

ENGAGING THE NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

APRIL 2026

Diffley Partnership



IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO KNOW WHAT PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE THINKING

The new Holyrood parliament will look and feel vastly different to any we have seen in the devolved era. The combination of record numbers of MSPs standing down in 2026 and the political churn of the election will combine to create a new landscape and, with it, the need to develop entirely new working relationships with policymakers.

Yet, this change is not the only one on the horizon. With growing time constraints from ministerial, committee and constituency responsibilities, MSPs are now busier than ever, requiring flexible and concise engagement that maximises impact. And with the advent of AI and emerging data analysis techniques, there are now more ways to engage with MSPs than ever.

Diffley Partnership is committed to meaningful engagement with Scoltand's politicians. So, we are reviewing and updating our approach so we can continue to deliver high quality insights. We highlight four engagement methods, including new, innovative approaches that will provide a crucial edge in the years to come. Our approaches include:

1. Open days.
2. Debate analysis.
3. Stakeholder methods.
4. Traditional methods.

These approaches will not only deliver you robust insights on the views of MSPs, but it will also assist you in developing a birds'-eye view of the new Parliament that will shape your future engagement strategy.

Working with us, you can begin the new Parliament on the front foot. Please do reach out to discuss how we can support you.

Kind regards,

Mark Diffley, Founder and Director

Diffley Partnership



OUR OFFER (1): OPEN DAYS

CREATIVE METHODS

We are reshaping the way that we engage in-person with MSPs by leading 'open day' events, where MSPs can take part in brief research activities which require just a few minutes of time. Our team of creative researchers is highly experienced in designing these events to balance the time needs of participants with the requirement for in-depth and robust insights. Past research methods that have been successful at open days include word association exercises, positive/negative sentiment activities and sticky note walls, all of which capture immediate reactions to scenarios or existing views towards a certain topic.

JOINTLY BRANDED

These events would be jointly branded between Diffley Partnership and your organisation, combining our strong track record of research engagement and your existing relationships with policymakers through your previous work.

LONG-LASTING BENEFITS AND NETWORKS

These events would also include the time and space for networking, giving your team the ability to further their relationships with long-standing MSPs and develop a rapport with the new cohort of MSPs. This will ensure that the benefits to your organisation from the research event last well beyond the project's completion.

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OUR OFFER (2): DEBATE ANALYSIS

INNOVATIVE DATA SOURCES

Utilising transcripts from parliamentary debates and committee meetings, we can explore what has been said about issues or Bills within the Scottish Parliament. With your input into the debates and committees which are relevant to your specific research question, we can seamlessly gather all contributions and deliver an overview of the views across different MSPs and parties.

STATE-OF-THE ART ANALYTICS

Our skilled researchers perform state-of-the-art text analysis to uncover the sentiment behind MSPs' contributions. Unlike more routine sentiment analysis approaches, our techniques have the ability to capture nuances such as sarcasm and historical context in text, ensuring rigorous analysis of large amounts of text at pace. We can also compare how sentiment differs by party or topic, in chamber versus committee settings, or over time.

We can also use analytical techniques to unpick themes which emerge in debates, allowing us to extract the most frequently appearing issues and arguments across a range of contributions. Tracking this over time gives you an understanding of the evolution of parliamentary arguments and beliefs as they emerge.



STREAMLINE FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

Having these in-depth details of spoken contributions will allow you to gain a better understanding of the members who tend to engage positively and proactively with a particular issue, and those who do not, allowing you to streamline future engagement.



OUR OFFER (3): STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

PRIORITIES OF INDIVIDUAL MSPS

We can apply similar sentiment and theme analysis techniques to the contributions of individual MSPs rather than entire debates, in order to map the issues that matter most to individual MSPs. By knowing the issues that MSPs are more likely to speak about, your organisation can better understand the parliamentary offices which will be more receptive to bespoke briefings or suggested lines for debates.

PAST WORK AND EXPERIENCE OF MEMBERS

We are also able to conduct robust desk research into the past work and constituency profile of Members. Where available, we can provide details of the topics which may be seen as more important due to either past experience or local dynamics.

PROFILE OF MEMBERS

As a part of this stream, we will deliver you a “profile” for MSPs of interest, including their background before entering politics, any spokesperson roles they hold within their party, issues which may be of particular relevance in their constituency or region, issues they speak about most frequently in Parliament and the topics which they are generally positive and negative towards.

This profile allows you to unpick the Members’ individual interests from their party priorities.

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OUR OFFER (4): TRADITIONAL METHODS

1:1 INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS

Traditional engagement methods remain important and relevant, particularly during the early stages of the new parliament. These methods include 1:1 interviews with MSPs, as well as surveys of either all MSPs or specific cohorts. While traditional methods have been challenged by the emerging time pressures facing MSPs, as your organisation continues to develop a working relationship with the new cohort of Members, these could be fruitful, particularly when done after other types of engagement, such as an Open Day.

