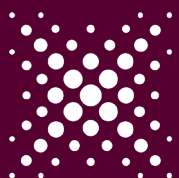




Scotland's Climate Assembly

Observers Report



Scotland's Climate
Assembly
Seanadh Gnàth-shìde
na h-Alba

CONTENTS

- 2** Introduction and Aims
- 4** Structure and Process
- 8** Registration and Attendance
- 9** Who were the Observers?
- 13** Ongoing Engagement
- 14** Institutional Learning
- 16** Annex One: Observer Policy

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

Grounded in Scotland's Climate Change Act (2019), Scotland's Climate Assembly is the second citizens' assembly to be held in Scotland and the first tasked with addressing the issue of climate change. It is a "mini-Scotland", made up of over 100 members broadly representative of the country in terms of age, gender, household income, ethnicity, geography, rurality, disability, and attitude towards climate change. The Assembly operates independently of government.

The Assembly is about doing politics differently. Citizens finding common ground through informed deliberation on how Scotland should change to tackle the climate emergency in a fair and effective way.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Scotland's Climate Assembly met entirely online and is one of the first citizens' assemblies anywhere in the world to do so. The Assembly also fully integrated the views, experiences and opinions of children through a unique project with Children's Parliament.

The innovative nature of the Assembly presents a potential source of learning for those wishing to organise similar deliberative processes in the future. This document aims to capture some of this learning, specifically in relation to the observer programme which formed part of the Assembly.

For more detail on the process of the Assembly and to read the final recommendations, download the [Assembly's full report here](#).

Aims

Scotland's Climate Assembly was governed by principles of transparency and accessibility. The observer programme was designed to support these principles, with the following overarching aims:

- Transparency: to allow scrutiny of the evidence and process.
- Trust: to build trust by welcoming close contact and questioning.
- Profile: by creating a network of interest across society, able to share Assembly recommendations widely, and broaden awareness of, and trust in, the process.

Key Messages

The observer programme offered insight into the process, proceedings, evidence and experience of the Assembly. It sought to provide, as far as possible, a complete picture of the Assembly to observers. It was hoped that the programme would create an additional network of engaged stakeholders who understand each stage of the Assembly – learning, deliberation and decision-making.

Prior to being granted observer status, registrants had to accept the Assembly's observer policy. This is included as Annex One to this report.

Summary of Reach

The observer programme was designed to simultaneously target relevant stakeholders from across Scotland, the UK and internationally, and to be open to the public. There were over 550 registrations for the Programme, with 91 individuals registering for multiple sessions. A total of 258 attended live sessions, with 33 individuals attending multiple sessions.

Sources of Learning

In developing the observer programme, we reviewed the arrangements made by other deliberative processes. However, Scotland's Climate Assembly met entirely online, allowing more observers to participate and easier sharing of information.

We drew on best practice in:

- protection of members;
- integrity of the deliberative process;
- prioritising access;
- organisation of stakeholder targets;
- data protection.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

A successful observer programme is a balance. Transparency is a core principle of the Assembly, contributing to the credibility and legitimacy of the process. This means observers must be granted maximum possible access, whilst considering the sensitivity of some aspects of the Assembly. Observers should be granted access to all materials and evidence provided to Assembly members, able to view plenary sessions where deliberations and sensitive discussions are not taking place, and given the opportunity to question and hear from different parts of the Assembly process.

However, Members' deliberations cannot be allowed to be influenced by external factors, and members must feel at ease in expressing themselves freely. Likewise sensitivity of content must be considered so that discussions and early conclusions are not taken out of context, misrepresenting the work and final conclusions of the Assembly members.

An Online Process

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all Assembly meetings and associated observer sessions were held online. Whether a process is in-person or online, established best practice is for the observer programme to be hermetic: it should not impact, influence or significantly interact with the Assembly. However, an online observer programme had to operate differently to one conducted in-person.

