

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales



**Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales**

Tim Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales (EYST Wales)

Response to Inquiry of Welsh Parliament Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform: “Electing a More Diverse Assembly”

1. About EYST Wales – EYST Wales is an award-winning Wales wide charity established since 2005 which aims to support ethnic minority young people, families and individuals living in Wales and help them to contribute, participate and feel a valued part of Wales. It does this through a range of services targeted variously at ethnic minority young people, ethnic minority families, refugees and asylum seekers and also the wider public. EYST Wales coordinates the All Wales BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) Engagement Programme, a project funded by Welsh Government to gather views and experiences of BAME people living in Wales and improve the evidence base from which to positively influence public policies and services to better reflect the needs of BAME communities. One component of this programme is “BAME Routes to Public Life,” a mentoring project for people who aspire to have an impact in public/political life. In the response below, we have drawn from partner contributions via online survey as well as discussions in previous sessions with mentees from the Routes to Public Life project.
2. The COVID 19 pandemic and crisis has brought existing and historic inequities in society into sharp focus, most notably the impact of structural racism. This moment highlights the pressing need to address structural inequalities including that of lack of representation of racial minorities in political and public life. The report by the expert committee referenced the importance of racial diversity in representation in the Senedd but made short shrift of proposing solid tactics to achieve that. The Welsh Parliament should create a racial equality plan with aspirational vision, yet also underpinned by concrete measurable goals. That plan must be co-produced by a wide variety of members of BAME communities, an incredibly diverse population – not a monolith. In answering your questions below, we argue that urgent attention must be paid to a variety of characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status in addition to gender (which was the primary focus of the expert panel report). Focus must be paid with a shifting lens through various characteristics to achieve an equitable intersectional approach.

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

3. Ensuring the views of under-represented groups are taken into account in the work of the Assembly, when there might not be any Assembly Members from those groups: The Assembly must evidence a real and serious commitment to including underrepresented groups, particularly people from ethnic minority groups and disabled people – a commitment that goes beyond this consultation. Inclusion and change in status quo will require prolonged engagement in communities. One person said that Assembly Members must “use the same effort put into campaigning for election into engaging with underrepresented groups in a meaningful way (not tokenistic or extractive).” That commitment must include dialogue about how and why the views of underrepresented people have or have not impacted Assembly Business and actions. Following are some concrete suggested avenues:

- AMs and other agents within the assembly must be more involved in encouraging people to get into political life but also must actively seek to be more educated about experiences of BAME people – e.g through reverse mentoring and unconscious bias training. Recent mentoring programmes such as those by EYST and WEN have made a start, but there must be more and these should mainstreamed as become part of the business as usual of the Welsh Assembly rather than discretely funded projects.
- Ensure that underrepresented groups are included in committee evidence sessions and that delivering evidence in those sessions is accessible and not intimidating.
- Engage paid consultants from BAME backgrounds with connection to those communities to advise on the best ways to engage them.
- Form a BAME Advisory Group to increase participation within the National Assembly.
- Create non-elected roles in National Assembly, a citizen’s assembly.
- Use outlets frequented by specific underrepresented communities such as places of worship, shops, community radio, to communicate key messages from the Assembly on their approach to increase representation.
- Produce draft policy documents in conjunction with underrepresented groups showing where their views have been incorporated and acknowledge the hurdles faced by underrepresented groups to gain influence and participate in decision making.
- Abena Opong Asare MP has spoken of the importance to challenge the notion of what leadership is and what are the qualities of a leader, which in our society, still carry default connotations of “White,” “male,” “middle class.”
- All potential candidates and elected members should undergo intensive and continuous Equality/Diversity/Inclusion training which includes cultural competency and anti-oppression training and a robust understanding of how to apply the Equality Act 2010 provisions in particular around Positive Action and Reasonable Adjustments through recruitment, selection and appointment.

