



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Diversity and inclusion guidance for registered political parties: appendix

Why the Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life.

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Introduction

The Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life and to advancing the rights of, and outcomes for, people from underrepresented groups, including those with protected characteristics and those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. This includes advancing rights of political participation contained in international human rights treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Welsh Government wants to create ‘a more equal Wales’ for all ([The Well-being of Future Generations](#)), including supporting equality for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people ([Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#)), disabled people ([Disability Rights Taskforce](#)), and members of LGBTQ+ communities ([LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#)), as well as advancing gender equality ([Advancing gender equality: action plan](#)).

The Welsh Government’s Socio-Economic Duty ([Socio-economic Duty: an overview](#)), introduced in 2021, aims to improve outcomes for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. This includes requiring those making strategic decisions to consider the experiences of people impacted by socio-economic disadvantage, ensuring that individuals are consulted, and that positive changes are made.

In 2022, the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units were established by the Welsh Government to help embed considerations of equality throughout all evidence across the Government. Having reliable and useable evidence is essential to understand the systemic inequalities citizens in Wales face and address the deep-rooted issues which adversely impact those with protected and related characteristics. The Units’ priorities have been developed with stakeholders based on existing commitments including requirements from the

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Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, Disability Rights Taskforce, Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan, the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, and other key Welsh Government plans and strategies.

It is well evidenced that people with certain protected characteristics are more likely to experience socio-economic disadvantage (**Evidence review: socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome**), therefore it is not always sufficient or appropriate to consider one element, or one type of barrier, in isolation. The reasons for underrepresentation are often complex and multilayered, and some people may have intersecting characteristics which can result in multiple barriers being faced. This must be borne in mind when developing and implementing policies aimed at supporting greater diversity and inclusion.

The Welsh Government's overall aim is reflected in the fifth of its National Equality Objectives, which is to 'create a Wales where everyone from the full diversity of backgrounds can participate in public life, have their voices heard and see themselves reflected in leadership positions' (**Written Statement: Achieving an equitable Wales: The National Equality Objectives 2024-28**). These objectives were developed in collaboration with people with lived experience of facing discrimination and inequality and provide a foundation for our work to eliminate inequality, promote equality and celebrate diversity.

Being able to reflect the languages of Wales is also an important part of realising the vision of democratic institutions that are representative of the population. **Cymraeg 2050: a Million Welsh speakers** underpins the Welsh Government's plans in respect of increasing the number of Welsh language speakers in the future. For the language to thrive in our society, it is vital to have positive role models in positions of power and influence actively using the language to conduct business, including in democratically elected bodies in Wales.

It is within this wider strategic context that the Welsh Government is keen to see all the faces of Wales, and to hear all the voices of Wales, reflected in the

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democratic institutions that make the decisions that ultimately define how we live our lives and impact on us on a daily basis.

Why is diversity good for democracy

Diversity, in all its forms, has the potential to increase the legitimacy of our democratic institutions. It can lead to better decision-making due to a greater range of views and experiences, and better outcomes with improved scrutiny of policy, spending and legislation. It also follows that the more representative our elected Members are, the more confidence and trust there will be in our democratic systems. Several recent reports relating to Senedd reform have concluded that the selection and election of a more diverse Senedd would enhance its capacity to effectively and authentically represent the people of Wales.

In terms of understanding how diversity can benefit the democratic process, there is a considerable body of research and evidence relating to the contribution which women bring to public office. This is particularly relevant to Part 3 of the guidance for political parties.

There is research, for example, to indicate that women, when elected to democratic institutions, prioritise policy issues relating to women, the family, and civil society, such as education and healthcare (**Women Political Leaders: the impact of gender on democracy**, p.11, p.59) and that they can also bring an alternative perspective to policy areas traditionally seen as masculine, such as security and tax - of which women MPs in Westminster lobbying for the removal of VAT on sanitary products is one example (**The substantive representation of women: The case of the reduction of VAT on sanitary products**). There is evidence that women Members of the Senedd are more likely to ask questions regarding issues affecting women, such as childcare and women's health (**Power to the people? Tackling the gender imbalance in combined**

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authorities and local government).

Women politicians are found to bring different qualities to the role of being a representative, including when engaging with constituents. Evidence suggests that women tend to prioritise constituency work and are more likely to co-sponsor legislation with other women, including across the political divide, to progress areas of mutual interest relating to their gender such as policies affecting families and social society (**Women Political Leaders: the impact of gender on democracy**, p.8; **How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy?**, p.242).

