

Consultation: Electing a more diverse Assembly

Who is WEN Wales?

i.i [WEN Wales](#) is a representative women's network¹ and human rights organisation. Our vision is a transformed Wales, free from gender discrimination. We call for a Wales where all women and men have equal authority & opportunity to shape society and their own lives.

i.ii WEN Wales asked our individual members to respond to the questions of the Committee. The views of the 24 respondents have informed WEN Wales' response below. *After WEN Wales had consulted with our members, the Welsh Parliament changed its name. Where quotes have been used directly, the former name for the Welsh Parliament has been included.*

i.iii Our general approach to electing a more diverse Senedd centres around three areas which we believe will all need concerted action. There is no silver bullet to increase diversity and now with the Covid-19 pandemic it is even more important that we take action or intersectional women will be so busy responding to the crisis that they will not have the time or finances to get involved in politics. WEN Wales believes it will take action in three areas: legislation, mentoring and changing our culture. One will not work without the other and it is a long-term project. Women have had the vote for 100 years and yet we still do not have equality in political life. Tinkering around the edges will not work. We need a suite of bold measures including:

- We need to **implement legislation** that compels political parties to put forward equal numbers of candidates – i.e legally binding gender quotas with incentives or sanctions which results in at least 50:50 MS's candidates from all parties
- We need to **create the pipeline** for diverse women leaders via supporting the WEN and the Eyst Mentoring Scheme – and as soon as possible bringing them together in an 'Equal Power, Equal Voice: All Wales Mentoring Programme' including Disability Wales and Stonewall Cymru
- We need to **change the culture** that surrounds politics via strong codes of conduct at the Senedd, via holding those MS's that do not uphold high standards to account and by holding social media companies and individuals who abuse politicians via social media to account.

i.iv We believe that all three measures above must be pushed forward if we are to get a truly diverse Senedd.

i.v Our specific recommendations to ensure the Senedd is more diverse are:

- a) Ensure that forthcoming legislation on Reform of the Welsh Parliament should include provisions on legally binding gender and diversity quotas**

¹ Over 1300 individual members and organisational members, including women's rights and allied organisations from across the third sector, academia, international and national NGOs.

The evidence supporting quotas is clear:

- Research shows that quotas are the “single most effective tool for ‘fast tracking’ women’s representation in elected bodies for government.”;
- Among the twenty Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) countries registering the sharpest growth in the proportion of women in parliament during the last decade... half had introduced legal quotas. By contrast, among the twenty OSCE countries lagging in growth, none had implemented legal quotas;
- There is international backing - various international institutions, including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU and the Council of Europe support quotas;
- Ireland has successfully used quotas requiring that at least 30% of the candidates each party stands nationally are female (rising to 40% after seven years). The percentage of women candidates increased 90% at the 2016 election compared to the 2011 election, with a corresponding 40% increase in the number of women elected – 35 in 2016 compared with 25 in 2011 ;
- The 2017 Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, appointed by the Llywydd of the Welsh Parliament, recommended introducing prescriptive gender quotas for the 2021 elections. This presented an opportunity for Welsh Government to bring forward legislation to ensure diverse and equal representation.

b) Establish an Access to Elected Office Fund in time for 2021 elections

c) Implement an action plan urgently to increase the involvement of BAME women in public and political life

i.vi In addition to our own response, WEN Wales would like to draw the Committee’s attention to the Centenary Action Group’s submission to this consultation. WEN Wales is a member of this group.

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?

1.1 “I do not think that the Assembly can ensure that views of under-represented group are taken into account in its work, when there might not be any AMs from these groups... the fact that e.g. the Assembly could ensure the views of Black and minority ethnic women are taken into account in its work without the Senedd having ever had a Black and minority ethnic woman representative is sexist and racist. It’s that simple.” – WEN Wales member

1.2 The Welsh Parliament has never had a Black, Asian or minority ethnic woman (BAME) Member of the Senedd. This is unacceptable because BAME women and girls have not been represented at the centre of Welsh politics. One WEN Wales member described this as a symptom of a **“crisis of democracy and representation.”** Political parties must do more to

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encourage diversity and if they are not willing to act voluntarily, they must be encouraged to do so by legal means.

1.3 Many of our members called for far greater engagement with underrepresented groups, including going out across the whole of Wales, with particular focus on rural areas in North and mid-Wales. There was a call for increased co-productive working in the development of policy and legislation, where underrepresented groups are supported to build capacity and financial support for potential future candidates is made available.

1.4 WEN Wales is disappointed at the lack of Access to Elected Office Fund for the 2021 Senedd Elections and while plans to make such a fund available for disabled candidates for the 2022 local government elections is welcome, we recommend that more underrepresented groups are also financially supported: BAME women, women from low-income households, women needing assistance with childcare costs, LGBT+ women etc.

1.5 “Introduce reversed mentoring or opportunities for shadowing with mentors being remunerated for their time. Ensure time is used to consult and engage with these groups – the same effort to engage in an election should be used at all levels of outreach and engagement.”
– WEN Wales member

1.6 Our members called for mentoring opportunities, such as those already offered by WEN Wales and EYST, for women and BAME young people advancing careers in political and public life in Wales. Others also suggested the use of reverse mentoring and shadowing. We know that these have been organised by organisations such as Women Connect First and Chwarae Teg in the past, though more financial support needs to be offered to women accessing these schemes, particularly in relation to childcare provisions for women wishing to attend but who would not be able to do so without access to free childcare. We would like to see an All Wales and All Protected Characteristic Mentoring scheme run by WEN in partnership with Eyst, Stonewall Cymru and Disability Wales and have put forward proposals for this to happen to the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.

1.7 The Senedd could do more to make the route to political office clearer and run a communications strategy to encourage people to consider a career in the Senedd, which could include interviews and testimonials, and engagement with young people in educational institutions across Wales. The Senedd could also create liaison posts, directly employing people from under-represented groups to liaise with communities.

1.8 The message from some is simple: **“Work out which groups are under-presented, work out possible reasons why that is, then devise ways to overcome these barriers so that they can be included.”** There are many women’s groups and charities in Wales already working with people who are in or at risk of being in poverty, are single parents, are disabled and not represented in the Senedd. The individuals who are underrepresented should be treated as much as experts as those already consulted on ‘expert panels’ and should be paid for their time and expertise.

2. What are the main barriers that may discourage somebody from an underrepresented group from standing for election to the Assembly?

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2.1 “Lack of experience of or exposure to public office. This is the effect of historical discrimination and marginalisation and requires concerted, targeted and long-term positive action. I believe that on-going racism and sexism also dissuades some people from standing. I would feel that as a BME woman I would start out with a disadvantage and that at every stage I would be scrutinised more closely and criticised more freely than either a male or white counterpart. I wouldn’t want to put myself or my family through that pressure.” – WEN Wales member

2.2 Many of the responses that WEN Wales received expressed concerns around institutional and cultural racism, alongside a multitude of other forms of discrimination: (cis)sexism, ableism, islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia. Not only was it raised that white supremacy and colonialism are at the heart of the workings of some political parties and existing political institutions, but concerns were also raised around social media abuse experienced by underrepresented groups. The sheer volume of online abuse and violence that Diane Abbott MP receives daily is an example of this, and is utterly unacceptable. Despite the wide reporting of this abuse, neither the police, the criminal justice system, social media conglomerates or political institutions have come near to dealing with this detestable behaviour. Underrepresented group should not have to accept this as the norm and live with the consequences for themselves, their families, and their communities. Welsh Government must do more to hold social media companies to account.

2.3 Gender stereotypes prevail in Welsh society and ‘default-male’ is still the model of leadership that predominates in the mind of people across Wales. Therefore, those who are not already represented may find it difficult not only to stand for elected office but to think that such an option is open to them. WEN Wales members have also raised issues of low confidence of potential candidates, lack of understanding about the political roles available and the process of how to get elected and the cost implications. Costs were raised in the context of those who would stand as independent, as well as those who are members of political parties.

2.4 Barriers were also highlighted within political parties, such as a perception that the current electoral system is being used to discriminate: **“Male only candidates constituencies using twinning as an excuse to now allow female candidates to stand in twinned constituencies.”** WEN Wales supports all recommendations of the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, including a Single Transferable Vote system with integrated legally binding gender quotas and diversity quotas.

2.5 Some also saw the Senedd as exclusionary: **“the Assembly is very much composed of people who have all the advantages of social capital and in many cases candidates are selected to stand because of personal social connections.”**

2.6 While the Senedd has prided itself on its family friendly policies, many felt that barriers for standing included caring responsibilities, lack of childcare provisions and difficulties with travelling, particularly for those from constituencies far from Cardiff Bay.

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2.7 *“I’m disabled, I need help with transport and other things if I’m to participate, the opportunity to job share would be welcome. How accessible is the Senedd. It doesn’t really look wheelchair accessible in the debating chamber. I don’t see people from minority groups in the chamber so don’t feel like we belong.”* While there is funding for reasonable adjustments for disabled Members of the Senedd, this is not widely communicated. Also as there is currently no Members of the Senedd who uses a wheelchair in the Chamber it is not clear whether the space could accommodate one appropriately.

