

# BRIEFING PAPER

## April 2022

# JOB-SHARING FOR SENEDD MEMBERS

## BACKGROUND

Job-sharing is a way of working which usually involves two people sharing the workload and responsibilities of a full-time job. This can provide better work-life flexibility and improve diversity in the workplace as it enables women, disabled people, and people with wider caring responsibilities to progress in the [world of work](#).

Job-sharing has existed in the UK since the 1940s and came to wider attention in 1987, when the then Secretary of State for Education and Science promoted job-sharing as a way to increase teacher numbers in [schools](#). Since then, job-sharing has increased across many professions. A 2004 [survey](#) showed that job-sharing was available to 41% of employees (up from 31% in 1998). A 2012 [study](#) shows the figure at 43%, with it disproportionately being used by women with dependent children. In 2021, there were 122,000 people on job-share agreements in the United Kingdom.

## JOB-SHARING IN POLITICS

The report of the [Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#), published in 2017, highlighted the benefits of job-sharing in increasing diversity of representation, particularly for older candidates, disabled candidates and those with caring responsibilities.

Following the Expert Panel, the Fifth Senedd [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#) considered job-sharing in further detail in its [2020 report](#). The Committee distinguished two potential types of job-sharing in the Senedd:

- 1. Non-executive job-sharing**, where two or more people are jointly elected to share a single elected office.
- 2. Executive job-sharing**, where responsibilities of an executive post like cabinet member are shared between two or more elected representatives.

The Committee found that both types of job-sharing could help to remove barriers to political office in the Senedd and recommended that:

***“A cross-party working group should be established early in the Sixth Senedd to explore in detail the feasibility of enabling election on the basis of job sharing and/or executive job sharing within the Welsh Government or other Senedd offices such as Llywydd, Commissioner, committee chair, or business manager.*”**

**The role of the working group should be to consider in detail and make recommendations to the Senedd on:**

- **How any political or public concerns relating to democratic accountability or transparency might be addressed.**
- **How practical issues and obstacles might be overcome.**
- **Developing a pilot scheme at Senedd, local authority or community council level.**
- **The approach to engaging the public in respect of these issues.”**

The report acknowledges that, while executive job-sharing in political office was emerging internationally (e.g. in Ireland) and in local governments in Wales, they were not aware of examples of non-executive job-sharing or election on the basis of job-sharing. At the time of writing this briefing, we could not identify any examples of job-sharing at parliamentary level in the UK or abroad.

So far, political parties’ attempts at standing job-share candidates have been rejected by Returning Officers. A joint candidacy on a [regional list](#) in the first Scottish Parliament elections in 1999 was turned down on the grounds that the seat was for an individual person. The [most recent attempt at job-sharing](#) by two Green Party members in the 2015 UK general election was equally rejected, as it sought to nominate the women jointly in a single [candidacy](#).

In both cases, candidates legally challenged the Returning Officers decision but were unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The judgement in the most recent High Court case implied that it was the role of Parliament to [resolve these matters](#), but to date this has not happened.

In an interview with Radio Cymru in 2021, Expert Panel Chair Professor Laura McAllister echoed that Wales could be ‘pioneers’ in job-sharing and set an example to other countries and institutions of what is possible.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these challenges, calls in support of job-sharing in politics have continued. In 2018, the [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#) identified job-sharing as one of the [simple changes](#) public bodies can make to further the well-being goal A More Equal Wales through encouraging a more diverse range of people to enter politics.

<sup>1</sup> Belcher, A., & Ross, A. (2001). The case for job-sharing elected representatives. *Edinburgh Law Review*, 5(3), 380-393.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Cymru interview, ‘Sefydli Newid’, October 2021.

## JOB-SHARING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Executive job-sharing has been used in recent years in several councils in England and Wales.

In Wandsworth Council, Fleur Anderson, now a Labour MP, and her colleague Candida Jones were joint Deputy Leaders of the Labour Group. They argue that job-sharing should be open to all councillors, not only women, and can help ensure that council chambers better reflect the demographics of the electorate.

In Lambeth, two men share the role of Cabinet Member for Healthier and Stronger Communities. Job-sharing has also taken place in Bath and Bristol Councils within Cabinet roles.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2019 enables job-sharing amongst executive members of principal councils in Wales to encourage greater diversity.

