Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers: Session 5

Presiding Officer: roles and responsibilities

The Presiding Officer is elected by other Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) within 14 days following an election and normally continues to serve in post throughout the session, during dissolution and until the election of the next Presiding Officer in a new session. The Parliament must elect the Presiding Officer before it conducts any other proceedings, with the exception of MSPs taking the oath or affirmation.

The current Presiding Officer is Ken Macintosh MSP, who was elected on 12 May 2016. He remains politically impartial in everything he does.


Parliamentary Business

The Presiding Officer chairs plenary sessions of Parliament in the Debating Chamber. He is in charge of ensuring that the business of the Parliament is conducted effectively, on time, fairly, within the rules and in an orderly manner.

He is also responsible for other aspects of parliamentary business:

- Selecting which amendments to motions will be taken in the Chamber.
- Selecting questions for Topical Question Time and First Minister’s Question Time and deciding whether to allow supplementary questions.
- Indicating whether he thinks a Bill is within the legislative competence of the Parliament.
- Deciding whether a financial resolution is required for a Bill.
- Selecting the amendments which are to be taken in the Chamber at Stage 3 of a Bill.

In the event of a tied vote in the Chamber, he exercises a casting vote.
Parliamentary Bureau

The Presiding Officer chairs meetings of the Parliamentary Bureau. As well as the Presiding Officer, the Parliamentary Bureau consists of representatives of each political party or group in the Parliament which has five or more members. The representatives are nominated by the leader of each party. The main functions of the Parliamentary Bureau are:

- To propose the business programme.
- To propose alterations to the Daily Business List in the Business Bulletin if there should be changes in the advance programme.
- To propose the establishment, remit, membership and duration of any committee or sub-committee.
- To determine any question regarding the competence of a committee to deal with a matter, and, if two or more committees are competent to deal with a matter, to determine which of those committees is to be the lead committee responsible for that matter.


Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

The Presiding Officer chairs meetings of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB). As well as the Presiding Officer, the SPCB is made up of at least four members elected by Parliament from its MSPs. It is responsible for ensuring that the Scottish Parliament is provided with the property, staff and services it requires. The SPCB considers and makes decisions on a wide range of issues concerning the running of the Parliament including the financing of the Parliament and allocation of the budget, the staffing of the Parliament, accommodation and the use and the security of parliamentary facilities.


Representing the Parliament at home and abroad

The Presiding Officer is responsible for representing the Scottish Parliament at home and abroad. This covers a wide range of duties and takes up a significant part of his time. The representative role can range from attending Royal functions, receiving delegations from across the world, leading outward Scottish Parliament delegations, and delivering speeches at events within the parliament and across Scotland, as well as at international conferences.

The Scottish Parliament website has an image gallery of the Presiding Officer representing the Parliament at home and abroad:

Conduct of MSPs

The Presiding Officer is responsible for handling certain types of complaint relating to the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament “sets out the principles and standards of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament in relation to their Parliamentary duties.” (Please note that this means the Code excludes the activities of Members in relation to their private or family life or in relation to reserved matters).

For the most part, complaints under the Code of Conduct are initially investigated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

However, there are two types of complaints relating to an MSP’s parliamentary duties which should be referred to the Presiding Officer. These are:

- Complaints about an MSP’s conduct at a meeting of the Parliament, including an MSP’s treatment of another MSP. Any complaints about a committee convener’s conduct (including the convener’s treatment of another committee member) should also be referred to the Presiding Officer.
- Complaints made under Section 8 of the Code of Conduct (engagement and liaison with constituents)


Biography of Ken Macintosh MSP

Ken Macintosh MSP was born in Inverness and went to primary school in Portree then Oban before moving to the Royal High School in Edinburgh. He graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1984 with a MA in History. Before entering Parliament in 1999, he was a television producer for BBC News working on programmes such as Breakfast with Frost, the Nine o’clock News and Election or Budget specials. He is married to Claire and the couple live in Busby with their six children.

Ken was first elected in 1999 to represent the constituency of Eastwood just south of Glasgow. He held the Eastwood seat in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 Scottish Parliamentary elections. He was a Ministerial Aide to the then First Minister Jack McConnell and, as a backbencher, he introduced a Member’s Bill designed to tackle skin cancer and proposing tougher regulation of sunbed parlours. In opposition, he has served as Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs; Education; Finance; Social Justice; and Community. In 2011 and again in 2015, Ken ran to be the Leader of the Scottish Labour Party. In 2016, Ken was returned as an MSP for the West Scotland region before being elected as the Scottish Parliament’s fifth Presiding Officer.
Deputy Presiding Officers

Two Deputy Presiding Officers are elected by other MSPs within 14 days following an election and normally continue to serve in post throughout the session, during dissolution and until the election of the next Deputy Presiding Officer in a new session. The Parliament must elect the Deputy Presiding Officers before it conducts any other proceedings, with the exception of MSPs taking the oath or affirmation and the election of the Presiding Officer.

The Parliament may also elect an additional Deputy Presiding Officer during the course of a session if appropriate, for example if a Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer is ill. The additional Deputy Presiding Officer may serve for a shorter time period than those elected following an election.

The Deputy Presiding Officers have the same range of responsibilities when acting in place of the Presiding Officer, but both retain their party allegiance and will vote in the Chamber unless they are chairing proceedings. This means that they also support the Presiding Officer in his representation of the Scottish Parliament at home and abroad.

In exceptional circumstances, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, an additional Deputy Presiding Officer can be elected for the duration of the outbreak and Standing Orders are suspended if this is agreed by Parliament.

The current Deputy Presiding Officers are Linda Fabiani MSP and Christine Grahame MSP, both of whom were elected on 12 May 2016. Both Deputy Presiding Officers are members of the Scottish National Party.

On 1 April 2020, the Parliament elected Lewis Macdonald MSP as additional Deputy Presiding Officer for the duration of the response to the novel coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.

http://www.parliament.scot/aboutthe.parliament/99452.aspx
Biography of Linda Fabiani MSP

Educated at Hyndland Secondary School in Glasgow, Linda Fabiani MSP left school in the mid-1970s and worked in various secretarial roles before starting a career within the housing associations sector. In the late 1980s Linda studied for a diploma in housing at Glasgow University and went on to become Development Manager at Bute Housing Association and then Director of East Kilbride Housing Association.

First elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 1999 for the Central Scotland region until 2011 when Linda was elected as MSP for the constituency of East Kilbride.

Linda is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. In 2007, the Italian Government awarded Linda the Cavaliere dell’Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italia (Knight of the Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity) for working to promote Scots/Italian links.

After the 2016 election, Linda was elected by colleagues to the post of Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.
Biography of Christine Grahame MSP

Christine was born on 9 September 1944 in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England and brought up in Edinburgh.

She attended the University of Edinburgh and, after graduating, worked as a teacher. She later returned to Edinburgh University as a mature student where she was awarded a law degree, and afterwards she practised as a solicitor.

Christine joined the Scottish National Party in 1970.

At the 1999 Scottish Parliament election she fought Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. Although she finished second, her position on the SNP regional list took her to Holyrood.

In the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary election, Christine won the seat of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale.

In session 4, Christine was Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee and also the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing. Christine currently chairs the cross party group on Animal Welfare.

Christine was elected Deputy Presiding Officer on 12 May 2016.