Integrity

Observers' movements around an Assembly are normally controlled to maintain the integrity of the Assembly. While observers are given access to similar information at in-person and online events, control is more easily maintained in an online process. This is clear to the observers themselves, who are obliged to rely more heavily on the organising body, increasing the need for the organisers to actively demonstrate transparency.

Access

It is standard practice that observers do not have access to small-group discussion between members, to allow members to express themselves freely and without external influence. However, in an in-person process, observers may see deliberation from a distance, or be present as members engage with evidence. This allows an opportunity to read the room and get a sense of the atmosphere that is hard to replicate online.

Rapport

Lack of physical connection makes it harder for online observers to generate a rapport with the Assembly body and to share in their experience of Assembly process. Other ways must be found to share the engagement and commitment of the Assembly members with those observing.

Structure

Three aspects made up the observer programme of Scotland's Climate Assembly:

- **Information on the weekend's agenda**

The aims and outline of the day and timings of the activity, as well as which sessions would take place in 'plenary', i.e. in the full Assembly, and which would be in small break-out groups with facilitators and would therefore not be accessible to the observers.

- **Links to video presentations**

All evidence materials were made live to the observers at the same time they were presented to members. Observers were provided with links, and the time at which to expect that video would go live. Videos of the online plenary sessions were made available after a short delay to format and upload material from the online platform to the Assembly's website and YouTube channel.

- **A live, hour-long online session with speakers and team members**

At 4:30pm on the Sunday of each weekend, Susie Townend, head of the secretariat, chaired a live Zoom call for observers to meet with the Assembly organisers and speakers. During this hour-long call, approximately half the time was given to speakers, evidence leads and facilitation leads to share their reflections on the weekend, and half was devoted to a live Q&A. The final two sessions were recorded, and the videos are available on the Assembly YouTube channel.

Numbers

Due to the online format, a larger number of observers were able to engage with the programme than would typically be possible in an in-person assembly. No restrictions were placed on participation and the largest live session was attended by 80 observers.

Details of the Programme

On the Friday before a weekend, observers were sent preparatory information, including email address confirmation, a description of the access they should expect and details for engaging with the Assembly across social media platforms.

On the morning of both the Saturday and Sunday, an email was sent to all registered observers featuring the programme of the day ahead, and the links to any video evidence being presented to the Assembly. On Sunday, this email included the access information for the live observer call in the afternoon.

A further email was sent in the days following the session, thanking the observers for their attendance, sharing plenary video links and inviting them to engage further.

The Live Sessions

Weekends 1-5 of the Assembly were weighted more heavily to the provision of evidence and learning. Each live observer session for these weekends followed the same format:

- Introduction to the Assembly origins and guiding principles
- Evidence Leads and speakers reflect on the content of the weekend
- Q&A

As the final weekends featured no new evidence for observers to view, a different focus was taken.

Weekend 6: Process and Deliberation

The observer session for weekend 6 focussed on process, responding to the large amount of national and international interest in the use of citizens' assemblies in decision-making and especially the operation of the first online assembly at scale.

'Later this year, Scotland's Climate Assembly will put its recommendations to Parliament. This observer session will offer insight into not only where those recommendations have come from, but how this representative group of Scottish citizens have moved through the evidence to generate their advice to government. This deliberative procedure is at the core of a citizens' assembly, and is why the assembly method is gaining traction worldwide in the face of knotty issues like climate change. We will also share our experience, as one of the first wholly online assemblies, of deliberating at a distance.'

Susie Townend, head of the Secretariat

Speakers:

4:30pm Susie Townend, head of the Secretariat

Introducing Scotland's Climate Assembly

4:35pm Dr Oliver Escobar, University of Edinburgh

On governance

4:40pm Brett Hennig, Sortition Foundation

On recruitment and selection

4:45pm Kaela Scott, Involve

On facilitating remotely

Reflections from table facilitators

On their experiences facilitating deliberations

5:00pm Kelly McBride, Democratic Society

On voting

Followed by a Q&A

Weekend 7: Summary

Weekend 7 looked back at the whole process. The recommendations were not available to observers at this stage as members voted on the proposed recommendations individually after weekend 7.

