



A PARLIAMENT THAT WORKS FOR WALES

The summary report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform

November 2017



INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



Today's Assembly is a very different institution to the one established in 1999, and devolution in Wales continues to develop. The Assembly is on the verge of becoming the Welsh Parliament. It will soon be operating on the basis of a new reserved powers model under the *Wales Act 2017*—with responsibilities for the first Welsh taxes in 800 years, including income tax-varying powers—and establishing its proper place in the UK's changing constitutional landscape.

Many who engage with and study the Assembly recognise that, with only 60 Members, it lacks the capacity it needs. This matters. Assembly Members have crucial roles to play in holding the Welsh Government to account, scrutinising and overseeing policy, legislation and spending, championing constituents' interests, and engaging the people of Wales in our maturing democracy. When these roles are fulfilled effectively, there is a real, direct and positive impact on the lives of people and their communities.

As an independent, impartial Panel, we have used our expertise and experience to conclude that a 60 Member Assembly does not have the capacity it needs to fulfil its responsibilities, now and in the future.

More Assembly Members are needed if the Assembly is to work effectively in meeting the scrutiny and legislative challenges and opportunities that it faces today as well as in the future. There is therefore a compelling case for a substantial increase in size.

I have no doubt that many will question whether money should be spent on more politicians at a time of austerity. However, as we explain in our report,

while the additional cost may be significant in absolute terms, it should be kept to a minimum and will represent a very small proportion of the money spent by the government that the Assembly oversees. We believe that even marginal improvements in the scrutiny of Welsh Government spending and policy decisions will reap significant dividends to the taxpayer.

Changing the Assembly's size also provides an opportunity to reform and revitalise the electoral system so that the Assembly better reflects the communities it serves. Similarly, giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote could become a powerful way to involve and engage the young people of Wales in our democracy, increasing their political awareness and participation now and in the future. After all, it is their future.

Calling for more politicians is unpopular. We understand that. Nevertheless, we believe that, as devolution in Wales enters its next phase, the Assembly cannot continue as it is without risking its ability to deliver for the people and communities it serves. This report is a call to action. From April 2018 the Assembly will finally have the powers it needs to address these issues itself, and to ensure that the 2021 election delivers a parliament that truly works for the people of Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. McAllister', with a horizontal line underneath.

Professor Laura McAllister CBE, FLSW, FRSA
Chair, Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform

THE EXPERT PANEL ON ASSEMBLY ELECTORAL REFORM WAS ESTABLISHED IN FEBRUARY 2017 TO PROVIDE ROBUST, POLITICALLY IMPARTIAL ADVICE TO THE LLYWYDD AND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION ON THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS THE ASSEMBLY NEEDS, THE MOST SUITABLE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, AND THE MINIMUM VOTING AGE FOR ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.



BACKGROUND

With effect from a Principal Appointed Day, expected to be 1 April 2018, the *Wales Act 2017* will give the Assembly powers over its size, electoral arrangements and franchise.

The Assembly Commission is leading work to explore how those powers could be exercised to ensure that the Assembly is an effective, forward-looking institution which delivers effectively for the people of Wales.

To this end, we were appointed by the Llywydd and Assembly Commission as an Expert Panel in February 2017, and tasked with reporting by autumn 2017. Our remit is to provide robust, politically impartial, and evidence-based advice on:

- ▶ The number of Members the Assembly needs;
- ▶ The electoral system by which they should be elected;
- ▶ The minimum voting age for Assembly elections.



EXPERT PANEL ON ASSEMBLY
ELECTORAL REFORM

CAPACITY AND SIZE OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Fourth Assembly Commission published a report in January 2015 on the capacity of the Assembly, and concluded that:

“With only 60 Members, the National Assembly is underpowered and overstretched.”

The Fifth Assembly Commission agrees with its predecessor, and in November 2016 the Llywydd announced the Commission's decision to take forward work to address the Assembly's capacity. We were tasked with providing advice on the number of Members the Assembly needs.



