

## Your Vote and How To Use It

Voting by secret ballot is at the heart of any democratic political system.

Scottish Parliament and Local Council elections normally take place every four years, on the first Thursday in May.

The next elections for both the Scottish Parliament and Local Councils will be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2007.

Elections give you, the voter, the chance to have your say on who you would like to represent you for the next four years.

### Why Vote?

#### Key Points

- Voting is critical to the democratic process
- Having the right to vote is just the start – you need to use your vote too
- Anyone can apply to vote by post

Voting is the single most important thing you can do to make your voice heard in Scotland.

By voting you're helping to decide who will make decisions on the issues that affect you everyday, whether they're on a local or national level.

People all over the world have fought for the right to vote. In the UK women only won the right to vote on equal terms with men in 1928.

But having the right to vote is only the start.

A strong and stable democracy relies on people **using** their votes.

Recent elections in Scotland and the UK have shown a drop in the number of people turning out to vote. This trend is often put down to 'voter apathy' but the Electoral Commission believes the reasons are more complicated.

Research shows that people don't vote for reasons such as:

- Lack of information
- Distrust of politicians
- Inconvenience

The **votescotland** website aims to give you the information you need to feel confident to use your vote.

You can get more informed about politics by following the links around the site, and if you don't have time to go to the polling place you can now apply to vote by post.

Don't miss your chance to vote!

## Eligibility

### Key Points

- You can register to vote now at [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk)
- Your Electoral Registration Officer can tell you if you're eligible to vote
- They can also tell you if you're on the Register of Electors

To be eligible to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections you must meet the following requirements:

- Your name must be on the Register of Electors
- You must be a British, Commonwealth, European Union or Irish citizen
- You must be 18 or over

You can find out more by reading the Electoral Commission's 'Who can vote?' factsheet available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

The Register of Electors is maintained locally by the Electoral Registration Officer.

### Nearly 18?

You can register to vote when you're 16 but you won't become eligible to vote until your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## Registering to Vote

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### Key Points

- The Register of Electors is also known as the “Electoral Register” and the “Voters’ Roll”
- Adding your name to the Register is called “registering to vote”

To be eligible to vote in Scotland, your name must be on the Register of Electors.

You can add your name to the Register throughout the year, up to the point when nominations for elections close.

To find out if you’re already on the Register or to register your name, contact your local Electoral Registration Officer.

You can inspect your local Register at your council offices or at some local libraries.

### Changed address?

Contact your local Electoral Registration Officer so they can update the Register of Electors

## Different Ways to Vote

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Most people choose to vote in person at their local polling place.

But if you can’t get to your polling place you can either get someone else to go for you – known as voting by proxy – or you can apply to vote by post.

Read on to find out what happens when you:

- Vote at the polling place
- Vote by post
- Vote by proxy

### At a Polling Place

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Voting at your local polling place is easy.

There is always a member of staff on hand to help if you’re not sure what to do.

If you’re on the Register of Electors, you will receive a poll card before the election telling you where your polling place is and when you can vote.

- Your polling place will probably be a school or hall near where you live
- It will be open between 7am and 10pm
- You can bring your poll card with you but it’s not necessary in order to vote

## Assistance To Vote

If you think you'll have difficulty in getting to the polling place, or with the voting process when you arrive at the polling place, then contact your local council. A helpline number will be printed on your poll card.

Alternatively, you could apply for a postal vote or proxy vote.

## When You Arrive

- Follow the signs into the polling place
- Tell the staff your name and address so they can check you're on the Register of Electors
- You can show them your poll card too if you've got it with you
- They'll give you a ballot paper listing all the parties and candidates you can vote for
- You will be given ballot papers for the Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections

## Casting Your Vote

- The staff will point you towards the polling booths where you can vote without anyone seeing
- If you have a visual impairment you can ask for a special voting device to vote by yourself, or you can ask for assistance from the polling staff
- Take your ballot papers into one of the polling booths and follow the instructions
- You don't need to bring a pen or pencil – there will be one in the booth
- For the Scottish Parliament election you will be asked to mark a cross (X) in the box next to the Constituency candidate of your choice and a cross (X) in the box next to the Regional list party or individual candidate of your choice
- On the Local Government ballot paper you will be asked to mark numbers (1, 2, 3 etc) against the candidates' names
- Make sure you don't write anything else on your ballot paper or your vote may not be counted
- You can take as much time as you like – there's no need to hurry
- When you're satisfied, put the ballot papers in the ballot boxes. Do NOT fold the ballot papers

You don't have to show anyone who you have voted for.

However, you may have to show the polling clerk the back of your ballot paper before putting it in the box.

## By Post

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Anyone can apply to vote by post. You don't have to live in a particular area or have difficulty getting to the polling place.

You can apply for a postal vote for a particular election, for a set period of time or for all future elections.

To apply to vote by post, simply:

- Go to [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)
- Enter your postcode
- Download and print out the postal vote application form
- Fill in your details and sign the form
- Send the completed form to your local Electoral Registration Office

Postal votes are usually sent out around one to two weeks before an election. If you are going to be on holiday around that time, you may want to consider having your postal vote re-directed to another address or could choose instead to vote by proxy.

## By Proxy

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If you can't vote in person, you can apply to vote by proxy. That means someone else votes on your behalf.

You can apply for a proxy vote for a particular election, for a set period of time or for all future elections.

Anyone can be your proxy as long as they are eligible to vote in the election and they are willing to vote on your behalf.

You have to provide a reason for needing a proxy vote. For example, maybe you can't get to the polling place on election day because:

- You are going to be away on holiday
- You have a physical condition that prevents you from getting to the polling place
- The kind of work you do means you can't get to the polling place
- You have to attend an educational course
- You are a British citizen living overseas
- You are a Crown Servant or a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces

To apply to vote by proxy, simply:

- Go to [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)
- Download and print out the appropriate proxy vote application form
- Fill in your details and sign the form
- Send the completed form to your local Electoral Registration Office at least six working days before the election

For more information, read the FAQs on proxy voting on [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

## Emergency Proxy

The deadline for applying to vote by proxy is normally six working days before an election.

In the event of physical incapacity occurring within the six-day period, preventing you from getting to the polling place, you may be able to vote by emergency proxy.