

**POVERTY AND
INEQUALITY**
COMMISSION

Embedding Participation in the Poverty and Inequality Commission: learning from the first iteration of the Commission's Experts by Experience Panel

December 2023

Contents

1. Summary	3
1.1 Visual Summary of Learning from the Panel	
1.2 Key Learning from the Panel	
2. Introduction	12
3. Embedding Participation in the work of the Commission	14
3.1 The Commission's Approach to Embedding Participation	
3.2 The Panel – An Overview	
3.3 Objectives of the Panel	
4. Process and design	16
4.1 Principles Underpinning the Approach	
4.2 Resourcing the Commission's Participation Work	
4.3 Recruitment	
4.4 Composition of the Panel	
4.5 Support for Panel members	
4.6 Activities and Outputs	
4.7 Types of Participation	
4.8 Methods Used	
5. The Context	22
6. Learning from the first iteration of the Panel	23
7. Reflections and Learning on Objective 1: The Commission effectively recruits a diverse group of Panel members from across Scotland	25
8. Reflections and Learning on Objective 2: The Commission effectively organises the Panel and builds the capacity of Panel members to contribute	27
9. Reflections and Learning on Objective 3: The Commission takes an accessible and intersectional approach to supporting the Panel, being considerate of differences and overlapping inequalities	31
10. Reflections and Learning on Objective 4: The Panel are partners in the Commission's work, and this is recognised by both	34
11. Reflections and Learning on Objective 5: The Panel influences policy on poverty and inequality in Scotland	43
12. Reflections and Learning on Objective 6: Relationships are built between the Commission and organisations and community groups to hear from people with lived experience	47
13. Conclusion	48

1 Summary

About this report

This report presents details of and learning from the Poverty and Inequality Commission's approach to embedding the participation of 'experts by experience' – people with lived experience of poverty and inequality – in its work.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission ('the Commission'), was established on 1 July 2019. It is an advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB) which provides independent advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality. The three strands of the Commission's work can be categorised as advice, scrutiny and advocacy. The Commission is committed to involving 'experts by experience' in its work. As part of its [Strategic Plan 2020-2023](#), the Commission's over-arching strategic priority was to "Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress."

In developing an approach to fulfil this priority the Commission funded [the Poverty Alliance](#) and the [Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit](#) (SPIRU) to co-produce guidance with a group of experts by experience.

In August 2021, based on this guidance, the Commission established an Experts by Experience Panel ('the Panel') – made up of 19 people from across Scotland with lived experience of poverty and inequality. The Commission's recruitment process was designed to ensure the Panel was made up of experts by experience who were:

- from across Scotland, based in cities, towns and rural areas.
- diverse in terms of their identity and their experiences of poverty and inequality.
- from [groups most likely to experience poverty in Scotland](#).

The Panel was developed to embed participation in the work of the Commission and to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty were engaged in all aspects of the Commission's work. The Panel ran for almost two years, until June 2023, with activities conducted largely online, alongside some hybrid meetings and in-person events.

This learning report details the purpose, process and context of the Commission's approach in developing and working with the Panel. We hope that the learning will improve participation work within the Commission and also prove useful for others engaged in, or seeking to develop, participatory processes with experts by experience.

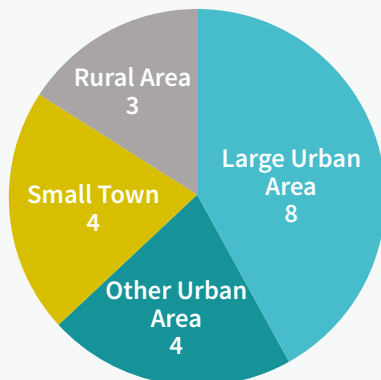
Outlined below is a visual representation of some learning from the process and written summaries of the key learning categorised under the objectives that it set for this work.

1.1 Experts by Experience Panel at a Glance

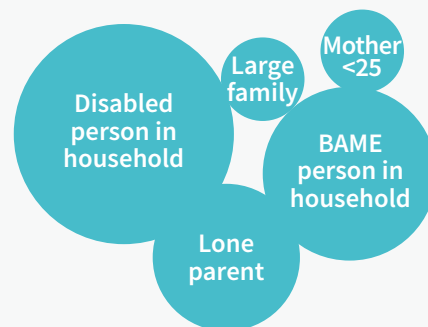
Panel members



Panel members came from 7 of Scotland's 8 parliamentary electoral regions. There were no Panel members from the West Scotland region.



Panel members came from a mix of Large Urban Areas (population 125,000+), Other Urban Areas (10,000 - 124,999), Small Towns (3,000 to 9,999), and Rural Areas (less than 3,000).



The Panel included membership from household types at higher risk of poverty.



84%
participated
throughout

3 of the original 19 Panel members stood down after taking up full time employment, higher education, or for health reasons.

Panel activities



Published outputs

Panel members contributed to 14 of the Commission's published outputs including advice and scrutiny to Scottish Government, reports, responses to consultations & calls for evidence.



Meetings

There were 27 core Panel meetings during the process, as well as further meetings of subgroups of the Panel and Commissioners, and meetings with Scottish Government and other stakeholders.



Events

Panel members presented at 3 events including the Commission's Public Meeting 2022, the 2022 Conference of the Scottish Leaders Forum and the First Minister's Anti-Poverty Summit (2023).

Learning from Panel Feedback

Recruitment

100%

In 2022, all Panel members surveyed agreed that they were satisfied with the recruitment process.

100%

In 2022, all Commissioners surveyed agreed the recruitment process ensured the Panel included people from a range of backgrounds.

Organising the Panel

100%

In 2022 and 2023, all Panel members surveyed agreed that they were happy with how Panel meetings were facilitated.

Panel Views on the Panel - Commissioner Relationship

Understanding of Poverty and Inequality



14 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that their understanding of poverty and inequality in Scotland increased as a result of taking part in the Panel. 1 neither agreed nor disagreed.



10 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that their understanding of poverty and inequality in Scotland increased as a result of taking part in the Panel. 1 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Confidence in Sharing Views and Experience



13 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 felt more confident about sharing their views, ideas and experiences about poverty and inequality in Scotland. 1 neither agreed nor disagreed. 1 disagreed.



9 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 felt more confident about sharing their views, ideas and experiences about poverty and inequality in Scotland. 2 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Accessibility of Panel Activities

Accessibility of Information Provided



14 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that the information provided before Panel meetings was accessible to them. 1 Panel member neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support for Participation



14 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that the Commission staff provided them with the support they needed to take part in Panel activities. 1 said that question did not apply.



11 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that that Commission staff provided them with the support they needed to take part in Panel activities.

Space for Participation



12 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed everybody on the Panel gets a chance to contribute during discussions on a topic. 3 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Commissioner Views on the Panel - Commissioner Relationship

More Effective Thinking about Poverty and Inequality



8 of 8 Commissioners surveyed in 2022 agreed that the Commission as a whole thinks about issues more effectively because of the Panel.

Panel Views Included in Commission Advice and Scrutiny



8 of 8 Commissioners surveyed in 2022 agreed that the views of the Panel are included by the Commission in the advice and scrutiny it provides to the Scottish Government.

Opportunities to Work Together



4 of 8 Commissioners surveyed in 2022 disagreed that the Panel and the Commission get enough opportunities to work together on issues. 3 agreed and 1 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Panel Views on the Panel - Commissioner Relationship

Opportunities to Work Together



9 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that they get enough opportunities to speak directly to Commissioners. 5 neither agreed nor disagreed. 1 disagreed.



7 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that they get enough opportunities to speak directly to Commissioners. 3 neither agreed nor disagreed. 1 disagreed.

Opportunities to Set Agenda



9 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that the Panel gets enough opportunities to decide what it works on. 5 neither agreed nor disagreed. 1 disagreed.



7 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that the Panel gets enough opportunities to decide what it works on. 3 neither agreed nor disagreed. 1 disagreed.

Panel Views Included in Commission's Advice and Scrutiny



12 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that the views of the Panel were included in the Commission's advice and scrutiny it provides to the Scottish Government. 3 were not sure.



10 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that the views of the Panel were included in the Commission's advice and Scrutiny it provides to the Scottish Government. 1 member was not sure.

Impact on Policy in Scotland

Impact on Scottish Government Decisions (Panel member views)



10 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that taking part in the Panel lets them influence Scottish Government decisions on poverty and inequality. 3 were not sure. 2 disagreed.



6 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that taking part in the Panel lets them influence Scottish Government decisions on poverty and inequality. 3 were not sure. 1 disagreed. 1 did not respond.

Impact on Scottish Government Decisions (Commissioner views)



4 of 8 Commissioners surveyed in 2022 agreed that the Panel influences decisions on poverty and inequality that the Scottish Government is taking. 4 were not sure.

Opportunities to Share Views with Decision-makers



13 of 15 Panel members surveyed in 2022 agreed that the Panel gives them the opportunity to share their ideas and experience with decision-makers. 1 disagreed. 1 neither agreed nor disagreed.



7 of 11 Panel members surveyed in 2023 agreed that the Panel gives them the opportunity to share their ideas and experience with decision-makers. 4 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Source of data: This summary uses administrative data held by the Commission on the panel (for demographic information and activities), and the results of confidential surveys conducted with the Panel and Commissioners in June 2022, and repeated again with the Panel in May/June 2023. Not all questions were asked in all surveys. Full results are available on the Commission's website.

1.2 Summary of Key Learning from the Panel

Key Learning - Objective 1: Recruitment

An examination of survey data and the make-up of the Panel demonstrates that the recruitment objectives were met, resulting in positive feedback on the process and a diverse range of individuals being recruited. There are, however, still areas of improvement and learning.

Firstly, there was overrepresentation and underrepresentation of people with certain identities and experiences. While this was not necessarily a problem in the first iteration of the Panel, it is something that the Commission will consider when designing future recruitment exercises.

Secondly, the Commission's recruitment materials explained that 'when we say experts by experience, we mean people who have lived experience of poverty and inequality'. It did not specify further what it meant by lived experience. This is something that could be clarified for the purposes of recruitment processes going forward.

Key Learning - Objective 2: Organising the Panel, providing information, and building the capacity of Panel members

Overall, feedback demonstrates that the Commission's approach to organising activities, providing information, and facilitation worked well for most Panel members. Feedback from, and observation of, Panel members demonstrated increased Panel member capacity in terms of confidence, skills and knowledge. Most members also reported feeling supported to share their experiences and to have meaningful discussions about how to reduce poverty and inequality. There are several areas of learning that the Commission will consider moving forward.

Understanding and Expectations

Most members reported that information provided helped them understand the roles of the Commission and the Panel. However, other feedback suggests that the motivations of some Panel members for participating – the desire to change Scottish Government (hereinafter 'SG') policy in order to reduce poverty – were outwith the powers of the Commission as an advisory body. The Commission will work to better contextualise the roles of the Panel and the Commission, ensuring understanding from the outset.

Furthermore, feedback highlighted both the positive and, occasionally, negative impact that involvement in the Panel had on members, particularly relating to not feeling 'heard' within the process at the level of a meeting or policy. Going forward more time will be spent to check in with all Panel members individually at regular intervals, seeking to identify issues with disillusionment, exclusion or disengagement that can be more difficult to pick up in online spaces.

Online Participation

Feedback on the online nature of Panel activities was largely positive but running most Panel activities online had both advantages and disadvantages. To address some of the disadvantages, the Commission will continue to plan some in-person/hybrid meetings and have spaces for social interactions, ensure Panel members can continue to contribute between Panel meetings, carry out more regular individual check-ins with Panel, and explore how it can better use engagement tools that cater to different communication preferences.

Relevance of Work to Individual Panel Members

Some Panel members felt excluded in discussion or activities where they did not, or felt that they did not, have experience of an issue. The Commission attempted to provide information to ensure that Panel members, in as far as is possible, were able to contribute to all activities. However, given the diversity of experiences of poverty amongst Panel members, and breadth of issues on which the Commission engages the Panel, it will never be possible to ensure that every Panel member has significant direct experience of every issue being discussed.

The Commission will reflect on how the Panel's engagement can build from activities on issues that clearly and directly affect all Panel members. Panel members could opt in or out of many Panel activities and members reported that this approach worked well. However, with the Commission's statutory focus on child poverty, it is important that it demonstrates the connections between child poverty and poverty more widely, and how the experiences of Panel members who do not have children can also be used in the development of the Commission's advice and scrutiny.

Key Learning - Objective 3: The Commission takes an accessible and intersectional approach to supporting the Panel, being considerate of differences and overlapping inequalities

Panel members provided positive feedback regarding the Commission's approach to creating an accessible, safe and supportive environment. They appreciated briefings and information that was provided in advance, and the efforts made to ensure accessibility and inclusion within the Panel. There are some areas of learning that the Commission will take forward.