We will work with you to design survey questionnaires or interview discussion guides, ensuring that fieldwork covers all relevant questions and topics. Furthermore, we would work with you to design a list of those that would be most useful to hear from, including party or MSP staff, ensuring incisive insights.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility lies at the heart of our approach to surveys and interviews; surveys would be initially scripted online, with the option to take part over the phone if easier for the MSP. Interviews can take place in a flexible format - we can attend a Member's office or the interview can be completed remotely, via video call or telephone, allowing us to meet MSPs where they are and encourage participation.

HARNESSING AI TOOLS

We have developed an innovative method for interview data collection. Our approach harnesses artificial intelligence to conduct short, online interviews - enabling us to engage with participants quickly and efficiently. It also allows participants to conduct interviews at a time and place of their choosing, without prior planning or scheduling.



OUR EXPERIENCE

HOUSING CHARITY - VIEWS ON HOMELESSNESS

We conducted research on behalf of a housing charity, investigating views of homelessness using 1:1 interviews with MSPs, MSP staff and party staff. Meeting with party staff, we explored the party manifesto formation process, delivering the organisation with key insights into how they could better influence the policy commitments of each major party.

Our research empowered the organisation to more efficiently input into party manifesto formation and helped them to map the Members that may be more receptive to future influence.

TRADE ASSOCIATION - VIEWS TOWARDS THE SECTOR

We conducted research for a major Scottish trade organistion, gauging MSP views towards their sector. We conducted a series of in-person and online 1:1 interviews with Members of Scottish Parliament, the transcripts of which were analysed thematically and combined with quantitative findings from a national survey.

We also conducted sentiment analysis of interview transcripts, enabling us to report on the MSPs whose views were the most strongly positive or negative towards the sector in general.

HEALTH RESEARCH CHARITY - VIEWS TOWARDS HEALTH

We conducted a survey of MSPs on behalf of a health research charity. Our research involved gauging the views of MSPs towards the charity itself, allowing the organisation to have an understanding of their existing policy influence. It also gathered views of the MSPs towards the specific policy asks of the charity.

The survey achieved a high response rate from sitting MSPs, demonstrating our ability to engage with a large cohort of elected officials.

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BROUGHT TO YOU BY INDUSTRY LEADERS



MARK DIFFLEY
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR

Mark founded Diffley Partnership in 2017 and has over 25 years of experience in delivering research and insights to clients across the public, private and third sectors in Scotland and further afield. Clients include Scottish and UK governments, other national public bodies, blue-chip businesses and major national and international charities. Mark also provides regular commentary and analysis on Scottish politics and the 2026 Holyrood election, including recently for MSPs and media outlets such as BBC, ITV, STV, the Scotsman, the Herald and Holyrood Magazine.



SCOTT EDGAR
SENIOR RESEARCH MANAGER

Scott is an experienced research professional with a strong track record of delivering quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research for public sector clients across the UK. His work at the Electoral Commission, including evaluation of voter identification pilots, gave him a strong working knowledge of the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, electoral administration and the democratic process. At Diffley Partnership, Scott manages major studies including the Understanding Scotland and Understanding Business trackers. He also provides regular commentary on Scottish politics through our Holyrood blog and has appeared on panels for Charlotte Street Partners, the David Hume Institute and Independent Age.



HALEY BARNES
SENIOR RESEARCHER

Since joining Diffley Partnership in 2022, Haley has led a host of projects, across quantitative and qualitative methodologies. She serves as lead analyst on our regular Understanding Scotland survey, and has previously managed a series of interviews with MSPs, office staff and party staff on views of homelessness and manifesto production. Previously, Haley completed an MSc in Social Research (Quantitative Methods) from the University of Edinburgh with distinction, emphasising research necessities, coupled with advanced quantitative techniques, such as sentiment analysis and topic models. She prides herself on presenting findings in unique and compelling ways, including but not limited to words, visuals, and once – a game of Jenga.



WILL SCHEFFLER
RESEARCHER

Will joined Diffley Partnership after several years working across the Scottish and UK parliaments and US election campaigns. Will holds an MSc (with distinction) in Applied Social Data Science from the London School of Economics and has strong skills in using advanced analytics and machine learning to answer complex research questions. At Diffley Partnership, he has applied these techniques through sentiment analysis of interview transcripts and clustering to segment survey populations. Will also played a central role in developing Diffley Partnership's seat projection modelling for the 2026 Holyrood election, the findings of which have been covered by outlets such as STV, the Scotsman, the Herald, the Daily Mail and Holyrood Magazine.

Enquiries

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Thank you.

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