ISSUES WE CONSIDERED

The role and powers of the Assembly have increased significantly since 1999.

The pressures on the Assembly are very likely to continue to increase as a result of a move to a reserved powers model of devolution, the devolution of taxation and borrowing powers (including income tax-varying powers), further devolution of other responsibilities, and Brexit.

While not directly within our remit, we considered what has been, or could be, done to increase the capacity of the Assembly without more Members.

A range of approaches have been taken by Assembly Members themselves, the Commission and the Assembly's independent Remuneration Board to seek to enhance and maximise the capacity of a 60 Member Assembly. These have included changes to:

- ▶ working practices;
- ▶ the structure of the Assembly's working week;
- ▶ the number of sitting weeks;
- ▶ induction, training and professional development;
- ▶ involvement of experts, the public and stakeholders in scrutiny;

- ▶ the resources available to committees;
- ▶ the configuration of the committee system; and
- ▶ the support and resources available to Members.

Individually and collectively these approaches may have increased the capacity of the institution as a whole, but ultimately they have not and cannot address the fundamental issue that there are only 60 elected Members available to carry out their vital roles.

Members' roles are complex and varied; formal Assembly business is just one element.

They are legislators, scrutineers of policy and finance, employers with responsibilities for staff, property and contracts, and, ultimately, elected politicians with important responsibilities to their constituents and to their parties. This includes, for example, representing their constituents by undertaking casework, leading or participating in local or national campaigns, and attending or arranging local events.

We believe that such roles cannot and should not be separated from Members' formal Assembly business roles, as casework or campaigning can provide valuable insight into the operation of policy or legislation on the ground.

A key element of Members' roles is their responsibility for policy, legislative and financial scrutiny and oversight of the Welsh Government and other public bodies in Wales.

Although the impact of scrutiny is not easy to measure objectively, we are clear that it has a positive impact on the lives of the people of Wales. For scrutiny to be effective, there must be sufficient Members outside the government to fulfil these functions.

ISSUES WE CONSIDERED

We gave particular attention to the capacity of the Assembly's committee system as committees are a key vehicle for the Assembly's scrutiny role.

We considered the current committee structure, including the number of committees, their remits and the number of members they have.

We also considered the capacity of the Assembly to populate the committee system, taking account of the need for preparation, research, informal engagement activity and formal meeting time, and the exclusion of office holders such as Ministers, the Llywydd and the Deputy Presiding Officer from the Members available to undertake committee roles.

We concluded that as a point of principle chairs of policy and legislation committees or other significant committees, such as Finance or Public Accounts, should sit only on their own committee, and other Members should sit on no more than two committees. With only 60 Members, this is not achievable within the current committee system.



We looked at UK and international comparators, comparing political representation at a devolved level in Wales with Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the size of the Assembly compared to sub-national legislatures internationally.

Such comparisons are not straightforward, as the devolution settlements vary significantly (for example in areas such as home affairs and welfare).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Assembly is very small compared to most similar legislatures. The Assembly is also small when compared to local authorities in Wales.



HOW MANY MEMBERS DOES THE ASSEMBLY NEED?

Alternative ways to maximise the capacity of the 60 Member Assembly have already been explored and implemented. Each has its merits and such alternatives should continue to be explored.

Nevertheless, **none of these approaches has addressed or can address the underlying limiting factor: the severely limited time available for just 60 elected Members to carry out their responsibilities**—including preparation, research and participation in formal Assembly business, and their roles as representatives, campaigners, politicians and employers. There are, therefore, compelling arguments that the number of Members should be increased.

Making the case for more politicians will be unpopular. However, as an independent, expert Panel, we believe we are well-placed to examine the case and make recommendations in a neutral and sustainable manner.

We intend that **our recommendations will provide the basis for a sustainable legislature which will not need to revisit these issues in the foreseeable future.** It will be for the Assembly to establish appropriate structures and ways of working which ensure that the additional capacity is deployed effectively to alleviate the current pressures while keeping the additional costs to an absolute minimum.

