



DLG 16

Ymchwiliad i amrywiaeth ym maes llywodraeth leol

Inquiry into diversity in local government

Ymateb gan: Comisiwn Cydraddoldeb a Hawliau Dynol

Response from: Equality and Human Rights Commission

Response of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Consultation:

Consultation details

Title:	Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government
Source of consultation:	National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
Date:	September 2018

For more information please contact

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Introduction

The Commission welcomes the Committee's Inquiry into diversity in local government in Wales.

In 2015, our 'Is Wales Fairer?'¹ report noted that women, disabled people, young people, people from ethnic minorities, people from religious minorities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people remain under-represented at all levels of politics in Wales.

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/wales-fairer-2015>

In January 2017, our ‘Who Runs Wales?’ report² examined the diversity at all levels of politics in Wales. The report found that only 26% of councillors, and 9% of council leaders, across Wales were women.

The report found considerable variation across Wales’ 22 local authorities. Anglesey had the lowest proportion of councillors who were women, with just 10%. Wrexham, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil all had less than 20%. As was the case in 2014, the three councils with the highest proportion of councillors who were women were Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea with 38% and Cardiff with 35%.

In our report, we were unable to provide information on people with other protected characteristics as this data is not consistently available across Wales.

The Local Government elections held in May 2017 resulted in little progress being made, with the total percentage of female councillors in Wales increasing to only 28%.

The Local Government Candidates Survey 2017³ showed that 33% of candidates were women, 47% were aged 60 or over, 1.8% were from an ethnic minority background, 66% were Christian, 7.1% were lesbian, gay or bisexual and only 12% of candidate were disabled people.

The Commission’s upcoming research on diversity in politics

Later this year, the Commission is to publish a report which examines the available data on the diversity of candidates and elected representatives at UK, national and local level elections and identify limitations and gaps. Where data existed, it analysed six protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This report will make a range of recommendations to improve the collection of diversity data in politics. We will share this research with you during the course of your Inquiry.

The Commission in Wales is also about to commission research to develop further our understanding of the experiences of women, disabled people, trans people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds in relation to standing for election. This research will examine barriers and pose solutions identifying recommendations aimed at increasing the diversity of politicians in Wales. In particular, this research will explore opportunities arising from the

² <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/who-runs-wales-2017>

³ <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>

Wales Act 2017's devolution of legislative competence over electoral arrangements to the National Assembly for Wales.

Pathways to Politics

In 2011, the Commission published research⁴ that explored the relationship between common pathways into politics and under representation of groups protected by the Equality Act (2010).

The study looked at Members of the House of Commons, the House of Lords, Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, the London Assembly and European Parliament. Local Government representatives were not directly included in the report, but many of those interviewed had experience of being a councillor as part of their pathway. Many of the barriers identified are common across political institutions.

The report highlighted many factors that prevent people entering politics. These include:

- The personal and financial costs of being in politics can be high and act as a barrier to those seeking involvement. This is a particular concern for those in underrepresented groups, who are disproportionately concentrated in lower income social groups.
- The perceived ideal candidate is often male, white, middle aged, middle class and professional, often reflecting the characteristics of those selecting candidates and of previously successful candidates. The informal, unwritten rules and conventions governing politics, including ‘knowing how to play the game’, work to exclude those who do not meet this model of the archetypal candidate.
- Established cliques and systems of informal patronage within parties have the effect of reinforcing existing under-representation.
- Individuals from under-represented groups reported being asked inappropriate questions by their political party which, they felt, would not have been asked of other candidates. For example, women were asked about their family and marital situation and ethnic minorities asked about their religion or belief.

More information from Pathways to Politics is appended at Annex 1.

Once our latest research is published we would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss the recommendations in the context of your inquiry, should this be considered helpful.

⁴ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-65-pathways-to-politics.pdf>

About the Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006. It operates independently to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote human rights. It contributes to making and keeping Britain a fair society in which everyone, regardless of background, has an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. The Commission enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and is accredited by the UN as an 'A status' National Human Rights Institution. Find out more about the Commission's work at: www.equalityhumanrights.com.

Annex 1 – Extracts from Pathways to Politics:

Prevent factors identified by protected characteristic:

- Women felt a perception remained that they lacked the appropriate gravitas and authority in politics. They perceived themselves to face a double bind of being seen as either not assertive enough or overly pushy. Their personal appearance was more of an issue than for men while their caring and domestic responsibilities limited their opportunities and were scrutinised by political parties. Women in national politics found it difficult to establish a work-life balance.
- A widespread lack of understanding persists about disability and the difficulties faced by disabled people in seeking selection and election. A lack of awareness and understanding about disability at the local party level was also identified, including by selection panels. Barriers include negative attitudes towards disability and obstacles that prevent disabled people's full participation in political life and discourage them from getting involved. Respondents felt that the public and the media wrongly perceived disability as inability.
- Ethnic minority candidates felt they were viewed by party selectors as more acceptable in areas with a relatively high ethnic minority population.
- Some politicians suggested there were few barriers to political participation by lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) people. However, there was evidence that LGB people seeking elected office still contend with homophobia not only from the media, but also from their own and other political parties. LGB politicians are often not visible as part of an under-represented group, unless they choose to disclose their sexual orientation.
- There are no openly trans politicians currently in local or national politics. Barriers to trans people participating in politics include outright hostility and a lack of understanding about their lives. While trans politics has seen development, the community is small and lacks capacity to support trans candidates.
- Age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and social background can intersect to create multi-dimensional identities. This inter-sectionality can present greater

barriers to people's involvement in national politics, for example, for younger mothers, ethnic minority women and lesbians.

The role of political parties

- Despite ideological and historical differences between political parties in addressing under-representation, there was evidence of a 'disconnect' between the rate of progress and leadership shown at the national level and a change in outcomes and attitudes at the local level.
- Recruitment of a more diverse party membership is a key step to encouraging more diverse candidates.
- Mentoring, informal peer networks and the activity of established interest and lobby groups were positive ways in which parties could, and sometimes did, use to recruit, elect and retain under-represented members.

The way forward

The report's findings suggest focusing on three areas to promote diversity in representation:

- re-frame the debate to include the positive electoral consequences of having more diverse candidates;
- open up pathways and the political recruitment process; and
- initiate debate on electoral reform and diversity, responding to opportunities for change.

The report states:

'(An) effective framing of the arguments about diversity would acknowledge that fielding more diverse candidates and supporting under-represented groups has potential electoral consequences in individual constituencies, and at an aggregate level. A re-framing needs to include discussion and better empirical data so that political parties can take effective action to improve their electoral appeal to a diverse electorate.

'For candidates from under-represented groups who do put themselves forward, the barriers to their success are high, the pathways available are narrow, and the support they receive from institutions is limited. Significant change is needed to address this.

‘Push, pull and prevent factors act to reinforce each other. Reform needs to happen at many levels to widen opportunities to participate in politics, broaden existing pathways and potentially create new routes.

‘Arguably, sustained and radically positive action and systematic change as well as education and training to influence attitudes are needed to improve outcomes and address under-representation.’⁵

⁵ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-65-pathways-to-politics.pdf>