

Copies of ministerial preferences for each of the Scottish Ministers:

Angela Constance – Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs

Angela Constance - top tips

Angela Constance MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. You can find her biography and responsibilities on the gov.scot website. You can find official pictures that are approved for publications on the Scottish Government's Flickr account.

The following is intended as guidance only and does not cover everything you might look for. If you are unsure of anything, contact private office.

Box times

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

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Taking minutes

All meetings where government business is discussed need to be properly recorded and documented. A minute is an official record and an important tool for capturing decisions made and actions to be taken.

It is the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of an event with a minister. Notes of meetings should be agreed through private office and, once agreed, stored by the policy area on eRDM (share the link with private office). You should also read the guidance on taking minutes.

Angela Constance – submissions

Check the guidance on submissions to ministers and use the standard submission template (document will download) when submitting a submission to Ms Constance.

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion or recommendation and timescale for response. Keep submissions as short as possible. Do not include background detail ministers are already familiar with.

In your covering email, clearly state whether this is for information or requires a decision and use the correct priority category:

1. immediate (within 24 hours – ideally let private office know before submitting)
2. urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
3. routine (three days or more)

Copy lists

All submissions should use appropriate copy lists which, as a minimum, include:

4. the DG office
5. your director and deputy director
6. special adviser (Jeanette Campbell)
7. communications officials

Other relevant ministers and officials should be included as appropriate.

All submissions to Ms Brown should, without exception, be copied to Ms Constance. You should give consideration as to whether Ms Constance should be a joint top copy recipient, or whether it should be sent on a 1:2 basis. There is no exact rule for this, but in general anything contentious, carrying a significant financial commitment or relating to a Manifesto or Programme for Government commitment should be top copied to the Cabinet Secretary.

Angela Constance – engagements

When suggesting engagements for Ms Constance, please consider her normal working week. If suggesting an engagement outside of Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, contact private office at the earliest opportunity. All engagements are subject to parliamentary business so can change at short notice. You should ensure stakeholders are aware of this.

AM/PM	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.	Cabinet meets on Tuesday morning. Ms Constance would only miss Cabinet by exception.	Best opportunity for external engagements.	Opportunity for external engagements until around 11am (depending on location).	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.
PM	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.

		outside parliament possible but normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	outside parliament possible but normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	outside parliament possible but normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	
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Official support is expected at all engagements. Exceptions to this should be agreed with private office in advance. Where agreed, a named official should be contactable immediately ahead of the engagement to answer any last-minute requests.

Supporting officials should play an active role during visits, particularly around ensuring the event runs to time and the agenda, and by facilitating valuable discussion and introductions.

Briefing

Find the correct briefing template from the table on this page and send as a Word document. Make sure you follow the guidance contained within them for completing the templates.

Briefing will normally be commissioned via the diary invitation. You should ensure the times within the invite match what you have agreed with stakeholders. Deadlines for submitting briefings are generally a week before the event, but private office are always happy to discuss.

You should always submit speeches as separate documents and include page numbers within the footer.

If briefing requires amending after it is submitted, check with private office before re-submitting. An amended section or additional annex is often better than an entire new pack, particularly for parliamentary debates and committee appearances – we can advise what is best in each instance.

Committee or debate briefing

You should refer to the briefing templates in the table, using the right one depending on what type of engagement. This is particularly important for briefing for any kind of parliamentary engagement.

You should think about the type of parliamentary engagement you are preparing briefing for and how the minister is likely to use the briefing pack.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Type of event	Template
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parliamentary debates, statement or committee appearances 	Debate or committee appearance template (document will download)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ministerial committees meetings with other UK ministers stakeholders or organisations 	Meetings template (document will download)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> receptions and events (including dinners) external visits/engagements/events including dinners 	Engagements template (document will download)

Angela Constance – speeches

You should read the general guidance on writing speeches before you start preparing a speech.

Speech requirements for Ms Constance vary based on the engagement. You should use verbatim speech (without bullet points) for:

- parliamentary debates or statements
- committee appearances
- conference keynotes

You should write bullet points which Ms Constance can improvise with for:

- smaller or less formal events
- where the minister is sitting at a table
- SCANCE items and other Cabinet speaking notes

When drafting, you should:

- consider the format of the event, including whether Ms Constance will be speaking from a lectern or a sitting position (for the latter, a bullet style speech is usually better than a full verbatim speech)
- think carefully about the audience (for example, if the audience will principally be young people, don't make it too heavy on policy)
- avoid simply cutting and pasting from previous speeches, as many of the events the minister speaks at attract similar audiences
- ensure the speech has a clear structure, flow, and is free of jargon and clichés
- consider using quotes as well as facts and figures to emphasise a point and give the speech more colour
- be clear on what the speech is trying to achieve
- avoid lengthy phrases and sentences
- allow time for the minister's own additions and anecdotes in the speech – Ms Constance speaks at around 135 words per minute, so don't submit a speech over the required time

- always read the speech back to yourself out loud to pick up repetitiveness or lack of natural breathing space

When formatting and finalising:

- do not split sentences or paragraphs between two pages - use the 'keep lines together' checkbox under 'Paragraph' then select 'Line and Page Breaks' in Word
- use Arial font, size 16 with 1.5 paragraph spacing
- keep paragraphs short which makes it easier to read
- insert page numbers as a footer (in centre)
- always send speeches as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack
- clear parliamentary statement and debate speeches with the special adviser before submitting

Angela Constance - parliamentary questions

Make sure you are familiar with the different types of parliamentary questions (PQs) before providing Ms Constance with answers to these.

Private office is advised of general questions and portfolio questions for the following week on a Wednesday afternoon.

The deadline for draft answers and briefing to be with private office is Friday 4pm for portfolio questions and Monday 2pm for general questions. These deadlines apply regardless of what the PQ tracker may say (which the system may default to something different).

When drafting:

- keep answers concise – the Presiding Officer has asked that answers are around a minute long (so no more than around 130 words)
- don't provide Q and A or suggested supplementary questions and answers unless specifically asked for by private office
- private office will advise of any portfolio questions which should be cleared with special advisers (SPAD)s before being submitted
- all oral PQ answers should be signed off by your deputy director
- make sure questions are allocated to the correct minister and private office on the PQ tracker before submitting

You should ensure someone is around immediately before any general or portfolio question, as last-minute requests are a common feature. If you aren't the action officer, let private office know who it is instead.

Written PQs

When drafting:

- add relevant Minister and private office to the PQ as soon as received on the system – that helps private office track relevant PQs

- keep answers short and concise, addressing all points in the question, but not offering further information unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position
- use tables for complex numerical information
- if information is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, refer to this in the answer for context
- keep background notes succinct and provide context to the question and answer

Angela Constance – correspondence

You should familiarise yourself with the guidance on handling ministerial correspondence before drafting replies for Ms Constance.

When replying on MiCase you should:

- add the full reply address to the draft where this is known
- include an email address directly under the final line of the address
- ensure you use the preferred reply address when corresponding with MSPs (some MSPs ask for a particular address to be used)
- begin by thanking the sender for their letter and refer to the date it was sent
- provide a short apology for the delay in replying if the response is late
- in cases where the original correspondence was sent to another minister, but Ms Constance is replying, acknowledge this and explain why she is responding instead

For all diary acceptance replies include the following text in your draft:

'Please note that all engagements accepted by the Cabinet Secretary are subject to Parliamentary business and can change at short notice. Please contact our office at CabSecforJHA@gov.scot to finalise arrangements.'

For ministerial replies, Ms Constance's signature should be centred at the bottom of the letter as:

ANGELA CONSTANCE

And for diary replies the deputy private secretary's name should be used:

[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)]
Deputy Private Secretary

For letters outwith the MiCase system use the preferred template (document will download).

Angus Robertson – Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

Angus Robertson - top tips

Angus Robertson MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. You can find his biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website. You can contact his private office for further advice and help.

The private office is based at St Andrew's House and the Scottish Parliament. Mr Robertson's constituency is Edinburgh Central, and his constituency days are Mondays and Fridays. Contact private office if you want to discuss events which may fall on these days. Besides from his own portfolio responsibilities, Mr Robertson should be copied into all UK Government related matters. [Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Briefing is always commissioned for a week in advance of any event, but we are always happy to discuss deadlines to accommodate officials. For a big set piece event, such as a parliamentary debate or speech, it should be sent a week in advance for Mr Robertson's consideration.

Officials should copy in special advisers and communications colleagues into all correspondence or briefings when sending these to the Cabinet Secretary. You should also confirm with private office as soon as possible who will be leading on the engagement and, where necessary, complete a minute for the corporate record.

You must send minutes of ministerial meetings to private office within five working days of the meeting taking place. This should include a Word document and eRDM link - read guidance for taking minutes for more information.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]
He also likes to be made aware of topical issues as soon as possible, so contact private office to make them aware of urgent issues, and flag any relevant hot topics or news items alongside a submission/PQ/briefing. If you are sending an urgent email to the box, contact private office in advance to make them aware of the submission.

Angus Robertson – speeches

Mr Robertson always:

- needs to know who is in the audience
- needs to see any agenda in advance
- needs the facts and then views
- prefers speeches to be simple
- likes to see speeches one week in advance of the event to check and allow time to commission more information, check facts or briefing
- likes headings for each section of the speech (except for autocue)
- dislikes long complex sentences full of abstract nouns
- likes helpful factual material and any detail for relevant facts

- likes speeches to be appropriate to the audience and event, picking up on recent, topical news or points of relevance (for example, include congratulations to a key attendee who has recently been appointed chair of the hosting organisation)

Mr Robertson sometimes prefers bullet points rather than a full speech in cases where there is no lectern or for informal engagements. These speeches should still flow logically, be grouped appropriately and read as he would say them (for example, 'I recently launched...' not '...launched by Angus Robertson on...'). Please check with private office if you're unsure as to whether a full speech or speaking points in bullet form are required.

When drafting a speech, you should also remember:

- it should be in Arial, point size 20 and with 1.5 spacing
- Mr Robertson speaks about 140 words per minute
- paragraphs should be no longer than two or three lines
- paragraphs should not run over pages – insert a page break (a page break, not multiple lines of hitting the 'enter' key) before any paragraph that does this.
- pages must be numbered (bottom right)
- to use headings to signpost sections of the speech and changes of topic (except for an autocue recording)
- to include phonetic pronunciations of any difficult names or terminology in [brackets] after the name or word
- to include examples of relevant events Mr Robertson has undertaken in his ministerial capacity, or relevant topical news stories
- to involve communications and special advisers in drafting
- to always check the speech for accuracy – facts and figures should be checked and double checked
- speeches should always be sent up as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack, and shouldn't have a blank page placeholder in the briefing pack saying the speech is attached separately – that will be obvious
- not leave any comments, even completed or 'hidden' ones, on the speech – this affects printing format
- to avoid using acronyms and jargon - where acronyms are necessary, these should be written out fully on first use
- if there is a quote included in a speech – the quote, and the paragraph related to it, should be on a separate page
- Mr Robertson likes to speak at a lectern - please request this where possible

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. You can also read the guidance on writing ministerial speeches.

You should keep these points in mind when writing a speech:

- make the speech relevant to the event
- who is the audience and what do they want to listen to
- the speech should use positive language
- don't recycle or copy and paste previous speeches on the same subject
- avoid getting bogged down in policy unless necessary

- include the big picture context - start and end with the big picture
- include some relevant and up-to-date context, especially in the introduction
- include any constitutional points that are appropriate
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- potential announcements should be discussed with communications colleagues
- add some colour to the speech to personalise it and feel free to include testimonials, startling facts and quotes
- it's important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it
- allow time for Mr Robertson to take interventions, or make personal additions when delivering speeches

Mr Robertson speaks German fluently - for German speaking audiences, he likes to be given the option of delivering speeches in German and may request a translation. If so, please ensure the translation is in an appropriate style (not either overly formal or too informal) for the event.

If you're writing a speech for an autocue recording, then the previous points apply but you should also:

- not use headings between different sections
- drop a new paragraph by only one line, not two – the extra space is unhelpful on an autocue recorder
- liaise with communications colleagues and private office well in advance to ensure a slot is booked in the media centre and held in Mr Robertson's diary

Angus Robertson - engagement briefing

Make sure you use Mr Robertson's preferred briefing template for visits and meetings. Tailor the information boxes as appropriate and only complete sections that are needed.

Keep the briefing as short as possible, ensuring it's relevant whilst avoiding duplication. It should focus on top lines for the engagement and biographies of those attending. Background information should be minimal, directly relevant, and clearly highlight anything new that Mr Robertson is not already aware of. Do include topical, recent news items if relevant. Don't include lots of wider background 'just in case' notes – if Mr Robertson wants more information, he will ask for it.

You should always submit speaking notes as separate documents and include page numbers (bottom right) in both briefings and speaking notes. Avoid including a blank page in the briefing pack saying the speaking note (or anything else) is attached separately – this is unhelpful for printing.

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office. Make sure the mobile numbers of supporting officials are included - this means the private office can contact you to advise of travel delays, or check on last minute logistics or details.

If amendments need to be made after the briefing or speech is submitted, contact private office as soon as possible to ensure Mr Robertson has the most up to date briefing pack or speech.

You should also make sure:

- communication colleagues and special advisers are aware of engagements where necessary, appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack and they are copied into correspondence
- to provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and phone numbers, and parking allocations (if available and required – Mr Robertson will often be happy to walk, cycle or take public transport depending on the location - private office can advise)
- not to leave any comments on the speech, even completed and 'hidden' ones – this unhelpfully affects the printing format
- you differentiate your briefing to ensure it's sufficient for the needs of the event or meeting
- to contact private office for further advice about specific requirements for engagements

Angus Robertson - parliamentary questions (PQs)

Answers to oral parliamentary questions (OPQs) should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs or 90 words maximum)
- respond to the question asked, and do so clearly and up front in the first sentence with any necessary explanatory text following, unless there's a good reason not to – Mr Robertson prefers this to answers that explain or caveat first before giving the answer in the final sentence
- avoid complex quotations or tables
- always include a background note, which should comprise of brief bullet points on each of the relevant issues
- the background note should include an FMQ style brief on the relevant issues and opposition activity (for example, recent questions they have asked on the subject, any articles they've commented on and social media activity)
- include likely supplementary questions, covering likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals that could be asked
- respond to the questioner in the third person, for example 'Mr X's constituency' not 'your constituency', as Chamber convention is that all members speak to the Presiding Officer, not to each other
- highlight separately to private office or in the PQ preparation meeting if there's something else topical, newsworthy or relevant to the question or policy context in general - Mr Robertson likes to ensure the Scottish Government has opportunities to proactively communicate its work to Parliament and could use the opportunity presented by portfolio questions to highlight things where appropriate

Officials should always seek to clear draft answers and background briefings with the special adviser before submitting to private office.

For special advisers, you shouldn't send these through the PQ system, but either as two standalone Word documents or a copy and paste into an email. Once OPQs have been cleared by special advisers, they should be sent through the system. Please notify private office as soon as possible if any further updates are required, so that we can either modify or return back to the official. Private office will clear these from the system once finalised.

If special advisers become aware of any supplementary questions, they will advise private office who will coordinate with officials for draft responses to these. The responses should be sent by email and not through the system, given that they are likely to be provided last minute.

Please be aware that there can also be follow up actions from OPQs – for example if Mr Robertson promises to write to another MSP with further information. It is helpful to watch him answer your question if you can (on Parliament TV).

For regular portfolio questions, Mr Robertson likes to have a short meeting that morning with all officials and special advisers to run through any questions he has.

Please ensure you or a substitute can attend this.

You should also ensure:

- we are not receiving draft answers or background briefings last minute, as Mr Robertson may ask to discuss these with officials before standing in chamber
- you're contactable on the morning the question is being answered or advise private office who can be contacted for last minute queries
- you have copied in portfolio communications colleagues to draft answers, particularly on topics of current media interest

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but don't offer information not requested (unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- answer the question clearly and up front in the first sentence with any necessary explanatory text following, unless there's a good reason not to – Mr Robertson prefers this to answers that explain or caveat first before giving the answer in the final sentence
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - make sure you're not padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- always be cleared by SPADs before submitting to private office

Background notes should provide context to the question and answer. Keep these as brief and succinct as possible – if Mr Robertson needs more information, he will ask. When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, Mr Robertson is keen that standard replies are used.

Read guidance on Parliamentary Questions, as there are strict guidelines for formatting PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerks' office would be happy to help.

Angus Robertson – submissions

Make sure you're using the current submission template and follow the guidance for ministerial submissions. All submissions to ministers should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. Mr Robertson should be able to quickly identify what he needs to consider.

The standard templates available are a helpful guide. If you're sending as an email, include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation. It helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information or requires a decision from Mr Robertson, what timeframe you need a response by, and briefly why. If it requires a decision, make sure you summarise what the recommendations are. Keep submissions as short as possible (one or two pages). Avoid including background details Mr Robertson is already aware of. Make sure you don't embed attachments in your submission document or send them solely as eRDM links.

You should also:

- number each page
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- proofread all material for correct grammar and spelling
- liaise with special advisers ahead of submitting if the contents are particularly sensitive

You must use the correct priority timings, which are:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office as soon as possible [Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]. You should always give consideration to recess, holidays, weekends and constituency days (Mondays and Fridays).

You must use the current security markings (where needed) and handling instructions such as Official Sensitive, rather than the previous Restricted or Confidential markings, and please be clear what information is or is not the public domain.

It's also the responsibility of officials to ensure responses to ministerial decisions are stored on eRDM.

Ensure that all relevant ministers, DGs, communications officers and special advisers are copied in, ideally in advance. As always, Mr Robertson should be copied into all submissions which are relevant or affect his portfolio interests.

Angus Robertson – correspondence

For correspondence on the MiCase system:

- all ministerial responses should reflect Mr Robertson's personality
- they should be person-centred and considerate of the correspondent - if you put yourself in the correspondent's position, what response would you expect?
- ensure the response answers all the points raised, or explains why we can't - try to be as helpful as possible
- don't pad your response with unnecessary Scottish Government policy lines - Mr Robertson finds this unhelpful
- refer to times flexibly where possible (for example, say that he 'recently' met Mr Y, not that he met Mr Y 'last week' or 'yesterday')
- provide an email address, as well as a postal address in the letter
- contact private office to check diary availability ahead of drafting responses
- avoid using jargon or abbreviations
- flag to private office if a response is needed before the MiCase deadline, for example for a diary invite where the event is earlier or a letter that needs to reach the recipient before something else happens
- contact private office if you would like further advice on handling correspondence
- private office will always send you the final copy, which was issued, with the minister's signature added
- keep a record of the letters and responses in eRDM (electronic Record and Document Management System) so we can make reference to them in future

For correspondence dealt with outside MiCase:

- responses to letters from devolved administrations or other MPs should be drafted and sent to private office for clearance within seven working days
- always provide an email address for the correspondent, as well as a postal address
- ensure formatting does not leave a big white chunk of space above and then put just his signature onto a new page – he really dislikes this
- private office will always send you the final copy, which was issued, with the minister's signature
- keep a record of the letters and responses in eRDM so we can make reference to them in future if needed

Mr Robertson also uses a preferred letter template and diary letter template which should be used for correspondence with stakeholders.

Ben Macpherson – Minister for Higher Education and Further Education

Ben Macpherson - Top Tips

Ben Macpherson is the Minister for Higher and Further Education. You can find his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

For submissions, number each paragraph, request, or decision you're seeking, to help with giving feedback.

Ben Macpherson - Briefing

The first pages of the briefing pack should set out the key points the Minister should make and any issues the Minister should know about. This is important if the Minister only reads one part of the briefing before a meeting/engagement, so consider what he needs to know and include that on the first page.

A briefing between one and four pages of just key facts can be incredibly useful. This can also be reused for other debates, statements and committee appearances.

Keep lines to take succinct and to the point, ensuring that they can be read out loud – don't pad out lines with words that do not say anything additional.

Ben Macpherson - Speeches

Formatting:

- headings should be right aligned
- use 16 Arial font and 1.5 spacing
- page numbers should be on the top right
- sentences should not run over the page

The Minister speaks at 150 words per minute. Think from the outset what key messages you want to convey in the speech and agree a structure first with the Minister before drafting. Keep to the point.

Draft the speech a minute or two less than allocated, to allow flexibility for Mr Macpherson to add sections in.

Speeches should:

- be written in active not passive language
- avoid acronyms and technical language unless they are initially explained
- think of the audience being addressed

Read the speech out loud and check that the sentences aren't too long, you don't trip over words, and uses plain English – if you can't read it out loud, amend.

Be careful not to be too repetitive, don't overly repeat the same point in the same section or elsewhere.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Engagements

Mr Macpherson is keen to arrive before speeches and stay afterwards rather than rushing in and out whenever possible. This is to get a sense of the event beforehand and afterwards, have discussions in the margins, and not just drop in and then disappear.

Ben Macpherson - Parliamentary questions

For oral PQs, the Minister would like the final version in the following order:

- Main question and answer.
- Supplementary question.
- Top lines set out by topic heading rather than drafting a possible question.
- Background note. Keep this as short as possible – think about the line or two of information you would say to someone if you were giving them the answer to clear, that is all that is needed.

Focus on answering the question only, don't add in too much extra information or lines to take.

Main question and answer

These should be clear and read out loud when checking.

Supplementary questions

These should be written similarly to the main answer, with a properly written response instead of bullet points. Read out loud when checking.
If very short on time, a bullet-pointed answer will be accepted.

Top lines

The Minister prefers top lines set out under topics as opposed to a question and answer format.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

The Minister will reject any background notes that are set up as questions instead of topics, so it's imperative that this format is followed.

Background note

The background note should be clear, concise and well-structured. The note should also include all the necessary information and shouldn't include things like "refer to S60-XXX". This information should instead be listed.

All tables should be inserted properly. Any images are rejected by Parly Clarks and can create issues in clearance on the system.

Correspondence outwith MiCase

For correspondence you should download and complete the Minster's letter template.

Make sure that Mr Macpherson's name doesn't have a capitalised P or is written as McPherson. The correct spelling is Macpherson.

Fiona Hyslop – Cabinet Secretary for Transport

Fiona Hyslop - top tips

Fiona Hyslop MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Transport. You can find her biography and responsibilities on the gov.scot website.

Kate Higgins is the special adviser covering the Transport portfolio. Kate should be copied into all submissions going to Ms Hyslop.

Ms Hyslop likes to receive all written work (submissions, engagement briefings, PQs, and correspondence) as early as possible and at least one week in advance of the deadline.

Working week

Ms Hyslop usually spends Mondays and Fridays doing constituency work. She would prefer to avoid arranging ministerial engagements on constituency days, where possible.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Meetings and engagements are always subject to parliamentary business and can be subject to change at very short notice. Ensure your stakeholders are aware of this when liaising with them on any events.

Fiona Hyslop – speeches

Speeches should have a clear structure and flowing style. Before drafting, you should think carefully about the audience the speech is intended for.

Make sure you know what the format of the event will be as well. Will the audience be standing or sitting? Will the Cabinet Secretary deliver the speech from a lectern (the preference for large events), sitting at a table, or standing in the centre of a room without a lectern?

This information should be included in the briefing.

Writing the speech

Use full speaking notes (with page numbers top and bottom right flush). Ms Hyslop speaks at around 150 words per minute. Always include a word count and approximate time at the start of the speech.

Think about what the speech is trying to achieve. Summarise this at the start, work through the body of the speech with it clearly in mind, then conclude by summarising the key message(s) again.

Ensure speeches have an introduction and conclusion, flow naturally and any subject changes are linked appropriately. Always check facts and figures, do a spell

check and read the speech aloud. This is the best way to notice things such as repetition or failing to allow for a natural breathing space.

If the time or word count is a concern (for example, for a debate), consider highlighting paragraphs in bold which Ms Hyslop could drop without affecting the flow of the speech or omitting key information.

Timescales for submitting the speech

You should send speeches to private office at least one week before the event or meeting. Speeches should always be quality checked and approved by special advisers.

The sooner speeches are shared with private office, the better. You can do this before sending the full briefing pack.

Format of the speech

Speeches should always be sent as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack in Arial font, size 16, 1.5 spacing.

Paragraphs should be left flush, with no bullet points or numbered paragraphs. Ensure paragraphs don't run over the page, are kept short using plain English and start on a new page when starting a new subject heading.

Further help and advice

Drafting a speech can be challenging and you may find it helpful to ask experienced colleagues for advice. If the speech is a high priority, a five-minute call with the Cabinet Secretary to run through the draft may be helpful.

Fiona Hyslop - engagement briefing

When preparing briefing, make sure you download and use Ms Hyslop's engagement briefing template.

Briefing is normally commissioned when private office sends out the diary scheduler to supporting official(s). Do not forward the diary invitation on, particularly to external stakeholders. They should receive separate details.

Ms Hyslop likes to consider briefings or speeches in advance and identify anything else she thinks should be included. All briefings must be sent to private office at least one week in advance of the engagement. If there's a good reason you're unable to meet the deadline, you must contact private office to agree a revised date.

Private office can advise on the drafting of engagement briefings and Ms Hyslop's preferences. Where something is unclear, early engagement with private office prevents briefings being sent back for redrafting on receipt.

Giving accurate logistical information in your briefing is important. It's often the small things that cause the biggest problems and sometimes determines ministers' views of a particular event. Please take the time to check our tips in these pages for preparing briefings.

A phone number for the supporting official is essential so that private office can contact them on the day about any last minute changes.

In briefings please do not use terms like tomorrow or next Monday - always use the day and date as briefing can sometimes come up over a week before the engagement.

How to use the template

Briefings should ideally be no longer than 10 pages. If briefings are too long, they will be returned for editing.

Don't delete cells from the first page of the briefing template. It should ideally fit on one side of A4 to allow for review of the details at a glance and follow the format and order.

The summary page for external events should capture the key issues that can be referred to quickly. Additional background briefing should be provided in as logical and succinct a way as possible.

Avoid unnecessary repetition between the summary page and the background briefing. In particular, avoid phrasing the same point differently in the two, as this can cause confusion.

Formatting tips:

- bullet points should not be used where possible
- avoid the use of italics
- always include page numbers
- use a consistent font type and size throughout the briefing (generally Arial, 12 point)
- use subheadings (bold and/or underlined) to assist with quickly locating relevant sections
- be clear about what are lines for Ms Hyslop to take, and what is background briefing not to be shared more widely
- the agenda should be written on its own individual page with timings

Speaking notes

Speaking notes should always be submitted as separate documents (and contain page numbers, top and bottom right flush).

For a speech delivered standing with a lectern or in Chamber use Arial 16 point with 1.5 line spacing.

For a speech delivered seated at a table (e.g. at Committee) use Arial 14 point with single line spacing.

For a short speech delivered standing with no lectern (e.g. remarks at ceremony) use Arial 14 with single lines spacing.

What to include in the briefing

All engagement briefings must have include a clear purpose and objective to the engagement as a whole and, where appropriate, for individual elements such as key agenda items. Ms Hyslop needs to understand what the engagement is seeking to achieve and what outcomes are anticipated.

