

Cross Party Group on Women

Sponsored by Siân Gwenllian MS

1 July 2022

Zoom, 10:00 – 11:00

Attendees:

Delyth Jewell MS (Chair)
Jane Dodds MS
Sioned Williams MS
Laura McAllister, Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (Speaker)
Tomos Evans, Chwarae Teg
Wanjiku Ngotho-Mbugua, Bawso
Nancy Lidubwi, Bawso
Elyn Stephens, Plaid Cymru
Abigail Thomas, Plaid Cymru
Patience Bentu, Diversity Practitioner
Rhianydd Williams, TUC Cymru
Sarah Rees, Oxfam Cymru
Keira Evans, Trans Aid Cymru
Shash Appan, Trans Aid Cymru
Eve, Trans Aid Cymru
Megan Thomas, Disability Wales
Alison Parken, Cardiff Business School
Ele Hicks, Diverse Cymru
Jane Fenton-May, Women in Europe (Wales)
Kirsty Fox, Camlas
Chloe Rees, Office of Sarah Murphy MS
Catherine Fookes, WEN Wales
Jennifer Ramsay, Board Member, WEN Wales
Jessica Laimann, WEN Wales

Apologies:

Sian Gwenllian MS
Llyr Gruffydd MS
Rhian Connick, NFWI
Suzie Davies, Board Member, WEN Wales

<p>1</p>	<p>Welcomes, Apologies, Introduction – Chair</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone and advised that the purpose of the meeting was to hear from Professor Laura McAllister on how women’s rights, gender equality and our commitment to intersectionality fit into the process for constitutional reform and how members can get involved in the consultation.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>The role of gender in constitutional reform – Prof Laura McAllister, Co-Chair of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales</p> <p>Prof McAllister noted it was important that gender and diversity issues are enshrined in everything we try to do to create a fit-for-purpose parliament in Wales. Enshrining</p>

equality and diversity rights in institutional change was crucial as it made institutions less likely to be discriminatory.

The current Senedd reform programme was an important opportunity to be world leading and it was crucial for gender quotas to be incorporated into that. Prof McAllister was glad to see the recommendations from Expert Panel largely replicated by the Bowden Committee and now endorsed by the Special Purpose Committee. She was entirely supportive on enlarging the Senedd to 96 members to address scrutiny and accountability with integrated gender quotas, but disappointed of the choice of a closed list PR system although integration of quotas into this system was relatively simple.

On potential issues around legislative competence for gender quota legislation, Prof McAllister explained that this had to do with equal opportunities being reserved while elections was devolved. They were aware of the issue and it would all come down to the purpose of the bill and the interpretation of the policy, and also whether the Supreme Court or UK Government would indeed want to make this a challengeable issue. Gender quota legislation should be pursued regardless as there were things that could be done to ensure Senedd reform would not be delayed by a potential legal challenge to quota legislation.

We also needed to use this opportunity to make sure other characteristics were not left out as we progressed Senedd reform and parties needed to understand that they had to take diverse and equal representation serious on a voluntary as well as legislative basis. Other things that should be done included better collection of candidate data - there was currently no buy-in from the UK Government but we should keep campaigning because we need the evidence to show how difficult it is for women and marginalised groups reach elected office. Enabling job-sharing was also important, more work was needed and the difficulties around this were not insurmountable.

On the work of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, Prof McAllister advised that they were currently undertaking their first engagement exercise which would close by the end of July. There would be further engagement opportunities further down the line, but early engagement from a gender and diversity perspective was strongly encouraged. She and the other chair were keen to ensure gender and diversity were mainstreamed into all the constitutional options considered and that all potential scenarios, from status quo to independence, were gender and diversity proofed.

The Commission was about to launch programme of small grants for co-production (around £5k) and was hoping organisations like those present would consider applying to facilitate conversations with the people they represented who may not directly respond to the consultation.

3 Discussion and questions from attendees

The Chair thanked Prof McAllister for the useful overview of Senedd reform and the work of the Commission and opened the floor to discussion. Members raised many comments and questions, including the following:

Patience Bentu referred to the recent revocation of Roe v Wade in the US and asked how developments like this would affect constitutional reforms in Wales. Prof McAllister said the Commission would be looking at devolution of justice, policing, prisons, probation and administration of justice. We needed to make sure women were properly represented in every aspect of Wales' judicial system. An equality dimension had to be built into the justice system in Wales if it was devolved, and it was difficult to see how there could be continued resistance to the devolution of justice because it was so fundamental.

Jessica Laimann asked what kind of evidence from organisations would be most useful for the consultation. For instance, could they provide evidence on where they had campaigned for progressive policies in Wales with wide support in the Senedd but encountered concerns around devolved competence, such as with gender and diversity quotas, job-sharing or progressive gender identify legislation. Prof McAllister advised that such information would be useful as the Commission's focus was on making the connection between the work of equality and diversity organisations in Wales and the current devolution settlement to identify where the pinch points were.

