

Dear Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform,

Please see my response to your consultation below.

Diversity of the Assembly

1. How can the Assembly ensure that the views of under-represented groups are taken into account in its work, when there might not be any Assembly Members from those groups?
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Consult with those groups direct eg, Mothers with childcare responsibilities come under diversity in a wider sense as they are a sub group of sex as they are female (one of the nine protected characteristics) and also are underrepresented in the Assembly as not many women with childcare responsibilities are AMs. In fact, I can't think of one at the moment. This is a blind spot in the Equality Act and maybe has to do with the fact that many women who reach senior levels have often got there because they are childless and/or don't have childcare responsibilities and therefore lack understanding or knowledge about the needs of mothers with childcare responsibilities.

Groups to consult with would include ysgolion meithrin, Ti a fi, mother and baby groups (via NHS Community Health workers/ midwives), NCT members, mothers via nurseries, primary & secondary schools, mums net etc.

Mothers provide the very foundation blocks for society but are often left out of decision making process for our society. If they were included it would make society work for all, not just people without childcare or eldercare responsibilities.

2. What are the main barriers that may discourage somebody from an underrepresented group from standing for election to the Assembly?
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The discrimination that they will face when they stand. I have held many different jobs and roles in my life but I can honestly say I have never experienced the direct sex discrimination I have experienced in political life anywhere else. Our governance system is massively behind the rest of society. I have stood for election at Town and Community Council level (got elected), stood as a County Councillor, and MP Candidates. I tried to seek selection as a

AM candidate but was told I could not stand as I was female. The constituency I sort selection in was designated as a male only candidate constituency by my political party as it was twinned with a female only candidate constituency. I filed a direct sex discrimination complaint against my party but it was not upheld as they said they were allowed to discriminate against females because the Twinning Arrangement was allowed under the Equality Act. I argued that I was being discriminated against because I was female and that there was no justification for male only candidate constituencies as the number of male candidates standing for election vastly out numbered the number of female candidates. Males are not underrepresented in the Senedd and therefore should not be entitled to positive action using the Equality Act.

Also the discrimination they may face from an employer for having a political view and expressing it eg, if you work in the public sector you're not allowed to express you political view, I believe. Protecting people's right to have a political voice wherever they work should be allowed.

3. What are the most important things that could be done to help people from underrepresented groups or who might be concerned about giving up their existing job or profession to stand for election?
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Put measures in place to stop direct sex discrimination and other discrimination against underrepresented groups by political parties. Positive action is essential for equal representation as from my experience it will not happen naturally, it has to be forced because ultimately certain groups of people don't want to give up their existing power and share power. Over represented groups should not be entitled to use positive action and misuse the Equality Act to further over represent a group in our society eg The Twinning Arrangement. There should be support for all underrepresented groups including mothers with childcare responsibilities.

Also have scheme where employers have to keep a job open for someone who gets elected and/or is entitled to time out to campaign (a fund could be established by WAG to fund this regardless of what your income is or which political party you stand for).

4. Do people in Wales, including those from under-represented groups, know enough about what the role of an Assembly Member involves to be able to decide whether they are interested in standing for election?
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No. There should be a day / week in the life of a typical AM available on the internet. There should also be more flexible opportunities to have an insight into the work of an AM / shadow an AM for a day or week etc. Shadow them in the Senedd and/or in their constituency (the more flexible the better for those with childcare /eldercare responsibilities). Make it compulsory for political parties to provide this opportunity to all.

Publishing data about the diversity of political candidates

5. If political parties were required to collect and publish anonymised data about the diversity of their Assembly election candidates, would this encourage them to select a more diverse range of people as candidates?
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Yes. Data should also include whether candidates have childcare responsibilities, to collect data on the motherhood penalty as it's not enough to have more female candidates. Female candidates need to reflect the whole of the female sex, it's not good governance just to have females who are childless, or don't have childcare responsibilities elected we need to make sure that women with childcare responsibilities and therefore their needs are represented etc. This seems to be a massive blind spot in our society as many of the women occupying senior positions or are politicians are childless and/or don't have childcare responsibilities and thus this large section of our society is frequently overlooked.

6. What would need to be done to ensure that candidate data was collected and published accurately and responsibly?
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An independent body needs to monitor and audit it to check it is correct. Political parties need penalties if they don't have the required diversity of candidates. Again you have to enforce this as it won't be done willingly by political parties otherwise.

Job sharing by Assembly Members

7. If people were allowed to stand for election on the basis of job sharing, are there particular groups or communities that would be most likely choose to stand for election in this way?
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Yes, mothers with childcare responsibilities, women with caring responsibilities eg, elderly relatives, professionals who don't want give up their profession entirely (particularly as there is no guarantee of you being elected ever). It would also increase the diversity of politicians and bring much need diverse life, work, community and voluntary experience into the Senedd to inform policies and cover everyone in society needs not just career politicians who often have very limited real life experience.

Electoral quotas

8. Should quotas be used to increase the representation of under-represented groups such as people with disabilities or ethnic minorities? What practical implications would need to be considered?
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Yes absolutely, again this has to be enforced to make political parties select candidates from under-represented groups (including mothers with childcare responsibilities) because as most political parties have more male members and/or non feminist members they will often exhibit unconscious bias and/or sexism and/or racism towards under-represented groups and therefore select candidates in their own image and not those from under-represented groups.

These quotas need to be proportional to how all groups in our society exist eg, Look at the whole population in Wales and how many people are an ethnic minority, I think it's 1 or 2 % in Wales, equally look at the proportion of mothers with childcare responsibilities in Wales and therefore of electoral candidate quotas the same to this, I think it's around 15% of the Welsh population, look at the proportion of LGBTQI in our Welsh society, I think it's 2% and equally have the same candidate quota for this.