'The Members of Scotland's Climate Assembly have gathered together over seven weekend meetings to address the central question, 'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in a fair and effective way?' They have done this from their own homes in the midst of a pandemic, pioneering national deliberative democracy in an online environment. As the final meeting closes, we will consider the journey these Scottish citizens have undertaken. Days before the Interim Report is laid in parliament, this Observer session will look back over the arc of the Assembly and its engagements in wider society, and chart the path ahead for the Assembly Members and their recommendations.'

Susie Townend, head of Secretariat

Speakers:

4:30pm Susie Townend, head of the Secretariat

Looking back at Scotland's Climate Assembly

4:40pm Children's Parliament lead Katie Reid

On the children's process alongside the main Assembly

4:45pm Conveners Ruth Harvey and Josh Littlejohn

On their role in the members' journey, and their own experience

4:50pm Assembly Members Susie and Khopolo

On their experience and hopes

4:55pm Evidence Leads Iain Stewart and Kevin Anderson

On developing a learning journey

5pm Looking ahead

What happens next for members and their work?

5:05pm Q&A

REGISTRATION AND ATTENDANCE

Levels of registration and attendance varied between the weekends, with the observer session for Weekend 6 proving the most popular. In general, there were more registrations than attendees at the live sessions, with an average attendance rate of 47%. However, it was possible to observe the Assembly through accessing the evidence presentations and plenary sessions without attending the live sessions.

Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate the number of registrations and attendees at each weekend.

	WE1	WE2	WE3	WE4	WE5	WE6	WE7
Total registrations	36	36	71	69	78	147	114
Of which, attendees at live session	20+	21	28	30	31	80	48
Rate of Attendance	55.6%	58.3%	39.4%	43.5%	39.7%	54.4%	42.1%

