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Research Report on the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland



PUBLIC SERVICES AND GOVERNMENT



Research Report on the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

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The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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Executive Summary

The Citizens' Assembly of Scotland was Scotland's first national level assembly which brought together a cross-section of Scotland's adult population. The Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland was published in January 2021 and the Government published its response in November 2021.

This report presents the findings of a collaborative research project led by a team of Scottish Government Social Researchers and independent academics from the Universities of Edinburgh and Newcastle, into both operation of the Assembly (internal dimension) and the relationship between the Assembly and wider Scottish society (external dimension).

Methodology

A comprehensive mixed-methods research design and an unprecedented level of access to the Assembly's proceedings have resulted in an extensive dataset that provides evidence from the following:

- **Non-participant observation** of all aspects of the Assembly weekends, including facilitator briefings and de-briefings.
- **Member surveys** tracking changes in knowledge, attitudes and experiences of the Assembly weekends as well as wider views about democracy and Scotland.
- **Recordings and transcripts of a sample of small group discussions** analysed to assess deliberative quality.
- **Population survey** assessing awareness, understanding and attitudes towards the Assembly and providing a comparison to member survey data.
- **Expert speaker survey** gathering views of preparing for and participating in the Assembly.
- **Interviews with organisers, facilitators and stewarding group** gathering views and experiences of planning, delivery, outcomes and impact.
- **Interviews with Scottish Government officials, politicians and journalists** providing wider views on the Assembly.
- **Analysis of media coverage** of the Assembly.

Key Findings

Member Experience

Overall, it was clear that the majority of members found participating in the Assembly to be hugely rewarding; they felt included and empowered and, by the end of the Assembly, had an increased interest and enthusiasm for participating in other political and civic activities. The research found that the practical, technological and emotional support provided by the organisers and facilitators was important to this experience.

There was some evidence of gender differences in participation. For example, women tended to volunteer less to report back in plenary sessions during the early weekends but actions by facilitators and organisers helped to equalise participation in later weekends. The move online led to variation in experiences; some members reported finding participation easier whilst others less so. Most members missed the social side of the in-person weekends.

Learning and Evidence Provision

The majority of members expressed satisfaction with the expert speakers and advocates who provided input on a range of topics. There was also evidence that members learned from this input and by the end of the Assembly, their knowledge was greater compared with the general population.

However, there were some challenges:

- the volume and breadth of knowledge and evidence presented were sometimes experienced by members as difficult to absorb.
- the six month pause in the middle of the Assembly, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, made recall of evidence difficult when forming recommendations.
- there was limited diversity in both, the perspectives offered by expert speakers, and the approach to evidence provision.

Facilitation and Deliberation

In the Assembly, facilitators were supported by regular briefing and de-briefing and a culture of reflective practice. However, there was variation in how facilitators managed group dynamics and attended to inclusion to ensure the quality of deliberation. Limited time to review facilitation instructions prior to the Assembly weekends and differences in professional backgrounds impacted on the quality of facilitation.

Members' deliberations were consistently respectful. An important feature of good quality deliberation – scrutiny and challenge – was largely absent in the small group discussions. The strong emphasis placed throughout the Assembly on cohesion and consensus together with limited framing of scrutiny as a positive dynamic during discussions was an important factor. Certain aspects of the design of deliberative sessions may have also undermined opportunities for constructive challenge. However, in general the quality of deliberation and facilitation improved as the Assembly progressed.

Governance

Despite formal arrangements covering the remits of those involved in organising and delivering the Assembly, most reported experiencing a lack of clarity at different points during the Assembly over respective roles and decision making. More time during inception of the Assembly to collectively agree respective roles would have been helpful.

Breadth of Remit

A key challenge faced by the Assembly was the breadth of the remit. The research found that this challenge permeated through all aspects of the Assembly, including:

- Design and delivery: Advance planning of evidence input and identification of expert speakers was not possible. The design of deliberative sessions was impacted by the breadth of topics that needed to be addressed.
- Governance: The stewarding group could not provide the spread of expertise required for appropriate scrutiny of the wide range of topics covered during the Assembly weekends.
- Wider public engagement: The wide range of topics made it difficult for journalists to decide how to report on the Assembly, consequently limiting opportunities for increasing public awareness and public deliberation.
- Assembly's recommendations: the breadth of the remit also led to broad and wide-ranging recommendations, which may be difficult to transfer into policy.

COVID-19 and the move online

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the second half of the Assembly meetings occurred online. The research found that the move online:

- created new challenges in relation to member participation and inclusion. The support provided by organisers helped to address technical issues and members' confidence in participating online.
- impacted on facilitation with some facilitators experiencing challenges in using new online tools alongside attending to group dynamics.
- impacted the length of time available to create, scrutinise and agree recommendations as a consequence of reducing the length of the weekend meetings.
- did not hinder the deliberative quality of the sessions.

Public awareness and Assembly influence

Public awareness, understanding and engagement of the Assembly were low throughout its duration.

Media coverage of the Assembly was largely neutral or positive, it tracked key milestones and there was more coverage during the establishment and first weekends compared to other stages of the Assembly. Overall, the limited media coverage of the Assembly, particularly in news outlets with the most significant reach across Scotland, was an important barrier towards increased public awareness and understanding of the Assembly.

Although initially sceptical, journalists and politicians interviewed as part of the research reflected positively on the success of the Assembly and recognised it as

an important prototype for future assemblies. Amongst others, concerns were expressed about the feasibility of the Assembly’s recommendations and how they would be addressed.

Recommendations

Seven recommendations are offered for future assemblies:

1. Assembly Remit	Decisions on remit must recognise the impact on design, delivery and governance. The broader the remit, the more time required.
2. Governance Framework	Roles and responsibilities must be collectively agreed and clearly defined with responsibilities for oversight, advice, design and delivery distinguished.
3. Assembly Phases	Sufficient time must be given to each stage of assemblies: 1) inception; 2) delivery; and 3) impact.
4. Assembly Impact	A clear mandate must be set out, including clear parameters for how the assembly will interact with the decision-making of other democratic institutions.
5. Public Engagement	Consideration must be given to how the assembly will interact with the wider public to build understanding, foster public deliberation and enhance legitimacy.
6. Capacity Building	Future action must include building capacity in skills, resources and infrastructure for delivering deliberative and participatory processes.
7. Research	Concurrent research should be embedded and used to inform the Assembly’s design and governance. The research should be fully funded and have a duration that enables an assessment of impact.

Introduction: Overview of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

In April 2019, the First Minister announced the decision to convene the first national citizens' assembly¹ in Scotland, in the wake of Brexit and the debate around a second independence referendum. The Citizens' Assembly of Scotland (hereafter referred to as "the Assembly") brought together 104 members to address the following 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?
- What further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices about the future of the country?

The Assembly's membership was intended to be a 'mini-public' (Escobar & Elstub, 2017) and as such constitute a broadly representative cross-section of Scotland's adult population. The recruitment process was carried out by Mark Diffley Consultancy and Research Ltd following a competitive tendering process. Households in each of the eight Scottish Parliamentary Regions were randomly selected and face-to-face interviews conducted with a randomly selected household member. To ensure a broadly representative membership, target quotas were compiled for each of the following criteria: geography, age, gender, ethnic group, education qualifications, limiting long term conditions or disabilities, and attitudes. A total of 120 individuals were selected following this process².

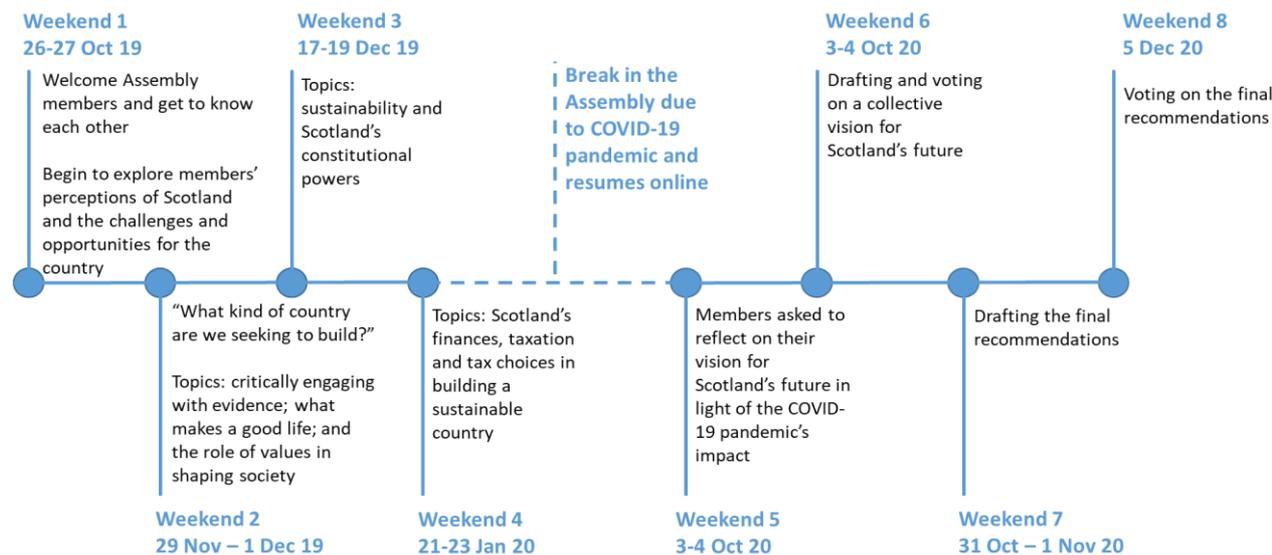
Two conveners, Kate Wimpres and David Martin, were appointed by the Scottish Government to lead the Assembly. David Martin resigned from his role in December 2019 and Kate Wimpres continued as sole convener of the Assembly. In doing so she was supported by the organisers team primarily composed of civil servants seconded from the Scottish Government; a stewarding group bringing together practitioners and academics with political expertise to provide strategic advice on the planning and delivery of the Assembly; and a range of specialist contractors commissioned to support the Assembly's design, delivery, communications and participant recruitment. A Members Reference Group was put in place once the Assembly was underway, membership of which was voluntary and varied over the course of the Assembly. The group was established to

¹ This Assembly had no citizenship requirements. The term 'citizens' assembly' is not rooted in a narrow legalistic interpretation of citizenship but rather on a human rights notion that is global in aspiration and sees 'citizen' as a term that recognises people's rights, responsibilities and agency.

² The research programme was established after the recruitment of members was complete and data relating to the recruitment and attendance of members throughout the Assembly is not part of the dataset. Further information about the recruitment can be found at: <https://www.citizensassembly.scot/sites/default/files/inline-files/Recruitment%20Report%20-%20final%20for%20upload.pdf>

contribute to the delivery of the Assembly by providing insights into the members' views and experiences of the process.

Figure 1 - Timeline of the Assembly weekends



The Assembly met for eight weekends between October 2019 and December 2020 (Figure 1). The first Assembly meeting took place over two days (26-27 October 2019) at the Grosvenor Hotel in Edinburgh following a welcome reception at Edinburgh Castle. The weekend provided an opportunity for participants to get to know each other and develop their understanding of the Assembly process and the issues that it would explore. The Assembly's work opened with an introduction on "The Scotland we know and the Scotland we don't know" by the conveners and a presentation on Scotland's constitutional powers by Professor Nicola McEwen from the University of Edinburgh and the Assembly stewarding group, prior to members starting to discuss their perceptions of Scotland and the challenges and opportunities for the country.

The Assembly met at the Golden Jubilee Hotel and Conference Centre in Clydebank for the following three weekends. During the second weekend (29 November – 1 December 2019) members began deliberating on their vision for Scotland, addressing the first question of the remit. The presentations covered how to critically engage with evidence (Phill Allan, 3x1 and Kaella Scott, Involve); what makes a good life (George Bangham, Resolution Foundation); and the role of values in shaping society (Dr Elke Heins, University of Edinburgh).

During the third weekend (17-19 January 2019) deliberations focussed on one of most popular statements made by members during the first weekend: "the kind of Scotland we are seeking to build will be a sustainable country balancing environmental, economic and social impacts for the good of the country and its citizens". Members were provided with a range of evidence on sustainability and Scotland's constitutional powers through presentations by Dr Chris McCorkingdale (University of Strathclyde), Kate Wimpres, Sandy Begbie (Tesco Bank), Dr Katherine Trebeck (Wellbeing Economy Alliance) and Dr Andy Kerr (EIT Climate-

KIC); and a discussion with a panel of politicians comprised of Jamie Halcro Johnston (Conservative), Lorna Slater (Green), Angela Constance (Scottish National Party) and Richard Leonard (Labour).

The fourth weekend (21-23 February 2019) built on members' deliberations to date and considered matters relating to Scotland's finances and taxation in building a sustainable country. Presentations covered a range of evidence relating to Scotland's finances (Fraser McKinlay, Audit Scotland and Professor David Bell, University of Stirling), taxation (David Phillips, Institute for Fiscal Studies and Charlotte Barbour, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland) and tax choices (Russell Gunson, Institute of Public Policy Research Scotland; Laurie MacFarlane, Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose at University College London; and Ewan MacDonald-Russell, Scottish Retail Consortium).

The public health measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 led to the Assembly being temporarily paused, during which time the majority of the organisers volunteered to return to the Scottish Government and assist with the pandemic response. In September 2020 the Assembly reconvened online for four shorter sessions over four weekends. While the Assembly was paused, the organisers remained in contact with the members and organised induction sessions for members to familiarise themselves with the online format. Members were reminded of the work completed to date during the first online session (5 September 2020) and were asked to reflect on their vision for Scotland's future in light of the pandemic's impact.

The remaining three weekends were devoted to drafting, voting upon and agreeing a collective vision for Scotland's future (3-4 October 2020) and the final recommendations of the Assembly (31 October – 1 November and 5 December 2020). 'Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland' was published in January 2021 and set out the members' vision and 60 majority-supported recommendations (58 of which received above 75% support) relating to future assemblies, incomes and poverty, tax and economy, support for young people, health and wellbeing, sustainability, and further powers for the Scottish Parliament.

Following the report's publication, a selection of volunteer members held virtual meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Government, a group of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) from the different political parties, and a selection of journalists, to discuss their vision and recommendations. These were further discussed at an event held by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Futures Forum on the 15th of February 2021. It was convened by the Presiding Officer and was attended by members of the Assembly, a political panel and a number of MSPs. Finally, the report's content was debated in the Scottish Parliament on the 18th of February 2021. The Scottish Government responded to the Assembly's findings in a report published on the 23rd of November 2021.

The Scottish Government has provided a short period of funding to an external organisation to provide support to members of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

to establish a members network. This project was initiated at the request of members who wanted to continue working together after the completion of the formal business of the Assembly. Members will be supported from September 2021 – January 2022 to create a self-sustaining network with the aim of enabling them to become ambassadors for the power and impact of deliberative democratic processes. The project will provide training and mentoring for members for a short period of time, to allow members to continue to work together. The network will be supported to engage with the Scottish Government's response to the Assembly's recommendations. At the end of the project the network will be handed over to members to self-administer, and lessons learned from this project process will be captured.

Given this was Scotland's first citizens' assembly and was set up with the aim of informing public policy in Scotland, its significance warranted a comprehensive programme of research to be established to respond to the ministerial commitment to review and learn from the experience. The research was undertaken collaboratively by Scottish Government Social Research and academic researchers from the University of Edinburgh and Newcastle University. The researchers operated independently from the Assembly and were supported by a wider Research Advisory Group, comprised of individuals with international experience of conducting research in the field of democratic innovation. The methodology underpinning the research is presented in the following chapter.

Methodology

In this chapter we outline the programme of research undertaken collaboratively by the team of Scottish Government Social Researchers and three independent academic researchers. The research aims were threefold: to provide learning about the citizens' assembly process to support the delivery of the Assembly; to assess the Assembly's efficacy and impact; and to evaluate its success as a model of public engagement in Scotland. The first aim was met by the development of data briefings³ sharing insights from the research activities with the convener, organisers and stewarding group following each weekend. This report presents the findings in relation to the latter two aims of the research.

In order to answer questions about both the operation of the Assembly (internal dimension) and the relationship between the Assembly and wider Scottish society (external dimension), a mixed method design was developed. This approach is best suited to investigate the multidimensional nature of deliberative processes, making use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative strands of research to answer different aspects of the research questions in Table 1 (Escobar & Thompson, 2019).

Table 1: Research questions

Internal dimension
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do participants learn and form views through the Citizens' Assembly process?2. How do participants experience the Citizens' Assembly process?3. What was the quality of deliberation and facilitation at the Citizens' Assembly?
External dimension
<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. How is the Citizens' Assembly perceived by the Scottish public?5. How do understandings of elite representation, wider perceptions, and attitudes to engagement evolve throughout the duration of the Citizens' Assembly?
Overall learning
<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. What are the lessons for informing other democratic processes and institutions in Scotland and internationally?

Data collection spanned 24 months, with **surveys of members and expert speakers** at the Assembly, **non-participant observations**, and **recordings of small group deliberations** taking place while the Assembly process was underway. A **survey of the Scottish population** and **interviews** with the Assembly's organisers, facilitators, stewarding group, politicians, civil servants and journalists were conducted once the Assembly had concluded. Throughout the duration of the Assembly process, the **media coverage** it received was monitored and logged for analysis. Taking a mixed methods approach, the development of certain research strands were guided by the findings of others. For instance, the

³ Find the data briefings here: [Data Briefings](#)

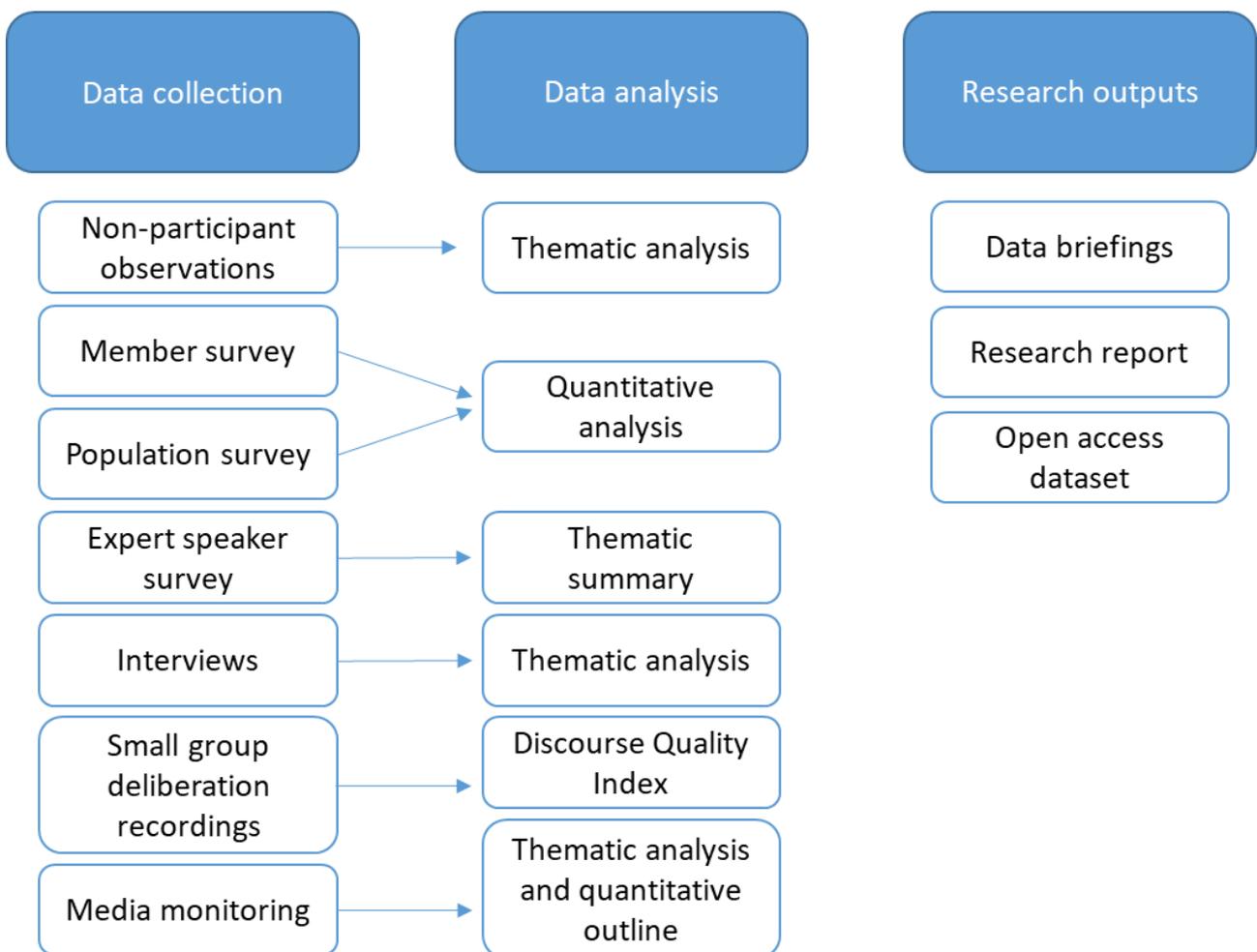
sequencing of the research activities allowed the findings from non-participant observations to inform the development of the survey and interview guides.

The result is a comprehensive dataset, combining qualitative and quantitative data that gives a voice to the many participants involved in the Assembly process and allowing the findings to be grounded in their experiences. The research questions were addressed by integrating these different strands of research, allowing meta-inferences to be drawn across the datasets (Escobar & Thompson, 2019).

The Assembly’s move online required adjustments to be made to the research to ensure consistency in the type and quality of the evidence collected across the face-to-face and the online weekends, which will be detailed below. The change in the Assembly’s format provided an opportunity for the research to make an additional and unique contribution to the evidence base in comparing members’ face-to-face and online engagement.

As a key output of the research, an anonymised dataset will be made accessible for use by researchers, practitioners and leaders in 2022, thus contributing to the global evidence base on democratic innovation.

Figure 2 – Outline of the research programme



Research programme

Non-participant observation

The research team was afforded an unprecedented level of access to the Assembly's proceedings compared to similar research projects through non-participant observation of the various formal and informal spaces at each of the eight Assembly weekends. At least three researchers attended each Assembly session, covering plenaries, deliberative sessions, facilitator briefings and debriefings, and the moments when members were on a break or having dinner. In addition, one or two researchers were present at other types of meetings, such as preparatory meetings by organisers and post-Assembly meetings between members and parliamentarians.

During the in-person weekends, researchers observed the proceedings from the side of the main room and were not present at the tables where members had their small group discussions. Once the Assembly moved online, the researchers joined the virtual breakout rooms via video conferencing software and had more direct access to the small group deliberations thanks to members' consent. To minimise the possible disruption to the Assembly, researchers' microphones and videos were kept off.

Fieldnotes were written following a flexible observation framework developed around the research questions to provide some guidance to researchers while allowing them to approach data generation with an open mind (see Appendix A). The resulting 23 sets (160,000 words) of fieldnotes were analysed thematically following inductive-abductive coding in Nvivo (see Appendix B).

Member survey

To address the first three research questions, a survey was developed to gather data directly from members about their experiences of taking part in the Assembly and their views about the Assembly process across a total of 12 time points (see Appendix C). All members who attended the weekends and consented to take part in the research were asked to complete a survey at the end of the first weekend and then at the start and end of weekends 2 to 4. Members were asked questions designed to track changes in knowledge and attitudes about the specific topic or activity at each weekend; their satisfaction with different aspects of the Assembly process; their experiences of deliberation and facilitation; and their views about democracy in Scotland and their role in it.

Prior to the Assembly moving online, members were invited to complete a survey in order to provide a new baseline of their knowledge and attitudes and explore their expectations ahead of reconvening online. The survey was expanded to consider the effect of the Assembly's mode of delivery on member' experiences. It also switched to being delivered online, with longer timeframes and additional modes of completion available to maximise the response rate and quality of data. To minimise the burden on members and mitigate the risk of research fatigue, only short post-weekend surveys took place in the week following weekends 5 to 7.

Finally, a post-Assembly survey was carried out in the week following the final Assembly weekend. This explored members' experiences, attitudes and understanding at the point of the Assembly concluding.

The sample size varied across each weekend according to the number of Assembly members in attendance who had agreed to participate in the research. The questionnaires were completed by between 85 and 113 members across the weekends and obtained a response rate of between 82% and 100%.

Responses were anonymised and a research identification code was generated for each members to use when completing the survey so their answers could be linked across the questionnaires. To best assess change over time, the decision was made to use responses from members who consistently answered every survey, thus reducing the sample size to 64. A list of variables used in the analysis of the member survey is included in Appendix C. Due to coding issues for the weekend 3 survey data, the decision was made to remove it from the analysis.

Population survey

A survey of the Scottish population was designed to respond to the external dimension of the research questions, assessing the awareness, understanding and perceptions of the Assembly across Scottish society (see Appendix D).

It gathered data from a demographically representative sample of the adult Scottish population. To appropriately compare responses to members of the Assembly, participants were also selected to be representative with respect to their political attitudes. A screening question was included in the survey to ensure that Assembly members were excluded.

Respondents were asked about their level of interest and participation in civic and political life; their perceptions and understanding of the Assembly; their attitudes and knowledge of the topics discussed during the Assembly; and their attitudes towards the Assembly's outcomes. This allowed the attitudes and knowledge of the population to be compared with that of individuals who were involved in this deliberative process.

The survey was administered online in two waves, the first taking place between the 11th and 22nd of March 2021 and receiving 1539 responses. A fresh sample was approached for the second wave, which took place between the 21st and 28th of September 2021 and received 1507 responses. A list of variables used in the analysis of this data is included in Appendix E.

Expert speaker survey

Fourteen expert speakers were invited to present formal evidence over the first four Assembly weekends. In order to gather their views and experiences of their preparation and participation, a short online survey was developed consisting of 15 closed and open-ended questions regarding their expectations of presenting at the Assembly, the preparation for their involvement, and their views on the Assembly process and members' engagement (see Appendix F).

All speakers were contacted by email and invited to participate via the Questback platform. Fieldwork took place between the 18th of June and 22nd of July 2020 while the Assembly was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic and received ten responses, obtaining a 71% response rate.

Interviews

Following the conclusion of the Assembly, a maximal sampling strategy was taken to identify individuals from groups that could address either the **internal dimension** (i.e. how the Assembly operates) or the **external dimension** (i.e. the impact and relationship with Government and the wider Scottish society) of the research questions. The rationale and final sample sizes are outlined in Table 2.

A sample of 23 individuals from the Assembly’s organisers (convener, secretariat and design team), facilitators and stewarding group were asked about their views and experiences relating to the planning, delivery, outcome and impact of the Assembly as well as their views on members’ engagement and learning (see Appendix G).

In addition, a sample of 14 Scottish Government officials, politicians and journalists were interviewed and asked about their awareness and understanding of the Assembly (and citizens’ assemblies in general); and their opinions relating to its outcome and impact (see Appendix H).

Table 2: Sampling strategy for the post-Assembly interviews

Sample group	Sampling rationale
Internal interviews	
Facilitators N = 8	A gender balanced sample was selected from across the organisations involved (Diffley Partnership, Involve, the Democratic Society and the Scottish Community Development Centre), and from facilitators who had attended all or most of the Assembly weekends (in person and online) for continuity of experience.
Organisers (convener, secretariat and design team) N = 7	Leads in all roles: Convener x 1 Secretary x 1 Assistant Secretaries x 2 Lead facilitators x 2 - 4
Stewarding group N = 8	Sample selected from the members most engaged with the Assembly, ensuring a mix of academic and practitioner members.
External interviews	
Politicians N = 7	Sample selected from across all main parties.
Civil servants N = 2	Sample selected from civil servants involved in the Government response to the Assembly.

Journalists
N = 4

Sample selected from journalists identified as having provided coverage of the Assembly across national (Scottish) and local media; and across print, radio/TV and online media platforms.

In line with restrictions on face-to-face research as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted online using video conferencing software between January and May 2021. Following transcription of the audio-recordings, a thematic analysis was conducted taking a combined inductive and deductive approach to coding (see Appendices I and J). This allowed the resulting themes to reflect the data as accurately as possible.

Small Group Deliberations and Discourse Quality Index Analysis

In order to assess the deliberative quality throughout the Assembly, a sample of the small group discussions were recorded. As not all discussions in a citizens' assembly are designed to be deliberative, we identified the sessions from each weekend that we thought had the greatest chance of containing deliberative norms. Weekend 8 was excluded as it did not contain deliberative sessions. We then used an online random number generator to randomly select two tables/online breakout groups from between two and four sessions of each weekend. We ensured that only Assembly members who had consented to this part of the research were included and that the sample contained a range of different facilitators.

Following transcription of the audio recordings, unclear transcripts were removed and a subsample was selected for analysis based on the following criteria:

1. Deliberation: recordings that were less deliberative than initially anticipated were eliminated.
2. Type of communication: recordings from communicatively divergent sessions were eliminated. This refers to sessions designed to be explorative as opposed to communicatively convergent sessions in which members were encouraged to make decisions and seek agreement. While divergent communication⁴ serves an important purpose in deliberation as it encourages members to engage with the evidence and explore different intuitions, positions and prioritisations, instances of divergent communication were excluded to achieve a greater fit between the sample and the analytical tool that was employed.
3. Spread across the Assembly: in order to track any change or progression in deliberative quality across the weekends, at least one session per weekend was included. These were selected from recordings that met the other criteria in the sampling strategy so the difference in deliberative quality between groups and facilitators could be accounted for. Finally, an even spread of discussions was selected across the in-person and online sessions.

⁴ For further discussion of the concepts of convergent and divergent communication, see Escobar (2011, p. 40).

This resulted in a sample of 936 contributions (known as “speech acts”) by Assembly members and 611 by facilitators on which to conduct a discourse quality index (DQI) analysis. This is a theoretically grounded instrument that involves quantitatively coding the extent to which discussions meet deliberative norms such as inclusion, reason-giving, focus on the common good or respect.

A coding framework (see Appendix K) was created based on the original codes developed by Steenbergen et al. (2003). In order to contextualise the framework to a citizens’ assembly we adopted developments made by other researchers (Bobbio, 2013; Davidson, et al., 2017; Elstub & Pomatto, 2018; Marien, et al., 2020; Elstub, et al., 2021a; Elstub, et al., 2021b). In order to help us address some of our other research questions, we also coded for the extent the members expressed a need for more information, referred to information provided by the speakers, or discussed the Assembly process. Finally, to enable analysis of how deliberation evolved throughout the Assembly process, we coded the weekend, day, session number and table at which the discussion occurred.

Given the importance of facilitation to deliberative quality in mini-publics (Escobar, 2019), facilitators’ contributions to the discussions were also coded following Ravazzi’s (2013) coding framework. This includes aspects such as whether facilitators invite Assembly members to speak or justify their demands, how they deal with conflict between members or whether they offer their own opinions on issues being discussed (see Appendix K).