Evidence indicates that when women are elected as a larger group, their presence can be a catalyst for change in the culture and working practices of the democratic body. For example, women have been observed to change the tone of debate from being combative to one of mutual respect (**The Impact of Women's Leadership in Public Life and Political Decision-making**, p.3). Women also tend to adopt more inclusive leadership styles which can reduce hierarchies (**Women Political Leaders: the impact of gender on democracy**, p.10) and nudge the elected body to adopt working practices (for example hybrid working or job-sharing) which better enable representatives to balance their political role with other responsibilities, such as caring or parenting duties (**The Impact of Women's Leadership in Public Life and Political Decision-making**, p.2). Such measures can change the perception of elected office, making it a more attractive career prospect for a broader range of people. Research also indicates that having more women candidates can drive a higher calibre of candidate overall, resulting in better quality politicians.

Importantly, having more women politicians has been shown to increase the legitimacy of democratic institutions, specifically amongst women voters. As a result of seeing women involved in the debates and the decision-making on policy affecting their lives, women are more likely to want to take an interest in politics (**The Politics of Presence**). This, along with having women in political leadership positions, provides important role models, which has the potential to

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encourage other women to feel empowered to put themselves forward (**Power to the people? Tackling the gender imbalance in combined authorities and local government**, p.38).

What we know about the barriers to elected office

There is a common theme of historical underrepresentation of certain groups of people across politics in Wales and the UK. For some of these people, and especially for those who may identify with more than one group, the journey into politics can present a range of hurdles (**Evidence review: socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome**). A person's background, education, experiences, occupation, financial circumstances, access to information and networks, for example, can be contributing factors in defining a person's journey into politics, or whether they would consider going into politics in the first place.

There is a growing body of research on the barriers to elected office faced by underrepresented groups. This can include financial, cultural, political, social, institutional, structural and physical barriers to participation.

Unpacking Diversity: Barriers and incentives to standing for election to the National Assembly for Wales, published by Cardiff University in 2018, explored barriers faced by prospective candidates for Assembly elections. The report found that some groups in society faced barriers in seeking selection as a candidate due to perceptions of what parties were looking for (stereotypes), the selection process, and unconscious bias. The report also found that a lack of transparency in nomination procedures was off-putting to aspiring candidates, especially those new to party politics.

The report found that age was also seen as a factor in candidate selection, with young people, in particular, identifying it as a barrier. Women were considerably

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more likely to view certain barriers as significant, particularly personal and family safety, and heavy workload.

It was also noted in the report that candidate selection processes are seen as a major obstacle to the selection of ethnic minority individuals because 'parties tend to hold the perception that ethnic minority candidates lose votes among white voters' ([Unpacking Diversity](#)).

Research was also commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2021 on removing barriers to elected office for people with certain protected characteristics. The report was published in 2022 and presents a theory of change ([Removing barriers to elected office for people with protected characteristics: theory of change](#)) for improving representation and diversity in local and national politics in Wales.

This research found there was a financial barrier to participation for people with certain protected characteristics, from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and people with caring responsibilities, as political parties may not cover campaign costs for individuals. Women were also found to be 'more likely to have caring responsibilities, work part-time, and take career breaks to raise children' compared to men ([Removing barriers to elected office for people with protected characteristics: theory of change](#)).

The report specifically identified incumbency as a barrier that resulted in fewer opportunities for candidates with protected characteristics. It was also reported that selection processes in local government can be biased towards people with certain protected characteristics.

A research paper published by Race Alliance Wales ([Do the right thing – achieving equity in racialised representation in public and political life in Wales](#)) took a similar view, referring to 'seat-blocking' as a process where an elected official seeks reappointment for their constituency or ward, meaning that space is not created for new individuals to pursue election. The paper goes on to state

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that where space is made for new candidates, it is often advertised internally to the party branch only and that greater transparency is needed regarding those processes.

In relation to LGBT+ candidates, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (**Building inclusive democracies**: A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes) found that the barriers faced by LGBT+ people could be categorised as structural, individual, organisational, and violence-related. The report highlights barriers such as a lack of political role models, stereotyped media coverage, exclusion from party candidate lists and harassment or violence against LGBT+ candidates and elected representatives. It also highlighted barriers such as political parties providing fewer resources and visible opportunities for their own LGBT+ candidates, and the high cost of election.

Disability and political representation: Analysing the obstacles to elected office in the UK, published in 2022, found that while disabilities are sometimes 'hidden', people wanting to be candidates for elected office might be reluctant to disclose them. They found that the proportion of disabled politicians lags behind 20%, which is the approximate proportion of disabled people in Great Britain.

The report identified specific barriers to elected office faced by disabled people, some of which were similar to those faced by women and ethnic minority candidates with a distinct set of additional barriers which they categorised as accessibility, resourcing, and ableism. Examples include:

- Inaccessible buildings and infrastructure for people with physical impairments that influence their mobility.
- Individuals with impairments affecting hearing, speech or vision often require adjustments in order to access information or for communication.
- Financial constraints being used to explain or justify why adjustments to improve accessibility were not made.
- An 'ableist culture' underpinning 'attitudes to both accessibility and

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resourcing’.