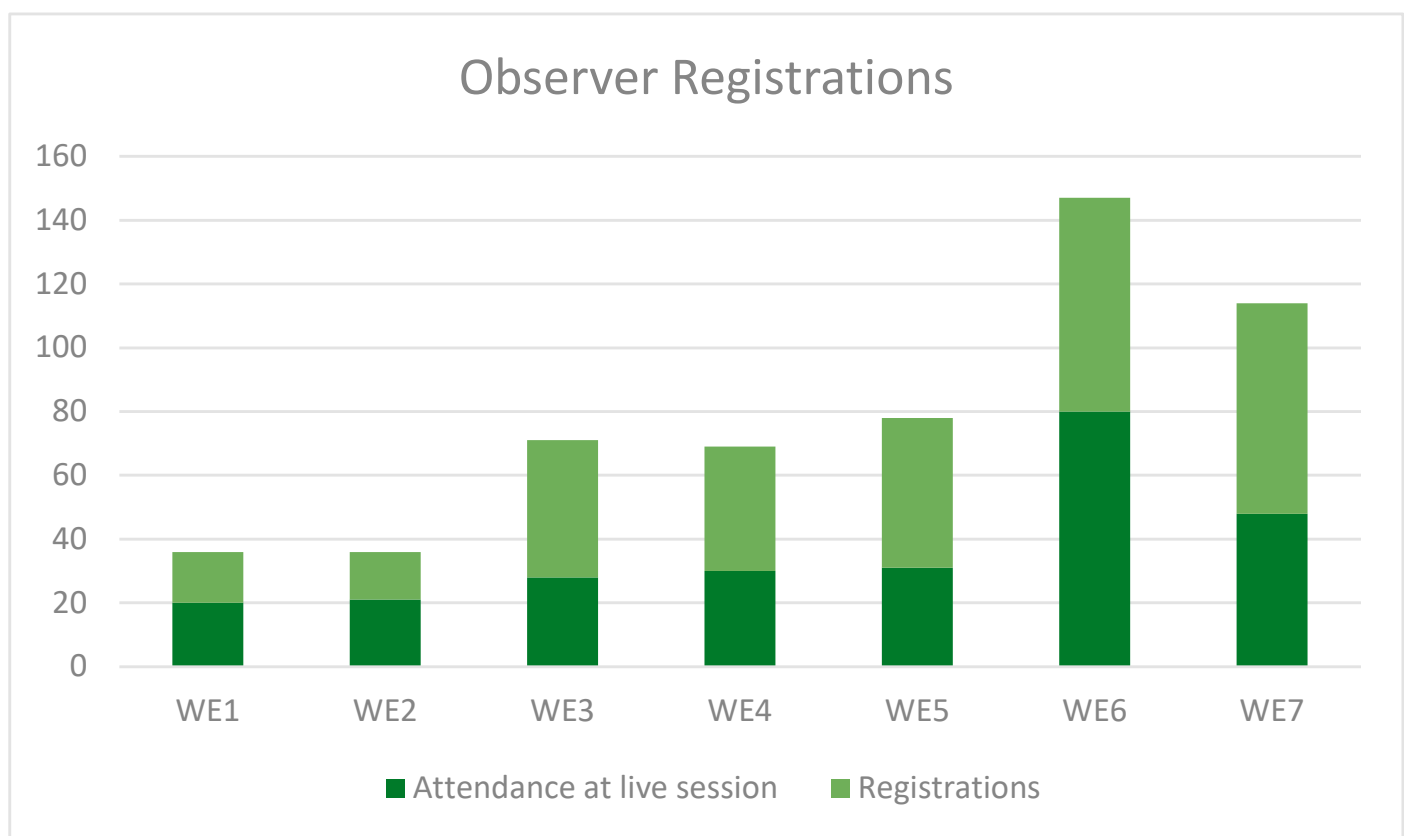


Figure 1. Total observer registrations and attendees at each live session.

WHO WERE THE OBSERVERS?

Entry Points

There were two key entrance points to the observer programme.

1. **Registration:** An outline of the programme and a sign-up link were available on the website under the 'Get Involved' tab, and in the frequently asked questions under 'How it works.' Anyone could fill out this form, and would then receive invitations to register as an observer in advance of each weekend session.
2. **Invitation:** An invitation to observe specific or all weekends of the Assembly was sent to a number of stakeholders representing diverse sectors. Where the content of a weekend was expected to be of particular interest to an organisation, a specific invitation was sent.

Stakeholder Mapping

To identify relevant stakeholders, a stakeholder mapping process was undertaken. The diagram below illustrates the different sectors that were identified during this process, all falling within the spheres of government, business and civil society. Sectors that were likely to be impacted by the outputs of the Assembly were first identified, followed by groups representative of different sections of society. The Assembly's Stewarding Group was also encouraged to invite observers from their own networks, and several regular observers were gained using this approach.