As is common practice in DQI analysis, each code was treated separately, rather than being aggregated into an overall score of deliberative quality (see Appendices M and N for the deliberation and facilitation scores). This is because not all deliberative norms carry equal credence (Davidson, et al., 2017). In reporting the findings, we have removed the first weekend from much of the analysis. As an introductory weekend it contained little deliberation and would have otherwise offset the aggregate results across the whole of the Assembly process.

Media monitoring

To assess how media reporting of the Assembly evolved throughout its duration and to track changing attitudes and perceptions about the Assembly, the media coverage of the Assembly was monitored from its announcement in August 2019 to its conclusion and the release of the Assembly’s report in March 2021. Broad inclusion criteria were included to capture as much relevant data as possible. An initial media monitoring was commissioned by the Assembly’s organisers between August 2019 and March 2020. This was supplemented with searches conducted by the research team using a number of databases: NewsBank, the National Library of Scotland Archives, Google, Google News, Newslookup and Bing.

The resulting dataset of 206 articles contains all mentions of the Assembly across local, national and international traditional online and print media between the period of August 2019 and March 2021. The media analysis followed the mixed-methods approach recommended by the bulk of the literature on the subject. A thematic analysis of the data was conducted in Nvivo, following three stages of

iterative inductive coding (see Appendices O and P). In addition, the analysis produced a quantitative outline of the amount of coverage different themes received (see Appendix P).

Ethics

This research was conducted in accordance with Government Social Research (GSR) Ethics Principles and followed Scottish Government standard ethics procedures. Informed written consent was obtained from everyone that participated in the research. In addition, verbal consent was obtained from members prior to recording the small group discussions.

Chapter 1: Members' experiences of the Assembly

Research questions:

- a) What is the level of satisfaction by Assembly members with all aspects of the process?
- b) To what extent do Assembly members feel included/empowered throughout the process?
- c) Group dynamics – Were there demographic/power dynamics at play? What features of the Assembly design had an impact on group dynamics and member satisfaction?

Data sources:

- Fieldnotes
- Member survey
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- Sample of transcripts from the small group deliberations
- Expert speaker survey

This chapter explores how satisfied members were with different aspects of the Assembly, as well as their varied experiences as participants in the process. We focus in particular on questions of inclusion and empowerment, investigating group dynamics and some features of process design that had a significant impact on the quality of participation and interaction, and thus on members' satisfaction.

Members' satisfaction with the process

Exploring the question of members' satisfaction across the full research dataset strongly indicates that members were generally very positive and engaged throughout the process. In this section, we unpack this general finding, analyse key factors, and examine areas where satisfaction fluctuated over the course of the Assembly.

In the member survey, large majorities of participants reported high levels of satisfaction with every aspect of the process, from general organisation of logistics and proceedings to online delivery, quality of evidence sessions, quality of deliberation, and agreement with the final recommendations. This resonates with findings from fieldnotes, which also show that members expressed satisfaction with other aspects of the Assembly, including: the collegiality and friendships developed;

the diversity of perspectives; the challenge of doing something unique and 'historical'; the level of respect and consensus-building; and the supportive work of organisers and facilitators.

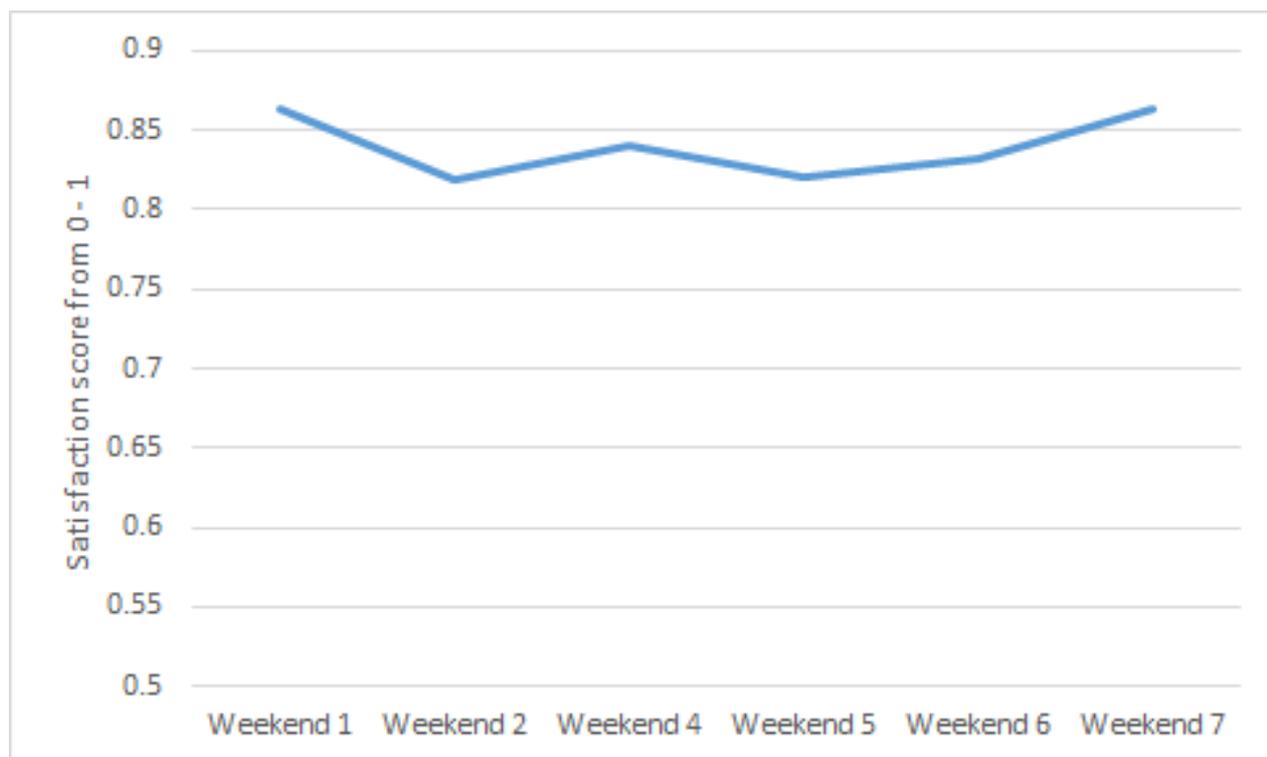
The member survey asked about different elements within the Assembly process (see Appendix C). A first set of questions asked about the general organisation of the weekends and ongoing communication with the organisers. On a scale from 0 (dissatisfaction) to 3 (satisfaction), the average response was between 2.5 and 3 for every Assembly weekend, indicating high levels of satisfaction. However, the spread of the responses indicated that a small minority of people were very dissatisfied with the organisation in weekends 4 and 5, which coincides with the Assembly's transition from in-person to online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, the Assembly moved online on weekend 5 and participants were asked about their satisfaction with this new space – for example, whether there were distractions or technical challenges. Initially the mean response was 2.47/3 and by weekend 8 satisfaction rose to 2.71/3, once again indicating high levels of satisfaction with the (now digital) process. Finally, when asked to evaluate the diversity of viewpoints in the information provided, speakers' presentations, and other Assembly members, participants were overwhelmingly satisfied and became more so as the weeks went on. By weekend 8, the average satisfaction score on this measure was 2.73/3.

We combined various satisfaction variables into a Process Satisfaction Index ranging from 0 (dissatisfied) to 1 (satisfied). The chart below shows the aggregate points of change in satisfaction score (see Figure 3). It is remarkable that there was very little aggregate change over the course of the Assembly, with the mean satisfaction scores in weekends 1 and 7 only differing by 0.0004. However, this aggregate level hides the finding that at the individual level there were slight changes in scores taking place over time. By the end of the Assembly, only two respondents consistently had the same satisfaction score and only 16 had the same level of satisfaction in weekends 1 and 7. Nevertheless, high satisfaction levels throughout the Assembly were consistently supported by open text responses highlighting enjoyment as a key reason for continuing engagement with the process:

'I enjoyed taking part in this Assembly, meeting people from all over Scotland and hearing their views and stories.'
(Assembly member, member survey)

Figure 3: Average aggregate member satisfaction with the Assembly process



Source: Member survey (due to coding errors in the data for weekend 3, this has been omitted from the analysis)

We also carried out tests to assess which participants were likely to be more satisfied with the process. Most demographic factors and opinion variables did not have a significant effect on a member's level of satisfaction. However, being a woman rather than a man decreased a person's satisfaction score by almost 10%. This resonates with recent research that suggests that women are not always equally included in different aspects of a citizens' assembly process (Gerber, et al., 2019; Harris, 2019; Harris, et al., 2021). We will return to this issue when discussing group dynamics.

A key factor in the consistently high levels of satisfaction relates to the work of the organisers and facilitators. The fieldnotes document sustained efforts by all organisers to support accessibility and inclusivity, both during the in-person and online phases of the process. The high retention rate when the Assembly was moved online, despite the extended gap between weekends 4 and 5, is illustrative of members' satisfaction and desire to be involved:

'I think the real yardstick of the success is that everyone came back.'
(Facilitator, internal interview)

'[I]n the very dark days of the pandemic I didn't think people would want to come back and meet and discuss and debate and deliberate together, but they really did. And then hearing the stories of the Assembly members and hearing their absolute enthusiasm for each other and for their country and for how we can make things better was a revelation.' (Organiser, internal interview)

The online phase elicited a new set of challenges that affected the experience of some participants, albeit the organisers remained responsive to emerging support needs. The internal interviews and the fieldnotes emphasise factors such as: problems with technology, for instance regarding access and the flow of conversation; challenges related to the increased attention and concentration required of members; and above all else the loss of the informal spaces for connecting and strengthening relationships. The data also indicates problems stemming from the variable levels of accessibility of the evidence presented by the speakers, and how that caused some level of frustration and challenges for members. Some presentations were very difficult to follow, and members commented on being overwhelmed by the amount of evidence and some of the presentation styles. The dataset also includes instances when members' confidence in the process wavered, albeit this tended to be temporary and for a small number of participants.

Despite variation in the quality of deliberation and facilitation throughout the process (analysed in Chapter 3), the Assembly produced a clear output in the form of the members' vision and 60 majority-supported recommendations (58 of which received above 75% support) relating to future assemblies, incomes and poverty, tax and economy, support for young people, health and wellbeing, sustainability, and further powers for the Scottish Parliament.

Members expressed a high level of satisfaction with these outputs. The fieldnotes illustrate a sense of collective ownership of the recommendations, which is clearly reflected in the strong support expressed through the anonymous votes. When asked in the member survey, not a single participant reported supporting *none* of the recommendations. A majority of 57% supported *some* of the recommendations and a further 38% supported *all of them*. Furthermore, only 8% of respondents to the members' survey did not feel that they had exerted any influence on the recommendations. The vast majority agreed (78% strongly agreed; 14% tended to agree; 3% tended to disagree; 2% strongly disagreed) that the process through which the Assembly's recommendations were agreed was fair, implying strong consent.

The final Assembly sessions were rich in instances of members expressing delight with the process and the outputs, being proud of having taken part, noting how much they got out of the experience and connecting to other people, and being passionate about demanding that their recommendations should be taken forward and acted upon. We cannot assess in this report whether these high levels of satisfaction continued in the aftermath of the Assembly, albeit new research is taking place to examine that question.

Inclusion and empowerment

Our analysis of the dataset suggests that, overall, members felt included and empowered by the Assembly process – albeit there were important shortcomings as explored below. Positive indicators can be seen in the members' pride in and ownership of the recommendations, along with their capacity to represent the work

of the Assembly in the media following the publication of the Assembly's report. Their excitement about being included in the process was noticeable from the outset:

'[P]eople were delighted to be asked ... what they thought and delighted to be given the time to think about these things.'
(Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

'[S]omebody mentioned it [was] like the golden ticket from Willy Wonka ... I think that really surprised me ... I just didn't think they would be so enthused about that ... [I]t made me realise that citizens don't feel that they're listened to very often' (Organiser, internal interviews)

The organisers put in place a support structure for members' welfare and accompanied participants throughout the process. This started prior to the official sessions, with phone calls to members to introduce them to the process, answer questions and determine logistical and financial needs.

Digital exclusion was a risk during the move online, and members were provided with technical support, induction sessions and hardware where needed. Efforts were also made to prepare and enthuse members for their return, for example, providing summaries of work and accomplishments to date. The high retention rate of members can be seen as a measure of the success of these efforts:

'We did a survey with members to find out ... their tech experience and tech needs ... We then did an induction session with every member to make sure they were comfortable using Zoom, Jamboard, all the tools, and also just to get them back in the swing of things and to give them the opportunity to talk to each other. We then had to do quite a lot of work with individuals who either weren't comfortable or didn't have the right type of technology so getting them a [computer] and stuff like that.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

Members often expressed appreciation for the efforts made by organisers and facilitators to support accessibility and inclusion. The evidence sessions, however, did pose problems. They required a great deal of concentration from members and were sometimes pitched at too technical a level to be accessible to all – a shortcoming that can create a sense of disempowerment. Overall, the facilitators reported that this part of the process was both challenging and enjoyable for members. The dataset suggests that this dimension improved over the course of the Assembly, but there were some persistent issues that we will introduce below and analyse in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Both the fieldnotes and the members' survey offer examples of procedural shortcomings that were also felt as exclusionary and disempowering. For instance, arbitrary voting thresholds, unclear procedures for proposition and review of vision statements, and questions about agenda-setting power (e.g. how key topics for evidence sessions were decided) elicited a sense of suspicion and

disempowerment amongst some members on weekends 2 and 6. These issues stemmed from a lack of engagement with participants, which was subsequently corrected:

'The processes around weekend 6, and the vision, were probably the weakest part of the Assembly ... I think we got [them] absolutely right in weekends 7 and 8, because we were ... determined we were going to ... have absolute transparency over decision making ... and you need to have walked that through with members ... I think that was a bit edgy in weekend 2, and ... even more edgy in weekend 6. And it's getting that balance of direction, consultation, and clarity, for people.'
(Organiser, internal interviews)

The Assembly design combined plenary and small group sessions, with the latter being where most of the personal interaction and group deliberation took place. Over the full course of the Assembly, the member survey indicates that between 85% and 95% of respondents consistently reported feeling they had ample opportunities to express their opinions in small group sessions. When asked if they felt able to speak, members consistently reported feeling included and respected by facilitators, with no more than 5% reporting that they did not feel so in any one weekend. Their open text responses are illustrative:

'[The facilitators] were both excellent, and helpful moving the conversation forward through some shy/awkward silences.'
(Assembly member, member survey)

'Great facilitators, really made sure everyone got to speak.' (Assembly member, member survey)

'There was one lady we didn't hear a lot from ... [the] facilitator brought her into the discussion and was very kind. Did include her but didn't push her too much.' (Assembly member, member survey)

A proxy to assess levels of empowerment is the extent to which members report being more able to participate in politics by the end of the Assembly. In open text responses in the member survey, participants consistently reported feeling empowered throughout the Assembly weekends:

'As the Assembly has progressed, I felt proud to be part of it. In the start I was probably a bit nervous and unsure, however I now feel part of something. I also feel as a collective we are making a positive contribution to some complex issues.' (Assembly member, member survey)

'Before the Citizens' Assembly I never really got involved in politics ... I am now very passionate and committed to being part of changing Scotland ... I feel empowered.' (Assembly member, member survey)

'I feel our input is going to make some radical changes to our country and its people.' (Assembly member, member survey)

The topic of public participation became a focal point in small group deliberations, as illustrated in these extracts from session transcripts where members discussed issues of inclusion, empowerment and the proposals for future assemblies:

'I think there's a consensus across the Assembly ... that people are very passionate and committed to the process of the mission statement and ... taking that forward. And I think the consensus that I feel is that people do want everyday members of the public represented, in some way, in politics.' (Assembly member, small group deliberation)

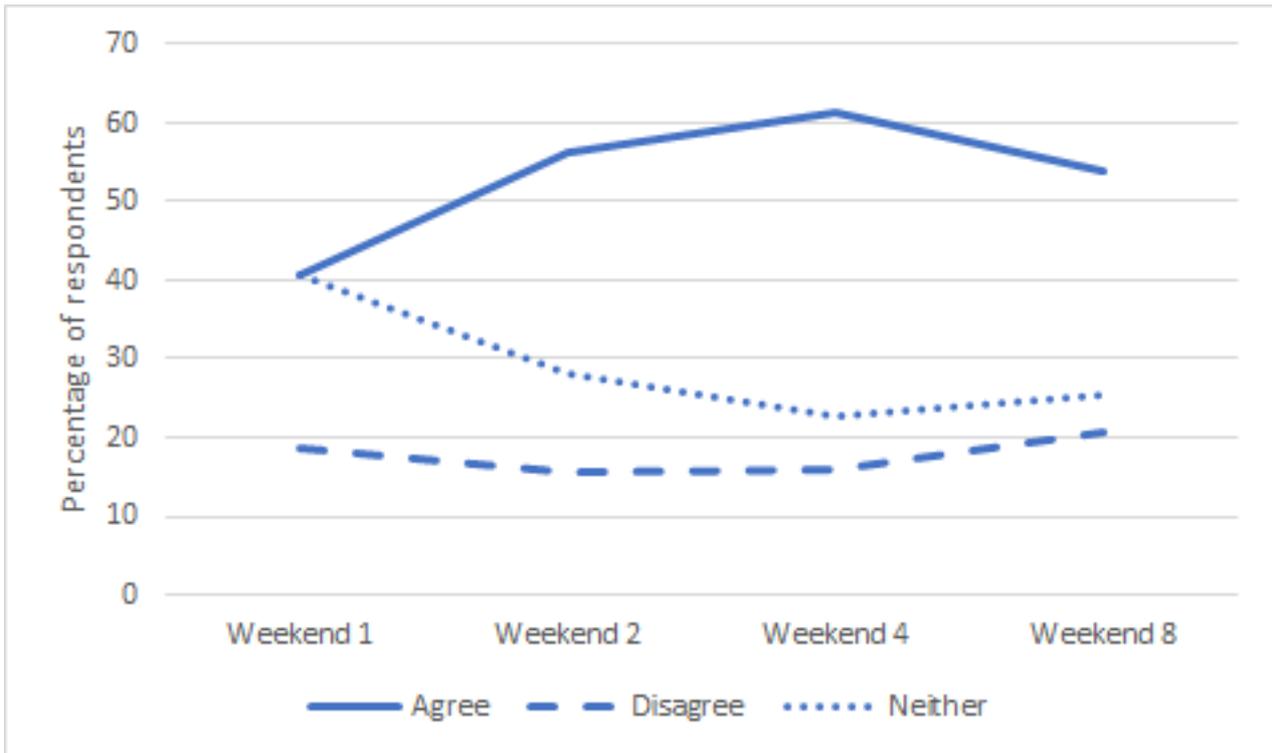
'And if we are gonna be introducing a type of Citizens' Assembly, that gives them a voice ... you know, younger, whatever age group ... that may not have been able to be heard before, may have an opportunity to be heard through this type of forum.' (Assembly member, small group deliberation)

Members often reflected on the sense of responsibility about the work they were doing for the country, which is arguably another proxy for empowerment. In the member survey, 84% felt that they had influenced the recommendations while 8% didn't. Across the entire dataset we found repeated comments about members' enjoyment and sense of making a difference.

Many participants in citizens' assemblies are not particularly politically active before they are invited to take part. The participatory experience of the assembly can therefore stimulate a change in civic attitudes and behaviour. Those who are already active can still find the distinct assembly experience transformative for their political behaviour. Participation can also change how people view the political system more generally. Consequently, we also explored how the attitudes to civic and political participation and democracy in Scotland evolved during the course of the Assembly.

In the member survey, participants were able to express their views on how ordinary citizens participate in politics, how they themselves participate, and the extent to which they think the Government listens to citizens. Beginning with self-reflection, Figure 4 shows that there was a significant change in how confident people felt in participating in politics from weekend 1 to weekend 8. Initially about the same proportion 'neither agreed nor disagreed' as 'agreed' that they knew enough to participate in politics, but by the end of the assembly the majority of members 'agreed' that they were knowledgeable enough to participate.

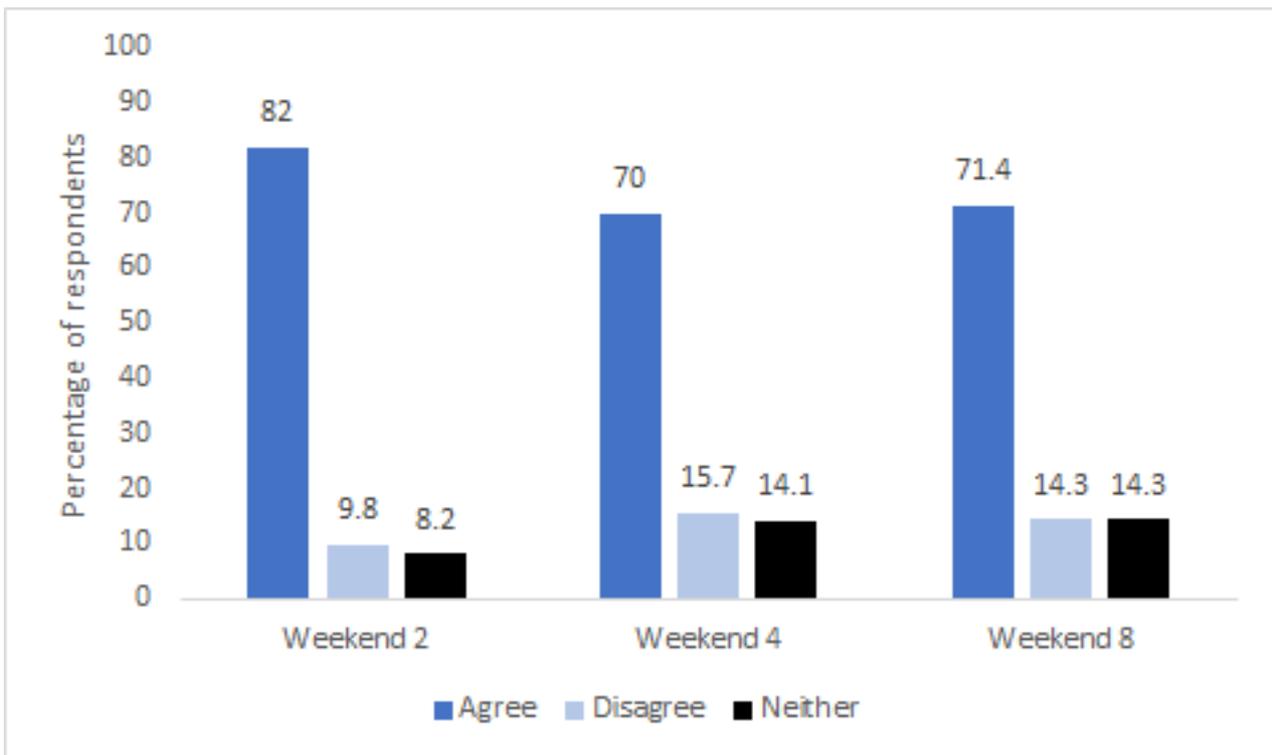
Figure 4: Changes in members' self-reported confidence in participating in politics



Source: Member survey (Question: I know enough to participate in politics)

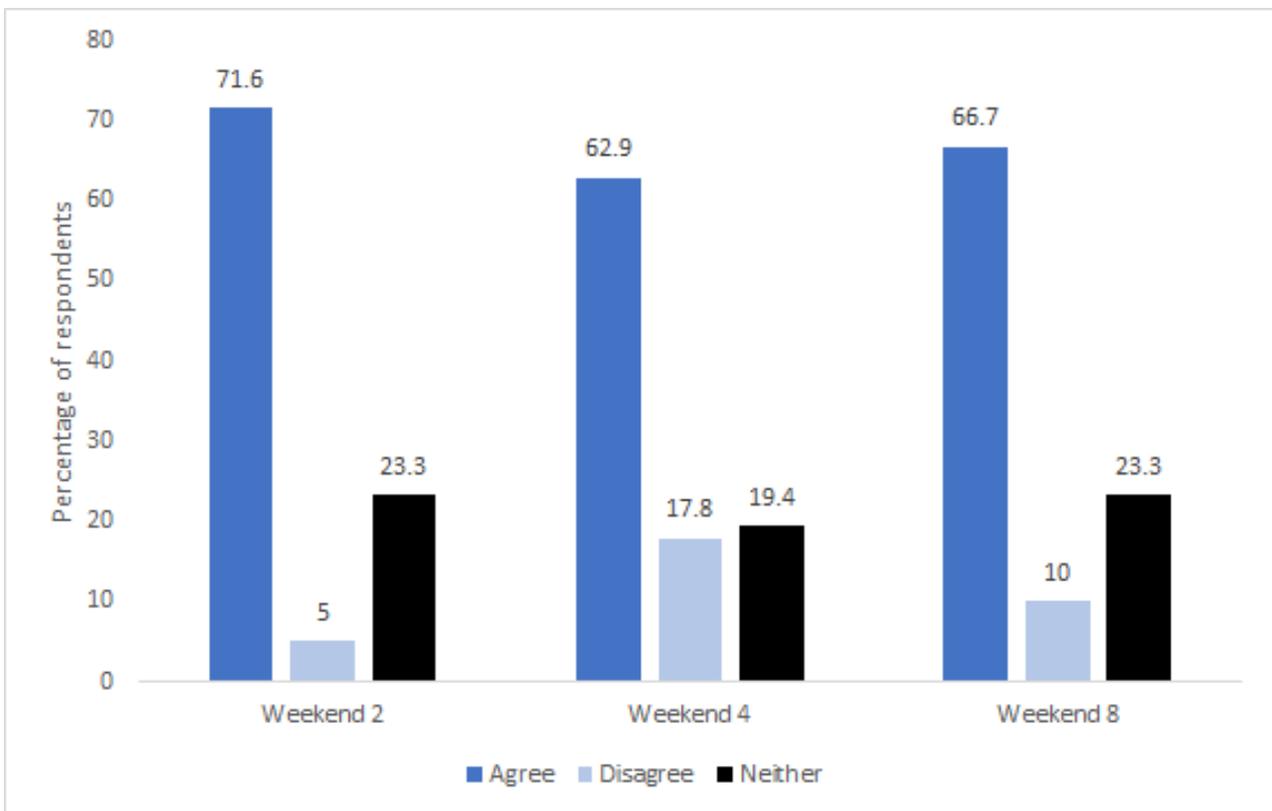
In contrast, when asked about their opinions about other members of the public participating in politics, respondents showed increasingly negative perceptions as the Assembly went on (see Figure 5). By weekend 8, fewer respondents agreed that ordinary people are able to participate in politics and that they trusted ordinary citizens to make good political decisions than in weekend 1 (see Figure 6). One interpretation of this finding is that it may reflect increasing awareness of the wide-ranging nature of the issues considered and the importance of having opportunities to learn and deliberate about them. Another interpretation is that the context of the COVID-19 pandemic may have generated greater trust in scientific and technocratic expertise. However, these are tentative readings that warrant further research and it should be noted that respondents agreeing with these statements (i.e. considering ordinary citizens as able to participate in politics and trusting them to make good decisions) were still by far the largest group.

Figure 5: Assembly members' changing attitudes towards the public's ability to participate in politics



Source: Member survey (Question: I consider ordinary citizens able to participate in politics)

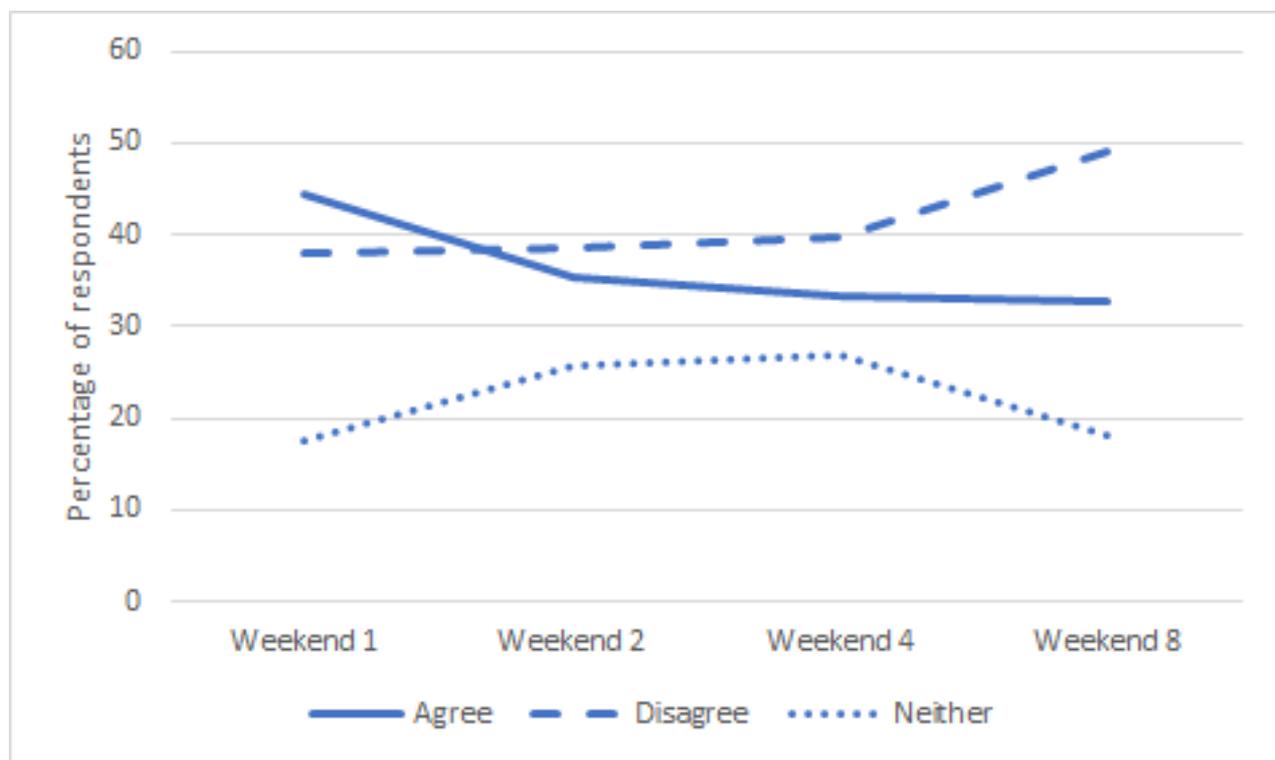
Figure 6: Assembly members' changing level of trust in the public's ability to make good political decisions



Source: Member survey (Question: I trust ordinary citizens to make good political decisions)

Finally, turning to measures of the extent to which Assembly members felt listened to by the Government we observe a marked change reflecting a positive effect. As shown in Figure 7, 44% of respondents in weekend 1 did not feel they had a say in what the Scottish Government does. By weekend 8 this had decreased to 33%, and 49% of respondents actively disagreed with the statement. Of all respondents, only ten did not change their minds about whether they influenced what the Scottish Government does. All ten either tended to agree or strongly agreed that they did not have a say. Over 70% of members changed their answer from the first survey to the second. Even between weekends 4 and 8, just under half the sample still changed their answer to this question. This suggests that opinions on how much people influence the Scottish Government were quite malleable throughout the process. Once again, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic may be a factor in the malleability of these responses (e.g. some participants may have answered the question in a general sense while others may have answered in reference to their immediate situation during the pandemic).