There is no one authoritative method for determining the optimum size of a legislature. Nevertheless, **our analysis points towards an appropriate size for the Assembly of between 80 and 90 Members. Increasing the Assembly to a size within that range would deliver meaningful benefits for**

the capacity of the institution and corresponding dividends for the people of Wales.

Within this range, clearly, there would be a noticeable difference between the lower and upper ends. A figure close to 80 would undoubtedly strengthen the institution and make it better able to fulfil its responsibilities effectively.

However, at the upper end of our range, the benefits would be greater, providing a meaningful difference in the ability of many Members to specialise, with consequent benefits for scrutiny and representation. The upper end of the range would also lessen the risk that the question of capacity would need to be revisited in the future, should the responsibilities of the Assembly increase further.

Our preference, therefore, is for the size of the Assembly to be at the upper end of our recommended bracket.

Clearly, there would be financial implications associated with an increase in the size of the Assembly. Table 1 provides the Assembly Commission's estimate of the additional recurrent annual costs which could arise from an additional 20 or 30 Assembly Members. For the purposes of these estimates, the Commission has split the additional recurrent annual costs into core and variable elements.

The Commission's estimate of the additional recurrent annual costs associated with our proposals ranges,

therefore, from some £6.6 million to £9.6 million per annum. In 2017–18, the Commission's annual budget was £53.7 million. The additional recurrent annual costs in the table represent 12 and 18 per cent of that budget respectively. In addition, there would also be some one-off costs associated, for example, with adjustment of the Siambr and Members' office accommodation. The Commission estimates that these would be approximately £2.4 million for 20 additional Members and £3.3 million for 30 additional Members.

Table 1: Estimated recurrent annual costs of an additional 20 or 30 Members

	£000	
	20 additional Members	30 additional Members
Core recurrent annual costs	5,970	8,860
Variable recurrent annual costs	650	780
Total recurrent annual costs	6,620	9,640

The cost estimates provided to us are, necessarily, based on the services and system of financial support currently in place. The bulk of the recurrent costs identified are determined by the Assembly's independent Remuneration Board, and driven directly by the number of Members, for example the salaries of Members and their support staff, allowances available to Members, and the cost of running constituency offices. A smaller, but nonetheless significant, proportion is dependent on decisions taken by a future Assembly about its working practices and the consequent cost of parliamentary support services provided to Members by the Assembly Commission.

We urge both the Remuneration Board and the Assembly Commission to consider how the current total levels of staffing, service provision and financial resources provided to support Members should be altered in the case of a larger Assembly, so that the cost of implementing our recommendations is kept to an absolute minimum. Popular acceptance of a larger Assembly could be dependent on this.

Ultimately, though, consideration of the costs must recognise that the scrutiny and oversight role of the Assembly, if carried out effectively, positively affects the lives of people in Wales by improving the quality of Welsh legislation, and influencing Welsh Government policy and decision-making. Moreover, although the cost of parliamentary democracy in Wales is significant in absolute terms, it amounts to a very small proportion of the sums expended by the government it oversees. Even marginal improvements in the scrutiny of the Welsh Government's expenditure and policy-making would, therefore, reap significant dividends to the taxpayer.

To this end, we agree with the view of the Silk Commission that:



Good scrutiny means good legislation, and good legislation pays for itself.



EXPERT PANEL ON ASSEMBLY
ELECTORAL REFORM

ELECTORAL SYSTEM

An increase in the size of the Assembly requires reform of the way in which Assembly Members are elected. Our conclusions on the number of Members the Assembly needs have driven and underpinned our consideration of the appropriate electoral system.



