

The
Electoral
Commission



Supporting New Scots to vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election

Facilitator Guide

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Introduction

In February 2020, the Scottish Parliament passed a new law that means if you are over 16 and resident in Scotland, you can vote in Scottish elections, regardless of where you were born.

The extension to voting rights means that refugees and other foreign citizens living in Scotland who have leave to enter or remain in the UK, or do not need such permission, can now vote in Scottish Parliament and council elections.

There will be an election to the Scottish Parliament on Thursday 6 May 2021. This will be the first election that many New Scots will be able to vote in. This guide has been created to support you, as someone who works with New Scots, to provide information to the people you work with so they can feel confident to take part in the election and know their vote matters.

The Electoral Commission is a politically impartial and independent organisation. We oversee elections in the UK to ensure that they are well-run and that campaigners follow the political finance rules. We also work to ensure that voters understand how to participate in elections and can have confidence in the democratic process. We have designed this guide to reflect our organisation's values of impartiality and independence.

We are grateful to have received support from the following partners in the development of this guide:

- Scottish Refugee Council
- COSLA
- Local authority resettlement officers
- Maryhill Integration Network
- The VOICES Network
- Saheliya
- WOSDEC (West of Scotland Development Education Centre)

Using this guide

This guide covers the following areas:

- The right to vote in Scotland
- What the Scottish Parliament does
- How to register to vote
- How political parties campaign in the run up to an election
- How to vote in the May 2021 Scottish Parliament election

It also contains some activities which you may find useful for encouraging conversation around the topics.

You can download PowerPoint slides which accompany the activities, as well as an FAQ for New Scots in English, Arabic, Farsi and Kurdish here:

electoralcommission.org.uk/democratic-engagement-resources/welcome-your-vote-resources.

You may choose to use the information and activities in this guide to support the New Scots you work with through online sessions, face-to-face, over the phone, or by other means.

Other sources of information

Electoral Registration Officers

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are appointed by councils and are responsible for registering voters. They can provide assistance with registration queries and some local EROs may offer further support including attending events. You can find contact details for your local ERO by entering your postcode here: electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a-voter/your-election-information.

The Scottish Parliament

You can find further information about how the Scottish Parliament works by visiting parliament.scot.

The right to vote in Scotland

This section of the guide will help you to explain:

- Who can vote in elections in Scotland
- How voting rights have changed over time in Scotland
- The right of the voter to choose how they want to vote

It also includes an activity to encourage discussion around how politics affects our everyday lives.

Who can vote in Scottish elections?

Anyone aged 16 or over and resident in Scotland can vote in Scottish Parliament and council elections, regardless of where they were born. This includes citizens from other countries who have permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who do not need such permission. Those with a pending asylum application in Scotland are not eligible to vote in Scottish elections.

To vote in UK Parliament elections you must be 18 or over and a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen.

More information about who can vote in elections in Scotland is available here: electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/which-elections-can-i-vote.

Timeline of voting rights

1918 - Voting rights extended to men aged 21 and over, and some women over 30

1928 - Voting rights extended to all women over 21

1969 - Voting rights extended to men and women over 18

2014 - 16 and 17 year olds allowed to vote in Scottish Independence referendum

2015 - 16 and 17 year olds given right to vote in Scottish Parliament and council elections

2020 - Voting rights extended in Scotland to give qualifying foreign citizens the right to vote in Scottish Parliament and council elections

Your vote

In all elections in Scotland, your vote belongs to you. You can decide whether or not you want to vote and who you want to vote for. Whether you vote at a polling station, by post, or via a proxy (where you ask someone you trust to vote on your behalf), it's your decision. It's illegal for anyone to influence you to vote a certain way against your will.

How does politics affect our lives?

Politics impacts everything around us. From what jobs we do, to the rules for renting, to bus and train services, and to how often your bin is collected. By voting in elections, New Scots can have their say about the issues that matter to them and help to choose who represents them in the Scottish Parliament and in their council.