Figure 7: Extent to which Assembly members feel they have an influence on what the Scottish Government does



Source: Member survey (Question: People like me don't have a say in what the Scottish Government does)

Developments in self-confidence and internal efficacy (i.e. a sense that one can make a difference) were also noted by various observers of the Assembly sessions, including the organisers and facilitators:

'I've seen people genuinely change and feel listened to and feel valued, [it] has been actually quite overwhelming at times. But also the fact that they now feel that they have a voice and they want that voice to be heard.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'I could see people become engaged more than as members of this specific Assembly. There were... more than a couple along the way... who said that before they were not interested in politics, they couldn't care less, they were totally switched off, and that now they felt like it's really important to be engaged, it's really important to have a say.'
(Facilitator, internal interviews)

Many observations in the fieldnotes convey a sense of members' evolving attitudes on civic and political life; for example, developing self-confidence and a sense of agency, expressing growing faith in other members, or believing that it is possible to find some level of common ground across differences. There were many instances indicating that members felt that, as the title of the Assembly's report says, 'doing politics differently' was possible. Perhaps one of the most telling aspects about this was the amount of time members spent discussing institutional reform towards embedding democratic innovations in Scotland. This was reflected in their final vision and recommendations. For example, pertaining to the introduction and normalisation of citizens' assemblies. The data includes some instances where members expressed wishes that other people in Scotland could get a chance to participate in processes like this. However, a distrust in traditional institutions and political arenas also remained consistent amongst some members throughout the Assembly.

Group dynamics

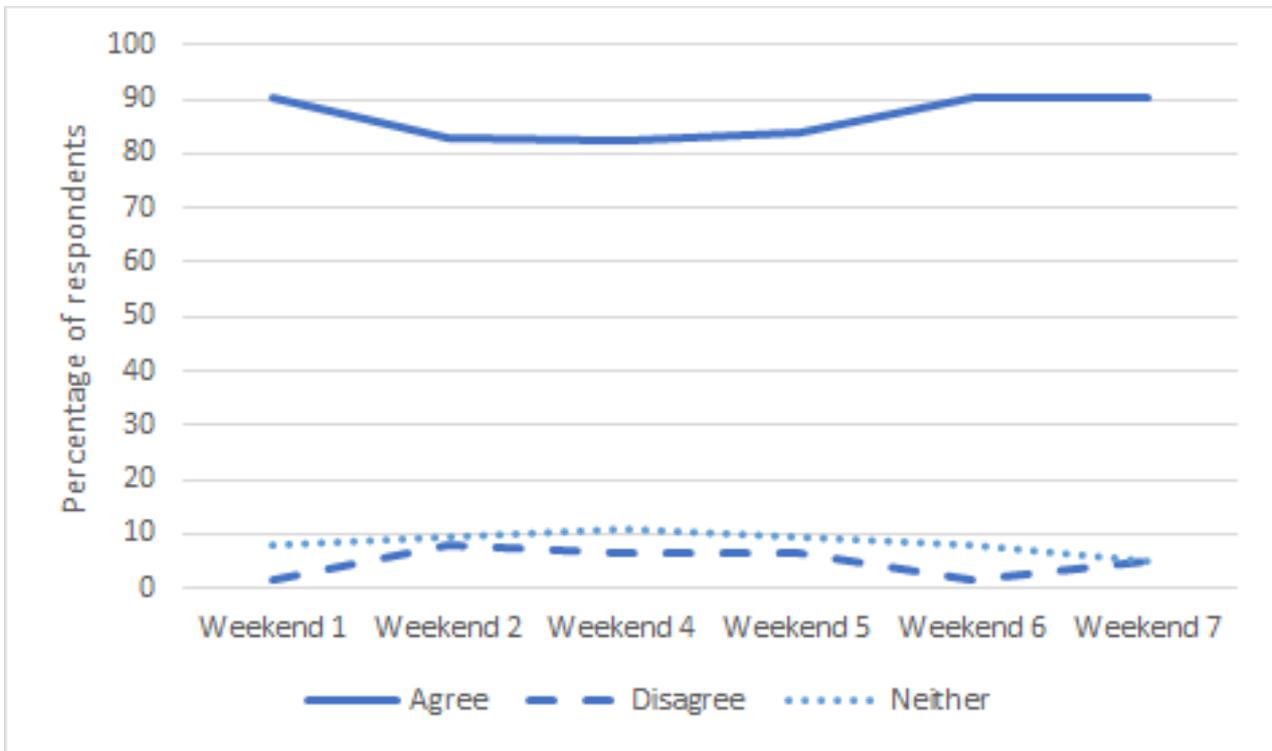
In this section, we unpack further some findings about group dynamics at the Assembly. As a collective, members developed a strong sense of identity as well as interpersonal bonds. The observed strength in relationships between members was noted in fieldnotes and internal interviews, which sometimes elicited surprise, given the diversity of backgrounds and experiences represented in the Assembly.

'I could see where alliances ... and friendships were being made. And I think the joy of that was some of them were between groups of people that you would expect to coalesce, and then other ones were between people who you would never in a million years think that they were going to ... meet and discuss.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

The graphs below offer an overview of key group dynamics (see Figures 8-10). When members were asked about how they felt around their fellow participants, most respondents reported feeling comfortable throughout the process. When asked if they felt respected by other members, over 80% expressed agreement, with over 90% agreeing on weekends 1 and 8. Over 77% of respondents consistently disagreed with the statement 'I didn't always feel free to express my views for fear of others' reactions', with a maximum value of 89% of respondents disagreeing by weekend 8. Our analysis of a sample of deliberation transcripts also indicates that there was little disrespect shown amongst members (around 1% of all instances coded in the transcripts). All counts of 'no respect' occurred in the face-to-face sessions and none occurred online. In this sense, the move from in-person

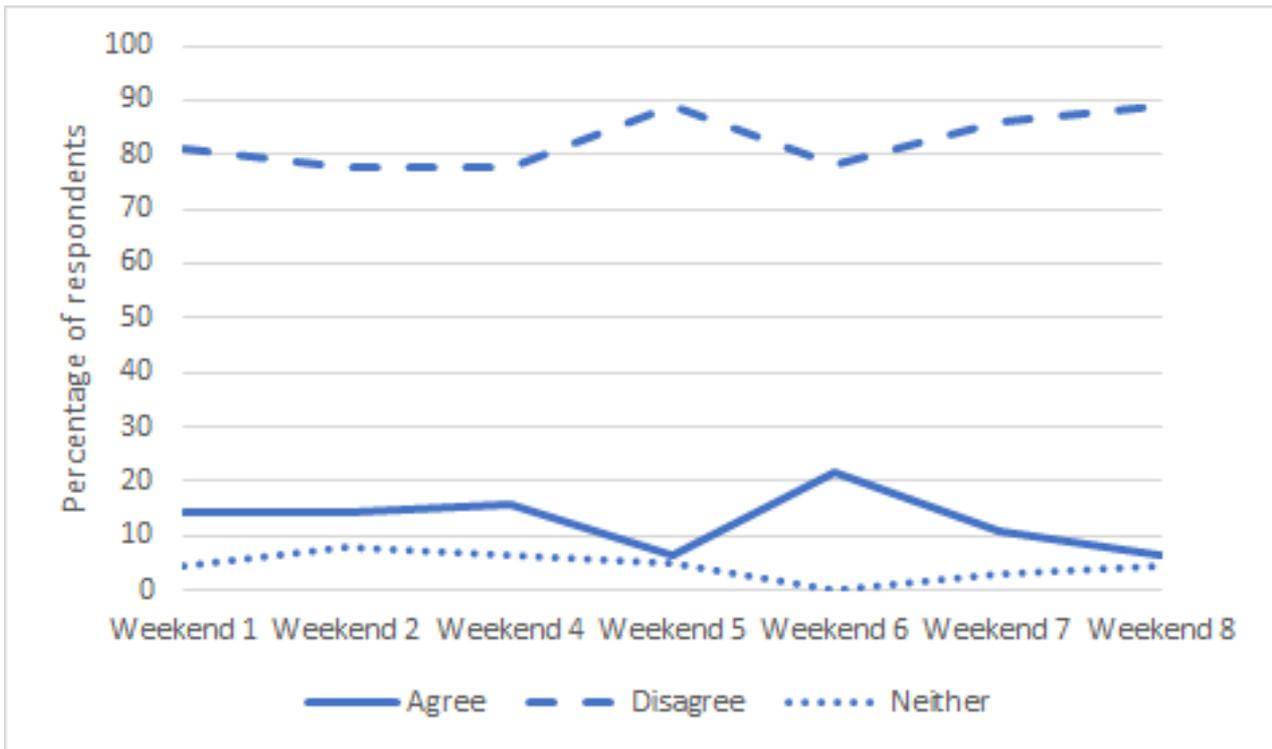
to digital seemed to foster even more respectful and considerate dynamics in small group deliberation.

Figure 8: Assembly members' self-reported feelings of being respected by others



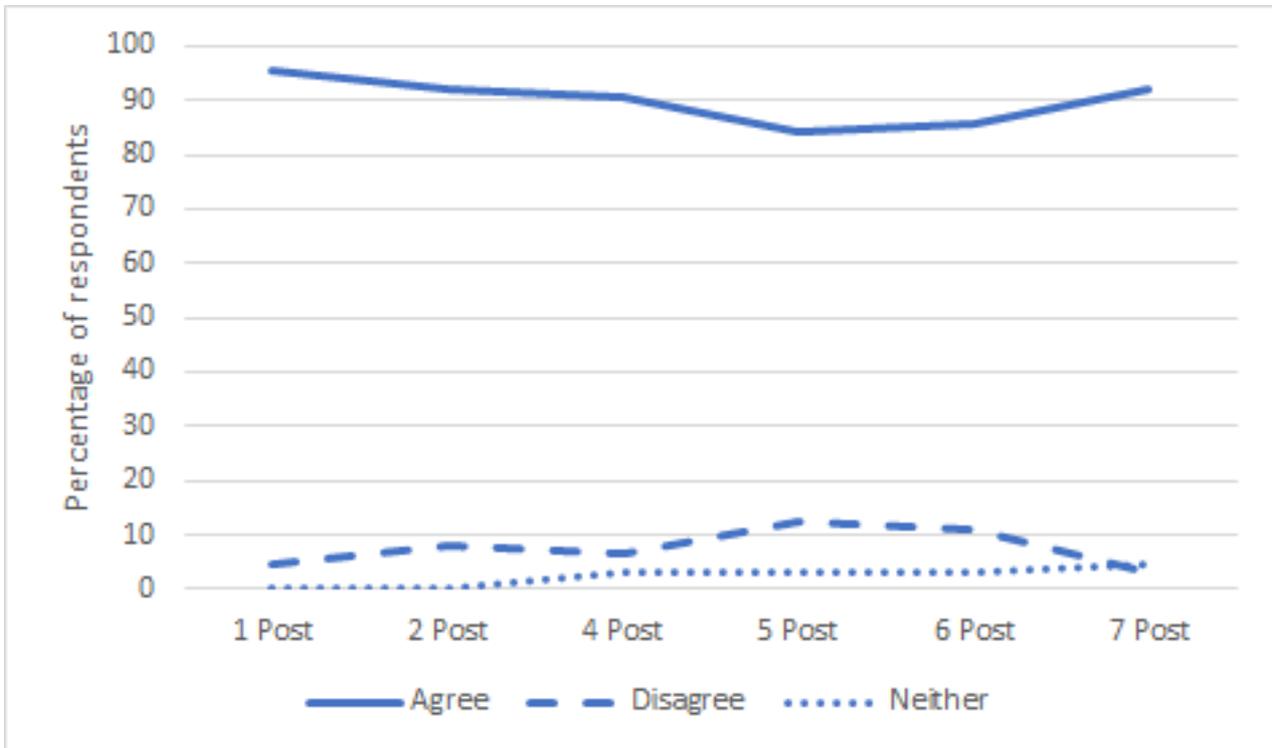
Source: Member survey (Question: My fellow participants respected what I had to say, even when they didn't agree with me)

Figure 9: Assembly members' self-reported ability to express themselves during discussions



Source: Member survey (Question: I didn't always feel free to express my views for fear of others' reactions)

Figure 10: Assembly members' self-reported feelings of inclusion in group discussions



Source: Member survey (Question: I have had ample opportunity in small group discussions to express my views)

In the internal interviews, facilitators frequently reflected on the need to manage the balance of voices to ensure that all members had a chance to contribute; and they were particularly concerned about this during the move online. They did not make any reference to specific demographic characteristics influencing dynamics beyond noting that younger members were on occasion less engaged.

'I had a young guy that was in my group throughout, for about three weekends, and the secretariat kept putting him back in because they felt I had a relationship with him. But I think we totally failed to engage him. And I think the process wasn't designed to engage him. And I think the problem is, it was open enough to get him there, and he came to Clydebank and had a good time ... But his lack of engagement was annoying the other citizens ... I think, if we were going to do it again, there might need to be some different arrangements made for some folk who just don't relate to that sort of process.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

According to our fieldnotes, gender inequalities seemed to shape dynamics in some of the small groups and plenaries – for example, men tended to speak more often when reporting back in the plenary sessions. Actions by facilitators and organisers sought to address this and representation improved towards the final sessions. In the member survey, similar proportions of men and women agreed that they felt respected in group discussions. However, when it came to whether they felt comfortable raising their opinions in the group, only one man disagreed whereas 18% of women disagreed. Women were also less likely than men to strongly agree that they had ample opportunity to express their views in group discussions: 86% of men strongly agreed while 7% tended to agree, for women the proportions were 64% and 24% respectively.

The analysis of the member survey data did not suggest that other demographic characteristics had a direct influence on group dynamics (e.g. disability; ethnicity). However, the fieldnotes (which included facilitator debriefs) provide some evidence that education level may have also influenced dynamics in some groups – for example when it came to having confidence crafting text, articulating propositions, or offering challenge and scrutiny.

Design choices in this type of deliberative process are often caught in the tension between structure and flexibility – that is, trying to plan as much as possible while leaving room to deal with contingencies such as the development of unequal group dynamics (Escobar, 2019; Faulkner & Bynner, 2020). In this Assembly, the design process was ongoing as the nature of the assembly's remit was broad and the route map unpredictable:

'I know that in between [weekends] they were desperately designing away and I'm sure that at times they felt that was almost from scratch each time, depending on how well the previous weekend had worked, and I'm sure that is the case – but my sense is that there was a purposefulness to where it was going. And the reason I say the design was good is I think a good design hinges on having the core

question and the outcomes in mind all the time.’ (Facilitator, internal interviews)

In contrast to the quote above, other facilitator interviews suggest that there was a fair amount of ‘trusting in the process’ going on (more or less happily) despite a lack of clarity about the route map for the Assembly. This could be related to the facilitators’ limited involvement in the design process, with several noting that they focussed (again, more or less happily) on their individual roles and responsibilities weekend by weekend.

What is consistently clear across the internal interviews dataset is that the breadth of the remit, coupled with a pre-determined timeframe, had a knock-on effect on key aspects of the process design that shaped group dynamics within the Assembly. It made it challenging to design and implement the evidence sessions because designers did not know in advance what issues would be covered in subsequent stages. It also proved a challenge to the design of deliberative sessions due to the breadth of topics that needed to be addressed. A significant portion of the preparations were spent dealing with the uncertainty about how to proceed. Organisers frequently stressed that this was particularly challenging within the tight timelines. Regardless of their views on the breadth of the remit, interviewees agreed that it created challenges to design and delivery, resulting in uncertainty about the direction, endpoint, and output of the Assembly.

Other design shortcomings related to voting systems, revision processes (e.g. for proposals), agenda-setting, and changing procedures – which generated confusion and even suspicion amongst some members and facilitators. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of this was the design and implementation of weekend 6, where a 90% threshold was required to agree vision statements. There was lack of clarity of the rationale for this design choice and no involvement of members (or of the stewarding group) in setting this up. The fieldnotes for that weekend are full of things that went wrong and caused distress for facilitators – one put it bluntly: ‘it was the most compromising experience of my professional career’. Some members also voiced discontent and confusion, and the open text responses in the member survey show suspicion amongst some participants. Parts of the procedure seemed to be made up on the go, creating substantial difficulties at the stage of developing, revising and voting vision statements. Some members noted that they may have voted differently if they knew that the statements could be revised and redrafted.

‘I am never doing a significant vote live in a session ever again ... Weekend 6 was the most stressful day of my working life ... [A]ll it took was for two members to have a technical issue for that process to essentially not go well, not go right.’ (Organiser, internal interviews)

‘There was one weekend that I remember coming out the end of thinking we kind of lost control of things a bit there ... although what we heard afterwards ... from the members is the members didn’t feel it in the same way as the facilitators had in terms of that didn’t actually go that well.’ (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Across the entire Assembly process, there seemed to be limited oversight of design and delivery by the stewarding group, which raises questions about overall governance of the assembly (see Chapter 6). Procedures seemed more carefully thought-out and worked better in the last two weekends. All in all, the process design did help produce clear outputs backed by substantial votes. However, the revision and refinement of the final recommendations was limited, which resulted in overlaps between some recommendations or in proposals for initiatives that may already exist (see Chapter 5 for more perspectives on these issues).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that levels of satisfaction with the process were, and remained, very high amongst members for the entire duration of the Assembly. Likewise, our assessment also indicates high levels of inclusion and empowerment, despite a range of challenges related to process design and group dynamics. Inclusion and empowerment go hand in hand with opportunities for participant development, and some design features and facilitation dynamics may have undermined this (for further analysis see Chapter 3). The online setting may have also accentuated some of the challenges by reducing the relational aspects that contribute to developing confidence and internal efficacy – not just in formal sessions but across the many informal spaces in the process. Shortcomings related to agenda-setting, voting and revision processes prompted learning and adaptation which improved the dynamics of the Assembly over time. This shows the importance of reflective practice and collaboration between organisers and facilitators. Finally, members' sense of internal efficacy for civic and political life was positively affected by their experience at the Assembly.

Chapter 2: Learning and Opinion Formation during the Assembly

Research questions:

- a) To what extent do participants share an understanding of the task?
- b) Does participants' knowledge increase?
- c) Do opinions related to the set task evolve?
- d) What are the critical learning points in the process?
- e) What are the critical opinion-formation points in the process?

Data sources:

- Member survey
- Expert speaker survey
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- External interviews (politicians, journalists, civil servants)
- Fieldnotes

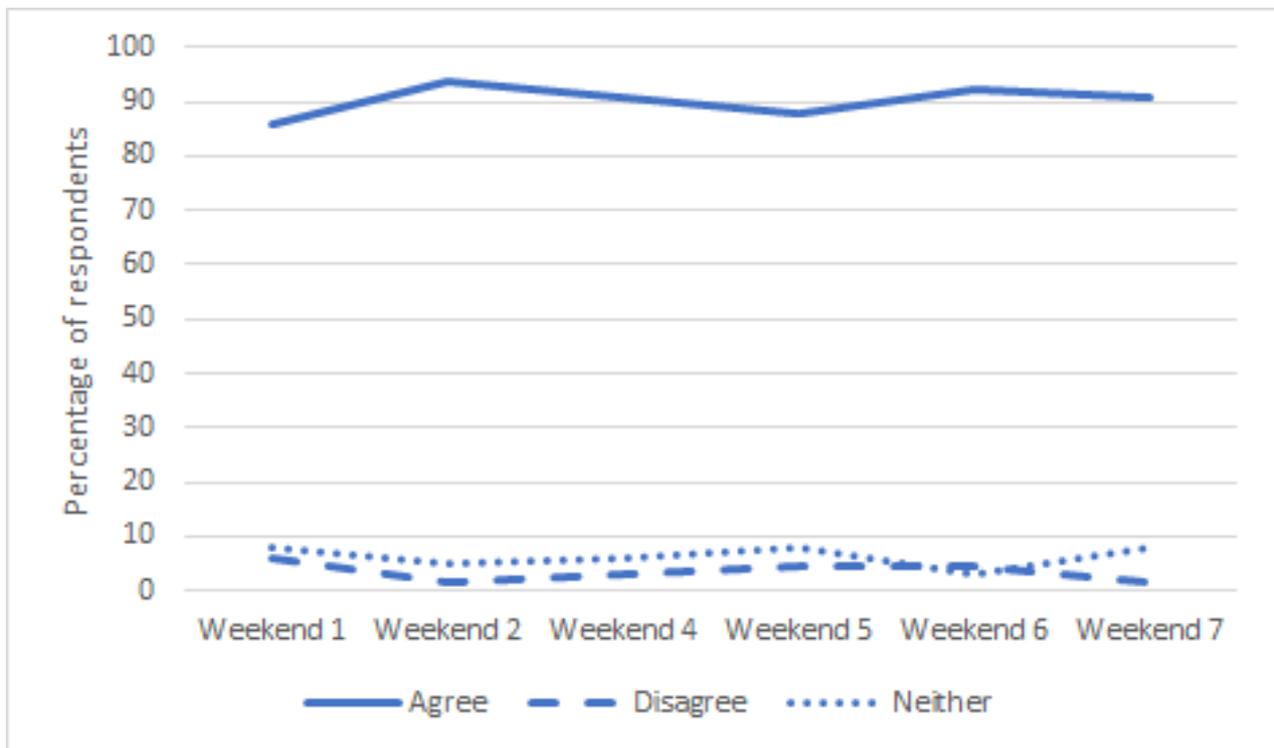
In citizens' assemblies, participants should be exposed to a range of information, from a range of speakers, but also from each other. Ideally this should enable them to learn more about the topic under consideration (Roberts, et al., 2020). In turn, this learning can lead Assembly members to reflect on their views on the issue and even change their views in light of this information, which means the recommendations an assembly produces can be based on evidence and considered opinion (Thompson, et al., 2021). In this chapter we cover the learning opportunities the Assembly members were afforded and the extent this influenced their views on the topics addressed by the Assembly. We then move to establish which elements of the Assembly had the greatest impact on learning and opinion change. We start though with a discussion of whether the Assembly members shared an understanding of the task. To answer these questions we draw on data from the member survey, expert speaker survey, internal and external interviews, and the non-participant observation fieldnotes.

Shared understanding of the task

For coherent learning and opinion formation to occur across the Assembly as a whole, it is important that the members share an understanding of their role in the

Assembly and for each weekend that they meet. We asked the Assembly members about this in our survey (see Appendix C). Figure 11 shows that their general understanding of the task was fairly consistent across the weeks, with over 86% either ‘tending to agree’ or ‘strongly agreeing’ that they understood what was expected of them every weekend. This understanding also increased as the Assembly progressed as in weekend 1, 44% ‘strongly agreed’ and by weekend 8 this rose to 72%.

Figure 11: Assembly members’ self-reported understanding of the task



Source: Member survey (Question: I understand what I am expected to do over the coming Assembly weekends)

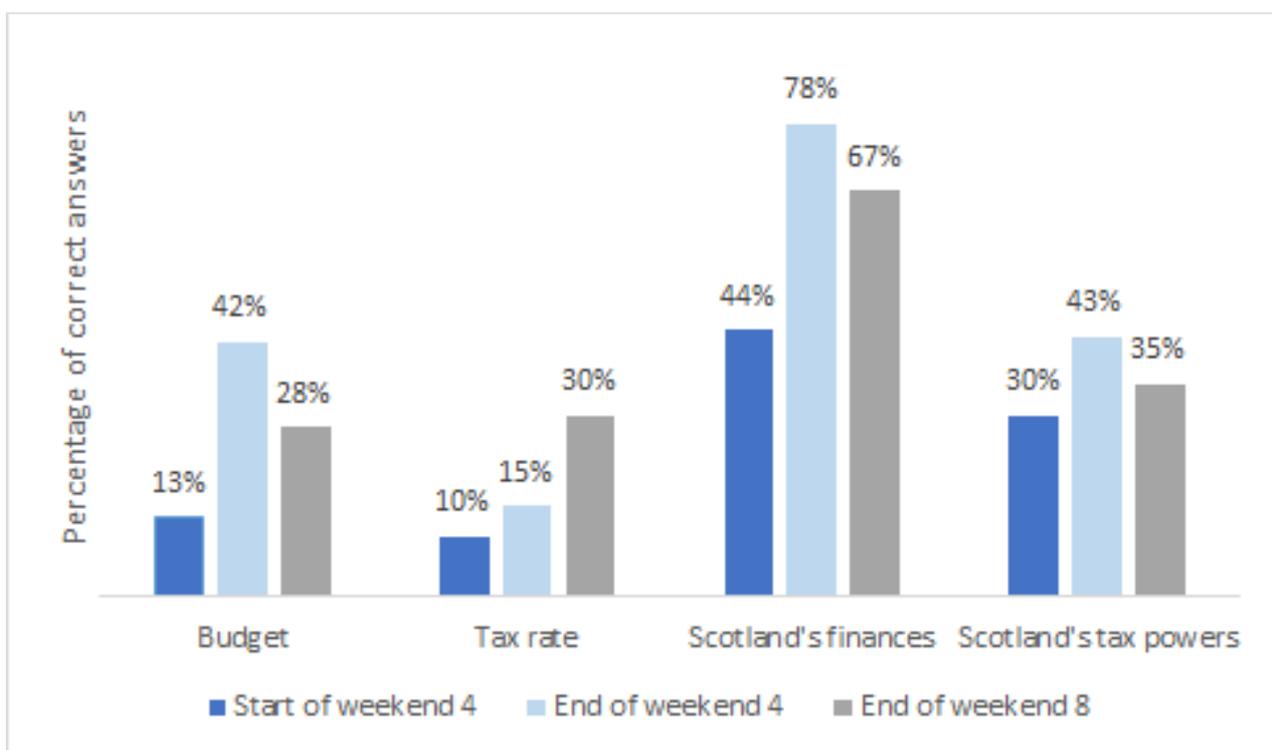
This is supported by the fieldnotes. Interviewees did not really dwell or elaborate on this point much as they overwhelmingly had the impression that members as a whole understood the overall purpose of the Assembly and their role within it. A very small number of interviews across the groups alluded to an initial period of uncertainty about the process, after which members became familiar and comfortable about what was asked of them. The fieldnotes also noted there was a considerable level of confusion about the remit, particularly during the first half of the process. Members very seldom referred to the three-pronged remit of the Assembly during their deliberations, which suggests that it was not necessarily seen as particularly useful or usable in guiding their work.

Does participants’ knowledge increase?

Due to the method of recruitment, participants in a citizens’ assembly typically have a diverse range of knowledge on the issues to be considered, with some knowing little or nothing at all, meaning there is a need for learning to be built into the process (Roberts, et al., 2020).

In our member survey we asked multiple choice questions about Scotland throughout the Assembly process to identify changes in objective knowledge (see Appendix C). The graph in Figure 12 shows the percentage of correct answers to questions asked about the Scottish budget, tax rates and tax powers, and Scotland’s general financial situation. In the case of all four questions, when asked about these topics before learning about them at the Assembly, those that answered correctly were in the minority. Directly after weekend 4, when the Assembly focused on these issues, the percentage of correct answers increased. However, only when asked about Scotland’s general finances did over 50% of respondents answer correctly. Finally, after the last Assembly session, members were asked the same questions again. There was a drop in the percentage of correct answers for three of the questions, which is understandable given that almost a year had passed since the evidence sessions covering the topic. However, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents able to remember specific income tax rates. Overall, Figure 12 demonstrates an increase in knowledge as a result of the Assembly, with two caveats. Firstly, although knowledge increased, in most cases more than half of Assembly members still answered questions incorrectly after an evidence session on the topic. Secondly, in most cases there was a decrease in knowledge retention over time.

Figure 12: Change in Assembly members’ objective knowledge

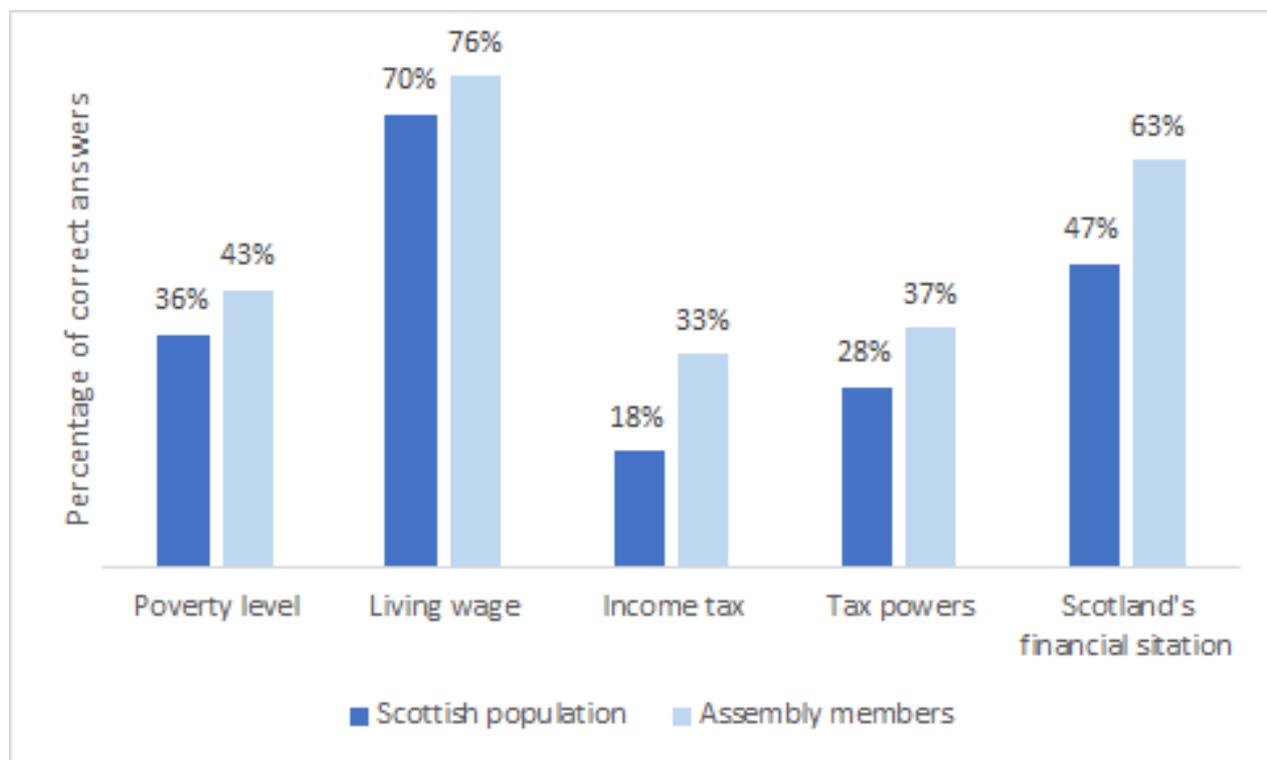


Source: Member survey

Figure 13 below shows a direct comparison of the objective knowledge of Assembly members (in weekend 8) and members of the general population on a wide range of topics. The chart clearly shows that consistently Assembly members on average had more objective knowledge by weekend 8 of the process. It is important to note that this trend is not visible when one compares the knowledge of Assembly members at the beginning of the process to the general population: Assembly

members tended to be around equally, or less, knowledgeable than the general population before discussing an issue in the Assembly. This suggests that on average objective knowledge is gained through participation in the Assembly.

