To Jenni Minto MSP, Convenor of Standards Procedures and Appointments Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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Parliamentary Business

Thank you for your invitation to provide written evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the temporary changes to parliamentary business. PCS is the largest trade union in the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body representing hundreds of staff. We have consulted our members on the impact of the temporary changes and provide a response below under the components in the package of changes to parliamentary rules and the parliamentary week.

Prior to being asked to provide evidence concerns over these changes were raised within the Trade Union Partnership group. There had been no prior consultation with the recognised trade unions on the impact to staff of the temporary changes. As you will be aware, working hours are contractual and in March 2026 the standard working week was reduced to 35 hours. For many, this reduction has been diminished or completely eradicated by the changes to parliamentary business and specifically the increased sitting times.

Staff in the most impacted areas—Chamber Office; Committee Office; Official Report; Parliamentary Business—are routinely starting earlier and finishing later to deliver an increased workload. It is most acutely felt by those with caring responsibilities. 50% of respondents have children and/or elderly relatives who are also adversely impacted by the changes to parliamentary business.

Had the trade unions been engaged at an earlier stage, concerns regarding caring responsibilities, workload pressures, resource implications and compatibility with the 35-hour working week could have been identified and addressed before implementation.

1. **Two, not one, First Minister's Questions a week: 30 minutes on a Tuesday for backbenchers and 30 minutes on a Thursday from Party Leaders**

   Almost 60% of PCS members surveyed said this would have an impact on their role and responsibilities. The recurring theme is that this will have a significant impact on workload giving rise to earlier starts and later finishes. Examples include:

   The Public Information team manage the bookings for FMQs. The introduction of a second session requires a significant increase in the workload in managing both the ticket and subsequent security arrangements. Previously 1 FMQs required 2 grade 3s and 3/4 grade 2s to manage over a collective period of approximately 1.5 - 2 hours. In addition there are administrative tasks which are done in preparation for FMQs which require a grade 3 for 1-2 hours, and a grade 2 for 1-2 hours.

   It also changes rules governing ticketing on a Tuesday which requires consideration and will likely lead to additional work to balance the needs of business and security. This has significant resource implications and a need to increasing staffing. Doubling the FMQ sessions could mean doubling the work of the team. This will also include double the number of briefings for BSL interpreters, double the cost of this provision and there are consequential implications for the staff providing technical support.

With two FMQs, Visitor Services has less time to run other activities and provide assistance on the booking processes.

FMQs are more resource intensive for the Official Report, as it often takes more time to report unscripted speeches due to the need to track down names, quotes, news stories and so on, with the consequence that reporters are under more pressure to meet publication deadlines. Also, on Tuesdays, the addition of an extra FMQs appears to always mean an extension to business rather than the afternoon's debate being curtailed, and an extra 30 minutes equates to 6 OR staff hours. The consequence is that both reporters and sub-editors end up having longer days in the office, working into the evening and, in the case of the duty editor, not finishing work until after 8pm.

The extra session for FMQs is in addition to all the additional extra parliamentary business that the changes have brought. The capacity of many teams is insufficient to cope, and a growing backlog that puts pressure on staff.

Our members report the overall effect of the temporary changes has been business running later. It makes Tuesday a more intense and demanding day. As staff need to work until or beyond the end of business, this means working later. Many don't normally have the option to start later due to already committed business so the overall effect is longer hours when the working week has just reduced.

2. **Time taken for interventions will be added, to protect the time of speakers who most engage**
   Labour and Reform will alternate each week in leading off on questions in First Minister's Questions, debates and statements
   Any Member outside the UK when a vote is being taken must have the PO's prior approval before they can vote

   Over half of PCS survey respondents indicated this is having implications to their role and responsibilities. Our members reported that the adding of intervention time has led to longer speeches and could be indulging those who simply like to hear themselves speak. The additional time for interventions has been leading to delays to decision time. There has also been an impact on the Presiding Officer's ability to select amendments in a timely fashion, an increase in staff workload and longer working hours.

   These changes have had an impact on security workload, particularly during Chamber sittings. There has also been increased movement of Members and visitors around the Chamber, requiring extra attention to access control and security arrangements to ensure everything runs smoothly.

3. **Chamber Business will run from 2pm to 5.30pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to provide more time for scrutiny in the Chamber**
   Chamber Business will run from 1.30pm to 5pm on Thursdays to accommodate more time for committee business in the morning

   70% of PCS respondents said this change is having significant implications for their role and workload. In the context of the working week having been reduced for all staff, the working day, and the amount of work staff have to deal with, has risen. The chamber days often do not finish on time and are now running much later than they used to. For example, members business slot

is due to start at 5pm on a Thursday but it regularly starts quite a bit later and goes on beyond the allotted 45 minutes. This means staff arrive home much later than before and report detriment to their work-life balance and caring commitments. Their work duties earlier in the day mean they cannot come in later to allow for having to stay late.

These changes have meant spending longer on logging committees and longer on reporting. In short there are fewer hours but more business to report. Staff have tried to change the way they do some things but struggle to report all parliamentary business before the next business week begins. They take pride in doing a good job but it is difficult to sustain. PCS members once took pride in working for a a family-friendly Parliament but that is no longer their reality.

For staff supporting proceedings, such as clerking, official report and broadcasting, this change frequently means remaining in the building until at least 7.00 pm or 8.00 pm, often several times each week. A particular concern is the increasing frequency with which members' business debates now extend beyond their scheduled finish time. While some flexibility has always existed, it appears that debates are being routinely extended to accommodate additional speeches, interventions and overruns in a way that was not common during previous sessions. The cumulative effect is a further extension of the working day for staff and greater uncertainty about when business will conclude.

Main business is already running later and decision time is taking longer because there are more votes due to the split between the parties, this means that there is more business to report and the whole team also has to work later, finishing on average between 90 minutes and two hours after the debate has concluded. -. Even given the flexible working arrangements in place, the uncertainty on finishing times puts pressure on caring arrangements and means that the end of the day is incredibly stressful.

With a 5pm decision time, members' business could conceivably be reported the same day, depending on the length of decision time, but that's unlikely with a 5:30pm decision time. The extra half hour a day represents several hours' worth of extra work each week particularly for the official report team. Our members in official report have estimated that the extension of the business finishing times equates to an extra six hours of work a week with no additional staffing resources. That diverts resources away from reporting committees, which in turn means that committees will get their reports later. A secondary but important issue is the number of parties lodging amendments this session, there can often be seven questions as the result of a debate, so decision time is much longer than it was previously, which further pushes back the end of members' business.

Visitor services provide an event registration service in the evening and typically remain on site when chamber business is sitting. This does not mean they have to remain, but they will need to engage with other parliamentary offices to continue to deliver services in their absence. Rescheduling the team to work later on a regular basis will cause issues for other services such as committee witness support with staff diverted to address the gap in resourcing.

In essence, the changes to sitting times were agreed in Parliament without any regard to how it will be resourced, the contractual working hours of staff, the impact to their work/life balance and caring responsibilities. The SPCB staff are proud to work at the Parliament and have exercised a huge amount of commitment and flexibility to ensure the smooth running of business. There is a limit to their good will and a risk of burnout bringing significant health risks.

4. **Questions to the First Minister will no longer be published in advance.**
   There will be 18 general questions a week, 10 more than previously.
   Members have to identify relevant procedure when making points of order.

   Two thirds of PCS respondents said these changes will have an impact on their role and responsibilities. The increase in the number of general questions is one of the reasons why the chamber is sitting for longer and having the negative implications outlined in previous sections above.

   Additional general questions will inevitably increase the workload. General questions are processed along with the portfolio questions, to a tight timescale, so it is now 18 general questions and 20 portfolios, to which a further 8 questions have been added to have in reserve. This is a significant increase, particularly if members submit them near the deadline.

   PCS members report that it is generally helpful to have questions to the FM published in advance. More questions and less advance information may lead to changes in visitor and MSP movements and require staff to remain alert and flexible. In terms of BSL briefings that are drafted for the interpreters, the added questions and lack of no pre-picked questions makes it very difficult to know what to cover in the briefing and take longer to do so they cover all topics. Some are unnecessary but they do not know that beforehand, it is also a lot more pressure for the interpreters and could present accessibility issues.

   The points of order aspect appears to have cut down the number of spurious points of order that get in the way of other business.

5. **Events and cross-party groups will be permitted during Members' debates to prevent delays to visitors**

   This is potentially a beneficial change as previously visitors would be held in the main hall resulting in a significant swell of people. This could include 450 invited event guests, cross-party groups, planned meetings and general visitors that is neither pragmatic nor ideal. It would also often result in cancelled events which created a great deal of tension in the main hall with disappointed visitors. Allowing events to begin while chamber business progresses ensures that events can continue to operate and should make the public spaces in general much safer.

   However, having events running at the same time as business means a wider variety of visitor in the main hall which increases pressure on services and stretches security staffing resources. As more events and cross-party group meetings may take place during members' debates, security staff may need to carry out additional visitor screening, access checks and provide support to manage visitor movements, ensuring that security is maintained and there are no disruptions to Chamber proceedings. Unless more staff are recruited this will be an issue.

   There are fears that it may be more likely that those presiding over business in the chamber will not feel the need to stop on time, leading to more business overall.

It is noted the Committee is undertaking scrutiny of these reforms with a view to reporting to Parliament on whether changes should be extended beyond their current deadline of 31 January 2027. As you can see from this response there are significant issues. The cumulative effect is an extension of the working

day for staff and greater uncertainty about when business will conclude. More fundamentally, PCS is concerned about the way these changes were introduced.

The changes have clear implications for staff working conditions, hours of work and work-life balance, yet they were progressed without the consultation and engagement that PCS members would reasonably expect. In particular, it is concerning that the established Partnership arrangements with PCS do not appear to have been followed, despite commitments to consult on matters affecting staff employment and wellbeing. This risks undermining confidence in the collective bargaining process and sets a damaging precedent for future changes to Parliamentary business.

The absence of consultation may explain why insufficient consideration appears to have been given to the practical consequences for staff. Had trade unions been engaged at an earlier stage, concerns regarding caring responsibilities, workload pressures, resource implications and compatibility with the 35-hour working week could have been identified and addressed before implementation. PCS will continue to raise our members issues through our established Partnership arrangements but it would be prudent for the Committee to note that Parliamentary business changes that have staffing implications must be subject to consultation with the recognised trade unions and should not override employees contractual arrangements and statutory employment rights.

PCS would consider the temporary changes to be just that and before any permanent changes are considered a period of full consultation must take place.

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