4. What are the main barriers that may discourage somebody from an underrepresented group from standing for election to the Assembly? The biggest barrier is structural

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

racism and institutional culture in the Assembly and political parties, which manifests in numerous ways:

- Lack of role models – There are very few BAME Assembly Members in Senedd history and none of them female members of colour. Likewise, BAME people are underrepresented in National Assembly staff.
- One person referred to the Assembly as “whitewashed” not only in general makeup of people inside but in the ways of being, acting and thinking required in that space. One person noted, “It is not always a comfortable feeling being the only minority in the room, [and coping with] the colonial structures within which they need to work that do not give room for innovative, radical or different ways of working.”
- Lack of visible commitment from elected members to address racism and discrimination in the political arena.
- Lack of understanding from the political arena of the cultural issues that affect decisions to enter public life.
- Intense scrutiny and bullying which is exacerbated for members of underrepresented and marginalised groups, especially people from ethnic and religious minority groups. This ultra-scrutiny is compounded the more marginal groups a person is associated with. For instance, being Muslim and Black and female results in triple oppression.
- Lack of evidence that the majority White public will vote for an ethnic minority candidate. Lack of faith in the system due to previous negative experiences.
- Cost and perceptions of cost of campaigning can be a barrier, both due to real lack of generational wealth for some people but also due to not understanding campaign costs and campaign funding. Both awareness raising and a solid commitment from parties towards potential candidates may have an impact.
- “It is important for individuals from underrepresented groups to feel supported in their ambitions to become elected members and have trust in the recruitment and selection process.”

5. 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?

- Change the narrative on politics so that potential Assembly candidates have faith they will be taken seriously by their peers and party leadership and be able to make an impact during the time that they serve. Change the institutional culture of the Senedd, Welsh Government and political parties.
- Develop policy or law that protects a candidate’s employment if they take time off to run and do not win an election. Ideally, there should be requirements or incentives for companies to allow staff paid leave whilst running for election. Welsh Parliament could pass a bill which deals with financial and flexible aspects of campaigning, particularly relating to BAME and disabled candidates and candidates from other seriously underrepresented groups.

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

- Paid assembly placements for aspiring politicians in underrepresented groups and other opportunities to shadow and find mentorship and sponsorship. Some existing programmes including from EYST and Wen Wales can be used as a starting point to build upon.
- Extensive pre-training to have a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and challenges of being an elected member to make an informed decision to take on the role.
- Acknowledge White privilege and how the unprivileged are under-represented.
- Allow job shares and other opportunities for Assembly Members to maintain previous professional skills and networks.

6. Do people in Wales, including those from underrepresented groups, know enough about the role of an Assembly Member to be able to decide whether they are interested in standing for election? In general, most people in Wales do not know enough about the role of an Assembly Member or the powers and functions of the National Assembly. Further, due to previous exclusion, BAME people are less likely to have political networks or know people involved in political circles and therefore less likely to develop firsthand and informal knowledge about the Assembly. As such, “extremely intelligent and capable people” lack exposure to this knowledge and cultural/social capital. Political education for the public along with targeted aspects for underrepresented groups may demystify the role of an Assembly Member and allow space to challenge conventional notions of the characteristics of leaders and leadership. Current work of several organisations can be expanded upon. MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) provides training which improves political literacy. EYST and WEN Wales run mentoring programmes which combine bespoke training and development of peer networks with mentoring opportunities including with AMs. They aim to collaborate with additional organisations such as Disability Wales and Stonewall to expand these programmes. A number of mentees in EYST’s trainings have expressed that previous to the project (and particularly chances to build relationships with AMs), they would not have considered running for office, but after the engaging in the programme, it is something they are currently considering or would in the future. However, political literacy and opportunities to build relationships with AMs is only one aspect of the work that needs to be done; it must be part of a wider effort to address structural inequity in the Assembly and political parties. One person argued that “awareness and understanding is not the issue ... if you were interested in politics, you would [understand the role of an Assembly Member].”
7. 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? What would need to be done to ensure that candidate data was collected and published accurately and responsibly? Collecting and publishing

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

accurate candidate data on protected characteristics is necessary for transparency around selection of candidates and for political parties to understand how to take action to transform current inequities in their own processes. Accurate data is essential to evidence and challenge inequality. However, requiring political parties to collect data will not on its own drive generation of more diverse candidate pools. Political parties simultaneously need more understanding in relation to data on candidate diversity. “Producing data without narrative or targets is not an incentive to select diverse candidates. Political parties should consider what actions they are taking to improve behaviours and attitudes before any real difference can be made. Underrepresented groups do not want to be token candidates.” The Assembly and political parties should get advice from a range of organisations including Operation Black Vote and Runnymede Trust to plan for ethical and effective collection and publication of candidate data. They may also look to organisations as National Federation for Training who have engaged in a campaign with work-based learning providers to increase recruitment of people with disabilities and ethnic minority people to apprenticeships.