Figure 13: Comparison of Assembly members' general knowledge in weekend 8 with that of the wider population



Source: Member and population surveys

The Assembly members' own perceptions of their learning support these findings. After the last Assembly session, they were directly asked if they felt they had learned during the Assembly. All but one respondent 'tended to' or 'strongly agreed' that they had. Several questions also measured how much people's subjective knowledge on various topics increased (see Appendix C). In weekend 1 and weekend 8 respondents were asked, "How much, out of 10, do you feel you know about life in Scotland." The mean response increased slightly from weekend 1 to weekend 8: 7.34 to 7.83. What is more interesting is the change for individuals: 17% of respondents' subjective knowledge scores decreased, for 42% the scores remained the same, and for 41% the scores increased. On this measure overall participants' knowledge increased, but not for each individual.

In weekends 2 and 4, pre and post surveys asked specific questions about the topics focused upon (see Appendix C). In weekend 2, respondents were asked about how much they felt they knew about wellbeing, quality of life, and values. 67% of respondents showed an increase in subjective knowledge for each topic, with ranges from 9% to 13% showing a decrease in subjective knowledge. In weekend 4 the questions focused on tax and public spending. For all questions, the vast majority of respondents showed increased subjective knowledge, with 78% reporting increased knowledge on Scottish tax powers. This large increase in knowledge could be attributed to the fact that most respondents did not know very

much about Scottish tax powers to begin with. Many open text responses in the survey supported the conclusion that the members learnt a lot: “I feel I have learned a lot through being part of the Citizens’ Assembly” and “I have enjoyed learning more about Scotland, good or bad, and seeing the progress we’ve made after each meeting”.

Our survey of expert speakers also indicates that they thought the Assembly members were engaging well with the information provided. The majority of respondents expected lower levels of engagement from members than they experienced, and several expressed being pleasantly surprised by members’ interest and the diversity of queries and opinions:

‘I slightly underestimated the level of engagement and self-reflection that members would have. And was delighted that my experience exceeded my expectations.’ (Expert speaker survey)

Members’ questions were described as ‘pertinent’, ‘thoughtful’ and ‘generally considered’:

‘Questions were more detailed and engaged than I had expected.’ (Expert speaker survey)

‘Some excellent questions and comments from diverse perspectives – which was very reassuring.’ (Expert speaker survey)

In order to further explore changes in the subjective knowledge of Assembly members, regression models were run comparing knowledge of topics before and after an Assembly session. The predictors used were demographic features and indicators of social class such as income and education. In weekend 2, evidence of democratisation of knowledge was found: before the Assembly session income and education were significant predictors of knowledge about values and wellbeing but after the session lost their significance. However, the same pattern did not occur in weekend 4 when discussing knowledge about taxes where income and education remained significant predictors of knowledge. This could be because how much a person knows about taxes will likely be directly related to their income.

Indeed, our interviewees suggested that catering for different forms of learning needs could have been improved. The evidence sessions required a great deal of concentration from members and may initially have been pitched at too technical a level to be accessible to all. The conveyed impression is that the format and pitch of evidence sessions improved as the Assembly progressed, as a result of which members were more able to engage with the information. Facilitators in particular report that the experience was both challenging and enjoyable for members.

One of the challenges to learning identified was the amount of time that passed between evidence sessions and agreeing on recommendations, due to the long break in the Assembly meetings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it more difficult for members to both recall and engage with the evidence in crafting recommendations. A few of the interviewees across the groups questioned the

extent to which the recommendations were based on and informed by the evidence presented:

'I think the problem was that when you were trying to bring in material in a later weekend that had been presented in an earlier weekend people really struggled to remember.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

'[I]t was a struggle for members a little bit to have that gap from when they heard the core evidence on a lot of the issues that we made recommendations about, and then coming back six months later.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

A few internal interviewees reflected that the breadth of the remit created challenges to planning a learning journey, possibly resulting in members engaging with evidence either inconsistently or in a fragmented way. Indicative comments on this topic from the organisers included:

'Some of the evidence was quite sort of unfocused as to what point it was there for ... [T]here wasn't a clear narrative of where it was going to end, which ... actively encouraged people to just pick up on something that grabbed their attention and focus in on that.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'[Q]uite how you design a learning programme for this kind of broad remit citizens' assembly ... that's one of the things that I don't really know.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews).

Some of our external interviewees also thought that the broad remit of the Assembly had a negative effect on the provision of evidence and information as it meant that so many different topics needed to be included:

'You want to expose people to expertise and to ... specific knowledge that they might not have had ready access to in the past ... [I]f the subject is very broad then the material that people have to absorb is just overwhelming.' (Politician, external interviews)

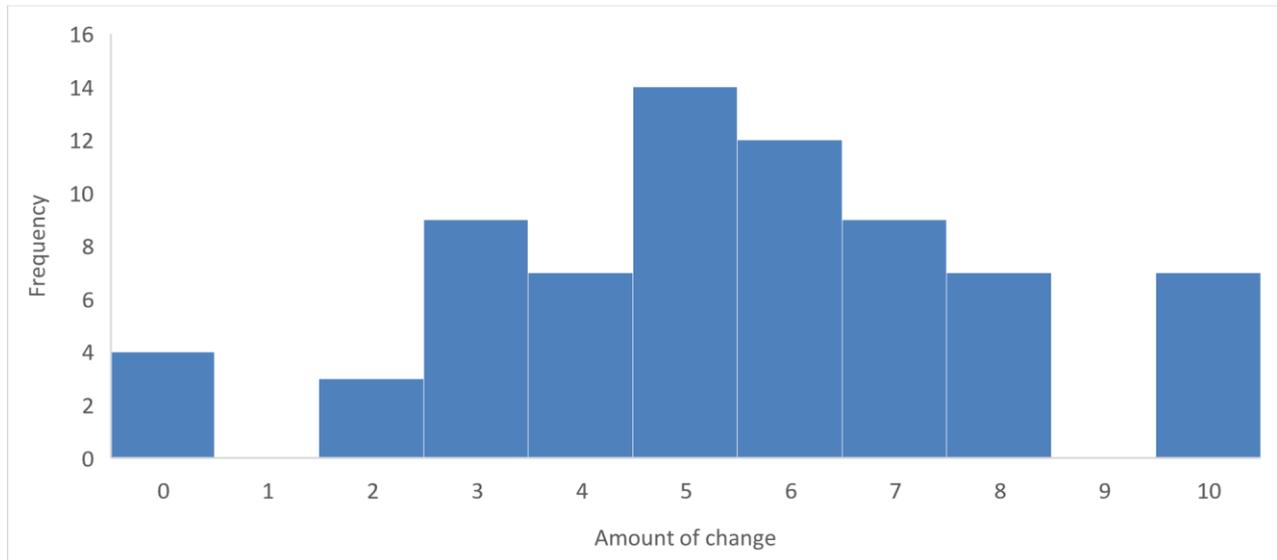
'[T]he way it is just now I think they are being asked to deal with too much. They have got too much data.' (Journalist, external interviews)

Similar concerns were noted in the fieldnotes. It seems apparent that stimulating assembly member learning and supporting knowledge gains is a complex matter linked to key aspects of process design – i.e. clarity and focus of the task, clear link between the evidence sessions and the issues to be deliberated on, etc. For example, if members do not know what information and evidence they may need later in the process, it is difficult for them to purposefully retain and develop a particular understanding of an issue. The broad remit of the Assembly made it more challenging to 'design in' the architecture of incentives for the learning phase, because the issues that were covered in subsequent sessions were unknown so it made it difficult for participants to know what evidence from the early sessions would be relevant to deliberations in later sessions.

Do opinions related to the set task evolve?

As assembly members tend not to have firm views about the issues they have been assembled to discuss, when they do learn more this can stimulate opinion change on the issue (Thompson, et al., 2021). In order to assess opinion change, in weekend 8 Assembly members were asked to report how much they felt they had changed their minds about issues discussed during the Assembly, with 0 indicating no change and 10 indicating “a great deal”. The histogram below in Figure 14 shows a fairly even split in the extent of change reported, with a mean of 5.23.

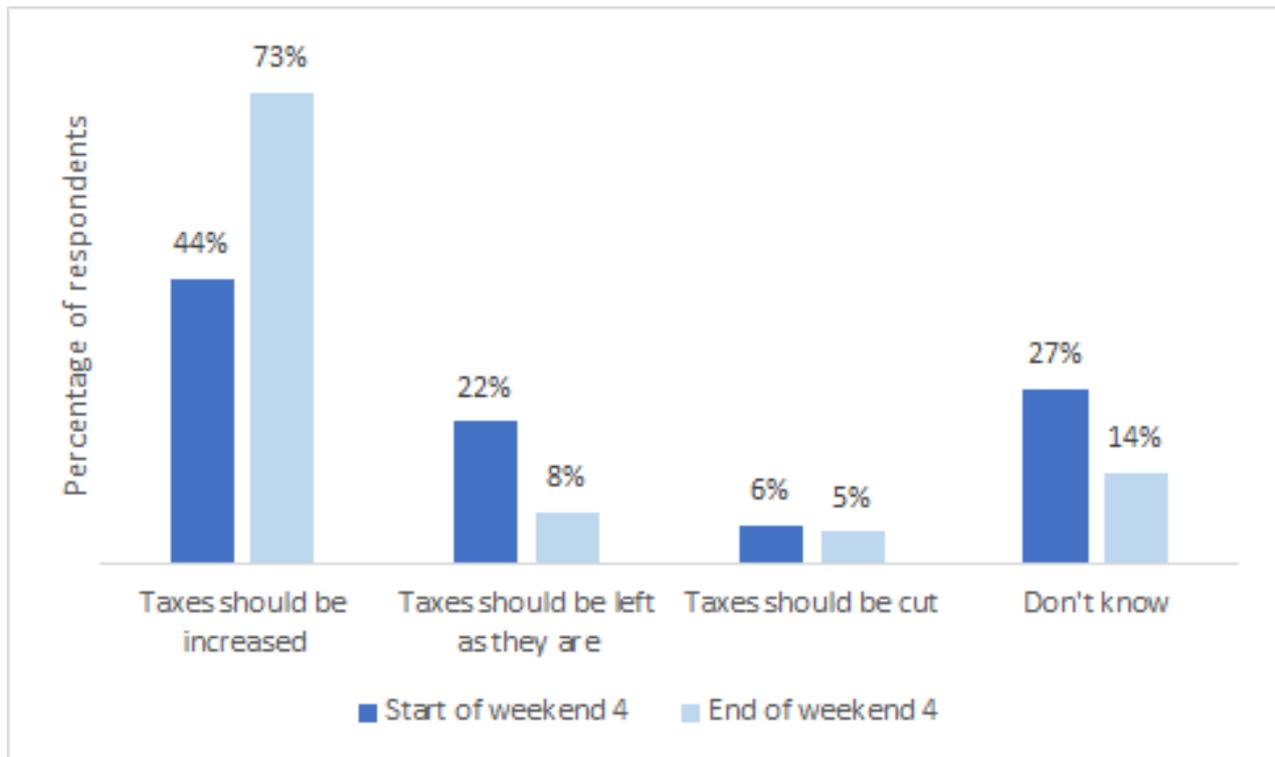
Figure 14: Histogram of Assembly members’ self-reported attitudinal change



Source: Member survey (Question: How much have you changed your mind about the issues discussed during the Assembly?)

A specific example of this attitude change at work occurred in weekend 4 which focused on discussing tax in Scotland. Figure 15 below shows the way Assembly members’ attitudes changed drastically between the start and end of the weekend. Fewer reported not knowing how they felt about the issue and generally members ended up favouring an increase in taxes rather than no change or cuts.

Figure 15: Changes in Assembly members' opinion on tax rate before and after weekend 4



Source: Member survey (Question: Which of these statements comes closest to your own view?)

Interestingly neither demographic factors, nor issue opinions, had a significant effect on attitude change in individuals. However, the fairer a member thought the process was and the more influential they thought they were, the more likely they were to have changed their opinions significantly during the Assembly. This suggests that regardless of social groupings before the Assembly, engagement with the process itself had the power to significantly change people's opinions.

What are the critical learning points in the process?

We have established that the Assembly members learnt as the process developed. In this section we explore which parts of the Assembly process were most critical in achieving this learning.

The fieldnotes include comments on numerous instances when members shared insights that they framed as newfound knowledge or perspectives. Some members did explicitly acknowledge that they learned a lot throughout the process (from speakers *and* members); and that this was both challenging, eye-opening, and enjoyable. It seems that members were learning as much, if not more, from listening to each other's experiences and arguments, as they were learning from the more formal evidence sessions. This suggests that "knowledge" travels and evolves in interesting ways within the Assembly process. For example, points made by some speakers were sometimes landing better once they were translated by members and brought into the deliberations alongside other forms of knowledge provided by members (e.g. local, experiential, professional).

The fieldnotes further show that a wide range of evidence, and different types of knowledge, were mobilised in different ways and at different stages of the Assembly. Some members wanted to find out more about what is happening in Scotland in ways that are more connected to ‘the real world’ (i.e. less abstract and more tangible). In some groups, the conversations only got going properly when they managed to connect evidence to their own experiences. There were numerous instances when members contributed evidence from their own experiences (e.g. getting into debt with credit cards and paying interest for a long time; loss of employment, especially during the pandemic).

The research indicates that despite members’ self-reported levels of satisfaction and understanding, the presentations and information packages were of variable accessibility. A number of factors contributed to this. The breadth of the remit required members to consider evidence on a wide range of topics within a relatively short timescale, resulting in several presentations within the day.

Some interviewees across the different groups (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group members and expert speakers) thought the format and pitch of the information created challenges and suggested that catering for different forms of learning was limited. For example, various facilitators noted that the didactic (“talking head”) format of the evidence sessions required a great deal of concentration from members:

‘I think the other big thing would have been, a different form of information giving for people. You know, that from the front, very didactic thing ... I know that didn’t suit people ... [O]nce we were in the lecture theatre, I sat next to someone explaining what was being said from the front ... and I could see him just being overwhelmed.’
(Facilitator, internal interviews)

‘[B]ecause everyone engages differently, everyone learns differently, everyone listens differently, everyone receives information differently and everyone likes to share opinions and information differently. You’ve got to use a mix.’ (Facilitator, internal interviews)

‘I did think it a bit odd that despite us consistently saying that folk were spending too much time listening to talking heads, that we still did more of that. I do understand that the evidentiary process needs people to impart knowledge, but I did also think that we were consistently getting a picture that citizens weren’t keen on reading things and were uncomfortable sitting for too long, and therefore it seemed a bit crazy to keep doing that.’ (Facilitator, internal interviews)

More participatory forms of learning were encouraged by the research team but were not widely adopted, in part due to time constraints. This was despite feedback about the exercise organised as part of the evidence session on taxation in weekend 4 indicating that members were receptive to other forms of learning:

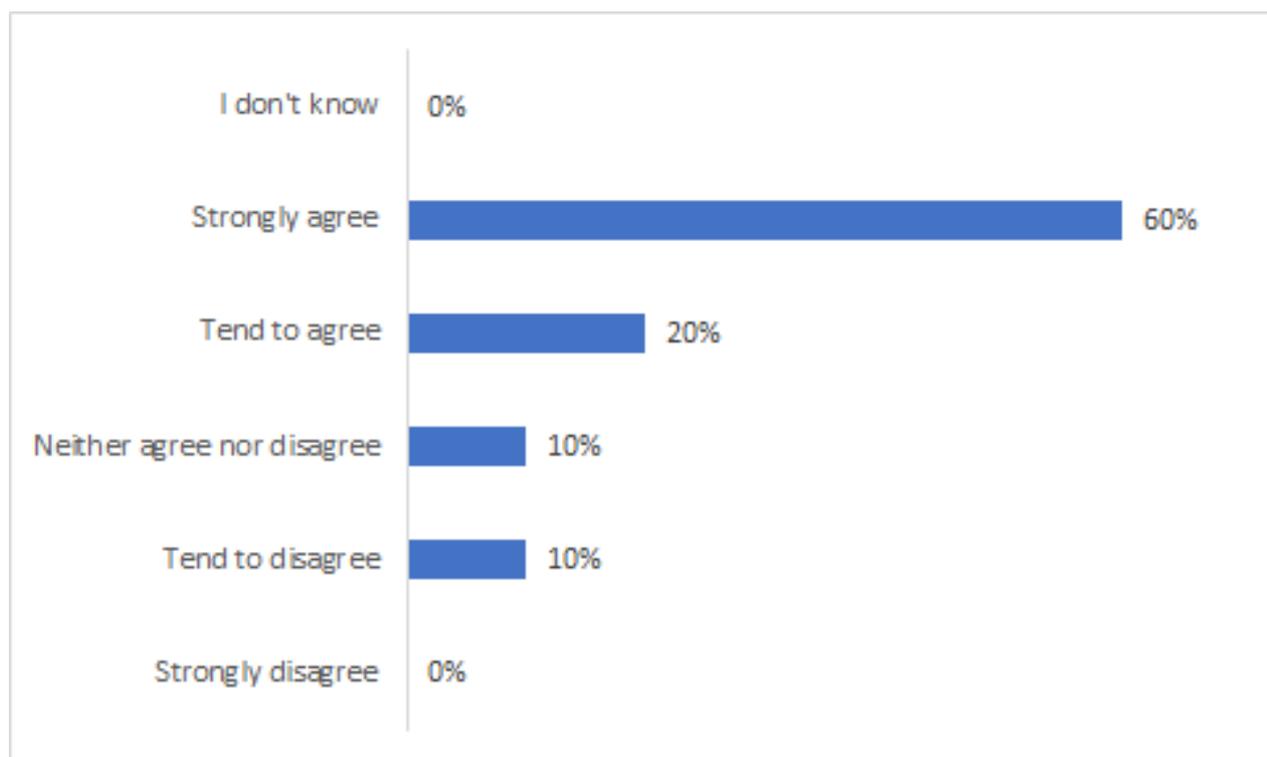
'[I]n terms of the accessibility and the different learning styles, it was something we were maybe conscious about at the beginning and we probably would have liked to do more. Present evidence in more different types of ways ... so doing more things like the tax game, doing more of that kind of creative evidence presentation, because we recognised that we were doing things in quite an old-fashioned, someone stands up and talks then you sit around and talk about it, and that is not a good learning style for everyone.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

Question and Answer sessions were considered especially beneficial for member engagement, allowing expert speakers to either clarify aspects of the presentations that had not been fully understood or to provide “basic” explanations that had been left out of the presentation due to being assumed to be general knowledge. Taken in combination with other sources of data, this strongly suggests that some of the presentations were initially pitched at too technical a level to be widely accessible, with expert speakers reporting that this was one of the main challenges to preparing for their involvement.

In addition, member engagement level depended considerably on expert speakers' individual relatability and communication skills, which is in line with findings from previous studies (Roberts & Escobar, 2015; Roberts, et al., 2020). Organisers reported that the format and pitch of evidence sessions improved over the course of the Assembly, due in part to feedback from the research team and the Member Reference Group.

While all expert speakers agreed they understood their role within the Assembly process (80% strongly agreed), the responses indicated that 30% did not feel entirely adequately briefed about what was required from their contribution (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Expert speakers' satisfaction with the instructions they received



Source: Expert speaker survey (Question: I was adequately briefed about what was required from my contribution)

This view that the expert speakers were well briefed is further evidenced by qualitative responses to questions within the survey:

'One of the things that impressed me ... was the amount of work put in by the secretariat to make it work effectively – that includes the preliminary discussions with speakers, the briefings of speakers about what was wanted and how the Assembly worked, and the consideration about the sessions and what could/should be learnt from the sessions.' (Expert speaker survey)

'It was extremely well organised and I felt well supported throughout. The information provided in advance was comprehensive and clear.' (Expert speaker survey)

The two main areas for improvement suggested by expert speakers who felt they were not adequately briefed were more clarity on what the contribution would involve and more time to prepare:

'It felt a bit rushed – more time could have been given to discuss with other presenters what they were going to do on the day.' (Expert speaker survey)

'[A]n improvement would have been longer lead times and more clarity from the outset about what I was expected to contribute.' (Expert speaker survey)

Some frustration was expressed at having the specifications for the contributions changed or expanded under short notice:

'The request to be involved came quite late, the nature of that request (what inputs I was required to give) changed (and expanded).' (Expert speaker survey)

'I think the only frustrating element was that some of the Assembly activities were clearly being made "on the hoof".' (Expert speaker survey)

'Ideas about process/format changed within a short space of time. This didn't have a massive impact on my preparation but left a slightly nagging feeling of uncertainty.' (Expert speaker survey)

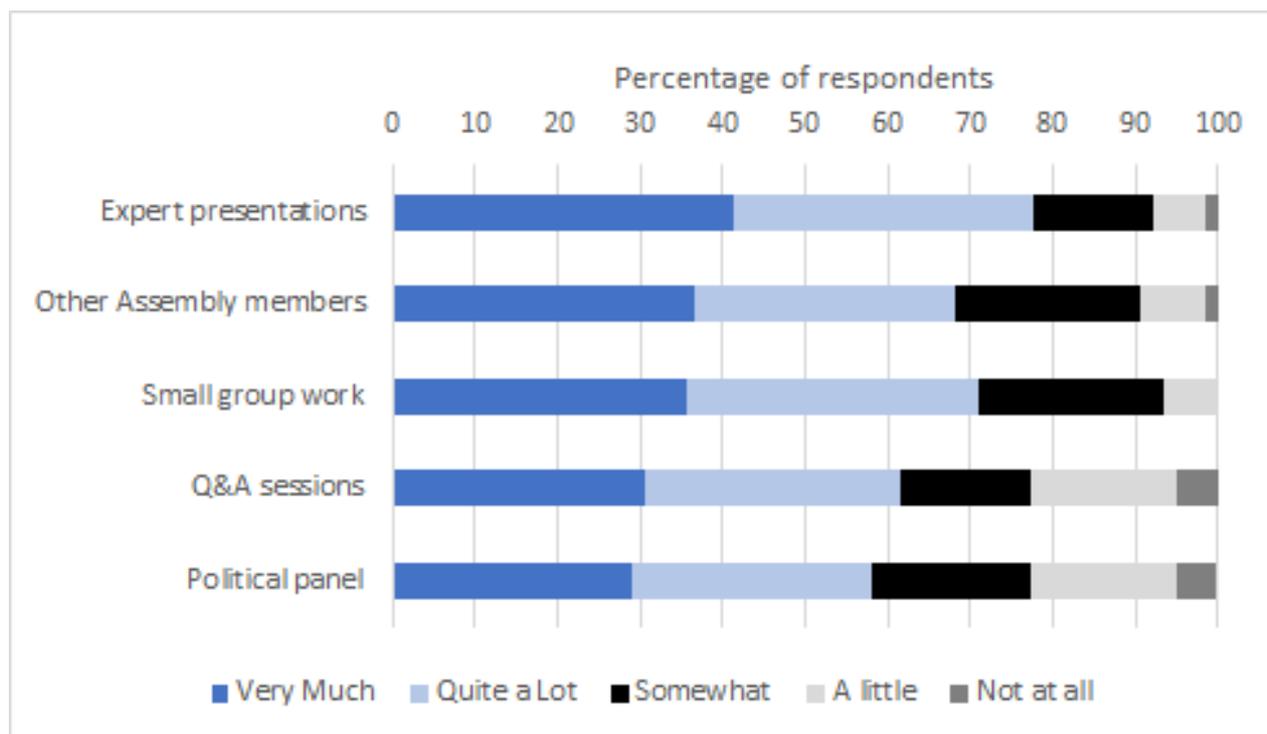
For the first half of the Assembly, formal evidence presented and written by various speakers seemed more prominent, although members sometimes did seek to relate it to their own expertise and experience. For the second half (online stage), experiential, professional and local knowledge became more prominent. The fieldnotes offer a very limited indication that members engaged with evidence and other material in the periods of time between Assembly weekends; but there are exceptions and some members seemed particularly well prepared towards the final sessions of the Assembly while developing recommendations.

What are the critical opinion-formation points in the process?

We have established that Assembly members changed their views on various issues being considered in the Assembly. In this section we consider which parts of the Assembly were the most crucial for these opinion changes.

When asked which Assembly activities contributed to any change in opinion, generally respondents seemed to be most influenced by the expert speaker presentations and least so by the political panel. This suggests that Assembly members found experts more persuasive than politicians. Regarding the influence of deliberation within the group on changing opinions, members did report being influenced by each other and their small groups, only slightly less so than by the expert presentations. Of particular interest is the fact that not a single member responded that small group discussions did not influence their opinions at all (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Importance of various activities for changing Assembly members' opinions



Source: Member survey (Question: How important were the following activities for changing your mind?)

In line with the member survey data, the fieldnotes also suggest that listening to the diverse experiences and perspectives of other members was especially critical in opinion-formation. This seemed particularly so once the Assembly reconvened in the context of the pandemic, which seemed to be a turning point in influencing the types of reflections and strength of propositions made by Assembly members. The fieldnotes suggest that some of the evidence sessions were very influential, judging by some of the issues emphasised during group discussions (e.g. poverty, taxation, redistribution, and green policies) and language used in many contributions and statements (e.g. 'wellbeing economy', incentives and disincentives for the right/wrong behaviours by individuals and companies).

The Assembly's organisers interviewed raised questions about the extent to which members were exposed to a diversity of viewpoints or a balance of evidence. The breadth of the remit, the timescale for preparation and the composition of the stewarding group (who did not feel able to vet the evidence or identify speakers from a position of expertise) were all identified as creating challenges to planning the evidence sessions. One indicative comment on this topic was:

'I fear that the Citizens' Assembly had an inadequate exposure to the breadth of ideas, the breadth and depth of ideas. I felt it had a particular orientation, and I'm not surprised at the outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly. It would be unfair, perhaps, to suggest that the topics and the speakers effectively predetermined, or primed the outcome, but I remain concerned about whether we really exposed the Citizens' Assembly to the breadth of academic, policy,

philosophical, and other thinking which is out there on the topics.'
(Stewarding group member, internal interview)

Some of our interviewees also indicated that there was insufficient time given to recruit expert speakers and that this in turn had an impact on the quality of the evidence sessions.

Similarly, some fieldnotes do flag that the range of issues and speakers may be questioned in terms of whether there was enough representation of neoliberal and conservative perspectives, albeit some speakers did offer moderate takes on taxation and economic policy.

Conclusion

In a citizens' assembly, it is important for the participants to learn more about the issues being covered, and for this learning to have a bearing on their views on these issues. In the Assembly, information was provided through a range of experts and advocates on various issues. There is evidence to suggest that the Assembly members did learn from the expert speakers and from each other and that this had a bearing on their opinions. Moreover, it seems apparent that by the end of the process they knew more than the average member of the public about these topics.

Nevertheless, the learning was limited for a number of reasons. Firstly, the remit of the Assembly was very broad. This meant it was difficult for the organisers to decide what topics the Assembly members needed information on, but it also meant it was challenging for the Assembly members to know what information would be needed later in the Assembly process. Secondly, the long gap in the Assembly, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that the Assembly members struggled to recall some of the information provided in the early stages of the Assembly when they moved online to form their recommendations. As a result, some of the final Assembly's recommendations are not based on evidence provided in the Assembly. Thirdly, there is some concern about the diversity of the perspectives provided by the expert speakers, compounded by short timescales to recruit experts. Although most of the expert speakers that were recruited felt they were well briefed, others were frustrated that their remit would change at short-notice. Fourthly, the approach to evidence provision lacked diversity which could have hindered the learning of some members. More opportunities for interaction between Assembly members and expert speakers could have helped.

Chapter 3: Facilitation and Deliberation at the Assembly

Research questions:

- a) What is the quality of deliberation and facilitation in each weekend?
- b) What participatory formats and facilitation techniques worked well? Which ones didn't?

Data sources:

- DQI analysis
- Fieldnotes
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- Member survey

Deliberation is a communicative approach to democratic decision-making that aims to be inclusive, reasoned and respectful. In citizens' assemblies, the discussions are facilitated with the aim of ensuring the presence of these deliberative norms. One of the more frequently used methods to assess deliberative quality is the Discourse Quality Index (DQI). This is a theoretically grounded instrument that enables researchers to quantitatively code the extent to which discussions meet deliberative criteria such as inclusion, reason-giving, focus on the common good and respect (see Appendix K). Its application to a sample of recorded small group discussions enables an assessment of the extent to which deliberation occurred and which deliberative norms were more prevalent at different time points (see Appendices M and N). By interpreting the results in combination with interviews with the Assembly's organisers, fieldnotes made by the researchers following non-participant observations of the Assembly weekends, and surveys completed by members of the Assembly and expert speakers, it is possible to assess the quality of the deliberation and facilitation at the Assembly and discuss their contributing factors.

What was the quality of deliberation at the Assembly?

While the quality of deliberation varied between weekends, the DQI analysis found that some forms of deliberation remained more consistent throughout the Assembly (see Appendix M). The contributions members made to the discussions – known as 'speech acts' – consistently contained high levels of demands (83%), where the speaker refers to what should or should not be done within the issue under debate, and were almost entirely relevant to the discussion (99.5%). Conversations were

also generally devoid of conflict and members were respectful towards each other, with no more than 5% reporting that they did not feel included or respected in any one week.

The DQI analysis found that most speech acts contained neutral respect towards demands (60%), one third contained no respect and 6% contained explicit respect. Members became increasingly respectful over the course of the Assembly, with over 40% of speech acts containing no respect towards demands during the in-person weekends compared to just over a quarter once the Assembly moved online. While the difference is statistically significant, this is likely to be due to the members getting to know each other better and honing deliberation skills with practice as the Assembly progressed, rather than the online format being more conducive to respectful discussion.

As is common in deliberative processes (Roberts & Escobar, 2015; Elstub, et al., 2021a), there is evidence that some forms of deliberation improved over the course of the Assembly as members got to know each other, became more familiar with the process and became more confident communicators.

'[S]eeing people that are maybe more quiet, you know, younger people, yeah, just people that maybe have trouble with their confidence and things, just seeing them come out their shells... I'm like, oh well, you're now able to speak in front of a room filled with people. Like, that is amazing to see.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

For instance, members were increasingly likely to be assertive in their contributions to the discussions the closer they got to finalising the recommendations. The percentage of speech acts containing a demand increased from 73% to 94% between weekends 5 and 7.

