



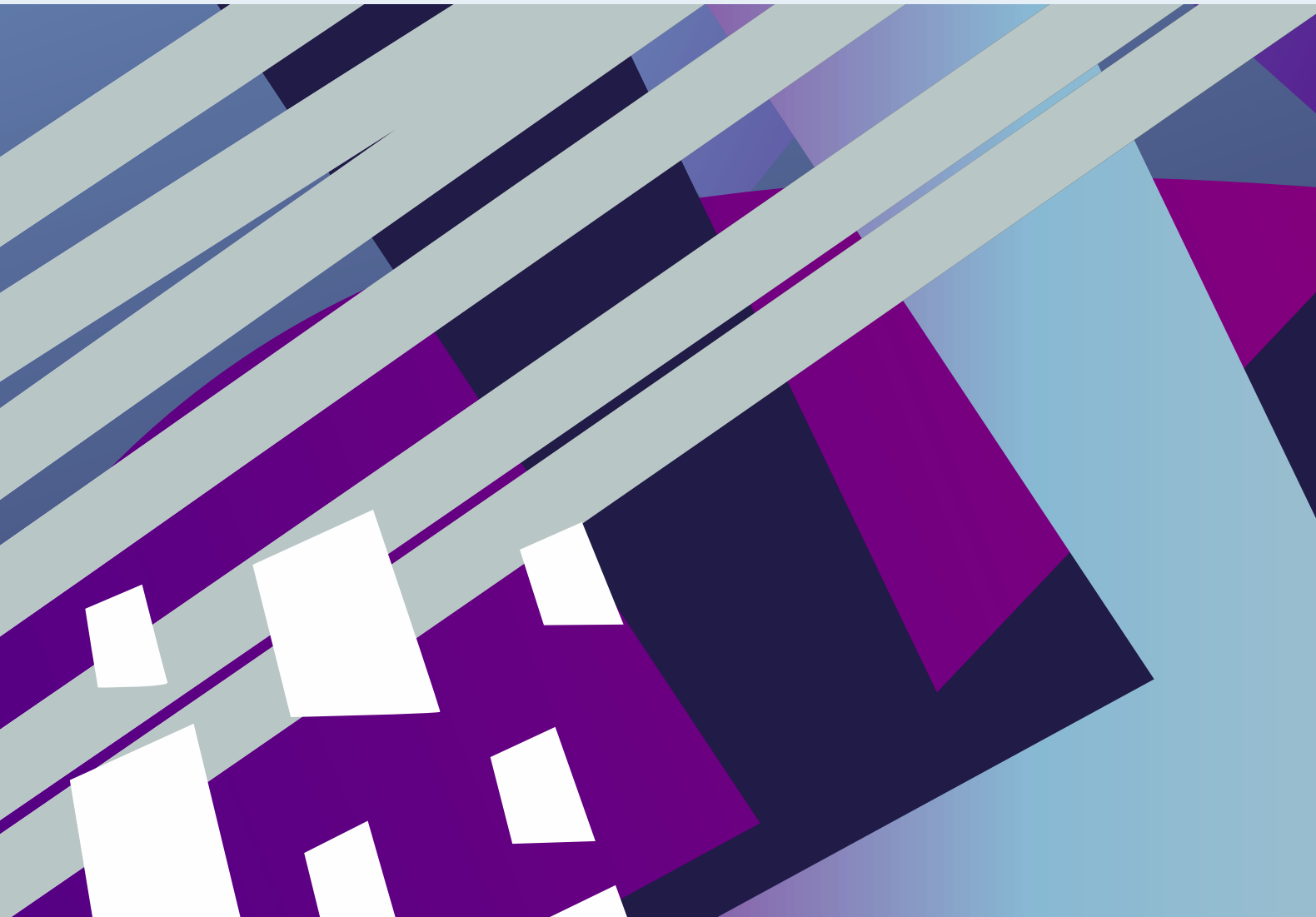
The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



Scotland's Futures Forum
Fòram Alba air Thoiseach

Finding solutions to tomorrow's challenges

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 | 23





Introduction



As the Scottish Parliament's think-tank, Scotland's Futures Forum works across the political parties and beyond to stimulate debate on our long-term future.

We create space for MSPs and others to step back from day-to-day politics and explore our future. In a world of constant change, we provide room to reflect on the challenges facing Scotland and how we can respond together.

Our work centres on events within and outwith the Parliament, bringing together diverse groups of people to explore the issues, challenge each other's thinking and consider the implications for the Scottish Parliament.

In 2022–23, we held our first in-person events after the Covid-19 pandemic, developing a programme to support and complement the work of the Parliament.

