

Update to MVM submission to the consultation on electoral systems and boundaries

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Make Votes Matter welcomes the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform's report *Senedd reform: The next steps*.¹ We are pleased to see the report refer to our written evidence² in multiple places.

2

We have brokered a list of principles for judging voting systems for parliamentary elections with dozens of political parties and democratic reform organisations: the Good Systems Agreement.³

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We welcome the fact that the seven of the ten principles outlined by the Expert Panel also match those in the Good Systems Agreement, and that the outlook of good electoral systems was broadly similar.

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The Single Transferable Vote (STV) can meet all the criteria in the Good Systems Agreement. We therefore believe that STV is a viable option for the Senedd.

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In paragraph 77 of the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform's report, it says that "STV was the clearly-preferred option for many of those who responded to our consultation", citing Make Votes Matter as one of those who clearly prefer STV.

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We wish to clarify that our support for STV is not to the exclusion of all other PR voting systems, and nor does it cover every form of STV equally.

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STV is a good voting system, alongside which we consider some other voting systems to be equivalently good. The Flexible List alternative considered by the Committee is another system that could provide the multi-member constituencies described in our written evidence. And the Additional Member System (AMS) currently used for Senedd elections could be reformed to provide

¹ <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13452/cr-ld13452%20-e.pdf>

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<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s99935/ESB%2011%20Make%20Votes%20Matter.pdf>

³ <https://www.makevotesmatter.org.uk/good-systems-agreement>

similar benefits, albeit with top-up regions covering larger areas than the constituencies of STV or Flexible List systems.

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Although the current system of Senedd elections already outperforms its Westminster counterpart, and although the Committee's proposal is an improvement, we suspect it leaves room for further development. Not all forms of STV are created equal.

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To achieve its full benefits, STV needs to have a sufficient district magnitude (the number of members each constituency elects). If this is too small, it seriously harms the diversity of the Senedd. Greater district magnitude makes it easier for parties to put forward diverse slates of candidates in each constituency, and makes it easier for minorities to elect candidates of their choice.

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Greater district magnitude also increases the proportionality of the system, so that if a certain percentage of Welsh voters vote for a particular party, they will receive roughly that percentage of MSs.

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Insufficient district magnitude would likely result in many Welsh voters feeling like they are unrepresented in the Senedd. This danger must be avoided.

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We believe that it is important that adequate scrutiny is provided to other features of the system, such as the method of vote transfer, the method of filling casual vacancies, the length of the ballot paper, and candidate ordering on the ballot. We welcome scrutiny of these features, both in the legislative process, and post-legislative scrutiny.

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We believe that (either under STV or another suitable proportional system) boundaries coterminous either with Westminster constituencies or with local authorities would help avoid the unnecessary cost to the public purse of a full boundary review dedicated solely to Senedd constituencies. Per our previous written evidence, we believe that seats could be reapportioned to multi-member constituencies each time local authority or Westminster boundaries are reviewed, avoiding a separate review of Senedd constituency boundaries, but still providing numbers of voters/residents per Member for each constituency within a required range.

In conclusion, we believe that there are several good voting systems which would be suitable for the Senedd. STV, Flexible List, and a reformed AMS system would all be good options. But it is critical that any option chosen is sufficiently proportional. In the case of STV, that means adequate district magnitude. We repeat our warning that insufficient district magnitude would likely result in a less diverse Senedd and less proportional outcomes. We must avoid any situation where many Welsh voters look at their Senedd and feel unrepresented.