Activity 1: Everyday politics

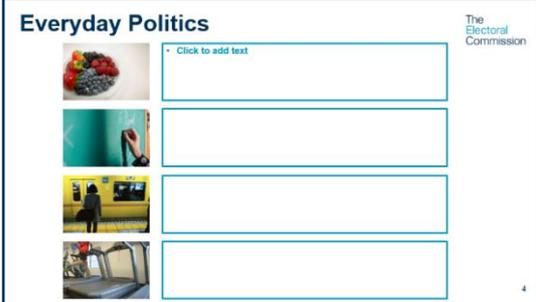
Time

20 minutes

Overview

This activity is designed to help New Scots identify how politics impacts just about every aspect of everyday life. You can download [PowerPoint slides](#) for this activity.

Instructions

	<p>Ask the group to consider the statement 'Politics doesn't affect me' and where they would place themselves on the scale from 'Agree' to 'Disagree'.</p> <p>You could also ask the participants to use an arrow or icon to select their position on the scale.</p>
	<p>Ask the group to consider the four images associated with everyday life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• breakfast• travel to work or school• schools/universities• sports/leisure facilities <p>Ask the group to think about how politics affects these different aspects of everyday life.</p>
	<p>Starting with breakfast, note some of the group's thoughts down, then move on to the other areas.</p> <p>Ideas could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• where the food they eat for breakfast comes from• how often the bus runs• what time school starts• which local sports facilities are available

Everyday Politics

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Politics doesn't affect me

Agree

Disagree

6

Ask the group to consider the statement 'Politics doesn't affect me' again and where they would place themselves on the scale following the discussion.

The Scottish Parliament

This section of the guide will support you to provide an overview of:

- What the Scottish Parliament does
- Who represents us in the Scottish Parliament
- How to contact your MSP

It also includes information on councils and the UK Parliament.

What does the Scottish Parliament do?

The Scottish Parliament makes laws in a number of areas, including:

- health
- education
- training
- housing
- tourism
- economic development

Its other functions include:

- debating important issues
- conducting inquiries
- holding the Scottish Government to account

Who represents you in the Scottish Parliament?

The people who represent you in the Scottish Parliament are called Members of the Scottish Parliament, or MSPs for short. There are 129 elected MSPs and every person in Scotland is represented by eight of them.

Each MSP looks after a particular area in Scotland. 73 MSPs are constituency MSPs, representing local areas. 56 are regional MSPs who look after a much bigger parliamentary area, known as a region. You are represented by one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.

Your MSPs divide their time between work at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh and local work in the area they represent. You elect your MSPs every five years.

Your MSPs might:

- look at the work and policies of the Scottish Government to check that they are serving the people of Scotland
- take issues forward on behalf of the people they represent
- respond to letters and emails from local people
- respond to an issue in their area by asking an official question in the Scottish Parliament
- hold regular open meetings with constituents to discuss the problems in their area, known as a surgery
- debate issues
- vote on changes in the law
- sit on committees to look at issues in more detail

How to contact your MSPs

You can contact any of the MSPs who represent you to ask questions about issues that are important to you. You can speak over the phone, by email, or face-to-face if they hold an open meeting in your area, known as a surgery.

You can find their contact details on the Scottish Parliament's website at parliament.scot/msps.

You can also watch debates and Committee meetings on Scottish Parliament TV at scottishparliament.tv.

Councils

Qualifying foreign citizens can also vote in council elections. You might also hear local councils be called 'local government' or 'local authorities'. The next council elections are scheduled to take place in May 2022.

Your local council is responsible for:

- education services
- youth and leisure facilities
- planning decisions
- council housing
- managing parks and other public places
- social services such as foster care, help for disabled people, or care for the elderly
- local roads and footpaths
- rubbish and recycling

The people elected to represent you in your council are called councillors. The geographic area covered by your council is divided into smaller areas called wards. Your ward could be represented by up to four councillors.

