

# Electing a more diverse Senedd

## Summary of evidence from political parties

The Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform was established to examine the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform in respect of the size of the Senedd and how Members are elected.

In January 2020, the Committee wrote to political parties to invite them to provide views on the practical implications associated with the Expert Panel's recommendations in respect of:

- Reporting on the diversity of Senedd electoral candidates.
- Enabling people to stand for election on the basis of job sharing.
- Introducing legislative candidate gender quotas.

The Committee advised parties that it did not intend to publish responses in full, or attribute issues raised to any specific political party. This note summarises themes arising from the responses the Committee received.



## Question 1: If a requirement were to be introduced for your political party to report on the diversity of your Senedd electoral candidates, what would be the practical, financial or other implications for your approach to candidate selection or your internal processes?

1. Parties had mixed views on whether a requirement to publish data about the diversity of candidates should be introduced, and on what the practical implications would be. Issues raised by political parties included:

- The risk that people would be reduced to categories rather than being treated as individuals.
- Parties could be constrained in their ability to select candidates on merit rather than on the basis of their diversity characteristics.
- Focusing only on the diversity of candidates, without also taking account of where seats may be more or less winnable for political parties, could result in parties appearing to have diverse pools of candidates without increasing the diversity of the Senedd itself.

2. Parties also had mixed views on the extent to which a requirement to publish data would give rise to practical or financial implications. Some parties suggested that there would be no implications or that any implications would be minimal or not unduly burdensome; others felt that the implications would be significant. Issues raised by political parties included:

- The need to adjust existing administrative processes or introduce new processes, with associated staffing and resource requirements.
- Data protection issues, including data processing, confidentiality and ensuring that the appropriate consents were in place.
- Whether candidates would feel comfortable disclosing sensitive personal data, and whether data could be sufficiently anonymised within relatively small groups of people.
- The need for clarity and consistency within and across political parties on the data to be collected and the definitions which applied. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for any proposals to be developed in consultation with political parties, and for common forms and guidance to be provided.

## Question 2: If candidates were permitted to stand for election to the Senedd on the basis of job sharing, what practical considerations, or financial or other implications would this have for your political party?

3. Parties had mixed views on whether people should be able to stand for election on the basis of job sharing. Some were supportive, whereas others expressed concerns in respect of either the principle or the practical implications. Issues raised by political parties included:

- Preferences for alternative measures, such as proxy voting for Members on parental leave.
- Concern that the pressure put by political parties and their memberships, stakeholders and local communities on people fulfilling the role as part of a job share could be significant, resulting in job share partners taking on more than was reasonable or there being a detrimental rather than a positive impact on the diversity of the Senedd.
- Concern that job shares between a woman and a man could be used to mask a lack of progress on gender balance within the Senedd.

4. Some parties suggested that the implications for them as political parties would be minimal, whereas others felt that the implications would be significant or that there was insufficient clarity on how job sharing would work in practice. Issues raised by political parties included:

- The potential to learn lessons from practical examples elsewhere, such as executive job sharing within local government.
- Whether a lack of clarity about what Members do could make it challenging to identify how the role of Member of the Senedd would be shared between job sharing partners.
- Arrangements would need to be in place to provide clarity on what would happen if one job share partner died, resigned or was disqualified, if the relationship between job sharing partners broke down, or if one or both of the job share partners wished to join, leave or change political groups (or was suspended or expelled from a political group). One party suggested that if more casual vacancies arose as a result of job sharing, this could have implications for the stability of the legislature and give rise to additional costs for the Senedd and political parties.

- Arrangements would need to be in place to manage voting and participation in Senedd business; to determine whether job sharing Members could hold executive office (either together or separately); for the employment and management of staff; and for Member remuneration and access to financial support.
- The need for clear guidance to be available to political parties, candidates and potential candidates on the operation of job sharing, and for implementation to be accompanied by a public education campaign. Parties would also need to update their internal rules, procedures and guidance.

### Question 3: If legislative candidate gender quotas were introduced for Senedd elections, what would be the practical, financial or other implications for your approach to candidate selection or your internal processes?

5. Parties had mixed views on legislative candidate gender quotas. Some were broadly supportive, others opposed, and some noted that they had not yet reached a firm policy position. Parties also had different views on the extent and impact of any practical or financial implications which would arise. Issues raised by political parties included:

- Parties could be constrained in their ability to select candidates on merit rather than on the basis of their diversity characteristics. Parties could also be constrained in their ability to encourage the selection of candidates from other underrepresented groups.
- The level at which candidate gender quotas should be set. Some parties suggested, for example, that 50 per cent female representation or zipping on regional lists might not be sufficient to compensate for any imbalance among constituency candidates. Others indicated that they would not support quotas which set a maximum proportion of female candidates.
- Whether candidate quotas could be sufficiently outcome-focused, on the basis that they cannot guarantee gender balance among elected Members or take account of parties' varying levels of electoral support across Wales.
- Whether section 104 of the *Equality Act 2010* (which enables parties to take some positive action in respect of candidate selection) would be

sufficiently flexible to enable parties to ensure that their candidate selection processes complied with quotas.

- The need for any legislative requirements to be reflected in updates to their own internal standing orders and procedures, and for this to be done sufficiently in advance of election periods to ensure that new arrangements could be in place before candidate application processes began. Some parties noted that candidate selection is currently devolved to local party branches, and suggested that ensuring selection processes complied with quotas could lead to greater centralisation within parties.
- Whether smaller parties would be able to attract sufficient candidates to enable them to comply with quotas without limiting the number of seats they were able to contest.

**Question 4: If political parties in Wales were required to implement the collection of candidate diversity data, support candidates standing on the basis of job sharing and develop gender balanced candidate lists what additional support would your party need?**

6. Parties indicated that the potential practical and financial implications depended on the requirements which were introduced. Some parties indicated that their current procedures and arrangements would be sufficient to enable them to adapt to any diversity measures without significant practical or financial implications or the need for any additional support. Others felt that additional financial support should be available to political parties to encourage people from underrepresented groups to participate in the political process, particularly if they were required to implement measures with which they disagreed.