

Team Scotland: New players in the Scottish Parliament

Briefing paper, May 2021



The David Hume Institute is an independent Scottish think tank which continually challenges itself and others to ensure the future is prosperous, inclusive, sustainable and fair. The Institute measures the diversity of Scotland's top team, including the Scottish Parliament.

The 2021 Scottish Parliament elections have given the country the most diverse parliament in its history. On the 6th May Kaukab Stewart and Pam Gosal became the first women of colour to be elected to parliament, with Pam Gosal also becoming the first Sikh MSP. Other historic firsts came from Pam Duncan-Glancy as the first permanent wheelchair user and Sandesh Gulhane the first male of Indian descent to be elected to Scottish Parliament.

This election also saw parties giving more consideration to accessibility for their manifestos, providing plain text, easy read and audio versions, and some parties also offering Braille, British Sign Language and Large Print versions.¹

As Scottish Parliament becomes more representative of the country's population, the David Hume Institute has analysed the diversity of the education and professional background of MSPs. This is a useful indicator of accessibility to political careers for the general population.

In 2020 we found that whilst parliament had made progress it continued to be over-represented by fee paying and elite university alumni.

Diversity of thought improves [organisation performance](#). The challenges Covid recovery brings means we need to ensure diversity across all decision makers to maximise resilience and innovation. The 2021 election brought 43 new MSPs. Nine MSPs from the last session were unseated, and 34 stood down.

Education Diversity

The speed of progress towards education diversity in the Scottish Parliament is increasing. Now 1 in 5 (20%) of MSPs attended a fee paying school, compared to 1 in 4 (24%) in the last session².

By comparison fee-paying pupils make up just 6% of the population³. Unless the rate of change increases

Fig.1. Diversity in the Scottish Parliament

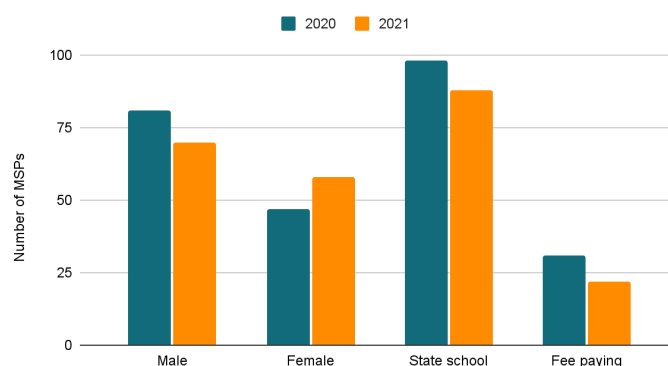
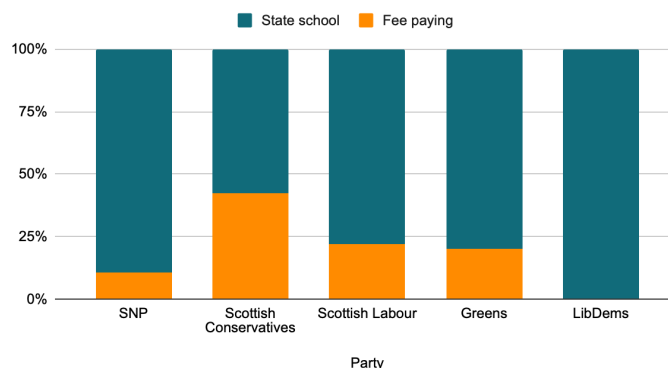


Fig.2. 2021 School education by party



¹ Disability Equality Scotland.

² Of 129 MSPs the David Hume Institute has educational data for 86%. Calculations exclude MSPs where data wasn't available.

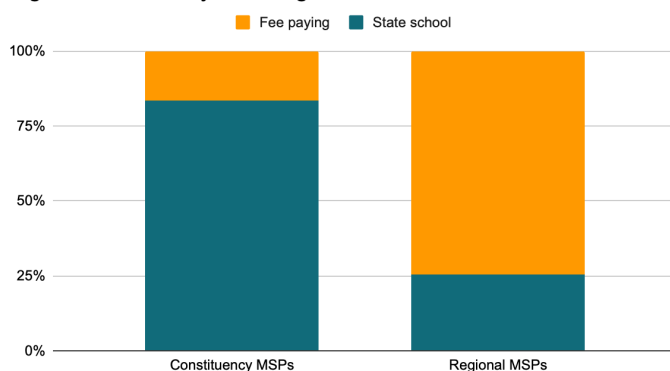
³ Of 300,954 secondary school pupils in Scotland in 2020, 17,634 attend a fee paying school. Source: Scottish Government, Summary statistics for schools in Scotland. [SCIS](#) Annual Census Data.

it will be the 2056 elections before parliament reflects the education background of the wider population.

Compared to other leaders in Scotland, 20% of MSPs attended a fee paying school compared to 21% in other leaders. 5% of MSPs are from a BAME background compared to 1% in other leaders. 45% of MSPs are female compared to 32% in other leaders.

There is a stark contrast in education backgrounds between constituency and list MSPs, with 83% of constituent MSPs attending state school compared to just 26% of list MSPs (figure 3).