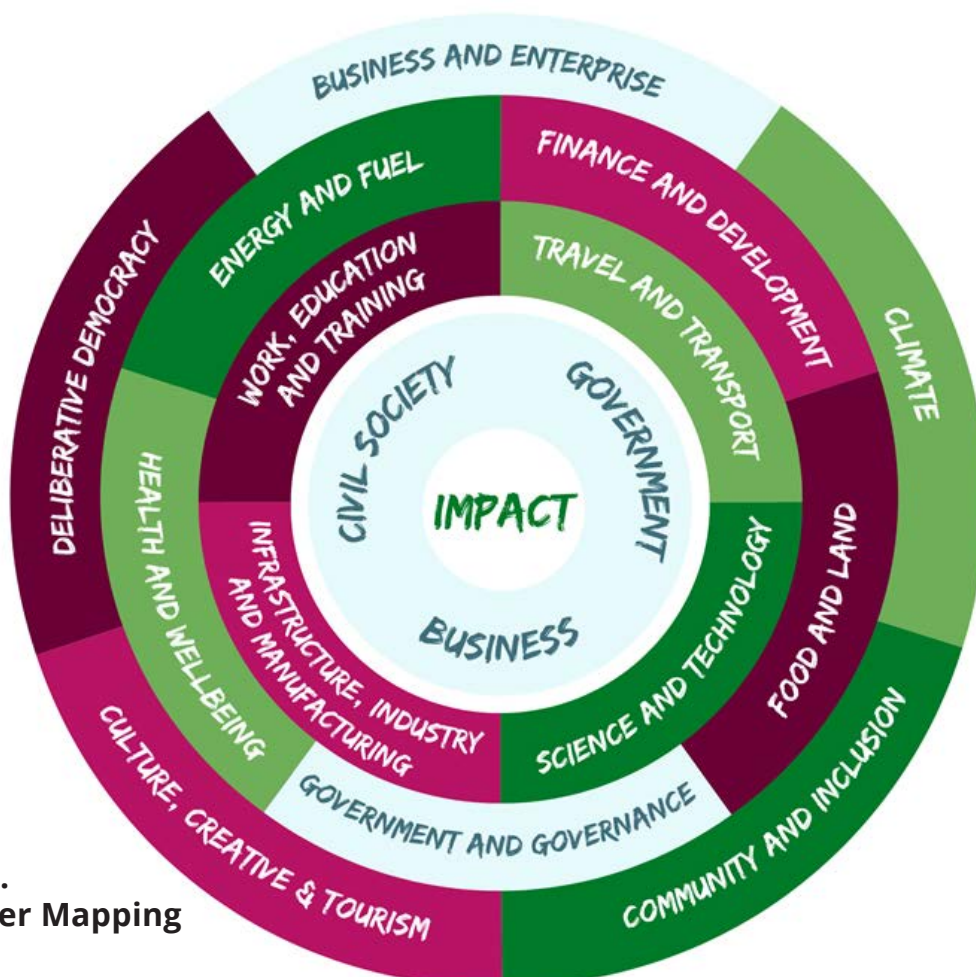


Diagram 1.
Stakeholder Mapping

Contact

Invitations were sent out in advance of each weekend. In the first instance, a registration form was sent to an initial list of stakeholder targets, inviting them to register as observers and to highlight weekend availability and topics of interest. However, uptake for this was limited. Thereafter, the stakeholder list was organised by likely areas of interest, and groups were targeted according to the content of the upcoming weekend. There was a particularly positive response from the food and land area, and deliberative democracy groups.

The observer policy provided in advance, and made available on the website, outlined the following:

“Where demand is high, places will be allocated according to the following order of priority:

- *Elected representatives*
- *Members of the press*
- *Stakeholders, advocacy and interest groups*
- *Academic researchers and those organising citizens’ assemblies on climate change.*

Priority will be given to those individuals who have not previously observed an Assembly meeting. If demand is high, places will be restricted to a maximum of two per organisation. A minimum of five places at each weekend will be reserved for members of the public. To ensure observers have reasonable opportunity to ask questions, the number of attendees may be capped by the organiser at 30-40 persons. The secretariat to the Assembly also reserve the right to prioritise or restrict access for any particular individuals or groups on the basis of level of interest.”

However, given the flexibility of the online format no capping, limiting or prioritising proved necessary and the registration numbers reached a high of over 150 individuals at the Weekend 6 session.

Observers can be broadly grouped into categories based on the type of organisation they were representing as presented in Figure 2, below.