Swansea Council introduced job-sharing in 2017 before legislation came in place and has since used it for various cabinet roles, all of which have been held by women. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) advised that they were not aware of other councils in Wales that had implemented job-sharing but guidance had been provided to all councils.<sup>3</sup>

**The Welsh Government states that job share measures were introduced as:**

*“increasing the diversity of elected members helps councils to better represent the communities they serve, by bringing a wider range of views and experiences to the table. This will help ensure local government in Wales deliver better public services for everyone, helping people who need support when and where they need it most”.*

## THE BENEFITS OF JOB-SHARING

The reports of both the Expert Panel and the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform recognise the benefits of job-sharing for diversity of representation, in particular representation of women, disabled people, older people, people with caring responsibilities and those who wished to continue to work in a paid or voluntary capacity.

The Committee’s report also highlights potential benefits for the legislature and constituents. Job-sharing could deliver “two for the price of one” in terms of skills and experience and it could enable members to retain better connections to their life outside the Senedd which can be relevant to scrutiny and representative work.

Politicians with experience in job-sharing or diversity and equality have echoed these points. Fleur Anderson MP for Putney said it could aid young professionals to go into politics:

**“People can balance their work and their role in the community. It could go some way to addressing class issues, as it would allow for an in-built mentoring system, and allow people to build and develop confidence in their roles. The job share pair can be a sounding board for one another, sharing questions and insecurities with one another.”<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> Email exchange with the WLGA, January 2022

<sup>4</sup> Zoom meeting with Fleur Anderson MP and Candida Jones, 11 February 2022.

The experience of Mohammed Seedat, Cabinet Member for Healthier and Stronger Communities, suggests job-sharing can also provide mentoring opportunities that enable candidates from underrepresented groups to progress into senior roles.

**“Job sharing with a more experienced Cabinet member has meant I have benefited from a mentoring role. [...] I would never have put my name forward if the role hadn’t been available as a job share.”**

This is also the view of Patience Bentu, an activist in the Labour party in South Wales. She said politics has many barriers for women, much more so for Black and ethnic minority women. She would not hesitate to stand for election to the Senedd should job-share be made available.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, job-sharing can provide a sense of team work and help with developing ideas, according to Louise Gibbard, who shares the Cabinet role for Supporting Communities in Swansea.

**“Two people are in close communication on topics of interest and share work where possible. We are able to represent one another at events and meetings, and co-work on projects. It can aid a sense of understanding and trust by working with a person with similar values and aims. It allows for people to clarify decisions they make as they must consult with another colleague on a regular basis.”<sup>6</sup>**

## PUBLIC VIEWS ON JOB-SHARING

According to polling research from 2013, public attitudes on job-sharing in parliamentary elections tend to differ, but come out predominantly in favour once people are presented with the benefits of job-sharing for different groups of people.

Without further information, equal parts of respondents (about 37%) were in favour and against, and a quarter answered “don’t know” when asked whether job-sharing was a good idea and whether respondents would be willing to vote for job-sharing candidate team. When participants received information on the key benefits of job-sharing, such as the promotion of women, disabled candidates, and candidates with children, levels of support rose as high as 48%, with less than a third being against.

This suggests that any future legislation on job-sharing in the Senedd can gather wide public support if the rationale and benefits of such a proposal are communicated clearly and transparently.

### PUBLIC SUPPORT

Once they understood the key benefits

**48% supported job-sharing**

Overall, support levels were especially high among:

- Women
- 18-24 year-olds
- 25-39 year-olds
- Labour Party supporters
- Liberal Democratic Party supporters<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Radio Cymru interview, ‘Sefydlu Newid’. October 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Councillor Louise Gibbard, 14 January 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Parties considered in the study were Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives and UKIP.

## HOW JOB-SHARING CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE SENEDD

The [Expert Panel report](#) recommended that job-share partners should be treated “as if they were one person”, a central tenet which was also reflected in the evidence taken by the [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#). Previous work on Senedd electoral reform discussed practical considerations for introducing job-sharing in the Senedd, including election, early termination of elected office, remuneration, employment and voting and workload arrangements.

