

# Diversity and inclusion guidance for registered political parties

## ERS Cymru response

February 2025

*Part 1: Guidance for political parties about developing, publishing, implementing and regularly reviewing diversity and inclusion strategies for local and national Welsh elections*

**Question 1: The Welsh Government must specify the characteristics and circumstances for the purpose of Parts 1 and 2 of the guidance. What are your views on the specified characteristics and circumstances? For ease, they are listed here:**

- **Age\***
- **Disability\***
- **Race\***
- **Religion or belief\***
- **Sex\***
- **Sexual orientation\***
- **Trans status or history (including gender reassignment\*)**
- **Socio-economic background**
- **Health conditions**
- **Previous political experience**
- **Caring responsibilities**
- **Parental responsibility**
- **Language**

**\* Protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010**

We are broadly supportive of the characteristics and circumstances listed for the purpose of Parts 1 and 2 of the guidance. This appears to be consistent with the Local Government Candidate Survey, however we do believe there should be a balance between gathering the information needed and ensuring the survey isn't overly extensive, to maximise the number and usefulness of responses.

Research into the impact of survey length on response rate indicates that shorter surveys obtain a higher response rate. A number of staff members at ERS Cymru have tested the proposed template survey and found it to be under five minutes to complete on average, which we imagine would vary depending on the nature of an individual's response (i.e. if you have more protected characteristics to declare).

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**Question 2: Please indicate your level of agreement with the suggested actions for political parties to take to increase diversity and inclusion in Welsh elections?**

Strongly agree

**2a: Please explain your reasons for your rating of agreement with the suggested actions for political parties to take to increase diversity and inclusion in Welsh elections.**

We were supportive of the statutory gender quotas outlined in the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill and were disappointed with the Bill's withdrawal. As such, while these measures are not statutory we do welcome them. With no formal quotas being introduced, parties' actions to improve diversity and inclusion and the data around this are even more important.

However, we do remain concerned about the voluntary nature of these measures. They will only be effective if all parties returned to the Senedd in 2026 adopt them. We will be working with the parties to support them in this, alongside WEN Wales, Race Council Cymru and EYST Wales as part of the Diverse 50:50 campaign.

Yet, it is important to consider how wider support can be offered to political parties to help them to utilise these measures. With each party in theory taking on the same or similar measures, regardless of their size, there could be a central hub for information or support, potentially through the new Electoral Management Board of the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru.

**Question 3: Are there other things which you think political parties need to consider in developing, publishing, implementing and reviewing diversity and inclusion strategies for Welsh elections? If so, what?**

Parties must properly consider issues around data protection and anonymisation. Parties must ensure data is disaggregated so it does not easily identify individuals' complete responses. They should also ensure they have the structures to hold this data securely.

We are happy that this guidance is comprehensive and strikes the right balance between effective, if utilised properly, and hopefully not too overburdening for parties. However, parties' feedback should be a key part of considering this.

***Part 2: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections on collecting, collating and publishing diversity information relating to candidates and elected Members***

**Question 4: What are your views on the candidate survey questions in Part 2?**

We are broadly supportive of the candidate survey outlined in the template and in the draft guidance.

As outlined in our response to question 1, we are confident that this is consistent with the Local Government Candidate Survey, however are mindful that this should be balanced with something people will actually want to complete. Response rates for the Local Government Candidate Survey have historically been low ([12% in 2022](#)) and it is worth considering why this is. Any learning from low uptake of the Local Government Candidate Survey should be applied to this survey of candidates for the Senedd too.

Parties should be encouraged to use this template to ensure consistency and that when published, parties' performances around diversity and inclusion, in terms of the selection of their candidates, are easily accessible and comparable.

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**Question 5: Do you think the guidance will help political parties to collect, collate and publish diversity information on Senedd candidates?**

Yes - depending on uptake

**5a: Please explain why you think this guidance will / will not help political parties to collect, collate and publish diversity information on Senedd candidates.**

The lack of official data on the diversity of candidates and elected representatives is a significant issue that has yet to be addressed. Existing data around the diversity of candidates and Members of the Senedd is not based on official figures and this could go some way to addressing that.

The limited information currently available on the [diversity of the Senedd](#) is largely restricted to those elected as MSs and not the candidates that stood (apart from gender representation where some candidate data is available). This guidance on collecting, collating and publishing diversity information on Senedd candidates will help to provide an important missing link in the information chain. To understand where barriers to election lie we need both diversity information on those who stand as candidates and those who are then elected.

This allows parties and electoral stakeholders to identify barriers at specific stages of the process i.e. whether there are barriers in terms of candidate selection or candidate placement on lists.

It also allows for measuring the effectiveness of a party's strategy on diversity and inclusion. For example, the effectiveness of approaches taken around voluntary gender quotas.

This is the first time guidance has been developed centrally to help parties to collect, collate and publish diversity information on Senedd candidates. The reality is that it doesn't matter how strong the guidance is, due to its voluntary nature it is the uptake that will make it successful or not successful. The responsibility will be on political parties to implement these measures and ensure they are collecting and publishing this data.

In terms of the timescales on reporting back on diversity information gathered we are supportive of the six weeks proposed.

If parties do adopt the guidance it is worth considering how the guidance evolves over time after parties have used it and fed back. This should be a relatively iterative process.

Over the longer term the Welsh Government should engage the UK Government to see whether further powers could be devolved allowing for statutory measures around equalities in relation to elections to be implemented.

***Part 3: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections on voluntary quotas for women***

**6a: Please explain why you think this guidance will / will not support political parties to take appropriate steps to achieve better gender representation in the Senedd.**

We welcome the inclusion of voluntary quotas in the guidance, in lieu of the statutory quotas outlined in the now withdrawn Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill. While we remain disappointed that this Bill was withdrawn, if parties take voluntary quotas seriously they could have a big impact. Voluntary measures in Wales have had an impact on gender representation in the past. The relatively high levels in terms of the representation of women in the Senedd has historically been reliant on voluntary measures. These include political parties taking positive action around the selection of their candidates and the placement of these candidates in winnable constituencies or high on lists, for example through the use of All Women Shortlists and Zipping.

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This effect of voluntary measures impacting gender representation can be seen at the 2021 Senedd elections where [31% of candidates were women but 43% of elected MSs are women](#). This increase in women's elected representation compared with the candidate pool was in part due to positive action by specific parties, namely Welsh Labour, who returned 30 MSs, 17 (56.7%) of whom are women.

While this was a positive outcome for women's representation in the 6th Senedd, it is heavily reliant on specific parties winning seats. Continued levels of party representation can never be guaranteed at future elections, and with the new electoral system coming in for the 2026 Senedd elections the results are even more likely to be different, thus highlighting the importance of every party committing to voluntary quotas for women ahead of 2026.

The new Closed List electoral system will allow for quotas to be easily implemented but parties will have to think carefully about their placement of women candidates to ensure the representation of women in the Senedd does not backslide.

The three dimensions of quotas outlined in the guidance (representation threshold, vertical criteria and horizontal criteria) are vital and should be used by parties in combination to maximise the effectiveness of voluntary quotas. Parties should also consider polling and past performance (although difficult in the first Closed List elections in 2026) to also consider where winnable seats may be.

In the course of work around the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill ERS Cymru produced some modelling of the effects quotas might have if implemented.

This modelling shows that quotas, while likely to have a positive impact on the representation of women in the Senedd, still requires parties to play an active role in considering where to place women at the top of electoral lists.

This can be seen in more detail in [our written evidence to the Bill](#) and should be considered by political parties when selecting candidates.

The most significant factor in the success of the voluntary quotas will be uptake by the political parties. Unless all parties represented in the Senedd after 2026 use voluntary quotas, its success will be limited.

### **Question 7: Are there other measures you think political parties could take to achieve a gender balanced Senedd? If so, what?**

In terms of what else the political parties could do to help ensure a gender balanced Senedd we believe that timing is key. One issue likely to arise is that parties are already positioning candidates for 2026, even ahead of the final boundaries being published. That could put this guidance at risk of being published after the horse has already bolted. Parties should be playing an active role in the development of this guidance and having discussions within their leadership now ahead of any selections.

At the same time the Welsh Government should be playing their part in ensuring timely conversations with parties around this guidance and that it is published as soon as possible.

### ***Final comments***

### **Question 10: We have asked a number of questions in respect of the different parts of the guidance. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share with us on the guidance?**

We strongly welcome the publication of this draft guidance on diversity and inclusion. It is vital that the Senedd is properly representative and reflective of the people it serves. The Senedd has an important scrutiny function to undertake and a more diverse Senedd ensures that a wider range of lived experiences are taken into account on a day-to-day basis.

For this guidance to be effective, the political parties should engage and commit to implementing these processes.