You should also include:

- an attendee list (including details of previous engagements and brief biographies at the end for key participants Ms Hyslop has not met before)
- a numbered agenda, with timings where appropriate
- a steering brief where Ms Hyslop is chairing larger meetings

Annexes should then include briefing, lines to take, and expected questions, against each agenda item, with further background briefing included thereafter.

For any engagements which involve speaking to the media, Ms Hyslop requires specific media lines so that she knows what lines and messaging to communicate. It is the responsibility of policy officials to prepare this briefing, and advice can be sought from communications colleagues. Ms Hyslop also requires briefing on wider government running issues and local issues the day before any media engagement. You should also include an up to date and accurate address checked with the organisers if necessary. Provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers. For remote locations or large sites, it would also be helpful to provide a grid reference and what3words reference.

Multi-engagement briefings

Where Ms Hyslop is undertaking a multi-engagement visit across one or more days, a coordinated briefing pack should be provided.

This should include an overall steering brief with annotated itinerary and core briefing on key issues across the engagements. Separate packs should then be provided for each day (or grouping of engagements) with individual engagement briefings, using the above guidance, as annexes. Each briefing should be submitted as separate, individual attachments.

Please discuss and clear the briefing with private office before sending for Ms Hyslop's consideration.

Preparing for the engagement

Contact the event/meeting organiser directly for an agenda, details of what they would like the Cabinet Secretary to do or discuss (if a formal meeting), and the format of their event as early as possible. Agendas are essential to help focus

discussions – if stakeholders don't provide one, you should do so and inform the attendees to help steer the discussion.

If anything is unclear or if you're uncertain whether the format is appropriate, contact private office as soon as possible. You should find out, in particular, whether Ms Hyslop will be expected to speak at an event and if she will be asked to take questions after. If so, make sure you inform private office.

Official support should be provided, unless otherwise agreed with private office in advance. Officials should also draft a short note (for example on action points or any sensitive issues) post meetings, which should summarise any action(s) to be taken forward. You should submit this note to private office within one week of the event taking place for consideration and/or clearance.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

For visits which include hospitality or where it would be considered courteous, Ms Hyslop may wish to issue a thank you letter. You should discuss this with private office after the visit.

Fiona Hyslop - parliamentary questions

Oral Parliamentary questions

General questions take place weekly (Thursdays from 11:40am to midday) when there are eight questions across all ministerial portfolios. Questions are selected at random by the chamber desk. Portfolio questions take place on a Thursday afternoon every third week. There are eight questions for the Transport portfolio. Private office are normally advised on a Wednesday afternoon of the general questions and portfolio questions for the following Thursday. [Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Ms Hyslop may wish to have a short call with actioning officers a few days prior to oral questions to advise what additional briefing is required.

Please use the oral parliamentary question template.

Answers should be short and concise at around 100 words and must respond to the question asked. Answers must be Size 16 Arial font 2.0 line spacing. Keep these responses as close to the limit for each question as possible. Each concern in the question should be addressed. Write the answer to be spoken, and read questions aloud to ensure they flow. Do not use acronyms in answers and make sure everything is typed out in full. You should also avoid complex quotes or tables in your answer.

Answers must also include a 'background note' Size 12 Arial font which should include, in order:

- Expected supplementary question and answer section.

- Lines to take section.
- Clearly marked background briefing section for information.

You should clear draft oral answers or background briefing with your deputy director and with special advisers.

On submitting the answer, advise private office whether it has been cleared by special advisers or not. Ensure the actioning officer is contactable the morning the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries. AOs should follow up on any actions arising from oral questions within one week.

Once a question has been answered, the lead official should check the official report for factual accuracy.

Supplementary questions

Supplementary questions should be drafted using the same template as the original question and indicated clearly at the top of the page. These should be size 14 Arial font. There is no set word limit, but supplementary questions should be around 100 words also. 150 should ideally be the limit of an answer. If the response exceeds this, please contact PO to make them aware. They should be sent by email rather than on the PQ tracker.

Background information

The background note should include previous relevant parliamentary questions. You may wish to consider including an issue timeline or history, sensitivities or live issue, and other background information. Facts and figures relating to the subject should be provided in a clear and concise format. Include live or sensitive issues in the background note.

Topical parliamentary questions

There's often a very tight turnaround for topical PQs, which are normally alerted to private office late on Monday afternoons. The turnaround will be short and sometimes the same day. The same guidance for written and oral PQs applies.

Written parliamentary questions

When drafting a written PQ, the answer should address all the points in the question and be as helpful as possible. This means the answer should be relevant, with no unnecessary background or padding. It's important to avoid repetition - if several questions are asked and the answers can be combined into one, please do so.

You should also ensure all facts and figures are accurate and correct at the time of answering the question. An accompanying background note should be kept short, provide context and any additional details Ms Hyslop should be aware of.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, standard replies should be used. If a parliamentary question (PQ) is referring back to a previous answer, it should be worded as follows:

'I refer the member to the answer to question S5W-[number] on [date]. All answers to written Parliamentary Questions are available on the Parliament's website. You should ensure that the background note includes the other questions and answers being referred to so that Ms Hyslop can review them. Read further guidance on parliamentary questions.

Fiona Hyslop – submissions

When drafting a submission, use the ministerial submissions template.

They should be short, succinct and have an easy to follow structure with clear recommendations, where appropriate. Submissions should provide a clear purpose and conclusion or recommendation, even if this is 'to note'. If the subject matter is complex, it can be helpful to provide options for the Cabinet Secretary's consideration, for example option one, option two and so on. Always offer to meet with Ms Hyslop to discuss those options further, if necessary.

You must write out acronyms in full before abbreviating them in the text. Use plain English and avoid technical jargon and the use of bullet points, except where necessary. You should also avoid embedding documents in the submission. If a letter forms part of a submission, send this as a separate Word document (without headers and footers marking them as annexes) using the Cabinet Secretary letter template, or memo format if you're sending to another minister. Annexes should be clearly marked and you should use size 12 Arial font, 1.0 line spacing. Ensure submissions are clearly marked with their priority:

1. routine – within seven working days
2. urgent – within three working days
3. immediate – within 24 hours (a call should be made to private office before sending the submission)

Proofread your submission before sending by checking spelling, grammar, facts and figures and punctuation carefully.

When sending eRDM Objective links, you should include a Word version of the document as well. Check copy lists to ensure relevant ministers and officials are included.

Once Ms Hyslop has considered a submission, private office will feed back comments and/or clearance as soon as possible.

Ms Hyslop will on occasion ask private office to arrange a meeting with officials to discuss policy advice and recommendations in the submissions and action points provided before making a decision.

For more detailed information, read the submissions to ministers guidance.

Fiona Hyslop – correspondence

Correspondence should be drafted by downloading and using the correct letter template.

Ministers attach great importance to all correspondence. The information on this page provides guidance on how responses should be drafted.

Make sure you quality check and proof read all correspondence before sending it to private office.

Letters

You should ensure that if the incoming letter has a reference, this is copied in the response under 'Your Ref' and delete 'Your Ref' and 'Our Ref' if not required. The Cabinet Secretary's name and job title should always be in bold underneath the signature – **FIONA HYSLOP / Cabinet Secretary for Transport**

Diary invitations

Responses to all invitations addressed to Ms Hyslop should be drafted as from her private secretary.

All diary acceptance letters should be 'subject to parliamentary business' unless the event is outwith the parliamentary session, during recess.

Sound advice should be asked for from both policy and communications and included in the PS minute to allow Ms Hyslop to arrive at the correct decision. You should also consider whether officials could agree to fulfil the commitment.

Language

Consider who will be reading the response, for example young people. Ensure the reply is clear, concise and written in language easily understood - it should answer the question and show empathy. (You should also bear this in mind when drafting official replies.) Keep sentences short and avoid technical jargon. Always spell check and proofread responses.

'Scottish Government' should be used explicitly where appropriate - do not shorten to 'Government'. Where the reference is to the 'UK Government', say so.

If a case is reallocated to Ms Hyslop, you should use the phrase 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for xxx issue'.

Layout (including MiCase)

Use Ms Hyslop's letterhead template if outwith MiCase. Do not alter the default page set up of the letter template. Try to fit the reply on one page but do not decrease the font size to do so. Include references, the date, subject and name at the bottom. If Ms Hyslop's name is the only text on the second page, insert an appropriate page break to ensure at least two sentences are on the second page.

MiCase correspondence

Populate the salutation – if the response is to an MP or MSP, use their first name only. If the correspondent is known to the Cabinet Secretary, first names are also fine – otherwise the salutation should be Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs/Cllr Last Name only.

Ensure the draft response is quality checked and any spelling errors, superfluous spaces and so on are rectified. The formatting of the final version of the letter must also be checked. Always tick the box when your draft is complete to insert Ms Hyslop's electronic signature before sending to private office for processing.

If you are unable to meet the deadline for MiCase correspondence, flag this to private office.

Keep track of your MiCases after they are sent to private office. You should undertake routine audits to ensure they are completed and signed off on the system.

Gillian Martin – Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy

Gillian Martin - top tips

Gillian Martin MSP is Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy. You can read her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Ms Martin's constituency is Aberdeenshire East, and her constituency days are Mondays and Fridays. You should reach out to private office as early as possible if you want to discuss events which may fall on these days. You should also copy Ms Martin's ministerial mailbox into any issues concerning Ms Martin's constituency.

Private office require all briefing a week in advance, unless otherwise agreed with them. If briefing deadlines are going to be unmanageable, contact private office as early as possible to discuss extensions. You should copy briefing for speeches, debates and external engagements to special advisers. Special advisers should also be consulted when drafting speeches.

Contact private office by phone or MS Teams to make them aware of any urgent issues before sending and mark it urgent in the subject. Private office will provide further advice and help where they can.

Gillian Martin - speech and events

When writing a speech for Ms Martin it should:

- be in Arial, font size 16 and with 1.5 spacing
- have 130 words a minute
- always be at least two to three minutes shorter than the time slot, to allow Ms Martin to personalise it
- have numbered pages on the bottom right
- be written as speaking notes rather than bullet points
- be short, clear and concise - paragraphs should be no longer than two or three lines and should not run over pages
- be sent up as a Word document separate from the briefing pack
- avoid using acronyms and jargon as the speech is being spoken
- be relevant to the event and acknowledge who is in the audience
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- have headings for each section of the speech
- include factual material and detail of relevant facts
- not use parts of previous speeches on the same subject
- include the big picture context and start and end with the big picture
- include any constitutional points that are appropriate
- be discussed with communications colleagues if it is to include potential announcements
- be colourful and personalised - feel free to include testimonials, startling facts and quotes

Points to remember are:

- it's important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it
- facts and figures in the speech should be checked and double checked

Gillian Martin - engagement briefing

When writing an engagement briefing for Ms Martin:

1. use the preferred briefing template for visits and meetings (document will download) - tailor the information boxes as appropriate
2. keep the briefing as short and concise as possible, ensuring it is relevant while avoiding duplication
3. ensure it contains only the key facts, background information and anything new that Ms Martin is not already aware of
4. the first page should have a list of Government initiatives that are useful, including names and budget which they come from
5. include current top lines
6. attach speaking notes separately and in the appropriate format
7. note any previous meetings in background information
8. assume official support for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office (you must ensure mobile numbers of supporting officials are included)
9. ensure communications colleagues and special advisers (SPADs) are aware of engagements where necessary, and appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack
10. include a map which is helpful (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names, parking information and allocations (if any) and numbers
11. get in touch with private office as soon as possible if amendments need to be made after submission, to ensure Ms Martin has the most up to date briefing pack or speech
12. all external engagement packs should include an annex which includes the top lines from the respective Building a New Scotland publication

Gillian Martin - parliamentary questions (PQs)

For general and portfolio questions your answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- be up to 97 words maximum for oral PQ answers
- tackle the questions asked
- avoid quotes or tables (do not add tables into the background note either)
- always include a background note, which should be brief bullet points on each of the relevant issues

The background note should include an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity. For example, recent questions asked on the subject, any articles commented on and social media activity. You should keep timelines

clear and relevant.

Officials should always seek to clear the draft answer and background briefing with special advisers (SPADs) before submitting to private office. When seeking clearance, send via the PQ tracker and flag to private office if there are any issues with the tracker causing delays in sending. If there are delays, you should send via email.

Make sure private office don't receive draft answers or background briefings last minute, as Ms Martin may prefer to discuss these where possible with officials in advance of the questions.

You should make sure you're contactable the day the question is being answered or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries.

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant and therefore have no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- always be cleared by SPADs before submitting to private office

If there are any sensitivities Ms Martin needs to be aware of, please email private office.

Background notes should be brief and provide context to the question and answer.

Gillian Martin – correspondence

All diary cases should be drafted in the private secretary's name unless the correspondence is from an MP/MSP/Cllr.

For general correspondence:

- use Ms Martin's letter template (document will download)
- all ministerial responses should be tailored to the correspondent
- correspondence from senior stakeholders should come from Ms Martin
- make it person-centred and considerate of the correspondent
- ensure you answer all the questions and points raised, or explain why we can't - correspondence should always be as helpful as possible
- provide an email address for the relevant recipient
- avoid using jargon or abbreviations
- avoid using the third person in ministerial responses

Contact Ms Martin's private office if you would like further advice on handling correspondence.

For diary correspondence:

- draft an accept and decline response along with a detailed PS minute for private office
- contact private office to discuss if a request is not clear
- avoid where possible any engagements which fall on constituency days
- submit both an accept and decline where a meeting date is specified
- do not include policy information, as this is issued under the Private Secretary's name

There are templates to use for accepting and declining an invitation, depending on who the reply is coming from:

Accept (personal)

Thank you for your letter of [INSERT DATE] inviting me to [INSERT ENGAGEMENT].

I would be delighted to accept your invitation. Please contact my Diary Secretary at CabSecforCAE@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements.

Accept (on behalf of Ms Martin)

Thank you for your letter of [INSERT DATE] inviting Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, to [INSERT ENGAGEMENT].

Ms Martin would be delighted to accept your invitation. Please contact the Cabinet Secretary's Diary Secretary at CabSecforCAE@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements.

Decline (personal)

Thank you for your letter of [INSERT DATE] inviting me to [INSERT ENGAGEMENT].

Unfortunately, I am unable to attend at this time. I wish you every success with the [INSERT ENGAGEMENT].

Decline (on behalf of Ms Martin)

Thank you for your letter of [INSERT DATE] inviting Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, to [INSERT ENGAGEMENT].

Unfortunately, Ms Martin is unable to attend your [INSERT ENGAGEMENT]. She sends her best wishes for a successful event.

MiCase correspondence

Keep MiCase correspondence via the system. This ensures letters are not delayed or misplaced.

Correspondence outwith MiCase

Responses to letters from devolved administrations or other MPs should be drafted and sent to private office for clearance within seven working days. You should always provide an email address for the correspondent, as well as a postal address.

Private office will send you back the final copy which was issued, with Ms Martin's signature added. Keep a record of these letters and responses in eRDM so reference can be made to them in future if needed.

Graeme Dey – Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans

Graeme Dey - top tips

Graeme Dey MSP is Minister for Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans. You can find his biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website. Mr Dey works from an electronic box, however he prefers a physical daily briefing pack for engagements. There is no formal box closure time, but if you plan on sending something that requires an immediate response, please alert private office in advance.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Feel free to contact private office at any time. We will happily provide further advice and help where we can - don't ever be stuck.

Diary

Mr Dey's constituency is Angus South and his constituency days are Mondays and Fridays. The Minister is keen to protect these days for constituency business as much as possible, but please contact private office if you wish to discuss any events which fall on these days and we will ask Mr Dey to consider them.

Mr Dey's attendance at any engagements which fall on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday during the parliamentary term are subject to parliamentary business.

Official Support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

When attending an engagement, you should arrive early and familiarise yourself with the venue. Mr Dey likes to arrive at visits at least 15 minutes early.

You should also be contactable on the number provided on the briefing in case of any last-minute changes or unforeseen issues.

For meetings, sit next to Mr Dey so you can provide support. When attending events such as a visit or reception, try to be close by to assist with policy points, whilst giving the Minister space to mingle and interact with stakeholders.

Graeme Dey - engagement briefing

Briefing and speeches should be emailed to private office at least one week before the event or meeting is due to take place. Private office will specify a deadline when they email you or in the relevant diary invitation. Should any deadline not be possible, speak to private office.

External meetings and engagements

Make sure you use the preferred template for visits and meetings (document will download). Feel free to tailor the information boxes as appropriate and only fill the boxes that are needed.

Some tips when providing briefing are:

- provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name (please include the complete name as well as the acronym), contact names and numbers
- ensure mobile numbers for support officials are included
- always consult communications colleagues in advance of events and ensure special advisers are sighted
- ensure that all tracked changes have been removed before sending to private office
- keep briefings succinct, concise and to the point
- include any sensitivities and flag to private office in advance
- avoid repetition and copying and pasting large chunks of text
- ensure any copy and pasted text is up to date
- include page numbers and an index on the first page of the pack

Briefings should be provided one week ahead of an event. If there is any reason for delay, contact private office to confirm a revised deadline. It is particularly important to receive speeches in advance to allow sufficient time for Mr Dey's consideration and for private office to print, given the Minister's preference for physical papers.

You must ensure communications colleagues are aware of external engagements, and that appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack. Please keep them copied into any exchanges in advance of, or following, the engagement.

Statements, debates and committee appearances

You should prepare a briefing for parliamentary statements, debates and committee appearances using the parliamentary briefing template (document will download). Delete any instruction text before submitting to private office.

Parliamentary briefings are usually more comprehensive than other briefings. You should generally consider:

- key messages
- a summary of relevant manifesto commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals
- background information on key issues (including third party quotes)
- summary of any previous parliamentary activity on the issue
- any particular interest in relevant issues by other MSPs
- key facts and statistics
- recent media attention on the issues, and the Scottish Government response
- stakeholder views - for committee sessions, this would include whether the committee has recently taken evidence from the stakeholder, and any particular issues explored by the committee
- Q and A
- the committee's agenda and corresponding papers

- any relevant correspondence with the committee or MSPs
- copies of the official report for relevant committee meetings, debates, and statements

You should submit any speaking notes as a separate document. Speeches should be drafted in full prose. Briefing and speeches should be signed off by a deputy director and special adviser.

A pre-brief will be arranged ahead of time, where briefing and speech requirements will be discussed in more detail.

Graeme Dey – speeches

For speeches from a podium or lectern such as a conference, Mr Dey prefers full speeches. For a seated engagement during which the Minister will speak such as a roundtable, Mr Dey prefers bullet points.

Speeches should be submitted ideally a week in advance of the engagement to allow sufficient time for Mr Dey's consideration and should be sent up with the briefing pack attached as a separate Word document.

Speeches should be formatted with:

- Arial font, size 18
- single spacing, double spacing between each paragraph
- page breaks at the end of a paragraph – please do not split a paragraph over two pages
- pages numbered at the bottom right
- a word count and estimated timescale for delivery

Top tips for speeches:

- Mr Dey speaks at approximately 150 words per minute
- Mr Dey prefers speeches to be written in plain English and accessible to a broad audience – don't use acronyms or jargon
- where appropriate, Mr Dey enjoys using humour in speeches and will sometimes add personal anecdotes
- avoid repetition both in terms of content and word choice (i.e. the same words shouldn't occur multiple times in the same sentence)
- consider the audience when drafting the speech
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest
- reference any recent related engagements or visits

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and feel free to contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in the writing a speech guidance.

Graeme Dey - parliamentary questions (PQs) **Oral parliamentary questions (PQs)**

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point (around 100 words long)
- avoid complex quotes or tables in the answer
- always include a background note, which should include information on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity (for example, this could be recent questions they've asked on the subject, any articles they've commented on and social media activity)

You should include around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked along with suggested answers. Please make them difficult questions covering likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals.

You should also provide information on the member's interest in the area and why they may be asking the question. For example, previous questions they have asked. When preparing Mr Dey's briefing pack, the preferred format used by the Minister's private office is:

- parliamentary question and answer, known supplementary questions and answers, background note and Q and A in that order
- Arial font
- answers presented in size 18, single spacing and double spacing between paragraphs
- background note presented in size 12, single spacing
- Q and A presented in size 14, 1.5 spacing

Remember to:

- clear draft answers and the background briefing with special advisers before submitting to private office
- ensure you are contactable the morning the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written parliamentary questions (PQs)

When drafting written answers:

- keep answers short and concise, addressing all points in the question, but not offering excess information unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position
- use tables for complex numerical information
- if information is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, refer to this in the answer
- keep background notes succinct and provide context to the question and answer (if the answer refers to a previous answer, always include this for context)
- have a background note with a brief on each of the relevant issues

Government initiated questions

There are occasions when the most effective mechanism for the government to bring a matter to Parliament's attention is by means of a government initiated question (GIQ), which is always a written PQ.

GIQs can be used for announcing new policy initiatives, new or additional funding, the outcome of a consultation exercise, the publication of a report and so on. However, the alternatives (a ministerial statement or ministerial speech in the Chamber, or an existing PQ on the same subject) should be considered carefully before deciding what to use. Refer to the guidance on when and how to make announcements to parliament.

As set out in the guidance on announcements, the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans has a role in clearing all GIQs for parliamentary handling purposes. The Minister must therefore be top copied into the submission that is sent to the relevant portfolio minister(s). It is also essential the Parliamentary Clerk mailbox is copied in. Failure to copy in the Parliamentary Clerk on the original submission may result in preferred dates for GIQs being missed.

Any questions relating to GIQs should be directed to [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], Parliamentary Clerk, or [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], Deputy Parliamentary Clerk, via the Parliamentary Clerk mailbox.

Graeme Dey – submissions

The key points to remember when creating a submission for Mr Dey are:

- all submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Mr Dey should be able to quickly identify what he is required to consider
- it helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Mr Dey
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send them as eRDM Objective links
- proofread and spell check the submission and remove tracked changes/comments
- if the submission is sent with a draft letter, please attach separately on the formatted template provided
- please ensure the relevant special adviser is sighted on everything (normally Jeanette Campbell except for Veterans policy, which is Kate Higgins)
- ensure each page is numbered
- use the current security markings

You should also use the correct priority timing for submissions, which is:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, alert private office to check that Mr Dey is available to clear it. You should consider recess, holidays and weekends.

Mr Dey should be copied into anything which is relevant to his portfolio interests.

Ivan McKee – Minister for Public Finance

Ivan McKee - top tips

Ivan McKee MSP is the Minister for Public Finance. You can find his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Submissions

Private office will try to turn submissions around quickly. Please discuss handling and time sensitivities with private office firstly so they can help manage expectations. If a submission is urgent, highlight the specific time constraints in the covering email and submission.

Use the correct ministerial submission template to ensure a more consistent approach throughout the organisation. You should also limit submissions to four pages, as Mr McKee prefers submissions to be clear, concise and to the point. Read more about preparing a submission for Mr McKee.

Box papers

Mr McKee receives box papers electronically at all times other than during specified periods of annual leave. Private office will always issue a box closure notice ahead of these periods, which should be cascaded across teams as appropriate.

Meeting minutes

You should submit minutes from meetings to private office after any meeting or event for the Mr McKee's consideration.

Minutes should be with private office no later than one week after the event or meeting has taken place. Minutes should be clear and concise and no longer than one or two pages. You should also include an eRDM link when submitting.

Meeting minutes should not be a verbatim account of the meeting but should instead reflect a high level summary of the meeting, including key points for the official record and any action points.

Ivan McKee – speeches

Mr McKee needs to know who his audience will be. It's helpful if this information can be included in briefings in the form of biographies for keynote speakers and attendees.

You should always include an agenda in the briefing for any speaking event. It's also important to highlight a designated speaking slot. This allows private office to manage Mr McKee's time.

Mr McKee will only require a full speech for parliamentary business activity and events of importance where form of word is essential. For other speaking

engagements, Mr McKee prefers to receive bullet points to refer to (maximum one page) together with a note of any specific announcements that need to be included in the speech.

Speeches for engagements should not be longer than eight minutes, unless private office have agreed otherwise in advance.

Submit speeches to private office one week in advance of any event and ensure they are submitted as a separate document to the briefing pack.

Mr McKee speaks at 165 words per minute. When writing a speech for Mr McKee you should:

- use Arial font, size 15
- use 1.5 spacing
- have narrow margins
- include a page break if a page break occurs at the end of a paragraph
- include page numbers
- allow 20% time for interventions for parliamentary engagements
- try to get speeches onto as few pages as possible

Ivan McKee - engagement briefing

Briefings for Mr McKee should:

- use Mr McKee's preferred engagement briefing template, tailoring the information boxes as appropriate
- be short, concise, relevant and avoid duplication
- contain only key facts, background information and anything new that Mr McKee is not already aware of
- include current top lines
- be separate from speaking notes
- note any previous meetings in background information
- for shorter engagements (half an hour or less) be no more than five sides of A4 (not including a speaking note)

You can contact private office for further advice or to talk through specific requirements for engagements.

Support at visits or meetings

Official support for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office, is assumed. You must ensure mobile numbers of supporting officials are included in the briefing. You should also make communications colleagues and SPADs aware of engagements where necessary, and ensure appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack.

Include a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names, parking information and allocations (if any) and phone numbers. Please also copy your briefing to the Government Car Service. Ensure there is a clear and

concise annex covering page – the briefing should be page numbered and match with the annexes listed.

Briefings should have a clear annotated agenda with speaking points under each item. Think carefully about the contents of the briefing, ensuring it is appropriate for the event or meeting. You should also factor in how much time Mr McKee has set aside for each meeting - timings should be agreed with private office in advance.

If amendments are required to a larger briefing pack (such as committees or debates), track change these or make them very clear in the covering email. Doing this means we can easily substitute pages as appropriate within the pack. You should get in touch with private office as soon as possible if amendments need to be made after submission, to ensure Mr McKee has the most up to date briefing pack or speech.

For meetings with key stakeholders, ministerial colleagues from other Governments, major conferences and high profile events you should include:

- a cover sheet (use the correct briefing template and include who, why, when)
- an agenda
- a succinct detailed list of meeting objectives and what outcomes are desired
- background information in an FMQ format, which should follow with a Q and A on high level issues that could be raised, including rebuttal lines
- whether there has been prior engagement with the individual or company, and a brief outline of the previous meeting alongside the progress that's been made since
- biographies of attendees
- a speaking note if required or suggested speaking points if necessary. These should be with private office one week in advance
- use the correct template for ministerial meetings

Media bids and interviews

If Mr McKee has been asked to record a short clip (either radio or TV) for the media, any briefing supplied should be no more than two sides of A4.

The briefing should cover:

- top lines alongside short and relevant background notes (FMQ style format is preferable)
- any key events which are relevant to the topic within the last year, including any recent lines or news releases released on the topic

For longer, more in-depth interviews (for example, longer segments or an interview on a specific subject with a newspaper or magazine journalist), a full briefing pack is usually required. You should discuss briefing expectations with private office.

Parliamentary engagements

Parliamentary engagements such as debates, statements or committee appearances are often complex and wide ranging. Such engagements will require clear, comprehensive, but also easily navigable and succinct briefing.

The briefing should include:

- a cover sheet, including a clear annex list alongside page numbers
- key messages Mr McKee will wish to focus on
- a summary of relevant FM policy prospectus commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttal lines
- FMQ style background briefing, including a Q and A on the issues that will be raised (including issues, rebuttals and background information)
- speaking note - read the guidance on writing speeches for advice on what to include
- historical context, including key facts or figures
- summary of any previous evidence sessions

Briefings should be signed off by a deputy director before sending to private office.

If amendments to larger briefing packs (such as committees or debates) are required, please make this clear. Private office will often request any extra, additional information is submitted as a separate document.

Ivan McKee - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum). Please note the 97 word count limit - often private office have to return answers as they are too long and won't be accepted.

You should avoid complex quotes or tables within the answer itself. Any tables required should be included in the background note. A background note should be provided for every question. It should also include an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity, such as recent questions they've asked on the subject, any articles they've commented on and social media activity.

A Q and A list should be included in the background note. These may be required for potential supplementary questions that could be asked. Make sure there are four or five provided and take into account likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals. Supplementary question answers should be no longer than 90 words.

Officials should:

- provide answers by private office's deadline to allow Mr McKee sufficient time for editing if necessary

- make sure SPADs are sighted in advance at all times
- ensure action officers (AOs) are contactable the morning the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

If an official is not going to be in the office on the day or days leading up to portfolio questions, you're responsible for ensuring another colleague is made the AO on the system. Contact ParlyClerk Scotland to do so.

Written parliamentary questions (PQs)

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all the points in the question, but should not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- be sure to answer the question
- always be spell checked.

You should always supply background notes in advance of submitting to private office for approval and should be succinct, providing context to the question and answer.

When an MSP asks a PQ regarding information already in the public domain, or information which has already been supplied in an earlier answer, please use standard replies.

For further information, follow the guidance on parliamentary questions. There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs - contact private office or the parliamentary clerks' office if you have any queries.

Ivan McKee – submissions

Submissions for Mr McKee should:

- have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response so Mr McKee can quickly identify what he needs to consider
- have a covering email clearly stating whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Mr McKee
- be kept as clear and concise as possible - do not include background detail Mr McKee will already be aware of
- not have any embedded attachments or eRDM objective links
- have all template comments and any tracked changes removed

Priority timings

Make sure you use the correct priority timing for your submission:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert them and also check Mr McKee is available to clear it. Consideration should also be given to recess, holidays and weekends.

You should ensure all relevant ministers, directors general, communications officers and special advisers are copied in. You should also consult special advisers in advance of submitting papers to Mr McKee.

Ivan McKee – correspondence

Ministerial correspondence is subject to corporate targets and should be answered within 20 working days. Urgent correspondence should be fast tracked.

Draft replies for ministerial consideration should be with private office within 10 working days.

You should familiarise yourself with the guidance on handling ministerial correspondence before drafting replies for Mr McKee.

When replying on MiCase you should:

- include an email address directly under the final line of the address
- ensure you use the preferred reply address when corresponding with MSPs (some MSPs ask for a particular address to be used)
- begin by thanking the sender for their letter and refer to the date it was sent
- provide a short apology for the delay in replying if the response is late
- in cases where the original correspondence was sent to another minister, but Mr McKee is replying, acknowledge this and explain why he is responding instead

For all diary acceptance replies include the following text in your draft:

'Please note that all engagements accepted by the Minister are subject to Parliamentary business and can change at short notice. Please contact our office at MinisterPF@gov.scot to finalise arrangements.'

For ministerial replies, Mr McKee's signature should be centred at the bottom of the letter as:

IVAN MCKEE

And for diary replies the private secretary's name should be used:

[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)]
Private Secretary

For letters outwith the MiCase system use Mr McKee's preferred letter template.

Jenni Minto – Minister for Public Health and Women's Health

Jenni Minto - top tips

Jenny Minto MSP is the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. You can find her biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website.

Box

Ms Minto works from an electronic box and generally doesn't take physical papers. This means we can get things to her quickly and can update any papers she already has.

It's always helpful to indicate on your submission or email when you need a response by.

Diary

Ms Minto is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. She does understand that there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]. Any event taking place outwith the Parliament building should only be accepted with the caveat that it's subject to parliamentary business, as Ms Minto will need that flexibility.

The diary fills up quickly, so it's helpful to have as much notice as possible of potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give us notice, but the time may be used if not confirmed.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a meeting request to the lead official requesting briefing. Please always let us know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this or if timings or location change, as they can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

Official support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

Chats

Ms Minto is happy to have a chat whenever needed, either face to face or on the phone. She does appreciate how busy everyone is, so if a chat would be helpful or reduce the need to prepare submissions let us know.

Special advisers (SPADs)

Please ensure you involve SPADs in various processes and seek their input and advice before submitting to Ms Minto. This includes submissions, PQs and communications items.

Jenni Minto – speeches

Speaking engagements (conferences, meetings, receptions)

Pre-meetings will be arranged in advance (where time allows) to discuss Ms Minto's requirements.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

- [Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]
- [Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Recordings

Full speaking notes are required

Debates or committee

Full speaking notes are required. However, debate closing speeches should be topped and tailed and include key messages and rebuttals.

Tips:

- send in first drafts of speeches as early as possible - private office will usually set a deadline and pre-meetings should be arranged, but please ask if this hasn't been done
- avoid jargon
- read speaking notes aloud to check fluency
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest

Format:

- Arial font 16pt
- 1.5 line spacing
- page breaks at the end of a paragraph
- pages numbered
- include a word count and estimated time of delivery

Speaking rate

Ms Minto speaks at around 140 words per minute.

Please ensure the following box is completed and included as page one (a copy is included in the briefing template):

Speech box

Clear message of speech -

Layout of room - round table, theatre style etc. -

Lectern or sitting as part of a panel?

Make-up of the audience?

How many are attending?

What do they want to hear?

Any media interest?

Have special advisers and communications colleagues been consulted?

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. Further advice can also be found in writing a speech.

Jenni Minto - engagement briefing

Please consider the event being attended and ensure the level of briefing is appropriate. Short visits do not require a lengthy briefing pack. Make sure you use Ms Minto's briefing template.

Key points

You should provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers. For remote locations or large sites, it would also be helpful to provide a grid reference. You can find a latitude and longitude reference on Google maps, by right clicking on a point and then selecting 'What's here?'. Please also copy your briefing to Government Car Service.

You should also:

- ensure mobile numbers for supporting officials are included
- always include speaking notes as separate documents
- if amendments are required after the briefing has been submitted, please track changes or make it clear in the covering email
- background information can be provided in FMQ format if appropriate
- if a previous meeting has happened, please include a note of progress since
- always consult communications colleagues in advance of events and ensure special advisers are sighted

Jenni Minto - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- answer the questions
- avoid complex quotes or tables

- have a background note that includes an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues

Officials should:

- consider around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked
- clear draft answers and the background briefing with the special adviser before submitting to private office - when doing so, don't send through the PQ system, but either as two standalone Word documents or copy and pasted into an email
- on submitting the answer, advise private office whether the answer has been cleared by the special adviser or not
- ensure that they are contactable the morning the question is being answered or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but do not offer up information not requested (unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, please use the standard reply that points to that information.

Read further guidance on parliamentary questions.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerks' office would be happy to help.

Jenni Minto – submissions

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. Ms Minto should be able to quickly identify what she's required to consider.

A standard template is available as a helpful guide. If sending in an email format, please include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation. It helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information or requires a decision from Ms Minto.

Make sure you use the correct priority timing:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert us and also check that Ms Minto is available to clear it. You should give consideration to recess, holidays and weekends.

Key points to remember are:

- to keep submissions as short as possible
- don't embed attachments in your submission document or send as eRDM Objective links
- to make sure each page is numbered
- to remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- to use the current security markings, such as Official Sensitive, not Restricted or Confidential (please also be clear what is in the public domain and what is not)
- to proof read all material to correct grammar and spelling
- you should send submissions that require the cabinet secretary and the lead minister, or the cabinet secretary and First Minister, to make a decision on a 1:2 basis
- to ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special advisers are copied in - ideally special advisers and communications should be consulted in advance

Further information can be found in submissions to ministers.

Jenni Minto - correspondence

Ms Minto is keen to be as helpful as she can when replying to correspondence. Try to ensure any points made in the letter have been addressed and questions answered where possible. If necessary you can provide a private secretary (PS) minute detailing additional information or advice not for inclusion in the reply. Make sure you use Ms Minto's letter template.

When preparing a diary case, ensure communications colleagues are consulted so Ms Minto can consider this along with policy advice and thoroughly consider the merits of attending.

For all correspondence, always begin with a thank you for sending the original email or letter and refer to the date it was sent. If our response is late, please provide an explanation.

If the original correspondence was sent to another minister but Ms Minto is replying, you should also make that clear.

When replying to MSPs, ensure you use the reply address provided. If replying to an invitation, please ask them to contact ministerphwh@gov.scot.

Key points:

- font – Arial, size 12
- language – consider the recipient and tailor appropriately
- sign off – ministerial reply – Jenni Minto MSP
- PS reply – [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], PRIVATE SECRETARY

Jenny Gilruth – Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Jenny Gilruth - top tips

Jenny Gilruth MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. You can find her biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website.

Box

Ms Gilruth works from an electronic box and generally doesn't take physical papers. This means we can get things to her quickly and can update any papers she already has. There is no formal box closure time, but if you plan on sending something that requires an immediate response, please alert private office in advance. It is always helpful to indicate on your submission or email when you need a response by.

Diary

Ms Gilruth is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. She does understand there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider these.

The diary fills up quickly, so it is helpful to have as much notice as possible of potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give private office notice, but the time may be used if not confirmed.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a meeting request to the lead official requesting briefing. You should always let us know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this or if timings or the location change. Any changes can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

Official support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

When attending an engagement, you should arrive early and familiarise yourself with the venue. You should meet Ms Gilruth at the entrance, introduce yourself and then facilitate introductions with others.

You should also be contactable on the number provided on the briefing in case of any last-minute changes or unforeseen issues.

Support the Cabinet Secretary by actively contributing to meetings where appropriate. Take a note of the discussion and follow up on any agreed action points.

Chats

Ms Gilruth is happy to have a chat whenever needed. She does appreciate how busy everyone is, so if a chat would be helpful or reduce the need to prepare submissions then let us know.

Minutes of meeting

All meetings with ministers need to be properly recorded and documented. These include both external meetings with stakeholders and internal meetings with officials.

It is the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of a meeting with a minister. Notes of meetings should be agreed through private office and, once agreed, stored in eRDM by the policy area. A link to the saved minute should be shared with private office.

Special advisers (SPADs)

You should involve SPADs and seek their input and advice before submitting to Ms Gilruth. This includes submissions, parliamentary questions (PQs) and communications items.

Jenny Gilruth - speeches and events

Speaking engagements (including conferences, meetings and receptions)

Pre-meetings will be arranged in advance (where time allows) to discuss Ms Gilruth's requirements.

Ms Gilruth in general prefers full speeches, although she appreciates this may vary depending on the audience. You should try to submit it at least a week in advance. If Ms Gilruth is chairing a meeting, you should make this clear in the briefing, which should also include a chair's brief and accompanying speaking points. This briefing can take the form of an annotated agenda.

Debates or committee

Full speaking notes are required for debate opening speeches. However, debate closing speeches should be made up of a written start to the speech and a written conclusion. The main body of the speech will be formed during the debate as Ms Gilruth responds to the points made. To assist with this, include a series of one pages on the most likely issues to arise, with lines to take on each, for Ms Gilruth to use as required.

Committee speaking notes should always be written out in full.

Some tips to be aware of when writing speeches are:

- it is helpful to have first drafts of speeches as early as possible and private office will usually set a deadline and arrange pre-meetings - please ask if this hasn't been done
- ensure it is tailored to the engagement and not copied and pasted from previous speeches
- consider the audience and tailor accordingly (for example, less “policy speak” would be more appropriate when speaking to young people)
- avoid jargon and acronyms
- read speaking notes aloud to check fluency
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest
- reference any recent related engagements or visits

Speeches should be formatted with:

- Arial font, 18 point
- 1.5 line spacing
- page breaks at the end of a paragraph - do not split a paragraph over two pages
- pages numbered at the bottom right
- a word count and estimated timescale for delivery

Speaking rate

Ms Gilruth speaks at around 160 words per minute.

Ensure the speech box details from the briefing template are completed and include as page one of your briefing.

You should include the following:

- clear message for the speech
- layout of room – for example round table, theatre style
- lectern or sitting as part of a panel
- make-up of the audience
- how many are attending
- what do they want to hear
- any media interest
- whether special advisers and communications colleagues have been consulted

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in the writing a speech guidance.

Jenny Gilruth - diary and engagement briefing

The following table gives a rough guide to when Ms Gilruth is likely to be available for engagements:

AM or PM	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Constituency commitments	Cabinet meets on Tuesday mornings during the Parliamentary term. This slot will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.	Opportunity for external engagements or meetings	Opportunity for external engagements or meetings until 11am	Constituency commitments
PM	Constituency commitments	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Constituency commitments

You should consider the event being attended and ensure the level of briefing is appropriate. Short visits do not require a lengthy briefing pack.

Make sure you download the templates for engagements and meetings.

Some tips when providing briefing for meetings or engagements are:

- consider the engagement and the level of briefing required
- provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers
- ensure mobile numbers for supporting officials are included
- include speaking notes as separate documents
- if amendments are required after the briefing is submitted, track changes or make it clear in the covering email what has changed
- provide background information in FMQ format if appropriate
- if a previous meeting has happened, include a note of progress since
- always consult communications colleagues in advance of events and ensure special advisers are sighted

Jenny Gilruth - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point (around 100 words long)
- address the question asked
- avoid using tables
- have background note that includes an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues

You should include around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked along with suggested answers.

You should also provide information on the member's interest in the area and why they may be asking the question. For example, previous questions they have asked.

Remember to:

- clear draft answers and the background briefing with special advisers before submitting to private office
- ensure you are contactable the morning the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written parliamentary questions

When drafting written answers:

- ensure it answers the question fully but don't offer information not requested
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- clear draft answers and background briefing with special advisers before submitting to private office

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, use the standard response to refer to it.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerks office would be happy to help.

For further information, follow the guidance on parliamentary questions.

Jenny Gilruth – submissions

Key points to remember when creating a submission for Ms Gilruth are:

- all submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Ms Gilruth should be able to quickly identify what she is required to consider
- clearly state when a response is needed by

- the standard template is available as a helpful guide - if sending in an email format, please include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation
- it helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Ms Gilruth
- keep submissions as short as possible
- previous submissions can be attached as background if this helps avoid repetition
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send them as eRDM Objective links
- ensure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- use the current security markings
- proofread all material to ensure correct grammar and spelling
- ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications (comms) officers and special advisers are copied in (ideally comms and special advisers are consulted in advance)

You should also use the correct priority timing for submissions, which are:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, alert private office to check that Ms Don is available to clear it. You should give consideration to recess, holidays and weekends.

You can find further information in the submissions to ministers guidance.

Jenny Gilruth – correspondence

Ms Gilruth is keen to be as helpful as she can when replying. You should ensure any points made in the letter are addressed and questions answered where possible. If necessary, you can provide a PS minute detailing additional information or advice not for inclusion in the reply.

When preparing a diary case, ensure communications colleagues are consulted so Ms Gilruth can consider this along with policy advice and the merits of attending.

Correspondence information to include	Further details and instructions
Address	<p>Use the reply address provided on the letter. Some correspondence specifies an address they would like a response to. If the letter has a reference, please include this under 'Your Ref'.</p> <p>When an MSP/MP writes on behalf of their constituent, refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given. You should do this in the subject line of the reply. For example: Dear XXX, RE: Jenny Gilruth, 1 Holyrood Place, Scottish Parliament, EH99 1SP I write regarding the above named constituent and your recent correspondence with my office. You should also personalise the response to the elected member. For example: 'Dear Mairi' as opposed to 'Dear Mairi Gougeon MSP'.</p>
Contact details	<p>When offering contact details for Ms Gilruth, please only use the email address CabSecES2024@gov.scot Personal accounts are not used.</p>
Content	<p>Consider who will be reading the response and tailor the language as necessary. For example, a softer, less "policy speak" tone will be more appropriate when corresponding with young people or children. Ensure the reply is clear and concise and avoid using unnecessary jargon. If Ms Gilruth is responding to a letter sent to another minister, explain that and why. For example - 'Thank you for your letter of DATE to OTHER MINISTER, I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for SUBJECT'.</p>
Co-ordinated responses	<p>Many MiCases are related to parliamentary questions (PQs) or press releases. Ensure all the facts and figures are consistent.</p>
Date	<p>Refer to the date of the original letter in the response. If you send the response at either the end or the beginning of a month, check the letter is dated appropriately. If in doubt, it is often best to date a response with the new month as, depending on ministerial availability, it may take a couple of days before Ms Gilruth sees it.</p>
Font	<p>The main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12.</p>

Diary invitations	<p>Always draft two separate letters - one accepting and one declining the invitation. Alternatively, a separate letter for any other possible answers, such as another minister will undertake the event can be drafted where appropriate.</p> <p>Always include a PS minute, detailing any background detail and policy advice</p> <p>Responses should be in the private secretary's name, unless the correspondent is a member of parliament, other government minister or a constituent.</p> <p>Example diary case replies</p> <p>Accept</p> <p>Thank you for your email dated XXXX inviting Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to attend / meet / visit XXXX.</p> <p>Ms Gilruth would be delighted to accept your invitation. I would be grateful if you would contact her Assistant Private Secretary at CabSecES2024@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>Decline</p> <p>Thank you for your email dated XXXX inviting Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to attend / meet / visit XXXX.</p> <p>Ms Gilruth will unfortunately be unable to accept your invitation. Please accept her apologies and best wishes for a successful event / conference / XXXX.</p>
Layout	<p>If drafting a letter outwith MiCase, use Ms Gilruth's letter template. Make sure you add page breaks at the end of a paragraph.</p>
Ministerial replies	<p>All letters to members of parliament, other government ministers and constituents should be drafted in Ms Gilruth's name.</p>
Official replies	<p>Include 'I have been asked by Ms Gilruth to thank you for your letter of [DATE] and to reply on her behalf, or a similar form of words.</p>
Photo	<p>You can find Ms Gilruth's official photo on the Scottish Government Flickr page.</p>
Signature	<p>Ministerial reply – JENNY GILRUTH PS reply – [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] Private Secretary</p>
Spelling	<p>Always check spelling and proofread the response before forwarding to private office.</p>

Salutations and pronouns	Ensure you use the appropriate titles and pronouns of those being responded to. Use the terms they use to refer to themselves.
Late correspondence	<p>It is always helpful if cases can reach Ms Gilruth as soon as possible to allow her more time to consider it amongst many other papers. If submitting a case to private office after the deadline, include an explanation for Ms Gilruth's information and offer an apology in the correspondence if appropriate.</p> <p>If a case is significantly late, consider whether it is still appropriate for the Cabinet Secretary to issue the response.</p>

Jim Fairlie – Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Jim Fairlie - top tips

Jim Fairlie MSP is Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity. Read his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Briefing is always commissioned a week in advance of any event and Mr Fairlie's private office is happy to discuss deadlines. If it's a big set piece event, such as a parliamentary debate or speech, the team require briefing a minimum of a week in advance for Mr Fairlie's consideration. Make sure you copy in special advisers (SPADs) and communications colleagues into all correspondence and briefings. They should also be consulted when drafting speeches.

Contact Mr Fairlie's private office to make them aware of any urgent issues before emailing regarding it and ensure it is marked urgent in the subject. Private office provide further advice and help where they can - get in touch by phone or MS Teams.

Jim Fairlie - speeches and events

You should read general guidance on writing speeches before you start preparing a speech.

Written speeches for Mr Fairlie should:

- be in arial, size 18 and with 1.5 spacing
- have numbered pages (on the bottom right)
- be short, clear and concise - paragraphs should be no longer than two or three lines and should not run over pages
- avoid using acronyms and jargon
- be relevant to the event and acknowledge who is in the audience
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- have headings for each section of the speech
- include factual material and detail of relevant facts
- include the big picture context - start and end with the big picture
- include any appropriate constitutional points
- be discussed with communications colleagues if they are to include potential announcements
- be colourful and personalised - feel free to include testimonials, startling facts and quotes
- have facts and figures double checked
- always be sent up as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack

It's important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it. Mr Fairlie speaks at approximately 140 words per minute and likes to speak at a lectern - please request this where possible.

Jim Fairlie - engagement briefing

You should keep briefing for Mr Fairlie as short and concise as possible, ensuring it is relevant while avoiding duplication.

Engagement briefings should:

- only include the important facts, background information and anything new that Mr Fairlie is not already aware of
- include current top lines
- be separate from speaking notes
- note any previous meetings in the background information
- assume official support for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office
- you must ensure mobile numbers of supporting officials are included
- ensure communication colleagues and special advisers (SPADs) are aware of engagements where necessary, and appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack
- include a map which is helpful (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names, parking information and allocations (if any) and numbers - a what3words reference is also useful, particularly in rural locations

Mr Fairlie often has a printed briefing pack. Please get in touch with private office as soon as possible if amendments need to be made after submission to ensure Mr Fairlie has the most up to date version.

Jim Fairlie - parliamentary questions

When preparing answers for general, topical and portfolio questions for Mr Fairlie they should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- be to 97 words maximum for oral parliamentary question (PQ) answers
- tackle the questions asked
- avoid quotes or tables (do not add tables into the background note either)
- always include a background note, which should be brief bullet points on each of the relevant issues

The background note should include an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity. For example this should include recent questions that have been asked on the subject, any articles commented on and social media activity. You should keep timelines clear and relevant.

Officials should always seek to clear the draft answer and background briefing with special advisers (SPADs) before submitting to private office. When seeking clearance do not send anything through the PQ system. Private office will clear these off the system when finalised. Make sure private office don't receive draft answers or

background briefings last minute. This is in case Mr Fairlie wishes to discuss these with officials in advance of the questions.

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant and therefore have no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- always be cleared by SPADs before submitting to private office

If there are any sensitivities Mr Fairlie needs to be aware of, email private office.

Background notes should be brief and provide context to the question and answer.

Jim Fairlie – submissions

Submissions for Mr Fairlie should:

- have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Mr Fairlie should be able to quickly identify what he is required to consider
- clearly state in the covering email whether this is for information, or required a decision from Mr Fairlie and a deadline
- be kept as short as possible (one or two pages)
- avoid including background detail Mr Fairlie is already aware of
- do not include embedded attachments or be sent as eRDM links
- have all template comments and any track changes removed
- be clear what is in the public domain and what is not
- ensure all relevant ministers, directors general, communication officer and special advisers (SPADs) are copied in – unless it's exceptional circumstances SPADs should be consulted in advance

Please use the following priority timing:

- routine - over three days
- urgent - within three days but more than 24 hours
- immediate - within 24 hours

Jim Fairlie – correspondence

Ministers attach great importance to all correspondence. The information on this page provides guidance on how responses should be drafted on behalf of Mr Fairlie. You should draft correspondence by downloading and using Mr Fairlie's letter template.

Make sure you quality check and proofread all correspondence before sending it to private office.

When handling general correspondence for Mr Fairlie all responses should be tailored to the correspondent. You should make it person-centred and considerate of the correspondent. Ensure you answer all the questions and points raised, or explain why we can't.

Correspondence should always be as helpful as possible. You should follow these steps:

- Provide an email address, as well as a postal address in the letter.
- Avoid using jargon or abbreviations.
- Contact private office if you would like further advice on handling correspondence.

Diary invitations

Responses to all invitations addressed to Mr Fairlie should be drafted as from his private secretary.

All diary acceptance letters should be 'subject to parliamentary business' unless the event is outwith the parliamentary session, during recess.

Sound advice should be asked for from both policy and communications and included in the PS minute to allow Mr Fairlie to arrive at the correct decision. You should also consider whether officials could agree to fulfil the commitment.

Include a draft accept and decline response.

Language

Consider who will be reading the response, for example young people. Ensure the reply is clear, concise and written in language easily understood - it should answer the question and show empathy. (You should also bear this in mind when drafting official replies.) Keep sentences short and avoid technical jargon. Always spell check and proofread responses.

'Scottish Government' should be used explicitly where appropriate - do not shorten to 'Government'. Where the reference is to the 'UK Government', say so.

If a case is reallocated to Mr Fairlie, you should use the phrase 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for xxx issue'.

Visit accept draft response

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, inviting the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity to XX

The Minister would be delighted to accept your invitation, subject to parliamentary business. I'd be grateful if you could contact his Diary Secretary, at MinisterforAC@gov.scot, to make the necessary further arrangements.

Visit decline draft response

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, inviting the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity to XX.

Unfortunately, due to existing commitments, the Minister is unable to accept your kind invitation on this occasion. He has asked me to pass on his best wishes for a successful event.

Meeting accept draft response

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, requesting a meeting with the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

The Minister would be delighted to meet with you, subject to parliamentary business. I'd be grateful if you could contact his Diary Secretary, at MinisterforAC@gov.scot, to make the necessary further arrangements.

Meeting decline draft response

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, requesting a meeting with the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity.

Unfortunately, due to existing commitments, the Minister is unable to meet with you at this time. He has asked me to pass on his best wishes.

Correspondence outwith MiCase

Responses to letters from devolved administrations or other MPs should be drafted and sent to private office for clearance within seven working days. You should always provide an email address for the correspondent, as well as an email address.

Private office will send you back the final copy which was issued with Mr Fairlie's signature added. Keep a record of these letters and responses in eRDM so they can be referred back to in future if needed.

John Swinney – First Minister

First Minister

John Swinney MSP is the First Minister of Scotland and head of the Scottish Government. You can read his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

All submissions, invitations, and general queries relevant to the First Minister should be sent in the first instance to the First Minister's private office (FMPO) to ensure all requests are dealt with.

Box times

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First Minister – speeches

The First Minister's Speechwriters are [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], and [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)].

The First Minister's speechwriters should be contacted at the earliest opportunity in preparation for any events where the First Minister is expected to give a speech or formal opening remarks, or to record a video address related to a national or religious holiday.

Policy videos are now handled by the relevant policy area. For more guidance on these, consult the ministerial video messages guidance for officials.

Preparation for every speech is different. For most speeches longer than 10 minutes, you can expect to have a brief, initial conversation with the team. This is to discuss the coordination of responsibilities and what you think will make the event a success, according to your knowledge of the audience and your policy expertise.

Working with the First Minister's speechwriters

Please contact [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] and [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] as soon as possible to discuss the audience, format and key messages for the event you are working on.

In most cases, you will be asked to prepare an initial draft of the speaking note. You should ideally clear this draft within your team hierarchy before speechwriters begin working with you. This ensures the facts, commitments, context and areas of emphasis in the speech are all correct from a policy standpoint. Speechwriters will

then liaise with you as they develop the next draft of the speech, clear it with special advisers, and submit it to the First Minister's Private Office.

The First Minister's speechwriters may also engage a trained writer from the Scottish Government (SG) Speechwriter Network to assist you and them.

