

**Hannah Blythyn AS/MS**

**Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol**  
**Deputy Minister for Social Partnership**



**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
**Welsh Government**

David Rees MS  
Chair, Reform Bill Committee

01 November 2023

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 26 September 2023 regarding interdependencies between the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill and the forthcoming Bill regarding gender quotas. I am replying as the Member in Charge of the forthcoming Bill. I have sought to address below each of the questions in your letter.

The Government's commitment to bring forward legislation within 12-18 months following the Special Purpose Committee's (SPC) report in May 2022 has required us to work at pace to translate high level recommendations into detailed policy proposals. This timeframe has not allowed for the forthcoming Bill to be published before introduction to the Senedd. Statutory candidate gender quotas for Senedd Elections have been the subject of consideration by various panels and Senedd committees over recent years and key stakeholders, including experts have been involved in informing some of the recommendations that have emanated from these groups.

I am keen to support scrutiny of the forthcoming Bill and its connection to the wider Senedd Reform package of legislation. I will therefore, if possible, aim to provide the committee with an embargoed, advance copy of the Bill before introduction. I would be grateful if Members would bear in mind that the Bill will be subject to the standard pre-introductory checks, including the Llywydd's determination upon it.

The purpose of the introduction of candidate quotas is to make the Senedd a more effective legislature for, and on behalf of, the people of Wales, by aiming to ensure the Senedd is broadly representative of the gender make-up of the Welsh population. The benefits that may be derived from the representation of women in a legislature will be set out in the Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill.

The Senedd has a relatively good track record of a membership that is gender balanced. A high point was achieved in 2003 with 50% of Members elected to the second Assembly being women. Since then, however, levels of women's representation in the Senedd has

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Hannah.Blythyn@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Hannah.Blythyn@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Hannah.Blythyn@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Hannah.Blythyn@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

fallen below this level, despite the latest census figures showing that 51% of the population are women. This shows that women are currently an underrepresented majority in our legislature.

In considering the high-level recommendation of the SPC, we have needed to design detailed policy which has included some consideration of approaches used around the world and what may work best in the context of Senedd elections. Our proposed model for quotas is designed to maximise the chances of achieving a Senedd comprised of at least 50% women (this being broadly reflective of our population), whilst also being capable of being effectively implemented within the Senedd electoral system.

The legislation will provide for candidate gender quotas within the closed list system (provided for in the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill), in keeping with the SPC recommendation. Specifically, it will set a minimum threshold for the proportion of women on party candidate lists and in the first position across all a party's lists. Constituency Returning Officers (CROs) and a new national officer will play a key role in assessing parties' compliance with the rules. In developing the model, we have worked to ensure that Senedd elections can continue to be run effectively.

During the design of the policy, the Welsh Government has engaged with representatives of the electoral community to consider the impacts of quotas on existing electoral processes, including in the context of the changes to be put in place as a result of the new closed list proportional system.

The forthcoming legislation will not impact on the operation and implementation of the electoral system proposed in the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill. For example, the provisions about submitting candidate lists to CROs (section 8 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill, substituting a new section 7 in the Government of Wales Act 2006), the length of candidate lists (new section 7(3)) and the filling of vacant seats (section 9 of the Bill), will remain the same whether they operate with or without quotas. Nevertheless, quotas are an important part of the overall Senedd reform package and both pieces of legislation have been designed to complement each other.

I can confirm that, as recommended by the SPC report, it is intended for CROs to be responsible for checking that party lists are compliant with the quota legislation at the local constituency level, much in the same way as they currently receive and assess nomination papers and party lists for completeness and compliance with current electoral rules.

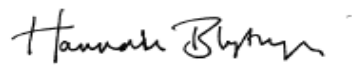
The Explanatory Memorandum and the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) for the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill was limited to the scope of that Bill. The financial impacts of quotas will be set out in a separate RIA within the Explanatory Memorandum for the forthcoming Bill. To help the Committee in its scrutiny of the Bill currently before the Senedd, the Counsel General and I can confirm that the financial or other impact assessments of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill would not have been substantively different had provision regarding quotas been included in it. This is because of the approach that has been taken to integrate the model into existing electoral processes and the proposals for a closed list proportional electoral system.

I understand you wrote to the Counsel General on 25 October 2023 in relation to questions 2(c) and 2(d) included in your letter dated 26 September 2023. I can confirm that my response to these questions reflects the position shared by us both, and I trust provides the committee with the information it requires.

I look forward to introduction of the Bill and to working with the committee during scrutiny.

This letter is being copied to the chairs of the Finance and Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committees.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hannah Blythyn'.

**Hannah Blythyn AS/MS**

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol  
Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

CC: Peredur Owen Griffiths MS, Chair, Finance Committee

Huw Irranca Davies MS, Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee