

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio | Reform Bill Committee

Bil Senedd Cymru (Rhestrau Ymgeiswyr Etholiadol) | Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Ymateb gan Plaid Cymru | Evidence from Plaid Cymru

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Plaid Cymru Response

Plaid Cymru welcomes the introduction of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill.

Plaid, as a party, has long campaigned for a more effective Senedd and we firmly believe that the two Senedd Reform Bills presented as part of the Cooperation Agreement between Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government will be a major step forward in building a truly representative and effective Senedd to serve the people of Wales. The two bills form an integrated package of reform and both are crucial to securing progress. Without the second bill, Senedd Reform would in our view be incomplete.

Our Party Conference considered these matters in 2022 and supported the principles of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill and committed the Party to enshrining gender quotas in our candidate selection mechanism for 2026.

Our commitment to ensuring that women are equally represented in the Senedd has been evident from the beginning with our commitment to take positive action – principally through our candidate lists – which has seen large numbers of women Plaid Cymru members elected to the Senedd (and previously to the National Assembly). Prior to 1999, no woman had been elected to full time parliamentary Office on behalf of Plaid Cymru; but since then Plaid has elected an MEP, our Parliamentary Leader in Westminster, and a number of Women AMs and MSs including the first female leader of the Party. We believe we can be proud of our record in recent years in promoting female representation, but there is more work to be done. While our elected members are relatively representative, our candidates are not. Today's candidates are tomorrow's elected members and there is a real worry that female representation could fall back if decisive action is not taken.

For this reason we welcome the introduction of statutory quotas as set out in the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists Bill), and support the Bill. We believe that the Bill should complete its parliamentary progress in a timely manner such that it may reach the statute book and be in place and fully operational for the Senedd elections in 2026, as the then Minister for Social Justice stated in the Senedd

the timetable proposed by the Welsh Government is fundamental to maintaining a pathway to implementing the measures in time for the 2026 Senedd elections. So, we are working to ensure that the measures are in place ahead of that election.

We also welcome the fact that the Bill is based on ensuring that at least 50% of candidates are women, not ensuring that one half of candidates are women and one half are men.

During our work on increasing female representation it has become clear to us that the barriers faced by women seeking to enter full time elected politics are significant. We would welcome any consideration given as part of this Bill and associated actions to support women more effectively across political parties to put themselves forward as candidates. A number of our women MS' have previously been part of mentoring schemes, whether formally or informally, but our perception is that the opportunities here are limited and considerably more work in a structured and long term manner needs to be undertaken to support more women candidates, and subsequently more elected women members.

We would also encourage the Senedd to consider how to strengthen provisions around improving diversity. In common with a number of parties in Wales, Plaid's progress on these matters (with the exception of women's representation) has been relatively slow, but we welcome the discussions around the requirement for parties to produce a Diversity Strategy. We believe that such a strategy should be a statutory requirement and include at the very least clear monitoring of diversity information, the provision of such information to a competent authority, and timelined actions to improve the diversity of the candidate pool. These provisions could in due course evolve further depending on the results and effectiveness of the strategies.

Returning to the theme highlighted above in relation to women, it is our view that dedicated cross-party and all-party resource needs to be in place to support people from under-represented groups who might consider putting themselves forward as candidates for election.

Finally, our desire as a party is to be inclusive of trans-people and though this Bill is not the vehicle to change legislation that is in force across the United Kingdom we reiterate our commitment to ensuring that trans-people can live their lives (and stand) in line with their identity.

We look forward to discussing these matters further with the Committee and colleagues from across the parties over the next months,

Yours

Marc Jones

Chair, Plaid Cymru