The First Minister's preferences for speeches are as follows:

- Mr Swinney speaks at approximately 160 words per minute
- use A4, Tahoma font and size 14 points
- 1.5 line spacing
- only use bold for emphasis
- allow time for interventions in parliamentary statements and debates
- include page numbers
- use numbers rather than words when referring to amounts (for example, '35 students' rather than 'thirty-five students')
- Mr Swinney likes key facts and headline policy lines to be very visibly presented

If the First Minister's speechwriting team is unavailable, contact the First Minister's Private Office to discuss event planning further.

Training

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First Minister - meetings and engagements

When preparing an engagement or meeting briefing for the First Minister, make sure you use the First Minister's preferred briefing template.

Once Mr Swinney agrees to a meeting or external visit, the relevant private secretary will contact officials to commission a briefing. For visits and events, in addition to the briefing we will also be providing the FM with an operational note. The relevant private secretary will share a link to a shared ops note document whilst commissioning a briefing. This new shared ops note will allow policy, visits and events and communications to contribute to or review the document.

The diary secretary will schedule the event, inviting external stakeholders if required.

The First Minister's visits and events team will assist in all logistical aspects of external visits and contribute to briefing packs.

For external engagements, you should consult and copy in communications colleagues, into any relevant email trails. Your briefing should include the background to this.

Providing official support

It is common practice for an official to support Mr Swinney at both internal and external engagements, unless otherwise agreed with private office. You should discuss and agree official support with the relevant private secretary in advance and the name and mobile number of the official should be included in the briefing.

Officials have a responsibility for ensuring their mobile phone is switched on and they can be contacted both ahead of, and during, engagements. This means First Minister's private office (FMPO) can contact you if we require any last-minute information.

If you are using a laptop during a meeting, please ensure the volume is turned off and typing does not distract from the meeting.

Keeping an official note

There's a requirement for an official note of all ministerial meetings to be produced. The most appropriate official who supported the First Minister should provide this. Read guidance on taking minutes for more information.

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What a briefing should include

Keep briefing short, relevant and avoid duplication. Briefing should tell the First Minister what he needs to know – it should not repeat information he is already aware of. All briefing should be cleared at deputy director level.

External meetings and visits briefings should:

- be as succinct as possible
- include a cover sheet which clearly outlines the purpose of the meeting and who the key people the First Minister is meeting are
- detail the First Minister's role in the agenda or running order where he is attending an event
- briefly outline the meeting objective(s) and what outcome(s) are desired
- clearly outline any sensitivities the First Minister should be aware of
- include relevant background on key issues to be discussed (use FMQ format)
- include information on any previous meetings and a note of progress since
- include bios on attendees Mr Swinney has not met before
- clearly stated if there is to be a Q and A session and provide relevant supplementary information

Speaking notes are drafted by the First Minister's speechwriting team. Officials should help the team by way of discussion and if necessary early sight of the briefing.

You must ensure briefing and speeches are with FMPO four days in advance of the engagement.

Parliamentary engagements

The First Minister will occasionally participate by opening or closing debates, or providing a statement to Parliament. First Minister's private office and special advisers will contact the relevant policy area to discuss requirements as appropriate.

The First Minister's speechwriting team will work with special advisers on any parliamentary statements or speeches. Policy teams will need to provide briefing on the subject matter to help with this.

First Minister – submissions

The First Minister's private office (FMPO) deals with large volumes of information and greatly appreciate all efforts to cut down on the amount of material the First Minister is expected to look at. You should only send or copy emails to the First Minister's mailbox if they genuinely require the attention of Mr Swinney or his private office team.

If you're in any doubt whether an email should be submitted to FMPO, contact the relevant private secretary, or send your submission to the relevant cabinet secretary. They, or their private office, can make a judgement on whether it should be forwarded to the First Minister. They can also tell you whether he needs to be involved in any decision being sought.

When emailing a submission to FMPO ensure you include and consider the following.

State if the submission is for clearance

Always state clearly whether a submission is for the First Minister to clear. The First Minister only has time to deal with emails or submissions where he's personally required to take a decision, or where it's clear he must be aware of the contents. It is important you make it clear within the body of the email what you're asking Mr Swinney to do.

Ensure your content is representative of government

You must ensure material in the submission is representative of the whole government. Getting separate advice from different areas of the organisation on a subject means it's difficult for us to provide the First Minister with a coherent picture. FMPO will assume the relevant cabinet secretary, minister and special adviser have already cleared the submission. Their comments should be included within the submission for the First Minister to see.

Give a clear, precise timescale for clearance

Indicate whether a submission is urgent or routine. You should submit routine advice with at least five days' notice before a decision is required for FMPO to review and to get a steer from the First Minister. Make sure you consider the timings of recess, holidays and weekends. You should also give a clear indication of what you're seeking from the First Minister – for example is it for a response, or for information?

Keep the submission short

It's important to keep material you provide short (maximum four pages). Often one page of bullet points is the most helpful type of background brief, and you should not include background material the First Minister will already be aware of. FMPO will reject submissions which are too long, so to avoid further editing, stick to the page limit.

You should also:

- stick to the facts - the First Minister prefers to receive key facts and attributable verbatim quotes, and does not find lines to take or Q and A useful except as supplementary material
- use the current security markings, and be clear about what is in the public domain and what is not
- recommendations and/or conclusions should be in bold
- accurately mark any annexes (A,B,C and so on) and give them appropriate titles properly format the document - don't embed attachments in your submission, or send them as eRDM Objective links, and ensure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and tracked changes
- ensure all relevant ministers, directors general, communication officers and special advisers are copied in
- consult communications and special advisers before you send the submission

When preparing a submission for the First Minister, use the standard ministerial submissions template (document will download) as a helpful guide. All submissions should be typed on the submissions template using Arial font size 12 points. If sending in an email format, include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation.

You can find further guidance on the submissions to ministers page.

First Minister – correspondence

If you need to draft a letter on behalf of the First Minister, you should speak to the relevant portfolio private secretary first. They will be able to offer a steer on what key points should be added to the letter.

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Responses should be written on the FM's letter template (document will download).

All letters should be proofread in advance and all spelling and grammar checked before you send them.

Title

For formal occasions, the First Minister should be referred to as the Rt. Hon. John Swinney MSP, First Minister of Scotland.

Diary cases

For all diary requests, ensure the relevant special adviser is consulted before submitting the case to FMPO. Check the PS Minute includes policy advice and portfolio SPADs recommendations. In cases where a letter is being provided for the FM to accept an invitation for a meeting or a visit, we should not put the onus on the organisation to get in touch to arrange this – the response should state “a member of my Private Office team will be in touch to take forward arrangements”.

Kate Forbes – Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic

Kate Forbes - top tips

Kate Forbes MSP is the Deputy First Minister (DFM) and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic.

You can find her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

If you need further information or advice, contact a member of the private office team. If you need something dealt with urgently, mark as urgent in an email or alternatively phone.

It is often helpful to follow up an urgent email with a phone call to make sure it's prioritised. On parliament days private office is very busy and can't always deal with things straight away. However, if the team know something is urgent, they will always endeavour to get to it as soon as possible.

The DFM's box is an electronic box, with papers emailed by private office.

Ms Forbes prefers to read briefings on her laptop, so you should ensure the layout is appropriate for reading from a screen.

Kate Forbes – speeches

When drafting a speech for Ms Forbes, you should remember she always:

1. prefers prose for opening speeches, bullet points for closing speeches - as a guide you should provide no more than one to two pages for a 5-minute speech, and no more than three to four pages for a 10-minute speech
2. needs to know who is in the audience - you can get this information from the organiser
3. needs to see any agenda - if it's a conference, there is usually one and a theme
4. needs to see any associated papers, such as a glossy brochure - it's very important to get hold of these, as they will help form a speech relevant to the occasion
5. needs to know the format, such as will the speech be followed by Q and A, is it part of a panel of speakers or is it an opening speech?
6. needs the facts, and then views - keep it simple (bullet points are usually enough)
7. wishes to record where there is a UK Government responsibility and set out the facts on that
8. likes to get speeches one week before the event to check over and allow time to commission more information, check facts or briefing
9. does like helpful factual material, and detail of relevant facts
10. likes to refer to the audience - include examples of what the audience do or have done to make the speech relevant
11. speaks at about 130 words a minute
12. often uses her iPad to give the speech

There should always be a briefing on possible questions and answers if the organisers have indicated there will be Q and A at the event. It should be formatted like the possible supplementary page for oral questions. Lead with questions most recently raised in the press, include high level economic achievements towards the end, followed by anything else deemed appropriate.

When drafting a speech:

1. use Arial font, 16 points with 1.5 spacing
2. ensure paragraphs are no longer than two or three lines
3. if the speech is in printed format, ensure page breaks are at the end of a sentence - paragraphs should also not run over pages
4. number pages
5. include examples of things Ms Forbes has done in her ministerial capacity
6. involve communications and special advisers (SPADs) in drafting
7. always check the speech for accuracy - facts and figures should be checked and double checked

Speeches should always be sent up as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack. Avoid using acronyms and jargon. Remember the speech is being spoken. As Ms Forbes often uses an iPad to give the speech, she wants to know where the nearest plug socket is. She also likes to speak at a lectern - please request this if possible.

Find out what kind of microphone will be used. Ms Forbes' preference is a lapel or mobile microphone rather than a fixed microphone.

Ms Forbes would like to see an early draft of the speech before it is finalised to give thoughts on direction and content. This does not have to be fully complete.

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. Further advice can also be found in writing a speech.

When drafting a speech, consider the following:

- make the speech relevant to the event
- who are the audience and what do they want to hear about
- the speech should use positive language
- do not recycle or copy and paste parts of previous speeches on the same subject
- avoid using highly technical content
- include the big picture context - start and end with the big picture
- include some relevant context, especially in the introduction
- include any constitutional points that are appropriate
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- potential announcements - these should be discussed with communications colleagues

- add some colour and personalise the speech - feel free to include testimonials, startling facts, and quotes
- it is important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it

Read examples of speeches on the gov.scot website.

Kate Forbes - engagement briefing

You should consider the type of meeting or event and tailor the briefing appropriately. Ms Forbes likes succinct briefings, with the high level, most relevant detail at the top, followed by additional details.

Think about what is particularly newsworthy at the moment in time, or what the audience will think is a priority. Always put the most recent or the most notable issues at the top so that Ms Forbes does not have to go digging in the briefing for the most important details. This is important as Ms Forbes has a very busy diary and may only have the opportunity to read briefings between meetings.

The briefing should be clear about the purpose of the meeting and what Ms Forbes needs to get out of it. Identify clearly what action you want the Minister to take and the deadline. If you want Ms Forbes to take actions, make decisions or make an announcement at a meeting, always ensure she has considered the issue in detail before asking in public.

Ms Forbes likes to know who she is meeting and their role/position. If there are a series of annexes, put the names, biographies and roles of who Ms Forbes is meeting at the top. It is also useful to know when the last contact the person had with the Scottish Government was, either by meeting another minister or through correspondence.

Private office understand there are occasions where briefing or submissions may need to be changed after being sent. If this is the case, it is important to return in tracked changes or clearly marked where the changes have been made.

You should also, where possible, only copy in private office into a final version and not any email exchanges that lead to a final document. However it is appreciated that this will depend on the situation, as it is sometimes useful to understand the status of submissions, briefings or responses.

If Ms Forbes has a meeting or event that covers a number of policy areas, it's helpful to have a single policy area lead on the co-ordination and preparation of the full briefing pack.

When drafting a briefing for Ms Forbes:

- ensure you use Ms Forbes's preferred briefing template for engagements or meetings
- it should always follow the structure laid out in the template including the sequence of the annexes

- where there are more than six annexes (for example A to F), please list annexes as page numbers on the contents page (for example 1 to 25) instead of using letters of the alphabet – this aids Ms Forbes in locating the information more easily in a larger briefing pack and avoids the need to tab each annex
- consider why Ms Forbes is having the meeting, what are the aims (what does she wish to get out of it), what might she be pressed on by stakeholders/attendees? A one-page covering the purpose and key points is always helpful
- email briefing and speeches one week before the event - only by exception, having discussed with private office can briefing and speeches be sent late
- provide an address and postcode (checked with the organisers) to the private office Assistant Private Secretary as far in advance as possible - check the details carefully as incomplete/confusing directions lead to delays and stress
- provide a map (where required), organisation name, contact names and numbers - for remote locations or large sites, it would be helpful to provide a grid reference (you can find a latitude and longitude reference on Google maps, by right clicking on a point and then selecting 'What's here?') - please also copy your briefing to Government Car Service
- provide any parking information and a map, include a photo from Google maps as an annex - you can either update the existing box in the template with car parking details or add an extra line and name it 'specific entrance for ministerial car/parking arrangements'
- ensure any official attending an event with Ms Forbes notes their mobile number in the briefing, and has this phone switched on, as this means private office or the Minister can contact them to advise of travel delays or check on last minute logistics or points of detail - officials are expected to be available before the engagement starts in case Ms Forbes requires a pre-brief
- briefings should be short, succinct and easy to follow - for regular meetings this is eight pages maximum and briefings for larger meetings that Ms Forbes is chairing should include a steering brief, but this should still be kept as succinct as possible
- request a lectern at the venue and note on the briefing - if this cannot be provided, include details the layout, for example speaking from a table
- speaking notes should always be submitted as separate documents (and contain page numbers)- make sure you read Ms Forbes' speech preferences
- any amendments required after the briefing is submitted may require to be written in by private office - please use track changes or make them very clear in the covering email
- official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office, and it would be helpful to include a mobile number for the day

Please differentiate your briefing to ensure it is sufficient and proportionate for the needs of the event or meeting.

Meetings with key stakeholders, ministers of other governments, major conferences and high-profile events

Briefing should include:

- ideally a maximum of 20 pages (number pages and don't embed documents in Word documents (they can get missed in our printing))
- cover sheet/index
- agenda
- meeting objective(s) and what outcome(s) are desired (this should be succinct)
- background on key issues to be discussed (use First Minister's Questions (FMQ) format)
- if there was a previous meeting, a note of that and progress since
- Q and A
- bios on meeting attendees (not previously met)
- provide a full delegate list
- speaking note - if required

Meetings with external stakeholders, receptions or events, including dinners

These briefings should be similar to meetings with key stakeholders, ministers of other governments, major conferences and high profile events but ideally no more than eight pages. If there is planned networking at an engagement, speak to private office in advance.

Routine visits/engagements or photo-ops

Briefings should:

- cover logistic briefing only - no more than six pages
- explain why Ms Forbes is attending
- include when, where, what and who, guest list, and bios
- note any key local or topical issues to be aware of
- include a line about most recent engagement the organisation has had with Scottish Government – for example correspondence, meeting, and a line on who the local MSP/MP is

Parliamentary engagements

Ms Forbes takes parliamentary engagements such as debates, statements or committee appearances very seriously. Such engagements will require comprehensive, but also easily navigable and succinct briefing. This is likely to include:

- cover sheet
- key messages to get across
- summary of relevant manifesto commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals
- FMQ style background briefing on key issues (including third party quotes)
- speaking note - read speech preferences (link to speech page)
- historical context, including key facts or figures (not covered above)
- summary of any previous evidence sessions

Briefing should be signed off by a deputy director and the special adviser before being sent to private office.

Kate Forbes - Parliamentary Questions

Answers to parliamentary questions (PQs) should:

- be short, succinct and to the point
- be 97 words long or fewer, as per instructions from the Presiding Officer regarding the length of all oral questions
- clearly answer the questions
- avoid complex quotes or tables
- include possible supplementary questions and answers as the first item of the background note (leading with the subject areas the member has most recently been active on, followed by issues in the press, FMQ lines and then any other relevant documents)
- include a separate general economy highlights briefing

Officials should:

- seek to clear draft answer/background briefing with the special adviser in advance of submitting to private office - when doing so these should not be sent through the PQ system but either as two standalone Word documents or a copy and paste into an email
- on submitting the answer advise private office whether the answer has been cleared by the special adviser or not
- ensure that they are contactable the morning the question is being answered or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Ms Forbes would like early sight of the draft before it is finalised. You should seek to clear draft answers with the special adviser before submitting to private office if the subject matter is controversial or likely to cause media interest.

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, Ms Forbes is keen that standard replies are used.

Read further guidance on Parliamentary Questions.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerk's office would be happy to help.

Kate Forbes – submissions

Key points to be aware of when creating a submission for Ms Forbes are:

- all submissions to ministers should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response - Ms Forbes should be able to quickly identify what they are
- it helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Ms Forbes
- keep submissions as short as possible (one or two pages) and do not include background detail Ms Forbes will already be aware of
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send as eRDM Objective links
- ensure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- use the current security markings, such as Official Sensitive, not Restricted or Confidential (please also be clear what is in the public domain and what is not)
- proofread all material to correct grammar and spelling
- submissions that require a Minister and the Cabinet Secretary, to make a decision, should be submitted on a 1:2 basis
- ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and the special adviser are copied in - ideally the latter two should be consulted in advance

Use the correct priority timing for submissions:

- routine (over 3 days)
- urgent (within 3 days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert them and also check that Ms Forbes is available to clear it. You should also consider if its recess, holidays or a weekend.

Further information can be found in submissions to ministers.

Kate Forbes – correspondence

Ministerial correspondence is subject to corporate targets and should be answered within 20 working days. Draft replies for ministerial consideration should be with private office within 10 working days. Guidance for drafting correspondence and handling invitations on behalf of Ms Forbes is detailed on this page and private office is more than happy to answer any queries you may have.

Please ensure you use Ms Forbes's Gaelic letter template (document will download), which you can also find in the shared ministerial templates on Word, when drafting responses out with the MiCase system.

Key points to remember are:

- Ms Forbes attaches great importance to correspondence and would like policy colleagues to draft quick and sympathetic responses to all letters from members of the public
- Ms Forbes will personally respond to all letters from MPs, MSPs, MEPs, Members of the House of Lords, councillors, chairpersons/chief executives of public bodies and key stakeholders, friends/acquaintances, and constituents (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch)
- in each case there is a 'main' point the correspondent makes. Replies should show that the Minister has 'got it'. To do that use 'playback' - in other words, begin the letter by repeating the main concern raised, simply to show that the Minister has understood the primary issue, concern, point, criticism or whatever is the purpose of the email or letter. Then respond by setting out the facts and then our views. Candour is good. We cannot satisfy all comers, nor should we raise expectations unfairly
- use plain English
- check several times for any typos or grammatical errors
- dates should follow Scottish Government convention (for example 18 October 2016, not 18th October 2016)
- remove unnecessary parts of the template (for example unused refs, signature)
- include the month and year at the top (day will be written in) and put the Minister's name in the signature space – the letter should be ready to print and not need further editing by private office
- leave four lines between the date and the start of the letter for the 'Dear x' to be handwritten and six lines between the end of the letter and the Minister's name for the signature, which should be in **bold** in the centre of the page
- we check the MiCase system regularly for all draft responses for clearance, so there is no need to phone or email to alert us
- ensure any MiCases which are either political or sensitive, if they relate to a current hot topic, are cleared by the special adviser before submitting to private office

Guidance is listed in the table in alphabetical order:

Considerations for correspondence	Instructions
Address	<p>MSPs - use the reply address provided on the letter template. Many MSPs now request replies are sent to their constituency address, or will only list their constituency as the reply address. Please also ensure that if the incoming letter has a reference, this is copied in the response under 'Your Ref'</p> <p>Constituents - when an MSP/MP writes on behalf of their constituent, please refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given</p> <p>Email - some correspondents prefer to receive their response by email, or do not give a postal address. If there is only an email address, please put this under the correspondent's name at the top of the letter. Once the letter has been signed off, it will be scanned and emailed by private office</p>
Contact details	<p>When drafting an acceptance to an invitation, include a sentence asking the correspondent to contact the Deputy First Minister's Diary Secretary, [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], by email at dfmcseg@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements (see also invitations).</p>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open the letter with some background, for example 'Thank you for your letter of x about...' • ensure the response answers the points raised by the correspondent • avoid 'general interest' details, which do not answer the question asked • if cutting and pasting from previous correspondence, please ensure the response is tailored to the current correspondent and that all facts and figures are up to date
Co-ordinated responses	<p>Many MiCases are related to PQs, press releases and so on. Make sure all facts and figures are consistent.</p>
Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refer to the date of the original letter in the response • if you send up the response at the end/beginning of a month, check the letter is dated appropriately. If in doubt, it is often best to date a response with the new month as, depending on Ms Forbes's box arrangements, it may be into the next month before the letter is signed
Delays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if it has been more than four weeks since the original letter was written, include an apology for the delay in replying

Considerations for correspondence	Instructions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if the MiCase is not sent to the Minister within the private office deadline, include a short note explaining the delay
Font	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12 the St Andrew's House address details, our ref and date are formatted. Please do not reformat.
Diary invitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure a valid postal/email address is put on the final reply letters - this is important so we can make sure the letter reaches the correct recipient make sure the final reply letters are signed off by the Private Secretary rather than the Cabinet Secretary. Private office sends out all accept/reject letters; the Cabinet Secretary does not sign these off please ensure the PS Minute includes all specific policy details/key points/comms views - the more information given, the more likely the Minister will make a firm decision flag up any diary cases that are going to be sent up late - especially if it is an event in the near future. This allows us to let the organisation know well before the event is taking place please ensure that the grammar/spelling is accurate - in private office we don't have time to change all the letters individually, so this is a great help <p>Sample diary case responses:</p> <p>Accept:</p> <p>Thank you for your letter of 1 January inviting Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, to attend your Annual Conference.</p> <p>Ms Forbes would be delighted to accept your invitation subject to Parliamentary business. I would be grateful if you could contact the Deputy First Minister's Diary Secretary, [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], via email at DFMCSSEG@gov.scot to arrange a mutually convenient date/make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p> <p>Decline:</p>

**Considerations
for
correspondence**

Instructions

Thank you for your letter of 1 January inviting Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, to attend your Annual Conference.

Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, Ms Forbes will be unable to accept your kind invitation. Please accept her apologies and best wishes for a successful event.

**[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)]
PRIVATE SECRETARY**

Language

- consider who will be reading the response, for example children/young people
- ensure the reply is clear, concise, and written in a language that is easily understood - read how to write well for reference
- do not use unnecessary phrases at the beginning of sentences for example: 'I am writing to...'; 'First of all,...'; 'I have to advise you that...'; 'Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to set out some general background about...'
- keep sentences short and avoid jargon
- if a case is reallocated to Kate Forbes for answer, the phrase 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise' should be used
- do not use the phrase 'I am afraid' - a good alternative is 'Unfortunately'
- please do not use the phrase, 'Scottish Ministers have no locus to intervene' - alternative wording is 'it is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers to intervene'
- where appropriate add, 'I hope this is helpful' at the end of a response

**Considerations
for
correspondence**

Instructions

Layout

- try to fit the reply on one page, but do not make the font smaller to do so
- do not alter the default page set-up and if drafting a letter out with MiCase, please use the ministerial template found in the Scottish Ministers folder in Microsoft Word
- leave four lines free at the top between the date and the start of the letter and six lines at the bottom of the text of the response to allow the Cabinet Secretary to add her signature
- if, due to the above formatting, the Cabinet Secretary's name is the only thing on the second page, insert an appropriate page break to ensure that either two full sentences or the last paragraph is moved onto the second page
- do not use **SUBJECT TITLES** at the beginning of letter, instead incorporate in the opening sentence 'Thank you for your letter of 1 January about...'
- do not use paragraph numbering
- ensure that unused text boxes are removed as these will appear in the final draft as <<text>>, Your ref, signature
- ensure that the Cabinet Secretary's name at the bottom of the letter is in bold and capitals in the centre of the letter '**KATE FORBES**'.
- the PS's signature should also be in the centre of the page as detailed in the signatures section
- text should be centre justified

Official replies

Please include 'I have been asked by Ms Forbes to thank you for your letter of day/month and to reply on her behalf' or a similar form of words.

Reallocation

Ministerial replies can be reallocated so that Ms Forbes is answering on behalf of another Cabinet Secretary/Minister who received the original letter. Please thank the correspondent for their letter to the original Cabinet Secretary/Minister and add, 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise'.

Signature

Letters for the Cabinet Secretary's signature (in the centre of the page)

KATE FORBES

Considerations for correspondence	Instructions
	<p>Letters for PS/Ms Forbes's signature (in the centre of the page)</p> <p>[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p>
Spelling	Use a spell checker and proofread the response before issuing it
Timing	It is always helpful if cases can reach the Cabinet Secretary as soon as possible, as this allows extra time for discussion if necessary.
Titles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include the full title of the correspondent i.e. Director/Chairman/Convener • if responding to a Councillor, please address him/her as such • if they have another title such as Convenor/Chairperson, this should also be included • do not use Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms unless the correspondent does • do not use Esquire after a name

Further advice

Contact private office if you have a query or require advice about any correspondence preferences. We are happy to discuss issues and find the best way forward. Our office is on the fifth floor in St Andrew's House or call the team.

Find contact details for Ms Forbes' private office.

Kaukab Stewart – Minister for Equalities

Kaukab Stewart - top tips

Kaukab Stewart MSP is Minister for Equalities. Read her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Kaukab Stewart – submissions

You should familiarise yourself with the general guidance on submissions to ministers.

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. Keep submissions as short as possible. Don't include background detail which has previously been submitted.

For significant submissions or proposed events, contact communications and/or special advisers before submitting to private office.

In your covering email, clearly state whether it is for information or for action and use the correct priority category:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours – call private office on submission)

Kaukab Stewart – engagements

Ms Stewart spends Mondays and Fridays in her constituency - please consider this when suggesting engagements. All engagements are subject to parliamentary business so can change at very short notice. You should ensure stakeholders are aware of this.

Official support is expected at all engagements. Any exceptions to this must be agreed with private office. Officials supporting at engagements should participate actively, particularly around ensuring:

- the event runs to time
- appropriate introductions are made
- the agenda is adhered to
- valuable discussion is facilitated

Briefing

Download and use the correct briefing template from the table on this page and send as a Word document – you must not send an eRDM link. Guidance for completing the templates is included within them.

Deadlines for submitting briefings are highlighted in the diary entry sent to you by private office. These are set with Ms Stewart's diary, priorities and commitments in

mind. Missing a deadline can have significant consequences. If you are likely to miss one, get in touch with private office as early as possible.

If a briefing requires any amendments after it's been submitted, phone private office before resubmitting. An amended section or additional annex is often more helpful than resubmitting the whole briefing.

Type of event	Template
<ul style="list-style-type: none">parliamentary debatescommittee appearances	Debate committee template - Kaukab Stewart
<ul style="list-style-type: none">ministerial working groupsmeetings with other ministers, stakeholders or organisations	Meetings template - Kaukab Stewart
<ul style="list-style-type: none">external visits and events or parliamentary receptions	Engagement template - Kaukab Stewart

Kaukab Stewart – speeches

Speech requirements for Ms Stewart vary based on the engagement, but as default you should draft the speech verbatim unless agreed otherwise with private office.

