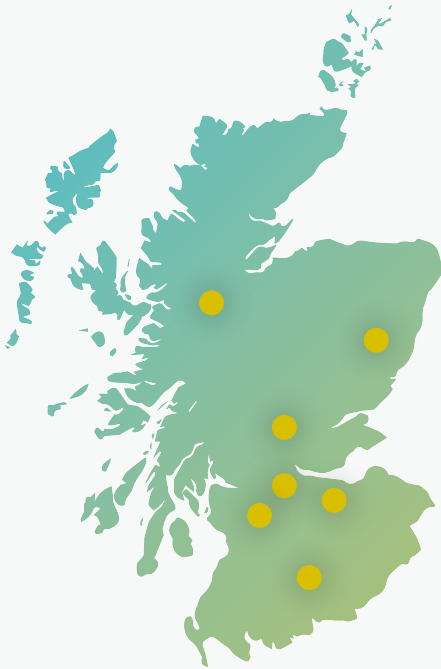


Embedding Participation in the Poverty and Inequality Commission: learning from the first iteration of the Commission's Experts by Experience Panel

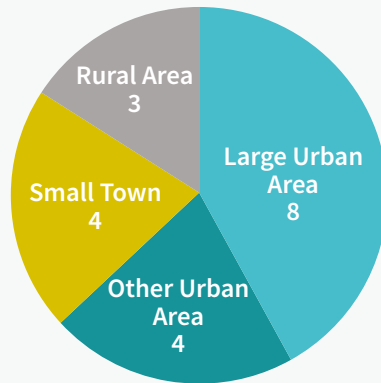
December 2023

Experts by Experience Panel at a Glance

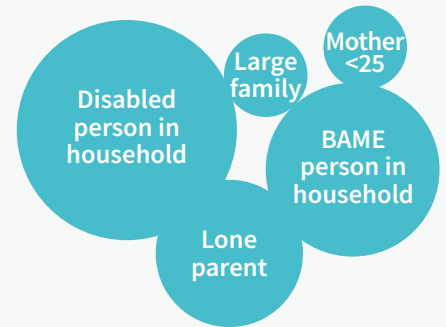
Panel members



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



Opportunities to Set Agenda



Panel Views Included in Commission's Advice and Scrutiny



Impact on Policy in Scotland

Impact on Scottish Government Decisions (Panel member views)



Impact on Scottish Government Decisions (Commissioner views)



Opportunities to Share Views with Decision-makers



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.

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.





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