Jane Dodds MS queried what guarantees the Commission has had that its recommendations would be accepted. Prof McAllister advised that the Commission was different from Senedd committees in that it was fully independent. Welsh Government had no control over its work, there were representatives from all parties and the delivery impact of policies was really important. While they could not guarantee that people would listen to the recommendations, it was crucial to remain positive and "keep the eye on the ball" – Wales could be at the forefront and shape constitutional future, things could change very quickly and we needed to be ready. Change would happen eventually just as it did with Senedd reform.

Rhianydd Williams asked how we could ensure that our constitutional work was future proof and did not depend on how committed future governments were to devolution. She also asked how we could provide safety for currently underrepresented candidates so they would be protected from harassment and abuse. Positive legislation like the public sector equality duty lacked enforcement in workplaces. Prof McAllister responded that further evidence on employment rights was needed and recent developments around strikes illustrated the key problem of Wales having a relatively weak constitutional machinery. But there also had to be a change of attitude and behaviour that showed respect for elected governments and parliaments and treated them as equals. Scrutiny, cooperation and consultation had to be enshrined as good

principles of intergovernmental relations and this would feature prominently in the Commission's deliberations. Sarah Rees added that there was absolutely no support available for candidates who experience online abuse and harassment even when this put their families and children at risk.

Catherine Fookes suggested that it may be useful to capture the perspective of the CPG through a joint response to the consultation. Members were in agreement.

Abigail Thomas highlighted the importance of diversity data, publication should be made mandatory and parties needed to have a mandatory diversity strategies.

Alison Parken emphasised the need for evidence of limitations within the current devolution settlement, such as things we were calling for that were not currently devolved. For instance, lack of control over welfare, employment and equality legislation was a real barrier to making progress for women in Wales. The Chair added the importance highlighting of how policies affected our day to day lives, such as the rolling back of the Human Rights Act.

Sioned Williams MS stated that workplace practices like job-sharing had not had enough time and consideration, politics needed to suit women and their responsibilities, gender quotas needed to be understood as a floor not as a ceiling.

Megan Thomas emphasised the role of financial issues that people experienced in running for elected office. Disability Wales' experience with the Access to Elected Office scheme showed that a significant proportion of applicants were disabled women, without necessarily particularly targeting this groups. This showed that financial barriers were especially present for women experiencing intersecting discrimination. A combination of quotas and specific financial support, e.g. for childcare and impairment-related expenses, could have a large impact on representation within the Senedd.

The Chair suggested that there was a connection between the points raised on Senedd reform and constitutional reform. We need more devolved powers and more diverse presentation to ensure those powers that are devolved can be adequately scrutinized.

Sarah Rees highlighted the little progress on child poverty which was linked to women and equality issues and a major problem in Wales. Keira Evans added that poverty was a huge issue especially for trans women, who had to pay for medication and surgeries that the NHS was not always covering. A big reason for this was that the competence for welfare was held by Westminster. There were big problems with Universal Credit going only into one household member's bank account, this kept people in gender minorities in really dangerous situation. She also emphasised issues around policing and refugees, Wales had its own police forces but could not always chose how they were run. Wales could not be a proper nation of sanctuary while Westminster was in charge of the asylum pathways.

	<p>Patience Bentu said that it was crucial to think about models and structures that would make equality happen, and one thing that had worked internationally was the quota system, and no one seemed to have a credible alternative to this at present. She suggested that the CPG could reinvite party leaders to put this question to them again – if they did not support quotas what were the alternatives that they propose.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Update from the Women in Europe (Wales) Group (Jackie Jones)</p> <p>Prof Jackie Jones provided a video update including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming events of interest included an Unequal Pay Conference on 3-4 November in Brussels and a Reclaim Your Space Euro Pride Event on 14-18 September in Serbia; • The European Parliament passed a resolution on the impact of war against Ukraine on women and on global threats to abortion rights; • The Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) had taken an initial vote on a directive on women on company boards, which was now going ahead after having been blocked for a number of years, including by the UK Government; • New publications: Anti-trafficking plan in relation to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, new reports on women in poverty and on intersectional discrimination, which will be fundamental to future legislative and policy work in the European Union, and a roadmap to implementing the Gender Equality Action plan; • The Czech Republic had taken over presidency of the Council of the European Union from France; • Ukraine and Moldova were now candidate countries for the EU, which would be significant in terms of gender equality and trafficking policies; • The European Commission had proposed a draft directive on ending violence against women and girls; • The UK Government had announced ratification of the Istanbul Convention in July but with reservations on the rights of migrant women • 2022 was the European Year of Youth with several events taking place, including a Wales for Europe event on 30 June on the Erasmus programme • There was increased spending on militarization and a robust oversight in terms of gender equality and the impact of war on women and girls was needed both in the European Union and in the UK.
<p>5</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>It was suggested that the next meeting could look at gender budgeting, members were in agreement.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p><i>Close</i></p>