



Citizens' Assembly
of Scotland
Seanadh Saoranaich
na h-Alba



Weekend One Report



This report has been prepared by the Secretariat to the Citizens' Assembly to provide a summary of the first weekend of the Assembly. We hope that members find it a useful reminder of that first weekend and that it provides insights for everyone else who is interested in the Assembly as well.

The aims for this first weekend were to:

Welcome Assembly members and for us all to get to know each other

Develop members understanding of how the process will work and the kind of issues that the Assembly will explore

Establish a foundational understanding of the constitutional position in Scotland

Begin to explore Assembly members perceptions and understanding of Scotland and the challenges and opportunities for the country

As the report shows, good progress was made on these aims.

Most important of all was the Assembly members are very diverse but highly enthusiastic and energetic range of people from across the country and the most important part of the weekend was that they had time to meet each other and talk for the first time.

From the minute we all sat down in the room it was obvious that we were starting out on a special journey together. As the report describes, we had a very busy and productive weekend and the feedback shows that overwhelmingly Assembly members felt welcomed, supported and motivated to continue on this journey together.

We hope that you enjoy reading the report and look forward to the next meeting of the Assembly on 29 November to 1 December.

[Kate Wimpres](#), [David Martin](#)

Conveners to the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

This report has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland to provide an overview of the first weekend. Should readers wish to find more detail on the content of the weekend or the Assembly more generally this can be viewed on our [website](#).

Citizens' Assembly of Scotland Weekend 1 Report 26-27 October 2019

The Start

On 24 April 2019, Scotland's First Minister made a commitment in the Scottish Parliament:

“The Scottish Government will establish a citizens assembly that will bring together a representative cross-section of Scotland, with an independent chair, and which will be tasked with considering, in broad terms, the following issues:

What kind of country are we seeking to build?

How can we best overcome the challenges that we face, including those arising from Brexit?

What further work should be carried out to give people the detail that they need to make informed choices about the future of the country?”

Exactly six months and two days later over a hundred members of the first Citizens' Assembly of Scotland gathered in Edinburgh for the first of six weekend meetings. The meeting was convened by the Conveners, David Martin and Kate Wimpess, who were appointed by the Scottish Government to independently take forward the remit of the Assembly.

Saturday 26 October

Introductions

The weekend started at a hotel in central Edinburgh with a welcome from Kate and David who also formally opened the Assembly process. The opening statement can be viewed [here](#).

David commented that:

“This weekend is the start of our journey together – a chance to get to know each other, to talk about your experiences, your hopes and concerns about the future of the country and how the Assembly can help the country to move forward together.”

Referring to the end result of the process, David noted that:

“Our remit requires us to set out recommendations in a report to be presented to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament. That report will be published within a month of our final meeting next April. The Government has committed to ensuring that our report will be debated in parliament and to produce a plan setting out how it intends to take forward those of our recommendations that are agreed by the Parliament.”

Kate added that

“Traditionally political discussions in this country – and let me be clear that when I say ‘politics’ or ‘political issues’ I’m not just talking about the work of politicians, but also about discussions in the media and in communities about the decisions that are made that affect people’s lives. Traditionally these types of political discussions are framed around the idea of debate – where one side literally tries to beat down the other side and win. Here in this Assembly, while we are going to be discussing some very important, and also potentially very divisive topics, we are going to try and do things differently. Rather than focussing on debate, in the Citizens’ Assembly we are going to focus on trying to build up a dialogue between members that helps us better understand different perspectives.”

Housekeeping and an explanation of the format for the weekend was provided by lead facilitator Anthony Zarcharzewski from the Democratic Society, who also steered members through the necessary form filling and the agenda for the weekend. The agenda can be found [here](#).

The Assembly research team introduced themselves to the group. Consisting of researchers from Edinburgh University, the Scottish Government and Newcastle University, the team explained that following member consent they would observe, evaluate and report back on the Citizens’ Assembly process itself and its wider impact. Commissioned by the Scottish Government, this research project will be conducted independently of the Assembly and will help to evaluate the effectiveness of the Assembly and provide insight on it as a public participation model. The outline of the research proposal can be found [here](#).

Hopes & Fears

Having heard from the Conveners, the members of the Assembly reflected on what they want to achieve from taking part, including their hopes and fears about the process.

