

Consultation

Electing a more diverse Assembly

11 March 2020 – 22 April 2020

The **Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform** was established in September 2019 to examine the recommendations of the **Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform** in respect of the size of the Assembly and how Members are elected. We are seeking written evidence to inform our inquiry into electing a more diverse Assembly.

The questions in this consultation explore issues relating to the diversity and representativeness of the Assembly and candidates who stand for election.

You can find the evidence that we have already heard about these issues on our [website](#). More information about the Assembly and its Members is available on the [Assembly's website](#).

How to respond to this consultation

You are welcome to answer some or all of the questions in this consultation. Your answers will help to inform our thinking on these matters.

We would like to hear from as many people as possible about what they think about the issues in this consultation—if you know anyone who might be interested in responding, please share it with them.

You can respond to the consultation by emailing SeneddReform@Assembly.Wales. The deadline for responses is 22 April 2020.

Providing written evidence

The National Assembly for Wales has two official languages, Welsh and English.

In line with the **Assembly's Official Languages Scheme**, the Committee requests that documents or written responses to consultations intended for publication or use in National Assembly proceedings are submitted bilingually. When documents or written responses are not submitted bilingually, we will publish in the language submitted, stating that it has been received in that language only.

We expect other organisations to implement their own standards or schemes and to comply with their statutory obligation.

Please see [guidance for those providing evidence for committees](#).



Disclosure of information

Please ensure that you have considered the Assembly's **policy on disclosure of information** before submitting information to the Committee.

Terms used in this consultation

- **Diverse/diversity:** when we use these words we mean both the nine protected characteristics set in the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) and diversity in a wider sense, for example people's socio-economic background, neurodiversity and professional background.
- **Under-represented:** some groups of people are 'under-represented' in the Assembly. This means that the proportion of people across Wales from that group is higher than the proportion of Assembly Members from it. For example, a little over half of the population of Wales is female, but fewer than half of the current Assembly Members are women.

Diversity of the Assembly

Background

The Expert Panel said that more diversity would enhance the operation of the Assembly and the way it represents the people of Wales. People have told the Committee that legislatures should be diverse because:

- It is fairer, as people from a range of diverse communities and backgrounds are able to take part in the political process.
- Greater diversity among decision-makers leads to better decisions being made.

The Committee has been told that the Assembly has a good record in relation to gender balance among Assembly Members, but that it is less diverse in other ways.

Some people have suggested that measures should be introduced to increase the diversity of the Assembly. Suggestions have included introducing quotas, allowing Members to job share, or providing additional funding to help people from under-represented groups stand for election.

Questions

1. How can the Assembly ensure that the views of under-represented groups are taken into account in its work, when there might not be any Assembly Members from those groups?
2. What are the main barriers that may discourage somebody from an under-represented group from standing for election to the Assembly?
3. What are the most important things that could be done to help people from under-represented groups or who might be concerned about giving up their existing job or profession to stand for election?
4. Do people in Wales, including those from under-represented groups, know enough about what the role of an Assembly Member involves to be able to decide whether they are interested in standing for election?

Publishing data about the diversity of political candidates

Background

The Expert Panel said that the Assembly should ask the UK Government to bring into effect section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 in relation to Assembly elections, or transfer the power to do so to the Welsh Ministers.

If it came into effect, section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 would require political parties to report on the diversity of their candidates for Assembly elections in respect of their protected characteristics. The powers in section 106 could be used to require the publication of some or all of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The powers could also be used to specify which parties had to publish data; for example it might be only parties putting forward candidates in more than a specified number of

constituencies or regions. The information would be anonymised before it was published, and people would be free to refuse to provide data if they did not wish to do so.

Questions:

5. If political parties were required to collect and publish anonymised data about the diversity of their Assembly election candidates, would this encourage them to select a more diverse range of people as candidates?
6. What would need to be done to ensure that candidate data was collected and published accurately and responsibly?

Job sharing by Assembly Members

Background

The Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform recommended that electoral law, Assembly procedures and the Remuneration Board's Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances should be changed to enable candidates to stand for election on the basis of transparent job sharing arrangements.

The Expert Panel argued that allowing job sharing could make it easier for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities to stand for election, or allow prospective Members to maintain their professional skills and commitments by working part-time within a job share arrangement. Candidates wishing to stand in this way would need to explain clearly to voters how the job sharing arrangement would work. Therefore the final decision as to whether any job sharing Members were elected would rest with voters.

Questions

7. If people were allowed to stand for election on the basis of job sharing, are there particular groups or communities that would be most likely choose to stand for election in this way?

Electoral quotas

Background

The Expert Panel recommended three electoral systems which could be used in Wales:

- Single Transferable Vote: voters rank candidates to represent a multimember constituency in their order of preference.
- Flexible List Proportional Representation: voters vote for either a political party to represent a multimember constituency, or for the particular candidate that they prefer.
- Mixed Member Proportional Representation (the current electoral system): voters vote for an individual candidate to represent a single member constituency and for a political party (or individual regional candidate) to represent their region.

More information about the recommendations the Expert Panel made about the Assembly's electoral system can be found in the Panel's report: [**A Parliament that Works for Wales**](#).

The Expert Panel recommended that legislative candidate gender quotas should be integrated into the Assembly's electoral system, and that parties should have to ensure that:

- 50 per cent of their candidates in each region under the Mixed Member Proportional system, or each multimember constituency under STV or Flexible List PR, are female and 50 per cent are male.
- Candidate lists for each region under the Mixed Member Proportional system or for each multimember constituency under Flexible List PR are zipped i.e. alternating male and female candidates. Parties standing candidates in more than one region/multimember constituency should try to balance how many of their lists start with a woman and how many have a man as the first candidate.

The Panel recommended that mechanisms should be put in place to enforce or incentivise compliance with quotas. It also said that if legislative measures were not adopted, then parties should adopt the measures voluntarily.

Questions

- 8.** Should quotas be used to increase the representation of under-represented groups such as people with disabilities or ethnic minorities? What practical implications would need to be considered?
- 9.** What evidence is there about how voters feel about the use of quotas to encourage the election of candidates with specific characteristics?

Other issues

Experiences of party politics

- 10.** Are there any barriers which might discourage people from under-represented groups from joining political parties or taking part in party politics?

Ways of working

- 11.** What changes could the Assembly introduce to its ways of working to make standing for election more attractive to people from under-represented groups?
For example, some people have suggested that having strict limits on the timing of Assembly business, enabling proxy voting, or allowing Assembly Members to attend meetings remotely might encourage a more diverse range of Assembly candidates.

International best practice

- 12.** Are there examples of measures introduced in other countries which have significantly improved the parliamentary representation of under-represented groups?

Implementing change

- 13.** Should voluntary measures to encourage the selection and election of more candidates from under-represented groups be pursued and exhausted before legislative measures are developed?

- 14.** Which voluntary or legislative measures to encourage the election of a more diverse Assembly would make the biggest impact, and which measures should be prioritised?