Our work covered the challenges to democracy from technological innovation, a contribution to the national discussion on education, and a joint event with the Finance and Public Administration Committee on the subject of tax.

For further information on our work:

- visit our website
www.scotlandfutureforum.org
- follow us on X (formerly Twitter)
[@ScotFutures](https://twitter.com/ScotFutures)
- get in contact
ScotlandsFuturesForum@parliament.scot

Democracy 2045

As a body based in the Scottish Parliament, the future for democracy remains a key concern for the Futures Forum.

As the impacts of climate change spread over the coming decades, bringing extreme weather events and an unpredictable living environment, technological innovation will create new tools with amazing capabilities.

At the same time, the role of citizens within democracies will continue to change as participative democracy develops.

These complex developments will bring ethical, legal and policy challenges for society, and democracy will have to evolve to respond.

The Futures Forum has explored these issues in a series of events and research reports on the themes of environment, technology and participation. In 2022–23, we completed a piece of work on our environment and supported discussion on emerging technologies.

Environment: Code Red for Parliaments

In July 2022, we published a report with SPICe, the Parliament's information centre, on how Parliaments can respond to the climate and ecological emergencies.

The report [COP26: Code Red for Parliaments](#) outlined a pathway for parliaments to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies.

This drew together learning from the Scottish Parliament events during COP26 in Glasgow, and focused on what democratic institutions can do in the face of the existential challenges ahead of us.

Noting that the role of a Parliament remains to represent the people of a country and to hold the Government to account, the report recommended that, in tackling climate change, Parliaments should fulfil these key functions by

- Analysing what is happening with trustworthy and reliable information
- Scrutinising effectively by making climate change central to all that they do
- Sharing experiences and lessons with each other, as a global problem needs global solutions.

Technology: Disinformation and Data

As lead partners for the Scottish Parliament's the Festival of Politics, we supported discussions on the impact of new technology on democratic societies.

Working with the Cross-Party Group on Tibet, we brought together an international expert panel to explore the [impact of disinformation on our lives](#). Featuring journalists and academics, the event covered the war in Ukraine, the role of big tech companies, and the interaction between politicians and journalists.

We also hosted a discussion on [the growing importance of data in democracies](#). Bringing together legal, technical and academic experts, the debate reflected on technological innovation and its impact on us as individuals, as well as the challenges in regulating what is a global industry.

Artificial Intelligence in Scotland

Informed by our work on technology and democracy, the Futures Forum focused on the growth of artificial intelligence in Scotland and its potential impact on our parliament.

With support from the Scottish Graduate School for Social Science, we hosted a PhD intern, Robbie Scarff, to look at how AI might change our world.

Robbie produced an overview of [how Parliaments have responded to the development of AI](#) across the globe.

Then, informed by [a seminar in partnership with the Public Audit Committee](#), Robbie produced [a toolkit for scrutinising the use of AI](#).

Featuring seven key questions to ask about the use of AI, the toolkit is designed to equip everyone with the means of challenging the use of a complex and fast-moving technology. It covers key issues to consider, from the ethical and legal challenges to questions of transparency, scientific validity and redress for harm.

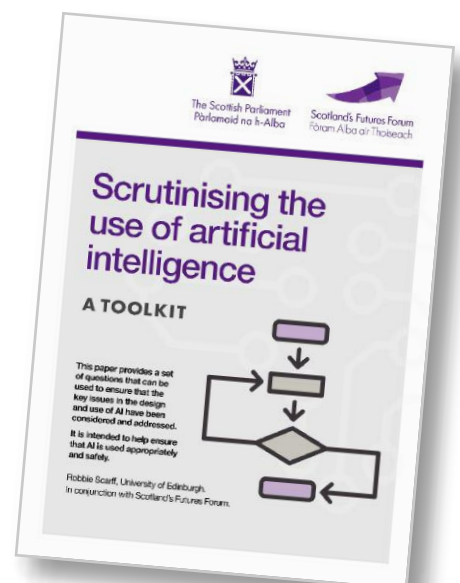
It also features as part of the [Scottish AI Playbook](#) run by the Scottish AI Alliance.

“ I thought that [the toolkit] was very valuable, as it got me thinking and flagged up issues that the Government and the public sector should think about regarding how to operate AI and use it effectively. ”

Richard Lochhead MSP
(Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade), **1 June 2023**



“Michelle Thomson and others mentioned Scotland Futures Forum's recently published Toolkit.”



Education Futures

With our partners in the Goodison Group in Scotland, we continued our work to explore the future for education and learning in Scotland.

