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# Scottish Parliament committee witness figures, 2018-19

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Building upon previous work for the Scottish Parliament, this paper provides an overview of some of the characteristics of committee witnesses for the 2018-19 parliamentary year, focusing on gender in particular.

## Method

The approach taken for counting committee witnesses in 2018-19 is the same as that used by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) Enquiry Team in providing data for the research report commissioned by the Scottish Parliament Committee Office: *Committee Witnesses: gender and representation* (Bochel and Berthier, 2018). That involved identifying witnesses by their appearance in the minutes for each committee meeting. For 2018-19, the data collection was undertaken by Professor Hugh Bochel and Colleen Wall from the University of Lincoln.

Committees of the Scottish Parliament do not at present record the gender identity of their witnesses. Witnesses were therefore classified as male or female on the basis of name only when it appeared on paper unambiguously male or female (e.g. 'John', 'Mary'), and otherwise on the basis of Internet research (e.g. 'Sam', 'Ashley') or parliamentary recordings. The analysis does not include cases where a witness may potentially have notified the committee of their gender identity before an appearance unless this is explicit in the minutes, or unless the witness specified on the record that they were non-binary. This approach has obvious limitations, and in particular is prone to potential misidentification both in terms of gender and gender identity; this is, however, an inevitable shortcoming of all analyses that use datasets where witnesses' gender identity is not defined by themselves.

It is also worth noting that for some organisations a degree of judgement has to be exercised in placing them into categories (for example, some could fall into more than one category). As far as is possible and appropriate, the decisions made by the SPICe Enquiries Team for the collation of data on witnesses in 2016-17 have been replicated here in order to maximise comparability.

## Discussion

In the 2018-19 year there were 1,942 witness appearances (as indicated by individual appearances on separate items in committee minutes), representing 1,339 separate people from more than 570 organisations. During the 2016-17 parliamentary year there were 1,898 appearances by 1,315 people.

Of the 1,942 witness appearances, 1,135 (58.5 per cent) were male and 806 female (41.5 per cent), while one person specified themselves as non-binary. This appears to reflect a continuing slow increase in the proportion of female witnesses over time (Table 1). The only other legislature for which equivalent figures are currently available is the House of Commons and its select committees, where, for April-November 2018, 33 per cent of witnesses were female (37 per cent of 'discretionary' and 27 per cent of 'non-discretionary' witnesses, with 'non-discretionary' defined broadly as below), with wide variation across committees. The House of Commons Liaison Committee has set a target that at least 40 per cent of discretionary witnesses should be female by the end of the Parliament, and has agreed that: '...other than in circumstances where there are compelling reasons for an all-male panel, a panel of three or more witnesses should normally include at least one woman, when the witnesses involved are not specific office-holders such as Ministers or heads of key public sector organisations falling within the remit of the Department the Committee is scrutinising' (Liaison Committee, 2018, p. 14). That is clearly likely to result in an increase in the number of female witnesses and their proportion of all witnesses.

*Table 1: Percentage of Scottish Parliament committee witnesses who are female/male*

1999-2000		2015-16		2016-17		2018-19	
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
25.1	74.9	35.9	64.0	38.2	61.8	41.5	58.5

If individual witnesses are considered, rather than appearances, then for the Scottish Parliament for 2018-19, 561 (42 per cent) were female and 777 (58 per cent) were male, with one non-binary person.

In terms of witness appearances, it should be noted that the proportion of women was boosted by the Auditor General being female (she made 49 individual appearances, and indeed Audit Scotland had a high proportion of female witnesses, see Table 7), and the fact that the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee frequently hears from Audit Scotland witnesses twice in a meeting, often in public and then in private, and in those instances witnesses will also appear twice as they show under different items in the minutes. Scottish Government ministers and officials are also likely to make multiple appearances, with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Derek Mackay, for example, appearing 23 times. Overall, men were slightly more likely than women to appear before committees more than once.

The Scottish Government is clearly a major provider of witnesses, and for 2018-19 just under two-fifths of appearances by both ministerial and official witnesses were women (Table 2).