Supporting participation in a way that meets multiple needs and preferences

The Commission invested a substantial degree of time in understanding Panel members' needs, preferences and access requirements, to develop a sound basis upon which to plan Panel resources and activities. In response to feedback, the Commission will reflect on some adjustments that could be made to Panel meetings including changing meeting schedules and timings, tighter facilitation to ensure that everyone is heard, more in-person/hybrid meetings and more working groups.

In attempting to design activities and materials that were accessible to all Panel members, the Commission took an approach that limited the use of some visual or creative methods to participation and group facilitation, and focussed largely on discussion or text-based approaches. The Commission did use more creative and visual approaches in asynchronous activities (where members are completing at their own pace, in their own time) but these were not usually integrated into synchronous Panel activities where members were completing activities together. This had the unintended effect of emphasising contributions of Panel members who were most adept and articulate in verbal or written discussion. Going forward, the Commission will consider how it can blend approaches to allow Panel members who have different communication preferences and strengths to better participate.

Intersectionality and recognising overlapping inequalities

The Commission attempted to take an intersectional approach to the recruitment of the Panel, by gathering appropriate data on multiple diversity characteristics and attempting to balance the Panel membership not only based on individual demographic factors, but on combinations thereof. Building on research on intersectionality conducted for the Commission by IPPR Scotland, the Commission organised two Panel sessions on intersectionality. Feedback from the sessions from Panel members indicated that this was seen as useful for future work.

As outlined in the [Commission's Intersectionality Strategy](#), in establishing the next Experts by Experience Panel and working with other experts by experience, the Commission will take an intersectional approach, continuing to work towards redistributing power.

Key Learning - Objective 4: The partnership between the Commission and the Panel

Panel members and Commissioners generally agreed that the Commission listens to and values the contributions of the Panel. However, many Panel members and Commissioners wanted more opportunities for direct engagement. Panel members and Commissioners were also largely satisfied with the impact of the Panel on the Commission's advice, scrutiny and other work; the integration of Panel members in discussions with SG; and the impact of the process on Panel members. Outlined below are some key areas of learning that the Commission will work on.

Direct engagement

Particularly in the early phase of the Panel, some members fed back that they wanted more opportunities to work with Commissioners, including more direct contact with and visibility from the Commission members. Some commissioners also expressed an interest in more joint work with the Panel. The Panel primarily met independently of the Commission, supported by the Commission secretariat. The decision to have the Panel to meet separately to the Commission initially with only periodic engagement with the full Commission was taken in order to allow Panel members time and space to become familiar with each other and the project, and to get comfortable in their understanding of issues and finding their voice to express them. This approach had both advantages and disadvantages.

On the positive side, it did appear to have the intended effect of allowing the Panel to become comfortable with each other and the project. However, it did also set up a dynamic where the Panel and Commission were somewhat separate – often operating in parallel, but without enough opportunities for direct engagement.

Despite the Commission's attempts to increase engagement between the Panel and Commissioners as time went on, the views of Panel members on the amount of time spent with Commissioners remained mixed until end of the first Panel in June 2023. The Commission will consider how it can better embed joint work between Panel members and Commissioners, while maintaining space and for work carried out independently or in parallel.

Perceptions of the Panel – Commission Relationship

Feedback demonstrated the varying perceptions on the nature of the Panel – Commission relationship, with some viewing it as a partnership of equals, some as a reciprocal working relationship and some as more of a “symbolic” relationship (i.e., something short of a true partnership). The varying types of engagement at different times, and the varying experiences that Panel members and Commissioners had as a result of the activities they took part in, could account for some of this. However, the Commission will consider how it can better ensure that all Panel members feel they are part of a shared project.

Feedback from both Panel members and Commissioners clearly highlights areas where further development of the relationship is needed. Both groups were interested in the Commission and the Panel having more, and more meaningful, opportunities for direct engagement, and increased scope for the Panel and the Commission to work together on setting and achieving shared priorities.

In an analysis of the Commission's outputs the Panel is visible with both the group and individuals being cited widely. However, in the future the Commission could improve how it illustrates how the work with the Panel shapes these outputs and how learning from members' ‘lived experience’ knowledge has been integrated.

Further areas for the Commission to consider are how the Panel can be more involved in co-designing the process, co-designing and delivering Commission activities and in co-designing and / or co-authoring outputs, including on the evaluation of the process.

Agenda-setting

Feedback highlighted tensions over who sets the agenda for the Panel's work and for the Commission's work. Whilst the Commission sought to increasingly involve the Panel in developing the Commission's work plan and in shaping its own activities, views of Panel members regarding whether they wanted more or less control over agenda-setting remained mixed. Whilst some Panel members sought greater freedom to set the agenda of the Panel and the Commission, others highlighted a desire for greater direction from the Commission to ensure the greatest impact.

As an advisory public body, the Commission's statutory duties require that it completes certain activities, and it wants to engage experts by experience in these. Furthermore, there are many issues that are outwith the remit of the Commission and the SG, often issues that are reserved to the UK Government. Going forward, the Commission will reconsider whether and how the Panel might have more freedom to decide on its work and influence the Commission's work programme, even if the things that it identifies are ones where the Commission has limited opportunities to influence.

Scope for discussion

Connected to this were concerns raised by some Panel members that discussions on issues that were outwith the remit of the Commission or the SG could feel constrained in ways that led to some members to feeling censored or to self-censoring. Some feedback suggested that content that was seen to be too political, challenging or radical was ignored or under-developed.

To promote creative and supportive participation, the Commission will consider how it can create time and space for Panel members to share experiences, ideas and solutions that may go beyond the Commission's statutory duties. Equally, however, the time limitations and statutory function of the body of which the Panel is a part mean this space for discussion and thinking beyond the remit of the Commission cannot be the sole focus and this will require careful balancing of time and priorities.

Clarity on which level of participation an activity sits

Given the breadth and types of activities in which Panel members participated, evidence demonstrated that there were times that some Panel members were unsure about the purpose of a particular activity, and the 'level' of participation a certain activity sat at. While the Commission tried to ensure that all background information outlined the purpose of Panel activities, feedback suggests there is scope for making this clearer.

Key Learning - Objective 5: The impact the Panel has had on poverty and inequality policy in Scotland

As part of the Commission, Panel members enjoyed significant opportunities (when compared with other similar groups that the Commission is aware of) for contact time with Ministers and to influence SG policy development and delivery. Feedback from Panel members, Commissioners and SG regarding the Panel's impact was largely positive. Most Panel members valued contact with Ministers and felt the visibility and proximity to SG meant there was potential for Panel members to influence policy. Based on feedback from Panel members, Commissioners and SG officials, there is scope for improvement.

Uncertainty around impact

SG officials who work on issues closest to the Commission's remit noted that the work of the Panel has been very visible to the SG within their direct area of work. They recognised occasions when Panel members had participated in meetings, including with Ministers. Officials said that, although the inclusion of Panel content in itself is unlikely to directly result in Ministers taking particular decisions, their perspectives and insights have nevertheless been valuable. While many Panel members were optimistic about the influence the Panel had had on decisions that Ministers make, views were mixed overall. This potentially relates to the complexity of the policy landscape on these topics, and the many necessary steps between Panel input and where decisions are made.

This is a common challenge with indirect participatory processes which function to provide information and recommendations to policy and decision-makers, in that decisions taken may or may not be shaped by the participatory process and, even where they are, they will often be shaped by many other factors.

Situating the Panel's work in context and providing feedback

A potential negative consequence of failing to explain adequately how engagement with experts by experience fits into the wider policy environment is for cynicism and/or disengagement to develop. Given that it is rarely possible – particularly in the short term – to point Panel members to clear policy “wins”, a transparent approach emphasising realism about the nature and scope of the Panel's impact in a complex policy system is one that the Commission will emphasise going forward.

Panel members said they would like clearer responses from SG to Panel contributions. Understanding the journey from Panel contributions to a final SG policy decision or action appeared difficult/opaque to Panel members. Some felt there should be a more formal feedback loop for how the SG responded to Panel input, and suggested a 'You said, we did' type of response mechanism.

In order to address some of the issues above, the Commission sought to consistently report back to the Panel to close the “feedback loop” on the recommendations it made (for example, by providing written and verbal updates at each Panel meeting and when the Commission had been made aware of a relevant development on an issue the Panel have commented on). The Commission also requested responses from SG policy teams on specific questions on behalf of Panel members and reported back the response to them for their consideration.

However, it is clear that more must be done by the Commission to ensure that Panel members feel they understand where their work and recommendations sit within the wider policy context. This could take the form of “big picture” reviews with Panel members at regular intervals to pull together responses and feedback on impact.

Key Learning - Objective 6: Working with Other Experts by Experience

The Commission’s ambition to build relationships with community groups, organisations and other experts by experience recognised the limitations of the Panel on account of its size, composition and capacity; the nature of the Panel was such that it could never include lived experience perspectives and knowledge on all issues that the Commission would be working on.

Panel members were positive about opportunities to engage with other experts by experience and practitioners. The Commission will explore options for supporting the Panel to engage with, inform and learn from and/or collaborate with other experts by experience, particularly those with experiences and knowledge that is not reflected on the Panel.

2 Introduction

In August 2021, the Poverty and Inequality Commission (hereinafter ‘the Commission’) established an Experts by Experience Panel made up of 19 people from across Scotland with lived experience of poverty. The Panel was developed to embed participation in the work of the Commission and to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty were engaged in all aspects of the Commission’s work. The Panel ran for almost two years, until June 2023.

This learning report details the purpose, process and context of the Commission’s approach in developing and working with the Panel. The details of practicalities and learning outlined in this report are contextualised and so will primarily serve the purpose of improving participation work within the context of the Commission. However, we hope that much of the learning will prove useful for practitioners, policymakers and decision-makers who are engaged in, or seeking to develop, participatory processes with experts by experience.

The report details:

- The Commission’s objectives in establishing the Panel.
- The context in which the Panel was established and embedded.
- The Commission’s approach to embedding the participation of the Panel in its work, including principles, design, methods and approach to learning.
- Details of the activities that the Panel took part in.
- The impact of the Panel on Panel members, the Commission and Scottish Government.
- Reflections on and key learning from the Commission’s work with the Panel.

2.1 The Commission

The [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) sets out statutory requirements for the Commission on child poverty, including to provide advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on Scotland’s [statutory child poverty targets](#).

The Commission was established on 1 July 2019. It is an advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB) which provides independent advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality.

The Commission’s role is to:

- Advise Scottish Ministers on any matter relating to poverty or inequality in Scotland, including the impact of policies and the use of resources in reducing poverty and inequality.
- Monitor progress in reducing poverty and inequality in Scotland.
- Promote the reduction of poverty and inequality in Scotland.

We sometimes call these three different types of work that we do **advice**, **scrutiny** and **advocacy**.

The Commission has specific responsibilities in relation to child poverty where it:

- Provides advice to Ministers on Child Poverty Delivery Plans.
- Comments on annual progress towards the child poverty targets and what further progress is needed to meet the targets.

The Commission responds to requests for advice from Scottish Ministers, but also develops its own work programme to scrutinise progress and to promote the importance of particular issues in reducing poverty and inequality.

2.2 Prioritising Lived Experience

As part of its [Strategic Plan 2020-2023](#), the Commission has an over-arching strategic priority to:

“Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress.”

In 2020, in order to develop an approach to involving ‘experts by experience’ – people with lived experience of poverty – in its work, the Commission funded [the Poverty Alliance](#) and the [Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit](#) (SPIRU) to co-produce guidance with a group of experts by experience.

[This guidance](#) set out a range of principles, recommendations and practical steps that the Commission could take forward to meaningfully engage experts by experience in its work. It made clear that to properly and meaningfully engage people with lived experience takes considerable time, effort and resource.

3 Embedding Participation in the work of the Commission

3.1 The Commission's Approach to Embedding Participation

The Poverty Alliance/SPIRU guidance included five key options for engaging experts by experience in the Commission's work. One of these options was the development of a panel of experts by experience, 'a long-term, standing group of people with lived experience of poverty sitting alongside Commission members and involved in all aspects of the Commission's work.' The Commission decided that this option aligned best with its strategic priority.

In August 2021, thanks to funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Commission established the Panel, the purpose of which was to shape and inform all three strands of the Commission's work - advice, scrutiny and advocacy.

3.2 The Panel – An Overview

The Panel ran from August 2021 to June 2023.

The Panel was made up of experts by experience who were:

- from across Scotland, based in cities, towns and rural areas.
- diverse in terms of their identity and their experiences of poverty and inequality.
- from [groups most likely to experience poverty in Scotland](#).

Panel members met online once per month and worked together to identify issues, and to develop advice and scrutiny around poverty and inequality. Members met more frequently to work on urgent or complex issues. Panel members worked together to develop Terms of Reference and a Group Agreement. The Terms of Reference document outlined the purpose of the Panel, the details of membership, the roles of Panel members and the Commission, and ways of working. The Group Agreement outlined how Panel members, members of the Secretariat and Commissioners work together in a group context.