When drafting:

- consider the format of the event and the audience
- set a clear structure and avoid jargon
- avoid long, wordy phrases and sentences
- keep to the required word count (speaking rate, 130 words per minute) - never draft above this
- read the speech aloud before submitting

When formatting and finalising the speech, do not split sentences or paragraphs between pages. Use the 'keep lines together' checkbox. To select this in Word expand the 'Paragraph' section in the ribbon and then go to the 'Line and Page Breaks' tab.

You should also:

- set text to Arial, point size 18 with 1.5 paragraph spacing
- insert page numbers in the top right corner
- submit as a separate attachment to the wider briefing pack

Kaukab Stewart - parliamentary questions (PQs)

You should familiarise yourself with types of parliamentary questions (PQs).

Oral questions

Private office are generally advised of oral questions one week in advance and will circulate guidance and deadlines on receipt, through the PQ tracker or directly by email.

Whilst drafting and submitting:

- keep answers short and concise, with a maximum of 97 words
- provide suggested supplementary questions and answers
- seek special adviser clearance of any contentious answers before finalising
- allocate to the correct minister and private office on the PQ tracker before submitting
- it is essential that an official is available in the days and morning leading up to the question being answered

Written PQs

When drafting and submitting:

- keep answers concise
- use tables for complex numerical information
- refer to a previous answer where information has already been provided
- keep background notes succinct and include any previous questions or answers where they are referred to

Kaukab Stewart – correspondence

Read the guidance on handling ministerial correspondence.

Replies will be sent out electronically, unless no email address is available. Even when sending electronically, the postal address should be typed in full and the email address provided directly under the final line of the address.

When drafting and submitting, thank the sender and refer to the original correspondence, acknowledging if it was sent to another minister.

Diary declines

For diary declines, reply that Ms Stewart is unable to accept at this time - do not mention 'diary pressures' as a reason for declining.

All diary responses should be drafted in the Private Secretary's name and should not contain policy information. Any diary responses that are issued in Ms Stewart's name should only be to key stakeholders, or the response must include policy information due to sensitivities.

Accepting invitations

When accepting an invitation, include the line 'Please note that all engagements accepted by the Minister are subject to Parliamentary business and can change at

short notice. Please contact MinisterforEqualities@gov.scot to finalise arrangements.'

Signing the reply

Make sure you left justify the signature and sign it KAUKAB STEWART for ministerial replies, or [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], Private Secretary for diary replies.

Mairi Gougeon – Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

Mairi Gougeon - top tips

Mairi Gougeon MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands. You can find her biography and responsibilities on the gov.scot website. If you need a high-resolution image of Ms Gougeon, you can find one on Flickr. Ms Gougeon's general preferences are:

- special advisors must be consulted on all submissions where there is a political sensitivity or the issue is highly significant - you should do this well ahead of any deadline, providing sufficient time for special advisers to consider and for their input to be taken on board
- when preparing submissions, briefings, or anything else for Ms Gougeon, use the correct template for consistency, as this often leads to a quicker response
- if any edits are made to documents (drafts, briefing, correspondence) Ms Gougeon would prefer to see these in tracked changes
- submissions, briefings and other products should be as succinct as possible and cover the key points
- additional background and contextual information is not required where Ms Gougeon is already aware of a situation (private office can guide you on determining whether more detail is needed)
- Ms Gougeon is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business
- Ms Gougeon often undertakes outdoor events – you should alert private office in advance if appropriate clothing or footwear is required (such as boots, high visibility gear, waterproofs) and indicate whether changing facilities are available
- security markings must be included in all communication to private office

Box times

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Mairi Gougeon – speeches

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. Read the guidance on writing ministerial speeches.

Planning a speech is key - be sure to have a good understanding of the topic area, event, location and audience before drafting to ensure the speech is relevant. Speeches must be appropriate for the type of event, for example a relaxed and casual event does not require a formal 10 page address. A more formal event may instead require prolonged introductory remarks focusing on guests of honour.

Top tips to be aware of when writing a speech for Ms Gougeon are:

- Ms Gougeon speaks at a rate of approximately 170 words a minute
- speeches should be kept simple
- any facts and figures should be checked and double checked
- you should add some personal touches to the speech
- once drafted, read the speech aloud to make sure it flows and identify any challenges with delivering it

When preparing a speech, you should:

- work with special advisers and communications colleagues when drafting
- identify who will be in the audience and ensure the speech is tailored to that audience
- provide useful information on the conference or event, including its theme, agenda and any associated material, such as a brochure
- provide background factual material with details of relevant facts as an annex to the speech
- ensure the draft speech is provided one week before the event
- consider Ms Gougeon likes to speak at a lectern and request this where possible

For content and tone:

- it's important to set out the bigger picture, start and end with the details in the middle
- cover hot topics relevant to the event, location or audience
- where applicable, set out where the UK Government has responsibility
- include constitutional points where appropriate
- avoid getting bogged down in policy jargon and detail
- if you're including any announcements, ensure this is agreed with communications colleagues
- do not copy and paste sections from previous speeches
- make it personal – include examples of visits and events Ms Gougeon has attended in her ministerial capacity (private office can advise)
- use testimonials, quotes and impressive facts to increase audience interest
- use positive language
- don't include long, complex sentences or vocabulary

When formatting, you should:

- add headings for all sections of the speech
- use Arial font 16pt with 1.5 line spacing
- add page breaks at the end of sentences – paragraphs should not run over two pages
- make paragraphs short with only a few lines
- number the pages on the bottom right
- avoid acronyms and jargon
- provide speeches as a separate Word document to briefing material

Mairi Gougeon - engagement briefing

Use Ms Gougeon's briefing template (document will download) for meetings and engagements, tailoring the boxes as necessary. The briefing should be short (maximum of eight pages in length), succinct and easy to follow. Its structure should be logical and include the following in this order:

- Information on the people or group Ms Gougeon is meeting.
- Purpose of the event.
- Agenda.
- Biographies of key stakeholders at the event – it's always helpful to include these and pictures (if possible) of stakeholders Ms Gougeon is due to meet.
- Key issues briefing.

The briefing should be specific for the event and not copied and pasted. You should also tailor it depending on who will be there, why the engagement is happening and what it is. Most importantly, the briefing needs to be up to date.

Official support should be provided for all engagements unless otherwise agreed with private office. Include contact details of officials attending the event in the briefing pack. It is also important to allow private office or Ms Gougeon to advise of updates, delays or last-minute logistics.

Always include the confirmed address, postcode and What3words location pin for the event in the briefing.

Where facts, figures and dates are included, double check these are correct and the most up to date available. If any edits are required once a briefing is submitted please highlight clearly in track changes so private office can make edits to the hard copy.

If a Q and A forms part of the event, provide a separate labelled briefing as an annex.

It is also helpful to include suggested topics and/or questions for the Cabinet Secretary, especially if the organisation or subject matter is not something Ms Gougeon is familiar with.

For high profile meetings, for example with key stakeholders, ministers of other governments, conferences and large events, make sure you include:

- a cover sheet, which you can find in the template (document will download)
- background information on the group/people being met
- the purpose and objectives of the meeting and what outcome(s) are desired
- an agenda
- a note of any previous meetings and progress made since
- Q and A as a separate annex
- rebuttal lines to likely criticisms or difficult questions
- speaking note (only if required and as a separate annex)

Briefing for meetings with external stakeholders, receptions or events (including dinners) should be set out in the same way, but no more than eight pages long.

Briefing for routine visits, engagements or photo opportunities should be short, noting any local issues and no more than six pages long.

Stakeholder engagement preferences

Ms Gougeon likes to get out and see things for herself in real life to help understand areas of concern or issues and to appreciate the work being undertaken by stakeholders. She also likes the opportunity to mingle with attendees at events informally.

Mondays and Fridays are constituency days, so Ms Gougeon is unlikely to be able to undertake ministerial engagements on these days.

Media bids or interviews

For short clips for radio or TV:

- briefing should be no more than two pages of A4
- top lines should be set out in bold text at the top of the first page
- you should provide short relevant background information

For longer in depth interviews for example, an interview with a print journalist on a specific subject, a full briefing back will usually be required. You should check this with private office in advance.

Parliamentary engagements including committees

Parliamentary engagements including debates, statements and committee appearances are very important to Ms Gougeon. For these you should provide a comprehensive and detailed briefing which is easily navigable. You must use Ms Gougeon's preferred templates for committee briefing and for committee opening remarks (documents will download). No other template will be accepted by private office (PO) for committee briefing, so it is important that the templates are not amended without discussing this with PO.

This briefing should include:

- a cover sheet - the engagement briefing template's cover sheet can be used
- a clear annex list with page numbers
- key messages Ms Gougeon should focus on
- a summary of relevant First Minister policy prospectus and mandate letter commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttal lines
- FMQ style background briefing, including a Q and A on the issues that will be raised
- speaking note - read the guidance on writing speeches for advice on what to include
- facts, figures and dates, which should be checked and signed off by senior civil servants
- background and context

- summary of any previous evidence sessions

Parliamentary briefings should be signed off by a member of the Senior Civil Service and special advisers before being submitted to private office.

It would be helpful to draft your email to private office in the following way:

Subject Line: [Security Classification] – [Priority] [Name of your briefing]

Body: [Relevant Private Secretary Name]

Please find attached a briefing for the Cabinet Secretary's engagement on [insert engagement name and date].

I can confirm that this briefing has been signed off by special advisers (where applicable).

For committee briefing packs the following confirmation must be included:

'I can confirm that this briefing has been signed off by a member of the SCS [insert name]. [Name of SCS] has checked all facts and figures for accuracy and can confirm these are up to date at the time of submission. [Name of SCS] has also reviewed for political acuity and has consulted SPADs where appropriate.'

You should then include any other relevant information.

Mairi Gougeon - minute taking

It's the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of an event. You should submit meeting minutes to private office after any meeting or event for Ms Gougeon's consideration.

The minutes should be with private office no later than one week after the event or meeting has taken place.

Minutes should be clear and concise and no longer than one page. You should also include an eRDM link when submitting.

Meeting minutes should not be a verbatim account of the meeting, but should instead reflect a high level summary, including key points for the official record, any decisions taken and any action points.

Read further guidance on taking minutes for ministerial meetings.

Mairi Gougeon - parliamentary questions (PQs)

The parliamentary questions (PQ) tracker will indicate whether it is a written or oral PQ – you must follow the relevant advice on this page depending on the format of the answer.

For further information, follow the guidance on parliamentary questions. There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs – contact private office or the parliamentary clerks' office should you have any queries.

General and portfolio questions

All responses must demonstrate political acuity and cover relevant media interest in the subject, as well as refer to or be aligned with recent questions and/or correspondence.

The answer should:

1. have a word count limit of 97 words – if you exceed it, the answer will be returned by private office
2. be short, succinct and to the point – no more than four or five lines (or two short paragraphs)
3. respond to the question as fully as possible

A background note should:

- be provided for each question
- include any complex information, quotes, tables and so on, which should not be in the answer
- include an FMQ style brief on each relevant issue and recent opposition activity, for instance questions they've asked, articles they've commented on or social media activity
- cover any likely supplementary questions (four or five) and likely areas of opposition attack - this should be no longer than 90 words

When providing answers to questions, you should:

- ensure special advisers are sighted on the answer before submitting to private office
- provide answers to private office by the deadline, allowing Ms Gougeon time to review and amend as necessary
- ensure a relevant official is available and contactable on the morning the question is being answered, and the name of the official is given to private office

If an official is not going to be in the office on the day or days leading up to portfolio questions, you're responsible for ensuring another colleague is made the accountable officer on the system by contacting the Parliamentary Clerk's office.

Written parliamentary questions

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all the points in the question, but should not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Answers should be cleared with the special adviser before submitting to private office if the subject matter is controversial or likely to cause media interest.

Background notes should always be provided before you submit to private office for approval. They should be succinct and give context to the question and answer.

When an MSP asks a PQ regarding information already in the public domain, or has already been supplied information in an earlier answer, the response must simply refer the member to the previously supplied answer.

Mairi Gougeon – submissions

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. They must also be signed off by special advisers in the first instance. The cover email to private office should state if the submission is for information or requires a decision and the date a response is required. The subject line should state the priority and government security classification.

You should send submissions that require the Cabinet Secretary and First Minister to make a decision on a 1:2 basis.

Communications and special advisers should be consulted before submitting papers to Ms Gougeon. You should also ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special advisers are copied in.

You can find further information in the submissions to ministers guidance.

Content and formatting

Use the correct ministerial submission template (document will download) to ensure a more consistent approach throughout the organisation.

Submissions should be short and concise – preferably no more than five pages.

Background information Ms Gougeon is aware of is not required – previous submissions on the same topic can be attached for reference instead of duplicating information.

All pages should be numbered and additional information should be provided as an annex. You must also proofread all material to correct grammar and spelling.

Use the current security markings such as OFFICIAL, SECRET and TOP SECRET.

Be clear what is in the public domain and what is not.

Priority

The correct priority should be used:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

If there is an immediate submission, alert private office to check Ms Gougeon is available to clear it.

Emailing your submission

It's helpful to draft your email to private office in the following way:

Subject Line: [Security Classification] – [Priority] [Name of your submission]

Body: [Relevant Private Secretary Name]

Please find attached a submission for the Cabinet Secretary's consideration. It would be helpful to have a response from the Cabinet Secretary by [date] in order to allow us to [insert reason (for example, publishing the consultation)]

This submission recommends that the Cabinet Secretary [agrees to X/notes X]

I can confirm Special Advisors have been consulted, and have provided feedback, on this submission.

You can then include any other relevant information.

Mairi Gougeon – correspondence

Ministerial correspondence is subject to corporate targets and should be answered within 20 working days. Draft replies for consideration should be with private office within 10 working days and use Ms Gougeon's standard letter template (document will download).

Ms Gougeon attaches great importance to her correspondence. She would like all responses to letters from member of the public to be drafted quickly and sympathetically.

Ms Gougeon will personally respond to all letters from:

- MPs, MSPs and MEPs
- Members of the House of Lords
- councillors
- chairpersons and chief executives of public bodies
- key stakeholders
- friends and acquaintances
- constituents (Angus North and Mearns)

Ensure any MiCases that are either political or sensitive, for example relating to a current hot topic, are cleared by a special adviser before submitting to private office. In each case there is a 'main' point the correspondent makes. Replies should show Ms Gougeon has 'got it'. To do that use 'playback' - begin the letter by repeating the main concern raised. This shows Ms Gougeon has understood the primary issue, concern, point, criticism or whatever the purpose of the email or letter is.

Responses should start by setting out the facts and then our views. Candour is good. We cannot satisfy everyone, nor should we raise expectations unfairly. Use plain English so the response is easily understood.

Check for previous responses on similar issues to ensure a consistent message and tone is used.

For more complex or specific cases (such as those that often arise in the Rural Payments and Inspections Division, crofting, Marine Compliance or fisheries) provide a background briefing to Ms Gougeon's Assistant Private Secretary [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] via email alongside the suggested response. This saves time and avoids a lengthy back and forth which often leads to us missing our response targets.

If a letter has been drafted to be sent by Ms Gougeon, provide the email address(es) of who it should be sent to.

Mairi McAllan – Cabinet Secretary for Housing

Màiri McAllan - top tips

Màiri McAllan MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Housing. You can find her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Submissions

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]. Private office will try to turn submissions around quickly, but please discuss handling and time sensitivities with the team in the first instance so they can manage expectations. If a submission is urgent, highlight the specific time constraints in the covering email.

You should use the correct ministerial submission template to ensure a more consistent approach throughout the organisation. You should also limit submissions to four pages, as Ms McAllan prefers submissions to be clear, concise and to the point.

If providing advice on a submission Ms McAllan has seen before, make sure the changes are tracked or highlighted. If Ms McAllan has provided feedback using the comments function on Word, add your response in the document using the comments section.

Box papers

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Meeting minutes

You should submit meeting minutes to private office after any meeting or event for Ms McAllan's consideration no later than one week after the event or meeting has taken place. Minutes should be clear and concise and no longer than two pages. You should also include an eRDM link when submitting.

Meeting minutes should not be a verbatim account of the meeting, but should instead reflect a high level summary of the meeting, including key points for the official record and any action points.

Màiri McAllan – speeches

Ms McAllan needs to know who her audience will be. It's helpful if this information can be included in briefings in the form of biographies for keynote speakers and attendees.

You should always include an agenda in the briefing for any speaking event. It's also important to highlight a designated speaking slot, which allows private office to manage Ms McAllan's time.

Ms McAllan requires a fully prepared speech, written in plain English. Do not include long, complex sentences, make sure paragraphs are no longer than two or three

lines and do not run over pages. You should send speeches to private office one week in advance of any event. This will allow the Cabinet Secretary sufficient time to read through and request more information, briefing or to check facts.

Speeches should not be longer than eight minutes, unless private office have agreed otherwise in advance.

Ms McAllan speaks at 160 words per minute. This should be taken into consideration for specific events with time constraints and particularly parliamentary business.

Speeches should:

- be in arial, size 16 and with 1.5 spacing
- have numbered pages (bottom right)
- be written as speaking notes rather than bullet points
- avoid using acronyms and jargon - this is being spoken
- be relevant to the event, acknowledging who is in the audience
- cover hot and topical issues, including detail of relevant facts
- have headings for each section of the speech
- not use parts of previous speeches on the same subject
- include the big picture for context - start and end with the big picture
- include any constitutional points that are appropriate
- be discussed with communications colleagues if they are to include any potential announcements
- be colourful and personalised - feel free to include testimonials, startling facts and quotes

Màiri McAllan - engagement briefing

You can contact private office for further advice or to talk through specific requirements for engagements.

Briefings should:

- use the preferred engagement briefing template for all visits and external engagements, tailoring the information boxes as appropriate
- use the preferred meeting template for all internal and external meetings being held via MS Teams or in person, tailoring the information boxes as appropriate
- be short, concise, relevant and avoid duplication
- contain only key facts, background information and anything new that Ms McAllan is not already aware of
- include current top lines
- be separate from speaking notes
- note any previous meetings in background information
- for shorter engagements (half an hour or less) be no more than five sides of A4 (not including a speaking note)

Official support for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office, is assumed. You must therefore ensure that mobile numbers of supporting officials are included. You should also make communications colleagues and special

advisers (SPADs) aware of engagements where necessary, and ensure appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack.

Include a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names, parking information and allocations (if any) and phone numbers. Please also copy your briefing to the Government Car Service.

Ensure there is a clear and concise annex covering page – the briefing should be page numbered and match with the annexes listed.

Briefings should have a clear annotated agenda with speaking points under each item. Think carefully about the contents of the briefing, ensuring it is appropriate for the event or meeting. You should also factor in how much time the Cabinet Secretary has set aside for each meeting – timings should be agreed with private office in advance.

If amendments are required to a larger briefing pack (such as committees or debates), track change these or make them very clear in the covering email. Doing this means we can easily substitute pages as appropriate within the Cabinet Secretary's pack.

You should get in touch with private office as soon as possible if amendments need to be made after submission, to ensure Ms McAllan has the most up to date briefing pack or speech.

For meetings with key stakeholders, ministerial colleagues from other Governments, major conferences and high-profile events you should include:

- a cover sheet (use the correct briefing template and include who/why/when)
- an agenda
- a succinct detailed list of meeting objectives and what outcomes are desired
- background information in a two page, top lines format
- whether there has been prior engagement with the individual or company, and a brief outline of the previous meeting alongside the progress that's been made since
- biographies of attendees
- a speaking note if required or suggested speaking points if necessary – these should be with private office one week in advance
- use the correct template for ministerial meetings

Media bids and interviews

If Ms McAllan is asked to record a short clip (either radio or TV) for the media, any briefing should be no more than two sides of A4.

The briefing should cover:

- top lines alongside short and relevant background notes (FMQ style format is preferable)

- any key events which are relevant to the topic within the last year, including any recent lines or news releases released on the topic

For longer, more in-depth interviews (for example, longer segments or an interview on a specific subject with a newspaper or magazine journalist), a full briefing pack is usually required. You should discuss briefing expectations with private office.

Parliamentary engagements

Parliamentary engagements such as debates, statements or committee appearances are often complex and wide ranging. Such engagements will require clear, comprehensive, but also easily navigable and succinct briefing. The briefing should include:

- a cover sheet, including a clear annex list alongside page numbers
- key messages the Cabinet Secretary will wish to focus on
- a summary of relevant FM policy prospectus commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttal lines
- top lines, including a Q and A on the issues that will be raised (including issues, rebuttals and background information)
- speaking note - read guidance on writing speeches for advice on what to include
- historical context, including key facts or figures
- summary of any previous evidence sessions

Briefings should be signed off by a deputy director and special advisers (SPADs) before sending to private office.

If amendments to larger briefing packs (such as committees or debates) are required, track change these or make them very clear in the covering email. We can then easily substitute pages as appropriate within Ms McAllan's pack.

Màiri McAllan - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum). Please note the 97 word count limit – often private office have to return answers as they are too long and won't be accepted.

You should avoid complex quotes or tables within the answer itself. Any tables required should be included in the background note. A background note should be provided for briefing every question. It should also include a two page top lines brief on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity, such as recent questions they've asked on the subject, any articles they've commented on and social media activity.

Top lines, two page briefing. Supplementary question answers should be no longer than 90 words.

Officials should:

- provide answers by private office's deadline to allow Ms McAllan sufficient time for editing if necessary
- make sure special advisers (SPADs) are sighted in advance at all times
- ensure action officers (AOs) are contactable on the day the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

If an official is not going to be in the office on the day or days leading up to portfolio questions, you're responsible for ensuring another colleague is made the AO on the system by contacting the parliamentary clerk's mailbox.

Written parliamentary questions (PQs)

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all the points in the question, but should not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Background notes should always be provided before submitting to private office for approval and should be succinct, providing context to the question and answer.

When an MSP asks a PQ regarding information already in the public domain or that has already been supplied information in an earlier answer, Ms McAllan is keen to use standard replies.

For further information, follow the guidance on parliamentary questions. There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs – contact private office or the parliamentary clerks' office should you have any queries.

Màiri McAllan - submissions

Submissions should:

- be no more than six pages
- have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Ms McAllan should be able to quickly identify what she needs to consider
- have a covering email clearly stating whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Ms McAllan
- be kept as clear and concise as possible – do not include background detail Ms McAllan will already be aware of
- not have any embedded attachments or eRDM objective links
- have all template comments and any tracked changes removed

Make sure you use the correct priority timing for your submission:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert us and check that Ms McAllan is available to clear it.

Consideration should also be given to recess, holidays and weekends.

All submissions, AO templates and SCANCE notes are to be cleared by relevant junior ministers before submitting to the Cabinet Secretary for a final decision.

You should ensure that all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special advisers are copied in. Special advisers should also be consulted before you submit papers to Ms McAllan.

Any changes to submissions, speeches or letters that Ms McAllan has already considered should be in track.

Màiri McAllan – correspondence

Ministerial correspondence is subject to corporate targets and should be answered within 20 working days.

Draft replies for ministerial consideration should be with private office within 10 working days.

You can find guidance for drafting correspondence and handling invitations on this page and private office are more than happy to answer any queries you may have. Ms McAllan attaches great importance to correspondence and would like all policy colleagues to draft quick and sympathetic responses to all letters from members of the public.

Ms McAllan will personally respond to all letters from:

- MPs, MSPs, MEPs
- members of the House of Lords
- councillors
- chairpersons/Chief Executives of public bodies and key stakeholders
- friends and acquaintances
- constituents (Clydesdale)

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

You should also:

- use plain English

- make sure dates follow Scottish Government convention (for example, 18 October 2023 not 18th October)
- include the month and year at the top (exact date will be inserted by private office when cleared by the Cabinet Secretary)
- leave three lines between the date and the start of the letter for the 'Dear xxx' and seven lines between the end of the letter and Ms McAllan's name for the signature
- ensure any MiCases that are either political or sensitive are cleared by the special adviser before submitting to private office

Further guidance is listed in the table in alphabetical order:

Correspondence information to include	Further details and instructions
Address	<p>MSPs - MiCase will default to the Parliament address, which is fine as we tend to email the letters to the MSPs. Please also ensure that if the incoming letter has a reference, this is copied in the response under 'Your Ref'.</p> <p>Constituents - when an MSP or MP writes on behalf of their constituent, refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given.</p> <p>Email - most correspondents now prefer to receive their response by email. Place the email address under the correspondent's name at the top of the letter. Once the letter has been signed off, it will be electronically issued via the MiCase system.</p>
Content	<p>You should open the letter with some background, for example 'Thank you for your letter of x about...'</p> <p>Ensure the response answers the points raised by the correspondent and avoid 'general interest' details, which do not answer the question asked.</p> <p>If cutting and pasting from previous correspondence, make sure the response is tailored to the current correspondent and that all facts and figures are up to date.</p>
Date	<p>Refer to the date of the original letter in the response.</p> <p>If you send up the response at the end or beginning of a month, check the letter is dated appropriately.</p>
Delays	<p>If the response is more than four weeks since the original letter was written, include an apology for the delay in responding. If the MiCase is not sent up to Ms McAllan by the private office deadline, include a short</p>

	<p>note explaining the delay to allow us to manage expectations.</p>
<p>Diary invitations</p>	<p>Ensure a valid postal or email address is put on the final reply letters - this is important so we can make sure the letter reaches the correct recipient. Check the final reply letters are signed off by the Private Secretary rather than Ms McAllan. Private office sends out all accept/reject letters. Ms McAllan approves these, but private office sign. Ensure that PS Minutes include all specific policy details/key points/communications colleagues' views. Ms McAllan will be able to make a more informed decision based on how much information she has to consider. Flag up any diary cases that are going to be sent up late, especially for events in the near future or coming week. This allows us to let the organisation know well before the event is taking place. Please ensure grammar and spelling is accurate – private office do not have capacity to change all letters individually, so this is a great help. Sample diary case responses Accept: Thank you for your letter of 1 January inviting Màiri McAllan MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Housing to attend your annual conference. Ms McAllan would be delighted to accept your invitation subject to parliamentary business. I would be grateful if you could contact Ms McAllan's Diary Secretary via email at CabSecHousing@gov.scot to arrange a mutually convenient date/make the necessary arrangements. [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY Decline: Thank you for your letter of 1 January inviting Màiri McAllan MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Housing to attend your annual conference. Unfortunately, due to prior commitments/due to engagements we're unable to rearrange, Ms McAllan is unable to accept your kind invitation on this occasion. Please accept her apologies and best wishes for a successful event. [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p>
<p>Font</p>	<p>The main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12. The St Andrew's House address details, our</p>

	<p>ref and date are formatted. Please do not reformat them.</p>
Language	<p>Always consider who will be reading the response, for example, children or young people.</p> <p>Ensure the reply is clear, concise and written in a language that is easily understood. Read our writing guide for reference.</p> <p>Please do not use unnecessary phrases at the beginning of sentences, such as: 'I am writing to...'; 'First of all,...'; 'I have to advise you that...'; 'Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to set out some general background about...'. You should instead keep sentences short and avoid jargon. You should never use the phrase 'I am afraid' - a good alternative is 'Unfortunately'. The same also applies to the phrase, 'Scottish Ministers have no locus to intervene'. An alternative wording is 'it is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers to intervene'.</p> <p>Where appropriate, add 'I hope this is helpful' at the end of a response.</p>
Layout	<p>Where possible, try to fit the reply on one page, but do not make the font smaller to do so and do not alter the default page set-up. If drafting a letter outwith MiCase, use the letter template. This can also be found in the Scottish Ministers folder in Word.</p> <p>If due to the formatting Ms McAllan's name is the only thing on the second page, insert an appropriate page break to ensure that either two full sentences or the last paragraph is moved onto the second page.</p> <p>Do not use subject titles at the beginning of a letter. Instead you should incorporate the subject in the opening sentence, for instance 'Thank you for your letter of 1 January about...'</p> <p>Do not use paragraph numbering and ensure that unused text boxes are removed, as these will appear in the final draft (for example << text>>, Your ref, signature).</p> <p>Make sure Ms McAllan's name is at the bottom left of the letter and in bold and capitals: MÀIRI MCALLAN.</p> <p>The private secretary's signature should also be at the left hand side of the page and the text should be justified.</p>
Official replies	<p>You should include this text: 'Thank you for your letter of day/month. I am responding on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Housing'.</p>

<p>Reallocation</p>	<p>Ministerial replies can be reallocated, so Ms McAllan is answering on behalf of another Cabinet Secretary or Minister who received the original letter. Thank the correspondent for their letter to the original Cabinet Secretary or Minister and add, 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise'.</p>
<p>Signature</p>	<p>Letters for the Cabinet Secretary's signature (bottom left of the page) should read as follows: Màiri McAllan Letters for the Private Secretary's signature (bottom left of the page) should read as follows: [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p>
<p>Timing</p>	<p>It is always helpful if cases can reach Ms McAllan as soon as possible as this allows extra time for discussion, if necessary.</p>
<p>Titles</p>	<p>Include the full title of the correspondent (for example director/chairman/convener). If responding to a councillor, address them as such. If they have another title, such as convenor/chairperson, this should also be included. Avoid using Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms unless the correspondent does and avoid using Esq after a name.</p>

Maree Todd – Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport

Maree Todd - top tips

Maree Todd MSP is the Minister for Drugs, Alcohol Policy and Sport.