Justifications and use of evidence

Members also became more likely to provide reasons (or justifications) for their demands as they started to focus on making proposals and developing recommendations. The overall level of reason-giving increased during the online portion of the Assembly, with almost a third less demands being made without justification (26% online compared to 41% in person). However the DQI analysis shows that the increase was largely in the percentage of inferior justifications, where the reason provided is not concretely linked to the demand, rather than qualified ones. Overall only 6% of demands were supported with qualified justifications.

It appears that the increase may be a result of more proactive facilitation in the later weekends – possibly following feedback from the research team to this effect – rather than being related to the online format of the Assembly. The DQI analysis found that facilitators only asked members to justify their demands 12% of the time over the course of the Assembly (see Appendix N). However, facilitators were more than twice as likely to do so during the online weekends (19% online compared to 7% in-person) and the results demonstrate that members provided more

justifications when facilitators asked for them. The increases in requests for and provision of justifications may also partly be related to the nature of the tasks in the later weekends, when members were asked to make recommendations and an emphasis was placed on providing reasons for these.

Furthermore, a key aspect of citizens' assemblies is the use of expert evidence to increase participants' knowledge of an issue and inform their decision-making. However the DQI analysis found that little explicit reference was made to expert opinion throughout the Assembly, with 97% of contributions not referring to any expert opinion (Table 3). There is however a statistically significant difference in the use of expert opinion across the weekends. While weekends 2, 3 and 7 contained no explicit references to expert opinion, 40% of the contributions made in the first weekend did.

Table 3 - Content analysis results for sample of small group discussions

Weekends compared	Weekend						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Request for information							
No request	62%	78%	91%	79%	65%	87%	92%
Request for process information	13%	13%	3%	3%	13%	8%	1%
Request for topic information	25%	9%	7%	18%	23%	6%	7%
Expert opinion							
No opinions referred to	60%	100%	100%	96%	99%	100%	100%
Expert opinion supported	28%	0%	0%	4%	1%	0%	0%
Expert opinion contrasted	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Additionally, the DQI analysis tallied the number of times that members explicitly agreed or disagreed with expert opinions and found a statistically significant difference between the in person and online weekends. All seven instances when members disagreed with expert opinion and 24 out of the 26 instances when they agreed occurred during the in person portion of the Assembly. Interestingly, it is in the weekends that members most referred to expert opinion (1, 4 and 7) that they most frequently asked for more information during their discussions. This suggests that members' requests for additional information was influenced by the particular topics discussed during those weekends rather than the stage the Assembly was at.

The period of time the Assembly was paused in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may have had a negative effect on the mobilisation of expert evidence within deliberations, due to members having to recall evidence presented months

earlier. Researchers observed that some members did refer to some of the evidence presented months earlier or available in their evidence hub in the final sessions, but this didn't seem very common despite the efforts made by the secretariat to provide members with summaries of the evidence and work done to date prior to reconvening.

These findings illustrate a discrepancy between the role of formal evidence within the Assembly and members' use of evidence within deliberations. We explored members' engagement with the evidence sessions in Chapter 2. However, while members expressed satisfaction with the evidence sessions and over 70% reported that they understood and trusted the expert speakers, they were observed to primarily draw on their own experiences and knowledge to provide reasons for their recommendations, rather than necessarily connecting this to evidence presented formally at the Assembly.

Level of scrutiny and challenge

The fieldnotes and internal interviews show that organisers and facilitators strongly emphasised finding "common ground" from the Assembly's outset. This arguably overvalued cohesion and consensus to the detriment of appreciating the importance of critique and disagreement in deliberative processes. As a result, the level of scrutiny and challenge during interactions with speakers and amongst members was one of the weakest or most uneven aspects across the Assembly. Most of the facilitators and some of the organisers interviewed felt (to varying degrees) that there was a lack of sufficiently robust deliberation or debate due to members not being sufficiently probed or challenged on their opinions or presented with different ones. Furthermore, while there was little conflict to resolve, facilitators generally did not intervene when it occurred. As we will discuss in Chapter 5, this had implications for the way in which the recommendations were received.

'[T]here wasn't really a point where you could sort of stress test that, like you couldn't argue it out with other people or you couldn't pin people down and go, well why do you think that?' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

'That real opportunity to engage with others that had different opinions from yourself and to be challenged on that view it feels like that really wasn't part of this process at all.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Comments made by a few of the facilitators during their interviews indicate that they did not feel able (or enabled) to support challenge and scrutiny. It is not possible to conclusively establish the source of this feeling or how widespread it was among facilitators, but some suggest that the organisers had a specific understanding of member welfare that may have been at odds with promoting facilitation techniques designed to support constructive challenge, explore differences and address disagreements. Some organisers offered a counterargument to this perspective, noting that there are differing perspectives on what counts as productive deliberation:

'I think it depends on your bar ... My starting point is a quality conversation between people who are largely strangers on emotive and actually quite complex issues. So, in that whole range of human emotions and experience, I thought there were incredibly good conversations, incredibly positive ones where people respected each other, listened, learned, enjoyed themselves ... Now, as I say, as a deliberative process, in a kind of rigorous, forensic engagement with evidence, through to conclusion, maybe not so strong. But in terms of quality human conversations, really powerful.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

In addition, some facilitators felt that the deliberation sessions were too output-driven, taking attention and time away from deliberation. Once again the remit and timing of the tasks presented challenges, with organisers and facilitators giving examples of deeper deliberation being interrupted by the need to move on to another task or topic.

'I think we spent a lot of time on stuff that wasn't deliberation, you know, we spent a lot of time voting, a lot of time creating words for things, but that's not deliberation.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

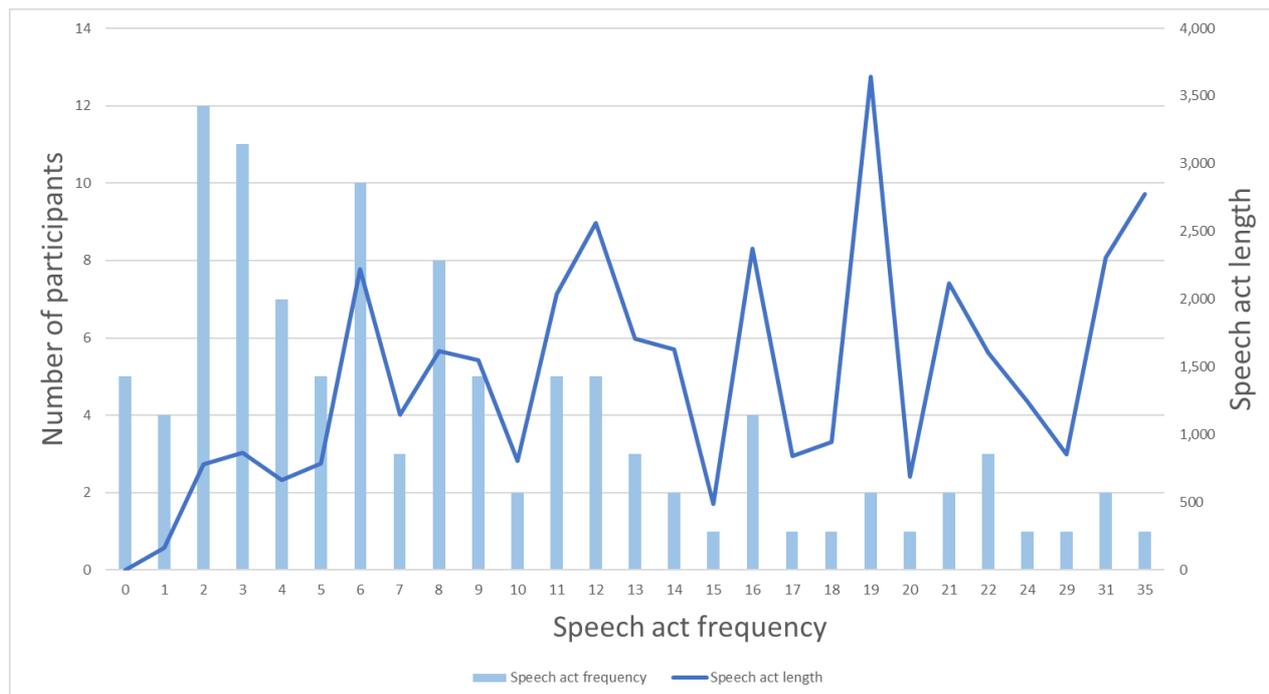
'I think having such an open-ended set of remits ... with the three questions, was almost kind of boxing the design into a corner before you started. And meaning that ... if we don't do all these things, we're not answering the remit, but in order to be able to answer the remit, you can't go as deep into some of these things as you might like to.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

However the DQI analysis found a substantial increase in the extent to which members engaged with each other's counter-arguments over the course of the Assembly. More than 22% of counter-arguments made by other members were ignored during the first five weekends, with between a third and half of counter-arguments being acknowledged but downgraded. Conversely, members engaged with counter-arguments more while drafting, voting upon and agreeing on a collective vision and recommendations. Over 55% of counter-arguments in weekend 6 were valued (highest of all weekends) and half of those made in weekend 7 received a neutral response (highest of all weekends).

Inclusion

A number of sources in our dataset (fieldnotes, DQI analysis and open text responses in the members' survey) suggest that levels of inclusion in the functioning of small groups was mixed across sessions. The issue of "dominant voices" kept recurring in some of the groups and some facilitators struggled to respond to this. Certain members went through entire sessions without making a single verbal contribution and some discussions were often dominated by a few participants. As demonstrated by the graph below (Figure 18), members who spoke most frequently also spoke longer on average (as determined by the number of words in a speech act).

Figure 18: Comparison between the length and frequency of members' speech acts



Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation between the length of a member's speech act and the level of justification used. This means that those members who were particularly vocal also had the most opportunity to persuade other participants.

However discussions seem to have become more inclusive as the Assembly progressed. Facilitators became more likely to encourage members to contribute to discussions, quieter participants seemed to gain in confidence and (some) dominant participants gained in self-restraint. As discussed in Chapter 1, members reported high levels of satisfaction with how they were treated by fellow participants and felt able to express their views and contribute to discussions. Furthermore, it is important to note that engagement and participation can take different forms depending on the individual. For example, listening rather than taking an active role in conversations, or contributing in written form.

'I noticed that happen quite a lot around the tables, that two or three people would be having a really interesting discussion about one of the topics and there'll be a couple of people listening in. And you get the sense that they are there kind of shaping things in their minds whilst not being active in the discussion, but they're still kind of ... cogitating through.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'[T]here's a mixed bag of actual engagement and by that I mean ... taking part in discussions, putting ideas forward. You always have a cluster of some members that are more confident doing that. You'll have a cluster of members that are quiet at the beginning and build up confidence. You'll have some that look disengaged but actually they're listening. And earlier I mentioned one member that would

draw stuff and make speech bubbles but wouldn't really say much in table discussions but would contribute in written form.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

In terms of participatory formats, the combination and sequencing of plenaries and small group sessions worked well. The icebreakers seemed straightforward and well received, often consisting of basic introductions of members' backgrounds and interests. However the range of participatory formats and techniques were heavily skewed towards verbal contribution and oral skills, although some exercises allowed writing or using visual aids. The fieldnotes document the use of various other artefacts to structure interactions throughout the sessions (particularly the first four weekends of in-person gatherings), including flipcharts, cards, sticky walls, voting pads, templates, etc. These all seemed to be consistently accepted by members and there were few instances of members pushing back against a particular format or tool, although levels of engagement were variable.

Some facilitator interviews suggest that there was too strong an emphasis placed on verbal communication, with challenges to maintaining the balance of voices and potentially creating barriers to participation. These were often connected to the fact that facilitators were usually both facilitating and scribing. Conflating these two important functions seems to have created numerous challenges, particularly when the Assembly moved online. Using tools such as a digital whiteboard during the online phase presented an alternative, but in the context of the logistical challenges it presented they ended up being used by the facilitators rather than members themselves, thus reducing the already limited options for kinaesthetic engagement by members. This said, members who commented on these matters seemed to prefer that the facilitator managed the tools.

What was the quality of facilitation at the Assembly?

The quality of facilitation at the Assembly was highly variable, ranging from excellent to poor. There was a clear ethos of care amongst the facilitators, sustained through debriefs and reflective practice, and their commitment to the process was illustrated by many observations of enthusiastic, thoughtful and skilful facilitation. However there were also instances of facilitators overstepping their role, being unprepared or unsure about the task at hand, being confused by emerging situations, and having limited awareness of facilitation techniques and deliberative standards.

Facilitation techniques

There were varying levels of experience and skills, with some facilitators seemingly unfamiliar with basic facilitation toolkits (i.e. techniques to address dominant voices; techniques to deal productively with difference and avoid avoidance; approaches to drawing in all members; techniques for inviting scrutiny and constructive challenge, etc.). The fieldnotes suggest that members in some groups struggled with the way some questions and tasks were framed by facilitators, who sometimes seemed

unsure about the purpose of the sessions and their contribution to the overall process.

In addition, the DQI analysis found fairly high levels of facilitators attempting to steer members' conversations with their own ideas. Facilitators took a position 15% of the time and introduced a new idea over 31% of the time over the course of the Assembly. Limited attempts were made to synthesise member's points (between 2% and 13%) despite members largely responding positively to their points being combined and reflected back at them.

However, facilitation generally did seem to improve, if not linearly throughout the Assembly, at least in its latter stages. As we've discussed above, facilitators increasingly prompted members to provide reasons for the demands. They were also more likely to encourage members to participate in the discussions. The percentage of facilitators' speech acts inviting contributions from members increased from just over 50% during the first weekend to 82% in weekend 7. It is possible that the improvement is, in part, due to feedback provided by the research team via their data briefings.

One factor behind this mixed picture is perhaps that the facilitators came not just from very different organisations and contexts, but from very different facilitation traditions (e.g. participatory, deliberative, dialogic, communitarian, organisational, market research) that in some cases are less steeped in deliberative approaches and standards. The interviews with facilitators strongly suggest an inconsistent understanding of deliberation and different levels of awareness about the facilitation techniques required. Some of the facilitators had clear prior experience of facilitating deliberation (including in other citizens' assemblies), while others had experience of public and community engagement more broadly – which may not always include deliberative techniques. This would explain some of the variation in both the techniques used and the overall quality of facilitation.

The majority of the facilitators interviewed reported feeling as prepared as they could be for the tasks, while specifying that plans and instructions were not shared far enough in advance to allow for enough preparation. Where these were shared ahead of time, facilitators commented that they were subject to changes at short notice. Some facilitators mentioned the additional challenges created by the complexity of the tasks and evidence:

'I did feel very stressed sometimes with the methods, and in particular I was incredibly stressed with ... the design canvas and the game, it was the tax game ... And I was really, really uncomfortable with that ... because we just got it ... literally before we went in.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Some facilitators deemed the plans to be overly structured and lacking sufficient flexibility to respond to group dynamics. As a result, some felt that their skillset and experience were underutilised: 'I just felt as though there was only part of me being used, and the rest was kind of wasted'. The interviews indicate that some

facilitators were confident in the transferability of their skills and previous experience to the Assembly process, and were relying more on these than any training organised by the design team:

'I just went into it trusting that once I was actually asked to facilitate something, I would be able to do that, because I know I can do that.'
(Facilitator, internal interviews)

'I think the people who were facilitators were all experienced enough to be able to bring in the techniques that they would normally deploy.'
(Facilitator, internal interviews)

In person compared to online

Finally, with regards to any difference in the quality of deliberation and facilitation between the in person and online portions of the Assembly, the DQI analysis indicates that members generally seemed more respectful, engaged and considerate online. However, as discussed above, this improvement is likely to be due to the online sessions coinciding with the latter part of the process, by which time members had improved their deliberation skills but were also approaching finalising their decisions, which could have led to a keener focus.

The move online made it easier for some members to engage and harder for others. The member survey indicates that some members noted exclusions either through accessibility issues or group dynamics affected by dominant voices. Most facilitators noted the increased challenge of sustaining the inclusion of a range of voices and ensuring that all members could participate online. Part of this stemmed from the technological challenges, with connectivity issues and uncertainty about online conversational etiquette resulting in deliberation sessions that were more challenging to facilitate.

'I think oddly it kind of ... makes some people feel more comfortable and confident in contributing, but then others less so. So, I think you ... there is a kind of shift. It works better for some people, not so much for others.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'People get kicked offline, some people don't like to show their face, so they turn their camera off and that makes it harder. Yeah, just any sort of internet problems, or sort of technical difficulties, and you know, unmuting and muting. So, you're sort of like, oh do you want to go next, and then they're sort of trying to unmute themselves, and then someone else speaks, you know, it can be messy.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

'[T]he other thing is, obviously, louder voices over quieter voices, you definitely noticed that in the online. It was really hard to facilitate that online versus in person.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Facilitators often expressed relief that the groups were smaller online, stating that any larger than seven or eight people would have been very difficult to manage. There is a consensus among facilitators that the online format created increased challenges for facilitation and maintaining the balance of voices. Amongst the key factors, they noted: having to split attention across multiple screens; not being able to rely on body language as members could either not be seen properly or did not use video (due to connectivity issues or personal preference); support being less readily available compared to in-person (when facilitators could raise a hand to request support).

Once the Assembly moved online, the space for relational dynamics, interpersonal connections and informal interaction was very limited – there wasn't any visible attempt to nurture the social dimension of the digital Assembly. Members often expressed missing the social side of the experience, which can be an important foundation for deliberative work. This highlights the importance of informal and relational spaces in citizens' assemblies. The in-person phase of the Assembly was credited by many in the internal interviews as setting the relational groundwork for the online phase by providing informal spaces for members to get to know each other and develop trust and rapport.

'It's never going to be the same as an in person, you know, around a table, having banter in-between meetings, building relationships. It's harder online. But yeah, I think the fact that they knew each other, and they'd built those bonds, really helped.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

'It certainly took away from the social aspect of the Assembly almost completely, it totally destroyed that in effect, and that is an important thing. It was fortunate that people had had a few weekends together so they'd made friends and stuff like that. You could tell that people were missing that.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the quality of deliberation and facilitation at the Assembly. While members' deliberations were consistently respectful and contained a high level of relevance and demands, we found little explicit reference made to formal evidence presented at the Assembly and very low levels of qualified justifications overall. The quality of facilitation was highly variable and while facilitators demonstrated a clear ethos of care and there were examples of excellent facilitation, we found a wide range in levels of experience and skills and an inconsistent understanding of both deliberation and the techniques required to facilitate this type of process. As is common in deliberative processes, certain forms of deliberation improved over the course of the Assembly (e.g. assertiveness, reason-giving) partly due to more proactive facilitation. While these improvements seem to occur following the move online, this is unlikely to be the result of the format but rather that the move occurred towards the end of the process. The move online appears to have led to additional challenges to facilitation, although the

impact on members is less clear with some members finding it easier or harder to engage.

The combination and sequencing of participatory formats worked well. However, they relied heavily on verbal contributions and oral communication skills. The levels of inclusions were inconsistent across groups and weekends, with facilitators repeatedly commenting on the challenge of dealing with 'dominant voices'. Certain aspects of design and facilitation may have presented challenges to inclusion and achieving more robust deliberation: lack of systematic use of go-rounds that give everyone a chance to contribute at least once on a given question; limited reciprocal deliberation, that is, direct exchanges between members as opposed to exchanges with or via the facilitator; limited opportunities to contribute to plenaries; and limited framing of mutual challenge and scrutiny as a positive and helpful dynamic for the Assembly.

Chapter 4: The Assembly in Scotland (I): Public Perspectives

Research questions:

- a) What is the level of public awareness through the different stages of the Assembly?
- b) Do public perceptions evolve throughout the process and if so, how?
- c) What shapes public perceptions? (e.g. media, political parties, prior attitudes)
- d) To what extent does the public engage in the learning process?

Data sources:

- Population survey
- Media analysis
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- External interviews (politicians, journalists, civil servants)

The Assembly provides an important opportunity to evaluate how such bodies might be used to facilitate greater public engagement in decision making. Low public support for such bodies can serve as a considerable constraint on their wider implementation. Even a well-run assembly, in which the quality of deliberation is high and members acquire considerable knowledge about policy issues, will have limited impact if it lacks wider public support, is perceived as a talking shop for elites, or is divorced from public concerns.

This chapter assesses the Assembly from the perspective of the public, drawing on a series of surveys of the general population, but linking also to the analysis of media reporting and both the internal and external interviews to understand what members of the public think of citizens' assemblies in general, and how they felt about the process and recommendations of this Assembly in particular. It then identifies possible explanations for these evaluations.

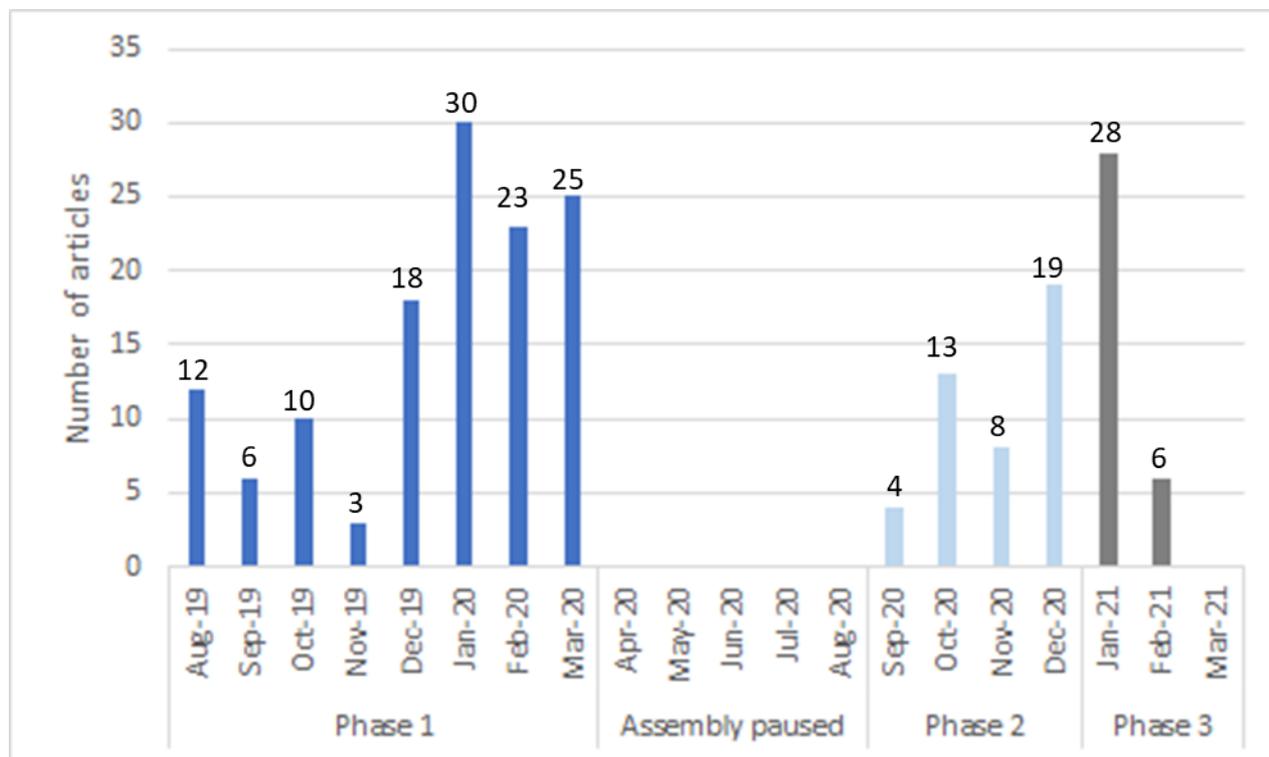
Media coverage of the Assembly

Before we can analyse what members of the public knew or felt about Assembly, it is important to outline how they might have become aware of it in the first place. The following section draws on two elements of data collection. First, an analysis of all media stories about the Assembly from August 2019 to March 2021. Second, an

analysis of the interviews with journalists, politicians and civil servants insofar as the responses they provided shed light on media coverage and public evaluations of the Assembly.

To evaluate the media coverage we examined both the level of coverage over time as well as what was covered and how, across three phases of the Assembly. Phase 1 (August 2019 - March 2020) included the establishment of the Assembly and the initial in-person meetings; Phase 2 (September - December 2020) covered the period during which the Assembly resumed online following the brief interruption prompted by the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; and Phase 3 (January - March 2021) which covered the period when the Assembly agreed its recommendations and issued its final report. Across the timeline of our research we collected 206 news items on the Assembly. By far the bulk of them occurred during Phase 1, the longest phase, when there were 127 articles, with a further 44 during Phase 2 and a further 35 in Phase 3. A breakdown of coverage by month appears below in Figure 19. While we might intuitively expect awareness of the Assembly to build over time, this is undermined by the fact that as the Assembly proceeded media attention to it tailed off rather substantially after March 2020, with a further flurry of interest coinciding with the recommendations towards the end of the process.

Figure 19: Media items on the Assembly, by month

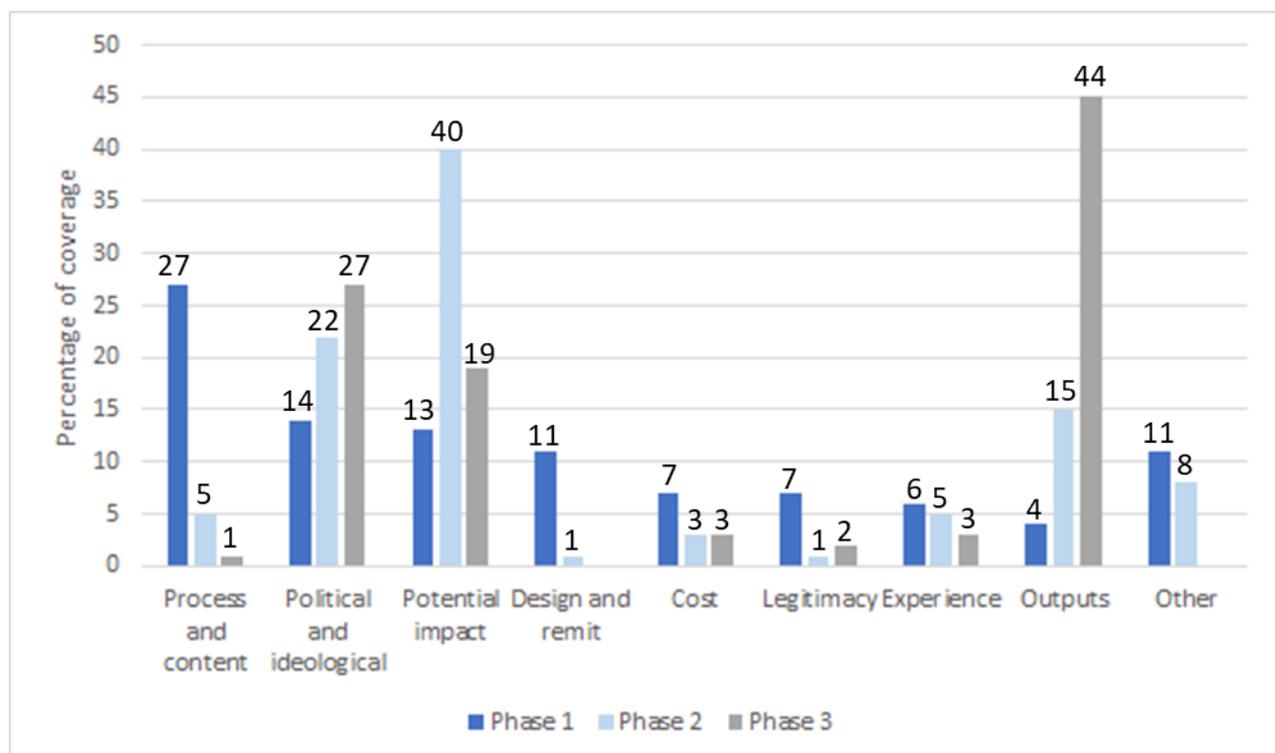


This general pattern of attention was not distributed equally among news outlets. Most of these articles appeared in the *Herald* (38) followed by the *National* (29) and *Scotsman* (16), with article numbers in the single digits for all other newspaper outlets in Scotland and the UK. The *Herald* and *Scotsman* alone have a combined monthly reach of 1.63 million but the vast bulk of the traditional media market share

in Scotland is made up of four UK-wide national newspapers (around 85%) who devoted negligible attention to the Assembly. The *Sun*, the *Mail*, *Mirror* and *Express*, which have a monthly reach of almost 11 million, produced a total of 14 articles (*Daily Express* 4, *Sun* 4, *Daily Mail* 3, *Mail on Sunday* 2, *Sunday Mail* 1, *Mirror* 0), or just over 6% of the media coverage of the Assembly. What is clear from the media analysis is that the newspapers with the widest reach in Scotland failed to devote sustained attention to it, which is something of an obstacle for generating public awareness.

Figure 20 summarises changes in content over time. Much of the coverage during Phase 1 focussed on the Assembly process and content of discussions (27%) compared to, for example, issues of cost (7%), legitimacy (7%) or potential impact (13%). Political and ideological coverage, the second most popular source of content (14%), included discussions of the Assembly with respect to particular constitutional solutions or the relationship between political parties or other stakeholders and the Assembly. By Phase 2, however, the content of the coverage had changed, with far greater emphasis on the potential impact (40%) of the Assembly’s recommendations and far less on process (5%). By Phase 3 the most frequent source of media coverage was discussions about the Assembly’s outputs (45%), namely recommendations, in particular about the four-day week, rent caps and tax. In addition, across these themes the coverage was predominantly positive. This includes 51% general positive stories, 35% neutral and only 12% generally negative over the period the media were monitored.

Figure 20: Change in media coverage across Phases 1-3



Various insights emerge from this analysis. First, the coverage would have failed to reach the average Scot as the greatest coverage of the Assembly was in a

broadsheet with 1% of the newspaper market share. That said there is clear evidence that the coverage tracked the rhythm of the Assembly, with greater attention to its outcomes at the end and to its process and remit at the start. And the coverage was overwhelmingly neutral or positive. There was very little criticism or cynicism in the reporting, a fact borne out by the low levels of attention to critiques of legitimacy or complaints about cost.

Interviews

In interviews, those engaged with the organisation of the Assembly expressed disappointment with the level of coverage, attributing low levels of attention to the wide remit as well as to the competition within the news cycle as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. They also identified a deliberate change in communications strategy, with an effort to highlight the experiences and ‘back stories’ of individual members as a way to sustain media interest as the Assembly progressed.

