

David Rees MS  
Chair, Llywydd's Committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1SN

13 November 2024

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter requesting further information to aid the Committee's scrutiny of our Estimate for 2025/26. We have addressed each of your points in turn below.

- 1. The Commission's letter notes £1.3m has been allocated for core business and £1.2m for direct event costs, which cannot be reconciled in its 2025-26 Estimate. Could the Commission explain how core business costs and direct event costs have been allocated in the Estimate?**
  - The attached spreadsheet provides further detail on how we have allocated core and event costs.
- 2. The Commission published its 2023-24 accounts which quantified its total expenditure relating to staff costs and goods and services, as well as the unused funds for devolved activities in Wales. Will the Commission commit to publishing a detailed breakdown of its outturns against Estimates for Wales in its accounts to ensure better scrutiny?**
  - We are happy to provide the Committee with the breakdown of outturns versus estimate as suggested moving forwards. This year's underspend totals £18k and is made up of £10k from the Wales Office budget and £8k from the Comms, Policy and Research budget.
- 3. The Commission notes it will work with the Welsh Government and participating local authorities on the development of automatic registration pilots. Could the Commission expand on how the automatic registration pilots would work, and the associated cost implications?**
  - The Welsh Government, working alongside the four pilot authorities, are responsible for the planning and management of the registration pilots, which will all take place over the course of 2025.
  - The Commission's role is limited to providing the formal evaluation of the pilots, which we will complete by the end of the year, and which will include gathering relevant public opinion data where possible. We have requested £10k for this work,

based on previous experience of running evaluation research, and any unused funds will not be drawn down. If it is useful to the Committee, we will work with the Welsh Government to prepare a written note on the detail of the pilots and provide this to the Committee in early 2025.

**4. The Commission notes it will run a paid voter registration campaign and develop accompanying assets targeted at 16–17-year-olds and foreign nationals living in Wales. How has the Commission engaged 16–17-year-olds and foreign nationals in 2024-25 and how does it evaluate its effectiveness? Also, Could the Commission elaborate on the paid voter registration campaign and the other programmes it will deliver during the run up to the 2026 Senedd election to encourage these groups to vote**

- We evaluate our education and voter engagement work by measuring levels of knowledge, understanding and confidence to participate in the democratic system. Further detail on the impact of this work is included in Annex 1.
- In 2024/25 our voter engagement work focused on building awareness ahead of the two reserved polls. While not all foreign nationals were eligible to vote at these elections, we worked with partner organisations including [Diverse Cymru](#) and [EYST](#) who have links with these communities. We will continue to build on our work with these organisations ahead of the 2026 election.
- For 16–17-year-olds this year we launched a new Democratic Education Forum in partnership with Welsh Government to build knowledge, share best practice and gain feedback from teachers across Wales. We published a new [resource on how to run a voter registration drive](#), and worked with our Youth Voice network to co-create materials ahead of the UK general election. Our Youth Voice network is facilitated by Children in Wales and aims to gather input from young people so that we can ensure our education programme effectively meets their needs. The network is made up of 25 young people aged 12-18 from across Wales, including Welsh speakers.
- Our public awareness work for the 2026 Senedd election will incorporate three key strands:
  - Voter registration: We will run an integrated voter registration campaign taking in paid-for advertising across TV, radio, digital, out of home and print channels. Our adverts will be weighted towards under registered groups. This will be supported by media engagement and partnership work. We will work with partners to share newly developed materials targeted at 16–17-year-olds and foreign nationals living in Wales. Cost - £650k
  - Voter information: We will distribute a booklet to all households in Wales containing information about how to register, the role of the Senedd and how to vote under the new system. We will develop accompanying assets linked to the booklet for local authorities to use e.g. social media graphics, posters and an animated video. Cost - £350k: booklet, £25k: information assets
  - Voter engagement: We will supplement the above activity via paid and informal partnership work with under-registered groups and development of co-created education and information materials and training aimed directly at these groups. Cost – £1.5k: education resources, £32.5k: partnership resources, £5k: training

**5. In its 2023-24 Annual Report, the Commission noted the introduction of a new partnership grant scheme, to “provide funding for projects that aim to increase knowledge and understanding of the democratic system amongst under-registered groups”. How is the Commission intending to fund the partnership grant scheme?**