8. Regarding barriers to joining political parties or taking part in party politics: Again, the primary barrier for ethnic minority people is institutional racism, including implicit bias, persistent lack of representation and lack of perceived support from political parties for certain underrepresented groups. As BAME people do not see themselves represented in political parties, for many people it does not feel a safe space. Political parties must challenge racial harassment and other types of bullying and hostile environments that occur on both a local and national basis. Racial harassment in the public arena is a huge concern both to public life participants and their families who may fear for them. Likewise, implicit bias does play a role in who gets selected to stand as a candidate and the electorate remains discriminatory in voting patterns (in who they are able to perceive as a leader). Additional barriers we have heard mentioned include transport, political jargon, time of meetings, tone of discourse at party meetings (heated arguments), financial barriers, being in a position to have time to volunteer, socio-economic status, and caring responsibilities. There may be benefit in educating people from underrepresented groups about how political party structures work and foster opportunities for people to get to know members in their local political parties. However, that must be part of a wider action plan in which parties reflexively interrogate and challenge inequity and bias in their structures. One repeated idea was a cross party investigation into perceptions of BAME people of different political parties. Such efforts whether in-party or cross-party must be led or at least coproduced by BAME people.
9. Standing for election as job sharing, would particular groups or communities that would be most likely choose to stand for election in this way? EYST found broad support for Assembly Member job shares, with just a few people proposing that “high-level” jobs require full commitment. The ability to share roles and responsibilities may remove barriers for people in some underrepresented groups who have time constraints or find

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

travel challenging. A number of groups may consider job-sharing: women, people with disabilities, parents, professional people who want to maintain skills (and salaries). One person noted, "Job sharing is much more popular than we think, and when it is offered, many people from varying backgrounds would opt for it." Like most measures, job sharing will not be a panacea leading to diversity amongst elected members. First and foremost, the rest of the house must be in order with attention to creating an inclusive environment and rectifying institutional racism and other types of bias.

10. Regarding Quotas: We encountered a variety of views on the use of varying types of quotas to increase diversity of representation in the Senedd and in political parties. Overall, there is support for quotas relating to under-represented groups, particularly people of colour and disabled people. These thoughts are qualified with numerous caveats and a critique of quotas that only consider gender.

- Reserving regional places for BAME candidates may go some way into getting better representation in Senedd and positive action may encourage more candidates from diverse backgrounds consider standing for election. Several people are keen to see some of the practices that have been applied to increase gender representation used to increase representation of additional underrepresented groups.
- If quotas are applied, this may be used to look at the different stages of the recruitment and selection process to assess where parties can apply efforts increase participation and representation. For example, consider the percentages of disabled and minority ethnic people who show interest, apply, are shortlisted and successfully elected.
- Quotas are not a panacea. They risk tokenism whereby a selected person is not given credence or power, or they are expected to be a gatekeeper and "end all-be all" representative for their "group." However, many people who recognised this risk also mentioned that "we need to start somewhere."
- Likewise, representative population percentage figures of minority groups in the Senedd will not automatically translate into influence and power in obtaining progressive policies for those groups. For instance, six ethnic minority assembly members amongst 52 White assembly members may still be "dismissed, ignored, and shut down" amidst a biased culture. In that context, quotas would need to go beyond "proportional percent of population" and/or combined with broad institutional transformation and change.
- Unmet quotas may encourage political parties to discontinue engagement work. However, it was noted that we can't wait 10-20 years to develop a pool of interested candidates and that it is the job of political parties to ensure they are creating policies, practices and cultures that attract diverse candidates right now.
- Any thought on quotas must be intersectional. The fixation on gender-only quotas is problematic and practices such as women only shortlists are likely to lead to exclusion of men from other under-represented groups, potentially only benefitting White, middle class women. The report of the expert advisory panel mentions the

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform
Electing a more diverse Senedd
DIV 07 Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales

importance of inclusion of ethnic minority and disabled people for healthy representation and quality decision making in the Senedd but gives short shrift to discussing means to achieve that, focussing instead on gender based quotas.

- Quotas are only as good as compliance.

11. Recognition and thanks to the following people who, amongst others, provided contributions for this consultation response:

- Leila Usmani, Race Alliance Wales
- Humie Webb, National Training Federation for Wales
- Sahar Al-Faifi, Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)
- Suzanne Duval, Diverse Cymru BME Mental Health Manager (also a member of Race Alliance Wales)
- Jill Duarte, African Community Centre
- Dr. Mahaboob Bash, International Relations and Engagement Officer

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