Box

Ms Todd works from an electronic box but uses physical papers for in-person meetings. Ms Todd does most of her reading early in the morning. Updates to papers for virtual meetings can be facilitated easily. Where the event is in person and papers will already have been printed, please consider on balance whether an update is required. You should always highlight the changes in the cover email and you must indicate on your submission or email when you need a response by.

Biography and headshots

You can find her biography and responsibilities on the gov.scot website. You can access her official portraits at the Scottish Government's Flickr site.

Diary

Ms Todd is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. She does understand that there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider. To help her consider, you should provide robust advice about the value of the engagement.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings are generally the best options for visits. Any event taking place outwith the Parliament building should only be accepted with the caveat that it's subject to parliamentary business, as Ms Todd will need the flexibility.

Ms Todd's diary typically runs eight weeks in advance, so it's helpful to have as much notice as possible of potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give us notice, but the time may be used if not confirmed.

If you have a known publication or event you wish the Minister to mark, advanced notice is strongly recommended.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a commissioning email, which outlines the requirements for briefing and support. Please always let us know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this or if timings or location change, as they can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

Official support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

Special advisers (SPADs)

Please ensure you involve SPADs in various processes and seek their input and advice before submitting to the minister. This includes submissions, PQs and communications items.

Maree Todd – speeches

Speaking engagements (conferences, meetings, receptions)

Ms Todd would be grateful for full prose speeches. Please try to submit these at least a week in advance.

Debates or committee

Full speaking notes are required. Closing debate speeches should be topped and tailed to include key messages and rebuttals and still allow sufficient time for Ms Todd to respond to issues raised during the debate.

Tips:

- avoid jargon
- read speaking notes aloud to check fluency
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest

Format:

- Arial font 16pt
- 1.5 line spacing
- page breaks at the end of a paragraph (i.e. paragraphs should not split across two pages)
- pages numbered
- include a word count and estimated time of delivery

Speaking rate

Ms Todd speaks at around 140 words per minute.

Ensure the following box is completed and included as page one (a copy is included in the briefing template):

Speech box

Clear message of speech -

Layout of room - round table, theatre style etc. -

Lectern or sitting as part of a panel?

Make-up of the audience?

How many are attending?

What do they want to hear?

Any media interest?

Have special advisers and communications colleagues been consulted?

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and read the writing a speech guidance.

Maree Todd - engagement briefing

Please consider the event the Minister is attending and ensure the level of briefing is appropriate. If you're unsure, ask private office.

For visits, use Ms Todd's visit briefing template and for meetings, use Ms Todd's meeting briefing template.

Dietary requirements

[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)].

Key points

You should provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers. For remote locations or large sites, it would also be helpful to provide a grid reference. You can find a latitude and longitude reference on Google maps, by right clicking on a point and then selecting 'What's here?'. Please also copy your briefing to Government Car Service.

You should also:

- ensure mobile numbers for supporting officials are included
- always include speaking notes as separate documents
- if amendments are required after the briefing has been submitted, please track changes or make it clear in the covering email
- background information can be provided in FMQ format if appropriate
- if a previous meeting has happened, please include a note of progress since
- always consult communications colleagues and notify special advisers before any events

Maree Todd - parliamentary questions

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- answer the questions
- avoid complex quotes or tables
- have a background note that includes an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues

Officials should:

- consider around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked

- seek to clear draft answers or background briefings with the special adviser before submitting to private office - these should not be sent through the PQ system but either as two standalone Word documents or within an email
- on submitting the answer, advise private office whether the answer has been cleared by the special adviser or not
- ensure they are contactable the evening before and the morning of the question being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but don't offer up information not requested (unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, please use the standard reply that points to that information.

Read further guidance on parliamentary questions.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerks' office would be happy to help.

Maree Todd – submissions

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. Ms Todd should be able to quickly identify what she's required to consider.

A standard ministerial submissions template is available as a helpful guide. If sending in an email format, please include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation. It helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information or requires a decision from Ms Todd and by when.

Make sure you use the correct priority timing:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, alter private office. Consideration should also be given to recess, holidays and weekends

Key points to remember are:

- to keep submissions as short as possible
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send as eRDM Objective links
- to make sure each page is numbered
- to remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- include the name of the senior civil servant who cleared the submission
- to use the current security markings, such as Official Sensitive, not Restricted or Confidential (please also be clear what is in the public domain and what is not)
- to proof read all material to correct grammar and spelling
- submissions that require the cabinet secretary and the lead minister, or the cabinet secretary and First Minister, to make a decision, should be submitted on a 1:2 basis
- to ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special advisers are copied in - ideally special advisers and communications should be consulted in advance
- ensure Parliamentary handling/obligations are considered with announcements

Further information can be found in submissions to ministers.

Maree Todd – correspondence

Ms Todd is keen to be as helpful as she can when replying. Try to ensure any points made in the letter have been addressed and questions answered where possible. If necessary, you can provide additional information or advice not for inclusion in the reply via email or the PS minute functionality of MiCase.

When preparing a diary case, please ensure communications colleagues have been consulted (if appropriate) so that Ms Todd can consider this along with policy advice and thoroughly consider the merits of attending.

A PS minute must always be provided with a diary case, as it acts as a permanent record of the advice the Minister received at the time of acceptance. If the Minister has accepted via other channels, note that alongside your advice.

You should also use Ms Todd's letter template for all cases processed outwith MiCase.

For all correspondence, always begin with a thank you for sending the original email or letter and refer to the date it was sent. If our response is late, please provide an explanation.

If the original correspondence was sent to another minister but Ms Todd is replying, you should also make that clear.

When replying to MSPs, ensure you address the MSP and not their caseworker. The same applies to the email address used on the case. If replying to an invitation, ask

them to contact ministerfordaps@gov.scot. You should never indicate that private office will contact the external stakeholder.

Key points:

- font – Arial, size 12
- language – consider the recipient and tailor appropriately
- any response being sent to PO for consideration will either be signed off by Ms Todd or the 'OFFICE OF MINISTER FOR DRUGS, ALCOHOL POLICY AND SPORT' – therefore it's either "please contact us" (if PO) or "please contact my Private Office" (if the Minister)

Natalie Don-Innes – Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise

Natalie Don-Innes - top tips

Natalie Don-Innes MSP is the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise. You can find her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Box

Ms Don-Innes works from an electronic box and generally doesn't take physical papers. This means private office can get things to her quickly and can update any papers she already has. There's no formal box closure time, but if you plan on sending something that requires an immediate response, alert private office in advance. It's always helpful to indicate on your submission or email when you need a response by.

Diary

Ms Don-Innes is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. She does understand there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider those.

The diary fills up quickly, so it is helpful to have as much notice as possible of potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give notice, but the time may be used if not confirmed.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a meeting request to the lead official requesting briefing. You should always let private office know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this, or if timings or the location change. Any changes can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

Official support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

Chats

Ms Don-Innes is happy to have a chat whenever needed. She does appreciate how busy everyone is, so if a chat would be helpful or reduce the need to prepare submissions let the team know.

Minutes of meetings

All meetings with ministers need to be properly recorded and documented. These include both external meetings with stakeholders and internal meetings with officials. It is the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of a meeting with a minister. Notes of meetings should be agreed through private office and, once agreed, stored by the policy area - read guidance on taking minutes.

Special advisers (SPADs)

Make sure you involve SPADs in various processes and seek their input and advice before submitting to Ms Don-Innes. This includes submissions, parliamentary questions (PQs) and communications items.

Natalie Don-Innes – speeches

Speaking engagements (including conferences, meetings and receptions)

Pre-meetings will be arranged where time allows to discuss Ms Don-Innes's requirements.

Speeches should never be longer than 10 minutes, unless agreed in advance with private office. If Ms Don-Innes is pre-recording a speech, it should be no longer than five minutes. Ms Don-Innes would like full speeches for all events and meetings. You should try to submit these at least a week in advance.

If Ms Don-Innes is chairing a meeting, you should make this clear in the briefing, which should also include a chair's brief and accompanying speaking points. This briefing can take the form of an annotated agenda.

Debates or committee

Full speaking notes are required for debate opening speeches. However, debate closing speeches should be made up of a written start to the speech and a written conclusion. The main body of the speech will be formed during the debate as Ms Don-Innes responds to the points made. To assist with this, include a series of one pages on the most likely issues to arise, with lines to take on each, for Ms Don-Innes to use as required.

Always write committee speaking notes out in full.

Some tips to be aware of when writing speeches are:

- it's helpful to have first drafts of speeches as early as possible - private office will usually set a deadline and arrange pre-meetings - please ask if this hasn't been done
- avoid jargon
- read speaking notes aloud to check fluency
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest

Speeches should be formatted with:

- Arial font 16pt
- 1.5 line spacing
- page breaks at the end of a paragraph
- numbered pages

Speeches should also include a word count and estimated timescale for delivery.

Speaking rate

Ms Don-Innes speaks at around 140 words per minute. Ensure the speech box details from the briefing template (document will download) are completed and include as page one of your briefing.

The following should be included:

- a clear message for the speech
- layout of the room – for example round table, theatre style
- lectern or sitting as part of a panel
- make-up of the audience
- how many are attending
- what do they want to hear
- any media interest
- information about whether special advisers and communications colleagues have been consulted

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in writing a speech.

Natalie Don-Innes - diary and engagement briefing

The following is a rough guide to when Ms Don-Innes is likely to be available for engagements:

AM/PM	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Constituency commitments	Opportunity for external engagements or meetings	Opportunity for external engagements or meetings	Opportunity for external engagements until 11am	Constituency commitments
PM	Constituency commitments	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament are possible but required back at parliament for decision time.	Constituency commitments

You should consider the event being attended and ensure the level of briefing is appropriate. Short visits do not require a lengthy briefing pack.

Make sure you use the templates for engagements and meetings (these documents will download).

Some tips when providing briefing for meetings or engagements are:

- provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers
- include mobile numbers for supporting officials
- include speaking notes as separate documents
- if amendments are required after the briefing is submitted, either track changes or make it clear in the covering email what has changed
- provide background information in FMQ format if appropriate
- if a previous meeting has happened, include a note of progress since then
- always consult communications colleagues in advance of events and ensure special advisers are sighted

Natalie Don-Innes - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point (around 100 words)
- address the question asked
- avoid using tables
- have a background note that includes an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues

You should include around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked along with suggested answers.

You should also provide information on the member's interest in the area and why they may be asking the question. For example, previous questions they have asked.

Remember to:

- clear draft answers and the background briefing with special advisers before submitting to private office
- ensure you're contactable the morning the question is being answered, or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written parliamentary questions

When drafting written answers:

- ensure it answers the question fully
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already

been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, Ms Don-Innes would still like the information in the answer. Do not refer to previous PQs in such cases.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerk's office would be happy to help.

For further information, follow the guidance on parliamentary questions.

Natalie Don-Innes – submissions

Key points to remember when creating a submission for Ms Don-Innes are:

- all submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Ms Don-Innes should be able to quickly identify what she's required to consider
- all submissions to Ms Don-Innes should be copied to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
- the standard submissions template (the document will download) is available as a helpful guide - if sending in an email format, please include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation
- it helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Ms Don-Innes
- keep submissions as short as possible
- previous submissions can be attached as background if this helps avoid repetition
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send them as eRDM Objective links
- ensure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- use the current security markings
- proofread all material to ensure correct grammar and spelling
- submissions that require the cabinet secretary and the minister to make a decision can be submitted on a 1:2 basis if appropriate
- ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special advisers are copied in (ideally communications and special advisers are consulted in advance)

You should also use the correct priority timing for submissions, which is:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, alert private office to check that Ms Don-Innes is available to clear it. You should give consideration to recess, holidays and weekends.

Find further information in submissions to ministers.

Natalie Don-Innes – correspondence

Ms Don-Innes is keen to be as helpful as she can when replying. You should ensure any points made in the letter are addressed and questions answered where possible. If necessary, you can provide a PS minute detailing additional information or advice not for inclusion in the reply.

When preparing a diary case, ensure communications colleagues are consulted so Ms Don-Innes can consider this along with policy advice and the merits of attending.

Correspondence information to include	Further details and instructions
Address	Use the reply address provided on the letter. Some correspondence specifies an address they would like a response to. If the letter has a reference, include this under 'Your Ref'. When an MSP/MP writes on behalf of their constituent, refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given.
Contact details	When offering contact details for Ms Don-Innes's office, please only use the email address MinisterCYPTP@gov.scot. Personal accounts are not used.
Content	Consider who will be reading the response and tailor the language as necessary. For example, a softer, less 'policy speak' tone will be more appropriate when corresponding with young people or children. Ensure the reply is clear and concise. Avoid using unnecessary jargon. If Ms Don-Innes is responding to a letter sent to another minister, explain that and why. For example - 'Thank you for your letter of DATE to OTHER MINISTER, I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for SUBJECT'.
Coordinated responses	Many MiCases are related to PQs or press releases. Ensure all the facts and figures are consistent.
Date	Refer to the date of the original letter in the response. If you send the response at either the end or the beginning of a month, check the letter is dated appropriately. If in doubt, it's often best to date a response with the new month as, depending on her availability, it may take a couple of days before Ms Don-Innes sees it.

Font	The main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12.
Diary invitations	<p>Always draft two separate letters - one accepting and one declining the invitation. Alternatively, a separate letter for any other possible answers, such as another minister will undertake the event, can be drafted where appropriate.</p> <p>Always include a PS minute, detailing any background detail and policy advice.</p> <p>Responses should be in the private secretary's name, unless the correspondent is a member of parliament, other government minister or a constituent.</p> <p>Example diary case replies</p> <p>Accept</p> <p>Thank you for your email dated XXXX inviting Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children and Young People to attend/meet/visit XXXX.</p> <p>Ms Don-Innes would be delighted to accept your invitation. I would be grateful if you would contact her Assistant Private Secretary at MinisterCYPTP@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>Decline</p> <p>Thank you for your email dated XXXX inviting Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children and Young People to attend/meet/visit XXXX.</p> <p>Ms Don-Innes will unfortunately be unable to accept your invitation. Please accept her apologies and best wishes for a successful event/conference etc.</p>
Layout	If drafting a letter outwith MiCase, use the letter template (this document will download). Make sure you add page breaks at the end of a paragraph.
Ministerial replies	All letters to members of parliament, other government ministers and constituents should be drafted in Ms Don-Innes's name.
Official replies	Include 'I have been asked by Ms Don-Innes to thank you for your letter of [DATE] and to reply on her behalf', or a similar form of words.
Photo	You can find Ms Don-Innes's official photo on the Scottish Government Flickr page.

Signature	Ministerial reply – NATALIE DON-INNES PS reply – [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] Private Secretary
Spelling	Always check spelling and proofread the response before forwarding to private office.
Salutations and pronouns	Ensure you use the appropriate titles and pronouns of those being responded to. Use the terms they use to refer to themselves.
Timing	It's always helpful if cases can reach Ms Don-Innes as soon as possible to allow her more time to consider it amongst many other papers. Please let private office know if a case will be late.

Neil Gray – Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

Neil Gray - top tips

Neil Gray MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. Read his biography and portfolio responsibilities.

Mr Gray's constituency is Airdrie and Shotts, and his constituency days are Mondays and Fridays. Contact private office if you want to discuss events which may fall on these days. You should copy our ministerial box into any issues concerning Mr Gray's constituency.

Briefing is always commissioned a week in advance of any event. We're happy to discuss deadlines. If it's a big set piece event, such as a parliamentary debate or speech, we require briefing a minimum of a week in advance for Mr Gray's consideration. Copy in special advisers (SPADs) and communications colleagues into all correspondence and briefings. They should also be consulted when drafting speeches.

Contact private office to make them aware of any urgent issues before sending and ensure it is marked urgent in the subject. Private office provide further advice and help where they can - please get in touch by phone or MS Teams.

Taking minutes

All meetings where government business is discussed need to be properly recorded and documented. A minute is an official record and an important tool for capturing decisions made and actions to be taken. You should read the guidance on taking minutes.

It is the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of an event with a minister. Notes of meetings should be agreed through the relevant private office and, once agreed, stored by the policy area by policy officials. Meeting notes should be provided in the following format:

Name (title) and date of meeting	Meeting note - Word (and eRDM Link)	Directorate and Division of AO
		Directorate: Division:

Neil Gray - speeches and events

Speeches should:

- be in Arial, size 18 and with 1.5 spacing
- be provided as a separate Word document from the briefing
- have numbered pages (bottom centred)
- be written as speaking notes rather than bullet points
- be short, clear and concise - paragraphs should be no longer than two or three lines and should not run over pages

- avoid using acronyms and jargon - this is being spoken
- be relevant to the event and acknowledge who is in the audience
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- have headings for each section of the speech
- not use parts of previous speeches on the same subject
- be discussed with communications colleagues if they are to include potential announcements
- be no longer than 8 minutes scripted material to allow the Cabinet Secretary 2 mins to personalise – so maximum of 10 minutes
- pre-record or video messages should be two to three minutes

Points to remember:

- it's important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it and to ensure it flows
- Mr Gray speaks about 165 words per minute
- facts and figures in the speech should be checked and double checked
- speeches should always be sent up as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack
- Mr Gray likes to speak at a lectern - please request this where possible and mention in the briefing template where no lectern is available

If you're new to writing speeches, read the guidance on writing ministerial speeches.

Neil Gray - engagement briefing

Please contact private office for further advice or to talk through specific requirements for engagements.

Briefings should:

- use the preferred briefing template for visits and meetings (document will download) - tailor the information boxes as appropriate (routine briefings for meetings or visits should be kept to 8 to 10 pages or less). You can also view an example of how the briefing template should look which you should try to follow
- keep the briefing as short and concise as possible, ensuring it is relevant while avoiding duplication
- be clear on who is chairing the meeting
- contain only the key facts, background information and anything new that Mr Gray is not already aware of
- include current top lines
- be separate from speaking notes
- note any previous meetings in background information
- assume official support for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office (you must ensure that mobile numbers of supporting officials are included)
- ensure communications colleagues and special advisers (SPADs) are aware of engagements where necessary, and appropriate handling arrangements are detailed in the briefing pack

- include a map which is helpful (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names, parking information and allocations (if any) and numbers
- get in touch with private office as soon as possible if amendments need to be made after submission, to ensure Mr Gray has the most up to date briefing pack or speech
- private office (PO) will routinely commission briefing within the diary scheduler - please ensure these are **not** forwarded on to external stakeholders. If PO have set up a meeting they will email attendees the location or dial in details or share these with officials to cascade to attendees.

Neil Gray - parliamentary questions (PQs)

For general and portfolio questions your answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- go up to 97 words maximum for oral PQ answers
- tackle the questions asked
- avoid quotes or tables (do not add tables into the background note either)
- always include a background note, which should be brief bullet points on each of the relevant issues

The background note should include an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues and opposition activity. For example recent questions they have asked on the subject, any articles commented on and social media activity. You should keep timelines clear and relevant.

Supplementary questions usually arrive with short notice. SPADS should be copied in when these come to private office for clearance. You should also make sure you're contactable the day the question is being answered or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries.

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant and therefore have no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information

If there are any sensitivities Mr Gray needs to be aware of, please email private office.

Background notes should be brief and provide context to the question and answer. When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, Mr Gray is keen that standard replies are used, and the previously given answer is copied in full to the text of the

response. There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt contact either private office or the parliamentary clerks' office.
Read guidance on parliamentary questions.

Topical questions

The process for topical questions for Mr Gray is:

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Neil Gray – submissions

Submissions should:

- have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response, as Mr Gray should be able to quickly identify what he is required to consider
- use the standard template available
- clearly state in the covering email whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Mr Gray and any deadline
- be kept as short as possible (one or two pages)
- avoid including background detail Mr Gray is already aware of
- not include embedded attachments or be sent as eRDM links
- have all template comments and any tracked changes removed
- be clear what is in the public domain and what isn't
- ensure all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers (comms) and special advisers (SPADs) are copied in - ideally comms and SPADs should be consulted in advance
- copy Mr Gray in where they are relevant to him or affect his portfolio interests

If a submission includes a funding request, Mr Gray prefers to discuss this where possible with officials before signing off.

Please use the following priority timing:

- routine - over three days
- urgent - within three days but more than 24 hours
- immediate - within 24 hours

Neil Gray – correspondence

Correspondence on MiCase system

For general correspondence:

1. all ministerial responses should be tailored to the correspondent
2. make it person-centred and considerate of the correspondent
3. ensure you answer all the questions and points raised, or explain why we can't - correspondence should always be as helpful as possible
4. provide an email address, as well as a postal address in the letter

5. avoid using jargon or abbreviations
6. contact private office if you would like further advice on handling correspondence

Private office will always send you back the final copy, which was issued, with Mr Gray's signature added. Keep a record of these letters and responses in eRDM (electronic Record and Document Management System) so we can make reference to them in future if needed.

For diary correspondence:

1. contact private office to check diary availability ahead of drafting responses
2. contact private office to discuss if a request is not clear
3. where a specific meeting or date is not requested and officials advise that a meeting should take place, this should be with officials in the first instance unless Mr Gray requests otherwise
4. please submit both an accept and decline where a meeting date has been specified

Keep MiCase correspondence via the system, as this ensures that letters are not delayed or misplaced.

Visit accept

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, inviting the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to XX.

The Cabinet Secretary would be delighted to accept your invitation. I'd be grateful if you could contact his Diary Secretary at cabsechsc@gov.scot, to make the necessary further arrangements.

Visit decline

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, inviting the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to XX.

Unfortunately the Cabinet Secretary is unable to accept your kind invitation on this occasion. He has asked me to pass on his best wishes for a successful event.

Meeting accept

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, requesting a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary.

The Cabinet Secretary would be delighted to meet with you. I'd be grateful if you could contact his Diary Secretary, cabsechsc@gov.scot to make the necessary further arrangements.

Meeting decline

Thank you for your correspondence of XX, requesting a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary.

Unfortunately the Cabinet Secretary is unable to meet with you at this time. He has asked me to pass on his best wishes.

Correspondence outwith MiCase

Responses to letters from devolved administrations or other MPs should be drafted and sent to private office for clearance within seven working days. You

should always provide an email address for the correspondent, as well as a postal address.

Private office will send you back the final copy, which was issued, with Mr Gray's signature added. Keep a record of these letters and responses in eRDM so we can make reference to them in future if needed.

Use the correct letter template and not a blank Word document (these are easily accessed in Word templates).

Richard Lochhead – Minister for Business and Employment

Richard Lochhead - top tips

Richard Lochhead MSP is the Minister for Business and Employment. You can read his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Box

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]. It is always helpful to indicate on your submission or covering email to the private office when you need a response by. Urgent papers can be dealt with by email on Friday and Monday.

Diary

Mr Lochhead is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. He does understand that there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings are generally the best option for visits. Any event taking place outwith the parliament building should only be accepted with the caveat that it is subject to Mr Lochhead being slipped from parliamentary business,

The diary fills up quickly, so it is helpful to have as much notice as possible of potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give us notice but the time may be used if not confirmed.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a meeting request to the lead official requesting briefing. Always let private office know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this or if timings or location change. This can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

Minute taking

It is the responsibility of accompanying policy officials to take an appropriate record of an event or meeting with a minister. You should follow the guidance on minute taking.

Minutes should be succinct, recording the key points of the discussion and agreed action points, not a verbatim transcript of the discussions.

When submitting a minute for clearance, include the eRDM link (for private office records) along with the word document.

If you have any queries regarding recording minutes of ministerial meetings, please contact private office.

Official support

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office.

Chats

Mr Lochhead is happy to have a chat whenever needed, either face to face or on the phone. He does appreciate how busy everyone is, so if a chat would be helpful or reduce the need to prepare submissions let us know.

Special advisers

Ensure you involve special advisers (SPADs) in various processes and seek their input and advice before submitting to the minister. This includes submissions, parliamentary questions (PQs) and communication items and so on.

Richard Lochhead - speeches

Speaking engagements (conferences, meetings, receptions)

If Mr Lochhead is just making short introductory remarks or a more informal speech, then bullet points with key facts and statistical information are fine rather than a full speaking note.

Mr Lochhead will want a formal and structured speech if:

- he's speaking for more than seven minutes
- he's giving the speech in a formal setting, for example conferences and Parliament
- the speech is likely to be released to the press

Debates and committee

Full speaking notes are required. Remember to leave time for interventions (when appropriate).