The external and internal interviews point to three particular challenges. These include, first, the initial announcement, which paired a citizens’ assembly with the referendum bill, giving the impression that the Assembly was designed as a cover to provide wider justification for pressing on with plans for a second referendum. As one opposition MSP reported: ‘My first impression – again just being totally honest about this – my first impression was that this is going to be a Government stitch up’. Second, the broad remit, which made it difficult for journalists to provide in-depth and changing coverage of a single issue as the discussions of the Assembly uncovered different facets of it, provided little purchase for journalists. As one MSP remarked: ‘To be honest, I don’t think most people registered it because I don’t think most people even knew it was there’. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic altered both the form of the Assembly, suspending it temporarily and then served thereafter as a competitor for media attention. As one civil servant commented: ‘Public engagement is harder, I think it wasn’t a very easy environment, public engagement, during a pandemic’.

Interviews with journalists identified other constraints. They typically agreed that the wide remit made it difficult to provide in-depth coverage or key debates, as might be possible with an Assembly exploring a single issue. The result, they explained, was media coverage that tended to focus on the process of the Assembly. Having produced various articles on process however, there was little to warrant repeat stories until specific recommendations emerged. Local papers opted from time to time to cover stories about members from their particular area, but national newspapers waited for the recommendations. In Chapter 5 we offer further analysis of media coverage and elite perceptions of the Assembly.

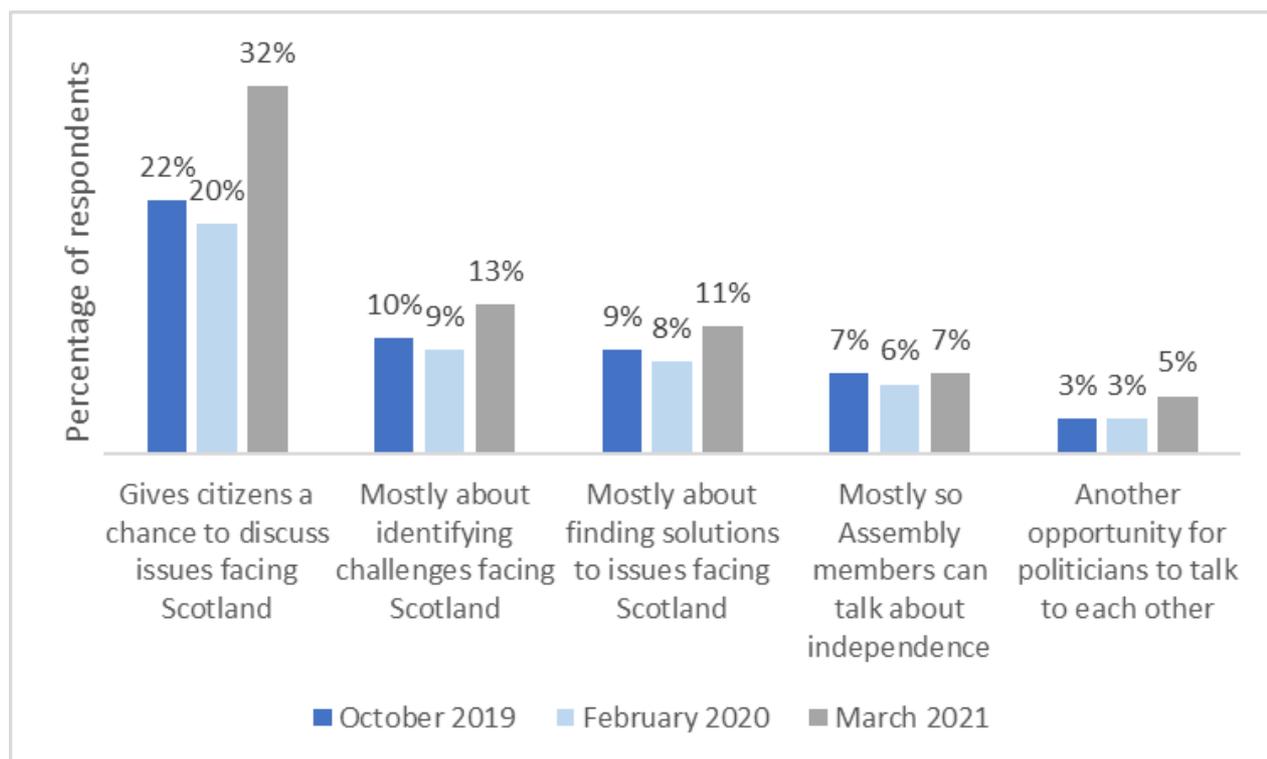
How is the Assembly perceived by the Scottish public?

If we want to examine what the public thinks about the Assembly we can distinguish among different themes. This includes awareness of the Assembly as well as evaluations of its process, in this case the Assembly’s recommendations. For awareness and for evaluations of process we can also check to see if public assessments change over the course of the Assembly.

In terms of awareness, majorities of the public were unaware of the Assembly or of citizens' assemblies in general although this decreased over time. In October 2019, 65% answered 'don't know' when asked to describe what the Assembly did. By February 2020 this was unchanged. By March 2021, just under half (49.7%) responded 'don't know' when asked what the Assembly was for. This is consistent with scores on subjective knowledge. Asked how much they felt they knew about the Assembly, only 3% in October 2019 indicated they knew a lot about it (selected 8, 9 or 10 out of 10). By February 2020 this remained unchanged. By March 2021 this increased by only one percentage point. By comparison, the proportion saying they knew a lot (8, 9 or 10 out of 10) about the Scottish Parliament was 25% in October 2019, 29% in February 2020 and 25% in March 2021. One might well hope such figures to be higher in the months before an election to the Scottish Parliament, but figures for the UK Parliament are not dissimilar: 26% in October 2019, 29% in February 2020 and 23% in March 2021. In short, knowledge of the Assembly increased by one percentage point over the course of the Assembly, but in reaching a high of less than five percentage it was very low when compared to subjective knowledge of other political institutions, and the subjective knowledge scores were not themselves particularly high.

In February 2020, less than a quarter (22%) believed that the Assembly gave 'citizens a chance to discuss issues facing Scotland', a figure which remained constant three months later, but had increased to just under a third (32%) by March 2021. From February 2020 to March 2021 around 10% consistently believed the Assembly was about finding solutions to issues facing Scotland such as poverty or climate change. Small minorities believed it was so Assembly members could talk about independence or so politicians could talk to each other (5%). Positively, while members of the public did not report knowing much about the Assembly, very few were prepared to label it as a talking shop for the political elite. Over time there was a remarkable amount of stability in these responses, with the exception of a large jump by March 2021 indicating it was to discuss issues facing Scotland (see Figure 21). This coincides with a marked increase in media attention to the consequences of the Assembly in Phase 2 and a focus on its outputs in Phase 3. To assess whether media coverage was likely to be responsible for changed awareness, we can track levels of public engagement with the Assembly, including sources by which they would have acquired information about it.

Figure 21: Public attitudes towards the Assembly



Source: Population survey (Question: Different people have different understandings of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland. If you had to describe what it does, what would you say?)

Engagement with the Assembly

Levels of engagement with the Assembly were low throughout its duration. In October 2019, 89% claimed to have had no engagement with the Assembly, a figure reduced by one percentage point by February 2020. By March 2021 almost four in five (78%) professed to have had no engagement with the Assembly at all. While this might seem a substantial drop in disengagement, this still indicates that by the end of the Assembly just under eight in ten reported having no engagement with it at all.

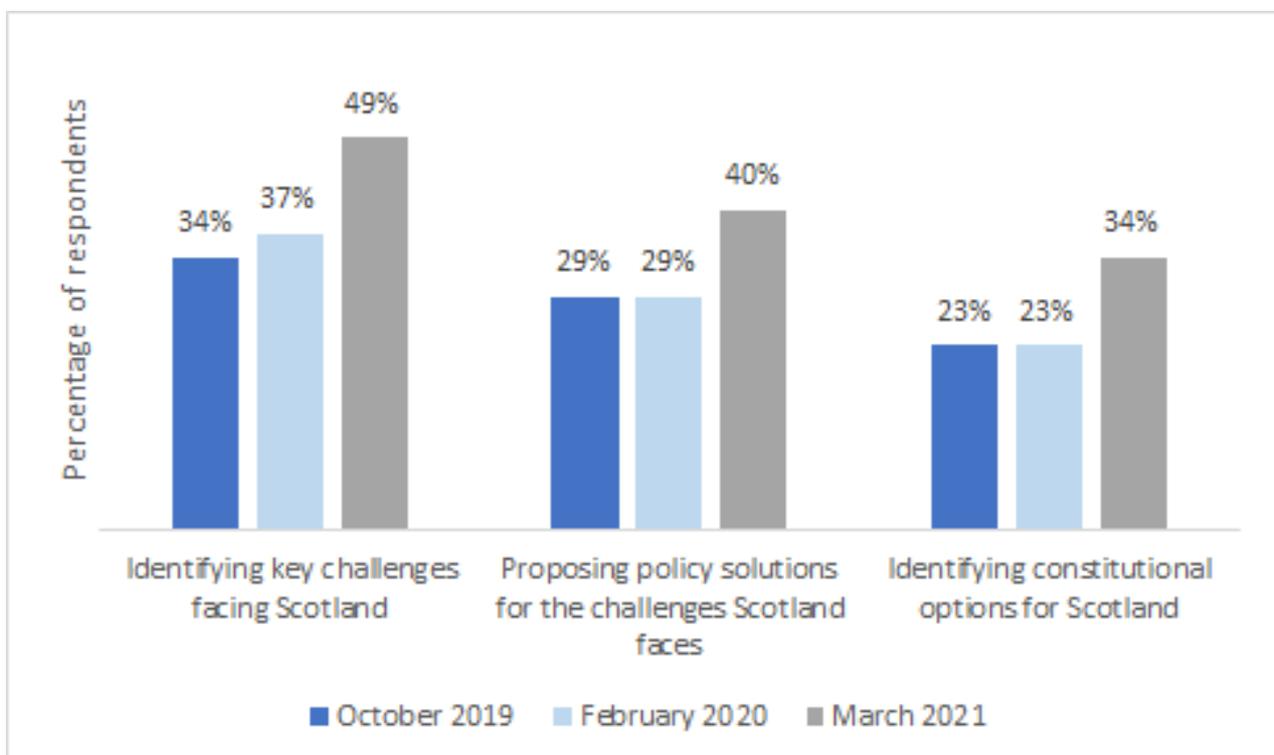
Rates of engagement across the various possible forms did not change substantially over time. By March 2021, 7% had read articles about it (which is, admittedly, double the figures for earlier periods), 6% had heard about it via TV or radio, 4% followed or discussed it on social media, 4% discussed it with family or friends, 4% heard about it from political parties, 3% visited the Assembly's website, and 2% discussed it with work colleagues. What this suggests is that mainstream media channels (newspapers, television or radio) were the greatest form of engagement (and thus information) about the Assembly. Since the analysis presented earlier demonstrates that the largest newspapers provided minimal coverage this highlights an obvious missed opportunity in terms of public awareness and engagement. By contrast, evidence of diffuse engagement via social media, friends, family or work is very limited. In addition, 2% (27 respondents) indicated that they had volunteered for Scotland's subsequent Climate Assembly, a feature which is not currently possible, so we should also treat proffered levels of engagement as, if anything, prone to over-estimation.

Evaluations of the Assembly

To understand public evaluations of the Assembly we can distinguish between attitudes to Assembly process and attitudes to its outputs, in this case whether it has fulfilled its general remit and whether members of the public support its specific recommendations.

In three surveys across the different phases members of the public were asked whether they supported the use of citizens' assemblies to identify key challenges facing Scotland, whether they supported them proposing policy solutions for the challenges Scotland faces, and whether they felt they should identify constitutional options for Scotland (see Figure 22). Each of these questions were phrased as options from 0 (strongly against) to 10 (strongly in favour). The results in Figure 20 show that across Phases 1 and 2 levels of support were relatively stable for each of the three possible roles of citizens' assemblies. By Phase 3, however, around the time when the recommendations were being debated and discussed in the media, support for each of these three possible roles increased. The second finding is that there are clear variations in support across the different possible purposes of citizens' assemblies, with lowest levels of support for identifying constitutional options, and greatest support for identifying challenges. This would seem to be something of a challenge for those who wish to involve citizens in decision-making. There appears to be broad public support for citizen engagement in identifying problems, but slightly lower levels of support for identifying solutions, and support drops lower still if those solutions involve the constitution.

Figure 22: Support for citizens' assembly roles over time



Source: Population survey (Question: Citizens' assemblies can do different things. How much would you be in favour of a citizens' assembly in Scotland doing each of the following?)

In the March 2021 survey, respondents were also asked whether they felt this particular Assembly had addressed its purpose. Here we see that 40% believe that the Assembly had answered the question ‘what kind of country are we seeking to build’, 38% felt it had addressed how to overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, while 39% felt it had identified further work that should be carried out to give all of us living in Scotland the information we need to make informed choices about the future. These responses provided a plurality – more agreed than disagreed – but are low in part because at least 35% responded ‘don’t know’ to each question. This is further evidence that public levels of awareness were not high. There is broad support for the ability of assemblies to frame problems, and support for the Assembly’s work, as well as plurality support for the fact that it has addressed its remit, but levels of awareness and engagement are low.

Attitudes to recommendations

In terms of attitudes to the specific recommendations themselves, the results in Table 4 show that there was majority support for each of the Assembly’s recommendations, ranging from 56% support for a central bank account for each citizen at birth to 82% for the introduction of a living wage. There are interesting patterns worth highlighting. Constitutional changes earned lower levels of support, largely due to higher levels of opposition. In contrast, lower levels of support for mini-publics (such as citizens’ assemblies) or bank accounts stem more from higher levels of ‘don’t knows’ rather than opposition to the proposal as such.

Table 4: Support for the Assembly’s recommendations

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL AGREE	Don't know
Living wage	3	6	35	47	82	9
Ban non-biodegradable waste	4	6	40	41	81	11
Rent caps	3	7	42	35	77	12
Criminal justice review	3	7	43	34	77	13
Higher NHS wages	3	10	33	43	76	11
Raise minimum wage for 12-24 year olds	4	9	38	37	75	13
No zero hours contracts	7	10	30	40	70	14
Lower state pension age	6	11	37	31	68	15
Traffic light tax compliance	4	9	37	31	68	18
Devolve further tax powers	9	12	33	33	66	14

Control over immigration	11	12	31	32	63	14
More mini-publics	7	10	42	21	63	20
Greater powers for international relations and trade	11	13	30	31	61	15
Ethically invest in society with central bank accounts	11	16	31	25	56	18

There are reasons to be cautious with the interpretation of these results due to limitations of the data. Many of the recommendations are technical issues of governance and tax on which citizens may not have pre-formed views. This is not to say that they are not capable of generating such views but that these responses are likely to be first impression responses and as such are likely to be more malleable in general, as well as responsive to strong priming and framing effects. Second, we know that those most supportive of the Assembly were also more supportive of its recommendations but we are unable to tease apart which came first – whether they were more supportive of the recommendations because they trusted the Assembly, or whether they were more supportive of the Assembly because they liked particular recommendations.

Do public attitudes towards assemblies vary?

Just as individuals read different papers and exhibit different forms of possible engagement with the Assembly, so too are there variations in support. Here we focus not on variations in support of particular recommendations (in other words whether some recommendations are supported more than others) but whether certain members of the public are more likely to support citizens' assemblies.

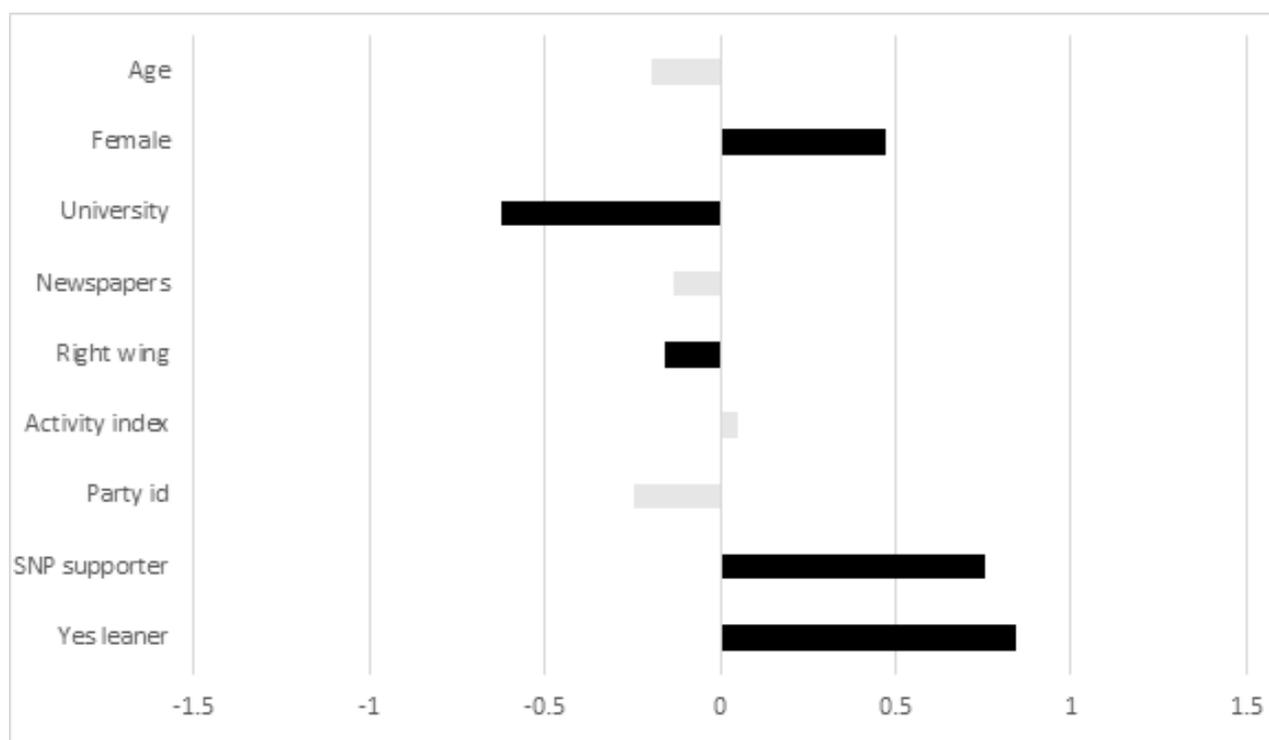
To analyse public support we can focus on two possible questions: first, whether members of the public support the idea of citizens' assemblies in principle (measured here as support for the recommendation to hold more mini-publics). Second, whether they support this Assembly in practice (measured here as support for the view that the Assembly has answered its core question: What kind of country are we seeking to build).

To test this we identified a range of variables that might make a difference. These include age (measured here on a scale from 0 youngest to 1 oldest), gender (male/female), university (whether the respondent holds a degree=1), newspapers (whether they say they get most of their information about challenges facing Scotland from newspapers = 1), right wing (measured here on a scale from 0 left to 1 right), an activity index (a composite index measuring activity across eight different indicators in formal and informal politics), political party identification, Scottish National Party (SNP) supporter and independence support (where for all of these 1 = yes and 0 = no).

There are various reasons why we might expect varying support in principle or practice. We might anticipate that those who are more engaged are more

supportive. This would include those who exhibited greater media exposure to newspapers (since this was the largest form of engagement with the Assembly), those who identify with any particular party, or those who have higher scores on a composite political activity index. Likewise we might expect that those who are supporters of the SNP or supporters of independence would be more supportive, partly because it the Assembly was announced by the SNP Government and partly because it was announced at the time of a referendum bill and there was, based on the interview material, an expectation that the Assembly would identify possible constitutional options for Scotland. If we analyse the effect of each of these variations – as well as controls such as age, gender and political ideology – on support for citizens’ assemblies in principle, then a political predisposition to support the Scottish Government (being an SNP supporter or pro-independence) makes one markedly more likely to support mini-publics. Most of the other variables did not produce significant effects, but women were significantly more likely to support them while university graduates and those who described themselves as right wing were not (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Sources of support for mini-publics

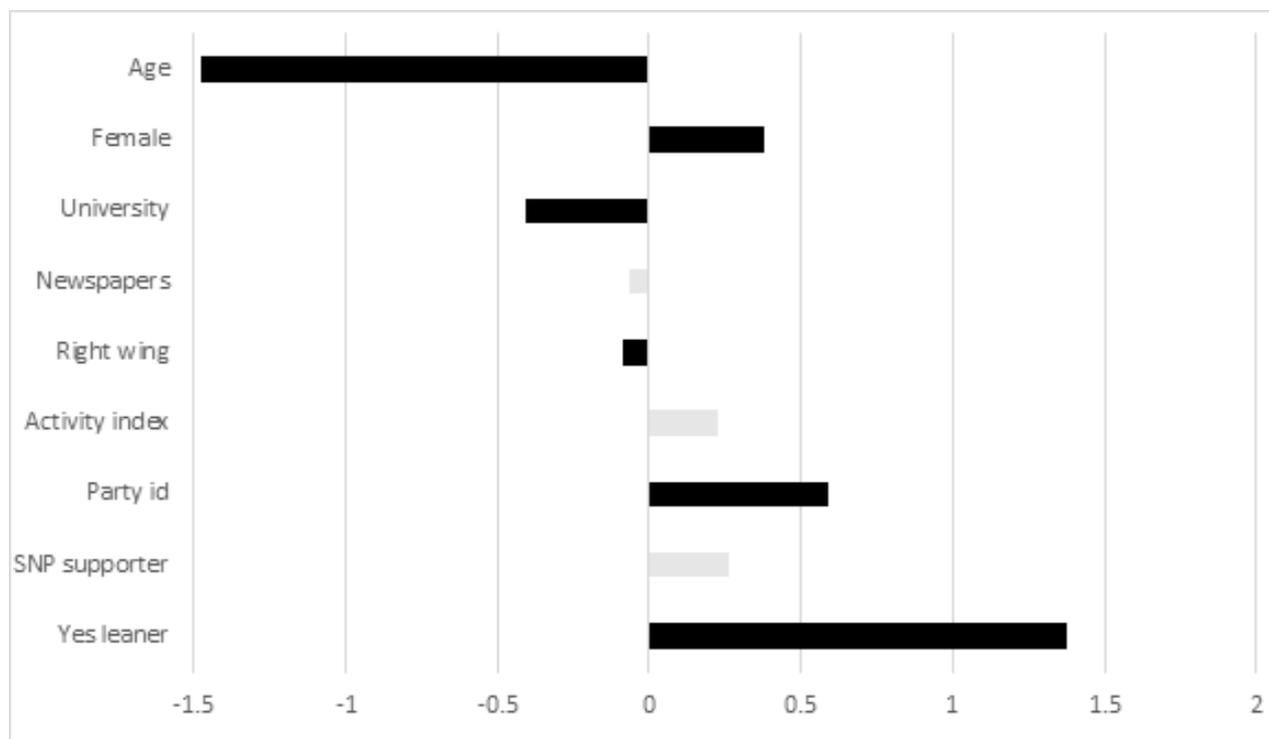


Results are coefficients for logistic regression. Black bars indicate statistically significant coefficients ($p < .05$) while grey bars are not significant.

As for support for this Assembly, we see some important differences (Figure 24). Women remained more supportive and university graduates less so. But we also found that older people were markedly less likely to believe that the Assembly successfully addressed its core question. SNP supporters were less enthusiastic than they were about mini-publics in general, but those who support Scottish independence are more supportive of this Assembly than mini-publics in general. In addition, just having a party identification made no difference to how one evaluated

mini-publics, but was significantly related to how one felt about this Assembly and its achievements. Those who felt close to a political party, regardless of which party it was, were more supportive of this Assembly.

Figure 24: Sources of support for the Assembly



Results are coefficients for logistic regression. Black bars indicate statistically significant coefficients ($p < .05$) while grey bars are not significant.

To evaluate why SNP supporters appeared to hold different views of mini-publics in general and of the Assembly in particular we conducted additional analysis to identify whether SNP supporters – or indeed pro-independence supporters – were different from the general public on other variables, and thus whether these factors, rather than party support or constitutional preferences, can explain things. If we add in new variables and these variables are significantly related to evaluations of assemblies but SNP and Yes support are no longer significant then we have found an explanation for why party preferences appears to structure support for assemblies. We have added additional variables we know often structure political engagement. These include ethnicity, income and levels of efficacy, and have distinguished between internal efficacy – a sense that one can make a difference – and external efficacy – a sense that the system is responsive to change.

Once these new variables have been added, identifying with the SNP is not statistically significant in any model. Measures of internal efficacy are not significant either, but external efficacy, in other words a sense that the political system is responsive to change, are significantly related to support for mini-publics. It is therefore not the case that SNP supporters are more supportive of assemblies in principle because they voted for the current Government in 2016 and are disappointed that this Assembly did not propose particular constitutional options,

but instead that they are more supportive of mini-publics because they believe the system is responsive to their action.

Conclusion

This chapter offers something of a mixed assessment of public attitudes to the Assembly. On the one hand, levels of awareness and engagement were low, explained in part by the challenging media environment in which the Assembly would have been covered but also by the particular pattern of media coverage. This includes coverage that was front-ended, process-heavy and with much of it concentrated in a handful of papers. In general the Assembly was largely neglected by those papers with the largest readership in Scotland. The consequences of this were low levels of subjective knowledge of the Assembly.

That said, support for assemblies in principle rose over the duration of the Assembly, peaking around the time of the recommendations when the content of media coverage also changed. In addition, there was majority support for all of the Assembly's recommendations, admittedly with more controversy around those tied to the constitution, committing substantial resources or linked to reserved areas of policy jurisdiction. One additional encouraging note may be found in attitudes to future involvement. At the end of the Assembly, more than two thirds (70%) of the general public said they would have been likely to accept an invitation to take part in the Assembly.

An analysis of variations in support shows that those who are more politically engaged are more supportive, but that this is particularly true for supporters of the Government. Their attitudes are better explained by their sense of efficacy in the wider political system rather than their constitutional preferences as such. This finding, when coupled with greater levels of support for assemblies to identify challenges rather than solutions, may be interpreted as a possible constraint on public support for the greater use of citizens' assemblies in Scotland.

Chapter 5: The Assembly in Scotland (II): Media and Elite Perspectives

Research questions:

- a) How does media reporting of the Assembly evolve during the process, from announcement to completion?
- b) How do journalists' and politicians' perceptions of the Assembly evolve throughout the process?
- c) Is the work of the Assembly coherently linked to the relevant institutions? Do the Assembly results feed into the work of the Scottish Government or Scottish Parliament? How? With what impact?

Data sources:

- Media analysis
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- External interviews (politicians, journalists, civil servants)

In Chapter 4 we provided an overview of key patterns in media coverage of the Assembly to contextualise public perceptions about the process. The relationship between a citizens' assembly and its broader public is often mediated by a range of elite actors, including journalists and politicians. This chapter thus delves deeper into media reporting of the Assembly and how the perceptions of journalists and politicians evolved throughout the process, with a particular emphasis on their views about the institutional impact of the Assembly.

Evolution of the media coverage of the Assembly

The dataset gathered to analyse media coverage includes 206 articles that mentioned the Assembly across 74 publications and through three periods of data collection, namely: August 2019 – March 2020 (Phase 1), September 2020 – December 2020 (Phase 2), and January 2021 – March 2021 (Phase 3). Data collection included online or print media outlets (traditional media), including newspapers, magazines and online news sites, but excluded blogs and social media posts. Table 5 below shows the total number of articles by month across the Assembly's timeline.

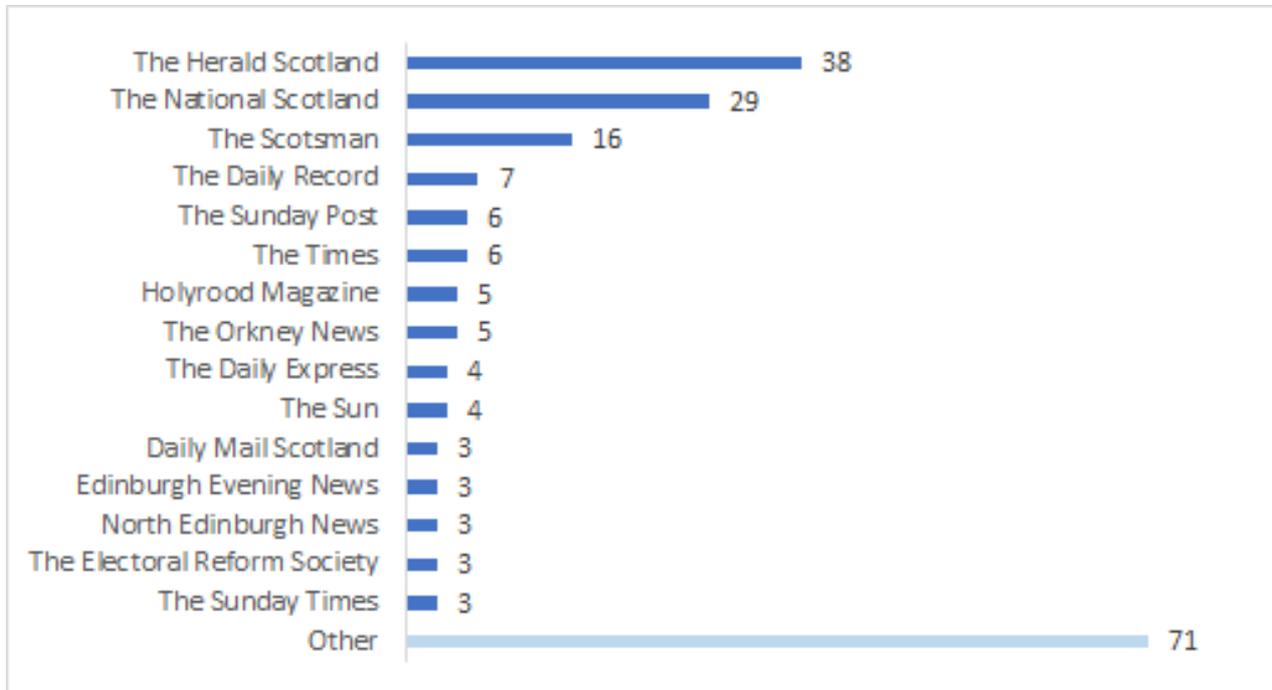
Table 5: Number of articles on the Assembly, by month

Assembly timeline	Year/Month	Total	Percentage
2019			
PHASE 1 Pre-Assembly and Recruitment	August	12	5.8%
	September	6	2.8%
	October	10	4.9%
	November	3	1.5%
	December	18	8.7%
In-person (weekends 1 - 4)	2020		
	January	30	14.6%
	February	23	11.2%
	March	25	12.1%
<i>Postponement – data collection paused</i>			
PHASE 2 Online (weekends 5 – 8)	September	4	1.9%
	October	13	6.3%
	November	8	3.9%
	December	19	9.2%
2021			
PHASE 3 Post-Assembly and publication of the Assembly's report	January	28	13.6%
	February	6	2.9%
	March	1	0.5%
Total		206	100%

Peaks in the level of coverage occurred around weekends 2-4 (December 2019 – March 2020), and the release of the Assembly's report (January 2021). There was increased attention given to the Assembly during the first two months of 2020, with 30 articles in January and 23 in February, compared to 18 articles in December 2019 (the highest point of 2019). This corresponds with increased communications activity led by the Assembly organisers, alongside an increase in awareness and interest as the face-to-face sessions got under way. There was a further high point around the conclusion of the process in December 2020 and the publication of the Assembly's report in January 2021, also corresponding with an increase in engagement with journalists and politicians during this time, including media launch events and sessions with parliamentarians in 2021.