If a political party can't find candidates from these groups to stand then they are not allowed to field candidates from over represented groups instead.

These quotas must be spread equally over winnable and non-winnable constituencies /regions eg, male candidates can't be allowed to stand in just winnable constituencies, equally mothers with childcare responsibilities must be allowed to stand in winnable constituencies etc.

Practical implications should include things like allowing mothers with childcare responsibilities to be given priority to stand in their home constituency/ region due to their need to be near their children's schools & their home address etc.

The different needs of each under-represented group needs to be looked at and met.

9. What evidence is there about how voters feel about the use of quotas to encourage the election of candidates with specific characteristics?
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I don't know of any evidence. But from personal experience:

I have had party members say to me that they don't think that there should be quotas, simply as it should be the best candidate gets selected. This however hides the fact that there are so many factors at play in the decision making process of a member selecting a candidate eg unconscious bias is at play where members may not even be aware of their own discriminatory behaviour which influences who they vote for as their candidate eg, an older female member may not be aware that they are not feminists and have been indoctrinated from birth to see only men as potential political candidates, so they won't ever vote for a female candidate when given the choice. When questioned, they may just say they just think the male candidate is better.

It's very complicated for many voters to understand unconscious bias and other factors which actually make them discriminate unfairly when they are choosing candidates, eg, the fact that we still live in a very patriarchal society.

Experiences of party politics

10. Are there any barriers which might discourage people from under-represented groups from joining political parties or taking part in party politics?
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Yes, the fact the majority of members in most political parties are from one group in our society, the white straight Christian older male. From experience as a younger mother with childcare responsibilities I have often not felt welcome in my political party.

Sexism is allowed to continue.

This has manifested itself in many ways, from walking into a room of older white male county councillor candidates at county hall and being the only female in the room. It's intimidating and takes a lot of courage to do.

Also the whole system of engagement of members is designed around retired people, members who can afford to travel and stay at conference (there is no grant or fund to help those attend who are unpaid or a video conference / skype / zoom available for members to contribute remotely) those who don't have childcare responsibilities eg, many meetings are held in the evening around the time you need to put children to bed rather than during school hours when some mothers may have more time available. More flexible opportunities for the engagement of members should be made available by political parties.

From being a non-fluent Welsh speaking member of Plaid Cymru, not being fluent in the Welsh language is definitely a disadvantage to standing as a candidate as many in the party think only fluent Welsh speakers should be allowed to stand as candidates (although it's not said publicly it's implied in many subtle ways).

All the work that members do is expected to be voluntary and there is no clear or fair pathway for members who want to progress in the party and seek selection. It seems to be OK for certain candidates to be helicoptered into a constituency who have done no work there but are from the Welsh elite or know senior people in the party etc These candidates are often from the over represented group as well.

Much of the work done by female members is not valued or credited in the same way as work done by male members.

I have very rarely been thanked for my considerable voluntary work and contribution to the party. In fact I am undermined and discriminated against in

return. This obviously doesn't encourage me to continue or contribute more to my political party or seek selection.

I also think the EHRC and Electoral reform society need to scrutinize political parties more as they are allowed too much scope to continue to discriminate against under represented members and/or candidates at the moment.

I think equality and diversity has to be enforced on political parties because they will not do so voluntarily. Something similar to employment law and rights needs to be set up for members and candidates. Currently under-represented groups are not protected enough in political parties and this ultimately contributes to the lack of diversity in our democracy and governance.

11. What changes could the Assembly introduce to its ways of working to make standing for election more attractive to people from under-represented groups?

I think strict timing of assembly business, proxy voting and attending meeting remotely would definitely encourage more diverse candidates. During the pandemic we have seen the Senedd continue working remotely allowing AMs to contribute to meetings from their homes. This is possible so why aren't we doing it all the time?

This would obviously help mothers with childcare responsibilities stand as it provides more flexibility. It would also aid the spreading out the money spent on our democracy eg, civil servants, political jobs could be located across Wales and not just centred in Cardiff. This would benefit all the economy in Wales not just SE Wales.

This would also make it a more sustainable democracy where travelling is reduced by politicians and they could spend more time in their constituencies.

12. Are there examples of measures introduced in other countries which have significantly improved the parliamentary representation of under-represented groups?

Take a look at Finland. Here they have put the needs of mothers with childcare responsibilities at the centre of their society and as a result mothers with

childcare responsibilities are enabled to become political leaders because their needs are met and they are supported by society.

'Generous parental leave policies, subsidised childcare and a commitment to work-life balance mean young working mothers are the norm here rather than the exception. Men are as likely as women to be chasing young children through Helsinki's vast new central library, or walking them home beside the city's lakes.

Statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show it is the only country where fathers spend more time with school-age children than mothers, said Mikko Koivumaa, who as a diplomat in Japan became an unofficial ambassador for his country's family-friendly way of life.'

13. Should voluntary measures to encourage the selection and election of more candidates from under-represented groups be pursued and exhausted before legislative measures are developed?

I don't think we should waste more precious time to encourage political parties to voluntarily select and elect more candidates from under-represented groups. Legislative measures should be developed immediately. Political parties have had 100yrs plus to reach sex equality and have more under-represented groups they have failed miserably.

There is too much discriminatory practices still allowed to go on by political parties as the majority are still run by just one group in our society 'white straight Christian older males' and they will always hold the majority vote unless you introduce positive action. From experience more diverse candidates will not happen voluntarily as the majority of members will not vote for them. It absolutely has to be enforced by legislative measures for the good of our democracy, governance and society.

Diolch,

