



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

A Scottish Parliament Guide: Decision time

What is decision time?

Decision time is the point at each meeting in the Chamber when Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) take a decision on the motions and amendments that have been considered that day.

Decision time normally takes place at 5pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

How do MSPs know when to vote?

A bell, known as the division bell, is activated by the Chamber clerk and can be heard throughout the Scottish Parliament building 10 minutes and 5 minutes before decision time.

This way MSPs who are not in the Chamber know it is almost time to vote. Members must be in the Chamber if they wish to take part in decision time.

What can MSPs vote on?

There are no votes on some types of parliamentary business, for example ministerial statements and members' business. Often business motions will be voted on separately, as they may involve immediate changes to the agenda for the day.

Decisions on amendments to bills are also taken at a different point in the day. If there are any amendments to a motion, they are voted on first. If the amendments are agreed to, the MSPs then vote on the motion as amended.

How do MSPs vote in the Scottish Parliament?

For most motions, the Presiding Officer asks if all the MSPs agree with the motion. If they all agree, there is no vote. If any MSP disagrees, or if it is a motion on passing a bill at stage 3, a vote must take place.

The Scottish Parliament uses an electronic voting system. MSPs insert their identity cards into the console on their desk in the Chamber. The screen will automatically change to a touchscreen pad during a vote.

MSPs can choose to agree or disagree with the motion or amendment being voted on. They can also abstain from a vote. This means they choose not to vote for, or against, the issue.

MSPs have 30 seconds to vote on their console. The Presiding Officer then announces the results of the vote.

You can find out how individual MSPs voted by looking at the Official Report of the meeting or at an MSP's page on the website.

How can I find out what happens at decision time?

You can find out when decision time will be in the Business Bulletin on the Scottish Parliament website.

You can watch decision time live on the SPTV pages of the Scottish Parliament website, or catch up with our recordings of previous sessions.

You can also watch decision time from the public gallery in the Chamber. You can request tickets online or by contacting Visitor Services at the Parliament.