

SCME - CYP06

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio | Reform Bill Committee

Bil Senedd Cymru (Aelodau ac Etholiadau): barn plant a phobl Ifanc | Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill: children and young people's views

Ymateb gan Platfform | Evidence from Platfform

What do you think about the new voting system?

Power Up is a young people's wellbeing and social action project, by the charity Platfform, for young people aged 10 to 25 who live in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. It has been co-designed by young people and aims to provide frontline wellbeing support as well as support young people to enact social change in their communities and Wales.

We know from engaging with 490 children and young people on their opinions and experiences of mental health and wellbeing support that they are passionate about various changes that could be made to the world in order to make it a better place. One issue that young people frequently mentioned was the Government, hence why we asked young people what their opinions were on this members and election bill and compiled a response.

Young people had mixed opinions on whether they thought that new voting system was a good idea or not.

Even though some young people recognised that many people tend to vote for the party rather than for a particular person, others emphasised the importance and right to be able to choose specifically who represents your community. One young person stated that it is "nice to have a face and know who you're actually voting for".



Young people thought that people would understand the new way to vote but perhaps not the reasoning behind why it has been changed in the first place.

Whilst people may end up with a party that they wanted, if the responsibility of choosing who gets the seat is down to the party, people may not be represented by a person that they wanted. Some young people remarked on whether it is fair to take this choice away from people.

Overall, young people thought that the Senedd could revisit the new voting system and whether it needed to be changed.

What do you think about increasing the number of Members from 60 to 96?

Young people thought that increasing the number of members was a good idea.

Having more members could lead to decisions and outcomes being made quicker. One young person commented on the fact that other parliaments in the UK have more members than 60 so the Senedd should too. Increasing the number of members would increase the representation across Wales as well as hopefully improve the representation of the members in the Senedd to match more closely with the population makeup of Wales (e.g., more Senedd members from minoritised and discriminated against groups). Additionally, an increase in members could lead to a rise in opportunities in the form of jobs or work experience.

Young people did recognise that there are some possible negatives with increasing the number of members. More people means that it could take longer for the Senedd to make decisions, which may lead to delays in the work of the Senedd. The main concern however was around the cost associated with this decision. Young people were worried about how the extra members would be funded and if this would have impact on the budget and lead to money being taken away from other areas it could be invested in (like the NHS). They did not want to have extra members at the detriment of losing investment into necessary sectors of life.

Young people thought that having more members may make a positive difference to way that they do their work, as the members would not be as overstretched and therefore have more time to focus on their particular interests and responsibilities. However, they did note that this has not be done before so they were unsure what the real effect would be.

Moreover, young people were unsure as to whether it would make a difference to who would stand for election. One young person thought that it might encourage more people to stand for election, given the fact that they could have a higher chance of being elected due to there being more members. But again, it has not happened yet so we cannot be sure of the effect.

On the whole, young people thought that increasing the number of Senedd members was something that should be implemented.

Would any of the changes in the Bill make you more or less likely to want to stand for election as a Member of the Senedd?

Young people had mixed views around members serving for four years instead of five. Some thought it was a good idea because it is a long enough period of time to enact change but short enough that people would not become complacent and reluctant to do anything. Shortening the term length could also lead to the Senedd becoming more diverse and representative, as people are elected in and out more regularly and potentially new and fresh ideas and perspectives to enter into the Senedd more frequently.

Some of our young people thought it was a bad idea because it could lead to people making short-term knee jerk decisions that result in no actual benefit to the population. Additionally, one young person thought that the elections were “frequent enough anyway”.

Young people were unsure whether changing the term length from five to four years would lead to more people standing for election or not. The shorter term length could both deter people (not long enough to make a difference) or encourage people to stand (more feasible commitment).

All young people agreed that members and candidates standing for election should have to live in Wales. They believed that only when you live somewhere, do you gain a real understanding of the issues concerning both Wales and the area they want to represent. If you are going to be making decisions about people’s lives, then you should also be subject to and affected by the decisions you put in place.

Young people also brought up the point that it should be a requirement not only to reside in Wales, but also in the area that you are planning to stand for in

election of. This would give the individual in question a better understanding of the needs and issues of that area as well as help the community feel more connected to the person representing them (if they too live there).

Young people thought that ensuring candidates live in Wales would lead to the Senedd becoming more representative, especially if it is put in place that candidates also have to live in the area of Wales they wish to represent. Regarding diversity, young people were unsure whether it would lead to significant changes in diversity of the members elected.

Again, young people were unsure whether requiring candidates to live in Wales would lead to more people standing for election or not. Young people discussed how they would hope that people standing for election into a Welsh Government were in fact Welsh.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Bill (we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)?

Whilst the suggestions made by this bill may increase diversity and representation (e.g., shortening the term length and ensuring members live in Wales), more direct and focused efforts are needed in order to make a noticeable change.

Regarding diversity and representation in the Senedd, young people had a few ideas on how to improve this.

For example, creating more development opportunities for people from underrepresented groups to get into politics. One young person highlighted programmes like 'Equal Power Equal Voice' who they thought were a great example of this.

Additionally, political parties could focus more on working with and recruiting people from different backgrounds to work with them and regularly review whether their workforce and represents views from a range of voices.

Also, young people thought that the Senedd could engage in more interaction with people from diverse backgrounds and go to places where these people are. One suggestion was collaborating with organisations who have established good relationships with these communities and hosting events to let people get to know who is representing them and learn what goes on in the Senedd.

Moreover, educational campaigns would be useful in informing the general public about the day-to-day business of the Senedd and their upcoming plans and policies and in a more accessible way via billboards, social media. This would perhaps inspire people to get more involved themselves.

But young people wanted to highlight any attempts in increasing diversity and representation needed to come from a place of change and wanting to do better and not about meeting quotas and being tokenistic.