ISSUES WE CONSIDERED

We identified principles against which we evaluated electoral systems, to determine which could be appropriate for Wales:

- ▶ **Government accountability and effectiveness:**
The system should encourage the return of effective, accountable and stable governments, whether majorities or coalitions.
- ▶ **Proportionality:**
The system should be no less proportional than the Assembly's current electoral arrangements, and preferably be more proportional.
- ▶ **Member accountability:**
The system should ensure that all Members are clearly accountable to voters and able to represent them effectively and appropriately in the national interest.
- ▶ **Equivalent status:**
As far as possible, the system should ensure that all Members are elected with broadly equivalent mandates which afford them equal status.
- ▶ **Diversity:**
The system should encourage and support the election of a body of representatives which broadly reflects the population.
- ▶ **Voter choice:**
Where appropriate within its design, the system should allow voters to select or indicate a preference for individual candidates.
- ▶ **Equivalent mandates:**
The system should reflect the general principle of electoral system design that votes should have approximately the same value, with seats apportioned taking electorate numbers and geography into account.
- ▶ **Boundaries:**
The system should be based on clearly defined geographic areas which are meaningful to people and take into account existing communities of interest, and existing electoral and administrative boundaries.
- ▶ **Simplicity:**
The system should be designed with simplicity and intelligibility for voters in mind.
- ▶ **Sustainability and adaptability:**
The system should be able to be implemented in 2021, and subsequently respond and adapt to changing political, demographic and legislative trends, needs and circumstances without requiring further fundamental change in the near future.

Clearly, no single electoral system can fully deliver against every one of our principles. Nevertheless, taken together they provide a robust framework against which to assess different electoral systems and reach impartial, politically neutral conclusions and recommendations.

We considered the Assembly's **current electoral arrangements**, and the **context for electoral reform in Wales**.

We considered the Assembly's strong and commendable reputation on **gender representation**, and the mechanisms to safeguard progress made by parties in Wales to date. We concluded that **legislative interventions**—such as **gender quotas**—in addition to provisions to require the **publication of anonymised candidate diversity information**, and enabling candidates to **stand for election on the basis of job sharing arrangements**, will support and encourage the election of a diverse Assembly, both in terms of gender and broader diversity characteristics.



By evaluating different electoral systems, **we rejected those systems which we were not confident could adequately deliver against our principles** and narrowed our focus to three systems which we concluded do meet those principles:

Single Transferable Vote

- ▶ **Our preferred option: Single Transferable Vote**, with the flexibility to elect an Assembly of 80 to 90 Members on the basis of multimember constituencies while maximising voter choice and providing simplicity for voters, should local authorities in Wales adopt STV.

Flexible List System

- ▶ **A viable alternative: a Flexible List system**, similarly flexible on the size of the Assembly it could elect and the constituencies upon which it could be based, but providing a balance between voter choice and party influence.

Mixed Member Proportional System

- ▶ **The 'status quo' option: a Mixed Member Proportional system**, adapting the Assembly's current system in a minimal way, with the advantage of familiarity for voters, but the limitation of a maximum Assembly size of 80 Members in 2021.

We then considered the electoral boundaries on the basis of which our remaining systems could operate. We **ruled out a full boundary review** due to insufficient time before 2021. We also **ruled out the 29 proposed Westminster constituencies** on the basis that the Assembly's boundaries should not be determined by factors of limited relevance to Wales. We therefore designed options which use **existing electoral or administrative areas as building blocks**. Such options provide the advantage of familiarity and simplicity for voters, as well as being able to be implemented for 2021. We propose two alternative sets of multimember constituencies:

- ▶ **Our preferred option: 20 constituencies based on existing Assembly constituencies**, indicated by our modelling to be the most appropriate option for electing an Assembly of 89 or 90 Members, i.e. towards the upper end of our recommended bracket, with the advantage of similar electorate sizes and therefore district magnitudes, but the limitation that separate boundary review arrangements would be required.



- ▶ **A viable alternative: 17 constituencies based on local authority areas**, which our modelling suggests could be appropriate for an Assembly of 83 or 84 Members, i.e. towards the middle of our bracket, with the advantages of requiring no separate boundary review mechanism and providing familiarity for voters, but the limitation that the varying population sizes lead to wide variance in district magnitude.

