



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Room CG.07
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12 June 2024

Dear Presiding Officer,

Gender Sensitive Audit – Recommendations referred to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thank you for your letter last month requesting an update on the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's consideration of the Gender Sensitive Audit published in March 2023.

As a Committee we recognise the importance of having a 'gender sensitive parliament' where equality exists between men and women in relation to both representation and participation in the Parliament. The Committee has given detailed consideration to the Audit report recommendations referred to us at several meetings since its publication.

As you are aware, in December 2023, the Parliament agreed to the Committee's recommendation for a permanent proxy voting system to be introduced. This delivered one of the Audit's key recommendations for proxy voting. Under the proxy voting system parental leave is one of the circumstances in which a Member can apply to designate another Member as their proxy to vote. We were keen to ensure the eligibility criteria for proxy voting had a more permanent status than had operated in the pilot scheme. As a result the eligibility criteria is included in the relevant Standing Order rules. We believe as a Committee that proxy voting should be recognised as an important component of ensuring a Parliament is inclusive and accessible.

To inform our consideration of other audit report recommendations, as referenced in your letter, we held a helpful evidence session with Susan Duffy, the parliamentary official who led on the Audit and from Professor Sarah Childs and Meryl Kenny who were expert advisers on the Board overseeing the Audit. As witnesses they shared with us the potential limitations of gendered committees for ensuring robust and rigorous scrutiny and the vulnerability in a system built largely on informal agreements on gender representation on parliamentary bodies and committees.

We have reflected on their evidence in our deliberations and have sought to explore how the Audit recommendations including those relating to committee membership quotas and gender balance in other parliamentary roles would operate in practice. We commissioned SPICe to conduct some modelling work of how the different quota options for committee membership would look based on the current membership of the Parliament. I attach a copy of this modelling for your reference. This modelling provides helpful insights into some of the potential challenges for political parties and individual members in delivering these changes.

We have been grappling with these issues in the context of how best to effect change to the Parliament's practices and culture when considering potential changes to Standing Orders. We are keen to explore these issues with you further. We would like to request an opportunity for you and relevant colleagues to meet with the Committee to discuss in an informal setting these points further so we can consider next steps for delivery of a gender sensitive parliament.

If you are content to meet with the Committee I will request Clerks liaise with your office to coordinate arrangements for a meeting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Whitfield', written in a cursive style.

Martin Whitfield MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee