

Dear Mr McCormick

I write to say how useful I found your meeting on Monday and to follow up on a couple of points that I didn't have a chance to properly get into.

I think the key to parliamentary reform is to make the committees more robust and to be seen to be more independent and not to be cowed by the government of the day. In session 4 most of us felt we were becoming a one party state and in order to avoid this I would elect and not appoint the chairman of committees and remunerate them for the extra work they would have to undertake. These should be seen as prestige jobs, as indeed they are at Westminster, and not something that is taken with reluctance. I wonder if we should therefore appoint chairmen for 2 years only i.e. half the term of the parliament and then the post could be re-appointed.

I am absolutely not in favour of co-opting members onto committees as I they wouldn't be able to vote and they wouldn't have the experience of parliament. We could have advisers as we have at present but not co-opted members. I also felt that there should not be a statutory number of people on a committee, sometimes a smaller committee works better. The problem with a larger committee is that everyone has to have their say and in the end very little can get done.

Another point I wish to make is I think there should be a more flexible speaking time, which the Presiding Officer can decide. I know this does happen occasionally but it is always at the last minute and by that time your speech is already running and it is difficult to extend it.

As was discussed the public involvement is very important for the committees and more outside engagements but not as we said the usual suspects. I know this is very difficult to arrange but it is nevertheless quite important.

Another point concerns post legislation scrutiny. For certain bills I think this is vital but I am aware that time constraints often conflict. For contentious bills only being passed by a narrow majority there should be some sort of sunset clause put in so that it could be reviewed by a committee. Perhaps a sub-committee that originally put forward the bill.

My final point is that I found this meeting very useful particularly for the parliamentarians who have been in for more than one session. I wonder if this should become a regular matter at the beginning of each parliamentary session where former MSPs are asked to attend with their suggestions. Personally I found it very useful speaking to experienced parliamentarians like Jim Mather and Alasdair Morgan, the previous DPO.

I hope this is helpful

Cameron Buchanan