### THE EXPERT PANEL 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.”

#### Election

The Panel emphasised that candidates need to clearly communicate the terms of their job-sharing agreement to voters. According to academic experts [Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs](#), job-sharing candidates should stand as a joint candidate with agreed priorities, goals and working arrangements in place prior to selection. They should be elected jointly through a single, shared vote to retain job-sharers as a “single legal entity” as one joint candidate on the election paper (rather than two half-votes, as proposed by the unsuccessful [Representation of the People \(Members’ Job Share\) Bill](#)).

#### Elected office

If one job-share partner left their elected office through resignation, suspension or death, the other partner would also lose their elected office. [Professor Sarah Childs](#) advised that, if the resulting casual vacancy was filled through by-elections, the remaining job-share partner could contest their seat either individually or with a different partner, but this would not be possible if the vacancy was filled by countback (as recommended by the Expert Panel for STV) or appointment from the list (as in the regional element of the Senedd’s current MMP/AMS voting system). If a Senedd Member in a job-share wished to defect to another party, then both politicians would need to defect, or this would trigger a by-election or the selection of another candidate on any potential list system.

#### Remuneration and financial support

The [Expert Panel](#) recommended that job-sharing Members should not give rise to any additional costs beyond those of a single Senedd Member. The [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#) suggested there may be limitations to this, for example with regard to home broadband or residential support allowance, and appropriate arrangements for governance and publication arrangements would need to be put in place. [Professor Childs](#) emphasised that any additional costs from job-sharing were unlikely to be “so huge that they would not be a price worth paying for a better democracy” through a more diverse legislature – a principle that was already reflected in allowances for costs related to impairments or caring responsibilities.

## Employing staff

Arrangements would need to be put in place with regard to job-sharing members' role as employers of staff. Members may have to form a formal partnership to employ staff jointly, which could result in additional legal obligations, and accountability issues would need to be taken into consideration if only one partner was responsible for employing staff. The [Committee report](#) highlights that such arrangements are commonplace in other sectors such as GP surgeries and have been used in political groups in the Scottish Parliament.

## Workload and voting

Academic experts argue that working arrangements on a job-share are [best agreed between partners](#), rather than prescribed from outside, to accommodate their different personal circumstances as well as their [constituents' expectations](#). This could include models where partners work on different parts of the week, different months or on different aspects of their role (e.g. Senedd vs constituency business) and could draw on best practice from [senior level job-shares in other sectors](#). Job-sharers would need to put in place arrangements for voting (discussion before voting, party whip, group vote) and a clear strategy for workload. One option would be voting on the basis of a rota, timetabling each partner's turn to vote on legislation and debates as a full member each turn. The Committee cautioned that job-shares could be used by political parties to increase capacity by expecting job-sharing partners to deliver more than the workload of an individual full-time member. Job-sharers needed to provide clarity on their roles and responsibilities and be open and transparent with their partners, other members and the electorate to ensure their work was carried out in line with agreed arrangements.

## Managing political differences

[Academic expert witnesses](#) argued that candidates would normally discuss and seek to align their views before entering a job-sharing agreement. Where political differences did arise in elected office, managing these would not substantially differ from managing differences within a political party, and similar mechanisms of discussion, negotiation and whipping could be used. If job-sharing partners disagreed on matters of conscience in a Plenary vote, they could abstain and procedural mechanisms could be introduced to facilitate formal abstention or enable job-sharing Members to record differences in position.

## Legislative competence

In terms of competency to pass legislation on job-sharing Emyr Lewis, Law Professor at Aberystwyth University, said that such legislation would likely be in competence of the Senedd as it relates to Senedd elections and would also fall within an exception to the reservation on equal opportunities, regarding "the encouragement (other than by prohibition or regulation) of equal opportunities, and in particular of the observance of the equal opportunity requirements."<sup>8</sup>

New ideas for future electoral processes are currently being considered as part of [Stage 2 of the Senedd reform process](#). We recommend:

- **The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform should make a policy recommendation to the Welsh Government for a change in legislation that permits job-sharing candidates in the next Senedd election**, which could be explored as the reform bill is being prepared.
- **Encourage executive job-sharing in local government to be used by a wide range of elected members**, not only women.

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