Most articles (57%) are from Scottish publications, followed by 18% from UK-wide publications, with international publications making up 2.4% of coverage (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Distribution of articles, by publication



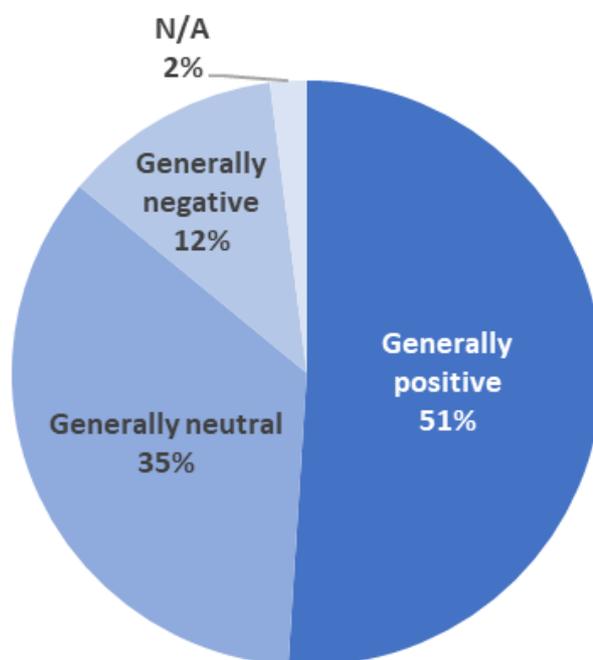
Overall, newspapers make up almost 80% of all coverage, and particularly daily newspapers at approximately 67% (daily tabloids 31%, daily broadsheets 21%, daily compacts 11%). Most articles were from daily Scottish newspapers, namely the *Herald*, the *National* and the *Scotsman* (combined, over 40% of the total coverage). Both the *Herald* and the *National* had 13 journalists each covering the Assembly across the period, indicating that the Assembly was of general interest to both publications, rather than to individual journalists.

Data on newspaper readership for 2020 shows that readership of Scottish news brands reached approximately 28% of Scotland's population (aged 15+) via print or online means. The *Herald* have approximately a 1% market share of the Scottish newspaper market as of 2020, with the *Scotsman* at approximately 2%. Figures are not available for The National. UK-wide newspapers are read far more extensively in Scotland, accounting for a high percentage of circulation (according to PAMCo figures), led by the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. Only approximately 18% of stories about the Assembly were reported in UK-wide publications, including those with Scottish versions of their newspapers. This indicates that coverage of the Assembly was prominent in some Scottish publications, and broadly ignored by UK-wide publications with high readership figures in Scotland.

As shown in the diagram below (Figure 26), coverage of the Assembly was broadly positive (51%), with a high number of neutral articles (35%), and 12% broadly

negative. A more changeable picture emerges once we examine the skew by month over the timeline of the Assembly. Only two months were negative overall, August 2019 and November 2019, coinciding with early misgivings about the origin, purpose, and cost of the Assembly –we return to these issues later in this chapter. The most positive months were February 2020 (weekend 4 of the Assembly, covering tax and finance), followed by October 2020 (weekend 6, preparing the final Assembly vision) and December 2020 (weekend 8, final Assembly weekend, agreeing the recommendations). Our data suggests that there was a robust communications approach to responding to negative stories, with instances of stories by the Assembly convener appearing shortly after a negative piece, sometimes directly responding to the article in question. The amount of coverage by month is moderately positively correlated with skew ($r(13) = .65, p = .00817$). This indicates that increased media coverage meant an increase in positive stories about the Assembly.

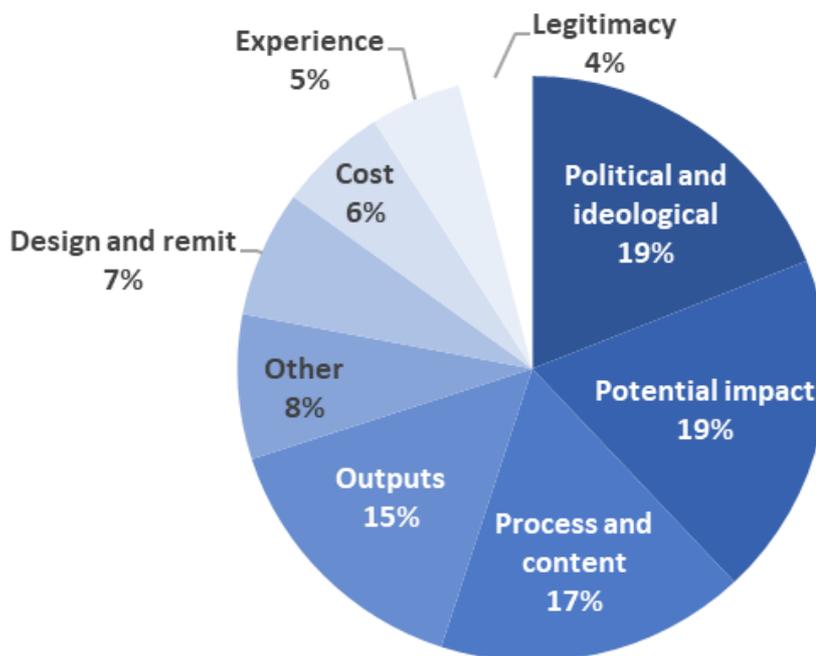
Figure 26: Overall skew of articles, August 2019 – March 2021



Most articles were written with an independent narrative, rather than copying from the Assembly’s press releases. As previously noted, the dataset indicates some level of scepticism at the beginning of the Assembly process (key themes include cost, links to independence campaign, concerns over the Assembly’s ability to be effective, etc.), but after the end of 2019, coverage in all months was either neutral or positive overall. As illustrated in Figure 27, the two most frequent themes over the entire period were the *potential impact* of the Assembly (19%) and *political or ideological* coverage of the Assembly (19%), followed by the *process and content* of the Assembly (17%) and its *outputs* (15%). There were some stories that can be interpreted as sensationalist, either positive or negative. But these are far

outweighed by the number of stories that include clear evidence to support their content.

Figure 27: Frequency of themes within articles on the Assembly, August 2019 – March 2021



Looking beyond the overview above, the balance and frequency of key themes changed significantly across the timeline. The diagram below offers a synopsis of this evolution.

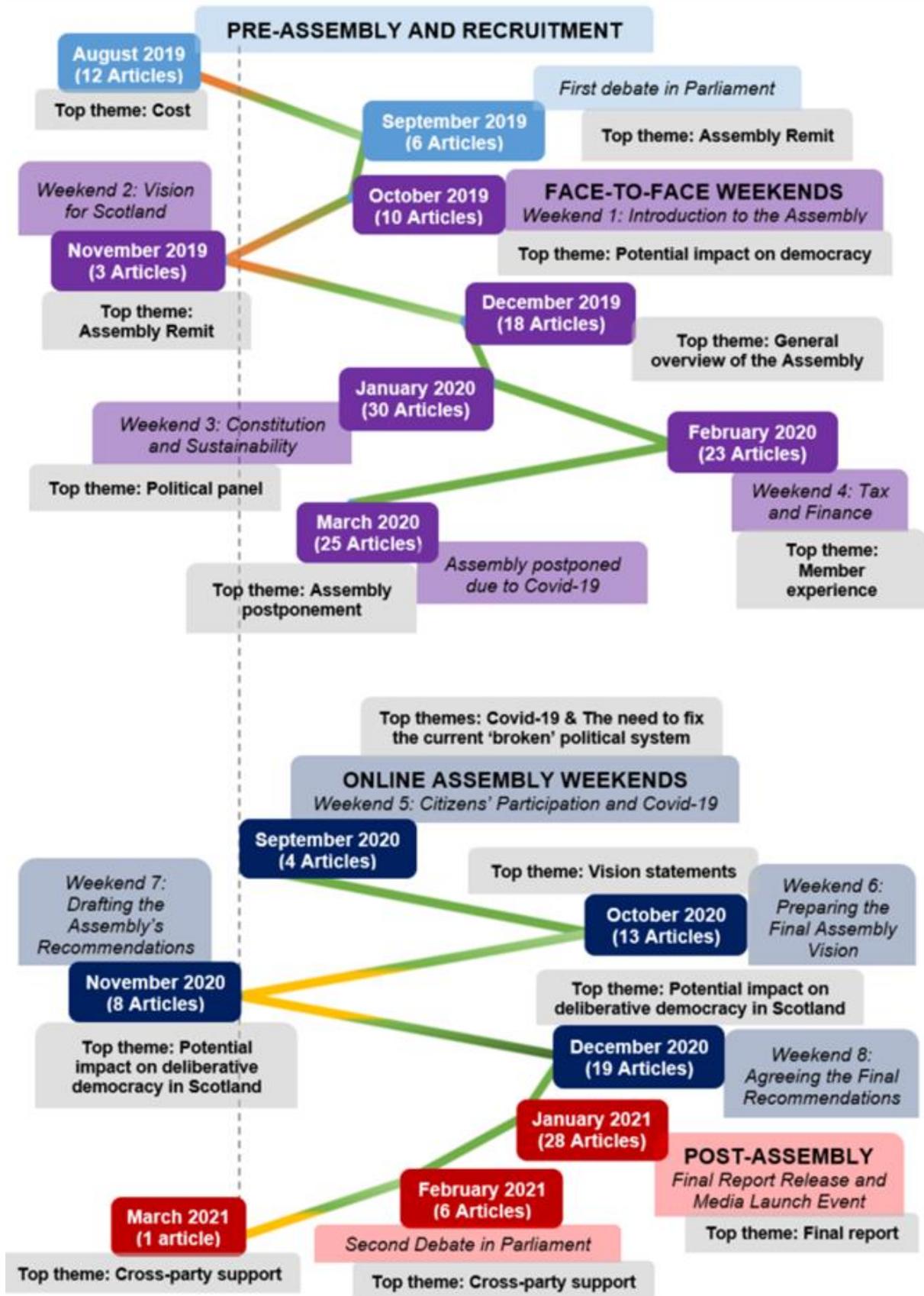
In Phase 1 (August 2019 – March 2020), there was more focus on *process and content* (27%), with a third of the stories related to the postponement of the Assembly due to COVID-19. The *process* of the Assembly (how it works) was a strong theme during the face-to-face stages, including the use of expert speakers, as well as the ways in which topics were approached during the weekends. This early stage also included more coverage about deliberative democracy and citizens' assemblies in other countries, as well as articles with negative coverage pertaining to the legitimacy of the Assembly (7%) and its politicisation along partisan lines. This included several pro-Union publications linking the Assembly to the Scottish Independence movement. We analysed the full dataset (August 2019 – March 2021) to assess whether coverage could be mapped onto newspapers' positions on the constitutional question. Most of the articles were from publications with no public stance on Scottish independence (49%), followed by pro-Union publications (34%) and 16% from pro-independence publications. The stance on independence did not generally indicate a positive or negative coverage, although some pro-Union publications initially reported critical stories about the Assembly cost and perceived links to the independence campaign. There was a period of increased attention on the Assembly members and their experiences in early 2020, with more local and regional publications showcasing individual participants as

representatives of their communities. This likely related to a communications drive by the organisers, encouraging members to produce 'member profiles'.

In Phase 2 (September 2020 – December 2020), the most frequent theme was the *potential impact* of the Assembly (40%), often linked to the Vision statements produced by Assembly members, which elicit most interest by the media during this period. *Political and ideological* coverage has an increased portion of coverage (to 22% from 13%) and as *outputs* are beginning to emerge from the Assembly, this is also mirrored in reporting (15%, up from 4%). By this stage, the cost of the Assembly receives less interest (3%, falling from 7%), and is referred to in less negative terms than previously. Approximately 31% of all coverage relates to the Assembly as a model for future deliberative democracy in Scotland, often featuring quotes from the Assembly convener and Assembly members. Other stakeholders become more included in the media narrative, with Sortition Foundation, the Electoral Reform Society Scotland, and Common Weal referred to as supporting elements of the Assembly process. Stories about the experiences of Assembly members made up 5% of articles.

Unsurprisingly, Phase 3 (January 2021 – March 2021) was particularly focussed on *outputs*, which represent 45% of coverage during the post-Assembly period, up 30% from the online period and 41% from the face-to-face sessions. Coverage on *outputs* is largely focused on the Assembly's report as a whole, with certain recommendations singled out in some publications, namely on rent caps, tax, the four-day working week, more citizens' assemblies and constitutional issues. *Political and ideological* themes increased once again, by 5% from the previous stage (to 27%). There is a marked change in tone towards more consensus from politicians, with stories about the parliamentary debate commenting on the level of cross-party support for the Assembly and its recommendations. The Assembly is seen as less partisan over time, with parties and politicians keener to endorse it. The tone of the articles thus shifted to a more reflective and celebratory one, with the recommendations used as evidence in calls for various policy changes. The Green Party were particularly featured during this period of coverage, having linked a policy proposal for rent caps to the work of the Assembly. Various stakeholders featured more prominently, at approximately 11% of the coverage, some supporting specific recommendations (e.g. Living Rent, on rent caps), and others supportive of the Assembly and its recommendations as a whole, and backing further citizens' assemblies (e.g. the Electoral Reform Society). This final period included different types of publications which had not typically engaged to date. For example, the Sun newspaper included a story in support of the four-day working week recommendation, despite only having run two previous stories on the Assembly, largely negative.

Figure 28: Visual timeline of Assembly coverage and key time points



Our analysis of media coverage resonates strongly with findings from the interviews dataset. Participants in the external interviews (including four journalists, seven politicians, and two civil servants) indicated that they noticed very limited media coverage. As illustrated in the quotes below, journalists noted that the announcement of the Assembly gave them material to cover but felt that there was limited newsworthy content to report while the process was underway. The politicians interviewed echoed this perception as they recalled there being meagre media coverage until the Assembly completion.

'[I]t would just be like eight hours of vox pops until it crystallises into a report and a recommendation. It's very hard to report any of that. It's just a lot of people giving their views. And until they coalesce, they're just ... eight hours of vox pops, that's not going to get covered.'
(Journalist, external interviews)

'[T]he thing that will make us report on it is outcomes and what comes out of it ... I guess maybe there needs to be a bit of a drive somewhere to make us want to report on, I guess, how they work a bit more.' (Journalist, external interviews)

A journalist highlighted a more practical issue, namely, that the press did not have the staff to cover eight weekends and commit to attend all-day sessions. One journalist spoke of the benefits of the Assembly moving online, mentioning they spoke to members at the virtual launch, which they found beneficial. Furthermore, some interviewees argued that the broad remit and lack of focus on unpacking contentious issues did not give journalists a great deal of material to report on. According to these interviewees, it was difficult for journalists to obtain in-depth coverage of the issues as there were so many on the agenda. Some also noted that reporting on this type of civic deliberation took them beyond the well-known tropes of political reporting. The following quote is illustrative of some of these points:

'One of the problems is that ... the people aren't politicians. Politicians ... have got a line they want to take and they will start off on that. With the Assembly people were talking but it wasn't a party line. So you were trying to identify aspects of what they were saying that would make a story ... It was actually harder work because they tended to come on, start talking, you would get a line there ... Then they would veer off to something else because it is such a wide-ranging address. That was a problem.' (Journalist, external interviews)

From the perspective of the journalists interviewed, there was clear consensus that the outcome was more important than the process, thus there was a fair amount of reporting on the Assembly's report and its recommendations but also with a question mark as to what will happen next. They also noted that the more impact citizens' assemblies have, the more the media will report on them.

'So I did quite a bit on the final report and the recommendations to Parliament ... and what happens next. 'Cause that's always what

people want to know. That's not the end of the story, what happens next? What are you actually going to do? ... Was it just a talking shop or is anything going to come out of it?' (Journalist, external interviews)

The internal interviews echoed some of the findings above but also reflected on the shortcomings of the Assembly's media strategy. There was a widespread view across the stewarding group and organiser interviews that the level of public awareness was very low throughout the course of the Assembly. All who addressed this issue agreed that it was a challenge to get the media interested because of competition from other newsworthy events. The organisers often acknowledged that the Assembly failed to capture the public imagination:

'I think it is a regret that the public weren't as engaged or enthused as the people in the room. We didn't quite get out of the room enough, and I wish we had. I wish the process had sparked the public's imagination the way that we did in the room.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

Some interviewees felt that opportunities were missed or that the media strategy was not properly considered at the inception stage. This is attributed by some organisers to insufficient resources or communications expertise at the outset. Interviewees generally noted an improvement to the media strategy when a communications specialist joined their team. This brought a switch in the strategy to focus on Assembly members and showcase them – something that the organisers appeared to have been initially very reticent about.

'There was an anxiety about protecting the Assembly members from the outset from the potentially invasive media attention. And on reflection ... I think we were slightly overanxious about that.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'[W]hat we were trying to do was to interest people in the human interest story ... And we had quite a lot of local media ... with members' stories. And getting members' voices out there, I think was reasonably successful.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

Journalists noted the value of engaging more directly with Assembly members, but one highlighted concerns in line with the cautious approach taken by the organisers:

'[P]ersonalities always help drive things like that, but I wouldn't want to drop any of the participants into, you know... have them just pecked to death on Twitter. You know, it's very difficult. So I ... you worry sometimes for the participants ... if it got personalised ... people would be creepy to them on social media.' (Journalist, external interviews)

This highlights an important tension in citizens' assemblies and other democratic innovations, namely, the need to balance the duty of care towards participants with

the need to reach the broader public and make the Assembly process open and transparent.

Journalists' and politicians' perceptions of the Assembly

Journalists and politicians are key actors in the field of democratic innovation because their involvement is crucial for the legitimacy, communication and impact of processes like the Assembly (Pomatto, 2019; Thompson, 2019). This section reports on findings from interviews with four journalists and seven politicians. The sample was limited and therefore these findings are not intended to be representative but rather to be reflective of the views of key informants who, due to their position, paid close attention to the Assembly.

As reflected in the analysis of media coverage, the Assembly had a very mixed reception when it was announced. At the outset, the journalists and some of the politicians interviewed were sceptical because some saw the Assembly as a potential 'talking shop' or 'PR stunt'.

'My first impression ... was this is going to be a ... talking shop that is designed to feed off something they've already decided rather than actually a genuine attempt to try and listen to the people of Scotland.'
(Politician, external interviews)

However, the views of those who were initially cynical evolved positively over time, although some still expressed concerns about the Assembly's remit, range of recommendations, and impact. Part of the initial scepticism related to the purpose of the Assembly due to the timing and nature of its announcement, with many feeling that Scottish independence was the ulterior motive behind it. There was consensus amongst interviewees on the need for the Assembly to be an independent body and to be seen as independent. Members not having vested interests in party politics was seen as a strength of the Assembly's credibility. Once the process got underway many were of the viewpoint that the Assembly asserted its autonomy and became more meaningful and valuable than initially expected.

'[It] had a cursed beginning ... It was announced in April 2019 ... by Nicola Sturgeon on the eve of the SNP Conference ... And she had this announcement in Parliament saying, we're going to have a referendum bill ... And alongside that, she announced the Citizens' Assembly. So it came as a package ... it should have been separated out ... And that gave the opposition a perfect opening to attack it. So it did seem ... umbilically linked to the broader efforts for independence.' (Journalist, external interviews)

'I don't have ... that opinion anymore. That's because the Assembly itself, kind of, asserted its autonomy and decided not to discuss independence ... [it] recognised that, you know, consensus on independence is pretty much impossible with the way the national mood is on that at the moment. So it skirted round it and ... I think it

has a lot of cross-party buy-in. If you look back at the start ... there was a great deal of hostility to it.' (Journalist, external interviews)

'I thoroughly expected it to just be a sort of PR exercise as a drive towards boosting independence and much more of a political thing than it has been. But I think what was done really well is actually get ... a real cross-section of Scotland in the room in one go. So it hasn't ended up being skewed in any particular way I don't think.'
(Journalist, external interviews)

While journalists were largely sceptical regarding the motivation behind the Assembly, the view amongst politicians was more mixed. Some viewed the Assembly as an opportunity to cut through the day-to-day politics and create a common vision for the future of Scotland from the 'ordinary citizen'. Over time, perceptions of the Assembly seemed to evolve in a positive way as more became supportive when it reached its conclusion and published its report.

Media coverage analysis also suggests that partisan lines were more prominent in the early stages of the process, with the Scottish Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats initially declining to support the Assembly, while SNP and Greens were fully supportive and Labour cautiously supportive. The inclusion of the Conservatives in the political panel in weekend 3, and media articles with more supportive quotations from Conservative and Liberal Democrat sources from early 2020 onwards, suggest that their perceptions had evolved around the midpoint of the process. The Liberal Democrat manifesto prior to the May 2021 elections also notes a commitment to 'take forward' the work of the Assembly, indicating a change in approach.

Interviewees felt the Assembly was a positive experience for members and were in strong agreement that members were enthusiastic and serious about the Assembly and their involvement in the process. The inclusion of members from a cross-section of Scottish society was highlighted as a key strength. Amongst the weaknesses, they highlighted five that clearly resonate from findings from other strands of our research: the remit, the quality of deliberation, the nature of the recommendations, the limited broader public engagement, and the Assembly's impact. Firstly, there was consensus amongst all interviewees (politicians, civil servants, and journalists) that the remit was very broad and generic and did not address specific questions. Secondly, as illustrated in the next section, there was consensus that issues were not discussed in-depth and that there was a lack of focus on more 'difficult' issues, while the more contentious aspects did not receive sufficient engagement – e.g. how to fund certain recommendations, how to balance trade-offs. Many interviewees, particularly politicians, felt this had an adverse effect on the quality of deliberation. They perceived that there was a lack of rigorous debate and that there seemed to be an expectation amongst members that consensus was the aim and therefore they were not fully challenged on their arguments.

Thirdly, the recommendations were welcomed across the board (with some describing them as ‘radical’), but their wide-ranging nature and somewhat vague language was noted as not giving the Government much to work with. Some felt many recommendations are hard to disagree with and would not really stimulate public debate. Fourthly, some indicated that the Assembly did not capture the public imagination the way assemblies elsewhere had done and that this was a result of the broad remit.

‘I don’t think most people even knew it was there. Again, it wasn’t like the ones in Ireland that people were paying attention to what they said. However, every one of those hundred people that was on that Citizens’ Assembly is a member of a community and will know people. So I think there is a sort of trickle out effect.’ (Politician, external interviews)

Finally, when asked about the prospect for future citizens’ assemblies in Scotland, some were generally supportive in principle whilst others were supportive only if the first Assembly had any real impact and any future assemblies had to give more careful thought to their remit.

‘Probably the main purpose of the Assembly was to see if it could work ... And the proof of concept, I think it’s done alright, you know, as a ... prototype ... I think it’s embedded itself in the political consciousness. It hasn’t had any obvious screw ups ... It’s worked pretty smoothly I think once it got underway ... But it’s just... you know, what happens next? What becomes concrete policy? And ... we will then have an idea about how to view the next citizens’ assembly, ‘cause if these things go nowhere, then they will become a bit of a joke.’ (Journalist, external interviews)

Similar concerns about these five weaknesses were found also across the internal interviews with organisers, facilitators, and stewarding group members.

The Assembly’s impact and links to relevant institutions

In terms of the link to relevant institutions, interviewees noted that the relationship between the Assembly, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament is unclear, particularly regarding how the report and its recommendations are to be taken forward. Some politicians expressed concerns regarding the Assembly’s lack of legislative power, while others were happy to consider it a consultative exercise.

‘I have reservations about some kinds of citizens’ assemblies having any kind of legislative oversight or veto or anything like that, which I think some of them would quite maybe like.’ (Politician, external interviews)

One MSP expressed doubt over the validity of the Assembly process in terms of dealing with contested issues and their trade-offs, and felt it best to leave such issues to politicians and elections and for assemblies to be more of an advisory body. Moreover, most interviewees, across both the internal and external

interviews, had doubts about whether and how the report should feed into policy processes. For example, interviewees typically agreed that the Assembly's report and recommendations constituted an important outcome, but many raised questions about whether they were the result of sufficient deliberation or engagement with the evidence:

'I would be deeply uncomfortable were any of those recommendations to then feed straight into policy development, because I don't think any of them came from a sufficiently deep deliberative process. Because it was trying to do too much.'
(Stewarding group, internal interviews)

There were concerns expressed about the timing of the report and how it may inform the Programme for Government following the May 2021 elections. One civil servant stressed that the Scottish Government was taking the Assembly 'very seriously' and that it would give careful consideration to the recommendations. However, the same interviewee also expressed uncertainty about the authority ('mandate') of the recommendations and how they are to be managed and related to other institutional and political processes:

'I think one of the issues we've been grappling with is about what kind of mandate the recommendations potentially create, if any. So the very initial conversations that we've been having are, how do these recommendations sit with statutory requirements ... and we have strategies that have been developed through stakeholder engagement and have been agreed, and we now have people developing things because of manifesto commitments. How do these recommendations interact with all of those processes, what kind of thing are these recommendations?' (Civil servant, external interviews)

'[The Assembly's report] says "we the people of Scotland present this report to the Scottish Government and Parliament." I have got a problem with that statement because what were there (...) a hundred of them and it is the saying we the people of Scotland is a bit of a jump. They are not elected, yes they are a cross-section of society but there are probably areas that they are not a cross-section in. It is a relatively small number and I think the relationship of such Assemblies to the elected Parliament is a question we need to resolve.' (Politician, external interviews)

On balance, participants in the internal interviews were satisfied with the output, considering the challenges of the broad remit and the circumstances faced by the Assembly (e.g. limited time; pandemic).

'Not just that they produced something given the size of the challenge, but they produced something that I think has a cohesiveness to it in terms of its direction of travel, which is quite impressive.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Politicians, journalists and civil servants highlighted that the institutional response will be setting a precedent for how governments and other institutions respond to future assemblies. The two civil servants interviewed stressed the commitment from the Scottish Government to draw upon findings from Assembly, as well as Scotland's Climate Assembly, in developing its ten-year economic plan.

'We've seen some quite strong manifesto commitments around Citizens' Assemblies, so we have a commitment specifically about the recommendations of Citizens' Assembly of Scotland and actually giving careful consideration to those recommendations ... and there's a very strong commitment to have other assemblies.' (Civil servant, external interviews)

However, all interviewees noted that the broad range of recommendations will prove difficult for the Government to act upon, and that the relationship between the Assembly and other institutions should have been clarified from the outset.

'[The] focus is now on how does the Government respond to these recommendations, and I think the recommendations make that very hard.' (Civil servant, external interviews)

'So then what are they obliged to do, what does careful consideration mean in a practical sense, and I think those are questions that need to be answered at a very high level, and if you could answer some of them in advance, that would be helpful.' (Civil servant, external interviews)

One interviewee noted how the Assembly itself felt like an 'add-on to the day job', highlighting how if the recommendations are also treated in a similar manner in Government they may not receive sufficient attention. Another interviewee suggested that the fact that the team of Assembly organisers was disbanded soon after the Assembly's completion was a factor hindering its potential impact:

'It felt like there was a massive head of steam with the secretariat team in the report. And since the report's come out I've not had a huge amount of engagement with anyone.' (Civil servant, external interviews)

Across both internal and external interviews, there were concerns that the Government will cherry-pick the recommendations that suit its agenda or those that are quick and easy to implement to rather superficially show they are responding to the recommendations. Most indicated that the Assembly produced interesting ideas, however, concerns were expressed that many recommendations were underdeveloped, referred to things that already exist, or fell outwith Holyrood's jurisdiction.

'I would have liked to have seen fewer recommendations, and them be the really radical ones. Because I think, you know, a lot of what's in there is already in planning for Government, and all the rest of it,

you know, there's a lot of stuff that politicians will be able to go, oh, tick, already doing that, oh, tick.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

'I think they could have done with another drilling down. Another sifting, another... you know what I mean? ... But we didn't have time to do that.' (Facilitator, internal interviews)

Many of the interviewees' doubts (both internal and external) revolved around uncertainty about the impact of the recommendations and where or with whom accountability for this impact rests. Journalists and politicians expressed differing views on how the work of the Assembly may feed into the Scottish Parliament. For instance, journalists were sceptical that the Assembly's work would have any impact there, with some stating Parliament may even resist it.

'But again a lot of those [recommendations] ... dilute the influence of politicians in the political process and the policy making process and give more citizens a direct say. I think there is obviously institutional resistance to that at Holyrood and just in the political system generally ... I can't see them rushing to do that.' (Journalist, external interviews)

Many interviewees stated that Parliament and Government have a responsibility to report and respond to the Assembly, for example by giving an annual report on how they have responded to the recommendations. Most politicians interviewed felt that the work of the Assembly would not influence Parliament to any great extent.

'There's no need for anybody to pay any attention to what they're saying. There's no legislative pressure to do so, there's no pressure from voters to do so. There's no requirement for anyone in Parliament to pay the slightest attention to what it says in those reports.' (Politician, external interviews)

'I think the parliamentary response is going to be what we've come to expect far too often, which is warm words on the day and then we carry on with business as usual. And that's the unfortunate part. I think there's some of the things in it that we will take up because they're on the Government agenda anyway.' (Politician, external interviews)

However, at an individual level, some MSPs noted that they are likely to use the recommendations as evidence in debates and motions, and to lobby the Government. These activities have the potential to establish an informal but significant link between the Assembly and Parliament.

The fieldnotes from the post-Assembly session between members and parliamentarians suggest that most of the politicians present had engaged to some extent with the Assembly's report and were keen to hear from members about their experience of the process, the development of the recommendations (e.g. what issues were difficult, controversial topics, levels of consensus), and their preferred proposals. There was some, but limited, discussion of the substance of the recommendations, albeit some politicians did welcome those that specifically

aligned with their own policies (e.g. environmental issues, taxation, wellbeing economy). Assembly members did ask the politicians to explain how they will take forward the recommendations, with mixed responses across parties – namely, noting that they will be taken seriously by the next Parliament, particularly for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic recovery; but also noting that there are limits in currently devolved powers to act on some proposals. Some politicians also indicated that the recommendations may have some influence on the forthcoming electoral manifestos.

We analysed the content of the May 2021 Scottish election manifestos. Three parties (Scottish National Party, Green Party and Scottish Liberal Democrat Party) mentioned citizens' assemblies in their manifestos, with varying degrees of commitment. References to this particular Assembly, however, were notably absent or limited in all manifestos, with the exception of the SNP's. But even that one did not commit to anything beyond considering the recommendations. Nonetheless, there was a reference in both the SNP and Green Party manifestos to this Assembly as a good precedent for future processes.