Some helpful tips when writing a speech are:

- it is helpful to have first drafts of speeches ready as early as possible - private office will usually set a deadline and pre-meetings should be arranged (either by phone or in person) if that would be helpful
- start with the big picture - think about who the audience is and set the speech in context with scene setting facts and figures
- avoid jargon or lists
- acronyms should be written in full when first mentioned
- please add phonetic spelling in brackets if pronunciation is not clear
- read the speech aloud several times before submitting to ensure it is easily readable and the sentence structure flows well (there should be no immediate change of topic)
- send speeches as a separate Word document (not embedded within briefing paper), this makes it easier to amend if necessary

- Mr Lochhead will put his own stamp on speeches, so please don't be feel offended if he makes changes
- consult special advisers and communications colleagues about political and media interest

When drafting a speech for Mr Lochhead use the following formatting:

- don't use headings within the speech
- don't add headers or footers to the document (except for page numbers)
- use Arial font 16 point
- use 1.5 line spacing
- think about natural pauses and catching a breath when delivering the speech
- keep paragraphs short - just one sentence is fine
- use a new line or paragraph with every pause (particularly when wanting to emphasise a line or statement)
- do not let sentences run over the next page – use page breaks to avoid this
- number pages (on middle bottom of pages) in the format page 1 of 1 etc.
- include a word count and estimated time of delivery at the end

Speaking rate

Mr Lochhead speaks at around 150 words per minute.

Please ensure the following bullet points are completed and included as page one (a copy is included in the briefing template)

Speech box

- clear message of speech
- make up of audience – who are they, what do they want to hear?
- how many are attending
- layout of room - for example round table, theatre style – make sure there's no horseshoe set up, as Mr Lochhead prefers round table/boardroom style
- lectern (for a full speech)
- panel session – for example sitting in chairs – bullet points of key points/facts/figures
- board meeting – bullet points of key points/facts/figures – no long speaking notes
- any media interest? – relevant hashtags for use on social media
- have special advisers and communications colleagues been consulted?

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in the writing a speech guidance.

Richard Lochhead - engagement briefing

You should consider the event being attended and ensure the level of briefing for Mr Lochhead is appropriate.

Short visits do not require a lengthy briefing pack. Make sure you use the briefing template.

Mr Lochhead has no special dietary requirements.

Key points

Key points to remember are:

- the briefing should be no longer than 10 pages, unless agreed with private office
- provide a map (where required), postcode, address, organisation name, contact names and numbers
- ensure mobile numbers for supporting officials are included
- speaking notes should always be included as separate Word documents
- include relevant subject key headline statistics and facts on one sheet of A4 at the beginning of briefings
- if amendments are required after the briefing has been submitted, please track changes or make it clear in the covering email
- background information can be provided in FMQ format if appropriate
- if a previous meeting has happened, include a note of progress since
- always consult communications colleagues in advance of events and ensure special advisers are sighted
- Mr Lochhead likes to send thank you letters following his visits, so please draft these as appropriate

If Mr Lochhead is chairing a meeting, the annotated agenda should include, under each agenda point:

- key point to be made by Mr Lochhead
- who Mr Lochhead should invite to speak
- follow up questions
- known issues/sensitivities
- Scottish Government lines/response to these issues

For Q and A, Mr Lochhead's preference is for headings on each subject that a question might arise under with the key facts in bullets under the heading. More detailed background and briefing can be provided in separate annexes.

Richard Lochhead - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long (two short paragraphs maximum)
- address the questions
- avoid complex quotes or tables
- have a background note that includes an FMQ style brief on each of the relevant issues
- include around three or four of the most likely supplementary questions that could be asked

Officials should:

Seek to clear draft answer/background briefing with the special adviser before submitting to private office. When doing so, these should not be sent through the PQ system but either as two standalone Word documents or copied and pasted into an email.

On submitting the answer, advise private office whether the answer has been cleared by the special adviser or not.

Please ensure the drafting officials are contactable on the morning the question is being answered or advise private office as to who should be contacted for last minute queries

Written PQs

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, please use the standard reply that points to that information.

Read further guidance on parliamentary questions.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerks' office would be happy to help.

Richard Lochhead – submissions

Key points

- all submissions should have a clear **purpose, conclusion** and **timescale** for response as Mr Lochhead should be able to quickly identify what he is required to consider
- a standard template is available as a helpful guide
- if sending in an email format, please include headings on purpose, timing and recommendation
- it helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from Mr Lochhead
- be brief - one page covering minute which sets out the background to the issue and explains the context of the decision he is being required to make is enough

- use bullet point as Mr Lochhead likes these as well as diagrams or mind maps - if a complex process can be explained in a flowchart, then that is preferred
- do not assume knowledge of acronyms as well as general information - you should always write out acronyms in full before you abbreviate them throughout the text
- use plain English
- do not embed attachments in your submission document or send as eRDM Objective links
- make sure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- use the current security markings, such as Official Sensitive, not Restricted or Confidential. You should also make clear what is in the public domain and what is not
- proofread all material to correct grammar and spelling
- submissions that require the Cabinet Secretary and the lead minister to make a decision, should be submitted on a 1:2 basis
- ensure that all relevant ministers, director generals, communication officers and special advisers are copied in - ideally special advisers and comms should be consulted in advance

Make sure you use the correct priority timing:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert us and also check that Mr Lochhead is available to clear it. You should also give consideration to recess, holidays and weekends.

Further information can be found in submissions to ministers.

Richard Lochhead – correspondence

Mr Lochhead is keen to be as helpful as he can when replying. Try to ensure any points made in the letter are addressed and questions answered where possible. If necessary you can provide a PS minute detailing additional information or advice not for inclusion in the reply.

When preparing a diary case, consult communications colleagues so that Mr Lochhead can consider this along with policy advice and thoroughly consider the merits of attending.

Use the letter template for all cases.

For all correspondence, always begin with a thank you for sending the original email or letter and refer to the date it was sent. If our response is late, please provide an explanation.

If the original correspondence was sent to another minister but Mr Lochhead is replying, make that clear in your reply.

When replying to MSPs, ensure you use the reply address provided.
If replying to an invitation, ask the person to contact Adam Cox
at ministerforbe@gov.scot.

You should use Arial font, size 12 in your reply. Make sure you consider the recipient
and tailor the language appropriately.

Correspondence Sign off –

Ministerial response – **RICHARD LOCHHEAD**

**Private Secretary/diary response – [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal
Information)], Private Secretary**

Shirley-Anne Somerville – Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

Shirley-Anne Somerville - top tips

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. You can find her biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website.

There is guidance for best practice in supporting ministers, which you should be familiar with before providing any kind of support to Ms Somerville.

The following is intended as guidance only and does not cover every scenario. If you're unsure of anything the best thing to do is contact private office.

Box times

Ms Somerville takes nearly all papers electronically. There's no formal box closure time, but if you plan on sending something that requires an immediate response, call private office so we can advise.

Be clear in your covering email and submission of papers requiring a response by a specific deadline. We try to avoid asking Ms Somerville to clear papers over the weekend wherever possible. If you have something that will require this, speak to private office in advance.

Private office will provide details of any specific box arrangements leading up to, and during, recess periods.

Diary

Ms Somerville is keen to protect Mondays and Fridays for constituency business as much as possible. She does understand that there will be occasions when an event falls on these days and is happy to consider.

The diary fills up quickly, so it is helpful to have as much notice as possible for potential events. Dates can be held as 'possible' if you give us notice, but the time may be reallocated if not confirmed.

When an event is confirmed in the diary, private office will issue a meeting request to the lead official requesting briefing. You should always let us know as soon as possible if there are any errors in this or if timings or the location change. Any changes can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the day.

If requesting a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary or multiple Ministers, please provide Private Office with as much notice as possible. Ministerial diaries are extremely busy so trying to organise a meeting with more than one can be difficult at short notice.

Private Office should be notified separately of diary asks included within a submission.

Minutes of meetings

Officials should review the guidance on duties for ensuring an accurate and timely minute of any meetings (both external and internal) with ministers, which states:

- it's the responsibility of a relevant policy officer to record a minute of any external meetings undertaken by ministers or internal meetings where substantive policy discussions are held or decisions made
- the relevant private secretary is responsible for ensuring that officials are aware that a draft minute is required and that private office receive such a draft (ideally within five working days)
- once that minute has been agreed the relevant policy officer ensures that the note is filed on eRDM. A link to that file should be sent to private office for logging on the ministerial engagements database and/or the private office spreadsheet

For more information, read our guidance on ministerial record keeping.

Shirley-Anne Somerville – speeches

Read general guidance on writing speeches.

Speech requirements vary based on the engagement.

Type of engagement	Speech requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• debates or statements• committee appearances• opening of debate• conference keynotes	Verbatim speech (without bullet points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• small or less formal events• closing of debate	Key points which Ms Somerville will use to ad-lib

When drafting, consider the format of the event, including whether Ms Somerville will be speaking from a lectern or a sitting position. For the latter, a bullet style speech is usually better than a full verbatim speech.

Where Ms Somerville is speaking at a conference, she will always prefer to follow her speech with a Q and A. For a 30-minute slot Ms Somerville's preference would be a 10-minute speech, followed by 20 minutes of questions. Ms Somerville speaks at around 160 words per minute. Allow time for her own additions and anecdotes and never submit a speech over the required time.

You should also think carefully about the audience. For example, if the audience will principally be young people, don't make it too heavy on policy. Many of the events Ms Somerville speaks at attract similar audiences. You should avoid simply cutting and pasting from previous speeches or pasting together separate contributions.

You should also make sure:

- speeches have a clear structure, flow and are free from jargon and clichés
- you're clear on what the speech is trying to achieve
- to avoid lengthy phrases and sentences
- to always read the speech out loud to pick up on repetition or a lack of natural breathing space

When formatting and finalising:

- don't split sentences/paragraphs between two pages (use the 'keep lines together' checkbox in Word, by going to 'Paragraph' and selecting the tab 'Line and Page Breaks')
- text should be Arial, size 16 with 2.5 paragraph spacing
- insert page numbers as a footer (in centre)
- speeches should be sent as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack

A speech template for Ms Somerville is available to download and use for speeches,

Shirley-Anne Somerville – engagements

When you're suggesting engagements, consider Ms Somerville's normal working week. If you're suggesting an engagement outside Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, contact private office at the earliest opportunity. All engagements are subject to parliamentary business so can change at short notice. You should ensure stakeholders are aware of this.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Constituency commitments	Cabinet	Best opportunity for external engagements	Opportunity for external engagements until 11am	Constituency commitments
PM		Internal meetings and Parliamentary business			

Official support is expected at all engagements. Exceptions need to be agreed with private office in advance. Where agreed, a named official should be contactable immediately ahead of the engagement to answer any last-minute requests.

When attending an engagement, you should arrive early and familiarise yourself with the venue. You should meet the Cabinet Secretary at the entrance, introduce yourself and then facilitate introductions with others.

Supporting officials should play an active role during visits, particularly around ensuring your event runs to time/agenda and facilitating valuable discussion.

It's essential that in the lead up to any visit you liaise with the stakeholder on any planned media activity – either by us, or that they may intend to undertake. Ensure you inform the communications team of any plans.

You should also be contactable on the number provided on the briefing in case of any last-minute changes or unforeseen issues.

Briefing

Use the correct briefing template and send this as a Word document, not an eRDM link. The templates include guidance and you should ensure you follow these steps. Deadlines for submitting briefings will be detailed in the diary entry private office sends you.

Speeches should be submitted as separate documents and have page numbers as a footer (in the centre).

If your briefing requires amendments after it's submitted, check with private office before re-submitting. An amended section or additional annex is often better than resubmitting the whole briefing, particularly for parliamentary debates. We can advise what is best in each instance.

Committee or debate briefing

Category	Type of event	Template
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parliamentary debates committee appearances 	Debate/committee appearance template Speaking note/speech template
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ministerial working groups meetings with other ministers, stakeholders or organisations 	Meetings template
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> receptions and events including dinners external visits, engagements or events including dinners 	Engagements template

Shirley-Anne Somerville - parliamentary questions (PQs)

Familiarise yourself with types of parliamentary questions (PQs).

Private office are advised of general or portfolio questions on a Wednesday afternoon for the following week.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

When drafting answers, you should keep them short and concise – no more than 97 words. You should also provide suggested supplementary questions and answers in all instances.

It's important to ensure questions are allocated to the correct minister and private office on the PQ tracker before submitting. You should also make sure someone is available in the days and morning leading up to the general or portfolio question being answered. You must tell private office who this is (particularly if they're different from the action officer).

All PQ answers must be signed off by your deputy director. Private office will advise of any portfolio questions which should be cleared with special advisers before being submitted.

Written PQs

When drafting:

- keep answers short and concise, addressing all points in the question, but not offering excess information unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position
- use tables for complex numerical information
- if information is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, refer to this in the answer
- keep background notes succinct and provide context to the question and answer (if the answer refers to a previous answer, always include this for context)

Shirley-Anne Somerville – submissions

Familiarise yourself with the guidance on submissions to ministers and use the submission template.

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion, recommendation and timescale for response. Keep your submissions as short as possible. Don't include background details if ministers are already familiar with them.

In your covering email, clearly state whether this is for information or requires a decision and use the correct priority category:

- immediate (within 24 hours – call private office on submission)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- routine (over three days)

Copy lists

Submissions sent to Ms Somerville should use appropriate copy lists. As a minimum, these include the DG office, your director and deputy director as well as our special adviser and communications officials. Relevant ministers and officials should be included as appropriate.

All submissions to Ms Stewart should be copied to Ms Somerville. You should give careful consideration as to whether Ms Somerville should be a joint top copy recipient or sent on a 1:2 basis. There's no exact rule but generally speaking anything with a significant financial commitment or contentious presentational issue should also be top copied to Ms Somerville. Ms Somerville should also be a top recipient for issues relating to manifesto commitments.

If a note is being sent to the First Minister from other ministers, Ms Somerville should always have the opportunity to comment in advance. If in doubt, contact private office.

Shirley-Anne Somerville – correspondence

Read the guidance on handling ministerial correspondence. The MiCase system is the primary correspondence tool for ministers.

On MiCase:

Wherever possible, a reply will be sent out electronically. Please include an email address directly under the final line of the address. Where a letter will be sent electronically, Ms Somerville still wishes for the full postal address to be entered. On MiCase you need to add these additional fields.

When replying to MSPs, ensure you use their preferred reply address – some MSPs ask a particular address to be used.

You should begin by thanking the sender for their letter and refer to the date it was sent. If our response is late, provide a short apology for the delay in replying. If the original correspondence was sent to another minister but Ms Somerville is replying, acknowledge this and explain why she is responding

For all diary acceptance replies include the following text in your draft: 'Please note that all engagements accepted by the Cabinet Secretary are subject to parliamentary business and can change at short notice. Please contact me at CabSecforSJ@gov.scot to finalise your arrangements.'

Left justify the signature which should be laid out:

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE for ministerial replies, or

[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)]
Assistant Private Secretary for diary replies

Shona Robison – Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government

Shona Robison - top tips

Shona Robison MSP is the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.

You can view her biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

When Ms Robison's ministerial box closes

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

Ms Robison's constituency days are Monday and Friday, and a box will not generally be taken on those days.

Ministers regularly receive high volumes of material, so you should give consideration to the timing of your submission. It won't always be read on the day you submit.

Urgent decisions can't be guaranteed, but please discuss with private office as soon as possible if you have urgent information for Ms Robison.

Shona Robison – submissions

A submission is used to provide information or advice to ministers, or to ask for a decision to be taken.

You should ensure you're using the latest ministerial submission template.

Do not embed attachments in your submission document or send as eRDM Objective links.

Where your submission includes a request for Ms Robison's time, contact private office (PO) separately to check dates and times. You should flag this element of the request in the body of your email. Some examples of where this is required include:

- time in the diary for a meeting
- request for a visit (PO will not only need to block the visit time, but will also plan and factor in travel time)
- when taking a paper to Cabinet (committees often clash with Cabinet, so we will need to confirm she is attending)

Ensure each page is numbered in your submission and remove all template comments and any tracked changes.

Address

It's important to address your submission accurately. If your submission is addressed to two ministers and requests a decision, it means you expect a response from both and can't proceed on a single minister's clearance. You will want to review guidance on the '1-2' convention before sending this submission.

If you want to copy a second minister for their awareness or information only, include them in the copy list section at the end of the submission. Make sure the appropriate box is completed.

Timing

The timing options for submissions are immediate, urgent and routine.

Most submissions will be routine, but if a response is required within three days, you should mark it as urgent. For a response within 24 hours, mark it as immediate. This includes submissions where making a decision prior to a fixed event would be of great benefit. For example, if Ms Robison is meeting relevant stakeholders who wish to discuss the issue.

If a short turnaround is required, officials should contact private office before sending the submission to ensure the Cabinet Secretary is available to consider.

Purpose

The purpose section should set out clearly the reason for sending the submission. Consider using language such as 'To update the Cabinet Secretary on...', 'To advise the Cabinet Secretary....', or 'To ask the Cabinet Secretary to confirm...'

Body

The body of the submission should be clear, concise, and to the point. Submissions should be short, and officials should consider whether any lengthy or complex information may be better as an annex. Where a submission is particularly complex, you should contact private office, as a meeting to discuss the issue with the Minister may be preferred.

Consider whether you need to reiterate background information that Ms Robison will be aware of, or whether this can be removed. Try not to take a previous submission, and top and tail it with the latest decision to be made. This usually results in a lot of unnecessary repeated information.

Recommendation

If your submission is asking for a decision to be made, it's important you provide a clear recommendation for Ms Robison to consider. Make sure your recommendation takes into account advice from special advisers.

Shona Robison – briefings

Ms Robison will generally require a briefing for meetings, engagements, committees, debates or statements.

You should prepare briefings using Ms Robison's preferred template. These briefings should be sent to private office at least one week before the event taking place. Private office will confirm the deadline at the time they request the briefing.

Ms Robison's portfolio is wide-ranging, and it's easy for briefings to become too long as they try to cover everything. Please keep briefings as short as possible, keeping in mind ministers generally will not have a lot of time to review the briefing ahead of the event.

You may also wish to consider whether a meeting beforehand would be beneficial ahead of the event. You can discuss the possibility with private office.

Shona Robison – speeches

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to ask experienced colleagues for advice. You can also contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in the writing a speech guidance.

When drafting a speech for Ms Robison you should remember:

- she speaks at approximately 150 words per minute
- to send draft speeches for significant events to private office a week in advance to allow time for Ms Robison to consider and provide feedback
- private office may also arrange a discussion between officials and Ms Robison to go over the content of a speech
- include a word count at the end
- speeches should be in Arial font size 16 with 1.5 spacing
- speeches should always be sent as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack, and pages should always be numbered
- page breaks should occur only at the end of a full sentence, with no split paragraph between pages (therefore providing a natural pause between changing pages)
- avoid using acronyms, jargon or tables - remember this is being read aloud

Where Ms Robison is giving multiple speeches on the same topic over a short period of time, keep in mind this means there's likely to be some crossover between the audiences. You should therefore avoid duplication between the speeches.

If a speech is for an online event or is pre-recorded, it should be no longer than 10 minutes in total to keep the audience engaged. Where a longer speaking slot is requested, Ms Robison is happy to take questions, rather than give a longer speech.

Shona Robison - Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

There is detailed guidance available for dealing with Parliamentary Questions (PQs). Make sure you have read and understood this guidance before taking forward any kind of PQ, as it's important they are handled correctly.

Oral parliamentary questions require particularly careful handling. The deadline for an oral PQ will be shorter than for a written PQ (and in some cases, quite a lot shorter). The answer has to be suitable for Ms Robison to give orally in the Chamber, in response to the MSP.

It's important to be aware oral PQs are often subject to last minute asks, as additional information can be received right up until the question is asked. If you are allocated a question, please ensure you are contactable in the hours leading up to the question to pick up requests. You should provide private office (PO) with an alternative contact if you will not be available.

Often these requests will come with tight deadlines and it's essential these are kept to. Timing is strict to ensure the lines are printed with enough time for Ms Robison to get to the Chamber. Given this, it's always appreciated if officials acknowledge that requests have been picked up and keep PO in the loop if they experience any problems.

Portfolio questions

Portfolio question sessions occur every three weeks, usually on Wednesday afternoons. This will consist of eight oral PQs, which may be answered by any of the portfolio ministers, depending on the topic.

Private office will usually receive the questions the week before the session, and the correspondence secretary will commission an answer and background note from the relevant official, with a deadline of 4pm on Friday.

General questions

General questions usually take place weekly on Thursday mornings before First Minister's Questions. Ministers may have several questions to answer, and similarly to portfolio questions, Private office will usually receive the question the previous week. They will typically commission an answer and background note for Monday.

Topical questions

Two topical questions are taken in the Chamber weekly on Tuesday afternoons. The questions are chosen on Monday evening and therefore require a very quick turnaround. Generally, private office will ask for an initial draft of the answer ahead of Cabinet taking place on Tuesday morning. They will arrange a meeting between relevant officials and Ms Robison to discuss afterwards.

Urgent questions

Urgent questions can be answered on days when a full meeting of parliament is taking place (typically Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday). These have the shortest

turnaround time of any PQ, as if a question is lodged before 10am an answer can be requested that same day.

Once the Chamber Desk has received the question, they will contact the Minister for Parliamentary Business's office by 10am. They will then let the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and the relevant portfolio minister know. Private office will contact officials for immediate briefing and a draft answer. A meeting may also be arranged with officials depending on timings.

Answer

The answer itself should be approximately 97 words (as per parliamentary guidance) and should lend itself to be given orally. Drafting officials should consider whether the answer feels natural and flows in response to the question. Little known acronyms or detailed statistics generally don't work for an oral answer. You should consider how best to get the information across in another way.

Background

For background, Ms Robison's preference is First Minister's Questions (FMQ) style briefing. You may be able to repurpose an existing FMQ brief if the subject area has required one that week, but you should make sure to remove irrelevant information. If you're drafting FMQ style briefing from scratch, follow the guidance on FMQ briefs.

The background note should also include anticipated questions and answers where possible. This does not mean officials should include every Q and A on a particular topic. You should use your considerable knowledge and experience of your subject area to attempt to understand why the original question is being asked.

For example, the MSP may have asked what seems to be a general question about affordable housing in Scotland. Policy officials will be aware they have written several times about a particular part of the country, as they have prepared numerous draft replies on the points raised.

You should also consider whether there's anything in the press that may reveal the intention behind the question. For example, when asked a question about audit processes for a particular local authority, an online search for news articles may reveal local opinion considers those processes have failed around a particular issue.

It may not be possible to determine the reason the question is being asked, and in that case, anticipated Q and A may not be possible. You should speak to private office ahead of submitting the PQ if this is the case.

Special advisers must review your PQ before you submit it to private office (by the given deadline) for Ms Robison's review. Please include a line at the top of the background note that confirms you have arranged this.

Shona Robison – correspondence

The central correspondence unit (CCU) manages correspondence sent to ministers using the MiCase system. Replies are drafted on their behalf for issue within 20 working days. The guidance here applies to ministerial replies from Ms Robison, with some additional top tips available.

Correspondence from MSPs and MPs

Many MSP/MP offices will include a reference number, so ensure this is copied in the response under 'Your Ref'. When a MSP/MP writes on behalf of their constituent, refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given.

If the letter is issuing from Ms Robison, address the Member by their first name. If the letter is issuing from the private secretary, address the Member as Ms/Mr. Where the correspondence has been sent by a Member's constituency staff, address the letter to the Member directly.

Official replies

You should include 'I have been asked by Ms Robison to thank you for your letter of [day/month] and to reply on her behalf', or similar.

Diary invitations

Replies to diary cases are typically sent from the private secretary (PS). You should ensure the PS Minute includes all specific policy details, key points and the views of the communications team. The more information given, the more likely the Minister will make a firm decision.

Flag up any diary cases that are going to be sent up late, especially if it's an event happening in the near future. This allows us to let the organisation know well before the event takes place. If the diary case is for an event on a particular date, get in touch with private office (PO) to check diary availability before drafting an accept response.

Contacting private office

If a letter needs to be issued at a particular time or by a certain date, email private office (PO) at the earliest opportunity to flag this. Where a letter is being sent out by PO rather than through MiCase, please ensure you include the email address(es) it needs to be sent to.

If you think you're going to need longer than the MiCase deadlines and an interim response will need to be issued, contact PO at the earliest opportunity. An interim response can therefore be arranged and not when the case is already late.

Reallocation

Ministerial replies can be reallocated, so Ms Robison is answering on behalf of another cabinet secretary/minister who received the original letter. You should thank

the correspondent for their letter to the original Cabinet Secretary/Minister and add: 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise'.

Delays

If the response is sent more than four weeks after the original letter was written, include an apology for the delay when replying. If the MiCase is not sent up to the Minister by the private office deadline, you should include a short note explaining the delay.

Some top tips for drafting correspondence are:

- the main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12
- include the full title of the correspondent, such as Director/Chairman/Convener
- if responding to a Councillor, address him/her as such, and if they have another title such as Convener/Chairperson, include that as well
- please spell it 'Convener' rather than 'Convenor'
- don't use Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms etc. unless the correspondent does
- don't use Esquire after a name
- refer to the date of the original letter in the response
- consider who will be reading the response for example children or young people
- make sure the reply is clear, concise and written in a language that is easily understood - read how to write well for more information on this
- don't use unnecessary phrases at the beginning of sentences for example. 'I am writing to...'; 'First of all,...'; 'I have to advise you that...'; 'Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to set out some general background about...'
- keep sentences short and avoid jargon
- don't use the phrase 'I am afraid' - an alternative is 'Unfortunately'
- don't use the phrase, 'Scottish Ministers have no locus to intervene' - alternative wording is 'it is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers to intervene'
- where appropriate add, 'I hope this is helpful' at the end of a response
- try to fit the reply on one page, but do not make the font smaller to do so
- don't alter the default page set-up - If drafting a letter outwith MiCase, use the Ministerial Template found in the Scottish Ministers folder in Word
- do not use paragraph numbering
- ensure the Cabinet Secretary's name at the bottom of the letter is in bold and capitals in the centre of the letter - 'SHONA ROBISON'
- the private secretary's signature should also be in the centre of the page
- use single spacing between sentences
- open the letter with some background, for example 'Thank you for your letter about...'
- make sure the response answers the points raised by the correspondent
- avoid 'general interest' details, which do not answer the question asked
- if cutting and pasting from previous correspondence, ensure the response is tailored to the current correspondent and all facts and figures are up to date
- use spell check and proofread the response to ensure the grammar and spelling is accurate before sending to private office

Shona Robison – media

Ms Robison is often asked to give comments to the media. Once a media bid is agreed, you should confirm the following information as soon as possible:

- where and when will the interview take place? Timing and format (virtual or in-person) must be agreed with private office before confirming with the media outlet
- who is the interviewer?
- which media outlet does the interviewer represent?
- what is the subject?
- has something specific prompted the request?
- do we know what kind of questions they will ask?

Officials must draft a short briefing for the interview, using Ms Robison's preferred template. You must provide the briefing in good time, so Ms Robison can digest it before the interview begins. Interviewers generally will not wait for a late briefing to come through. This could potentially lead to the interview slot being missed, or worse, something incorrect being said, which causes serious reputational damage to the government.

Siobhan Brown – Minister for Victims and Community Safety

Siobhian Brown - top tips

Siobhian Brown MSP is the Minister for Victims and Community Safety. You can find her biography and portfolio responsibilities on the gov.scot website.

The following is intended as guidance only and does not cover every scenario. If you're unsure of anything, contact private office.