A report from the University of Bath in 2018 (**Barriers to women entering parliament and local government**) highlighted social and cultural barriers, referring to the white, middle class, and male-dominated environment of British politics as a major barrier to widening participation among women and other underrepresented groups. It referenced the continued role of women in assuming primary caring and household responsibilities, and the associated financial barriers to participation. The challenges of achieving an acceptable work-life balance due to the demands of long and irregular working practices were also noted.

The report also references a ‘disconnect’ between the national policies of political parties about attitudes to diversity and how they are interpreted and acted upon at a local level, as well as evidence of direct and indirect discrimination against women.

Addressing Barriers to Women's Representation in Party Candidate Selections refers to the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ in the political recruitment of women. The report argues that supply increases and decreases in response to political parties’ demand for women candidates. It also highlights concerns around harassment, abuse and intimidation of women candidates and elected Members, which may deter many potential women candidates from entering politics because of growing concerns of safety and the deteriorating political discourse.

Women Political Leaders: the impact of gender on democracy, p.42, published by the Global Institute for Women’s leadership at King’s College London and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, noted that, due to bias within party selectorates, women face additional barriers when attempting to be selected as an electoral candidate compared to men. Reviewing evidence presented in various studies, Dr Cowper-Cowles identifies ‘bias against women at the point of candidate selection’ to be a ‘major barrier to women’s entry into

politics’.

Another study by The Fawcett Society ([Strategies for success: Women’s experiences of selection and election in UK Parliament](#)) found evidence of ‘resistance from party members and the public to women as credible candidates’ and evidence of ‘explicit and implicit preferences amongst selectorates for male candidates’.

The Global Institute for Women’s leadership also suggests that ‘women are placed lower down on candidate lists than men or in positions that are more difficult to win’ in settings where closed list proportional electoral systems are used ([Women Political Leaders: the impact of gender on democracy](#), p.22). This issue was raised by The Electoral Reform Society in its [evidence to a Senedd scrutiny committee](#) when it presented its findings and modelling for gender quotas. They noted that whilst ‘winnable seats will be different for different parties, due to the new electoral system, it will require parties to play an active role in considering where to place women’. It was also noted that ‘as a result of 16 new constituencies, parties will need to reassess what is a winnable seat for them’ and therefore could factor in the placement of women as they carry out this exercise ([SCECLB2 – P Electoral Reform Society Cymru](#)).

What the Welsh Government is doing to facilitate more diversity in our democratic institutions

The Welsh Government has long recognised the importance of diversity at all levels of government, introducing measures to encourage people from all walks of life to consider standing for elected office. One example of this is the Diversity in Democracy Programme, which first launched in 2014, and seeks to increase the number of local government candidates from diverse backgrounds through mentoring and engagement with political parties. The introduction of family absence provisions within principal councils in Wales enables elected Members

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to balance their roles with family and other responsibilities.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced several provisions to increase diversity within councils. These included duties on councils to encourage local participation in decision-making, provisions for remote attendance at meetings, and the removal of barriers for job-sharing arrangements within council executives. Further work is underway to explore the extension of these arrangements to non-executive roles in councils.

In addition, the Welsh Government has established specific schemes, including the Access to Elected Office Fund to promote and enable greater diversity among those standing for election.

As part of the Welsh Government's ongoing campaign to promote greater diversity in elected office, we are introducing a number of important measures which will lead to changes in the Senedd and in local government through our recently enacted Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 and the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024.

As well as requiring the Welsh Ministers to publish this guidance, the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to provide services to promote diversity in the protected characteristics and socio economic circumstances. It also requires Welsh Ministers to provide for a scheme of financial assistance to help disabled candidates in a Welsh election overcome barriers to their participation in the election connected to their disability. In addition it provides a power for the Welsh Ministers to provide for financial assistance schemes to help candidates overcome barriers in connection with their specified characteristics and circumstances.

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 also makes changes to the format and engagement process in terms of the development and delivery of the survey of candidates required in connection with local government elections. The Local Election survey guidance will continue to evolve and incorporate

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lessons learned from each set of elections, including how to encourage greater participation in the survey to increase the rich feedback captured as part of the process.

Conclusion

It is clear from the research available that discrimination, inadequate support, and unfair treatment can hinder some people from participating in politics or seeking election. The Welsh Government wishes to address such barriers and increase opportunities for underrepresented groups to play a full role in supporting and representing their communities. Whilst it is recognised that there are wider issues at play, which are beyond the direct power of political parties, this guidance is intended to encourage parties to do what they can to play their part in working towards this shared objective.

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