- The paid partnership scheme is covered within the Digital Communications and Voter Engagement budget. In 2025/26, £20k has been allocated for the continuation of our Youth Voice scheme, and £2k has been allocated for the continuation of existing projects for deaf and anonymous voters with [RNID](#) and [Welsh Women’s Aid](#).
- We have also allocated £15k for action research partnership projects, with the aim of testing innovative approaches to engage under-registered groups. In the 24/25 financial year we launched this action research scheme in England using reserved funds. Following a formal tender process, we are currently entering into contracts with five civil society organisations in England.
- We are also in the process of piloting a project in Wales with [TPAS Cymru](#) using unused reserved funds to build knowledge and confidence amongst housing association residents, which we hope will run into the 2025-26 financial year.

**6. The Commission previously said a challenging aspect of engaging with foreign nationals is identifying these groups in communities. What is the Commission doing to identify foreign nationals and how is it supporting these groups in registering to vote?**

- We will utilise the 2021 Census data and information held by local authorities to pinpoint areas where there is a higher concentration of foreign nationals living in Wales. We will then work with the Senedd 2026 Communications Group, local authorities and relevant partner organisations to assist in the work of identifying these communities and discuss effective ways of engaging with them.
- As part of our responsibility to monitor the performance of Returning Officers, we will look at public awareness activities undertaken by local authorities to reach under-registered groups including foreign nationals.

**7. The Commission says its programme of democratic education is in its fourth year and is an increasingly important area of its work, which aims to affect a steady and profound change to engagement in the democratic process amongst young people. What impact has the Commission’s programme of democratic education had on young people and how has it evidenced this? And, what is the Commission’s plans for this programme for 2025-26?**

- We evaluate the impact of our education and voter engagement work on educators’ knowledge and confidence to support their learners, and in turn on their learners’ knowledge, confidence and willingness to participate. This is in line with our Learning Strategy. We gather feedback from teachers, young people and partners via evaluation surveys, further detail is included in Annex 1.
- In 2025/26 we will work with the Senedd Commission and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales to develop new education resources and guidance ahead of the 2026 election. We will also launch a teacher training programme to increase knowledge and confidence amongst teachers. We will ensure our work is fit for purpose by utilising our Youth Voice panel and Teachers’ Forum to gain input on this work from young people and teachers across Wales.

8. **The Committee noted your comments on the impact of Senedd Reform being minimal on your budget, due to the need to run an election campaign regardless. However, the Committee would welcome an indication of any additional costs as a consequence of Senedd Reform.**

There will be no new costs to the Commission as a result of Senedd Reform. The Commission has a statutory duty to ensure an understanding of whichever voting system is used. As discussed at the scrutiny session, any required updates to existing material would be included within core costs.

If you require further detail on any of these areas, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elan Closs Stephens". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Elan Closs Stephens  
Electoral Commissioner for Wales

# Annex 1: Voter engagement impact

## 16–17-year-olds

- 67 schools, youth groups and local authorities in Wales signed up to take part in Welcome to Your Vote Week 2024
- 33 teachers signed up to the Democratic Education Forum Wales in 2024
- 78% of respondents who completed our Welcome to Your Vote Week survey said that participating in the week had increased knowledge of democracy and likelihood of registering to vote with their young people.
- Feedback from teachers has consistently shown that our resources make it easier to teach political literacy and help them feel more confident.
- Of the young people who completed our feedback survey after using our resources:
  - 78% said that they know more about registering to vote
  - 72% said that they know more about their democratic rights
  - 51% said that they know more about how to take part in democracy outside of election time
  - 63% said that they know more about where to go for information that they can trust about elections and voting
  - 69% said that they feel more confident about voting
  - 76% of respondents said that they know and understand more about their vote

## Under-registered groups

- We engaged with 35 different partner organisations in Wales ahead of the two 2024 elections, including Age Cymru, Learning Disability Wales and RNIB Cymru via resource sharing/development and briefing sessions.
- Of the partners who responded to our partnership survey for the UK general election:
  - 88% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that our resources “made it easier for our staff and/or volunteers to help the people we support to meet the voter ID requirement” (up from 80% for May 2024)
  - 88% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that our resources gave the people they support “more confidence” or “made it easier for them” to cast their vote in the election (up from 80% for May 2024)