The whole Commission and the Panel met three times, once online and twice in a hybrid meeting. Individual or small groups of Commissioners also attended Panel meetings and worked alongside small groups of Panel members to develop responses; to take part in consultations, meetings and events; and as part of the short life tax working group.

Panel members also met with Scottish Ministers and officials to share their views directly. In addition to core Panel meetings and activities, some Panel members took part in additional activities, further details on which are outlined in section 4.6.

The process was designed, and adapted on an ongoing basis, to meet the access requirements of Panel members. In addition to the support provided to the whole group, Panel members received one to one support by phone and email.

During the course of the Panel's work, 3 of the original 19 Panel members resigned from the Panel for reasons related to availability (on the grounds of starting employment and education) and for health reasons. The remaining 16 Panel members all continued to actively participate until the end of the process.

3.3 Objectives of the Panel

3.3.1 Strategic Objectives

The Commission's Strategic Plan outlined the following objectives in relation to the Panel and its wider work with experts by experience.

- Our advice and scrutiny reflect the views and experiences of experts by experience, and this leads to action by Scottish Government (hereinafter SG).
- Experts by experience are established as credible, valued participants in discussions with SG and other decision makers.
- Experts by experience tell us that they feel valued and that their work with the Commission has been worthwhile and had an impact.

Indicators for success outlined in the Strategic Plan were as follows:

- We can clearly see the influence they are having over the Commission's work.
- Both core Panel members and Commission members feel that the collaboration is challenging them and making change happen.

In addition to these strategic objectives were those outlined in the Commission funding award from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Panel's Terms of Reference. We have combined these into six key objectives and have organised this learning report to detail reflections and learning on each of the six areas.

3.3.2 Wider Objectives

Project outcome for the purposes of this report	Source
Objective 1: The Commission effectively recruits a diverse group of Panel members.	Commission Strategic Plan
Objective 2: The Commission effectively organises the Panel and builds the capacity of Panel members to contribute.	Panel terms of reference
Objective 3: The Commission takes an accessible and intersectional approach to support the Panel, being considerate of differences and overlapping inequalities.	Commission Strategic Plan Panel terms of reference
Objective 4: The Panel are partners in the Commission's work, and this is recognised by both.	Commission Strategic Plan JRF funding award Panel terms of reference
Objective 5: The Panel influences policy on poverty and inequality in Scotland.	Commission Strategic Plan Panel terms of reference
Objective 6: Relationships are built between the Commission and organisations and community groups to hear from people with lived experience.	Commission Strategic plan JRF funding award

4 Process and design

In this section we will outline how the Commission established the Panel, how the Panel functioned and the work the Panel did.

4.1 Principles underpinning the approach

The approach the Commission took to designing the Panel was underpinned by the [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) which set out the key good practice principles for effective community engagement.

- **Inclusion:** We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement.
- **Support:** We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.
- **Planning:** There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.
- **Working Together:** We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.
- **Methods:** We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.
- **Communication:** We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.
- **Impact:** We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.

Alongside these, the Commission was guided by the principles below that were developed for the aforementioned guidance from the Poverty Alliance and SPIRU.

- **Taking a person-centred approach:** experts by experience should be supported to engage by being provided with varied, flexible opportunities to take part. Providing a range of support to individuals to prevent any barriers to their engagement (e.g. around accessibility, childcare, digital access) and to fulfilling their role (e.g. training) is crucial.
- **Experts by experience should be fully informed:** experts by experience should be provided with transparent information on how the work they have carried out for the Commission has been utilised and should be kept informed of impacts and opportunities to be part of influencing processes.
- **Relationships first:** trusting relationships need to be built between the Commission and experts by experience from the outset. Experts by experience should have a key contact within the Commission who acts as a support person and facilitator. Relationships between experts by experience should also be fostered.
- **People first:** The Commission should ensure that in all aspects of their work, experts by experience are treated as people first and foremost rather than in relation to their role and experience of living in poverty. Individuals involved should always be able to refer to themselves in any way that they choose and fully understand that sharing of personal experiences is voluntary and not a requirement of being involved.
- **Recognition:** unpaid work for the Commission must be recognised and valued. Experts by experience should gain from their involvement and have opportunities for one-to-one reviews to reflect on their experience of being involved.

4.2 Resourcing the Commission's Participation Work

The Commission received £45,000 from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to trial its approach with embedding the participation of experts by experience in a public body. It used this funding in combination with its core funding from the SG in order to resource the approach. From financial year 2022-2023 the Commission received an additional £27,000 from SG to support the Panel on an ongoing basis.

In June 2021, the Commission appointed a Senior Participation Officer to develop and lead on the Commission's approach with the Panel. While the Senior Participation Officer led on the work, all members of secretariat to the Commission, the Secretariat Manager, Analytical Manager and Secretariat Administrator, were involved in embedding and supporting the approach.

In addition to staff costs, other significant costs for establishing and supporting the Panel included those for Panel members expenses (e.g. childcare, travel and accommodation), in-person events, translation, digital devices, and communication and engagement tools.

In order to recognise and value the expertise that experts by experience bring to the Commission, and to acknowledge their contribution to the Commission's work, the Commission explored different approaches to thanking people for their participation. In light of advice and research into the practicalities of different options, the Commission decided to offer vouchers for a retailer of each Panel member's choosing as a thank-you for participation in the project. The Commission developed guidance on how and when vouchers and expenses would be covered.

4.3 Recruitment

Between June and August 2021, the Commission developed and delivered a plan to recruit a diverse group of 15 – 20 Panel members from across Scotland to work with the Commission. In order to achieve this, the Commission:

- Worked with grassroots groups, and practitioners from networks, local authorities and third sector organisations across Scotland to inform them about the Panel and to identify potential Panel members.
- Produced, with support from [Disability Equality Scotland](#), accessible recruitment materials including leaflets, a video, presentation materials, social media content, and application forms.
- Provided support and information via email, phone, post and text to people who were interested.
- Invited applications from people interested in joining the Panel, providing them with options to complete application documents by email, over the phone, by post, or through a supporting organisation.
- Delivered online events with grassroots organisations and charities to meet with and inform people who are interested in joining the Panel.
- Developed selection criteria and completed application assessments the week following the application deadline.
- Informed all successful and unsuccessful applicants of the outcome of their applications as soon as possible after the closing date.

The Commission's Panel [recruitment video can be found here](#).

4.4 Composition of the Panel

The initial Panel of 19 people was made up of people who were diverse in terms of their experiences of poverty and inequality, and based in cities, towns and rural areas across Scotland. [Six 'priority groups'](#) have been identified as being at higher risk of child poverty in Scotland. While this definition is used specifically in the context of child poverty (and this is the reason it was chosen as a criterion to help guide Panel recruitment given the Commission's statutory functions), it has broader application in identifying groups at greater risk of poverty. These priority groups are:

- **one-parent families.**
- **a household where someone is disabled.**
- **larger families (families with three or more children).**
- **minority ethnic families.**
- **households with a mother under 25.**
- **families with a child under 1 year old.**

Each Panel member was a member of a least one of these priority group and 9 of the Panel members recruited belonged to at least two of the priority groups.

Furthermore, the majority of Panel members had lived experience of multiple forms of inequality – particularly on the grounds of protected characteristics – in addition to their experiences of poverty.

4.5 Support for Panel members

As part of the recruitment process, and following recruitment to the Panel, Panel members provided information on access requirements for their participation. These were reviewed periodically as the Panel and Panel activities evolved and changed.

Over the course of the Panel, members of the Commission's secretariat provided Panel members with one-to-one support and communication by email, phone and text. This took the form of both practical and emotional support.

To support people's participation as Panel members, the Commission:

- Provided physical and/or digital welcome packs, as requested, which included information on the Commission and the Panel.
- Provided laptops/tablets and internet connectivity for Panel members as required.
- Provided stationery and resources that would be required for Panel activities.
- Developed and implemented an approach for how the experts by experience should be thanked for their time and how expenses should be paid.
- Covered necessary expenses and provided thank you vouchers.
- Sent materials in advance of meetings by email and/or by post, as required.
- Ensured that digital engagement tools (video conferencing software, survey software, coworking tools) met the access requirements of all Panel members.
- Co-produced, with Panel members, a Terms of Reference document and Group Agreement.
- Supported Panel members and Commission members in developing a productive working relationship.
- Provided preparatory group support and individual support for engagements with stakeholders outside the Commission.
- Provided public speaking and media training, along with other workshops and learning opportunities.

4.6 Activities and Outputs

Over the course of the Panel, the Panel as a whole, smaller groups of Panel members and, occasionally, individual Panel members, took part in a range of activities. Some of these took place jointly with the Commission to support its statutory functions, while others were priorities that were identified and taken forward by the Panel itself.

The Panel contributed to a wide range of work between August 2021 and June 2023. Outlined below are the major areas of work the Panel was involved in during this time.

Core Work

Most of the Panel's 'core' work was completed jointly with Commissioners, sometimes because the focus of the Panel's work mirrored that of the Commissioners, and, at other times because Commissioners and Panel members were working together directly. Some examples of activities and outputs that all Panel members worked on, often along with Commissioners include:

- Contributing to the Commission's [Advice to the Scottish Government on its Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26](#) and associated meetings with Scottish Ministers and officials.
- Working with the Commission on its [cost of living advice to the Scottish Government](#).
- Contributing to the Commission's response to [Draft Rented Sector Strategy Consultation](#).
- Providing lived experience recommendations for actions on poverty to be included in the next Scottish National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP 2).
- Contributing to discussions and scrutiny to inform the Commission's position on the SG November 2022 Emergency Budget Review and 2023-24 SG Budget.

Particularly in the early stages of the Panel, Panel members met separately to the full Commission, in order to allow the Panel members time and space to become familiar with each other and the project, and to get comfortable in their understanding of issues and finding their voice to express them. During this initial phase, the Panel Co-produced the Terms of Reference and Group agreement documents to support their work with the Commission.

Furthermore, over the course of the Panel's work, the Panel identified a number of priorities that they wanted to take forward and work on themselves. These included disability assistance, fuel poverty, carer poverty and rural poverty and took forward work on these. While these were identified by Panel members in core meetings, the work that was taken forward was carried out by smaller groups of Panel members, some of these activities are described below.

Additional Panel Activities and Outputs

In addition to the Panel's core work, members could volunteer to take part in additional activities. Some examples of activities and outputs that smaller groups of Panel members worked on include:

- Taking part in the Commission's scrutiny process with SG and discussing recommendations to inform the Commission's [Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23](#).
- Two members taking part in the [Commission's tax working group](#) alongside three Commissioners and external experts.
- Responding to consultations and calls for evidence, and engaging directly with policy officials and other advisory bodies, including:
 - a [submission](#) to the Scottish Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament on a call for evidence about the cost of living impact on rural communities.
 - a [submission](#) to a request from the Scottish Commission on Social Security about draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment.
 - a [submission](#) to the review of the Adult Disability Payment mobility component.

- Responding to the SG [Low Income Winter Heating Assistance consultation](#).
- Contributing reflections on the Panel for the [Commission's Annual Report 2021-22](#).
- Preparing a series of blogs, social media and web content as part of Challenge Poverty Week 2022.
- Taking part in public speaking training to help with Panel members' participation in both of work of the Commission and other speaking opportunities.
- Taking part in media training to help with a [feature](#) that was shown across BBC Scotland on Online, Radio and TV about the Panel.
- Working with a PhD researcher who is using the Panel as a case study on participation.
- Presenting online at the Commission's Public Meeting 2022, alongside contributions from Commissioners, SG Ministers and senior SG officials.

In addition to core panel activities and additional activities with smaller groups of Panel members, some members took part in additional activities on their own. These included:

- A Panel member contributed to a [blog](#) about the experience of people seeking asylum in Scotland.
- A Panel member spoke, by request, to delegates at the first ever First Minister's Anti-Poverty Summit (2023), urging decision makers to '[Be Brave](#)'.
- A Panel member spoke, by request, at the 2022 Conference of the Scottish Leaders Forum.
- Preparing and delivering individual presentations on areas of personal interest and experience (Unpaid Carers' Poverty, Human Rights, the Social Model of Disability).

Section 10.1 details four case studies which demonstrate some of the ways that the Panel contributed to Commission activities and outputs.

4.7 Types of Participation

The International Association for Public Participation designed a spectrum which outlines five 'levels' of public participation. These are as follows:

- **Inform:** To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- **Consult:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- **Involve:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- **Collaborate:** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
- **Empower:** To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

The Commission's intention when designing and establishing the Panel was to embed it in all three strands of the Commission's work – advice, scrutiny and advocacy. Given the breadth and types of the work in which the Panel was engaged, the work did not sit clearly at any one 'level' of participation. Rather, the Commission's engagement with Panel members varied in its form, sitting usually at the levels of collaboration and involvement but, occasionally at the level of consultation, usually when dictated by timeframes and/or capacity. Given the statutory duties of the Commission, it did not, nor is it likely to, 'empower' (delegate decisions to) the Panel. See further details on this in section 10.2.

4.8 Methods Used

The participation methods and tools that the Commission used to support the Panel's participation were determined largely by:

- the predominantly online nature of the Panel's work.
- the access requirements of Panel members.
- a focus on fostering dialogue rather than deliberation (though some activities were deliberative in their nature).

These tools and methods were used to support Panel members to:

- share their views and experiences.
- engage in meaningful discussions on how to reduce poverty and inequality in Scotland.
- listen to and ask questions of others (Panel members, Commissioners, SG officials, and other stakeholders).
- find common ground and difference.
- engage with and analyse information.
- produce new knowledge and solutions based on individual and collective understandings.

In facilitating the participation of Panel members, the Commission used a range of synchronous and asynchronous (where members are completing at their own pace, in their own time) tools and methods, a non-exhaustive list of which is outlined below

Synchronous Participation Tools	Asynchronous Participation Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video conferencing• Voting/prioritisation tools• Polling tools• Chat function• Digital surveys• Digital collaboration tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital surveys• Voting/prioritisation tools• Ranking tools
Synchronous Participation Methods	Asynchronous Participation Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whole group discussion (online, hybrid)• Small group discussion (online, hybrid, in person)• Pair work (online, hybrid, in person)• Short and medium-term working groups• Case study analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of poetry, prose and visual art• Creation of blogs and social media content

5 The Context

The Panel's work took place in an organisational and political context that is largely positive about and receptive to the participation of experts by experience in the development of solutions to complex social and political issues.

5.1 Democratic participation

The Panel was established in the context of increasing political, social and academic interest in democratic participation and democratic innovations, with public bodies at local, regional and national levels increasingly seeking the views, experiences and engagement of members of the public on complex sociopolitical issues¹. Importantly, alongside this increase in efforts to involve members of the public in the process of policymaking has been an increased focus on the impact of such participation and the extent to which it influences policy and practice.

5.2 The Commission

The Panel was developed and established in a supportive organisational environment that values lived experience and views it as a valuable form of knowledge alongside other forms. It was for this reason that the Commission:

- Identified involving experts by experience as its overarching strategic priority.
- Developed its approach to involving experts by experience by commissioning guidance developed with experts by experience.
- Resourced work with experts by experience in a way that recognised the time, effort and funding that is necessary for meaningful engagement.
- Elected to use core funding to continue the work when the initial funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for work with the Panel came to an end.
- Committed to involving the Panel in all three strands of its work.
- Committed to internal monitoring and evaluation and to working with an external researcher to learn from, and improve upon, the process.

5.3 Scottish Government

The Panel was designed to be embedded in all parts – advice, scrutiny and advocacy – of the Commission's work. Given the Commission's statutory duties to both advise and provide scrutiny to SG, Panel members enjoyed a substantial degree of direct access to Scottish Ministers.

In its Open Government Action Plan 2021 – 2025, SG made a commitment to improve public participation in the development of policies and services. SG's [Participation Framework](#) notes that 'the distinctive Scottish Approach is characterised by moves towards embedding more participatory, co-productive and assets-based approaches at the core of how government operates. It recognises the important role that people have in bringing different types of knowledge and experiences to address the challenges faced by government.'

¹ Elstub, S., & Escobar, O. (2019). Handbook of democratic innovation and governance. Edward Elgar Publishing

6 Learning from the first iteration of the Panel

The learning outlined in this report is intended primarily to serve the purpose of improving participation work within the context of the Commission. However, we hope that much of the learning will also prove useful for practitioners, policymakers and decision-makers - who are engaged in, or seeking to engage in, participatory processes with experts by experience.

6.1. Approach to learning from the first iteration of the Panel

The Commission has been clear that in establishing the Panel it was setting out on a journey towards sharing power and co-production, and that this would not be achieved immediately. It is important to note that this ambition sits alongside some constraints to full co-production and power-sharing; the statutory duties of Commissioners and the Commission mean it will always be ultimately responsible for its outputs, and for agreeing any decisions, advice and recommendations that it produces. Learning from the first iteration of the Panel has been an important part of identifying how the Commission can better share power within this context. Throughout the life of the Panel there was ongoing learning and reflective exercises to try to identify what was and was not working, and where improvements could be made in both this and future iterations of the Panel.

In developing an approach to engaging experts by experience, the Commission funded the SPIRU of Glasgow Caledonian University to produce a rapid review of evidence from the academic literature appraising the ways in which those with lived experience of poverty are reported to be involved in the co-production of policy and service development. This review included a recommendation calling for 'Organisations involved in anti-poverty work in Scotland [to] co-operate and commit to developing a culture in which documenting all experiences of co-production are highly valued. Improved practice in engaging experts by experience will only result when such knowledge is shared openly.'² This report has been written in the spirit of this recommendation.

It draws on evidence gathered by the Commission from a range of sources. These include:

- A confidential survey for Panel members with both quantitative and qualitative questions designed around the outcomes, carried out in June 2022. 15 of the then 18 Panel members completed the survey.
- A confidential survey for Commissioners, covering similar topics, carried out in July 2022. Eight of the then nine Commissioners completed this survey
- A follow-up confidential survey for Panel members carried out in May/June 2023. 11 of the then 16 Panel members completed the survey.
- A statement from the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison MSP, on her engagements with the Panel (December 2022).
- An interview with senior officials from the Scottish Government Directorate for Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice in December 2022.
- Operational information including details of the Panel's activities, inputs and outputs.

We have published a summary of the responses to the closed questions asked of Panel members in the two surveys alongside this report.

² McKendrick, J. H., Marchbank, J., & Sinclair, S. (2021). Co-Production Involving 'Experts with Lived Experience of Poverty' in Policy and Service Development in Scotland: A Rapid Review of Academic Literature. Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit.

The report also draws on evidence gathered by a PhD Researcher from the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow, Anna Baillie, who is looking at the Panel as a case study as part of her PhD research on the use of participation in socio-economic decision-making. As part of her research, she has gathered qualitative evidence about the panel through:

- **In-depth interviews:** Eight Panel members met with the researcher for about an hour to talk about their experience participating in the Panel.
- **Direct observation:** Observational data collection through attending a typical meeting of the Panel.
- **Co-production Workshop & Survey:** Workshop convened with eleven Panel members to reflect on the participatory process and co-produce a suite of 'lessons learned'. This workshop was immediately followed by a joint session with the Panel members, four members of the Secretariat and members of the Commission. Prior to this workshop, Panel members (N=15) completed a survey about their experience. Their responses were used to inform the workshop.
- **Documentation:** Analysis of Commission policy and administrative documents, looking at how the Panel is conceptualised and identifying evidence of Panel influence.

We are grateful to Anna for sharing some key insights from her research and allowing us to use them in this report.

Not all Panel members participated in every form of evidence gathering, and some were confidential so we are not able to conclude definitively whether every Panel member contributed to the evidence gathered for the purposes of this report. However, because of the range of methods used to gather evidence and the involvement of an independent researcher, we believe that the points that follow are based on as broad a range of views of Panel participants as could reasonably be obtained.

In addition to this formal evidence gathering, members of the Panel and the Commission have regularly reflected upon their experiences of the project at meetings and at events such as the Commission's Public Meeting. This has provided useful informal feedback throughout the lifetime of the Panel.

REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING

In sections 7 to 11, we will outline reflections and learning from the first iteration of the Commission's Experts by Experience Panel. We will explore the extent to which the Commission achieved its objectives and highlight key learning from each of these areas that will shape the second iteration of our Panel and our other participation work going forward.

7 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE 1: The Commission effectively recruits a diverse group of Panel members from across Scotland

7.1. Reflections

As outlined in section 4.3, the Commission hoped to recruit a group of 15 – 20 experts by experience who were:

- based across Scotland, based in cities, towns and rural areas
- diverse in terms of their identity, and their experiences of poverty and inequality
- from groups most likely to experience poverty in Scotland

All Panel members and Commissioners responded positively to questions about recruitment in the first evaluation survey of the Panel. 15 of 15 Panel members responding to the June 2022 survey either agreed or strongly agreed that they were “satisfied with the recruitment process for the Panel. For example, the materials were clear and I found it easy to apply.” 8 of 8 Commissioners agreed or strongly agreed that they believed “the recruitment strategy and recruitment process for the Panel ensured it included people from a range of backgrounds.”

7.2 Key Learning - Objective 1: Recruitment

An examination of survey data and the make-up of the Panel demonstrates that the recruitment objectives were met, resulting in positive feedback on the process and a diverse range of individuals being recruited. There are, however, still areas of improvement and learning.

Make-up of the Panel

Whilst the Panel was never intended to be statistically representative of those experiencing poverty in Scotland, nor could it be with such a small number, certain groups were overrepresented and underrepresented on the Panel. All Panel members were from at least one of the six ‘priority groups’ most likely to experience child poverty.

There was, however, underrepresentation of people from groups outside the priority groups who also experience poverty or are likely to have a more specific experience of poverty. This includes, amongst others, working age (particularly younger people) without children, people living in an island community and people from the Gypsy/Traveller community.

People from certain groups – disabled people, people from one-parent families and people who are not in work – were overrepresented in the Panel. While organisations with a focus on working with people from these groups were not over-represented in organisations initially approached to recruit the Panel, the Commission's recruitment materials did highlight that the Commission was particularly interested in recruiting people from the priority groups. While this was not necessarily a problem in the first iteration of the Panel, it is something that could be looked at in any future recruitment exercise.

Clarity on the meaning of ‘lived experience’

Feedback from Panel members demonstrated their views on the importance of lived expertise as a form of knowledge. There are, however, many definitions and understandings of the term ‘lived experience’. It is clear from Panel member feedback that many Panel members held differing and, sometimes, opposing views on what constitutes ‘lived experience’. The Commission’s recruitment materials explained that ‘when we say experts by experience, we mean people who have lived experience of poverty and inequality’. It did not specify further what it meant by lived experience. This is something that could be clarified for the purposes of recruitment processes going forward.

8 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE 2: The Commission effectively organises the Panel and builds the capacity of Panel members to contribute

8.1 Reflections

The Panel met at least monthly between August 2021 and June 2023. During the Autumn of 2021 the group met more frequently, twice per month. This was to ensure sufficient opportunity for the Panel to get to know each other, the Commission secretariat, Commissioners, and to co-produce terms of reference and agreed ways of working. It also enabled the secretariat to organise sessions and activities with the purpose of building capacity and knowledge within the group before the Panel started on its first major project: the Commission's Child Poverty Delivery Plan advice to the SG.

“In the beginning we met fortnightly which was because of an initial deadline but actually that helped us create a bond and allowed us to open up with each other a lot more quickly than if we had only met monthly. I don't think we would have had the same connection had we not met so often initially.”
(Panel member)

Regular Panel meetings were conducted online over approximately two hours using Zoom. The Commission held two hybrid meetings between Panel members and Commissioners, with the majority of Panel members attending in person.

Panel members were supported in their participation through provision of laptops/tablets and internet connectivity where required to enable participation in online activity, coverage of necessary expenses such as childcare or travel, and were offered thank you vouchers after each engagement to recognise their contribution.

Feedback from the Panel surveys in 2022 and 2023 shows that Panel members who responded had a positive attitude regarding the way the Panel has operated:

- All Panel members responding to the 2022 survey agreed that “the early Panel meetings helped me to understand what the Commission does.” In the same survey, the majority of respondents agreed that “the early Panel meetings helped me understand the role of the Panel”, with only 1 Panel member neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- In the 2022 survey, all Panel members strongly agreed that “the information provided by the Commission secretariat before Panel meetings is useful” and in 2022 and 2023 all reported that the “amount of information provided before Panel meetings” was about right.
- Most Panel members agreed that “the information provided during Panel meetings is useful” (with 1 Panel member strongly disagreeing and 1 disagreeing in 2022, and 1 Panel member neither agreeing nor disagreeing in 2023).
- In both the 2022 and 2023 surveys, all Panel members agreed with the statement that they were “happy with the way Panel meetings are facilitated by members of the Commission staff”.
- In the 2023 survey, the majority agreed that “I feel I have got to understand the perspectives of other Panel members on poverty and inequality” with 1 respondent neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

In our 2022 and 2023 Panel member surveys, we asked ‘have you ever had a complaint or issue with the way the Panel has been run?’ In our 2022 survey, 3 Panel members reported that they had a complaint or issue, 1 reported that they raised this issue with a member of the secretariat team, and they also reported that the complaint or issue was addressed. In our 2023 survey, 1 Panel member responded that they had a complaint and noted that they felt the complaint had not been dealt with. They noted also, however, that the issue could not have been addressed by the Commission.

In terms of offering Panel members the opportunity to learn and develop their understanding of poverty and inequality in Scotland, survey responses showed that most Panel members agreed that the Panel had increased their understanding, and contributed to developing their thinking, on issues related to poverty and inequality.

The majority of respondents to the 2022 and 2023 surveys agreed with the statement “I think about issues related to poverty and inequality differently since taking part in the Panel” with one respondent disagreeing in 2022 and 2023, and 2 people neither agreeing nor disagreeing in both years. Again, in response to the statement “My understanding of poverty and inequality in Scotland has increased as a result of taking part in the Panel”, most Panel members agreed in both 2022 and 2023, with one respondent neither agreeing nor disagreeing in both 2022 and 2023.

In addition, most Panel members reported feeling “more confident about sharing my views, ideas and experiences about poverty and inequality in Scotland”, since taking part in the Panel (13 of 15 agreeing, 1 disagreeing and 1 neither agreeing nor disagreeing in 2022. 9 of 11 agreeing and 2 neither agreeing nor disagreeing in 2023).

Panel members were given the opportunity to share either positive or negative impacts that the Panel had on them personally, these included positive statements such as:

- “Prior to joining the panel I had just my own experience of living in poverty. Since hearing others views and experiences I have realised that people in rural areas have different issues and challenges to mine. As a panel we support one another and share our own struggles relating to poverty...” (Panel member)
- “Becoming a panel [member] has made such a positive impact on me and in the way I view so many things in my life as well as family members and other groups I am involved with. I feel privileged to be part of it.” (Panel member)
- “The whole experience has genuinely been life changing for me. The secretariat and the commissioners have encouraged me to grow in confidence in so many different ways. The public speaking training was so valuable. The secretariat have gone out of their way to support panel members”. (Panel member)
- “I have become more confident within myself on speaking, be it publicly or not. I have a voice, and I now use it.” (Panel member)

However one Panel member highlighted the issue that not all topics the Panel worked on have resonance or relevancy for all Panel members, which left some Panel members feeling excluded from certain activities or processes:

- “Often subjects or certain benefits are being discussed I know nothing about. I often feel that I walk away from meetings knowing less than everybody else.” (Panel member)

8.2 Key Learning - Objective 2: Organising the Panel, providing information, and building the capacity of Panel members

Overall, feedback demonstrates that the Commission's approach to organising activities, providing information, and facilitation worked well for most Panel members.

Feedback from, and observation of, Panel members demonstrated increased capacity in terms of confidence, skills and knowledge. Feedback also demonstrated that Panel members felt supported to share their experiences and to have meaningful discussions about how to reduce poverty and inequality.

In both the 2022 and 2023 surveys Panel members were asked if they had volunteered to meet with decision-makers (such as SG Ministers and officials) or spoken at the Commission's public meeting. If they had, they were asked whether they felt supported by the Commission in this activity. In both the 2022 and 2023 surveys, all strongly agreed that they felt supported

During the course of the Panel's work, 3 of the original 19 Panel members resigned from the Panel for reasons related to availability (on the grounds of starting employment full time and education) and for health reasons. The remaining 16 Panel members all continued to actively participate until the end of the process, with levels of engagement high throughout. There are several areas of learning, however, that the Commission will consider moving forward.

Understanding and Expectations

In the 2022 survey, all Panel members reported that information provided by the Commission helped them understand the role of the Commission, and 14 of 15 Panel members reported that that information initially provided to them helped them understand the role of the Panel. However, other feedback suggests that the motivations of some Panel members for participating in the Panel – largely the desire to directly change SG policy in order to reduce poverty in Scotland – were outwith the powers of the Commission as an advisory body. Furthermore, both Panel members and Commissioners are limited in their capacity. While there may have been a desire from some for more joint work between Commissioners, constraints on time and the sometimes differing requirements for facilitating the participation of the Commission and the Panel will necessitate some activities being delivered separately.

Whilst the Commission did seek to clearly frame the role and purpose of both the Panel and the Commission more generally, this is something that should be revisited to ensure the Commission is doing all it can to clearly contextualise the role of the Panel and the Commission more broadly.

Connected to this is that formal and informal feedback highlighted both the positive and, occasionally, negative impact that involvement in the Panel had on members. Whilst the majority of members reported positive personal impacts of being involved in the Panel some Panel members highlighted negative impacts, particularly relating to not feeling 'heard' within the process, be that at the level of a meeting or at the policy level. In the future more time could be spent to check in with all Panel members individually at regular intervals, seeking to identify issues with disillusionment or disengagement that can be more difficult to pick up on in online spaces.

Online Participation

Feedback on the remote, digital and online nature of Panel activities was largely positive but running all but two Panel meetings online had both its advantages and disadvantages. Panel members were supported to participate online through one-to-one practical support, support with accessing digital skills training, support with digital access through the provision of digital devices and internet connectivity where required.

Some key advantages of the online format included:

- Greater ease in bringing together Panel members, Commissioners and others from across Scotland.
- Improved accessibility for those members for whom attending in person was difficult or not possible.
- Increased time for Panel members, Commissioners and members of the secretariat to focus on taking-part in and/or facilitating Panel activities rather than, for example, travelling.
- Increased confidence of some Panel members when public speaking online rather than in person.

Some disadvantages included:

- Decreased scope for organically building relationships when most interactions are taking place in a 'facilitated' space.
- Less time to work on issues, particularly complex issues, as a result of meetings being shortened to minimise risks of online fatigue.
- Greater difficulties picking up on issues with engagement or group dynamics.
- Fewer options for catering to different communication and learning preferences.
- Issues with connectivity that remained a problem for some members in rural communities.

In light of these, the Commission will continue to plan some in-person/hybrid meetings and have spaces for social interactions, ensure Panel members can continue to contribute between Panel meetings, carry out more regular individual check-ins with Panel members to identify and address any emerging issues, and explore how it can better use engagement tools that cater to different communication preferences (see section 9.2). While there was little else the Commission could have done to change issues with connectivity, there may be improved options going forward with the expansion and improvement of full-fibre and 4G coverage in Scotland's rural communities.

Relevance of Work to Individual Panel Members

The key piece of learning that emerged from evidence gathered is that some Panel members felt excluded in discussion or activities where they did not, or felt that they did not, have direct experience of an issue. Whilst the Commission attempted to provide information to ensure that Panel members, in as far as is possible, were able to contribute to all activities, there were times and activities that did centre on Panel members' direct experience of a given issue. Given the diversity of experiences of poverty amongst Panel members, and breadth of issues on which the Commission engages the Panel, it will never be possible to ensure that every Panel member has significant direct experience of every issue being discussed.

One key problem, raised by Panel members, was that the Panel's first major project focused on the Commission's Child Poverty Delivery Plan advice to SG, meaning that some Panel members who do not have children felt they had less to contribute to activities. This piece of work was completed first on account of statutory timing required by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and, whilst the Commission provided information and designed activities in a way in which all Panel members could participate, the impact on some Panel members was such that they felt excluded or sidelined in what was the first key piece of work the Panel completed as a group.

Going forward, the Commission will reflect on how the Panel's engagement can build from activities on issues that clearly and directly affect all Panel members in some way. Panel members did have the option to opt in or out of many pieces of work during the life of the Panel, and Panel members reported that this approach worked well. However, with the Commission's statutory focus on child poverty, it is also important that the Commission demonstrates the connections between child poverty and poverty more widely, and how all people in poverty will have experience that will enable them to participate in the development of advice and scrutiny on child poverty.

9 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE 3: The Commission takes an accessible and intersectional approach to supporting the Panel, being considerate of differences and overlapping inequalities

9.1 Reflections

The Commission secretariat prepared materials for Panel members in advance of each meeting or activity. These were provided digitally and in hard copies, to meet the access requirements of Panel members. 14 of 15 Panel members in the 2022 survey agreed or strongly agreed that “the information provided before Panel meetings is accessible to me” (1 Panel member neither agreeing nor disagreeing). They noted that:

“I don’t think the information could be delivered any better. The secretariat clearly work hard to ensure everyone feels included and information is accessible and without jargon.” (Panel member)

“I request information in writing so that I can process it better. Information provided only in email format is difficult [for me] to digest.” (Panel member)

All but one respondent in the 2022 survey and all respondents to the 2023 survey agreed that the “Commission staff have provided me with the support I need to take part in Panel activities”; the remaining Panel member from the 2022 survey said the question did not apply to them.

The majority (12 of 15) Panel members in the 2022 survey agreed or strongly agreed that “everybody on the Panel gets a chance to contribute during discussions on a topic”, with 3 of the 15 neither agreeing nor disagreeing. While substantial effort went into designing the process and activities in a way that would facilitate the participation of all members, there were times where facilitators could have been better at ensuring certain participants did not dominate.

“The secretariat goes out their way to ensure our needs are met and information is presented in a clear way with our needs in mind. I don’t believe there is anything they can do to make it any more accessible.” (Panel member)

One Panel member with experience of, in their words, ‘cognitive issues’ highlighted the barriers they faced during the process.

“Even though everything was done by the secretariat to make me feel included alas the format, meeting length and discussions don’t allow for an individual with cognitive function problems to participate fully in the Panel. I don’t have the answers on how to change things, but I would urge the Commission to look at how they can be more inclusive towards people with cognitive issues.” (Panel member)

These are issues that will be explored further by the Commission in designing processes going forward. It should be noted that while a minority of Panel members felt meetings (2 hours with a short comfort break) were too long, some felt meetings were too short and that they did not offer enough time to do the work they felt needed to be done.

Panel members noted occasional issues where hard copy papers arrived late (our understanding is that this related to postal delays outwith the Commission’s control), or where certain accessibility requirements in terms of format were not met completely (due to errors in following printing instructions that have since been rectified through adopting a different process).

In both formal and informal feedback, many Panel members expressed feeling safe to express their views, to share their experiences and to ask questions.

“I felt safe within the group quite early on and felt I was able to share my personal experience without being judged. I felt there was a common theme amongst us all when it came to the daily struggles we faced financially due to poverty.” (Panel member)

“I appreciated the safety provided to talk about my experiences. I appreciated the professional handling of the sessions by those facilitating.” (Panel member)

Improving the Commission’s approach to intersectionality – the recognition that people experience multiple overlapping inequalities that can compound their experience of poverty – is a commitment in the Commission’s 2020-23 strategic plan, including that “[t]he Commission’s analysis and recommendations demonstrate a more intersectional approach and this is recognised by partners, including experts by experience.”

9.2. Key Learning - Objective 3: The Commission takes an accessible and intersectional approach to supporting the Panel, being considerate of differences and overlapping inequalities

Panel members provided positive feedback regarding the approach taken by the Commission with regard to creating an accessible, safe and supportive environment for Panel members. They appreciated briefings and information that was provided to them in advance, and the efforts made to ensure accessibility and inclusion within the Panel. Support mentioned included the provision of information in different formats, bespoke technical support/digital devices and an open-door policy between the secretariat and Panel members to discuss any issues they might want to raise.

Supporting participation in a way that meets multiple needs and preferences

Immediately following the recruitment of the Panel, the Commission secretariat invested a substantial degree of time in understanding Panel members’ needs, preferences and access requirements, through one-to-one telephone conversations and emails. This allowed the Commission secretariat to develop a sound basis upon which to plan Panel sessions, activities, briefings and engagements that work well around different needs and preferences, and emerging group dynamics. The access needs of some Panel members required ongoing consideration and adaptation of the project by the Commission.

Some Panel members found it easier to participate in discussions and activities done in smaller groups. These included one-off sessions or longer-term working groups with other Panel members and Commissioners, and smaller group discussions during Panel meetings (such as in break out rooms). Some Panel members highlighted preferences for using the chat function in meetings rather than speaking, while others found that this sometimes distracted from what a speaker was saying.

The Commission will reflect on some adjustments that could be made to Panel meetings including changing meeting schedules and timings to be more suitable for some Panel members to attend, tighter facilitation to ensure that everyone is heard, more in-person/hybrid meetings and more working groups.

Some methods commonly used in online participatory approaches – for example, highly visual or arts-based content – would have created barriers to the participation of some Panel members due to, for example, the fact that some Panel members could not work with information presented in a visual form. In the Commission’s attempt to design activities and materials that were accessible to all Panel members, it took an approach that limited the use of some visual or creative methods to participation and group facilitation, and focussed largely on discussion or text-based approaches methods. The Commission did use more creative and visual approaches in asynchronous activities but these were not usually integrated into synchronous Panel activities. This had the unintended effect, particularly in meetings, of emphasising contributions of Panel members who were most adept and articulate in verbal or written discussion.

While the approach of charting a “middle ground” - attempting to make activities accessible to all - was a defensible one given the circumstances, learning highlights that in the future it would be worth considering how to use a range of methods and approaches in synchronous activities. This would allow Panel members who have different communication preferences and strengths to better participate.