3. What are the most important things that could be done to help people from underrepresented groups or who might be concerned about giving up their existing job or profession to stand for election?

3.1 “I think that the Senedd and political parties in wales have historically not given due regard under various Acts and now we are at a point where the Senedd is toxic and they need to rush equality. Equality can never be rushed. We can’t bypass 30+ years of work to just say “what can we do” ... we need to organically create a political climate within which ‘underrepresented’ groups feel comfortable.” – WEN Wales member

3.2 There is a perception that behaviours and procedures need to change within political parties and within the culture of the Senedd to make them more inclusive, supportive and not allow any direct discrimination to occur within political parties: *“Parties and Welsh Government to provide clear anti-oppression statements and policies that outline how oppressive and discriminatory behaviour will not only not be tolerated but will be dealt with within the party.”* Following the #MeToo movement and subsequent moves towards improving standards of complaints procedures in the Senedd, WEN Wales and our members have been disappointed at failings of the Standards Commissioner to instil confidence in the system, for example, in relation to the sexist video created by Gareth Bennett MS of Joyce Watson MS, which was entirely inappropriate. Failure to recognise clear acts of misogyny does not paint the Senedd in good light.

3.3 Cost is a significant barrier which is why we suggest an Access to Elected Office Fund.

3.4 Some members felt that candidates should be able to continue their jobs until they are sworn into office. Others highlighted that secondments from current jobs or career breaks, either full or part-time, would reduce barriers.

3.5 In relation to the need for widely available information about the workings of the Senedd, there was a suggestion that case studies could be distributed which show how different viewpoints in the Chamber and within the work of the Senedd made a measurable difference to the people of Wales.

3.6 There were calls for organisations who could guide and encourage people to stand, as well as calls for mentoring, training, and shadowing of existing Members. WEN Wales and EYST Wales run mentoring schemes for small cohorts of people wanting to advance in their political and public careers, including prospective political candidates, however the schemes are heavily over-subscribed and we would like to double their size to have a bigger impact. We

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recommend that further investment into existing schemes should be made to increase capacity and the impact now and in the future.

These schemes work - WEN Wales has had one mentee elected to the UK Parliament and several have become candidates for Senedd Elections, as well as several women becoming Councillors since being on the scheme. The attached infographics show the results of the two WEN mentoring schemes so far – there have been big increases in wanting to stand for elected office and in mentees understanding of how to run for office. So whilst Mentoring schemes are not a silver bullet, they are most definitely needed to increase the pipeline of women coming through to stand for political office.

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?

4.1 “No, there is a general cynicism about politics and about politicians currently, which leads to a lack of understanding about the role.” – WEN Wales member

4.2 WEN Wales’ members either responded **“no”** or **“probably not”** to this question. One respondent suggested making greater use of the Youth Assembly as advocates. Another suggested that Welsh Government should fund an inquiry into this issue, which could then be gather information to inform an action plan for change.

4.3 One practical suggestion was: **“I don’t think so. I also think the negative press about politicians can put people off. So perhaps it would be helpful to produce a video with AMs explaining the positive side of being involved in politics. For example, the good they are able to do for others, the positive influence in the legal system.”**

4.4 Educating people across Wales about our political institutions is vital. **“There are people from all over Wales, not necessarily from underrepresented groups, who know little or nothing about the role of an Assembly Member. I know the Assembly does its best to provide information on its role and activities but far too many see it as a sort of additional Council which we have to pay for and fail to recognise devolved matters and the link between the Assembly and Westminster. I know the assembly provides information on its activities and that of its members, but people just don’t get it.”** Our member highlighted a lecturer at Cross Keys College who runs an excellent politics course. WEN Wales fully supports the Electoral Reform Society Cymru’s call for compulsory non-partisan political education in all educational institutions. Without it, this issue of misunderstanding the political systems of Wales will continue and will weaken our democracy. We urge the Committee to ensure that Welsh Government do not miss this opportunity to include meaningful, compulsory political education in the new curricula.

4.5 Consultations with underrepresented groups should be done through engagement with people or organisations already positioned to consult with each group, with enough time,

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information and an appropriate way in which to respond, to make it as easy as possible. Consulted groups should always be remunerated for their time and expertise.

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?

5.1 “Encourage or force? They may certainly be under more pressure to do more to attract a more diverse range of people.” – WEN Wales member

5.2 WEN Wales believes it is essential that parties publish candidate data and supports the recommendations laid out by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) Cymru in their report *New Voices*². The report states that:

“The UK Government has legislated under the Equality Act for parties to publish information around the diversity of their candidates for elections, however this provision has never been enacted. Often the reason for this is cited as due to the burden on smaller parties, however we know that some smaller parties already collect this information. The lack of data on protected characteristics is a major barrier to progress on diversity. If we are unclear of the scale of the problem, then how can we begin to address it? Unless the UK Government takes this issue seriously and enacts Section 106 of the Equality Act, then the fundamentals of inequality will remain.”³

5.3 Without this data it is extremely hard to robustly hold parties to account on the lack of diversity in candidate lists. Some protected characteristics are hidden, such as sexual orientation and disability, and all characteristics should be self-defined by candidates and should not be taken on assumption. One member stated that they thought it would **“definitely”** make a difference as **“it would show how poorly we are currently doing in terms of encouraging diverse groups.”** While some members agreed, others thought it might make a difference. Some thought that it would only work **“if targets were also set.”**

5.4 Concerns were raised that parties should be free to **“select the best candidates not fulfil a box ticking exercise. Quality candidates not people learning as they go along.”** As ERS Cymru stress in their report, “quotas alone are not a panacea.”⁴ Diverse candidates must be supported through initiatives such as mentoring schemes, as discussed elsewhere in this document.

5.7 Concerns were also raised around the word diversity – implying that there is a non-diverse group. It was raised that **“the Senedd is in Butetown. Butetown is home to one of the oldest multiracial communities in Northern Europe, but you won’t find a woman of colour there who works as an Assembly Member... how offensive it is to say that we in S Cardiff are “diverse”.**

² <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/New-Voices.pdf>

³ <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/New-Voices.pdf>

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6. What would need to be done to ensure that candidate data was collected and published accurately and responsibly?

6.1 WEN Wales' members' responses have highlighted that the data should be collected and verified independently, whether this be through existing commissioners, the electoral commission or a third party; and be audited independently too.

6.2 It is imperative that the system ensures that data is anonymised – with a clear process for when publishing data would easily break this anonymity (e.g. if there was one female candidate reported this may break anonymity). Categories for how data will be published needs to be made clear and it was suggested that aligning this data to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, and **“not adjusting to pander to a vocal but small lobby group”** would be essential.

6.3 Another suggestion was that people from the protected characteristics laid out in the Equality Act 2010 should be paid to conduct this work: **“hire people from the “diverse” backgrounds you have mentioned above under the Equality Act to make sure that this happens, basically, pay people, pay working class people, disabled people, older people, people of colour etc.”**

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?

7.1 This would benefit women, people with disabilities, people with caring responsibilities, those worried about leaving their jobs either for financial reasons or because they wouldn't want to leave their careers, as well as those leading Third Sector organisations.

7.2 One member said: **“I can't speak for other people/groups but I think it would encourage someone like me/BME women. That would be purely due to feeling more supported (by a job-share partner) as I don't have caring responsibilities.”**

7.3 Others used the opportunity to raise concerns around the electorate's understanding of a job-sharing system: **“Yes, women. But, although people may be happy to stand on a job-sharing ticket, I'm not convinced the electorate would accept it easily. It could be seen as someone just “being a part-timer” and less effective. It's a big sell!”** Another view was **“I don't see how that would work? I wouldn't vote for 2 people. What happens if you like 1 candidate but not the person they job share with?”**

7.4 WEN Wales supports the use of job sharing, as we have highlighted in our *Feminist Scorecard 2020*⁵ at all level of politics, though we are aware of the issues raised by our members. We endorse Professor Sarah Childs view, as expressed to this Committee in February: **“Job sharing will enable some women to participate in politics who couldn't otherwise, but the**

⁵ <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Feminist-Scorecard-Report-2020-Eng.pdf>

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global evidence is absolutely clear that it is electoral quotas which are the most effective at increasing the participation of women in politics.”⁶

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?

8.1 “I think the Assembly should reflect its constituency. What I mean is, if the ration is 50% males and 50% female it should aim to be the same.” – WEN Wales member

8.2 WEN Wales strongly believes that quotas should be used and have included our briefing on quotas in the appendix. Quotas are a temporary special measure supported and recommended by the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). We also believe that the principles of CEDAW should be incorporated into welsh policies and laws in relation to devolved matters. While women make up 52% of the population of Wales, the high proportion of women Members of the Senedd could regress dramatically in next year’s Senedd elections if parties who do not use temporary special measures such as twinning and zipping are elected.

8.3 We also believe that people with disabilities or those from BAME communities should also benefit from temporary special measures. These would have to not be at odds with the Equality Act 2010, as current all-women shortlist allowances are specific exemptions within the Act that do not apply across other protected characteristics. As our members’ responses have highlighted, gender quotas have benefited white women, and therefore not diversified politics as effectively as further measures surly could.

8.4 WEN Wales does recognise that not all are convinced of the benefits of quotas and fear that unqualified people would usurp stronger candidates to fill the quota. For others, there is a worry that quotas would feel tokenistic. One member highlighted that **“quotas would have to go alongside lots of other positive action measures – but they could help.”**

8.5 Another member suggested **“Use figures to name and shame parties and ask them how they will address the imbalance.”** WEN Wales believes that all political parties must be obliged to publish anonymised candidate data, including protected characterises, so that the information needed to lobby political parties on their lack of diversity at selection stage, is available, as currently, this strategy is undermined by the lack of available figures. Even data on elected politicians is incomplete and flawed, as the Electoral Reform Society Cymru’s report *New Voices*⁷ found in 2018.

8.6 One supporter of the use of quotas answered **“Absolutely, practical challenges would be preparing people for candidature including confidence building but also training party**

⁶ Professor Sarah Childs speaking to the Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform, Monday, 3 February 2020 10.15, <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=542&MId=6029>

⁷ <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/New-Voices.pdf>

members, including other candidates, so that they fully understand and support the aim and the purpose.”

9. What evidence is there about how voters feel about the use of quotas to encourage the election of candidates with specific characteristics?

9.1 A member who supports quotas suggests that *“some people resent it as it blocks the way for (usually male) candidates who have to make way for ‘diverse’ candidates, who might be weaker candidates and might lack experience compared to them. Other people approve of this.”*

9.2 Political parties who have used systems of twinning and zipping, like Plaid Cymru and the Labour Party, should inform this discussion – *“this evidence could be gathered from the Labour Party for example, who have used it for the recruitment of women candidates’* via All Women Shortlists – which is a form of quotas.

9.3 This question also highlights again the need for strong political education in Wales: *“I’m afraid not enough people understand even the basics of selection and find quotas even more confusing. Admittedly, this is based on general conversations I’ve had both within a political party structure and in the wider community.”*

9.4 One member expanded on this point:

“I’ve received anecdotal evidence from members of my political party who don’t like male only candidate constituencies as they think it’s unfair to female candidates who would like to stand. There needs to be an education campaign to inform the electorate as to the need for positive action and quotas. Many don’t understand why we will never have a 50;50 female / male representation in the Senedd naturally unless there are quotas. This is because the reasons are complex and are to do with our still very patriarchal Welsh society, unconscious bias against women especially mothers with childcare responsibilities, the fact that discrimination against women can come from some other women (e.g. childless women, older women) as well as some men. The reasons are many and complex and in a way quotas are necessary because many female candidates are being asked to challenge and change the whole of our Welsh patriarchal society on their own - It is impossible and too much to ask each female candidate to do on their own (they are being asked to change and challenge their own political parties too, which still have the majority of members who are male and/or females who can discriminate against other women too!). I think if you look to the workplace it’s common to see positive action going on e.g. Welsh speakers only or ethnic minorities, disabled people will have an automatic interview etc. It’s just bringing our governance and democratic systems up to date.” WEN Wales member

9.5 One member suggested that the Committee looks at recent United Nations survey data on world-wide gender bias against women and leadership positions. The United Nation’s Committee for the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) routinely recommend the use of temporary measures such as quotas to all

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countries who go before them. Data around the use of the Convention may help inform this issue.

9.6 WEN Wales published a CEDAW briefing for Members of the Senedd in March 2020. This can be found on our website⁸, as can further information about CEDAW⁹:

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

10.1 ***“Vile bullying online, a climate of sexual harassment in the Welsh Senedd or Westminster or the Scottish Parliament. Politics has always been hard, uncompromising, male dominated arena where verbally abusing each other is part of the process. It seems to me that makes a system where all sorts of other abuse is accepted.” – WEN Wales member***

10.2 From social media to print media, vile abuse and violence experienced by politicians, the reasons that under-represented groups may be discouraged are vast. ***“Mainstream media needs to be accountable”*** argues one member, while another raises the life-threatening reality of online abuse that women in public and political life suffer, which is a serious and prevalent form of violence against women: ***“There are barriers facing all people – social media assassination, family scrutiny, party political in-fighting, financial checks. It’s a minefield which the honest, upright committed candidate has to develop a thick skin pretty quickly.”*** The ERS Cymru report *New Voices*¹⁰ details this further, with evidence gathered from interviews and surveys of Welsh politicians from across political parties and institutions. There is also a lack of faith in current internal complaints procedures, both inside parties and political institutions: ***“young women’s voices and complaints are frequently being silenced or not upheld because some male members and/or non-feminist female older members don’t see feminist viewpoints”***. There is a call for more independent scrutiny of political parties’ internal processes and complaints procedures to address institutional sexism and racism.

10.3 Another member raised that ***“one of the biggest barriers are poor engagement methods that fetishize diverse communities and lead to community consultation. Other ones include racism, sexism, sexist racism, racist sexism, ableism anti-blackness, white supremacy, institutionally racist political parties not responding to e.g. Lammy review, despite an epidemic of BME people in Wales in prisons and Senedd in “BME heartland” of Wales. Party politics in Wales is closely related to gentrification.”***

10.4 Some have raised issue around parties and meetings seeming very ***“cliquey”***, male-dominated, and not accessible to those with caring responsibilities. Others have highlighted that there is ***“still institutional sexism in the process and procedures of political parties, e.g. male-only candidate constituencies are being used with twinning arrangements even when there are massively less female candidates being selected.”*** Some members see that the

⁸ https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WEN_CedawBriefing_Bilingual.pdf

⁹ <https://wenwales.org.uk/cedaw/>

¹⁰ <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/New-Voices.pdf>

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Equality Act 2010 is being used by men to discriminate against potential and actual women candidates.

10.5 Mistrust of political systems, apathy, lack of feeling represented by parties and time and money constraints were also raised as barriers.

11. Ways of working: 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.

11.1 The workings of the Senedd has had to adapt very quickly to the limitations due to the COVID-19 crisis. WEN Wales believes that best practices from this period should be incorporated into everyday practices going forward, rather than seen as extreme measures during a crisis. The relative youth of the Senedd has enabled quick reaction to external factors imposed by the pandemic, unlike the dusty corridors of Westminster. This has allowed for continued scrutiny of Welsh Government's response to the crisis, which has been extremely important, especially given that specific issues for women and girls have been further worsened by COVID-19. One member stated that the Senedd should use **"remote working which nondisabled people are suddenly discovering is practical. Disabled people have been telling them this for ages!"**

11.2 WEN Wales is particularly interested in the way that the Senedd has used remote voting, something that has been a real area of contention for AMs on parental leave, with no provision to allow proxy voting in the Chamber. This is something that Bethan Sayed MS has been vocal about in recent months and something that WEN Wales has discussed at greater length in evidence submitted to this Committee.

11.3 Some members have simply responded their support for all the listed suggestions, adding surprise that these are not currently in place, given their prevalence in many other work environments. Others have suggested that **"the Assembly should consider having an in-house creche or child care vouchers so mothers can work."** This is an initiative that WEN Wales supports.

11.4 There are been suggestions too that upskilling Members of the Senedd and all staff about **"unconscious bias and why some people simply do not hear women's voices, especially mothers with childcare responsibilities in the same way as others."**

11.5 There are also calls for the Senedd to try different ways of working **"that enable AMs to balance constituency and Assembly business. However, there is still a given amount of business that needs to be done and scrutiny needs to be effective – this goes to the point about the need to increase the number of AMs."**

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11.6 As has been discussed in more depth elsewhere, there is also a need for an inquiry into **“why the Senedd has refused to interact with certain groups and allow this issue to fester. That’s how we do this, I feel.”**

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

12.1 WEN Wales has included as list of international best practice in relation to quotas in the briefing in the appendix of this document. These include:

- i. **Croatia** has legally binding quotas and uses incentives - for each MP representing an underrepresented gender, political parties receive an **additional 10 per cent of the amount envisaged** per individual MP;
- ii. **Bosnia and Herzegovina**: where 10 per cent of the funding provided to political parties is distributed to parties in proportion to the number of seats held by MPs of the gender which is less represented in the legislature.
 - a. One member has also recommends “Intersectionality, recruitment and Section: Ethnic Minority Candidates in Dutch parties”¹¹ by Liza M Mügge, suggesting that **“qualitative research would be a good move including overseas research in other European countries.”** Others have highlighted Scotland – which has many ethnic minority MSPs and MPs, Iceland, Rwanda, Sweden, Finland – where younger women lead all the political parties and other Scandinavian countries, Basque Country (see WEF index).
 - b. Another member stated that **“in India there have been reservations in public office and employment in public sector workforce since Indian independence. The success has been mixed and those not in beneficiary group resent reservations. However, I think it has given minorities confidence to stand for election and a greater believe in their right to have a say. It is a flawed system but in principle it’s good and in practice better than not having it.”**

13. Implementing change: 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?

13.1 WEN Wales supports the use of legislative quotas with either incentives or sanctions for compliance. As one member states **“political parties must be forced to do this. 100 years since some women secured the vote. Time has shown us it will not happen voluntarily by political parties.”**

¹¹ <https://academic.oup.com/pa/article-abstract/69/3/512/2240751>

13.2 Respondents from WEN Wales' membership had mixed opinions on this issue, some stating, **“voluntary has not worked... legislate”** and **“if you want to change things, the change will be quicker if you just enforce it.”** Others felt that here was time to use voluntary measures – some suggesting **“but time limited, say 3/5 years”** and others **“Perhaps introduce and monitor other measures first, and then bring in legislation if necessary.”**

13.1 WEN Wales strongly believes that it will be necessary to legislate. One member has suggested **“Things should definitely be tried on a voluntary basis (but not exhausted) – this could happen while legislation is being developed and passed (like happened with Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – some Local Authorities agreed to pilot different parts of the legislation a year before it was enacted).”**

14. Implementing change: Which voluntary or legislative measures to encourage the election of a more diverse Senedd would make the biggest impact, and which measures should be prioritised?

14.1 **“Best to set up a project specifically designed to do this and choose leadership who are qualified and passionate about this subject, not necessarily simply getting paid to do ta job. Someone who is from a minority group(s) to head it up. There will need to be budget to produce video footage, education in comprehensive schools and universities, literature, a website and advertising. It sounds like an exciting project!” WEN Wales member**

14.2 Several members have called for a project or inquiry focusing specifically on this question, that could look at why these groups have been ignored for so long. Others have highlighted the need for a wider cultural change, addressing wider **“discrimination in society, particularly poverty and quotas might help.”** Many respondents have listed quotas here, as well as publishing equality data and **“getting out into communities, education, and “more active engagement and communication with underrepresented groups which is valuable and not just a PR opportunity.”**

14.3 Others have suggested that the Senedd needs to meet across Wales and take its business to the people. One member urges that decisions are not made to **“introduce voluntary measures as they won't be adhered too”** but instead calls for **“insisting on legislative measures to ensure 50:50 female to male candidates in winnable constituencies and regions.”** They have also raised the need to think specifically about women with childcare responsibilities.

14.4 Further discussions around equal representation and leadership can be found in our [Feminist Scorecard 2020](#)¹², launched on 21st April 2020.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

¹² <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Feminist-Scorecard-Report-2020-Eng.pdf>

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Appendix 1:

BRIEFING PAPER

The case for quotas to deliver equal and diverse representation

1. WEN Wales favours an electoral system that results in gender balance or ‘Equal Power and Equal Voice’ in the Senedd and in Local Government in Wales. The system must also ensure that the voices of those with protected characteristics are represented. **We therefore support the use of legally binding prescriptive gender quotas with sanctions or incentives.**
2. WEN Wales supports the findings of the Expert Panel on Senedd Electoral Reform, who support the Single Transferable Vote with **the integration of gender quotas into the system.**
3. WEN Wales believes that women’s participation and the success of women as candidates in elections are vital indicators of the health of a representative democracy, and an integral part of achieving a more equal Wales, in line with the ambitions of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
4. Gender quotas should be enforced through legislation, and not just through voluntary measures as we believe we need to ‘bake in’ gender equality into our electoral system or we will continue to see reductions in numbers of woman AMs, low number of women as Councillors and a lack of diversity of political representatives too.

Evidence supporting quotas

5. Research shows that quotas are the **“single most effective tool for ‘fast tracking’ women’s representation in elected bodies for government.”**¹³
6. Among the twenty Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) countries registering the sharpest growth in the proportion of women in parliament during the last decade...**half had introduced legal quotas. By contrast, among the twenty OSCE countries lagging behind in growth... none had implemented legal quotas.**¹⁴
7. There is international backing for gender quotas. Various international institutions, including the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination (**CEDAW**), the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU and the Council of Europe support their use.
8. **Ireland** has successfully used quotas requiring that at least 30 per cent of the candidates each party stands nationally are female (rising to 40 per cent after seven years). **The percentage of women candidates increased 90 per cent at the 2016**

¹³ Drude Dahlerup et al., *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], IPU and Stockholm University, 2013.

