

Presiding Officer calls for Parliamentary reform



The voices of the people must be heard in Parliament following Scotland's unprecedented voter turn-out at the Referendum, says [Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick](#).

Leading Time for Reflection, at the first meeting of the Scottish Parliament since Thursday's vote, and ahead of a statement by the First Minister, Mrs Marwick said the "power to be heard" was ever more pressing and further parliamentary reform to strengthen participation will follow.

In a rallying call to MSPs, the Presiding Officer said more must be done to engage the people in Parliament's business, particularly young women and people from deprived communities.

With parliamentary reform already implemented on Holyrood's sitting patterns, the Presiding Officer said renewed ways of engaging the public will be the next phase of her reform programme.

In her speech The Rt Hon Tricia Marwick MSP, Presiding Officer said:

"Over 3.6 million people in Scotland made their mark on a piece of paper and, in so doing, ensured their voice was heard.

"I have been truly humbled by the clear wish of so many of our fellow Scots to be involved, many for the first time. How often have we heard people say they were not going to bother voting because it wouldn't make any difference?

“Not this time. Let us be clear about the scale of this unprecedented level of involvement and what it means for all of us. It is now for us to embrace and nurture that desire for political expression.

“There are challenges for politicians, for political parties and for institutions.

“It is now our duty to make sure that all those who have expressed their wish for the power to be heard, are heard in this Parliament and by this Parliament.”

We return to this Parliament in a Scotland that has changed forever.

The vote last Thursday on the future of our nation was an extraordinary expression of civic democracy the like of which we have never seen – a turnout of 85% on a registered vote of 97%.

Over 3.6 million people in Scotland made their mark on a piece of paper and, in so doing, ensured their voice was heard.

Scotland has demonstrated once more our commitment to ensure that constitutional change comes through the democratic process.

This Referendum campaign has been remarkable, and it has been inspirational, not just for us in Scotland but to people throughout the world who have fixed their eyes on us.

Like you I have been truly humbled by the clear wish of so many of our fellow Scots to be involved, many for the first time. How often have we heard people say they were not going to bother voting because it wouldn't make any difference?

Not this time

Let us be clear about the scale of this unprecedented level of involvement and what it means for us all. It is now for us to

embrace and nurture that desire for political expression.

There are challenges for politicians, for political parties and for the institutions in Scotland.

It cannot and must not be business as usual. People have come off their settees, out of their homes into the streets and public meetings, and then into the polling station.

They are not going back.

It is for the political parties to make their own decisions about how they involve young people, those living in our most deprived communities and women in the future.

However, this Parliament like other institutions in Scotland must also respond and I pledge to you and to our fellow citizens my determination to do so.

When you elected me as Presiding Officer I made it clear we needed to reform this Parliament. I said in July 2011 *"We need to find new ways of working in this Chamber, in our committees and in all of our other activities"*.

Progress has been made. Our working week has been changed, topical questions introduced and for two years, through our Parliament Days, I have been taking the Parliament to towns throughout Scotland.

The doors of the Parliament have been thrown wide open through the revamped Festival of Politics and The Great Tapestry and Andy Warhol exhibitions. Fifty five per cent cent of people viewing the exhibitions were visiting the Parliament for the first time.

But we have more to do.

I have plans already in place to hold a conference in the spring for young women of school age.

Two weeks ago I asked the Parliament's officials to draw up a programme to expand the Parliament Days into our most deprived communities.

Our committees also need to continue to assess their own programmes to consider when they meet, where they meet and who is invited to speak to them.

I know I can count on your support to do more.

As politicians we have our own heroes. The people who inspired us to get involved in politics.

My inspiration as a teenager was Senator Robert Kennedy, brother of President John F Kennedy.

In 1966 he travelled to South Africa, at the height of apartheid and when Nelson Mandela was in prison. He made a speech to young people often referred to as the ripples of hope speech. I return to that speech time and time again to remind me why I am involved in politics. I want to share a couple of paragraphs which struck me as particularly relevant to us but it is a speech of its time so the references to "men" refer to all of us.

"The first element of this individual liberty is the freedom of speech; the right to express and communicate ideas... ..above all, the right to affirm one's membership and allegiance to the body politic – to society – to the men with whom we share our land, our heritage, and our children's future.

Hand-in-hand with freedom of speech goes the power to be heard – to share in the decisions of government which shape men's lives. Everything that makes men's lives worthwhile – family, work, education, a place to rear one's children and a place to rest one's head – all this depends on the decisions of government;

...Therefore, the essential humanity of man can be protected and

preserved only where the government must answer – not just to the wealthy; not just to those of a particular religion, not just to those of a particular race; but to all of the people.”

It is now our duty to make sure that all those who have expressed their wish for the power to be heard, are heard in this Parliament and by this Parliament.

Colleagues, we now have a huge opportunity and many challenges. Let us face them together.

– See more at:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/newsandmediacentre/81682.aspx#sthash.G4EhGYEQ.dpuf>

The FM called upon the right of 16 & 17 year-olds to vote. We should be proud of our decision to widen the franchise, and we should do this across Scotland in future.