Box times

Ms Brown takes nearly all papers electronically. As such, there is no formal box closure time. If you plan on sending something that needs an immediate or urgent response, a heads up to private office is always helpful.

Be clear within the covering email and submission on any specific deadline. Ms Brown generally tries to clear her box daily or, where this is not possible, will do so over the weekend so you can expect a response by the start of the following week. Private office will ensure any papers with specific deadlines are seen and prioritised accordingly.

The team will also provide details of any specific box arrangements leading up to and during recess periods.

Taking minutes

All meetings where government business is discussed need to be properly recorded and documented. A minute is an official record and an important tool for capturing decisions made and actions to be taken.

It is the responsibility of accompanying officials to take an appropriate record of an event with a minister. Notes of meetings should be agreed through the relevant private office and, once agreed, stored by the policy area.

You should also read the guidance on taking minutes.

Siobhian Brown – submissions

You should familiarise yourself with the guidance on submissions to ministers and use the standard submission template (document will download) when submitting a submission to Ms Brown.

All submissions should have a clear purpose, conclusion or recommendation and timescale for response. Keep submissions as short as possible. Don't include background detail ministers are already familiar with.

In your covering email, clearly state whether this is for information or requires a decision and use the correct priority category:

- immediate (within 24 hours – ideally call private office before submitting)

- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- routine (three days or more)

Copy lists

All submissions should use appropriate copy lists which, as a minimum, include:

- the director general (DG) office
- your director and deputy director
- our special adviser (Jeanette Campbell)
- communications officials

Other relevant ministers and officials should be included as appropriate.

All submissions to Ms Brown should be copied to Ms Constance. You should give careful consideration as to whether Ms Constance should be a joint top copy recipient, or the submission should be sent on a 1:2 basis.

There is no exact rule, but in general anything contentious, with a significant financial commitment or relating to a Manifesto or Programme for Government commitment should be top copied to the Cabinet Secretary.

Siobhian Brown – engagements

When suggesting engagements for Ms Brown, please consider her normal working week. If suggesting an engagement outside of Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, contact private office at the earliest opportunity. All engagements are subject to parliamentary business so can change at short notice. You should ensure stakeholders are aware of this.

AM/PM	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.	Opportunity for external engagements until around midday.	Best opportunity for external engagements.	Opportunity for external engagements until around 11am (depending on location).	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.
PM	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament possible but	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament possible but	Mixture of internal and external meetings in parliament. Engagements outside parliament possible but	Constituency commitments – ministerial engagements by exception.

		normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	normally required back at parliament for decision time at 5pm.	
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Official support is expected at all engagements. Exceptions to this should be agreed with private office in advance. Where agreed, a named official should be contactable immediately ahead of the engagement to answer any last-minute requests.

Supporting officials should play an active role during visits, particularly around ensuring the event runs to time and the agenda, and by facilitating valuable discussion.

Briefing

Find the correct briefing template from the table on this page and send as a Word document. Make sure you follow the guidance for completing the templates included in them.

Briefing will normally be commissioned via the diary invitation. You should ensure the times within the invite match what you have agreed with stakeholders. Deadlines for submitting briefings are generally a week before the event.

You should always submit speeches as separate documents and include page numbers within the footer.

If briefing requires amending after it's submitted, check with private office before re-submitting. An amended section or additional annex is often better than an entire new pack, particularly for parliamentary debates – we can advise what is best in each instance.

Committee and debate briefing

You should refer to the briefing templates in the table, using the right one depending on what type of engagement. This is particularly important for briefing for any kind of parliamentary engagement.

You should think about the type of parliamentary engagement you are preparing briefing for and how the minister is likely to use the briefing pack.

Also bear in mind for statements and committee appearances Ms Brown will be asked questions directly and will need to answer immediately. She will not have the luxury of spending time looking through lengthy annexes to find the key bit of information. Make annexes concise and don't include information you know the minister is already well-versed in. FMQ documents prepared for the First Minister for instance can possibly be made more concise.

Type of event	Template
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parliamentary debates, statement or committee appearances 	Debate/committee appearance template
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ministerial committees meetings with other UK ministers stakeholders or organisations 	Meetings template
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> receptions and events (including dinners) external visits/engagements/events including dinners 	Engagements template

Siobhian Brown – speeches

You should read general guidance on writing speeches before you start preparing a speech.

Speech requirements for Ms Brown vary based on the engagement. You should use verbatim speech (without bullet points) for:

- debates or statements
- committee appearances
- conference keynotes

You should write bullet points which Ms Brown can improvise with for:

- smaller or less formal events
- where the minister is sitting at a table

When drafting, you should:

- consider the format of the event, including whether Ms Brown will be speaking from a lectern or a sitting position (for the latter, a bullet style speech is usually better than a full verbatim speech)
- think carefully about the audience (for example, if the audience will principally be young people, don't make it too heavy on policy)
- avoid simply cutting and pasting from previous speeches, as many of the events the minister speaks at attract similar audiences
- ensure the speech has a clear structure, flow, and is free of jargon and clichés
- be clear on what the speech is trying to achieve
- avoid lengthy phrases and sentences
- allow time for the minister's own additions and anecdotes in the speech – Ms Brown speaks at around 150 words per minute, so don't submit a speech over the required time
- always read the speech out loud to pick up repetitiveness or lack of natural breathing space

When formatting and finalising:

- do not split sentences or paragraphs between two pages - use the 'keep lines together' checkbox by going to 'Paragraph' then 'Line and Page Breaks' in Word
- text should be Arial, size 18 with 1.5 paragraph spacing
- insert page numbers as a footer (in centre)
- you should always send speeches as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack

Siobhian Brown - parliamentary questions

Make sure you're familiar with the different types of parliamentary questions (PQs) before providing Ms Brown with answers to these.

Private office is advised of general questions and/or portfolio questions on a Wednesday afternoon for the following week.

[Redacted – Section 29(1)(d) (Operation of a Ministerial Private Office)]

When drafting:

- keep answers concise - the Presiding Officer has asked that answers are around a minute long (so no more than 150 words)
- provide suggested supplementary questions and answers in all instances
- private office will advise of any portfolio questions which should be cleared with special advisers (SPADs) before submission
- all oral PQ answers should be signed off by your deputy director
- make sure questions are allocated to the correct minister and private office on the PQ tracker before submitting

You should ensure someone is around immediately before any general or portfolio question, as last-minute requests are a common feature. If you're not the action officer, let private office know who it is instead.

Written PQs

When drafting:

- keep answers short and concise, addressing all points in the question, but not offering further information unless it's helpful to the Scottish Government's position
- use tables for complex numerical information
- if information is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, refer to this in the answer
- keep background notes succinct and provide context to the question and answer
- if the answer refers to a previous answer, always include this for context

Siobhian Brown – correspondence

You should familiarise yourself with the guidance on handling ministerial correspondence before drafting replies for Ms Brown.

When replying on MiCase you should:

- include an email address directly under the final line of the address
- ensure you use the preferred reply address when corresponding with MSPs (some MSPs ask for a particular address to be used)
- begin by thanking the sender for their letter and refer to the date it was sent.
- provide a short apology for the delay in replying if your response is late
- in cases where the original correspondence was sent to another minister, but Ms Brown is replying, acknowledge this and explain why she is responding instead

For all diary acceptance replies include the following text in your draft:

'Please note that all engagements accepted by the Minister are subject to Parliamentary business and can change at short notice. Please contact our office at MinisterforVCS@gov.scot to finalise arrangements.'

For ministerial replies, Ms Brown's signature should be centred at the bottom of the letter as:

SIOBHIAN BROWN

And for diary replies the private secretary's name should be used:

[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)]
Private Secretary

For letters outwith the MiCase system use Ms Brown's letter template.

Tom Arthur – Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing

Tom Arthur - top tips

Tom Arthur MSP is the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing. You can read his biography and responsibilities on gov.scot.

Mr Arthur's box is an electronic box with papers emailed by private office. Mr Arthur prefers to read briefings on his laptop, so make sure the layout is appropriate for reading from a screen.

Consider the type of meeting or event and tailor the briefing appropriately. Mr Arthur likes succinct briefings, with the high level, most relevant detail at the top, followed by additional details. Think about what is particularly newsworthy at the moment in time, or what this audience will think is a priority. Always put the most recent or the most notable issues at the top so that Mr Arthur does not have to go digging in the briefing for the most important details.

The briefing should be clear about the purpose of the meeting and what Mr Arthur needs to get out of it. Identify clearly what action you want the Minister to take and the deadline. If you want Mr Arthur to take actions, make decisions or make an announcement at a meeting, always ensure that he has considered the issue in detail before asking in public.

Consider why Mr Arthur is having the meeting, what are the aims (what does he wish to get out of it), and what might he be pressed on by stakeholders or attendees. A one-pager covering the purpose and key points is always helpful. Mr Arthur likes to know who he is meeting and their role or position. If there are a series of annexes, put the names, biographies and roles of who Mr Arthur is meeting at the top. It's also useful to know when the last contact the individual had with the Scottish Government either by meeting another minister or through correspondence. It is important that the briefing accurately reflects the name/s of the officials attending meetings and events.

You should send briefings to private office one week before the event. Where possible, this timescale should be adhered to and briefings should only be late by exception, and after discussing with private office.

We understand there are occasions where briefing or submissions may need to be changed after being sent. If this is the case, it's important to return in tracked changes or clearly mark where you have made the changes.

We would also ask, where possible, to only be copied into a final version and not be included in the email exchanges that lead to a final document. We appreciate this will be dependent on the situation, as it is sometimes useful to understand the status of submissions, briefings or responses.

If Mr Arthur has a meeting or event that covers a number of policy areas, it would be helpful if a single policy area would lead on the coordination and preparation of the full briefing pack.

Provide any parking information and a map, and include a photo from Google maps as an annex. Either update the existing box with car parking details or add an extra line and name a specific entrance for ministerial car parking arrangements.

Further information or advice

If you need further information or advice, contact a member of the private office team. If you need something dealt with urgently please mark as urgent in an email, or alternatively phone. It is often helpful to follow up an urgent email with a phone call to assist prioritising it. On Parliament days private office is very busy and we can't always deal with things straight away. However, if we know something is urgent, we will always try to prioritise.

Tom Arthur – speeches

For speeches, Mr Arthur prefers prose. As a guide you should provide no more than one to two pages of bullet points for a five minute speech and no more than three to four pages for a 10 minute speech.

It is important Mr Arthur sees any agenda. If it's a conference, there is usually one and a theme. There may also be papers such as a glossy brochure. You must get hold of this and associated papers as it will help form a relevant speech for the occasion.

Mr Arthur needs to know who is in the audience, which you can find out from the organiser. The Minister also likes to refer to the audience – include examples of what the audience do or have done to make the speech relevant.

You should make sure Mr Arthur knows the format. Will the speech be followed by Q and A, is it part of a panel of speakers or is it an opening speech? There should always be a briefing on possible questions and answers if the organisers have indicated that there will be Q and A at the event. It should be formatted like the possible supplementary page for oral questions. Lead with questions most recently raised in the press, include high level economic achievements towards the end, followed by anything else deemed appropriate.

Mr Arthur needs the facts and then views. Bullet points are usually enough. Keep it simple. Mr Arthur usually wishes to record where there's a UK Government responsibility and set out the facts on that.

Mr Arthur likes to get speeches one week before the event to check over and to allow time to commission more information, check facts or briefing. He does like helpful factual material - and detail of relevant facts.

Please note:

- Mr Arthur speaks at about 150 words a minute
- speeches should be in Arial 16pt with 1.5 spacing
- paragraphs should be no longer than two or three lines

- if the speech is in printed format, page breaks should be at the end of a sentence, paragraphs should not run over pages and each page must be numbered
- you should include examples of things Mr Arthur has done in his ministerial capacity
- you should involve communications and special advisers (SPADs) in drafting
- Mr Arthur likes to speak at a lectern, so please request this if possible
- Mr Arthur likes to see an early draft of the speech before it is finalised to give thoughts on direction and content - this does not have to be fully complete
- Mr Arthur likes to find out what kind of microphone will be used (Mr Arthur's preference is a lapel or mobile microphone rather than a fixed microphone)

You must always check the speech for accuracy – facts and figures should be checked and double checked. Speeches should also be sent up as a separate Word document to the wider briefing pack - and pages should always be numbered. Avoid using acronyms and jargon. Remember this is being spoken.

Drafting a speech is challenging, so be sure to draw on experienced colleagues for advice and contact private office for direction on the type of speech and structure expected. You can find further advice in the writing a speech guidance.

When drafting a speech, consider the following:

- the speech should be relevant to the event
- who the audience are and what do they want to hear
- the speech should use positive language
- do not recycle or copy and paste parts of previous speeches on the same subject
- avoid getting bogged down in policy unless necessary
- the big picture context - start and end with the big picture
- including some relevant context, especially in the introduction
- including any constitutional points that are appropriate
- cover hot issues and topical subjects
- potential announcements (these should be discussed with communications colleagues)
- adding some colour to the speech and personalising it - feel free to include testimonials, startling facts, and quotes
- it's important to read the speech aloud to identify any potential challenges or problems in delivering it

Read examples of speeches on the gov.scot website.

Tom Arthur - engagement briefing

Make sure you use Mr Arthur's preferred briefing template for engagements or meetings. Email briefing and speeches one week before the event.

The briefing should always follow the structure laid out in the template, including the sequence of the annexes. For briefings with more than six annexes (for example A to F), please list annexes as page numbers on the contents page (for example 1 to 25)

instead of using letters. This helps Mr Arthur to locate the information more easily in a larger briefing pack and reduces the need to tab each annex.

Provide a map and directions (where required), address with postcode, organisation name, contact names and numbers in the briefing. You should also send it to the private office assistant private secretary as far in advance as possible. Please check the details carefully as incomplete or confusing directions lead to delays and stress. For remote locations or large sites, it would also be helpful to provide a grid reference. You can find a latitude and longitude reference on Google maps, by right clicking on a point and then selecting 'What's here?' Please also copy your briefing to the Government Car Service.

Official support should be assumed for all visits or meetings, unless agreed otherwise with private office. Ensure any official attending an event with Mr Arthur includes their mobile number in the briefing, and has this phone switched on. This means private office or the Minister can contact them to advise of travel delays or check on last minute logistics or points of detail. Officials are expected to be available just before the engagement starts in case Mr Arthur requires a pre-brief.

Briefings should be short, succinct and have an easy to follow structure. For regular meetings they should be eight pages maximum. Briefings for larger meetings that the Minister is chairing should include a steering brief, but still be as succinct as possible.

You should always submit speaking notes as separate documents and add page numbers. You can also find more information on speech preferences. Any amendments required after the briefing has been submitted may require to be written in by private office. Please use track changes or make them very clear in the covering email.

You should request a lectern at the venue and note this on the briefing. If this is not possible, advise the Minister of the layout (for instance, speaking from a table).

Please differentiate your briefing to ensure it's sufficient and proportionate for the needs of the event or meeting.

For example, meetings with key stakeholders, ministers of other governments, major conferences and high profile events should include:

- ideally a maximum of 20 pages (number pages and don't embed documents in Word documents (they can get missed in our printing))
- cover sheet or index
- agenda
- meeting objective(s) and what outcome(s) are desired (this should be succinct)
- background on key issues to be discussed (use First Minister's Questions (FMQ) format)
- if there was a previous meeting, a note of that and progress since
- Q and A
- bios on meeting attendees (not previously met)

- provide a full delegate list
- speaking note - if required

Meetings with external stakeholders, receptions or events, including dinners should also be very similar but ideally no more than eight pages for the briefing.

Routine visits and engagements or photo-ops should include:

- logistic briefing only - no more than six pages
- why the Minister is attending
- when, where, what and who, guest list, bios
- any key local or topical issues to be aware of
- a line about the most recent engagement the organisation has had with the Scottish Government – for example correspondence or meeting and a line on who the local MSP and MP are

Parliamentary engagements

Mr Arthur takes parliamentary engagements such as debates, statements or committee appearances very seriously. Such engagements will require comprehensive, but also easily navigable and succinct briefing. This is likely to include:

- cover sheet
- key messages to get across
- summary of relevant manifesto commitments and progress in achieving them
- likely areas of opposition attack and rebuttals
- FMQ style background briefing on key issues (including third party quotes)
- speaking note - find more information in speech preferences
- historical context, including key facts or figures (not covered above)
- summary of any previous evidence sessions

Briefing should be signed off by a deputy director and the special adviser before being sent to private office.

Tom Arthur - parliamentary questions (PQs)

General and portfolio questions

Answers should:

- be short, succinct and to the point - ideally no more than four or five lines long, two short paragraphs maximum
- directly respond to the questions
- avoid complex quotes or tables
- include a separate general economy highlights briefing

Possible supplementary questions and answers should be the first item of the background note. These should lead with the subject areas that the member has

most recently been active on, followed by issues in the press, First Minister Question (FMQ) lines and then any other relevant documents.

Officials should seek to clear draft answers and background briefing with the special adviser in advance of submitting to private office. When doing so, these should not be sent through the parliamentary question (PQ) system but either as two standalone Word documents or a copy and paste in to an email.

On submitting the answer, advise private office whether it has been cleared by the special adviser or not.

You should make sure you are contactable the morning the question is being answered or advise private office who should be contacted for last minute queries.

Written parliamentary questions (PQs)

When drafting written answers, they should:

- address all points in the question, but do not offer up information not requested (unless it is helpful to the Scottish Government's position to do so)
- be helpful in tone
- be relevant - no padding
- avoid repetition
- use tables for complex numerical information
- seek to clear draft answers with the special adviser in advance of submitting to private office if the subject matter is controversial or likely to cause media interest

Background notes should be succinct and provide context to the question and answer. Remember as well that Mr Arthur would like early sight of the draft before it's finalised.

When written PQs request information which is publicly available or has already been supplied in an earlier PQ answer, Mr Arthur is keen that standard replies are used.

You can read further guidance on parliamentary questions.

There are strict guidelines on formatting for PQs. If in doubt, either private office or the parliamentary clerk's office would be happy to help.

Tom Arthur – submissions

All submissions to ministers should have a clear purpose, conclusion and timescale for response. Mr Arthur should be able to quickly identify what they are. It helps private office if the covering email clearly states whether this is for information, or requires a decision from the Minister.

When preparing your submission, you should:

- keep it as short as possible (one or two pages)
- not include background detail Mr Arthur will already be aware of
- not embed attachments in your submission document or send as Objective (eRDM) links
- ensure each page is numbered
- remove all template comments and any tracked changes
- proofread all material to correct grammar and spelling
- ensure that all relevant ministers, director generals, communications officers and special adviser are copied in - ideally the latter two should be consulted in advance

Submissions that require Mr Arthur and the cabinet secretary to make a decision should be submitted on a 1:2 basis.

You should also use the correct priority timing:

- routine (over three days)
- urgent (within three days but more than 24 hours)
- immediate (within 24 hours)

Include the priority in the subject box of the accompanying email and if immediate, call private office to alert us and also check that Mr Arthur is available to clear it. Consideration should also be given to recess, holidays and weekends.

Further information can be found in submissions to ministers.

Tom Arthur – correspondence

Ministerial correspondence is subject to corporate targets and should be answered within 20 working days. Draft replies for ministerial consideration should be with private office within 10 working days. Private office are more than happy to answer any queries you may have.

Mr Arthur attaches great importance to correspondence and would like policy colleagues to draft quick and sympathetic responses to all letters from members of the public. Mr Arthur will personally respond to all letters from:

- MPs, MSPs and MEPs
- Members of the House of Lords
- councillors
- chairpersons or chief executives of public bodies and key stakeholders
- friends and acquaintances
- constituents (Renfrewshire South)

In each case there is a 'main' point the correspondent makes. Replies should show that the Minister has 'got it'. To do that use 'playback' - in other words, begin the letter by repeating the main concern raised, simply to show that the Minister has understood the primary issue, concern, point, criticism or whatever the purpose of the email or letter is. You should respond by setting out the facts and our views.

Candour is good. We can't satisfy all comers, nor should we raise expectations unfairly.

Make sure you remove unnecessary parts of the template (for example, unused refs or signature). Include the month and year at the top (the day will be written in) and put the Minister's name in the signature space. The letter should be ready to print and not need further editing by private office.

We check the MiCase system regularly for all draft responses for clearance, so there's no need to phone or email to alert us. Please ensure any MiCases that are either political or sensitive, for example relating to a current hot topic, are cleared by the special adviser before submitting to private office.

You should also:

- use plain English
- check several times for any typos or grammatical errors
- make sure dates follow Scottish Government convention (for example 20 May 2025, not 20th May 2025)

Further guidance is listed in the table in alphabetical order:

Address	<p>MSPs - use the reply address provided on the letter template. Many MSPs now request that replies are sent to their constituency address or will only list their constituency as the reply address. Please also ensure that if the incoming letter has a reference, this is copied in the response under 'Your Ref'.</p> <p>Constituents - when an MSP or MP writes on behalf of their constituent, refer to the constituent by name and state their address if given.</p> <p>Email - some correspondents prefer to receive their response by email, or don't give a postal address. If there's only an email address, put this under the correspondent's name at the top of the letter. Once the letter has been signed off, it will be scanned and emailed by private office.</p>
Contact details	<p>When drafting an acceptance to an invitation, please include a sentence asking the correspondent to contact the Minister's Assistant Private Secretary, [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], via email at ministerSCMW@gov.scot to make the necessary arrangements.</p>

Content	<p>Open the letter with some background, for example 'Thank you for your letter of x about...'</p> <p>Please ensure the response answers the points raised by the correspondent. You should also avoid 'general interest' details, which do not answer the question asked. If you're cutting and pasting from previous correspondence, make sure the response is tailored to the current correspondent and all facts and figures are up to date.</p>
Coordinated responses	<p>Many MiCases are related to PQs, press releases etc. Please ensure that all the facts and figures are consistent.</p>
Date	<p>Refer to the date of the original letter in the response.</p> <p>If you send up the response at the end or beginning of a month, check that the letter is dated appropriately. If in doubt, it is often best to date a response with the new month as, depending on Mr Arthur's box arrangements, it may be into the next month before the letter is signed.</p>
Delays	<p>If the response is more than four weeks since the original letter was written, please include an apology for the delay in replying.</p> <p>If the MiCase is not sent up to the minister within the private office deadline, include a short note explaining the delay.</p>
Font	<p>The main text of the letter should always be Arial, font size 12.</p> <p>The St Andrew's House address details, our ref and date are formatted. Please do not reformat these.</p>

<p>Diary invitations</p>	<p>Ensure a valid postal or email address is put on the final reply letters - this is important so we can make sure the letter reaches the correct recipient.</p> <p>Make sure the final reply letters are signed off by the private secretary rather than Mr Arthur. Private office sends out all accept/reject letters; the Minister does not sign these off.</p> <p>The PS minute should include all specific policy details, key points and communications views. The more information given, the more likely the Minister will make a firm decision.</p> <p>Flag up any diary cases that are going to be sent up late - especially if it is an event that is in the near future. This allows us to let the organisation know well before the event is taking place.</p> <p>Check the grammar and spelling is accurate - in private office we don't have time to change all the letters individually, so this is a great help.</p> <p>Sample diary case responses</p> <p>Accept:</p> <p>Thank you for your letter of [date] inviting Tom Arthur MSP, Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing, to attend your Annual Conference.</p> <p>Mr Arthur would be delighted to accept your invitation subject to parliamentary business. Please note that all engagements accepted by the Minister are subject to Parliamentary business and can change at short notice. I would be grateful if you could contact the Minister's Assistant Private Secretary, [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)], via email at ministerSCMW@gov.scot to arrange a mutually convenient date and to make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p> <p>Decline:</p> <p>Thank you for your letter of [date] inviting Tom Arthur MSP, Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing, to attend your Annual Conference.</p> <p>Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, Mr Arthur will be unable to accept your kind invitation. Please accept his</p>
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	<p>apologies and best wishes for a successful event.</p> <p>[Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p>
Language	<p>Consider who will be reading the response, for example children or young people. Ensure the reply is clear, concise, and written in a language that is easily understood. Keep sentences short and avoid jargon. Read how to write well for more information.</p> <p>Please do not use unnecessary phrases at the beginning of sentences for example: 'I am writing to...'; 'First of all,...'; 'I have to advise you that...'; 'Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to set out some general background about...'. Do not use the phrase 'I am afraid'. An alternative is 'Unfortunately'.</p> <p>If a case is reallocated to Tom Arthur for answer, the phrase 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise' should be used.</p> <p>Please do not use the phrase, 'Scottish Ministers have no locus to intervene'. An alternative wording is 'it is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers to intervene'</p> <p>Where appropriate add, 'I hope this is helpful' at the end of a response.</p>
Layout	<p>Try to fit the reply on one page, but do not make the font smaller to do so. Leave four lines free at the top between the date and the start of the letter and six lines at bottom of the text of the response to allow the minister to add his signature.</p>

	<p>Do not alter the default page set-up. If drafting a letter out with MiCase, use the ministerial template found in the Scottish Ministers folder in Microsoft Word.</p> <p>If, due to the above formatting, the Minister's name is the only thing on the second page, insert an appropriate page break to ensure that either two full sentences or the last paragraph is moved onto the second page.</p> <p>Do not use SUBJECT TITLES at the beginning of letter, instead incorporate in opening sentence 'Thank you for your letter of 1 January about...'</p> <p>Do not use paragraph numbering and make sure text is centre justified.</p> <p>Ensure that unused text boxes are removed as these will appear in the final draft, for example << text>>, Your ref, signature. Make sure also that the Minister's name at the bottom of the letter is in bold and capitals in the centre of the letter 'TOM ARTHUR'.</p> <p>The PS's signature should also be in the centre of the page as detailed.</p>
Official replies	Please include 'I have been asked by Mr Arthur to thank you for your letter of day/month and to reply on his behalf' or a similar form of words
Reallocation	Ministerial replies can be reallocated so that Mr Arthur is answering on behalf of another Cabinet Secretary/Minister who received the original letter. Please thank the correspondent for their letter to the original Cabinet Secretary/Minister and add, 'I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for the issues you raise'.
Signature	<p>Letters for Mr Arthur's signature (in the centre of the page) TOM ARTHUR</p> <p>Letters for PS/Mr Arthur's signature (in the centre of the page) [Redacted – Section 38(1)(b) (Personal Information)] PRIVATE SECRETARY</p>
Spelling	Please use a spell checker and proofread the response before issuing it.

Timing	It's always helpful if cases can reach the Minister as soon as possible as this allows extra time for discussion, if necessary.
Titles	<p>Include the full title of the correspondent, for example Director/Chairman/Convener. If responding to a Councillor, please address him/her as such. If they have another title such as Convener/Chairperson, this should also be included.</p> <p>Don't use Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms unless the correspondent does.</p> <p>Don't use Esquire after a name.</p>

Further advice

For letters outwith the MiCase system use the preferred template (document will download).

Please contact private office if you have a query or require advice about any of this. We are happy to discuss issues and find the best way forward. Our office is in St Andrews House or call the team. Contact details are available on the Mr Arthur's contacts page.