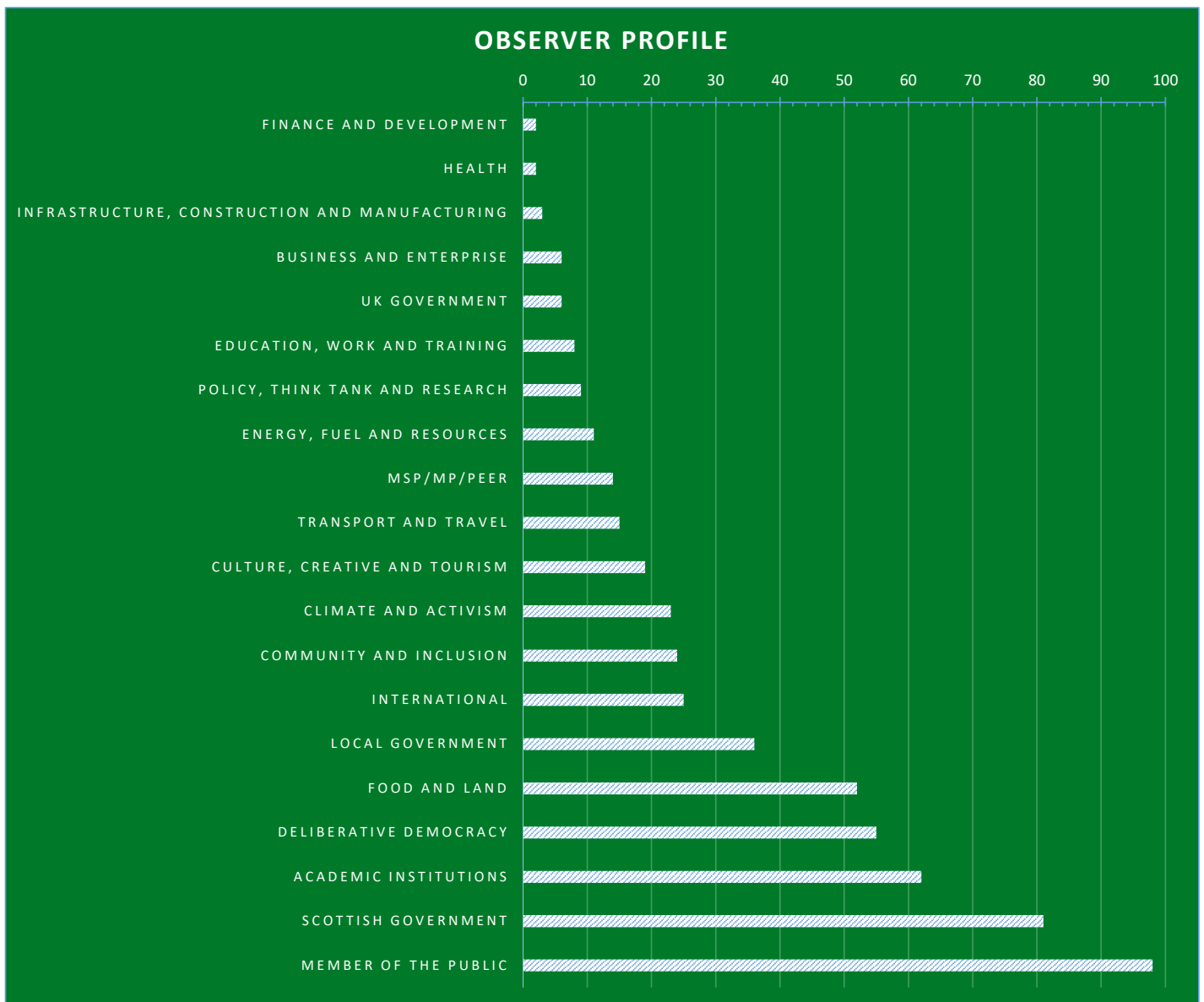


Figure 2. Profile of Assembly Observers

Questions

Questions from observers fell into several themes:

- conducting a citizens' assembly online,
- targets and ambition,
- evidence and remit,
- content, process and design,
- implementation and next steps,
- members experience,
- justice and inclusion.

