



Citizens' Assembly: Conveners Welcome

Kate Wimpres: Convener of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

Welcome everybody!

Welcome everybody to the first meeting, of the very first Citizens Assembly of Scotland.

I am Kate Wimpres, one of the Conveners of this Assembly, working alongside my fellow convener David Martin.

I think it is important to take moment to recognise this landmark point in how ordinary people from across Scotland are able to participate in shaping Scotland's future – and I, for one, am incredibly pleased to be able to play a role in this.

I am very much looking forward to working with you, the members of this first Citizens Assembly of Scotland, over the 6 weekends that we will be meeting together

We will take forward this exciting opportunity we have been given to help shape the future of how government better engages the people of Scotland in important decisions about our all our futures.

Now you may have spotted that I am not from round these parts. I was lucky enough to make Scotland my home 17 years ago, and am raising a family here. I truly love this country, so it is a real honour for me to be standing here, speaking to you today.

But... while David and I will be leading the Assembly you, the members, are the ones who will be setting the agenda. We are here to help you have your voice heard about the future of Scotland. To listen to what you have to say and to take your ideas, concerns, and recommendations out to the wider public, when we speak on your behalf.

So... you are the Assembly members, and you are driving this process. And we'll talk more about what that means later today.

Now you know who we are, but anyone looking around will see there are a lot of other people in room.

First, we have the camera here. It is filming what is happening at the front so that it can be livestreamed online. Anyone who is interested can follow the progress of the Citizens Assembly that way, watching and listening to the presentations at the same time as us.

It is however important to note that today it will only be filming speakers at the front of the room, and when you go into discussions at your tables the filming will be turned off.



I'd also like to introduce Ian Davidson, the Secretary for the Citizens Assembly of Scotland (and you'll hear more from him later), and the wider Secretariat team. They have been busy working with us to organise the meetings of the Assembly, and you will have spoken to some of them in the lead up to today, and met many more of the team when you arrived. They are here to support you throughout all of our meetings, so any questions do just ask them and they will be able to sort things out.

Seated at the back of the room are some of the members of the Stewarding Group who have provided advice and support to us, as conveners, in preparing for today. They are here to observe, but they will be staying at the back, not able to listen in to your conversations at your tables (and you can spot who they are by their badges). Some of them may want to talk to you during the breaks about how you are finding the process, but it is entirely up to you whether you want to talk to them or not

We also have a few journalists at the back as well. They are here to cover our first meeting and will be speaking to myself and David about what we are hoping to achieve today and tomorrow.

For this weekend at least, we've asked the media not to speak to any of the Assembly members. We think it only fair that you get a chance to familiarise yourself with each other, and with the task ahead, in private.

However, at a later date, there may be an opportunity for some of you to speak to the media if you wish to.

We also have a research team who will be joining us throughout the 6 weekends. As I said earlier this Citizens Assembly is a new thing for Scotland and it is important that we take the opportunity to learn from it – from weekend to weekend, and across the whole process. The research team, who are independent from the Conveners and the Secretariat will tell you a bit more about their work later on.

And finally - last, but by no means least, we have the Facilitation Team. At each of your tables there is a facilitator who will work with you throughout the day, and at all of our meetings, and we also have Anthony here today who will be leading the weekend from the front with us.

So, finally, sincere thanks again for embarking on this unique and fascinating journey with us. It is your thoughts, experiences and opinions as Assembly members that matter, and that make Citizens Assemblies' such powerful democratic tools.

David Martin: Convener of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

Good afternoon members of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland.

This is a special moment. The convening of the Assembly.

As Kate said a moment ago, I am David Martin and I am the fellow convener of the Assembly. It is my happy duty to now say a few words to you about what the Assembly is about and what we have been asked to do.



You will all have lots of thoughts and questions about what we will achieve through the Citizens Assembly.

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.

In a few minutes we will go through the agenda for the weekend, but as we get started Kate and I wanted to explain a bit of the background to the Assembly – how and why it was established and what it is here to do.

