



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Published 7th October 2016

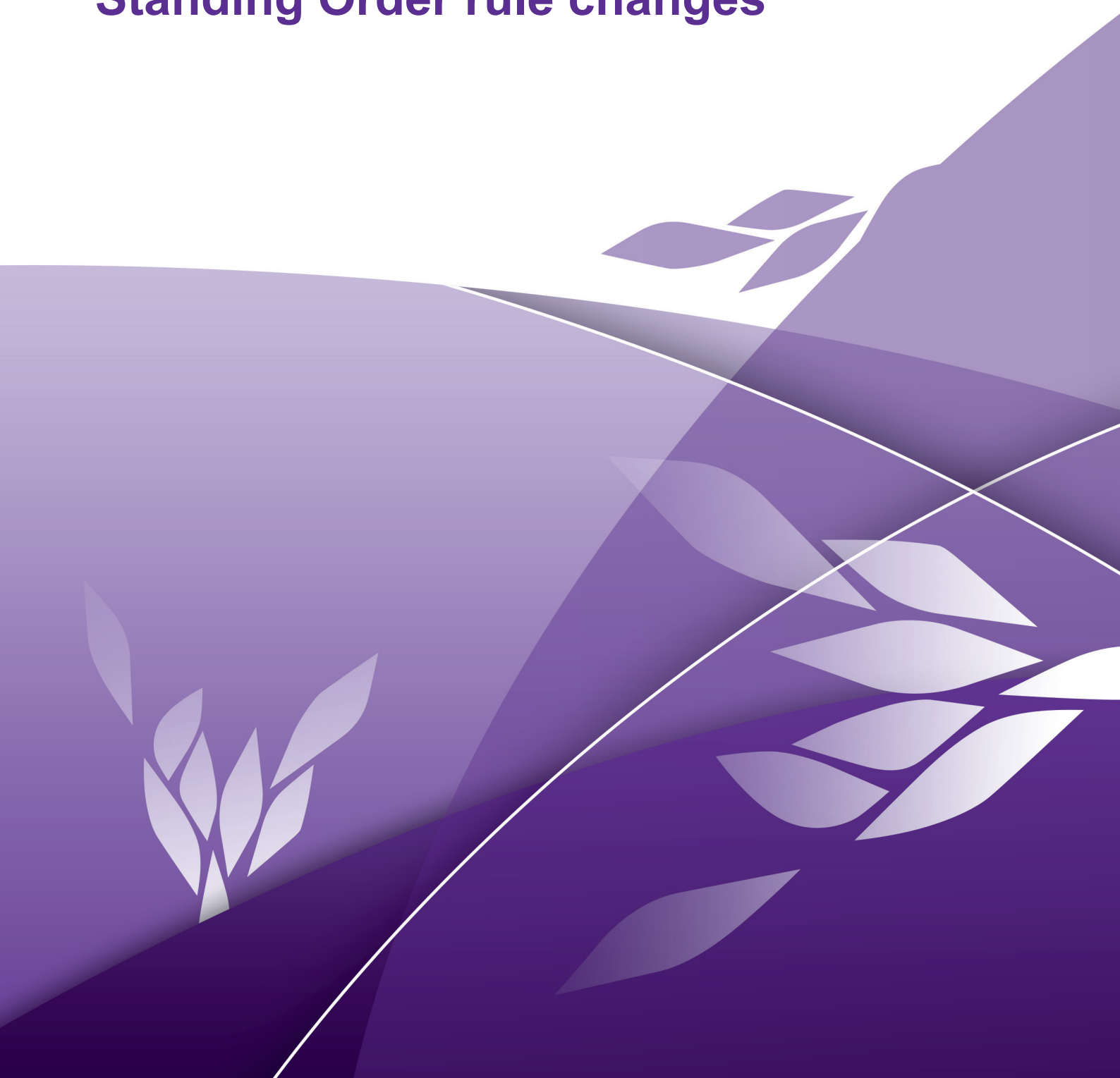
SP Paper 22

4th Report, 2016 (Session 5)

Web

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

First Minister's Question Time - Standing Order rule changes



Published in Scotland by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

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Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

1. The remit of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is to consider and report on—
 - (a) the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business;
 - (b) whether a member's conduct is in accordance with these Rules and any Code of Conduct for members, matters relating to members interests, and any other matters relating to the conduct of members in carrying out their Parliamentary duties;
 - (c) the adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members;
 - (d) matters relating to public appointments in Scotland: and
 - (e) matters relating to the regulation of lobbying.



