



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

A Scottish Parliament Guide: The Role of the Presiding Officer

The role of the Presiding Officer

The Presiding Officer (PO), and the Deputy Presiding Officers (DPOs) in the PO's absence, have specific responsibilities in the Scottish Parliament.

What is the difference between the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officers?

The Presiding Officer must act impartially during the whole of their term as PO and, by convention, they give up any party affiliation they have during this time.

Deputy Presiding Officers must also act impartially when carrying out their official duties as DPOs, such as chairing in the Chamber. They can, however, keep their party affiliation, speak in debates and vote when they are not acting in their DPO role.

How does an MSP become Presiding Officer or a Deputy Presiding Officer?

The PO and DPOs are elected by the Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) at the start of a new session of the Parliament. The outgoing Presiding Officer chairs the vote for the PO. The new PO then chairs the votes for the DPOs. There is a separate election for each post.

The election of the PO and DPOs is by secret ballot and the electronic voting system is not used. If there is more than one candidate for a post, rounds of voting are held until a candidate is elected to each post.

What does the Presiding Officer do in the Debating Chamber?

The PO is responsible for chairing meetings in the Chamber. This involves calling MSPs to speak in debates, maintaining order and responding to any questions on procedure (points of order) raised during a debate.

In the event of a tied vote, the Presiding Officer also has the casting vote to decide whether or not a motion or amendment is agreed to. By convention, the PO will always vote against a motion or amendment. This is the only circumstance in which the PO can vote.

What else does the Presiding Officer do?

The Presiding Officer has several important responsibilities beyond the Chamber.

The Presiding Officer chooses the questions to be asked at First Minister's Questions, as well as several other question time sessions in the Chamber, such as Urgent Questions and Topical Questions to Scottish Government Ministers.

The Presiding Officer deals with complaints about how Members engage with their constituents.

The Presiding Officer is the chair of the Parliamentary Bureau (which proposes the Parliament's business programme) and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (which employs Scottish Parliament staff and makes decisions about how the Parliament is run).

The PO and DPOs are international ambassadors for the Scottish Parliament. They welcome guests to the Parliament and also carry out visits to other parliaments abroad to share experiences and approaches.

Finally, the PO is still an MSP and so can take forward casework on behalf of their constituents like any other Member of the Scottish Parliament.

How can I keep up to date with the work of the Presiding Officer?

You can find out more about the role of the PO and DPOs and what they have been doing on the Scottish Parliament website.

You can also follow the current Presiding Officer on Facebook and Twitter.

Find out more at www.parliament.scot or email info@parliament.scot