The Assembly was established by the Scottish Government in a statement by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon to the Parliament on 24 April.

That statement was exactly 6 months and 2 days ago. Not a long time from this standing start, and a great tribute to Ian and the team who have got us all together today ready to start our journey together.

In that statement, Nicola spoke about the challenges of Brexit and the very different views of the political parties and across Scotland more generally about the way forward for the country. She spoke about the need to take decisions about our future in a different way that neither ignores nor seeks to suppress differing views. She said that we should try to find ways of debating our choices respectfully and in a way that seeks maximum areas of agreement and lays a foundation that allows us to move forward together, whatever decisions we ultimately arrive at.

And that's what Citizens' Assemblies are for. They have been used across the world to help tackle difficult and controversial issues. They involve citizens –

- in considering evidence that is free from bias or political spin and is presented in a way that everyone can understand;
- discussing issues in a respectful way so that everyone's views are heard;
- and coming to decisions which participants and the wider public can agree have been reached fairly, even where they may not agree with them.

That is the background to this Citizens Assembly. Over 100 of you, broadly representative of the wider adult population in Scotland, brought together to consider issues about the future of the country and to make recommendations that will help the country to move forward as far as possible by agreement.

The questions that we have been asked to look at by the Government are:

- What kind of country are we seeking to build?
- How can we best overcome the challenges that Scotland and the world faces, 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?

These are very broad set of questions and you will all have thoughts about how we will go about answering them. Essentially it is for the Assembly collectively to decide



how to go about this - the Government has made clear that it wants you to decide that for yourselves, with the guidance of Kate and me as conveners.

The process we are starting today will take us on this journey, but it might be helpful if I set out a few comments on how Kate and I have been thinking about these issues.

First of all, the Assembly is obviously taking place against the backdrop of significant uncertainty about Scotland's place in the world, including our relationships with our near neighbours in the UK and our wider partners in the EU. In particular:

- We don't know for certain yet whether we will remain in or leave the EU and, if we do leave the EU, when we will do so and on what terms.
- The Scottish Government has made clear its intention to hold a further independence referendum next year and to update the prospectus on independence in advance of that referendum.
- The upheaval at Westminster further demonstrates the uncertain outlook for our constitution and our politics.

This backdrop matters. There is no doubting that different constitutional journeys will have a profound impact upon the lives of citizens. There will be choices to be made.

But we are not here to decide whether any of these choices are good or bad for Scotland.

Some people might disagree with that of course - they might say that is precisely what we should be doing.

But that is to miss the point of the Assembly. We all hold views on these matters to some degree or other – but the Assembly is not about debating the merits of general constitutional outcome. It is not about winning or losing those arguments. It is not a platform for any political view or any political party. It is not a substitute for the proper processes for decision-making through elections or referendums.

In any case it would not be possible even over 6 weekends to take the range of evidence and undertake the deliberation required to work through all of those constitutional choices and come to agreed conclusions which could realistically be agreed and seen to have been reached fairly by Assembly members.

But what the Assembly will do is absolutely vital to the health and vitality of our politics and to ensuring the country moves forward as successfully as possible, no matter what decisions are taken about the future.

On behalf of and - as far as we can - hearing about the views of our fellow citizens, we will have time to consider what kind of country we want to be, to discuss the challenges that we face, and to take evidence on some of the issues that we are most concerned about in making choices about the future. In doing so we will have the chance to explore how different constitutional changes might impact upon us in real life.



Independently of any and all political parties, we will consider how people should be supported to take decisions in a fair and objective way – to decide what information we think people need to have when faced with such choices.

Our recommendations will be absolutely critical to ensuring that the country can take decisions on an informed basis, and that we can move forward by agreement, whatever decisions are taken.

It is a very real opportunity to change how people are involved and supported at these moments - to set new standards for the quality of information that we are provided with, and new standards on how discussion of contentious issues is conducted.