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Introduction

1. The Presiding Officer has written to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee (SPPA Committee) to propose some changes to the rules on First Minister's Question Time in Standing Orders.
2. This report discusses these proposed changes and makes recommendations for amendments to Standing Orders.

Current rules

3. Rule 13.6.2 in Standing Orders states that the Presiding Officer may select, from all admissible First Minister's Questions lodged, up to 6 questions for answer at First Minister's Question Time.
4. Rule 13.7.A1 states that First Minister's Question Time shall be a period of up to 30 minutes each week (normally on Thursdays).
5. Since the start of this parliamentary session, the Presiding Officer has trialled changes to the format for First Minister's Question Time. These have involved up to 8 questions being selected instead of 6 and the time allocated being extended from up to 30 minutes to up to 45 minutes.
6. The relevant rules in Standing Orders have had to be temporarily varied in order to allow these changes to take place. This has been done by Parliament agreeing to a motion lodged on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau prior to each occasion that First Minister's Question Time takes place.

Letter from the Presiding Officer

7. On 20 September 2016 the Presiding Officer wrote to the SPPA Committee about the format of First Minister's Question Time.
8. The Presiding Officer expressed the view that the temporary changes to the format have generally been well received and have allowed for a better balance between Party Leaders' and backbench questions.
9. The Presiding Officer, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, invited the SPPA Committee to revise Standing Orders to make these changes permanent.

Discussion

10. The Committee's view is that the revised format of First Minister's Question Time represents an improvement on the previous arrangements. There appears to be cross-party support for amending Standing Orders to allow this new format to continue in the future. Amending Standing Orders also avoids the need for Parliament to agree to temporarily vary the rules on each occasion that First Minister's Question Time takes place.
11. The Committee proposes two Standing Order rule changes. These are set out at Annexe A.
12. The first rule change would allow "up to 8" questions to be selected. The other change would allow First Minister's Question Time to last "up to 45 minutes". The words "up to" allow the flexibility for the Presiding Officer to select fewer than 8 questions or for First Minister's Question Time to be shorter than 45 minutes, if this is deemed to be appropriate.
13. The Committee considers that these relatively limited amendments would bring flexibility to Standing Orders and allow the changes introduced to First Minister's Question Time by the Presiding Officer to continue in the future.

Recommendation

14. The Committee recommends to the Parliament the Standing Order rule changes at Annexe A of this report.

Annexe A - Draft Standing Order rule changes

Rule 13.6 First Minister's Questions

In Rule 13.6.2, for "6" substitute "8".

Rule 13.7 Oral Questions in the Chamber

In the first sentence of Rule 13.7.A1, for "30 minutes" substitute "45 minutes".

Annexe B – Letter from the Presiding Officer

Clare Adamson MSP

Convener

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

The Scottish Parliament

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6 October 2016

I hope you had a nice summer recess and are looking forward to the challenges ahead in the new session.

I am writing regarding the recent changes to the format of First Minister's Questions which have been in place since the start of this session. This has allowed FMQs to last for up to 45 minutes and has allowed me to select up to 8 questions. You will be aware that, in order to do this, we have had to make temporary variations to the rules each week.

The new format has been well received generally and I believe it has allowed for a better balance between Party Leaders' and backbench questions.

The Parliamentary Bureau has agreed that I should invite the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to revise Standing Orders to make these changes permanent. I would be grateful if your Committee could consider the necessary rule changes at your earliest convenience.

You will also be aware from my recent letter to all Members that I am proposing other reforms to FMQs to allow for greater involvement of backbenchers. FMQs is an important part of parliamentary scrutiny and I hope that the proposed rule changes and the other reforms I am bringing forward will allow for a more participative and responsive FMQs.

Yours sincerely

KEN MACINTOSH