Intersectionality and recognising overlapping inequalities

The Commission attempted to take an intersectional approach to the recruitment of the Panel, by gathering appropriate data on multiple diversity characteristics and attempting to balance the Panel membership not only based on individual demographic factors, but on combinations thereof. Ultimately this kind of exercise is unlikely to ever be perfect in a situation where there is a relatively small number of individual participants, however many Panel members experience discrimination and inequality on the bases of many factors including but not limited to their race, nationality, sexual orientation, immigration/citizenship status, age, relationship status, housing setup, age and location.

Panel activities, and Panel members themselves, consistently sought to draw attention to intersecting identities within the group and amongst people in Scotland affected by poverty. Activities, such as the discussion of composite case studies, asked Panel members to consider people's unique experiences of discrimination and oppression in developing advice.

To attempt to make use of an intersectional lens with the Panel and building on [research on intersectionality](#) conducted for the Commission by IPPR Scotland, two Panel sessions on intersectionality were organised in May and June 2022. Feedback from the sessions from Panel members indicated that this was seen as both useful for future work and resonated particularly with some Panel members who had previously been concerned that that Panel was too focussed on issues around child poverty. Building on this, Panel members were invited to two sessions in March and May 2023 jointly with Commissioners to inform the Commission's intersectionality strategy, the outputs from which are discussed further below.

The Commission's Intersectionality strategy

The Commission recognises that taking an intersectional approach is critical in tackling poverty and inequality in Scotland and is committed to working towards taking an intersectional approach to developing its advice and scrutiny.

In establishing our next Experts by Experience Panel, and extending our engagement with experts by experience, the Commission will explicitly take an intersectional approach and continue to work towards redistributing power. The Commission will identify key community-based organisations that represent or engage individuals with specific overlapping inequalities and work with them to invite applications for our new Panel. The Commission will work to ensure that membership of the Panel over-represents people who experience multiple forms of marginalisation. The Commission will continue to build the capacity of the Panel, through training and skills-building on intersectionality to try to create a space where Panel members are supported to feel able and safe to share their experiences of compounding inequalities, and able to consider what this means for taking action to tackle poverty.

10 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE 4: The Panel are partners in the Commission's work, and this is recognised by both

10.1 Reflections

In the early stages of the Panel, whole Panel meetings and Commission meetings took place separately. From its inception, individual Commissioners were invited to attend some Panel meetings, or parts of Panel meetings. The nature and frequency of this varied over time, with less frequent contact at the start of the project and with more contact to support particular activities, outputs or events.

The decision to have the Panel to meet separately initially, with only periodic engagement with the full Commission, was a deliberate choice rather than accidental. It was done in order to allow the Panel members time and space to become familiar with each other and the project, and to develop personal and shared understandings of issues and to feel comfortable participating in meetings.

The relationship between the Panel and the Commission – Commissioner perspective

In July 2022 Commissioners were asked a range of questions regarding the learning and understanding they had gained from engagement with the Panel. Responses generally painted a positive picture with most Commissioners tending to agree with these statements.

In addition, Commissioners surveyed unanimously agreed (8 of 8 unanimously agreeing or strongly agreeing) that:

- “The Commission listens to the views of the Panel on issues it is working on.”
- “The Commission as a whole thinks about issues related to poverty and inequality more effectively as a result of the Panel.”
- “The Panel’s contributions have influenced what is included in the Commission’s work programme.”
- “The views of the Panel are included by the Commission in the advice and scrutiny it provides to the Scottish Government.”

7 of 8 Commissioners reported that they “have learned new things about poverty and inequality as a result of the Panel’s engagement with the Commission”, with one neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

However, Commissioners were less unanimous on the following issues:

- Whether they had “a better understanding of things that can be done” to reduce poverty and inequality as a result of the Panel’s engagement (5 of 8 Commissioners agreeing, 3 neither agreeing nor disagreeing)
- Whether the “Commission has meaningfully changed the way it works, as a result of the engagement it has with the Panel.” (5 of 8 Commissioners agreeing, 1 disagreeing, 2 neither agreeing nor disagreeing)
- If the “Panel and the Commission get enough opportunities to speak to each other.” (3 of 8 Commissioners agreeing, 3 disagreeing, and 2 neither agreeing nor disagreeing)
- Whether the “Panel and the Commission get enough opportunities to work together on issues.” (4 of 8 Commissioners disagreeing, 3 agreeing, and 1 neither agreeing nor disagreeing)

This paints a picture of Commissioners generally agreeing that the Commission listened to and valued the contributions of the Panel, but less certainty over whether the Commission changed how it works as a result of the Panel, and a clear desire for more opportunities for Panel and Commission direct engagement.

There is also a signal that this represents a view among some Commissioners that the relationship at that time was too “one-way” – i.e., the Commission was receiving input from the Panel but with insufficient two-way interaction. This was a theme that was present in some qualitative remarks from Commissioners in the 2022 survey:

“It feels a bit of an add-on rather than integral at the moment. It would be great to do a collaborative piece of work with a task group run by a combination of panel members and commissioners” (Commissioner)

“Consideration of how to ensure we are being truly informed/directed by the Panel and are not being extractive in the relationship.” (Commissioner)

A potential explanation for this pattern of responses was that, in mid-2022 when the survey was conducted, the Panel and Commissioners were operating more independently and some Commissioners had more opportunities than others at that time for direct engagement with the Panel. In response to this and some Panel member feedback outlined below, the Commission modified its approach, increasing opportunities for joint work between Panel members and Commissioners, and opportunities for the Panel to decide what it works on.

The relationship between the Panel and the Commission – Panel perspective

The pattern of responses described in the previous section looking at Commissioner perspective generally also hold true when looking at Panel members attitudes on similar topics.

In both 2022 and 2023 surveys, a large majority of Panel members responding agreed that:

- “The Commission listens to the views of the Panel on issues it is working on.”
- “The views of the Panel were included by the Commission in the advice and scrutiny it provides to the Scottish Government.”

As was the case with the Commissioner survey, Panel members surveyed in 2022 had mixed views about whether “the Panel gets enough opportunities to speak directly to the Commissioners of the Poverty and Inequality Commission” (9 of 15 Panel members agreeing or strongly agreeing, 1 disagreeing, 5 neither agreeing nor disagreeing).

In addition, there was also less of a clear agreement about whether the Panel had “enough opportunities to decide what it works on” (9 of 15 Panel members in 2022 agreeing or strongly agreeing, 1 disagreeing, 5 neither agreeing nor disagreeing).

This also potentially reflects the same issue identified by Commissioners that (at the time of the surveys) the relationship was too “one way” and some Panel participants were of the view that more could be done in terms of the Panel setting joint priorities with the Commission or its own priorities.

Following the changes the Commission made to its approach - increasing opportunities for joint work between Panel members and Commissioners, and opportunities for the Panel to decide what it works on - there was an improvement in the average score around these aspects in the 2023 survey (see published annex of results for full details). However, due to a smaller number of respondents and the confidentiality of the results which were not linked to Panel member names, it is uncertain if there was genuine movement in Panel members views. From other evidence gathered through interviews and group discussions it is clear that there is still some disagreement amongst Panel members as to whether they had enough opportunities to work directly with Commissioners and to decide what they work on.

In 2023, 7 of 11 those responding agreed that the Panel had enough opportunities to speak directly to the Commissioners of the Poverty and Inequality Commission. 3 members neither agreed or disagreed and 1 member disagreed.

7 of 11 also agreed in 2023 that the Panel had enough opportunities to decide what it works on. Again 3 members neither agreed or disagreed and 1 member disagreed.

Panel members were generally positive about the response they received from the Commission on their ideas; responding to an additional question in the 2023 survey that asked whether Panel members were “happy with the response the Panel receives from the Commission on [their] ideas”, 9 out of 11 Panel members agreed and 2 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Integrating Lived Experience Knowledge

The secretariat provided background information for all Panel activities and, depending on the activity, invited Commissioners or external speakers to provide information, hear from and answer questions from Panel members. The Panel contributions were then prepared by the Commission secretariat for inclusion into Commission outputs, checking back with the Panel during or, where necessary, after sessions to ensure there was agreement on what was being included.

Although, on some occasions the Panel and Panel members produced content entirely in their own (i.e., as a Panel or individual Panel member rather than the Panel and the Commission together), most commonly the Panel and Commission views on any given issue were integrated together in the final reporting output. Depending on the nature of the piece of work, the final Commission output had a range of different types of Panel member contributions. On some occasions it may have a few contributions from a small number of Panel members, while at the other end of the scale the main output can be composed mostly of substantive Panel member contributions (drafted and formatted by the Commission secretariat).

Case Studies

The following four case studies give a fuller account of how the Panel has contributed to some areas of the Commission's work.

- Child Poverty Advice to Scottish Government 2022.
- Cost of Living Crisis Advice to Scottish Government (June, August 2022).
- Developing the Commission's Child Poverty Scrutiny 2022 – 23.
- Participation in the Commission's Tax Working Group (2023).

CASE STUDY 1: Developing the Commission's Child Poverty Advice 2022

The first major piece of work that the Panel worked on with the Commission was the [Commission's Child Poverty Advice](#) to the Scottish Government. This advice is a statutory requirement for the Commission and is required once every four-year period. To produce this advice the Panel and the Commission worked together in a way that was intended to move beyond sharing lived experience of poverty, towards producing ideas and solutions based on collective understanding of policy problems.

Between September and December 2021, the Panel met more frequently (every two weeks) to work on the Advice. During this time, they:

- participated in five online Panel meetings with pre-meeting reading and tasks.
- participated in one joint meeting between the Panel and Commissioners.
- completed two digital surveys.
- co-presented the recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government with Commissioners.

Each of the meeting included a section where new information on policy topics relevant to child poverty were introduced, with Panel members completing tasks relevant to these topics prior to the meetings. During the meetings Panel members then shared their ideas and solutions based on their lived experience. This process was designed to allow an opportunity for Panel members to share their experiences and learn from others; to reflect on the experiences of families in Scotland using composite case studies; and to meet with Commissioners to discuss these ideas.

This approach to joint working resulted in recommendations in the Commission's advice that were jointly developed between the Panel and Commissioners. These were substantively

different to the recommendations than those that the Commission would have developed alone, and included recommendations on:

- **Social security entitlement** that came from insights from our Panel members around the complexity of the system, and the need to shift the burden from individuals being expected to navigate multiple, complex public sector processes to the government making the system simpler for the individual.
- **Developing employers' knowledge and skills to recruit and support disabled employees** – as Panel members recognised that the main barrier for employment for disabled people was employer knowledge and attitudes, which could not be overcome by the traditional employability support of increasing individual prospective employee confidence, skills and experience.
- **The importance of making transport more available, affordable and accessible for low-income families** – both the Panel and Commissioners recognised transport as an enabler, but also too frequently a barrier, to low income households. Panel members emphasised the importance of transport in addressing child poverty in terms of affordability, but particularly accessibility and service improvements in rural areas, reflected in the final recommendation.

CASE STUDY 2: Responding to the Scottish Government's request for advice on the cost of living crisis (June, August 2022)

In May 2022 the Commission received a request for advice from SG on actions it should take in the short, medium and longer term to respond to the cost of living crisis. Building on the ways of working developed for the Child Poverty Advice mentioned above, the Panel and the Commission worked on recommendations, providing [Initial Advice in June, and Final Advice in August 2022](#).

The Panel met in June, July and August 2022 to look at how it could contribute to the request for advice. Because of the tight timings for the initial advice (requested on 20 May 2022 and to be submitted by 14 June), it was not possible to bring the Panel and the Commission together for joint meetings in the way that had previously been done for the Child Poverty Advice. Instead, members of the Commission secretariat – who lead on the drafting of the advice under the instruction of the Commission – used their close relationship with the Panel and proximity to the drafting of the advice to incorporate and align the recommendations with emerging views from the Panel.

In June, the Panel received information provided by the secretariat on the current scope of UK Government cost of living support, and had discussions on identifying gaps in support, commented on initial ideas that the Commissioners had suggested, and were invited to highlight any gaps in the Commission's early thinking. Panel members were encouraged to think about how the tool of intersectional thinking (the focus of the previous two Panel meetings) could be used to better understand and develop solutions to the crisis. These highlighted areas of consensus to feed into the advice, but also areas where Panel members constructively disagreed, such as on the writing off of public debt.

In its July meeting, the Panel were updated on the current status of the advice and the rapidly changing context of the cost of living crisis. The July meeting focussed on longer-term options that the SG should pursue to mitigate the effects of the crisis. Panel members discussed their experiences on longer term energy efficiency measures, support for off-grid households, council tax and tax reform, and other options. Panel members highlighted how they felt they had limited benefit from accessing energy efficiency schemes and support, particularly for those that had experience of the private rented sector.

The August meeting of the Panel was close to the deadline for the submission of the final advice, so recognising the rapidly changing and worsening outlook of the crisis, this Panel session focussed on how the evolving crisis had been impacting Panel members and how they live.

Throughout the process of preparing the advice, Panel member ideas, policy analysis and

critique, and voice, were fed into the emerging recommendations of the Commission. This resulted in recommendations in both the initial and final advice that reflected Panel contributions, including:

- The need to support those using off-grid fuel in the right way, and avoiding giving out support to off-grid fuel users in a way they may only get limited benefit from and supporting fuel buying clubs.
- Making sure the SG works effectively with landlords and tenants to improve energy efficiency in practice in the private rented sector.
- Reform of the way that public sector debt is managed and recovered.

CASE STUDY 3: Developing the Commission's Child Poverty Scrutiny 2022 - 23

The Poverty and Inequality Commission reports each year on whether it thinks enough progress is being made towards meeting the child poverty targets. In scrutinising progress over 2022-2023, the Commission wanted to look at what progress had been made in implementing some of the major commitments in Best Start, Bright Futures. It identified the following commitments to focus on:

- Parental Employability
- Parental Transition Fund
- Affordable Housing Supply Programme
- Early Learning and Childcare
- School Age Childcare
- Pathfinders
- Social Innovation Partnership
- Data, monitoring and evaluation

To do this the Commission wanted to meet with Government officials working in these areas to discuss progress. It wanted to involve members of the Panel in these discussions and proposed that two members of the Commission, two members of the Panel and a member of the Secretariat met with the policy leads for each of these areas.

The proposal was discussed by the Panel who supported the approach, and the majority of members said they would like to be involved in the discussions. There was some discussion about which policies to look at but there was limited opportunities for the Panel to influence this at this stage. Commissioners and Panel members volunteered for the meetings that they were most interested in and five Panel members took part in the meetings, with some taking part in more than one meeting.

The secretariat provided a briefing to Commissioners and Panel members in advance of each of the meetings. This set out the purpose of the meeting, who would be attending, information about the relevant commitments in the Delivery plan, any available information about funding and progress, and possible questions they might want to ask. Everyone was also provided with a 'Terms of Engagement' document that had been agreed with SG, setting out the approach that would be taken in the meetings.

Panel members and Commissioners had a pre-meeting ahead of each meeting to discuss what they wanted to focus on in the meeting and what questions they wanted to ask. Commissioners and Panel members both had the same opportunities to ask questions. The secretariat took notes of the meetings.

After most of the meetings with policy officials there was a short debrief where Panel members and Commissioners had an opportunity to share their reflections on the discussion and, again, the secretariat took notes.

Based on the discussions and reflections the secretariat prepared some key points that the Commission might want to include in its scrutiny report for each of the policy commitments, and circulated these to the Commissioners and Panel members involved for comment before incorporating them into a paper to go to the Commission. The Commission agreed key messages and areas to be included in the report. The Secretariat then met with the Panel members who had participated to talk through the key messages and check whether anything was missing.

The Secretariat drafted the report and Executive Summary and shared them with the Commission for comment. The Executive Summary was shared with Panel members for comment, with an offer for them to review the full report if they wanted to. Both the Executive Summary and final report can be found [here](#).

The Panel members who had participated in the scrutiny were invited to join Commissioners at a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and had the opportunity to directly share their reflections on the scrutiny work with the Cabinet Secretary.

CASE STUDY 4: Participation in the Commission's Tax Working Group (2023)

As part of its work programme in 2022-23 the Commission agreed to establish a [working group](#) to look at how devolved taxation can better address poverty and inequality in Scotland.

This working group focused on gathering evidence around a set of “framing questions” set by the Commission (below), and making considered recommendations on tax policy in Scotland, for the endorsement of and publication by the Commission. The working group was composed of Commissioners, two Panel members, and two external members.

Framing questions the Tax Working Group considered were:

- To what extent are current arrangements for taxation in Scotland progressive?
- How could existing taxes be made more progressive in order to reduce poverty and inequality?
- What opportunities are there to raise additional revenue through existing or new taxation in order to reduce poverty and inequality?
- How can the representation aspect of taxation be promoted and understood, as a way of reducing inequality?

The working group had discretion in how to carry out its task, and Panel members participated as full members of the group, alongside Commissioners and external members. The group met monthly throughout most of 2023 until the final report was published in October 2023.

Panel members participated in all aspects of the group's work during its life, including:

- Discussing and agreeing collectively the working group's response on the framing questions.
- Identifying experts for the group to speak to and questioning them on current and future tax policy in Scotland.
- Providing suggestions for policy proposals to address the framing questions and assessing them against the criteria agreed by the group.
- Providing comments on written drafts of the recommendations and report, and giving their views on communications issues and how the report might be most impactful.

In addition, the two Panel members on the tax working group also led discussion groups with

the wider Panel in June 2023, where they sought Panel feedback on the working group's current thinking on recommendations.

The Commission published its [report on how better tax policy can reduce poverty and inequality](#) in October 2023, and working group members were credited for their work in its preparation.

While all working group members contributed to all aspects of the process behind the production of the report, Panel members of the group provided particularly valuable insights on:

- How some of the policy recommendations around tax should be presented in order to recognise the difficulties faced by people on low incomes as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and the challenges of asking people to “pay more” at such a time.
- The importance of fairness and equal treatment in the tax system, and the perceptions of different, preferential, treatment of people on high incomes (when it comes to tax) when compared with people on low incomes (when it comes to social security).
- How to design questions intended to gather data on tax in a way that does not inadvertently reinforce stereotypes around people on benefits when making comparison between benefits fraud and tax avoidance.

10.2. Key Learning - Objective 4: The partnership between the Commission and the Panel

Formal and informal feedback paints a picture of both Panel members and Commissioners generally agreeing that the Commission listens to and values the contributions of the Panel. However, many Panel members and Commissioners wanted more opportunities for direct engagement and synchronous joint working.

Direct engagement

Particularly in the early stages of the Panel, some members fed back that they wanted more opportunities to work with Commissioners, including more direct contact with and visibility from the Commission members. The Panel primarily met independently of the Commission, supported by the Commission secretariat. Commissioners were invited to the Panel to discuss particular issues, with an open invitation for Commissioners to attend any Panel meeting as their schedules allow. Panel members were also invited to some Commission meetings, increasing in frequency as the Panel went on. The decision to have the Panel to meet separately initially to the Commission with only periodic engagement with the full Commission was a deliberate choice rather than accidental. It was done in order to allow the Panel members time and space to become familiar with each other and the project, and to get comfortable in their understanding of issues and finding their voice to express them. This approach had both advantages and disadvantages.

On the positive side, it did appear to have the intended effect of allowing the Panel to become comfortable with each other and the project. However, it did also set up a dynamic where the Panel and Commission were somewhat separate – often operating in parallel, but without enough opportunities for direct engagement.

Despite the Commission's attempts to increase engagement between the Panel and Commissioners as time went on, the views of Panel members on the amount of time spent with Commissioners remained mixed until the end of the first Panel in June 2023.

This may point to the different experiences that Panel members and Commissioners had throughout the process, with those who took part in additional activities having increased contact.

Where Panel members are working on the same area or output, some key reasons for maintaining some space for separate work include:

- The need to design some Panel activities in a different way to Commissioner activities to ensure Panel members can contribute in a safe and accessible environment that best supports their participation.
- The differences in role of Panel members and Commissioners and the statutory duties of the latter.
- The time limitations that Panel members and Commissioners have to fulfil their respective, and sometimes different, roles.
- Deadlines and timeframes that don't allow time for full joint working.

The Commission will consider how it can better embed joint work between Panel members and Commissioners, while maintaining space and for work carried out independently or in parallel.

Perceptions of the Panel – Commission Relationship

Feedback demonstrated the varying perceptions regarding the nature of the relationship between the Panel and the Commission, with some viewing it as a partnership of equals, some as a reciprocal working relationship and some as more of a “symbolic” relationship (i.e., something short of a true partnership). The varying types of engagement at different times, and, indeed, the varying experiences that Panel members and Commissioners had as a result of the activities they took part in could account for some of this. However, the Commission will consider, going forward how it can better ensure that all Panel members feel they are part of a shared project.

In its 2020-23 Strategic Plan, the Commission noted that it will know it has made progress on its overarching priority of “amplifying the voices of experts by experience”, if:

- Our advice and scrutiny reflects the views and experiences of experts by experience, and this leads to action by Scottish Government.
- Experts by experience are established as credible, valued participants in discussions with Scottish Government and other decision makers.
- Experts by experience tell us that they feel valued and that their work with the Commission has been worthwhile and had an impact.

Evidence suggests that Panel members and Commissioners were largely satisfied with the impact of the Panel on the Commission's advice, scrutiny and other work; the integration of Panel members in discussions with SG, and the impact of the process on Panel members.

In an analysis of the Commission's outputs the Panel is visible with both the group and individuals being cited widely. However, in the future the Commission could improve how it illustrates how the work with the Panel shapes these outputs and how learning from members' ‘lived experience’ knowledge has been used.

Feedback from both Panel members and the Commission clearly highlights areas where further development of the relationship between the Panel and the Commission is needed. Both groups were interested in the Commission and the Panel having more, and more meaningful, opportunities for direct engagement and joint working, and increasing the scope for the Panel and the Commission to work together on setting and achieving shared priorities.

Further areas for the Commission to consider are how the Panel can be more involved in co-designing the process, co-designing and delivering Commission activities and in co-designing and / or co-authoring outputs, including on the evaluation of the process.

Agenda-setting

Feedback from Panel members highlighted tensions over who sets the agenda for the Panel's work and for the Commission's work. At the Panel's regularly scheduled monthly meetings, an agenda and background papers and/or presentations were prepared by the Commission secretariat. The items on the agenda were decided by several factors:

- Items on the Commission's agreed annual work plan
- What Panel members tell us their priorities are, issues they want to discuss, or find out more about.
- Urgent or emerging priorities (for example, the cost of living crisis).
- Where the Commission was asked, and agreed to, consult with the Panel on a particular issue on behalf of others (for example on particular SG strategies or policies).

Whilst the Commission sought to increasingly involve the Panel in developing the Commission's work plan and in shaping its own activities, views of Panel members regarding whether they wanted more or less control over agenda-setting remained mixed. Whilst some Panel members sought greater freedom to set the agenda of the Panel and the Commission, others highlighted a desire for greater direction from the Commission to ensure the greatest impact.

“The purpose of the panel was to inform the work of the commission and this obviously directed what we covered but I think it would have been valuable for us to sometimes decide what we collectively wanted to work on and produce more radical solutions.” (Panel member)

As an advisory public body, the Commission does have statutory duties meaning there are some areas of work that it must do and would want to involve the Panel, or Panel members in. Furthermore, there are many issues that are outwith the remit of the Commission and SG often these are issues reserved to the UK Government.

Going forward, the Commission will reconsider whether and how the Panel might have more freedom to decide on its work and influence the Commission's work programme, even if the things that it identifies are ones where the Commission has limited opportunities to influence.

Scope for discussion

Connected to this were concerns raised by some Panel members that discussions with a focus on topics or solutions that were outwith the remit of the Commission or SG meant that conversations and discussions could feel constrained in ways that led to some members to feeling censored or to self-censoring. Some feedback suggested that content that was seen to be too political, challenging or radical was ignored or under-developed.

To promote creative and supportive participation, the Commission will consider how it can create time and space for Panel members to share experiences, ideas and solutions that may go beyond the Commission's statutory duties. Equally, however, the time limitations and statutory function of the body of which the Panel is a part mean this space for discussion and thinking beyond the remit of the Commission cannot be the sole focus and this will require careful balancing of time and priorities.

Clarity on which level of participation an activity sits

Given the breadth and types of activities in which Panel members participated, evidence demonstrated that there were times that some Panel members were unsure about the purpose of a particular activity, and the 'level' of participation a certain activity sat at. For example, is the purpose of a meeting with civil servants for Panel members to be 'informed' by the civil servants, for civil servants to 'consult' Panel members or, perhaps, 'involve' them more deeply in a process?

While the Commission tried to ensure that all background information outlined the purpose of Panel activities, feedback suggests there is scope for making this clearer, particularly because of the varied nature and purposes of Panel activities.

11 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE

5: The Panel influences policy on poverty and inequality in Scotland

11.1 Reflections

In addition to their work in developing Commission outputs, individual Panel members and subgroups of the Panel have been involved in a range of other activities. These include meetings with SG officials and Ministers along with Commissioners, individual speaking contributions at events, and media appearances. Particularly of note is the frequency and nature of contact that the Panel had with SG Ministers.

What impact the Panel has had on poverty and inequality policy in Scotland

As described in section 4.6, the Panel contributed to essentially all Commission outputs of significance during the project period. The Commission has a prominent and largely unique statutory role in providing advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on matters within its remit, particularly in relation to Scotland's child poverty targets. However, the Commission is clearly not the only actor feeding into the policy and decision-making process in this broad and complex topic. Many other public organisations, charities and advocacy groups, and private businesses take a view on these matters and use the levers available to them to influence decisions and policy outcomes.

On some occasions the advice of the Commission, incorporating the views of the Panel, may be different compared to advice being offered by other actors. On other occasions there will be partial or even complete overlap (for example, in recommending the value of the Scottish Child Payment be increased during 2022) between Commission recommendations and those originating from other sources. While the Commission has some unique levers of influence available to it through its statutory powers, it is nevertheless difficult to disentangle the causal effects of Panel (or Commission) advice or recommendations and any changes in policy.

To initially explore this issue we asked for the perspective of both Panel members and Commissioners relating to policy impact. As already shown in the previous section, there was general agreement that the contributions of Panel members were visible in the Commission's outputs (albeit with areas to improve and develop on in relation to how that process is executed).

Through informal feedback gathered from Panel members, it is clear that some particularly value the "face time" with SG Ministers and officials that being part of the Panel confers.

In both the 2022 and 2023 surveys, most respondents (13 of 15 and 7 of 11 respectively) agreed that "If I want to, the Panel gives me the opportunity to share my ideas and experience of poverty and inequality directly with people who make decisions in Scotland". In 2022, one Panel member neither agreed nor disagreed, and one disagreed. In 2023, 4 Panel members neither agreed nor disagreed.

However, in 2022, in response to the statement, "The Panel gets enough opportunities to speak to Scottish Government staff and ministers", 5 of 15 Panel members agreed, 2 disagreed, and 8 neither agreed nor disagreed. Results in 2023 were broadly similar and, due to a smaller number of respondents and the anonymity of the results, it is unclear whether there was movement in Panel members views over time.

In 2022, in response to the statement "taking part in the Panel lets us influence decisions on poverty and inequality that the Scottish Government is taking", 10 of 15 agreed, 2 disagreed, and 3 weren't sure. In 2023, while a smaller proportion of respondents agreed overall, again, due to a smaller number of respondents and the anonymity of the results, it is unclear if this represented genuine movement in Panel members views.

This feedback suggests that over the course of the Panel, while most members felt they had enough opportunities to share their experiences with decision-makers, many felt they wanted more direct contact with SG staff and ministers. Several Panel members felt that the time allocated to meeting with ministers was too limited.

“I think we have had a few good opportunities to interact and feed into meetings with cabinet secretaries, but I would like to see Scottish Government allocate some more time to listen to and explore the ideas of the panel and the commissioners. Everything is always very rushed.” (Panel member)

While it is difficult to say exactly how much movement there was in Panel member views regarding their influence on SG decisions, it is important to note that the proportion of Panel members who felt they could influence decisions decreased. Furthermore, across the life of the Panel there were mixed views and uncertainty regarding what impact their work was having.

“Great people, interesting sessions but I wonder if any fundamental changes will happen.” (Panel member)

“It would be good to have more feedback from Commissioners on topics and subjects we have worked on, and be good to know if change is even possible. As of this moment, I have not seen changes based on what we have spoken about, and while this might be due to the panel being 9 months old, we do not know what has been given to Scot Gov or ministers, nor what they are looking at, or thinking. So it feels like we are moving in the dark a little.” (Panel member)

The Commissioner survey carried out in 2022 showed an even more mixed result, with 4 of 8 Commissioners agreeing that “the Panel influences decisions on poverty and inequality that the Scottish Government is taking” and a further 4 saying they were not sure.

Taken together along with other evidence from Panel members gathered during the course of routine engagement with the Panel, this suggests that while many Panel members were optimistic about the influence their work on the Panel had on decisions that Ministers make, there was still uncertainty surrounding it.

Feedback from Scottish Government

In December 2022, the Commission sought the views of senior SG officials from the Directorate for Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice, the area of the SG with primary corporate responsibility for SG’s tackling child poverty policy in addition to a range of other functions closely related to the interests of the Commission and Panel. In the same month, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison MSP provided a statement for the Commission. Both feedback from SG officials and the then Cabinet Secretary highlighted similar themes to feedback from Commissioners, particularly regarding the value of hearing from experts by experience and of embedding of lived experience knowledge in approaches to reducing poverty and inequality.

SG officials noted that the work of the Panel was very visible to the SG within their direct area of work. They recognised occasions when Panel members had participated verbally in various meetings, including with Ministers, and “in terms of written communications, they have also been visible, and also [their contribution has been] really positive”.

In relation to the impact of the Panel’s contributions in the Commission’s advice and recommendations to the SG, officials emphasised that this topic needs to be seen in the wider context of how decisions are made in the SG and how decisions in public policy are arrived at more generally.

Officials said that although the inclusion of Panel content in itself is unlikely to directly result in Ministers taking decisions as a result of the Panel’s contributions alone, that nevertheless it was impactful in order to: “consider different types of opportunities, the risks, and the interdependencies. That is where it is helpful to get the quantitative data as well as qualitative data, [as] it allows us to have more meaningful discussion around risks and consequences. It allows Ministers to have a greater depth of information when making decisions.”

Contribution and reflections on the Panel from the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Shona Robison MSP

Is there anything in particular that you have valued in terms of what our Panel members with lived experience of poverty have brought to your engagements with the Commission?

Hearing first-hand from the Panel members has been invaluable. Their voices paint a powerful picture of the reality they face every day. I particularly appreciate how open, frank and honest the Panel members have been during our discussions about what is or is not working for them, the challenges they face, often on a day-to-day basis, and what more we as a government can do to make things better for people.

Has hearing from our experts by experience in meetings you have had (or through their inclusion in the Commission's written advice and scrutiny) made you consider any issues differently or in a new light?

Yes, hearing directly from people always helps with decision making and I have shared the insights provided by the experts by experience in my wider discussions with colleagues and Ministers. Their voices keep the reality of the day-to-day difficulties people are struggling with at the forefront of our thinking when, along with the wider body of evidence, we are making the tough decisions on competing priorities and how we can best support households in Scotland. Through the Commission's cost of living briefing paper in September, the voices of the experts by experience helped inform our [analytical report](#) published alongside the Emergency Budget Review on 2 November 2022.

How would you like to see the Commission (and/or the Scottish Government or other public bodies) bring lived experience more closely into policy design and delivery in the future? Is there anything you would like to see done differently?

I think the embedded approach adopted by the Commission is an excellent example of involving people with lived experience and one that others can learn from. I would encourage all public bodies to adopt a similar approach.

Co-designing policies and services alongside the people who they will impact on is essential if we want to deliver the kinds of services that people in Scotland want and need. Lived experience is central to the Scottish Government's policy development, whether that be our initial policy thinking, implementation, or delivery.

11.2 Key Learning - Objective 5: The impact the Panel has had on poverty and inequality policy in Scotland

As part of the Commission, Panel members enjoyed significant opportunities (when compared with other similar groups that the Commission is aware of) for contact time with Ministers and to influence SG policy development and delivery. There is evidence that this is valued by Panel members, though issues remain over improving clarity around impact, feedback, and understanding of the circumstances in which policy decisions are made that the Commission will address in the future.

Uncertainty around impact

Feedback demonstrates that many Panel members were positive about the impact that the work of the Panel, and the Commission more widely, had on SG policy. Most Panel members also valued direct contact with Ministers and felt the visibility and proximity to SG meant there was potential for Panel members to influence policy.

While many Panel members were optimistic about the influence their work on the Panel had had on decisions that Ministers make, views were mixed. This potentially relates to the complexity of the policy landscape on these topics, and the many necessary steps between Panel input and where decisions are made.

This is a common challenge with indirect participatory processes which function to provide information and recommendations to policy and decision-makers, in that decisions taken may or may not be shaped by the participatory process and, even where they are, they will often be shaped by many factors.

Situating the Panel's work in context and providing feedback

“Please continue to provide opportunities for people to share their experiences through meaningful dialogue. Also, remember that whereas change can take time, we do want to be kept informed of what is happening, and where delay does occur, why it is occurring and what can be done in the meantime.” (Panel member message to Scottish Government)

A potential negative consequence of failing to explain adequately how the Panel's work fits into the wider policy environment is for cynicism and/or disengagement to develop. SG officials emphasised that the nature of interpreting the causality of decision-making means that on many occasions, it is not possible to attribute one particular source (such as the Panel) as to why a decision has or has not been taken, and instead it is better viewed as one voice, albeit an important one given the value of the advice and the statutory nature of the Commission, amongst a range of perspectives that the SG and Ministers must look at in totality.

Given that it is rarely possible – particularly in the short term – to point Panel members to clear policy “wins” (i.e. things that are different as a direct result of the Panel's influence), a transparent approach emphasising realism about the nature and scope of the Panel's impact in a complex policy system is one that the Commission will emphasise in future participation work.

Panel members said they would like clearer responses from SG to Panel contributions. Understanding the journey from Panel contributions to a final SG policy decision or action appeared difficult/opaque to Panel members. Some felt there should be a more formal feedback loop for how the SG responded to Panel input, and suggested a ‘You said, we did’ type of response mechanism.

In order to address some of the issues above, the Commission sought to consistently report back to the Panel to close the “feedback loop” on the recommendations it made (for example, by providing written email updates and verbal updates at each Panel meeting and when the Commission had been made aware of a relevant development on an issue they have commented on). The Commission also requested responses from SG policy teams on specific questions on behalf of Panel members and reported back the response to them for their consideration.

However, it is clear from the evidence gathered that, in future work, more must be done by the Commission to ensure that Panel members feel they understand where their work and recommendations go, and what is done with them, as part of the wider policy context. This could take the form of “big picture” reviews with Panel members at regular intervals to pull together responses and feedback on the Panel impact that the Panel is having.

12 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON OBJECTIVE 6: Relationships are built between the Commission and organisations and community groups to hear from people with lived experience

12.1. Reflections

This objective, as articulated in the JRF funding award, recognised the limitations of the Panel on account of its size, composition and capacity; the nature of the Panel was such that it could never include lived experience perspectives and knowledge on all issues that the Commission would be working on.

In order to build on the deeper - but in some senses narrower - insights provided by the Panel, the Commission sought to extend its networks and relationships with other organisations and groups who work with or include people living in poverty. This was intended to involve in the Commission's work those with both professional experience and lived experience, building on the Commission's previous engagement with organisations and groups who supported the Commission's [2020-21 Child Poverty Scrutiny Report to SG](#).

During the course of the Panel's work, the cost of living crisis started to impact Scotland in early 2022. This necessitated a reassessment of the Commission's work plan and priorities in the short- to medium-term. Commissioners agreed to engage in a programme of (primarily in-person) cost of living visits to community and voluntary organisations across Scotland in order to better understand how the crisis was affecting local and grassroots organisations and groups, and the people that access them.

From June 2022 to March 2023, Commissioners met with frontline staff and volunteers from twenty community-based and grassroots organisations, joined by Panel members where possible. The Commission published [briefings and blogs](#) based on the information provided during the visits, and from discussions with the Panel. The Commission worked with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS) and Aberlour to support the participation of young people (not represented on the Panel) in developing the Commission's [2021-22 Child Poverty Scrutiny Report](#).

12.2. Key Learning - Objective 6 - Working with Other Experts by Experience

The Commission's programme of cost of living visits was successful terms progressing towards the original aim of the project, building and learning from a network of community and voluntary organisations across Scotland. However, the focus of the visits meant that the Commission were often hearing about people's experiences through practitioners rather than from the experts by experience themselves. While this was not necessarily a problem given the focus of the cost of living project, it differs from the original objective of hearing directly from people with experience of poverty through these professional organisations. The Commission will likely continue to work with practitioners who can share both their professional knowledge and they views of the experts by experience with whom they work or support.

Our experience in working with CYPCS and Aberlour on our 2021 – 22 Child Poverty Scrutiny demonstrated how having good relationships and networks with organisations that have direct contact with experts by experience - particularly where the Commission can work directly with them - is of value to the Commission's advice and scrutiny.

With respect to the Panel, there are several potential areas for development. Based on feedback from Panel members, the Commission will explore options for supporting the Panel to engage with, inform, learn from and/or collaborate with other experts by experience, particularly those whose experiences and knowledge are not reflected on the Panel.

13 Conclusion

This report has detailed the objectives, impact and learning from the Commission's approach to embedding the participation of experts by experience in its work. We hope that much of the learning will prove useful for others who are engaged in, or seeking to develop, participatory processes with experts by experience. The Commission will build on the reflections and learning outlined in the report in developing the next iteration of the Experts by Experience Panel in early 2024 and in its other work with experts by experience.



@povinequalscot

Visit our website
povertyinequality.scot

For general and press enquiries:
info@povertyinequality.scot