One of the questions that people who participate in a Citizens' Assembly often ask is what will happen as a result of their work. It's a very important question.

In this case, 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.

These are important commitments which I hope demonstrates that politicians are committed to acting on our conclusions.

Kate and I are both tremendously excited to be joining you on this incredibly important journey. I'm sure like us you all feel a bit daunted about what we are embarking upon as well as excited about it.

We will have a lot to get through over our 6 weekends. We promise you that won't be rushing through this though. This first weekend is not about answering the big questions in our remit, but as I said earlier is about getting to know each other, to talk about our experiences and our hopes for the Assembly.

And finally, as we get going, it is important to point out that there will be a lot of interest the media and amongst friends and family in what the Assembly is about and what it is doing. It will be very important that everyone takes care in this spotlight. We will talk later on about some of the arrangements that we are putting in place and how we will should deal with the media and on social media.

In the meantime please don't be too concerned at the prospect of any of that. You will have a lot of support as we go on this journey. Not just Kate and I as conveners, but the Secretariat - who you should of course contact at any point at or between meetings to discuss anything about the Assembly. We are all here to support you so please do not hold back from talking to us.

In conclusion I would like to personally thank you for agreeing to be part of the Assembly. We are at a big moment for the future of Scotland and you are making a



huge commitment of time and energy in agreeing to be involved. I'm very confident that you will all find it a great experience, and Kate and I, together with Ian and everyone in the Secretariat look forward to getting to know you all and making sure this it truly is a special experience.

Thank you all very much.

Kate Wimpres: Convener of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

You're probably thinking, how will the Assembly work?

The Citizens Assembly of Scotland is probably going to be different to any other public meeting or discussion of political issues that you've been involved with before.

This is because it has been established as a deliberative process – a process through which people, not just despite their differing opinions, but actually, really because of their different views, can learn together and identify where they can find common ground.

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 thing 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.

And although both David and I have already said that this Citizens Assembly is a first for Scotland, Citizens Assemblies themselves are becoming an established way for governments across the world to do just that - to better understand the views and priorities of the populations they are elected to serve.

As we move forward you, the members, will be involved in determining what issues you want to explore, the types of information you think you need in order to discuss them properly, and how we as a group develop recommendations and come to decisions.

That might seem like it will be a difficult task, but we have a team of people with skills and experience in facilitating deliberative processes like this working with us to help us do this in a fair and inclusive way.

So how will it actually work...



Over the next 5 weekends that we are together you'll spend most of your time seated, as you are today, in small discussion groups – and we'll mix these groups up each day so you get a chance to talk to all of the other Assembly members.

Throughout the meetings you'll have the opportunity to hear from a wide variety of speakers. Some of these will be presenting you with factual information about the current state of play in Scotland, and some of them will be presenting arguments to you about what they believe needs to change, and why.

You'll also have the opportunity to discuss what you learn with your fellow Assembly members, to explore what the different arguments presented would mean in real life and for the things that are important to you.

These discussions are a vitally important part of the Assembly process. As David has already noted you've been brought together as a group that is broadly representative of the population of Scotland. Talking through some of the issues we'll be looking at together will be a chance to get out of our usual 'bubbles' – where we usually mostly only hear from people a lot like ourselves.

We want the Assembly to be an enjoyable experience for you, and later today we'll be working together to look at what procedures we can put in place to ensure everyone is able to feel confident, and able to have their say and know they will be listened to.

And finally it will be up to you, collectively, to evaluate the evidence that is put before you, in light of your own experiences and what you learn from the views of your fellow Assembly members, to draw conclusions... and at that point develop the Assembly's recommendations for government.

This weekend is our starting point. It will be a chance to get to know your fellow Assembly members and for us as Conveners to begin to get to know you.

We're also going to spend some time making sure you understand how the process will work and what is expected of you, and begin learning about some of the issues the Assembly will cover. We are also going to start exploring our views and understanding of Scotland and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Kate Wimpess and David Martin
Conveners of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland