

The Scottish Women's Convention's
response to the Scottish Parliament's
consultation on:

Inquiry into Public Administration – Effective Scottish Government Decision- Making



February 2023

Premise

The Scottish Parliament is conducting an inquiry into how public administration can be altered across Government, as well as areas which currently provide best practice examples. It has been stated that good public administration enables Government's to function in a more effective way, ultimately working for the general public. Therefore, it is vital that the Scottish Government consider how they can change and create new ways of working.

This particular consultation aims to understand the current policy decision-making process used by the Scottish Government, while also hoping to identify the skills and key principles necessary to support an effective government decision-making process.

After the Scottish Parliament has received all consultation responses, they shall consider alterations that are required and rectify their plan accordingly – incorporating suggestions made.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Our Response

What are key methodologies, processes and principles that should underpin an effective decision-making process in Government?

Governments should attempt to be ever-changing and dynamic in their processes, with the ultimate goal being a governance structure that works for all peoples. By embracing feminist techniques, the Scottish Government can incorporate lived experience into policy construction, enabling democratic participation while combining the expertise of stakeholders and specialists. Third sector organisations have a long history of carrying out participatory knowledge production, and as such, it would be recommended that the Scottish Government include the charitable sector in future methodology development. Furthermore, participatory processes must be underlined by feminist, intersectional practice, which attempt to remove pre-existing power dynamics that underpin traditional decision-making processes. By incorporating intersectionality at top-level government, it would also allow for a variance of voices to be heard, creating policy that can challenge social inequality.

- “The ministers...are put into these little boxes, and they have one mission to work on, but instead they should have a collaborative approach, with a gendered lens which would create a more feminist style of working.”
- “I think the benefit of the feminist approach is that it does create a space that’s really welcoming...It’s very sort of equal, it’s a space for everyone, and that includes ethnic minorities and people with disabilities”

What are the capabilities and skills necessary for civil servants to support effective decision-making, and in what ways could these be developed further?

Civil servants are an essential element of the decision making process, and as such must be well supported to carry out their duties. This includes maintaining high levels of training, whereby they can learn new skills, and hone existing ones: particularly in data collection techniques. Civil servants must be well-versed in quantitative and qualitative data analysis and collection, and by developing collaborative processes, civil servants can be at the forefront of participatory action research design. In addition, this would be aided through good communication with stakeholders.

It would also be useful, if civil servants with particular specialities were placed in relevant departments – for example, an individual with a background in healthcare could assist with healthcare policy. This would allow civil servants to effectively implement policy, while utilising their hard-earned skills and knowledge.

What are the behaviours and cultures that promote effective decision-making?

If the Scottish Government were to implement feminist cultures across departments, a state of empowerment would be created. By inspiring all those involved in decision making processes, the Government could work towards dismantling patriarchal governance which is focused on top-down, authoritarian practices. Empowerment also works to reduce power dynamics that prevent marginalised groups to enter the political spectrum, allowing different voices to be heard.

What is best practice in relation to what information is recorded, by whom and how should it be used to support effective decision-making?

To effectively support decision-making, it is imperative that the Scottish Government actively collect disaggregated data across departments. This will allow minority group data to be gathered, providing further insight into how these groups interact with public services. By understanding this, the Scottish Government can become informed on any potential barriers and know where to allocate support. The data collected could then be effectively distributed across departments, encouraging further collaboration across Scottish Government divisions. This collaborative approach is key with regards to properly implementing intersectional practice, as it would allow data to be shared and worked upon cooperatively.

It is also key that data collected aligns with GDPR processes, while also being transparent where possible. Women have explained to us that they currently feel distanced from government decision-making and are unsure where their information goes. By increasing transparency around government outcomes, relations with stakeholders could be improved.

- “A lot of the time policies are just filled with gobbledegook, and they’re not relevant to what you actually want to know.”

What does effective decision-making by the Scottish Government ‘look like’ and how should it learn from what has worked well and not so well? Please share any best practice examples.

Recent legislation to reduce period poverty across Scotland - Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill – has been an effective and efficient policy, that shows collaboration and dynamism at its best. A clear issue was identified, and through lobbying and the implementation of a 2018 pilot project in Aberdeen, policy was created to actively reduce poverty in Scotland. It was initially centred around foodbanks, however, was quickly expanded to include educational establishments. There has also been take-up across third party organisations, with the Bill being viewed as a success story of good parliamentary business. Therefore, lessons can be learned from this Bill, with the collaboration across Parliament allowing for its progress. There is also scope to continue to expand and develop, which aligns well with the fluidity that must be at the heart of government policy.

To what extent should there be similarities or differences in the process for decision-making across the Scottish Government?

Collaboration with the Scottish populace should be consistent, with lived experience being at the centre of policy creation. This can be ensured through regular consultation, while including stakeholder groups throughout the policy process. Furthermore, by maintaining a similar approach across Government, clarity can be provided around how decision-making occurs.

How can decisions by the Scottish Government be more effectively communicated with stakeholders?

Social media provides the Scottish Government with a real opportunity to establish decision-making to a wider range of people, while also engaging in a modern and innovative way. As discussed above, governments have to continuously develop their methods and activity to ensure that they are remaining dynamic and incorporating new approaches into policy development. Furthermore, despite the Scottish Government website being easily negotiable and providing clear information, improvements can always be made.

In addition, the Scottish Government has good practice internally, as evidenced by many Lived Experience Panels, for example the Mental Health Equalities and Human Rights Forum (MHEHRF). By holding these forum events, stakeholders, and those directly affected, have the opportunity to influence policy, while also receiving feedback from Government. This practice increases transparency and works to further a collaborative approach. By ensuring that more directorates of government had similar forums, lived experience will become embedded in government policy.

Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- By incorporating feminist practice across departments, the Scottish Government can ensure that all voices are heard and listened to.
- Disaggregated data should be collected as standard across Scottish decision-making bodies, to fully understand the experiences of minority groups.
- Lived experience should be at the heart of decision-making processes, and as such lived experience forums should be utilised to a higher degree.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament's consultation on **Inquiry into Public Administration – Effective Decision-Making**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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