



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Conveners Group

Martin Whitfield MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public
Appointments Committee

Liam McArthur MSP
Chair of Conveners Group
The Scottish Parliament

By email only

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Dear Martin

The Conveners Group had a good discussion at its meeting on 25 May regarding your Committee's inquiry on future practices and procedures.

I have provided a summary of our discussion to contribute to your inquiry, concentrating on issues that relate to committees' ability to perform their key role in the work of Parliament.

- There was a general view that meetings were easier to conduct when both members and witnesses were in person. That said, it was noted that the hybrid system has enabled committees to hear from a wider range of people (including a greater geographic spread of witnesses across Scotland) and may be beneficial in addressing issues around inequality of access. It also has practical advantages in terms of enabling committees to be able to hear from witnesses at shorter notice.
- However, Conveners were also aware of the need to balance this flexible way of working in a manner consistent with the critical role that committees play in supporting scrutiny and accountability to Parliament.
- Therefore, a distinction may need to be drawn between committees in 'information-gathering' mode and those instances where committees are conducting parliamentary business which is either more politically contentious or where witnesses are being held to account. Where information is being gathered, the general view is that hybrid proceedings can work well. In contrast, examples of where in-person meetings were generally thought to be preferable include:
 - Stage 2 proceedings
 - Consideration of draft committee reports
 - Evidence-taking where a witness is being held to account

- Ministerial participation at committee meetings
- Individual Conveners had their own perspectives and it was noted that individual committees are adopting different approaches which points to any new system providing for a degree of flexibility.
- A lack of continuity of membership is a barrier to any committee being able to operate effectively. The Group agreed a hybrid model provided flexibility, enabling committee members to still attend if they are unable to travel to Holyrood. The Group highlighted this would help ensure consistency of committee membership. Continuity of membership – albeit with some Members at Holyrood and participating virtually – is seen as being preferable to the use of (in-person) substitutes.
- Conveners Group supports the production of guidance to accompany the formalisation of long-term hybrid capability for committees. This guidance will be an important operational framework to ensure broad consistency across committees, recognising the role of individual Conveners to manage business as befits their own committees' needs and circumstances.
- This guidance should cover procedure and practical application. For example, the guidance should set out that witnesses who wish to seek to participate remotely must ensure that they have access to a strong and reliable internet connection.

Thank you for seeking the views of the Conveners Group, and once you have reported, it would be very helpful for you to provide an update to the Group on the next steps.

Yours sincerely

Liam McArthur MSP
Chair, Conveners Group