This brought together MSPs, teachers and leading experts from different parts of the Scottish education system to consider the way ahead following the Covid-19 pandemic. In a time of reform, where next for Scotland's education?

Following forum discussions in June and November 2022, we produced **a contribution to the National Discussion on Education**.

Our report provided an updated scenario for our future and reflected on ways of overcoming the barriers to change.

In particular, the contribution focused on how the purpose of education and schooling could be clarified and how to ensure the effective participation of children and young people.

“
Incredibly thought provoking, good to hear the views of the panel, everyone putting our young people at the centre.”

Kaukab Stewart MSP,
7 June 2022.



Scotland 2030 Education Report

Taxation in Scotland Conference

Following a request from the Finance and Public Administration Committee, in November 2022 we hosted a conference on taxation in Scotland now and in the future.

Working with partners in the Royal Society of Edinburgh, we brought experts from across the United Kingdom to reflect on the situation in the different devolved nations before focusing on the opportunities and challenges for Scotland.

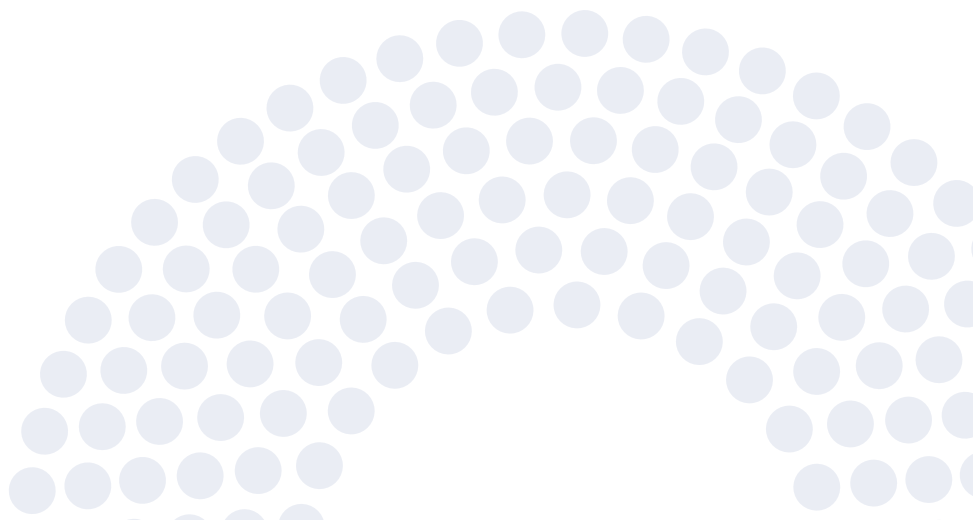
The event brought together the Finance Committee members and conveners from the Local Government and Economy committees in an informal setting to explore the implications for Scotland in general and the Scottish Parliament in particular. The event was also attended by the Welsh Senedd Finance Committee chair.

Participants explored what worked well in Scotland and what we could and should do next, building on the positives to explore the different policy options and, in particular, review and improve local taxation.

Both the event and the Futures Forum report following it informed the Committee's work programme and brought a response from the Scottish Government.

“
I welcome publication of the report and the contribution it makes to the debate on taxation in Scotland. It is clear that the event provided an opportunity for participants to consider a wide range of important issues from different perspectives.”

John Swinney MSP
(Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery), 15 February 2023.



Supporting Parliament

As a body wholly owned by the Scottish Parliament, the Futures Forum also works to support the Parliament's functions and offices.

As well as the Festival of Politics collaboration, in which the Futures Forum was a key partner in planning and delivering events, our staff contributed to the Parliament's work on its digital strategy, the visitor experience, and climate change and net zero scrutiny.

Staff also provided significant support for the Parliament's response to the death of Her Majesty the Queen in September 2022.

Who is involved?

The work of the Futures Forum is guided by a Board of Directors drawn from within and outwith Parliament. The following directors served during 2022–23:

- > **Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP** (Presiding Officer and Chair of the Board)
- > **Maggie Chapman MSP**
- > **Kirsten Hogg** (appointed 16 May 2022)
- > **Diarmaid Lawlor**
- > **Louise Macdonald OBE** (resigned 8 April 2022)
- > **Stuart McMillan MSP**
- > **Sarah Munro**
- > **Esther Robertson**
- > **Alex Rowley MSP**
- > **Brian Whittle MSP**

Susan Duffy, Group Head of Engagement and Communications in the Scottish Parliament, served as Company Secretary.

Rob Littlejohn, the Head of Business, and Audrey Gray, who provides administrative and events support, were employed on secondment from the Scottish Parliamentary Service.