

Written Evidence from Mark Munro (TEB 22)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry

Re: Post vote rejection

I write with the agreement of my 20-year-old daughter to express our concerns about her recent postal ballot being rejected because of signature mismatch.

We earnestly hope this personal experience will help you design better legislation.

Even though this story relates to the May 2021 Scottish election the rejection would have occurred for any UK election.

The facts:-

1. In 2016 my daughter applied for postal vote registration when she was 16. She provided a reference signature.
2. In 2021 she cast her vote in the Scottish elections.
3. Post the election she was advised by the Highland Council, postal ballot team that **her vote made in all honesty and integrity** was rejected.
4. The reason given was a signature mismatch.
5. I have been communicating with the Highland Council Elections Manager, Kate Forbes MSP, the Electoral Commissioners office and Drew Hendry MP to express our concern and to gain as much understanding of the legislation and process.

The problem:-

6. My daughters signature changed from the age of 16 to 20. Not surprising.
7. The process did not require her to submit a new reference signature.
8. No one was obligated to advise her of the signature rejection prior to the ballot and provide her the opportunity to attend the polling station in person.
9. The current signature validation process, although correctly judged a mismatch in this case, is subjective and archaic in 2021.
10. The Electoral Commission are driven by process. They are not interested in maximising the franchise.
11. The Electoral Commission consider an election a success if rejection rates between elections is maintained.

The consequence:-

12. My daughter feels disenfranchised and now has no confidence in the legislation or process.
13. She believes the process is flawed and archaic.
14. She believes her vote is irrelevant.
15. Instead of encouraging young people to participate she and her friends quite understandably mistrust the system, the legislation which they conclude poorly designed, and they doubt if their votes are valued.

The new legislation:-

16. I am advised new legislation is going through parliament.
17. I am advised that it proposes a new reference signature will be required after 3 years rather than the current 5 years.
18. I am advised this will resolve, the problem of signature validation.

19. We contend this is wrong. My 16-year-old daughters' signature changed significantly in the first 6 months let alone 3 years or 5 years.

The Electoral Commission:-

20. We contend the Electoral Commission is tasked ne' driven by process not by maximising the franchise.
21. I am not reassured when they say on their website, 'Public confidence in the running of elections is as high as we have found in our research.' There is no information I could find on how the research by the commission was done or on the questions asked or the sample size. Maybe they are asking the wrong question. Smacks of complacency!
22. We believe if the electoral commission was so perfect, they should have anticipated the problem of signature evolution and advised the legislators back in 2016 or when the current legislation was devised.
23. The Electoral Commission believe the process is acceptable if the rejection rate doesn't increase significantly from election to election. This is not good enough.

Conclusion:-

24. As a family, all four of us have discussed all the communications received in detail so to be fair and reasonable in our opinions.
25. We conclude the system should be better. We contend signature verification in 2021 is archaic and obsolete.
26. We see it as wrong my daughter was advised post the 2021 election that there was a signature mismatch. We contend there should also be a process not for appeal but for her to have been asked to attend the local polling station to validate her signature mismatch and ensure her **honestly cast vote made with integrity** should be counted.
27. Whilst we understand the UK legislation will not automatically apply to the Scottish Elections similar considerations and legislation will no doubt be needed in both parliaments.
28. It seems to us that there is maximum consideration for following the process, to follow and enact the legislation, but not to consider the consequence or the limitations.
29. The new legislation being proposed in the UK parliament for UK elections we believe does not reduce or eliminate the problem experienced by this family.
30. The Scottish parliament hopefully will incorporate the ideas in the new UK legislation for its own elections

Other observations:-

31. I have been amused to recently receive a package from Amazon. To ensure it was handed to me personally, Amazon sent me an encrypted one-time pass code to my phone which I had to give to the delivery driver. Only then would he release the package to me. Amazon have implemented this security enhancement to overcome the problems of signature validation at the door and consequent fraud.
32. It seems to me this would be a secure way to ensure the correct person receives the postal ballot paper. Additional use of encrypted keys would ensure the votes cast are from that voter. Surely this would negate the signature evolution problems I have highlighted.
33. None of the banks or financial companies I deal with, nor most tech companies rely on signatures as a means of validation. They utilise encryption keys, two stage authentication and other advanced security techniques. Not one person looking at a five-year-old signature.

Please remember:-

34. My daughter submitted her postal vote after considerable research and thought and to fulfil her democratic and social responsibility. It was made **with complete and total honesty and integrity**. Her vote has been ignored.
35. I have kept this discussion and these arguments as precise as possible hoping you will have the time to consider and maybe cause new and proposed legislation to be improved.
36. As a family we have spent considerable time and thought to ensure we have been fair and reasonable.
37. As a family of four voters none of us have confidence in the postal voting system.

I wish you well and thank you for your time and consideration of these matters.
Thank you.

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