That the Assembly will:

Have positive discussions and reach a consensus

Treat everyone fairly and discuss the future openly

Foster hope

Be a truly valuable forum that will improve political understanding

Unite and strengthen Scotland

Be informative

Create more knowledge, clarity and truth (about politics, for example)

Lead to positive change and help Scotland move forward

Be for the betterment of Scotland and the Scottish people

Create a better future for younger generations

Make an impact

Bring in unique issues and views (for example from the Islands)

Lead to more use of Citizens' Assemblies and encourage people to see them as a positive thing

Ensure people's voices are heard and listened to

Ensure politicians listen more than talk

The discussion also focused on what members personally hoped to gain from their involvement. They hoped to:

Be part of something positive in Scotland – to make a contribution

Use their hopes and opinions wisely

Have the courage to share their truths

Allow for everyone to be heard and respected

Get to decide what issues to discuss

Meet new people

Exchange opinions, ideas and learn from others particularly those with different beliefs

Learn more about Scotland and how it can be a better country

Have more information and a clearer view

Gain more knowledge, understanding and learn more

Understand the future of Scotland at the end of the six weekends

As one member put it:

“I hope that my little voice provides an opportunity to be heard and make a positive difference for Scotland.”



The comments above are a selection of the range of comments received.

Along with aspirations came inevitable fears about the process. While some members did not express any concern about the Assembly, others feared:

Failure in the process

That no change would result from the Assembly's opinions – it would be a talking shop

That the noise of politics would drown out their voices

Being out of their comfort zone

People being left behind

Being ignored and isolated

Being judged or misrepresented

Divisiveness and entrenched positions would undermine the process

Not being able to contribute enough

The unknown and being out of their depth

Not understanding and being confused by jargon

Being targeted by the (social) media

More disillusionment

Not liking the outcomes of the Assembly



A concern about whether the conclusions and recommendations the Assembly collectively agrees to will be implemented was also strongly expressed. Another theme among members was a lack of confidence in their own abilities and in their relevance to the process.

Constructive Conversations

Following this initial discussion, Assembly members worked together to develop a set of conversation guidelines.

Common themes emerged around the need to foster considerate and active listening, being open minded and avoiding judgement, respecting the privacy of others' stories, and to being mindful about language, kind and supportive to each other. Value was placed on being honest and developing trust. High on the list was avoiding jargon and using plain language. The agreed conversation guidelines can be viewed [here](#).



Living in Scotland

Assembly Members then discussed their experiences of living in Scotland and what is special about living here. Each table group agreed 5 words that reflected key points from their discussions. These were gathered together in the word-cloud below.

What is special about living in Scotland?



The word cloud captures a very diverse set of points identified by Assembly members. Scotland's people and our culture, history and heritage came through strongly, as did friendliness, pride, patriotism and fairness, together with scenery, sustainability and natural resources, and public service including education and healthcare, the legal system and our democracy. Assembly Members noted a range of points around ambition, potential, opportunity, innovation and resourcefulness, and whilst reference was made to polarisation and being opinionated, points were also noted about Scotland being diverse, empathetic and warm.

Welcome Event

In the evening, a short reception to mark the formal opening of the Citizens' Assembly was hosted by Mike Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations. Mr Russell explained his role in bringing about the Assembly, and reiterated his and the Scottish Government's commitment to it and to taking account of the recommendations it makes. He underlined that the Assembly will operate entirely independently from government and that it is for members of the Assembly to decide what issues they wish to explore and to determine its own recommendations.

Louise Caldwell, a member of the Irish Citizens' Assembly, spoke about her journey as a Citizens' Assembly member. She recalled her disbelieving response to the knock on her front door inviting her to take part, her nervousness at the first meeting, and subsequent growing confidence in the role. Particularly significant for her was the building of relationships with fellow members. Louise explained that while there had been ups and downs along the way, the group had worked hard to establish shared understandings and to uphold the value of all contributions throughout. In such a way they overcame differences in background and outlook and were able to reach a consensus together about what mattered to them and the changes they wanted to see happen.



Jackie Kay, Scotland's Makar (or national poet), took the last speaking spot giving readings from her poems 'April Sunshine' and 'Threshold' from BANTAM, c. Jackie Kay 2017 to mark the occasion of the establishment of the Assembly. Extracts are provided below.

'April Sunshine'

Nobody imagined how you marched against Polaris,
How you sat doon at Dunoon - stood up for UCS.
Nobody pictured you writing to Mandela
And fifty other prisoners of South Africa

You were just an old woman;
You were just an old man

'Threshold'

Find here what you are looking for:
Democracy: guard her

Like you would a small daughter
And keep the door wide open, not just ajar,

And say, in any language you please,
Welcome, welcome to the world's refugees.

