

Voting and the Scottish Parliament

This document tells you how to register to vote, what is involved, and how your vote will count.

Did you know that...?

Elections to the Scottish Parliament will be held on 5 May 2011.

A UK-wide referendum on the voting system for the UK Parliament is also proposed for 5 May 2011.

A referendum is a vote where people are asked to accept or reject a proposal or suggestion.

Voting and the Scottish Parliament

Why vote?

When you vote, you are voting for the people you want to represent your area in the Scottish Parliament – your Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs).

The Scottish Parliament is made up of 129 elected MSPs.

At a Scottish Parliament election each voter has two votes – one for their constituency and one for their region.

Each voter has a chance to influence who will run Scotland, as the largest party (or coalition of parties) after the election will have the opportunity to form the Scottish Government.

What does the Scottish Parliament do?

The Scottish Parliament can pass laws affecting Scotland on a wide range of domestic issues known as devolved matters. These include health, education, justice and housing. It also scrutinises the work of the Scottish Government and holds it to account.

What does the Scottish Government do?

The Scottish Government is responsible for formulating and implementing policy on devolved matters. It is answerable to the Scottish Parliament for its decisions.

Who represents me at the Scottish Parliament?

Each person in Scotland is represented by one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs. At a Scottish Parliament election each voter has two votes – one for their constituency and one for their region.

Registering to vote

Can I vote? Who can vote?

Anyone who is on the register of local government electors can vote. To be included on this register and able to vote you must be:

- aged 18 or over on the day of the election
- a UK, Commonwealth or European Union citizen
- resident at an address in Scotland

I am serving overseas. Can I vote?

Yes. People who are normally resident at an address in Scotland but who are serving overseas with the British armed forces can also be included on the electoral register.

I do not have a fixed address at the moment. Can I still vote?

Yes. People who do not have a fixed address can register to vote by using a declaration of local intention.

I will be away from home on the day of the election. Can I still vote?

Yes. If you will be away from home on election day, you can arrange to vote by post or by proxy. Your local electoral registration office will be able to advise you how to do this.

How do I register to vote?

You need to be on the electoral register to vote in a UK election or referendum. You can find your local electoral registration office by using the postcode search on the

About my vote website (www.aboutmyvote.co.uk) or by contacting your local council.

Who does what?

Who is responsible for Scottish Parliament elections?

Elections to the Scottish Parliament are a reserved matter and, as such, policy and legislation governing these elections are matters for the UK Government and UK Parliament. Within the UK Government, the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for the conduct and funding of parliamentary elections in Scotland.

What is the Electoral Commission?

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Its role includes registering political

parties and setting standards for the conduct of elections. The Electoral Commission is also responsible for making sure people understand why it is important to register to vote and know how to vote. You can find more information on its website (www.electoralcommission.org.uk) or telephone 0131 225 0200.

What is the role of my local council?

Local authorities (councils) are responsible for running elections in their area. Part of this process involves creating a list of all eligible voters who have registered to vote within each local authority. This list is called the Register of Electors or Electoral Register but it is also referred to as the Voters Roll.

By law, polling places have to be accessible for people with disabilities. Contact your local electoral registration office for more details.

My vote and the Scottish Parliament

How do I vote?

In the UK, there are three different ways you can vote. How you vote is up to you, and you can choose the method that is most convenient for you.

You can vote:

- at a polling place in person on election day
- by post
- by proxy – this is when someone votes on your behalf

Where and when do I vote?

If you want to vote by post or by proxy, you must arrange this in advance by contacting your local electoral registration office.

If you are registered and are going to vote in person, you will receive a polling card with the address of your polling place and its opening times. Polling places will be open on 5 May 2011 from 7am to 10pm.

What do I do at the polling place?

At the polling place, you will be directed to a desk, where a polling clerk will ask for your name and address or for your polling card. You will then be given the ballot papers you should use for voting.

If you ask them, the polling clerks will explain how to fill in the different ballot papers. There will also be information on the noticeboards. It is up to you, however, to choose who you vote for.

Why do I have two votes in the Scottish Parliament elections?

You have two votes because you are represented by both a constituency MSP and regional MSPs.

Your constituency vote

One of the votes in a Scottish Parliament election is for you to choose from the candidates standing in your constituency. The candidate who gains the largest number of votes will win the constituency seat. There are 73 constituency seats in total.

Your regional vote

The other vote is for a political party, or for a candidate standing as an individual, within a larger electoral area called a Scottish Parliament region. There are eight Scottish Parliament regions, each with seven seats in the Parliament. In each region, parties are allocated seats

depending on the number of votes they receive in this regional ballot, and taking into account the number of constituency seats they win in the region. The members chosen to fill these additional 56 seats are known as regional MSPs.

Both your votes in a Scottish Parliament election count – both help to determine who will become an MSP.

The Scottish Parliament will be dissolved about a month before the election, and MSPs cease to be Members of the Scottish Parliament at dissolution. They may continue with casework that they began before dissolution, but they may not accept new constituency casework at this time. Instead, if they are approached by members of the public seeking help during dissolution, they may choose to deal with the enquiry in their role as a candidate or prospective candidate.

The 2011 referendum

Will there be a referendum on the same day as the Scottish Parliament election?

Yes. In 2011, you will also be asked to vote in a referendum on proposals to change the voting system for the UK Parliament.

What is a referendum and how does that work?

A referendum is a vote on a specific question. The referendum on 5 May is on proposals to change the voting system for the House of Commons in the UK Parliament. You should indicate whether you agree or disagree with the question by putting an X in the box which states your view.

Finding out more

Where can I find more information about Scottish Parliament elections and voting?

The About my vote website, run by the Electoral Commission, has information about how to register to vote, how to vote, and what you can vote for. Look at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk or telephone 020 7271 0500.

The Electoral Commission will be sending information on the election and the referendum to all households in Scotland in spring 2011. This will include guidance on how to fill in the ballot papers.

More information about how MSPs are elected is available on the Scottish Parliament website or by contacting Public Information, whose details are at the end of this leaflet.

How do I find out who is standing for election?

There is no official source of information on all candidates, but details will be available in the media and you could visit party websites, candidate websites or write to the party or candidate. Once nominations have closed, the names of the candidates for your area will be available from your local council.

How can I find out who my MSPs are after the election?

Once the results of the election have been confirmed, you will be able to find details of the MSPs elected by looking at the Scottish Parliament website or by contacting Public Information (full details are at the end of this leaflet). You will be able to find out the names of the eight MSPs who represent you by texting your postcode to 07786 209888.

For more information on the Scottish Parliament, its membership, business and procedures, **please contact us.**

Address Public Information
 The Scottish Parliament
 Edinburgh
 EH99 1SP

Telephone 0800 092 7500
 0131 348 5000

Fòn 0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

Textphone users can contact us on 0800 092 7100. We also welcome calls using the Text Relay service.

Text 07786 209888

Email sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

Website www.scottish.parliament.uk

Contact us if you need this information in another format such as Braille, large print or audio or in another language.

Please note that the Scottish Parliament is not responsible for the content of external websites.