

**Scottish Parliament Election 2021**  
**Additional Directions to Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers**  
**from the Convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland**  
**3 February 2021**

	Topic	Direction
<b>10</b>	<b>Count Timing</b>  <i>Verification and Count</i>	<p><b>Returning Officers must ensure that the first ballot boxes are opened no earlier than 9am and no later than 10am on Friday 7 May 2021, to allow the verification and counting of constituency and regional ballots in their constituencies.</b></p> <p><b>For the avoidance of doubt, there is to be no overnight counting of votes.</b></p> <p>For local government elections in Scotland a “next day count” is well-accepted procedure and is acknowledged to allow a greater level of resilience within Election Teams. Such resilience is even more important at this Election in the context of the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is reasonably anticipated that the counting process will take significantly longer than in previous Scottish Parliament elections. It is not reasonable, particularly considering working conditions for election staff, candidates and agents, to begin an overnight count where there is no realistic prospect of it being concluded by early morning;</li> <li>• Count venues will be subject to enhanced hygiene and capacity limits; these are most appropriately managed during daytime hours;</li> <li>• This approach will significantly reduce the mingling of count and polling staff; and</li> <li>• General resilience in terms of staffing and support for systems is best delivered during the daytime.</li> </ul> <p>The Direction formalises the position that there will be no overnight count, but ensures there will be no undue delay, with all counts underway by 10am. The Direction does not preclude an overnight reconciliation of unused or spoilt papers nor the checking of arithmetic on Ballot Paper Accounts.</p> <p>Returning Officers are reminded that if they undertake any checking of spoilt or unused papers overnight then the access of candidates, agents, observers etc. will need to be permitted. The need to ensure transparency, scrutiny and acceptance is paramount so any such activities would need to be publicised to candidates, agents, observers etc.</p>

<p>11</p>	<p><b>Polling scheme</b></p> <p><i>Allocation of voters to polling stations</i></p>	<p><b>Returning Officers must allocate a maximum of 800 electors, excluding postal voters, to each polling station.</b></p> <p>Returning Officers must plan their polling arrangements to ensure there is sufficient capacity to allow voters to cast their vote without having to wait in a queue for an unacceptable time.</p> <p>Physical distancing and the consequent need to limit the number of people in a polling place at any one time due to COVID prevention measures mean there is a risk of queues developing outside the place. Limiting the number of in-person voters allocated <i>per</i> station should minimise this risk.</p> <p><b>If an RO chooses to allocate more than 800 electors to a polling station, that RO must provide the Convener of the EMB with a justification that their proposed arrangements will be sufficient for predicted turnout.</b></p> <p><b>In addition ROs must review all polling places to ensure that where places contain multiple polling stations, overall arrangements for that location will provide for appropriate physical distancing and other measures consistent with guidance and risk assessments, such as one way routes and ventilation.</b></p> <p>Particular attention should be given to polling places with three or more stations and to those that are especially compact, to ensure that the layout of the building allows space for the movement of voters through the premises.</p> <p>ROs will wish to consider how to support especially busy periods although it has been noted at recent by-elections that with people working from home the usual peaks before and after working hours were less marked.</p>
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**MALCOLM BURR**

CONVENER OF THE ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR SCOTLAND

3 FEBRUARY 2021