

# The Association of Electoral Administrators



## Response to the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill – Call for Views

**Organisation:** Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA). A joint response from the National AEA and the Scotland and Northern Ireland Branch of the AEA.

**Summary of Organisation:** The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has just under 2,000 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services. There are eleven UK regional branches of the Association covering the United Kingdom, including the Scotland and Northern Ireland Branch.

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### Call for Views Questions:

#### Consultation – The main proposals in the Bill include:

**Proposal 1: To change the standard term length for both Scottish parliamentary elections and local government elections from four years to five years**

It is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to determine election cycles, but we do see some benefits to introducing consistency to terms of office to different governance institutions.

There would also be benefit in moving to a five-year cycle. The current four-year cycle means that over time, there will always, at some point, be a combined poll with a UK Parliamentary general election. This combination can cause voter confusion and add complexity to the conduct of those polls.

[The Gould Report](#) made clear recommendations and advises the avoidance of having different elections on the same day and we support this recommendation when different voting systems are involved.

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## **Proposal 2: To give greater flexibility to set the size of all council wards by allowing for two or five member wards, as well as three and four member wards (one member wards will continue only to be possible in island communities)**

It is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to set the policy/legislation for the number of councillors per ward. However, the decision should be made with the consideration of the interests of the voter, i.e. what will give the optimum degree of representation and also recognise the importance of local community boundaries, balanced with equality of representation. Having five member wards may increase the number of candidates for some wards. This can cause some practical issues for the Returning Officer in the production of ballot papers and during the count.

## **Proposal 3: To restrict electors to voting in only one local authority area in Scotland at local government elections held on the same day**

Whilst this is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to determine, we support measures that, after full and proper evaluation, enhance public confidence in electoral systems, are deliverable and do not add unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and risk into the process.

We clearly see the clarity this restriction could give, but it could equally be seen to disenfranchise those who are resident in more than one local authority area.

We would also raise how this restriction would be policed, and whether the Scottish Government would also restrict registration to one local authority area.

## **Proposal 4: Enabling provisions to help to facilitate pilots that include some form of electronic voting or other digital processing to be undertaken at a future date**

We support measures that, after full and proper evaluation, enhance public confidence in electoral systems, are deliverable and do not add unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and risk into the process. Therefore, we support the flexibility in the Bill to facilitate pilots at a future date to evaluate some form of electronic voting or other digital processing.

## **Proposal 5: To allow people to apply to be added to the electoral register from 14 years of age**

Electoral Registration Officers proposed this reform and we fully support this proposal. It will simplify the process, assist young people in understanding their rights, simplifying engagement and promotion of registration amongst young voters, in areas such as publicity, promotion and on registration forms.

## **Proposal 6: To allow the Presiding Officer to re-schedule a poll for a Scottish general election in certain circumstances after dissolution, and to require the Presiding Officer to consult the Electoral Commission before setting the date for a Scottish Parliament election that has been postponed**

It is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to determine, however, as highlighted above, combinations of elections using different voting systems should be avoided wherever possible.

We support the requirement to consult with the Electoral Commission for the reasons outlined, including that it will ensure that the Presiding Officer is aware of any practical issues with the organisation of the poll which might impact the date selected.

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## **Proposal 7: Various reforms in relation to the Electoral Commission, to support the use of the new powers relating to elections devolved to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2016**

We have no comment to make other than the Association supports the role and the work of the Electoral Commission.

## **Proposal 8: To provide for the Electoral Commission to prepare Codes of Practice to help candidates, campaigners, observers and on issues like expenses and donations at devolved elections**

We support the proposal for the Electoral Commission to prepare Codes of Practice as outlined and that such codes should be enforceable by law.

## **Proposal 9: Extending the functions of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland to cover Scottish Parliamentary elections**

We support this proposal. It is important to provide consistency and the EMB role brings benefits for local government elections. We see no disadvantage in this being extended to include Scottish Parliamentary elections.

## **Proposal 10: Changes to the way the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland carries out its work**

We have no comment to make other than we support the role and the work of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland.

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Chair of Scotland and  
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**6 November 2019**