



Electing a more diverse Senedd Consultation Response ERS Cymru

Becoming a more diverse Senedd is key to ensuring we have a parliament that works for Wales. As the Committee will note we have already provided evidence around electoral systems and the capacity of the Senedd and diversity of a future Senedd goes hand in hand with both elements.

Putting mechanisms in place to ensure greater diversity in Welsh politics is now necessary. While the Senedd has been historically successful in demonstrating gender balance, with a record breaking proportion of women elected in 2003, that has since declined and there are no formal requirements in place for this to be rectified.

Furthermore, since the Senedd first sat in 1999 there has never been a single BAME woman elected. Wider diversity recognising intersectionality is key in ensuring the Senedd is an institution that properly reflects the people of Wales.

As the parliament of Wales the Senedd also has a responsibility to ensure it sets an example to other institutions, both across borders and within Wales. Local Government in Wales in particular faces a diversity crisis, and any measures put in place for the Senedd and its elections should also be considered for councils.

Exploring whether political parties should be required to publish anonymised diversity information about their Assembly election candidates, and the practical implications to which this would give rise;

Understanding the current levels of diversity and the areas in which we are lacking is key to understanding how we improve the situation. The delay in enacting Section 106 of the Equality Act has meant our knowledge of how diverse candidates for the Senedd are, and subsequently those elected, is based on a combination of guesswork and survey responses.

Getting this information is not just about how diverse our institutions are but it also focuses on parties and their selection processes.

Requiring political parties to collect and publish anonymised data on diversity is a good first step in getting the information we require. We know from local government elections that completion rates for voluntary surveys by electoral registration officers are very low, so

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parties formally requiring this information would provide much more motivation for candidates to share information and provide a much clearer picture.

Practically, there has been some resistance from previous UK Governments to enacting section 106 of the Equality Act, which would legally require parties publish their data, which the UK Government saying in a response to a House of Commons Women and Equality report, that it would put a 'regulatory burden on parties', and made a particular point of stating that this would be higher for smaller parties¹.

However, we know that many parties already collect this data and some also publish the data in some format. The Labour Party, the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and the , SNP all made manifesto commitments to enacting section 106 in 2019.

In terms of a burden all that would be required of a political party would be to add some questions on to the forms that all candidates must fill out anyway, and input the data from these into a shared template for publication. Many other sectors already compile such information as part of equalities monitoring in applications processes so why should political parties be exempt?

Clearly, anonymity is vital in the publication of data, but we believe broad diversity data could easily retain anonymity.

Given the UK Government's reluctance to date to enact Section 106 of the Equality Act, there are opportunities for discussion on how this could be introduced in Wales.

As such, we agree with the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reforms recommendation in full that:

"The Assembly should request that the Secretary of State commences section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 in relation to Assembly elections, or transfers the power to do so to the Welsh Ministers. Otherwise, legislation to reform the Assembly's electoral arrangements should include provision that would secure the availability of information regarding diversity".²

Considering the principles and the practical implications of the Panel's recommendation that legislative candidate gender quotas should be integrated into the Assembly's electoral system, and any voluntary steps parties could take to increase the diversity of their electoral candidates across the full range of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010;

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642904/Government_Response_-_Women_in_the_House_of_Commons.pdf

2

<https://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/A%20Parliament%20that%20Works%20for%20Wales.pdf>

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It is clear that without direct action to promote diversity very little will change. Wales' success in achieving gender parity in 2003 and 52% female representation in 2006 was largely due to the success of parties that used positive action mechanisms to ensure they were fielding gender balanced candidates³. The use of All Women Shortlists and the twinning of constituencies were fundamental in that for Labour and zipping of the list system proved effective for Plaid Cymru.

While to date parties within the Senedd's use of systems like this has proven effective, if their electoral fortunes were to decline and parties who don't use systems like these were to increase representation it is likely we would see a fall in the number of diverse elected representatives. The Expert Panel report compared the number of female and male candidates standing for each party in the 2016 elections and found huge disparities between them.⁴ As such voluntary measures adopted by parties will never be as effective as quotas in ensuring institutions retain or increase diversity, although parties should certainly be encouraged to use them.

Quotas themselves are a blunt tool that often fail to consider that candidates are people with multiple characteristics and skills, however we know from international success that they do prove effective.

Mona Krook's research points out that 100 countries world-wide now have some form of gender quotas in place and 40 also use them for intersectional groups such as BAME women⁵.

For example, Ireland has successfully used quotas requiring that at least 30 percent of the candidates each party stands nationally are female (rising to 40 per cent after seven years). The percentage of women candidates increased 90 percent at the 2016 election compared to the 2011 election, with a corresponding 40 percent increase in the number of women elected—35 in 2016 compared with 25 in 2011⁶.

9 of the 10 parliaments with the best gender parity in the world use mixed or PR systems, and the Canadian Parliament have published a useful overview of how electoral systems interact with gender.⁷

³ <https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/thinking-wales/2016/10/12/gender-and-representation-in-national-assembly-for-wales-elections/>

⁴

<https://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/A%20Parliament%20that%20Works%20for%20Wales.pdf>

⁵ Mona Lena Krook, "Electoral Gender Quotas: A Conceptual Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (9): 1268-1293, 2014

⁶

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310494640_Women_and_the_Election_Assessing_the_Impact_of_Gender_Quotas

⁷ http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/bdp-lop/bp/YM32-2-2016-30-eng.pdf

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We have long advocated for the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote for the Senedd and agree with the Expert Panel's recommendation that this could be introduced for Senedd elections with an integrated gender quota.

Examining issues relating to the Panel's recommendation that people should be allowed to stand for election on the basis of job sharing, including implications for democratic accountability and any practical considerations which would need to be addressed.

In our 2018 research report, '[New Voices](#)', we explored issues of job sharing with a number of people we interviewed as part of the project. Broadly job sharing was seen as a positive way of reducing some of the barriers that we know are present in getting more diverse people to stand for office. These are particularly pertinent in those with other job commitments or caring responsibilities, commitments which otherwise might deter a candidate from standing.

At a Senedd level this can be particularly aggravated by the distances between some constituencies and the Senedd in Cardiff Bay. Sharing of a role could make the time away from home more manageable, especially for those with caring responsibilities.

Certainly job sharing has already proved successful at a cabinet level in local government across Wales. Swansea Council in particular already has 3 of its 9 cabinet roles shared between members.

At an actual councillor or Member of the Senedd level though, this has yet to be seen, and does raise important questions about how such roles can be elected.

Clear guidance would need to be developed after thorough consultation and discussion with both the Electoral Commission and the Senedd Commission on how practically job sharing would work. This would also need to be clearly communicated to the electorate, with any candidates standing on the basis of a job sharing ticket doing so jointly and transparently on the ballot paper. The electorate should be informed at the outset and not following an election.

We also concur with the Expert Panel's conclusions that "job sharing partners are treated as if they are one person, and that job sharing Members should give rise to no additional costs beyond those of a single Assembly Member".⁸