Fig.3. Constituency and Regional

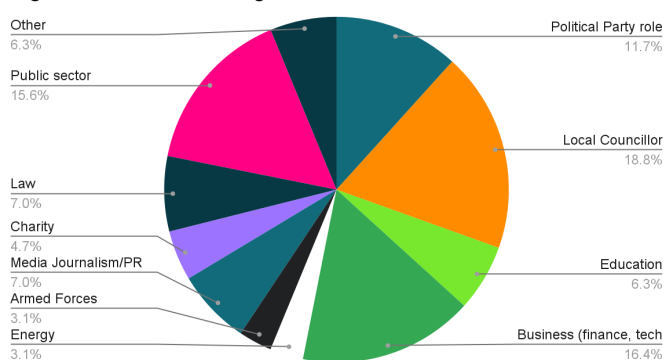


New MSPs bring a wide range of University and professional backgrounds, with previous careers in teaching, engineering, the environment and local government. There is also considerable political experience in the new intake with 16% (or 7) being former MPs, and 42% (or 18) have been local councillors.

In the wider parliament the most significant career backgrounds are in politics (including political party employees and local councillors), business (including finance, tech and IT), public sector (including health and social care, planning, police) and education. See figure 4.

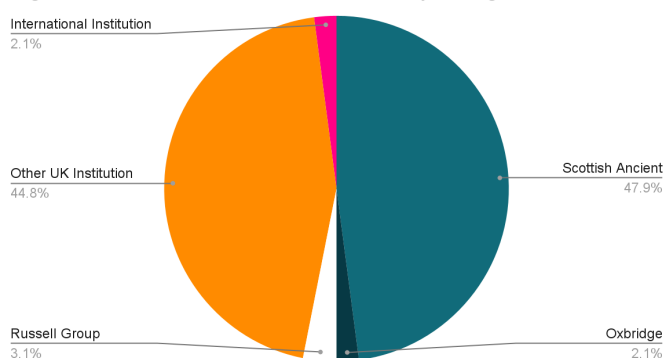
12% of all MSPs come directly from employment in political parties in roles such as special advisors, researchers or assistants to politicians.

Fig.4. Professional background of MSPs



There has been no change in the number of Oxbridge graduates in the 2021 intake (2% of total MSPs). 48% of all MSPs attended one of the Scottish Ancient Universities and of these the University of Glasgow was most attended (at 16%, followed by 9% University of Edinburgh, 6% University of Aberdeen, 2% University of St Andrews).

Fig.5. 2021 Scottish Parliament University background



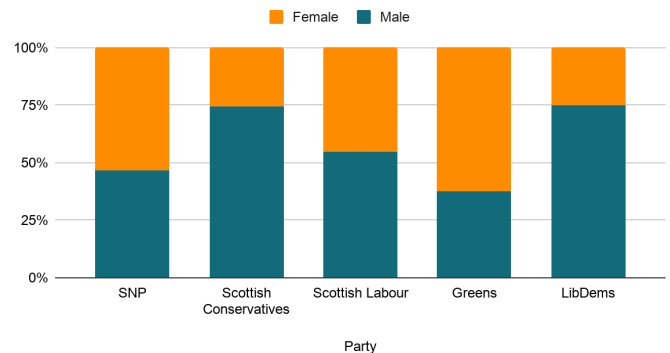
We note that there are a very small minority of those educated at fee-paying schools who come from less advantaged backgrounds and were eligible for scholarships. Similarly, people can attend state schools and be from highly advantaged social backgrounds.

Gender

The 2021 intake shows that gender equality in Scottish Parliament has gone much further than our previous analysis, with the SNP, Labour and Green Parties achieving or surpassing equal female representation across the whole Party.

Of the 43 new MSPs, 65% were female (15 male, 28 female). Across all MSPs 55% are male and 45% female, compared to 64% male and 36% female in the previous parliament.

Fig.6. 2021 Gender by party



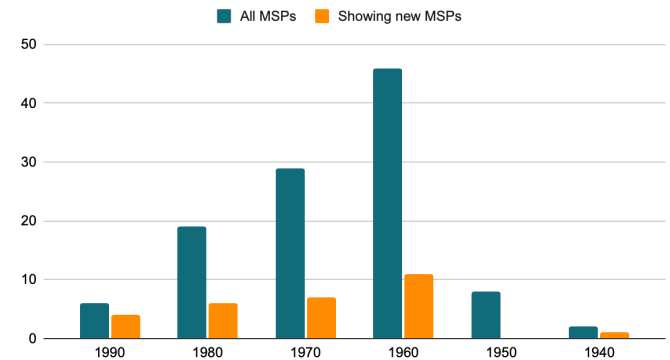
Scottish Cabinet

The 2016-2021 Scottish Cabinet were 58% female, with 83% attending state school. The new 2021 Cabinet has a 50:50 gender ratio, and 80% attended state school. Career backgrounds before politics include law, finance, armed forces, media and health.

A younger parliament

The new intake also brings more younger MSPs. 5% of all MSPs were now born in the 1990s. The overall age profile of MSPs, including the new intake, is shown in Figure 8.

Fig.7. Age demographic of Scottish Parliament



Conclusion

The degree of change in this session of the Scottish Parliament is significant. Parties worked to ensure greater diversity of candidates and this has shown in the results. Even though voter choice is the key determinant of election to the Scottish Parliament, intentional moves by political parties to increase diversity of candidates is leading to a parliament that more accurately reflects its population.

As high-profile public servants, MSPs have a key role to play in helping the public see that leaders can come from a wide range of backgrounds. This election has increased diversity in the Scottish Parliament but we should not forget that Scotland cannot afford for the pace of change in the rest of its top leaders to continue at the current rate.

More equal societies have higher productivity, and higher productivity allows more investment to create even more equal societies. Business and other sector leaders still have a long way to go to realise the benefits of greater diversity.