*Table 2: Scottish Government witness appearances, 2018-19*

	Number of witness appearances	% female
Ministers	177	38
Officials, etc.	436	38

Table 3 provides the number and percentage of witness appearances by committee, and also the figures for those from the Scottish Government. As with previous years, there are clearly significant variations across committees in the number and gender of witnesses. These figures may be skewed in different directions by a variety of factors, including the gender balance among Scottish Government ministers and officials and the subject matter of inquiries.

*Table 3: Number and percentage of committee witness appearances and witness appearances from the Scottish Government, 2018-19*

Committee	Number of witness appearances	Number of appearances by female witnesses	% female	Number of appearances by Scottish Government witnesses	Scottish Government witness appearances % female
Culture, Tourism Delegated Powers	109*	35	32	24	38
Economy, Energy	190	60	32	43	21
Education and Skills	103	49	48	13	15
Environment, Climate	181	71	39	86	44
Equalities	113	67	59	21	52
Finance and Constitution	139	38	27	63	16
Health and Sport	155	78	50	45	62
Hutchesons' Hospital	4	0	0	0	0
Justice	119	44	37	34	35
Justice sub-committee on policing	27	3	11	2	50
Local Government	122	44	36	27	22
Public Audit	256	162	63	34	53
Public Petitions	53	32	60	24	67
Rural Economy	207	53	26	119	38
Social Security	129	61	47	59	51
Standards	12	5	42	0	0

\*One non-binary

It is also possible to consider the number of panels that are entirely composed of men and of women (Tables 4 and 5), with the former being considerably more common.

*Table 4: Number of all female panels (for panels of 2 or more people) (panels all from Scottish Government in brackets), 2018-19*

	All panels	(Panels with only Scottish Government witnesses)
2 women	14	(7)
3 women	19	(4)
4 women	5	(0)
5 women	2	(1)
6 women	1	(0)

*Table 5: Number of all male panels (for panels of 2 or more people) (panels all from Scottish Government in brackets), 2018-19*

	All panels	(Panels with only Scottish Government witnesses)
2 men	34	(17)
3 men	31	(17)
4 men	14	(7)
5 men	9	(1)
6 men	4	(1)
8 men	1	(0)

As with previous years, there are also significant variations in the proportions of appearances by male and female witnesses that are associated with different types of organisation, and indeed individual organisations. Tables 6 and 7 show some examples of these (universities are excluded from Table 7 as, for the most part, such witnesses are chosen for individual expertise, rather than to represent their institution).

*Table 6: Witness appearances by type of organisation, 2018-19*

	Number of witness appearances	% female
Public bodies	320	48
Local government	92	47
Charities	195	48
Higher education	88	42
NHS bodies	57	35
Trade unions	38	34
Police Scotland	31	7

*Table 7: Organisations providing 8 or more witness appearances (excluding universities), 2018-19*

	Number of witness appearances	% female
Audit Scotland	169	66
Citizens Advice Scotland	10	20
COSLA	24	50
Crown Office/PF Service	12	17
Glasgow City Council	9	56
Law Society of Scotland	11	46
Police Scotland	31	7
Scottish Fiscal Commission	18	22
Scottish Natural Heritage	9	67
UK Government	23	44

One area where the figures for 2018-19 show considerable difference from those for 2016-17, is that the proportion of appearances by women is much more even across the different types of committee activity (Table 8). During 2016-17, the proportion of appearances by women for primary and subordinate legislation was markedly lower than for other inquiries.

*Table 8: Witness appearances by type of committee activity, 2018-19*

	Number of witness appearances	% female
Inquiry	1307	41
Post-legislative scrutiny	65	46
Primary legislation	390	41
Subordinate legislation	180	41

## References

Bochel, H. and Berthier, A. (2018) *Committee witnesses: gender and representation*, SPICe, Edinburgh.

Liaison Committee (2018) *Witness gender diversity*, House of Commons, London.



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