilee tour and her parliamentary address which was shown live on BBC television.

Our mobile camera unit televises proceedings of committee meetings that take place outside Edinburgh such as the Shetland and Orkney islands and Kirkcudbright in Dumfries and Galloway. These pictures are used by television programmes such as Scottish Television's The Week in Politics.

The multi-channel internet broadcasting service is still the best of its kind in the world. Anyone with access to an online computer can watch or listen to webcasts of the Parliament's proceedings regardless of where they happen. Debates are also available on the

internet for two weeks after they take place. Linked to the internet broadcasting service are our interactive forums. Here, members of the public can express their views to MSPs and other site users on topics debated by committees and in members' business.

The Broadcasting Unit is also responsible for making videos that promote and explain the work and achievements of the Parliament. These can also be viewed online. The latest, Working for You, summarises the work of the Parliament in its first four years.

Cross-Party Groups

Cross-Party Groups (CPGs) are a valuable link between the Parliament and wider society. At the end of the first session there were 49 of these groups registered by the Standards Committee, each providing a dynamic forum for the exchange of ideas and information. The groups cover a wide range of issues from chronic pain to the Scottish contemporary music industry. Some CPGs deal with international issues such as what is happening in Palestine and Cuba.

All existing CPGs will have to re-register with the Standards Committee if they wish to continue in the new session. If you wish to become involved in any of the CPGs, contact details may be found in the CPG Register on the Parliament's website or you can contact the Standards Committee Clerks for further information.

Our place in the world

In its first four years the Parliament has built good international relations. Learning more about how other Parliaments and organisations operate across the world helps members and staff work more effectively.

Strong ties continue to develop with Westminster and other devolved institutions in the United Kingdom. The address to the Parliament during its meeting in Aberdeen in May 2002 by Her Majesty the Queen reflected the Parliament's firmly established place within the constitution. Westminster has adopted parliamentary practices that it has seen working successfully in Scotland. Our membership of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, which brings together all UK institutions, allowed us to debate a range of issues of common concern such as fisheries and tourism.

The Parliament, drawing on the work of the European Committee, continues to contribute to the debate on the future of Europe. The President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox MEP, praised the Scottish Parliament's role in this process when he addressed members in February 2003. MSPs now represent Scottish interests in two key European institutions, the Committee of the Regions and the Council of Europe.

We have developed close relations with the Catalan and Flemish Parliaments. In autumn 2002, we began to explore links with Nordic countries during Scotland in Sweden week. We also held a successful seminar, which we organised with the Nordic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Scottish Executive. Our interest in the enlarged European Union was reflected in discussions between MSPs and Czech and Estonian parliamentarians. We also welcomed study visits from the Bosnian and Slovak Parliaments. Through their work in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, members have strengthened democracy in the world by, for example, observing elections in Kenya. Members also welcomed visitors from across the Commonwealth to events in the Parliament and talked about issues such as young people in society and standards in public life with our Commonwealth partners. Particularly strong links were developed with Canada.

We received a great number of distinguished visitors and high-level delegations. In particular, MSPs were honoured to be addressed by Her Majesty the Queen, EU Commissioner Chris Patten, President of the European Parliament Pat Cox MEP and EU Commissioner Frits Bolkestein. The Parliament was also visited by the Speakers of a number of Parliaments, government ministers and European Union representatives. The graphs indicate the level of interest across the world in our Parliament.

We aim to give as many people as possible the chance to be involved in the work of the Parliament. We do this by opening addresses, seminars and other appropriate events to public participation and by publicising our programme and work on our website.

Holyrood

In 1999, as the Parliament met for the first time in its temporary accommodation on the Mound, an old brewery on the site for the new building was being demolished. Now one of the most modern and exciting projects in the world nears completion in its place at the foot of the historic Royal Mile, facing east to the Palace of Holyrood and south to Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags.

As with any ground-breaking project on this scale it has met with problems. New ways of working have had to be found to translate Enric Miralles' stunning design into a suitable home for Scotland's Parliament, a durable symbol of a modern, forward-looking and ambitious country.

Where possible, Scottish skills and materials are used but the best that Europe and the rest of the world has to offer has also been included. This will be a building for the people of Scotland and considerable effort has gone into ensuring that it will not only be a high quality working environment but also perhaps the most accessible public building in Europe.

Many column inches have been written about the progress of this project and no doubt many more articles will appear before the Parliament moves into its new home. Another picture of public opinion can be seen in the comments made by the more than 80,000 visitors to the site over the last four years: the majority of remarks are extremely positive and encouraging. Overseas visitors frequently suggest that the quality of the architecture is envied across the world. The journey has not been without its problems, but the destination is certain to be a unique and extraordinary building.



Work begins on the Debating Chamber, March 2002

Local newspaper readers from across Scotland gather to see their Voices of Scotland quotes about Scottish identity on display at the site.



Work in progress

Committee Activity

[Fact-finding visits](#) [Table in Pdf format]

[All Civic Participation Events](#) [Table in Pdf format]

[Formal Committee meetings outside Edinburgh](#) [Table in Pdf format]

Partner Libraries

We have set up a network of 80 partner libraries throughout Scotland. There is one in each parliamentary constituency, plus an extra seven - mainly in the Highlands and Islands to reflect the unique geographic and transport problems faced by people there. Partner libraries act as central points in the local communities for information from, and about, the Scottish Parliament.

[Table of Partner Libraries](#) [Pdf Format]