You can contact any of the councillors who represent you, and you'll usually find their contact details on your council's website.

The UK Parliament

You must be a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizenship to vote in UK Parliament elections. You must also be aged 18 or over.

The UK Parliament makes some decisions that affect Scotland. These are called 'reserved matters' and include things like defence, foreign affairs, immigration and anything to do with the monarchy. The UK Parliament is made up of two chambers – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The public vote for the people who sit in the House of Commons.

The UK Parliament makes decisions about how the UK is run and makes laws that affect everyone's lives. Its roles include:

- providing the funds to do government work by voting for tax
- protecting the public and the rights of individuals
- looking closely at government policy and actions - this is known as scrutinising debating the major issues of the day

The person who represents you in the House of Commons is called a Member of Parliament, or MP for short. As with MSPs, you can contact your MP to ask them questions. You can find out how to get in touch by visiting the UK Parliament's website at parliament.uk.

Registering to vote

This section of the guide will help you to explain:

- the importance of registering to vote
- how to register to vote
- what the electoral register is

How to register

You must be registered to vote in Scottish elections. If you're not registered, you can't vote. It's as simple as that.

Once you're registered, you don't need to register again before each election. You only need to register to vote again if:

- you move house
- you change your name for any reason

You'll stay registered to vote as long as you live at that the same address and don't change your name.

Registering to vote takes just five minutes if you do it online. If you're 16 or older, you will need your National Insurance number. **You can register now at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote).**

The deadline for registering to vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election is 19 April 2021.

If you're unable to register online, you can register by post. Download a form at [gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms).

If you don't have a National Insurance number, you need to state this on your registration application then continue to submit it. Your Electoral Registration Officer will then contact you to ask you to provide documentary evidence to prove your identity

The electoral register

Once you've registered, you'll appear on the electoral register. This is a list of everyone in your area who is registered to vote. These lists are managed by your local electoral registration office. If you have any questions about the electoral register, you should contact them. They'll be happy to help. You can find their contact details by entering your postcode here: [electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information).

Who can see the electoral register?

There are two types of electoral register. The full register includes the name and address of everyone registered in the area, except those who have registered anonymously. This list is only used for:

- electoral purposes, such as issuing poll cards
- detecting crime
- calling people for jury service
- checking credit applications

Candidates, registered political parties and other registered campaigners are also allowed to have copies of the full electoral register. They can use the register for campaigning activities, including sending election communication to voters. The open register is an extract of the full electoral register. This version is available to anyone who wants to buy it, such as businesses or charities. You can opt out of appearing on the open register.

Campaigning

This section of the guide will support you to explain:

- what campaigning is
- how political parties campaign ahead of an election
- how to find out more about the priorities and policies of the parties

It also includes two activities to encourage discussion around different campaigning techniques and what influences which candidate or political party we want to vote for.

The most important thing to remember when deciding who to vote for is that your vote belongs to you. It's up to you to decide how you want to use it. No one should pressure, blackmail or bribe you to vote a certain way – this is against the law.

For all elections, you should choose the candidate that you feel would be the best person to represent you. They might share your views or prioritise issues that you think are important.

The list of candidates standing at an election in each local area is published by the Returning Officer (the person who runs elections) at each local council and is usually available on the council website a couple of weeks before the election.

To help decide who to vote for, you should research the candidates standing for election in your local area and what they are standing for. You should access all the information you need so you can make an informed decision about your vote.

What is campaigning?

Political campaigning is where political parties and their candidates try to persuade you to vote for them, normally by talking about their policies. This is most noticeable in the run up to elections, but campaigning can take place all year round. Campaigning is a really important and useful part of helping you choose who to vote for.

Types of campaigning

Newspapers will run lots of stories during the campaign period, including interviews with candidates. Many newspapers publicly support one of the main political parties. This means you may see a newspaper publishing more positive stories about one political party than any other. Journalists who work in TV and radio are not allowed to encourage

voters to vote a certain way. They are asked to give an independent view of elections and campaigns.