¹⁴ Norris, P. and Krook, M. for OSCE, *Gender equality in elected office: a six-step action plan*, 2011

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election compared to the 2011 election, with a corresponding **40 per cent increase in the number of women elected** – 35 in 2016 compared with 25 in 2011.¹⁵

9. **100 Countries** world-wide now have some form of gender quotas in place and 40 also use them for intersectional groups such as BAME women.
10. A report published by the United Nations in 2012 found that **out of the 59 countries that held elections in 2011, 17 of them had quotas**. In those countries, women **gained 27% of parliamentary seats compared to 16% in those without**.¹⁶

Types of Quota

11. Different types of gender quota have been used in different countries, depending on the electoral system and local circumstances. The Expert Panel on Electoral reform¹⁷ describes the three main types as:
 12. **Candidate quotas which introduce a 'floor'** for the proportion of male or female candidates a party stands for election. These could be applied in the form of constituency twinning for First Past The Post (FPTP) seats. They could also be applied to multimember systems such as STV or Flexible List at a constituency or a national level. Parties in Scandinavia, Spain and Austria have voluntarily adopted similar quotas, ranging from 33 per cent to 50 per cent.
 13. Requirements for **the ordering of candidates on any list** element of the system. Voluntary quotas of this nature have been used by parties in Wales in Senedd elections, for example zipping of regional candidate lists. (i.e. listing candidates alternately according to their gender)
 14. **'Reserved seats'** to which only female candidates could be elected. This type of quota is widely used in South Asia, the Arab region and sub Saharan Africa.

Examples of Incentives used:

15. **Croatia** has legally binding quotas and uses incentives - for each MP representing an underrepresented gender, political parties receive an **additional 10 per cent of the amount envisaged** per individual MP;
16. **Bosnia and Herzegovina**: where 10 per cent of the funding provided to political parties is distributed to parties in proportion to the number of seats held by MPs of the gender which is less represented in the legislature.
17. **Two for the price of one deposits** for two candidates of different genders could be used in Wales —this would appear to us to be proportionate in the context of seeking

¹⁵ Brennan, M. and Buckley, F. 'The Irish legislative gender quota: the first election', *Administration*, vol 65(2), May 2017

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/aug/20/quotas-women-parliament-authors-edinburgh-book-festival>

¹⁷ *A Parliament that works for Wales, Report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, November 2017*

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to ensure that the gender balance in the Senedd reflects the gender balance in the communities it serves.¹⁸

What needs to happen next

18. After decades of campaigning by NGOs to make change, women – who make up 52% of the population in Wales - still do not have equality in terms of representation in politics. In Welsh local government just 28% of local councillors, four of the 22 council leaders (18%) and 27% of Council Cabinet members are women. One local authority cabinet is 100% male. At the rate of change to date, gender balance in Welsh councils is unlikely before 2073.
19. We have a unique window of opportunity to progress the diversity and equality of representation agenda and push for legislative and party political change to enshrine diversity into our political system for years to come. Wales is at a tipping point and, with legislative quotas, Wales could lead the way and be a trail blazer in terms of showing the rest of the UK how quotas can be used.

Political Context:

20. In 2017 the Wales Act devolved power to Wales to have control over its own electoral system. An expert panel on Senedd reform, Chaired by Prof. Laura McAllister and appointed by the Llywydd (Presiding Officer) recommended introducing gender quotas for the 2021 Senedd elections as part of a new electoral system with STV or Flexible List PR, lowering the age of voting to 16 and changing the name of the Welsh Assembly to Senedd Cymru.
21. This resulted recently in 'Phase 1' of the Electoral Reform legislation - The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill however it was not bold enough in tackling equality and diversity partly as the Presiding officer felt there was not sufficient public support, though it extended the franchise to 16 year olds. The Liberal Democrats said it is an "important step" that will "ensure the voices of young people are heard within Welsh politics and help us create a better Welsh democracy."
22. Phase 2 of the reforms are likely to take place after the May 2021 elections and will include looking at the electoral system and the enlarging of the Senedd. **We see the legislation on quotas as being a perfect fit with this reform Bill as it goes hand in hand with STV and an enlarged Senedd.**

Conclusion

23. WEN Wales believes that legally binding quotas, with sanctions or incentives, are essential to ensure we do not continue to see a reduction in the numbers of women AMs elected to the Senedd and the continuation of low numbers of women elected in Local councils.

¹⁸ A Parliament that works for Wales, Report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, November 2017

We are calling for:

- 1) All Political Parties to include a commitment to legally binding quotas in their Manifestos for the 2021 elections**
- 2) The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill and forthcoming legislation on Reform of the Senedd should include provisions on legally binding quotas.**

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