Sunday 27 October

On day 2 Assembly members began to consider background evidence that may be relevant to considering the questions set out by the First Minister on 24 April.

Constitutional Considerations

The first evidence session comprised a presentation from Nicola McEwen, Professor of Territorial Politics, Edinburgh University, co-director of Centre on Constitutional Change and Senior Research Fellow, UK in a Changing Europe, on Scotland's current constitutional arrangements, including how decisions are taken for and about the country and its place in the world and how these arrangements might change in the future.

The slides from Nicola's presentation can be viewed [here](#) on the website.



In particular, Nicola looked at:

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1. The current constitutional set up and how we got to this point

 2. The range of constitutional options which are generally recognised and how decisions are taken on change

 3. Issues that often come up in debates about the constitution and the different constitutional options available to countries
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Members discussed the presentation at their tables and agreed a range of questions and points for clarification. The resulting question and answer session, hosted by Conveners, can be viewed [here](#).

All of the [questions](#) raised in this session will be answered over the course of the Assembly. As a starting point, Nicola has provided a number of factsheets covering a range of the questions asked. The factsheets can be viewed [here](#). In addition, a glossary of terms has been prepared by the Secretariat and can be viewed [here](#).



The Scotland we know, the Scotland we don't know

The next session of the weekend comprised an introductory presentation by the Conveners of certain key facts and figures about Scotland.

Assembly members represent the diversity of Scotland according to geographical distribution across the Parliamentary regions and according to key characteristics of age, gender, disability, educational qualifications, ethnicity and political attitudes. The profile of Assembly members can be viewed [here](#).

The presentation drew upon this socio-economic profile and introduced a range of related data about Scotland and how it is changing. The presentation also introduced at a high level some of the diverse range and kinds of issues that feature in discussions about the future of the country from international and national concerns, through to issues about public services, communities and families.

In concluding the presentation, Kate referred again to the First Minister of Scotland's words from her statement of 24 April 2019 when establishing the Assembly, and which underpin the ambitions for the Assembly, where she said that:

“We should try to find ways of debating our choices respectfully and in a way that seeks maximum areas of agreement. We should lay a foundation that allows us to move forward together, whatever decisions we ultimately arrive at.”

Assembly members discussed what they had found surprising and interesting in the presentation. Some of the key things that stood out to the members included:

The projected decline of the population in Scotland

The differences in life expectancy depending on where you live in Scotland

The level of support in Scotland for EU membership

Approximately 25% of the population of Scotland have a limiting long term condition expected to last 12 months or more

The high percentage of the population that identified as White Scottish or British

That the second most spoken language in Scotland is Polish

That rural populations are declining



The [text](#) and [slides](#) of the presentation can be found here.

The Scotland we want to build

In the final session of this first meeting, Assembly members considered the kind of country they would like to live in the future. They discussed the word cloud produced on Saturday and whether these words reflected the Scotland that they would like to live in, what would remain the same and what would change? Each table selected five words or short phrases that reflected the Scotland they would like to see in the future. These are captured in the word cloud below.



The outputs from this exercise developed many of the themes identified in the earlier discussion and began the process of identifying ambitions and actions. These themes, together with ambitions and actions will continue to be developed in future Assembly meetings.

Conclusion

Conveners reflected on the scope of the evidence considered in this first weekend and the thought and energy that the Assembly members had put into it, reflecting that they had quickly overcome any nervousness about the process and had embraced the opportunity. They also thanked everyone involved in the design and delivery of the event and looked ahead to the next meeting on 29 November to 1 December.



“The weekend has been really well organised. It’s flowed well. They said it might feel rushed but it didn’t feel rushed. The sessions have been really informative. It would have been better to have a copy of the slides on constitution.”

“It’s been good - food for thought. I thought the sessions were excellent. And I’ve been well looked after - you have all made me feel like a princess.”

“It’s been surprising. I was nervous coming in and quite sceptical actually. But it’s been enjoyable. Been good to mix up the tables today to meet other people. The sessions at times are confusing because there is a lot to take in. It’s been quite loud but hopefully Jubilee [the venue from now on] will be better. I’m not really into politics but it’s been good to find out more about the future of Scotland.”

“It’s been interesting and I have really enjoyed myself.”

“The weekend has been good. It’s been eye opening.”

“Today has been informative. It’s been relaxed and it’s been easy to get your point across without worrying. It’s felt like a safe place to express yourself without feeling judged.”