You might also see large posters in your local area. In Scotland, political parties are not allowed to advertise on television. Instead, the main political parties are given a set amount of time on television to put their policies to voters – these are called party election broadcasts. Supporters of political parties and their members might also put small posters in their windows or placards in their front gardens to show their support. Candidates might knock on your door, or may have a stand on your high street. This is called canvassing.

Talking to your candidates

You can ask candidates and their teams questions about issues that are important to you when they knock on your door or have a stall in your local area. This is called canvassing. You're welcome to ask questions so you can understand their views - it's why they're there. They want to tell you what they're all about, and they'll want to hear what's important to people in your area so they know what to focus on if they get elected. You do not have to speak to candidates if you don't want to.

Candidates might also take part in public debates with other candidates in your area. These are called hustings. They usually take place in a local community building or online and you're free to go along. Hustings are often advertised in local newspapers and on community Facebook groups.

Manifestos

Ahead of Scottish Parliament elections, political parties will publish a document outlining all of their policies and priorities. This is called a manifesto. They will be available on political parties' websites.

Activity 2: Election campaign

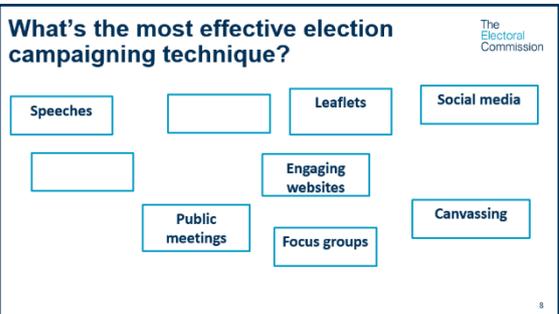
Time

20 minutes

Overview

This activity will get the group talking about different campaign techniques and which ones they think are effective. By using the 'Diamond 9' approach, you can encourage discussion and debate amongst the group. You can download [PowerPoint slides](#) for this activity.

Instructions

 <p>Election campaign</p> <p>The Electoral Commission</p> <p>Most effective</p> <p>Least effective</p> <p>7</p>	<p>After talking to the group about different campaigning techniques, break into small groups (or virtual breakout rooms).</p> <p>Explain to participants that you are going to discuss which ones they think are effective and put them in order from 'most effective' to 'least effective'.</p>
 <p>What's the most effective election campaigning technique?</p> <p>The Electoral Commission</p> <p>Speeches</p> <p>Leaflets</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>Engaging websites</p> <p>Public meetings</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Canvassing</p> <p>8</p>	<p>Next, ask participants to look at the campaign techniques on the slide and discuss which techniques they think are most effective.</p> <p>You could ask them to think about political campaign they have seen or heard about.</p> <p>You can then start to move the different campaign techniques into the diamond shape from most effective at the top to least effective at the bottom.</p> <p>Participants may disagree about which order the techniques should be in, but the group should discuss their different opinions and eventually come to an agreement.</p> <p>You can use the blank boxes to add other campaigning techniques.</p>

Activity 3: What influences?

Time

10-20 minutes

Overview

This activity is designed to help participants think about the different influences on how they would vote. You can download [PowerPoint slides](#) for this activity.

Instructions

Present the 'What influences?' table on your screen. Ask participants to imagine for a moment that there is an election tomorrow and they have decided to vote. Ask them to pick the three main things that might influence which candidate or political party they vote for.

You can then either divide participants into breakout rooms for smaller discussions then come back together as a group and discuss why they picked particular influences, or go straight to a group discussion.

Ask if there are any other things that might influence them and add them to the table for the next time you run this activity.

It may be helpful to start with a group discussion about what influences decision making in our everyday lives. For instance, how do we choose what to watch on television or what we are going to do at the weekend? Then move on to discuss what might influence their decision making about politics. This may help the group to connect the decisions they make about politics more readily to other aspects of their everyday lives.

