



Citizens' Assembly
of Scotland
Seanadh Saoranaich
na h-Alba



Our Journey so Far



Convener's Statement



Our interim report tells the story of Scotland's first Citizens' Assembly, so far. It gives a recap of the work members have done, the big questions we've tackled and how we got to this point.

There's certainly a picture coming into focus. But it is our members who will write the final chapter of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland between now and the end of the year.

What a tremendous opportunity it is. Last year we took on the challenge of laying out a roadmap for Scotland's future. We've already shown that we can do politics differently, with all different kinds of people coming together for informed deliberation on thorny issues.

Nobody could have foreseen the impact of Coronavirus on the Assembly or the country. But what should Scotland's renewal look like beyond this pandemic? This Assembly will help set the course ahead.

I know members will carefully study this interim report, as well as the other resources it links to that give us a strong basis for taking the Assembly forward.

I want to thank members for sticking with it after these difficult and painful months.

Your commitment is a source of hope.

We've got unfinished business.

Introduction

The Citizens' Assembly was established in October 2019 against a backdrop of big policy challenges and uncertainty about the future direction of the country.

Our work was due to be complete by June 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic required our last two meetings be postponed. Given continuing uncertainty over when it will be possible to hold large scale gatherings, the Assembly will now reconvene online and complete our work by the end of the year.

Members have already undertaken a wide range of work to begin to prepare a vision for Scotland and to explore key challenges and areas for action. They have learned about key constitutional issues, including where power lies to take decisions for the country. Members have developed their skills in engaging with evidence and participating in deliberative processes.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on the lives of citizens and dominates consideration of the future of the country. Members will want to discuss this when they reconvene.

As an independent and representative voice of citizens, the Assembly's conclusions will be an important contribution as the country works towards renewal.

A series of summary papers have been prepared to remind members of this work. More detailed reporting and all of the evidence presented to the Assembly so far can be reviewed on our website at www.citizensassembly.scot/meetings.

Who we are

The Citizens' Assembly of Scotland is truly a mini-Scotland. It is made up of over 100 people randomly recruited from across the country to be broadly representative of the adult population in terms of age, gender, socio-economic class, educational qualifications, ethnic group, geography and political attitudes. For a full rundown of how the membership came together, click [here](#)

Assembly meetings are a unique gathering of different people and different views about what's best for the future of the country. There's **a serious shared commitment to making a meaningful contribution as citizens**, by working through intractable issues respectfully and finding common ground. This hasn't been politics as usual.

The Assembly first met as a group of strangers back in September. That didn't last long. Learning and deliberation is hard work and it would be even harder without the warm and supportive community members have built up together. **There's always a special buzz in the room.** There are disagreements of course, but there's plenty of laughter and jokes too. **New friendships have flourished** among folk that may never have met one another if they didn't share a real commitment to making a difference for Scotland.

How we work

Our remit is to consider three questions:

What kind of country are we seeking to build?

How best can we overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, including those arising from Brexit?, and

What further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices about the future of the country?

Our full remit can be found [here](#). It's an unusually wide remit compared to other Citizens' Assemblies internationally. That breadth comes with challenges as well as opportunities. Members drive our agenda within the terms set out in the remit.

The Assembly is committed to respectful dialogue that tackles difficult issues through collective deliberation informed by evidence. To support this, members follow a [code of conduct](#) and [conversation guidelines](#) jointly created at our first meeting.

There have been some points of disagreement, including around processes, that required members to work together with the secretariat to find solutions that worked for everyone.

Deliberation is informed by high quality, accessible evidence. Members are able to question speakers directly. Our [evidential standards](#) lay out the different forms of evidence as well as how evidence is identified and collated. In addition, Assembly members have engaged with politicians from four of the five parties represented at Holyrood.

The Assembly is independent of government and is led by our convener supported by a secretariat and an advisory stewarding group. A members' reference group is consulted on the agenda and evidence for meetings. Our discussions are conducted with the help of a team of independent facilitators. Our [operating principles](#) are independence, transparency, inclusion, access, balance, cumulative learning, and open-mindedness.