Examples of questions asked
in the sessions:

What lessons have been learned about deliberating online and the best way to support and facilitate a process like this?

What have you agreed as the political process to take this forward for consideration and implementation?

To what extent has the process brought new information and/or changed the minds of assembly members, and to what extent do the members feel they own the recommendations?

Will you continue to keep in contact with assembly members or involve them in other ways after the process has ended?

How can the process of a national citizens assembly be scaled down in a way that can be adapted to and used by regional authorities in Scotland to engage with their local citizens?

Can we ensure that the recommendations of the Assembly are taken seriously by politicians and officials in Scotland?

How have issues of equity and addressing the most vulnerable been addressed by the assembly to help shape recommendations?

Ongoing Engagement

Observer Engagement

Social media prompts were provided to observers in advance to encourage engagement at each session. Questions and queries were received by email in advance as well as during the sessions. The final two sessions were recorded, and the videos made public on the [Assembly YouTube channel](#).

Observers were also encouraged to share their hopes for the Assembly process – some examples are shown below:

...that participants will feel energised and informed to be able to share their experience with others...

...to bring the community into active participation with government in terms of policy decisions...

...to crystallise a long-term vision for a low-carbon, climate resilient future...

Institutional Learning

Organising an online citizens' assembly and accompanying observer programme was not without its challenges. The programme was continually refined as the process progressed and feedback gathered from those involved. For future citizens' assemblies with online observer processes, the following themes for key institutional learning have emerged.

Expectation Management

Running observer sessions online removes some of the logistical limitations to the total number of observers. More people are able to join, which increases the transparency of the assembly. However, those that do join do not receive the same experience that physical observer sessions offer. Although it is standard practice that observers are not able to join small group discussions, when an assembly meets in person observers are able to get a general sense of the atmosphere in a room when these discussions are taking place. Online, observers are not able to read the room to see how information or a speaker has landed with Assembly members.

It is therefore essential to make clear from the outset the limits to access, particularly around small-group discussion between members.

Providing access to evidence and plenary sessions is consistent with physical observer programmes, yet there is more control available online. That control can be read as a barrier to transparency so deliberate steps to counterbalance this, such as access to speakers, facilitators and organisers, is even more important online.

In some instances, observers were keen to input to the Assembly, in addition to learning about it. It is important to manage expectations around how possible this is likely to be from the outset.

The live sessions were also an opportunity for the secretariat and design and facilitation team to learn from observers, using their comments and observations to continuously improve the Assembly process.

Audience

The audience during each live session was diverse. Some regular observers attended every session and did not require an introduction to the process, whereas new observers were less familiar with Scotland's Climate Assembly. Observers also had different interests which resulted in wide ranging discussions and occasionally questions unrelated to the week's specific theme.

Holding the assembly and observer sessions online arguably increased the accessibility and therefore transparency of the process. There was no need for observers to travel, which reduced some of the barriers that may otherwise have been present.

Like the Assembly itself, there was a risk of digital exclusion of potential observers, which could not be offset as it was for Assembly members themselves.

Attendance

The greatest attendance was from representatives and members of third sector and environmental organisations. In contrast, it was difficult to reach those who were not already engaged in climate change or deliberative processes.

It was not possible to measure how many of those who registered as observers watched the evidence and plenary sessions online, but did not attend the live sessions. The number of observers in attendance at the live sessions is therefore likely to be a minimum estimate of the reach of the programme. Introducing a method to measure the engagement outside of the live sessions would provide a more accurate picture.

Annex One: Observer Policy

Policy on Observer Engagement at Scotland's Climate Assembly

Covid-19 has caused several changes to the Assembly's proceedings and for now we are not able to hold Assembly meetings in person: most or all of our meetings will take place online. Nonetheless, the overarching principles underpinning Scotland's Climate Assembly include those of transparency and accessibility. In accordance with those principles and recognising the public interest in the Assembly we will be running virtual observer sessions where you will be able to learn more about the Assembly's evidence base and deliberative process and to get involved with Q&As with some of our speakers.