The politicians and journalists interviewed often expressed the view that whether any of the recommendations translate into policy will ultimately determine how seriously any future Assemblies are taken:

'The more effect they have, the more impact they have, the more they will be reported because they will become a significant part of the process ... If what they say matters, they will get reported in proportion to that. But if they're just an idle exercise then no.'
(Journalist, external interviews)

Ultimately, the Scottish Government has no legal obligation to act upon the recommendations, hence why many interviewees were sceptical about the impact of the Assembly. However, most were encouraged by the work of the Assembly and felt it could be used as a prototype for better participatory and deliberative processes. In this vein, one noted that the Assembly may have a longer term impact as a contribution to democratic innovation in Scotland:

'Sometimes these things are a slower burn. I think it'll be seen to be well in advance actually of its time. But I think in terms of the impact of this as a way of doing things and its importance I think that's still to come along.' (Politician, external interviews)

Conclusion

Our analysis of media coverage shows how flurries of activity map onto key stages and milestones at the Assembly. Improvements in the communications capacity of the organisers team made a difference, albeit coverage remained limited in newspapers with the highest readership in Scotland. As a result, only certain types of readers will have received consistent news coverage of the Assembly. Data shows that the vast majority of Scottish traditional media market share is made up of UK-wide national newspapers (about 85%), and Assembly coverage in these

publications was notably limited. Overall, the content of the coverage was mostly neutral or positive, with the exception of the initial stages of the Assembly. Journalists and politicians expressed the view that the Assembly worked much better than they initially expected. Although there was some cynicism towards the Assembly initially, most had a more positive view of it by the end.

The general view, across both internal and external interviews, was that the Assembly ran smoothly, was a positive experience for members, and was a good prototype for future processes. Nevertheless, concerns were expressed about five key weaknesses: the wide remit, the quality and depth of deliberation, the feasibility of the recommendations, the limited broader public engagement, and the lack of clarity about institutional routes for Assembly's impact. Most interviewees were sceptical the Assembly will have a significant impact on the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, due to its lack of formal power, but there was some confidence that it will be used as evidence by individual MSPs to lobby the Government. Most external interviewees felt that as the Assembly does not have any legislative power, nor clear plans about what to do with the recommendations, it will not influence Scottish institutions to any great extent and many feared its impact will be negligible. It was unclear to interviewees what kind of mandate, if any, does the Assembly and its recommendations have. They expressed concern over how the recommendations sit with statutory requirements and how they may interact with various policy processes, and some suggested that it would be better to have these questions answered in advance of the process. Nonetheless, most saw this Assembly as having a clear impact in establishing a positive precedent for future participatory processes in Scotland, generating important learning and a 'proof of concept' to inform democratic innovation.

Chapter 6: The governance of the Assembly

Data sources:

- Fieldnotes
- Internal interviews (organisers, facilitators, stewarding group)
- External interviews (politicians, journalists, civil servants)

The Assembly had different actors and groups involved in its governance. It was initiated by the Directorate for Constitution and Cabinet, which fits into the Scottish Government portfolio of what was then called the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. A team of seconded civil servants and a civil society practitioner with direct experience of running citizens' assemblies formed a secretariat, responsible for organising the Assembly and accountable to the convener. An external organisation was contracted to recruit the Assembly members, and two organisations experienced in participation practice to design, deliver and facilitate the Assembly. Two conveners were also appointed as public figureheads for the Assembly. Finally, a stewarding group – consisting of a range of topic and process experts from academia, industry, Government and civil society – provided advice and oversight of the process.

Governance is an important aspect of a Citizens' Assembly but what constitutes the best governance arrangements is contested. There has been limited previous research on the governance of citizens' assemblies for us to build on, in comparison to other aspects of our report. Governance was an implicit dimension in our sixth research question (What are the lessons for informing other democratic processes and institutions in Scotland and internationally) and also emerged as an important issue frequently highlighted in the interviews. However, we have less data on these topics and our conclusions are consequently more tentative.

In this chapter we assess perceptions of how effectively the different groups involved in organising the Assembly worked together. We further consider the implications of the Assembly remit for its organisation. Finally, we begin a discussion about the adequacy of the plans made to deal with the Assembly recommendations. To do so we primarily draw on our internal and external interviews, supplemented with non-participant observation fieldnotes.

Effectiveness of the Governance of the Assembly

As described above, there were a lot of different actors involved in the organisation and design of the Assembly. There were a number of arrangements in place to co-ordinate the activities of these actors as set out in the box below.

Citizens' Assembly of Scotland Governance Documentation

- Published remit and terms of reference for the Assembly and its operations
- Role of conveners set out in letters of appointment
- Remit and terms of appointment of stewarding group members
- Memorandum between the Government and Conveners on the independence of the Assembly, including the responsibilities and reporting arrangements for the secretariat
- Contractual agreement with the design and facilitation team which specified roles and responsibilities
- Assembly administration records, including papers for and record of outputs from stewarding group meetings, project management of the Assembly, audit trail recording how and when key decisions were taken and by whom

Despite the governance documentation, the arrangements were described by one interviewee as having a lot of 'moving parts'. Interviewees from the Assembly's organisers, facilitators and stewarding group frequently suggested that there was a lack of shared understanding and clarity about how the division of labour would work in practice. Interviewees were careful to modulate their language but several expressed frustration, and in a couple of cases anger, at this lack of clarity. Moreover, according to some Assembly organisers, the lack of clarity over the division of roles and responsibilities led to tensions between the different groups, impacting design decisions:

'I think it was unusually complex and I think sometimes the dividing line between the different functions weren't entirely clear ... in particular, the dividing line between what was [the design team's] domain ... and what was the secretariat's domain. I think that was often a bit unclear.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

'I think it created a very unusual dynamic for the design team, so the secretariat took a lot more ownership of the detail of the design. And didn't quite trust ... the process would be managed and get to somewhere, so they kept second-guessing how the decision-making process would happen. They didn't trust for a long time.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'It must have been so frustrating for the design team ... Well, actually I know that at times it was, I could see it, because they were having to kind of act not only as designers but persuaders, that such and such a thing was a good idea to do or not to do.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

However, others did think that good working relationships were achieved after some initial teething problems, even though a lack of shared understanding over who had responsibility and authority for which aspects of the process persisted:

'I think we did get a good working relationship eventually ... it took a while and it was just a case of building a bit of trust. But there was a lot of confusion around decision making and who got to make decisions about things.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'We got to a place where our relationship was such that we could challenge each other and it was all okay then.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

The internal interviewees frequently suggested that having more time at the offset to discuss roles and responsibilities and establish working relationships would have improved the process.

The Assembly had a Memorandum of Understanding in place to allow it to operate independently from Government. A couple of interviewees explicitly questioned the extent to which the organisers could truly be independent from Government if composed of civil servants. Still, they acknowledged that the organisers were careful to set themselves up as independent from the outset. The interview data also highlighted how the organisers came to be very protective of the Assembly members.

'I mean they were really pretty careful not to ever comment publicly as Government, really careful to knock back any questions that were more appropriate for Government but when push came to shove, they responded in a way that civil servants would, to protect the minister. That also changed over time, I have to say, they became just as defensive over the Assembly members in the end, which was a really interesting shift. So yes, they all learned but no, I think the perception of the secretariat calling itself independent of Government where every single member were just lifted out of Government and given a new name, clearly isn't.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

This also speaks to debates within existing literature on governance models of Assemblies. On the one hand, independence in organising the assembly is important for upholding credibility and legitimacy. On the other hand, assemblies with no formal link to Government can struggle to achieve impact (OECD, 2020). Civil servants are frequently seconded to carry out duties in other organisations. Moreover, this view from some members of the stewarding group was not necessarily shared by others. Organisers were aware of the risk that they may be perceived not to be independent from Government and were careful to act in accordance with the governance documentation.

'[B]ecause of the possibility of that type of perception amongst people ... we always knew we had to be really, really careful and be as

objective as possible and make sure that it was conveners who were making decisions and members who were making decisions where it was them that needed to.’ (Organiser, internal interviews)

‘[It] was always very, very clear about how important the impartiality of the Assembly was, and we did a huge piece of work before the secretariat was formed setting out all the different ways in which the independence of the secretariat should be achieved in actuality and be sure to be seen to be independent ... we had a different office space set apart ... both practical and kind of symbolic things as well.’ (Organiser, internal interviews)

To avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest, citizens’ assemblies are often overseen by a stewarding group or equivalent to provide independent advice, oversight and scrutiny of the process. In this Assembly, the stewarding group was set up to operate in an advisory capacity only. Some interviewees raised questions about the role of the stewarding group, its contribution to scrutiny of the Assembly process, and whether members’ expertise was sufficiently utilised:

‘When I was in the stewarding group ... I just assumed it had a governance role, but then as we sat on it we realised it didn’t have a governance role, and it was mainly an advisory group.’ (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

On the other hand, other stewarding group members felt that they had been afforded a much more active role in advising on the design of the Assembly than they had experienced in other assemblies:

‘So, you know, I’ve seen this role in various different assemblies and I guess it’s been quite different in each one. So in this one, it’s been a much more kind of active role in many ways ... And I think that probably reflects, at least in part, the nature of the remit for this Assembly that it was so wide.’ (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

As a function of the broad remit, a wide range of topics were covered at the Assembly weekends, particularly in the in-person phase. This, in combination with the timescale between Assembly weekends, created a range of challenges for identifying and meeting the evidence requirements for those topics, and a particular challenge for any scrutiny of the evidence provided. Although this scrutiny role is often played by a governance or oversight group in citizens’ assemblies, the membership of the stewarding group did not (and arguably, could not) provide the spread of expertise needed for scrutiny of the evidence on all the topics. Scrutiny was also reduced due to severe time constraints. Overall, our dataset suggests that there was less oversight of design issues by the stewarding group than was optimal.

Evidence from a number of datasets across our research (including the internal interviews and fieldnotes) indicate disagreements and tension with regard to the deployment of subject or process expertise in the planning and delivery of the

Assembly. Here too, a lack of collective understanding on the roles and responsibilities of the different governance groups created challenges to collaborative working. Some of the secretariat and stewarding group members interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the nature or extent of the input they were able to provide or were receiving from each other along the process.

Facilitators did not speak about the governance structure much and when they did, it was to say that the roles were unclear. This does not seem to necessarily have been an issue as facilitators were clear on their own role and responsibilities and their involvement was largely limited to the Assembly weekends.

The Assembly also had two conveners: Kate Wimpres, who remained throughout the process; and David Martin who withdrew after the first two weekends. Some of our external interviewees liked that the Assembly was chaired by individuals perceived as neutral, as this was seen to maintain the Assembly's independence and autonomy from Government. The change to a single convener was noted as an additional challenge to work through in implementing the Assembly. Moreover, there was a lack of clarity in design as to what the role of the conveners would be:

'I think this demand that they were going to have conveners and without really setting out a role for them first and without thinking through what that role was and created a lot of issues, created a problem ... because they'd never really thought through what it was going to mean' (Organiser, internal interviews)

The fieldnotes also recorded some observations around a lack of clarity over the role of the conveners. For example, in early Assembly sessions the conveners carried out some mediation and translation of members' questions to the expert speakers.

Impact and implications of the Assembly remit

One of the key governance decisions made was the remit for the Assembly, and we have noted its breadth throughout the report. In this section, we further explore the impact and implications it had for organising the Assembly.

Some organisers from our internal interviewees considered the breadth of the remit to be positive as they thought it enabled the Assembly members to set their own agenda and determine their own priorities for Scotland:

'I think on reflection, and having gone through the process, I think it really worked. And the reason I think it worked is because it gave the Assembly itself the opportunity to set the parameters of their work.'
(Organiser, internal interviews)

'The advantage of that was it was absolutely member-led, members did direct the journey that they went on with this Assembly.'
(Organiser, internal interviews)

'I think the remit enabled people to have an open conversation about Scotland ... [I]t meant challenges in terms of evidence, how do you take that conversation forward. And with such an open remit ... it meant that we were always going to face some difficulties in doing deep evidential discussions in the way that I think ... is one of the strengths of an Assembly. But on the other side of it, it meant that members could go where they wanted. And what we were always trying to do was ... follow members' noses.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

However, interviewees across all internal groups agreed that the broad remit further contributed to design and implementation challenges and that insufficient time was allocated for the Assembly process to fully address it:

'I think the scale of the question was such that by the time the Assembly members had kind of decided the areas that they wanted to look at it was just too... There just wasn't enough time to assemble everything in a way that you would want to do to make the very best of the time you had together.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

The range of relevant topics meant that it took a while for members to make sense of the remit, thereby preventing the organisers and designers from planning each successive weekend well in advance:

'The real challenge that it presented by being member design led and also designing almost as you go, was that we had four weeks between each weekend. And between each weekend we didn't know what the next weekend would be.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'I think it is the time between weekends and because of the need for members to have a say on what it was they wanted to do, and what it was they wanted to achieve, meant that we had to be really careful ... not to be seen to be steering the Assembly too much and not to be leading it too much.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

'I don't think there necessarily was anything wrong with the remit but the combination of a very broad remit and a very tight timescale was what made it quite difficult, and meant that the design and delivery of the Assembly had to be done in that kind of progressive fashion as it went on, rather than ideally obviously we would have set that all out at the beginning, here's what we're going to do, here's where your end product is, here's how we're going to work through six weekends to achieve that.' (Organiser, internal interviews)

As well as causing time issues for planning the Assembly, some of the internal interviewees thought that the breadth of the remit compromised the level of depth that was achieved, precisely because they did not know what issues would be covered in advance:

'It was never in-depth enough and they quite often said that, so I suppose there's a degree to which the time that was allotted for the Assembly was done in advance of understanding what was needed really.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

Ultimately, the stewarding group members we interviewed thought that the broad remit made it difficult for the organisers to coordinate and plan a process that would result in a coordinated and focused set of recommendations:

'I think one of the learning points for me was to give more time towards the end to refine recommendations because the timing was really very tight all the way through, and I think that was partly due to the huge remit.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

'With such large abstract topics, it was an impossible ask really, and there wasn't enough focus from the beginning on the end point. There wasn't enough focus at the beginning on how we could get to the end point with the resources that we had and the time we had for the Assembly.' (Stewarding group member, internal interviews)

The broad and generic remit of the Assembly, which did not address specific questions, was also the main issue highlighted in our external interviews. Many interviewees stated that the Assembly's recommendations would have been more deliverable if the remit was more focussed:

'Maybe if we'd had a tighter remit in the first place, then what would have come back ... would be more deliverable.' (Civil servant, external interviews)

'The agenda was too broad. They have this host of recommendations.' (Politician, external interviews)

Consequently, the view amongst the external interviewees was that more specific questions are better to put to an Assembly:

'Finding more technically defined questions ... you're asking them to wrestle with an answer, seems to be where they're more effective.' (Politician, external interviews)

'This kind of process is going to be much more useful in the long term if we do ... set specific tasks or focus, rather than, what kind of country do we want to be. Sort of, very broad, general remit.' (Politician, external interviews)

Some cases from Ireland were given as successful examples of a citizens' assembly with a tighter remit focused on contested issues, as a result of which it was seen to have been able to consider the issue in-depth and provide clear recommendations:

'The example in Ireland ... the debate they had around the Abortion Laws, is the one that's held up as the ... best example of it. 'Cause it

managed to resolve a difficult issue for the country and did shift or influence public opinion and support. So, I think that one was effective.’ (Politician, external interviews).

‘Again, I suppose the contrast ... when they were dealing with something like abortion in Ireland that was very specific and they could really drill down into the detail of it. Whereas this was much more your big picture stuff.’ (Politician, external interviews)

In sum, the internal interviews indicate that the Assembly’s remit made it hard to govern and design. The external interviews also suggest the breadth of the remit affected policy-makers’ perceptions of the Assembly.

Adequacy of the plans for dealing with the Assembly’s recommendations

The Government officially responded to the Assembly’s recommendations in the Scottish Parliament in November 2021, shortly before publication of our report. Therefore, we cannot yet assess the influence the Assembly has had on Government policy. However, we can draw on our interview data to offer some reflections on the governance arrangements for dealing with the Assembly’s recommendations.

The civil servants involved in taking forward the Assembly’s recommendations into policy and some of the expert speakers reflected that the governance plans to deal with the Assembly’s recommendations (the impact phase of the Assembly process) were not sufficiently concrete. This was described as adding risk to the delivery or the effect that the recommendations will have on public policy in Scotland. There were also consequences identified for Assembly members’ understanding of what was happening to their recommendations. Some indicative quotes on this topic include:

‘I think understanding what the recommendations will mean at the beginning rather than having to start doing that work at the end I think is one of the things I would want to learn from this Assembly. Because it is hard to respond to the recommendations while also trying to answer that question, it would be easier to respond to them if we knew the answer already.’ (Civil servant, external interviews)

‘So then what are they obliged to do, what does careful consideration mean in a practical sense, and I think those are questions that need to be answered at a very high level, and if you could answer some of them in advance, that would be helpful.’ (Civil servant, external interviews)

‘[C]ould have done with more explanation of what will happen to the outcomes of the process in due course – where do they go, who will listen to them?’ (Expert speaker, expert speaker survey)

'I think some process of feedback to members about what happened to the recommendations, which we don't have at all in this Assembly. There was no ... plan published, everything is disbanded, and it's a hard full-stop actually, and I think that wasn't very satisfactory at all.'
(Civil servant, external interviews)

In addition to the challenges it presented to the design and delivery of the Assembly, the breadth of the remit may be creating challenges to the process once the Assembly has concluded.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed views and experiences about the governance arrangements of the Assembly. These were important themes that emerged during data collection and analysis, although there is less evidence to support our analysis than in other sections of this report. There is also less previous research on what constitutes good governance for citizens' assemblies for us to draw on.

We found that there was a disconnect between the formal governance arrangements and the experiences of interviewees as they designed, delivered and advised on the Assembly. Overall, those involved in organising the Assembly experienced a lack of clarity in relation to roles and responsibilities. This was in part due to the lack of time available to clarify responsibilities in advance of the Assembly. There were also differing perceptions about the extent the organisers could be independent from Government. The membership, broad remit and time between the weekends were all factors that contributed to challenges in the stewarding group being able to fulfil its advisory role.

The Assembly remit was acknowledged by all interviewees to be very broad. For some this gave the Assembly members the opportunity to establish their own priorities. However, the consequences of the broad remit meant that it was hard to plan the Assembly weekends in advance, meaning that their organisation was compressed and rushed. Interviewees also expressed concern that the array of topics covered meant that none of them were addressed in any depth. This in turn meant that there were a lot of recommendations, some very general, which may prove hard to transfer into policy. Moreover, there was little advance planning on what would be done with the recommendations before they were produced.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Assembly was the first citizens' assembly conducted at a national level in Scotland. Its successful completion was a notable achievement in the face of a number of challenges. Most significantly, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the Assembly to be paused for six months before resuming online until its completion.

In the following, we consider the internal dimension of the Assembly – its design and delivery and the members' experience – and the external dimension of the Assembly – its wider reception and impact. We draw conclusions about what worked well, what were the key challenges, and what learning can be drawn. We make recommendations to inform the design and delivery of future assemblies and other deliberative approaches in Scotland and internationally.

The internal dimension of the Assembly

Members' experience

For the majority of members, taking part in the Assembly was overall a rich and rewarding experience, both individually and collectively. This is common in assemblies and other deliberative approaches, which provide a level and quality of participation for members which they are unlikely to have experienced in other ways. Nonetheless, it was clear that the work of the organisers and facilitators was a key factor in members' experience. The care for the welfare of members and practical, technological and emotional support for their participation was notable.

Ensuring member inclusion and participation is a key design feature of citizens' assemblies. Overall, most members in the Assembly felt included in, and empowered by, the process. Over the course of the meetings, there was increased self-confidence and belief in their ability to participate. This personal growth was also associated with a greater sense of their ability and interest in participating in other political and civic activities: an 'activating' aspect to their experience.

There was some variation to this general picture of members' experience. Female members overall reported slightly lower levels of satisfaction; and lower levels of comfort and opportunity to express their views in small-group discussions. They were also observed to participate less in all-Assembly plenary sessions in the early weekends but engaged more equally with men in later weekends. Organisers sought to encourage and support this improvement. There was also a small minority of members that reported dissatisfaction, less positive experiences and a lack of inclusion.

Design and delivery of the Assembly

There are a number of common features associated with the design and delivery of citizens' assemblies. These include the provision of expert evidence, opportunities

for members' to learn and reflect collectively, deliberation between members' about the topic, and a process that supports members to draw conclusions or make recommendations, depending on the defined task.

The breadth of **the remit** given to the Assembly is unusual when compared to other citizens' assemblies and deliberative approaches. Characteristically, they focus on a specific issue and are tasked to respond to a particular question. A range of design and delivery decisions follow from the remit. The scope of the Assembly was expressed as 'what kind of country are we seeking to build' and it was tasked to respond to three broad questions. This presented a range of challenges to its design and delivery and also had an impact on its wider reception. Still, in practice, that breadth was used as an (arguably necessary) opportunity for members to play a role in shaping the agenda of the Assembly and the topics for discussion.

A range of design and delivery plans generally flow from decisions about how to implement the remit of an assembly. In this case, the Assembly was planned rather more on a weekend by weekend basis, particularly between weekends one to four where the topics for discussion reflected the results of discussions from the prior weekend. This placed pressure on all the organisers to design the following weekend, and crucially to identify expert speakers, in a tight window of about four weeks. This timing placed a constraint on speaker selection and availability, and also on the time for preparation and scrutiny of speaker input. In practice, if there had been a longer interval between each weekend meeting, then it would have likely mitigated these constraints somewhat.

The **move online** for the second half of the Assembly meetings was a significant change in the delivery of the Assembly and had a broad impact. First, it created a new constraint on member participation and inclusion. Organisers invested time and practical and technological support in advance of restart to ensure all members' were able to connect online and use the virtual meeting platform to participate fully. There were teething problems in the first online weekend for some members, relating to connection issues and members' understanding of how to participate online. This improved significantly in the following weekends as a result of interventions from the organisers, and members' growing familiarity and confidence with the format. The length of weekend meetings was also reduced, reflecting concern about what might reasonably be expected from members in the online environment. It was also evident that most activities simply took longer than in person. Together, this compressed the time available for recommendation formation, scrutiny and agreement. There were additional challenges for facilitators who had online collaborative tools to use alongside completion of group discussion tasks and managing group dynamics. Some members found engagement easier online, others less so; but there was a common sense of regret that the opportunities for informal and social interaction valued in the in-person weekends were missing.

A key element of any citizens' assembly is to build **members' knowledge and understanding** of the issue they have been asked to consider to help inform their deliberations. Members of the Assembly heard from a range of experts and

advocates across a broad spread of topics, particularly in weekends 1-4. The quantity and breadth of knowledge and evidence presented were sometimes experienced by members as difficult to absorb. The quality of delivery we observed from the selected experts varied, although the majority of members commonly expressed satisfaction. There were opportunities to hear from a greater diversity of perspectives on some topics, but which could not be taken due to the constrained time available between weekend meetings to identify and access diverse expert input. The six month pause in the middle of the Assembly made it more difficult for members to recall and engage with the evidence presented in the first four weekends, despite concerted efforts by organisers to remind members about what they had heard when the Assembly restarted. There is evidence members learnt from the evidence they were provided and from each other, which informed their views. A greater diversity in evidence provision formats, to meet the range of learning styles and needs of the assembly members, could have further enhanced this learning. Their knowledge was greater at the end of the Assembly when compared with members of the public we surveyed.

The majority of deliberative work undertaken by members in assemblies takes place in small group discussions. This places a premium on the quality of **facilitation** in small groups. The facilitators at the Assembly demonstrated a commitment to the Assembly process and to the care and support of members. Regular briefing and debriefing at and after every weekend encouraged a culture of reflective practice and improvement. There was evident variation in how well facilitators managed group dynamics to ensure inclusion, and encouraged members to engage in deliberative discussion. Some of this variation reflected different levels of skill, but also that facilitators were drawn from a range of different organisations and professional traditions. There was not a consistent understanding of deliberative facilitation practice. Equally, weekend design decisions were routinely finalised very close to Assembly meetings, which led to facilitators receiving detailed instructions with less opportunity for preparation than might be ideal.

Developing and fostering **deliberation** is a central design feature of citizens' assemblies. This is not a conventional mode of participation and so members require support through the process to encourage a range of deliberative values and practices. Some forms of deliberation improved over the Assembly weekends, a common finding in other assemblies. Some of this resulted from proactive facilitation, which might have been informed by feedback from the research team, from organisers and facilitators' reflective practice, and from members' growing in confidence and familiarity. The practice of scrutiny and challenge – of expert evidence and between members – was the least well developed. Our dataset suggests there are likely to have been a number of influences on this, including: cohesion and consensus were valued explicitly and repeatedly emphasised in the Assembly; there may have been insufficient time given to it in small group discussions, methods and techniques may not have systematically fostered constructive challenge, and its importance may not have been given enough emphasis.

Responsibility for the **governance** of the Assembly – which we take to comprise oversight, advice, organisation, design and delivery (including media communication and public engagement) of the Assembly – was distributed across a spread of different groups, namely: convener, secretariat, stewarding group, design team and facilitation team. This constitutes quite a lot of ‘moving parts’ to articulate the relationships between. It was evident that the tight timescale from the inception of the Assembly and the broad remit added to the challenge of working this through to common agreement. Together, there was a shared commitment to the members, to working together and to the successful delivery of the Assembly. There was a distinction in function between these groups but the boundaries were not clearly distinguished and there was a lack of collective and complete understanding of the respective roles that each would play. Arrangements for oversight of the evidence provided to the Assembly in particular were not optimal. The lack of collective clarity was experienced at different points as more or less frustrating, affected collaboration, and placed constraints on the overall effectiveness of the governance. In practice accommodations and adaptations were made that prevented any significant fissure to emerge.

There is value in reflecting on the **role and importance of the research** itself for the Assembly. The research was independent but deliberately embedded in the process. This meant that the Assembly organisers’ commitment to continuous improvement was supported by regular feedback after each weekend from the research to the organisers and the stewarding group. This feedback was not uniformly applied but did inform changes and improvements in design and delivery, particularly in the early weekends. Unprecedented openness and access for the research, and a comprehensive mixed-methods design, enabled a unique level of granularity and robustness in the data obtained.

The external dimension of the Assembly – its wider impact and reception

There is less available evidence on the external impact of citizens’ assemblies than on the internal dimensions. This research can contribute to learning on that, drawing on its analysis of media coverage, public awareness and the perceptions of journalists and politicians as key actors mediating the relationship between the Assembly and its public.

Wider public awareness and understanding of citizens’ assemblies is important if there is to be support and legitimacy for their role in decision-making by governments and other public authorities. **Media coverage** can make an important contribution to public perceptions but citizens’ assemblies have not always received significant media attention. The analysis of written media coverage of the Assembly indicates this was variable, with monthly reporting greatest across the in-person weekend meetings and at the time of the publication of the Assembly’s report. The content was largely neutral or positive overall, focused on the process at the beginning of the Assembly and its outcomes and report at the end. But the pattern of which media covered the Assembly means that it would not have been seen by much of the Scottish population. The pause in the Assembly and the media focus

on the pandemic clearly contributed to this. The organisers increased the communications capacity available initially and took a more strategic approach which had a positive effect, particularly with local media coverage which focused on particular members from the locality.

From our survey analysis, **public awareness** of and engagement with the Assembly were low. Still, support for the use of citizens' assemblies in principle increased over the Assembly period, and over two thirds of the population surveyed after the Assembly's completion indicated willingness to participate in a future assembly. The Assembly's recommendations were supported by a majority of the participants in the population survey, which is an important finding for policy-makers taking forward this work.

The Assembly was perceived positively overall by the journalists and politicians we interviewed. Although there were some more cynical initial perceptions about the purpose of the Assembly, by the end most were more positive and concluded that it had worked much better than they had initially anticipated. The general view was that the Assembly process had been well run, that members had clearly had a positive experience, and that it could have a positive influence as a prototype for future assemblies or other deliberative processes. This indicates importantly a recognition of legitimacy of the Assembly. Concerns expressed about the Assembly centred on the breadth of the remit, the quality of deliberation, the feasibility of Assembly's recommendations and the limited engagement with the wider public, and were unclear about how the Assembly could have impact. There were doubts expressed about the **Assembly's influence**; whether and how its recommendations will be taken up by the Scottish Government or Parliament, due to the lack of any formal legislative basis for the Assembly, and a perceived uncertainty about its mandate. Questions were raised about how the Assembly's recommendations sat alongside statutory requirements and common policy processes. There does not seem to have been clear advance plans about how the Assembly's recommendations would be dealt with. It is difficult to assess at this point what the medium to long term impact of the Assembly's report will be.

There are lessons to draw from this first experience of democratic innovation in Scotland in the form of a national-level citizens' assembly. This will help clarify how future assemblies would relate to, and connect with, the decision-making processes in the existing democratic institutions of Government (central and local) and Parliament and other public governance functions such as public audit and scrutiny. This is important for the wider legitimacy of assemblies and to meet the expectation given to members that their participation would influence decisions.

Recommendations for future assemblies

The following recommendations draw from the learning taken from this specific assembly, and we hope serve as a contribution to the growing body of evidence and experience internationally in democratic innovation broadly, and the particular use of citizens' assemblies.

- **Assembly Remit:** Recognise the importance of decisions about remit for design, delivery and governance and the benefits of a clearly articulated task and specific question. Decisions on remit and the time needed for an assembly are integral and interlocking: the broader a remit, the more time is likely to be needed for the assembly. The process that is used to determine an assembly remit can itself serve to enhance its mandate and legitimacy.
- **Governance Framework:** Collectively agree roles and responsibilities in a clear and distributed governance framework that distinguishes responsibilities for oversight, advice, design and delivery. This can contribute importantly to build in checks and balances on key aspects such as evidence provision and process design.
- **Assembly Phases:** Recognise the importance of three distinct phases to assemblies: inception, delivery and impact; and the need to plan for, resource, and give sufficient time to, each phase from the beginning of the process. At the inception phase, decisions about remit, governance and research are key; this will importantly shape the design and delivery phase. The impact phase of any assembly cannot be assumed but needs to be planned for and should include considerations about where accountability will lie for impact and how and when that is provided to assembly members and the wider public.
- **Assembly Impact:** Set out a clear mandate and identify how any assembly will interact with, and influence, the decision-making of existing democratic institutions.
- **Public Engagement:** Consider how to integrate engagement with the wider public into any assembly process to help build their awareness and understanding and enhance the legitimacy of assembly outcomes.
- **Capacity Building:** Build capacity in skills and resources for this kind of participatory work, focused on deliberative principles and practices. This includes training in specifically deliberative facilitation.
- **Research:** Concurrent research should be embedded and used to inform the Assembly's design and governance. The research should be fully funded and have a duration that enables an assessment of impact.

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