The journey so far

The following gives an at-a-glance picture of this work. For more detail, please see our [handy summary papers](#) as well as the weekend reports for each meeting. Links to these and other relevant material are included below.



A vision for Scotland

A key output from the Assembly will be to agree a vision for the kind of country we are seeking to build. The [summary paper](#) on vision describes this work.

As a starting point, members shared their experiences of living in Scotland and ideas about what matters most in thinking about the future of the country. Members considered evidence on key facts and figures, constitutional matters, approaches to the economy, including ideas about well-being and happiness, and explored the role of values in shaping decision-making.

In concluding this phase, members prepared a set of 67 statements which represented the breadth and diversity of views about the future of the country and a smaller set of 22 which best represented the common ground between them.

As the summary paper sets out, these statements describe:

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1. **the values that members agreed are important to a vision for the future of the country**

 2. **the issues and outcomes that matter most to members, and**

 3. **what members think about how decisions should be taken for and about Scotland**

How we overcome the challenges facing the country

It is not possible in the time available to explore all the challenges facing the country in detail. Key areas of interest emerged in members' early discussions around building a sustainable country balancing environmental, social and economic impacts and Scotland's finances and taxation. As described in the [summary paper](#) on challenges, discussion in weekends 3 and 4 focussed on these topics.

A broad range of evidence on these topics was presented, including relevant constitutional evidence about where powers lie to take decisions.

Members worked together to consider the hard choices and trade-offs involved and prepared initial ideas about potential areas for action, which come together under the following broad categories:

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1. [fair work and fairer taxes](#)

 2. [a greener Scotland, and](#)

 3. [citizen information and improving decision making.](#)

How decisions are made for and about Scotland

The uncertainty about the constitutional direction of the country, notably around Brexit and a further independence referendum, was an important background issue for the Assembly, although we are not tasked with agreeing a constitutional direction for Scotland. The third [summary paper](#) on constitution describes the background evidence that was presented on constitutional matters and where powers lie in relation to the key challenges of sustainability and Scotland's finances and taxation.

Members broadened the terms of this discussion to look at how politics is conducted and how citizens can be better informed and more meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect our lives. Some of the breadth and diversity of views is reflected in statements on a vision for the future of the country and potential areas for action on key challenges.

Members have been respectful of the different views on constitutional matters across the Assembly. There is a general agreement that [the quality of political debate needs to improve and citizens need to be better informed and involved in decision-making](#). This positive and constructive approach is a reminder that discussion of complex and contested issues can be conducted positively and how Citizens' Assemblies can support that process.

Next Steps

The Assembly has been an incredible journey so far for everyone involved. We have considered a tremendous diversity and complexity of evidence.

Friendships have been forged, preconceptions challenged and minds have been changed

and we have worked expert speakers, facilitators and each other hard. Substantial progress has been achieved in laying the foundations of a vision for the kind of country we are seeking to build and in identifying key challenges and priorities for action.

The Assembly will now reconvene to prepare its final outputs. As we do so it will be important to reflect upon this earlier work.

What is our vision for the future of the country?

What conclusions and recommendations will we make about how to overcome key challenges?

What is our contribution to the discussion about how decisions are made for and about Scotland?

What will we say about how politics should be conducted and the action needed to ensure citizens are better informed and involved in decision-making?

What have we learned through the Citizens Assembly and about how this approach might be used more generally to consider difficult issues?

There is no doubting the fact that we face an uncertain outlook and finishing this job will not be easy. It is vital that we discuss the impact of COVID-19 and different ideas about recovery and renewal as we come to conclusions.

The Assembly was set up to give citizens **a strong voice on the direction of the country**. If things seemed difficult and uncertain back in 2019, the pandemic has only made the Assembly's work even more urgent and necessary. It has **been a crisis the likes of which few people in Scotland today have ever experienced**, and it poses profound challenges.

The Assembly is a unique institution. Members developed strong bonds and skills to engage with evidence and deliberation in those earlier sessions. It is now time to **step forward confidently and take the opportunity** to add our voice to the debate about the future of the country at this critical time.

For further information visit citizensassembly.scot