It is important that the observer programme does not undermine the integrity of the Assembly process. Therefore observers will not have access to discussion sessions among Assembly members. The Assembly participants are members of the public, many of whom may not be used to speaking in a public forum. The design of the Assembly is intended to ensure that all participants feel comfortable in expressing themselves, unhindered by external influences.

The arrangements for applying to attend as an observer and the rules with which observers are obliged to comply are set out below.

Who can observe the Assembly?

The majority of observer places will be by invitation. These invitations will target parliamentarians, industries, organisations and relevant individuals.

For the remaining places, anyone can apply to observe the Assembly and all expressions of interest will be given due consideration. Where demand is high, places will be allocated according to the following order of priority:

- Elected representatives
- Members of the press
- Stakeholders, advocacy and interest groups
- Academic researchers and those organising citizens' assemblies on climate change.

Priority will be given to those individuals who have not previously observed an Assembly meeting. If demand is high, places will be restricted to a maximum of 2 per organisation. A minimum of 5 places at each weekend will be reserved for **members of the public**. To ensure observers have reasonable opportunity to ask questions, the number of attendees may be capped by the organiser at 30-40 persons.

The Secretariat to the Assembly also reserve the right to prioritise or restrict access for any particular individuals or groups on the basis of level of interest.

Aims of the observer programme

- Transparency: to allow scrutiny of the evidence and process.
- Raising Assembly profile: by creating a network of interest among figures in all areas of society able to share Assembly recommendations widely, and to broaden awareness of and trust in the process.

What will observer sessions involve?

Evidence sessions will be shared with observers via links over the Saturday and Sunday of the weekend. Some will be available at the same time they are presented to Members, while video of the online plenary sessions will be made available after a short delay to format and upload material from the online platform to our website and YouTube channel.

Observers will be invited to attend a live session online at the end of the weekend to hear from speakers and to ask their own questions. As is standard practice across citizens' assemblies, observers will not have access to small-group discussion between Members.

How do I apply to be an observer?

To apply to observe an Assembly meeting, please complete [this form](#). Any questions should be directed to info@climateassembly.scot. We ask that you identify the capacity in which you will be observing, as a member of the public, a member of the media or as representative of an organisation.

Social media:

You are welcome to use social media while observing the Assembly, in compliance with the rules below. Please use the handle @ScotClimateCA and hashtag #ScotClimateAssembly.

Rules for Observers

- Observers are not allowed to participate in Assembly proceedings. Instead, the observer programme aims to give observers an insight into the process.
- Observers must agree to respect the privacy of members and not disclose any personal information which they become party to without express permission. This applies to all observers, including any representatives of the media.
- Observers are not permitted to photograph or record observer sessions.
- Observers are asked to consider carefully when commenting on social media about the Assembly; in particular they must respect the privacy of Assembly members and Assembly speakers and staff and comment accurately and truthfully on Assembly proceedings.
- Only those registered to observe any Assembly meeting will be allowed entry to the live observer session - tickets are not transferable. If you have registered on behalf of someone else, please contact us with the correct name of the attendee.

Failure to comply with these rules will result in exclusion from the observer programme.

Press requests to speak with members of Scotland's Climate Assembly or speakers must be raised in advance. Please contact info@climateassembly.scot with your request.

If you have any additional support needs, please let us know at info@climateassembly.scot. We also welcome your feedback on the observer experience at the same address.

Assembly Dates:

7th and 8th November 2020
12th and 13th December 2020
9th and 10th January 2021
23rd and 24th January 2021
20th and 21st February 2021
6th and 7th March 2021

Note: the Assembly voted for a 7th Weekend which took place on 20th and 21st March 2021. The vote occurred after the Observer Policy had been distributed, and therefore is not included in the list above.