What influences?					The Electoral Commission
The views of my family members	Who is most popular in the opinion polls	The state of the economy	The views of my friends	Political party leaders	
The election campaign of a political party	What I have read in newspapers	What I have read online	My personal experience of the political party or candidate	Talking to a political party campaigner when they knock on my door	
Celebrities that endorse a political party	The political parties' policies or manifestos	How trustworthy I find a candidate or political party	A candidate's educational background	A candidate's former job	
What I have seen on the television	My job	My gender	Meeting a candidate	Where a candidate lives	
My age	My background	A candidate's age	A candidate's background	Leaflets about a candidate	
What a candidate looks like					

Voting in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election

The final section of the guide will help you to explain:

- what a poll card is
- how to vote in person at a polling place
- how to vote by post
- how to vote by proxy

Poll card

Before the day of the election, known as polling day, you'll receive a card, called a poll card. Everyone who is registered to vote in your household will receive their own poll card. Your poll card tells you where you need to go to vote. The place you go to vote is called your 'polling place'.

Voting methods

There are three different ways you can vote. You can choose the way that suits you.

1. At the polling place

On polling day, you'll need to go to your polling place. You can find out where your polling place is by checking your poll card. It's usually a public building like a nearby school or village hall. Polling places are open from 7am until 10pm. As long as you're in the queue to vote by 10pm, you'll be allowed to vote.

Due to COVID-19, there will be safety measures in place at the polling places to help you stay safe. There will be physical distancing, hand sanitiser and there may be a limit on how many people are allowed inside the polling place at a time.

When you arrive at the polling place a member of staff will ask for your name and address. The staff member will give you your ballot papers. You will then be directed to take your ballot papers into a polling booth where you can fill out your ballot paper.

On one ballot paper there will be a list of people and the party that they represent and on the other there will be a list of political parties and independent candidates.

Your ballot papers will look similar to these:

Constituency ballot paper

(Local area)

Election of Members of the Scottish Parliament for the [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX] Constituency	
Vote for only one candidate by putting a cross in the box next to your choice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Candidate A A Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate B B Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate C Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate D D Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate E Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

Regional ballot paper

(Larger electoral area)

Election of Members of the Scottish Parliament for the [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX] Region	
Vote only once by putting a cross in the box next to your choice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
B Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
C Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate D Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate E Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

On the first ballot paper you should mark the person you are voting for with an 'X'. On the second, you should mark the party or independent candidate you are voting for with an 'X'.

You should then fold up your ballot papers and place them in the ballot box. If you need assistance at any point, or if you need a new ballot paper, just ask a member of staff.

2. By post

If you know that you won't be able to get to your polling place on polling day, you might want to consider a postal vote. You need to register for a postal vote with your electoral registration office by **5pm on 6 April 2021** – but the sooner the better.

You can download an application form by visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter. Or, you can ask your electoral registration office to send one to you. You will need to give your signature on your application form, and again when you vote. This is to confirm who you are. A postal vote pack will be sent to you about a week before the election. Follow the instructions, put everything back in the envelope provided and post it to the council to be counted.

3. Someone can vote on your behalf

You can also ask someone you trust to vote on your behalf. This is called a proxy vote and your trusted person is called your proxy. You need to tell your proxy who you'd like to vote for and they need to go to your polling place to vote for you. This may be different from their own. The deadline for applying to vote by proxy is **5pm on Tuesday 27 April**.

You can download an application form by visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter. Or, you can ask your electoral registration office to send one to you.

If you change your mind and want to vote in person, you can still do so, as long as your proxy has not already voted on your behalf. If your proxy can't get to the polling place, they can apply to vote for you by post. This is called a postal proxy.

No matter how you choose to vote, your vote belongs to you. It is up to you to decide who you want to vote for, and it's illegal for anyone to influence you to vote a certain way against your will.

Further information about voting in person, by post and by proxy is available on our website: electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter, or you can call our helpline on 0800 3 280 280.