We also demonstrate how the **existing Assembly constituency and regional boundaries** could be used as the basis for the election of a larger Assembly via a Mixed Member Proportional system—the **status quo option**.

We considered how to ensure that our proposed boundaries remained sustainable, highlighting the need for **boundary or seat apportionment review mechanisms** to be put in place to enable the Assembly's electoral arrangements to respond to future demographic changes.



HOW SHOULD ASSEMBLY MEMBERS BE ELECTED?

We were tasked with making recommendations which could be implemented for the next Assembly election in 2021. Our preferred option, provided our recommendation for an integrated gender quota is implemented, is for **an Assembly of 89 or 90 Members to be elected by Single Transferable Vote on the basis of 20 multimember constituencies** formed by pairing the 40 current Assembly constituencies.

Ultimately, we recognise that it is for the Assembly to determine the priorities and principles it wishes its electoral system to deliver. To this end, we have also identified a viable alternative electoral system and electoral boundary model, as well as a status quo option.



EXPERT PANEL ON ASSEMBLY
ELECTORAL REFORM

MINIMUM VOTING AGE FOR ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

We were asked to consider what the minimum voting age should be for
Assembly elections from 2021.



ISSUES WE CONSIDERED

We considered the context in Wales, the UK and internationally. In Wales, the Welsh Government is consulting on proposals to reduce the minimum voting age for local government elections to 16. The voting age in Scotland has been reduced to 16 for local government and Scottish Parliament elections, and pressure for a reduction in the voting age across the UK continues to increase.

Much of the public discussion around the voting age focuses on whether a lower **age threshold** would fit better or worse with the ages at which other rights and responsibilities arise. We concluded that there is a lack of coherence and consistency in the age thresholds which apply in the UK and internationally, and that the reality is that there is no single age at which a young person takes on all the rights and responsibilities of an adult citizen.

Comparisons between the ages at which young people acquire rights and responsibilities may be relevant, but we do not find them compelling.

In respect of **political participation** there are good theoretical reasons for expecting that establishing the habit of voting at a young age, when many young people are still living at home, can lead to increased turnout in the longer term.

There is evidence that, when supported by appropriate and effective citizenship education, and in relation to higher salience elections, a reduction in the voting age can, in the short term, result in higher turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds than 18- to 21-year-olds. Evidence of a longer term impact is not yet available because those places that have reduced the voting age to 16

have done so only recently. We also considered other types of political participation, but found limited evidence as to whether a reduction in the voting age increases wider political participation beyond voting.

We looked at studies of the **political knowledge, maturity and independence of thought** of 16- and 17-year-olds. Studies can be divided into two categories: those conducted in places where they have not been enfranchised, and those conducted where they have. The results vary, but the key evidence comes from those places where 16- and 17-year-olds can vote. For example, research by the Electoral Commission found that in

the 2017 local elections in Scotland, 16- and 17-year-olds found it easier than 18- to 24-year-olds to access information on how to cast their votes, and were less likely to find it difficult to complete their ballot paper.

Polls and surveys in the UK of **public opinion** on this issue consistently show limited support for an extension of the franchise. However, the issue appears to be one of low salience to the public, and many people are unlikely to have given much thought to it. The profile of the issue is likely to be raised by the Welsh Government's proposals in relation to local government elections in Wales.

While not representative of all young people, the responses we received from organisations who work with young people suggest there is support among young people for a reduction in the minimum voting age.

We asked the Electoral Commission about the potential implications of a reduction in the voting age for **electoral administration**. It outlined some of the issues which would need to be taken into account if the minimum voting age were to be lowered, including costs, public awareness-raising, administration of the electoral register and training.

It concluded that the key consideration was that any changes be introduced in good time before the relevant election. Should the Welsh Government proceed with its proposals for local government elections, these issues will need to be addressed in any case.



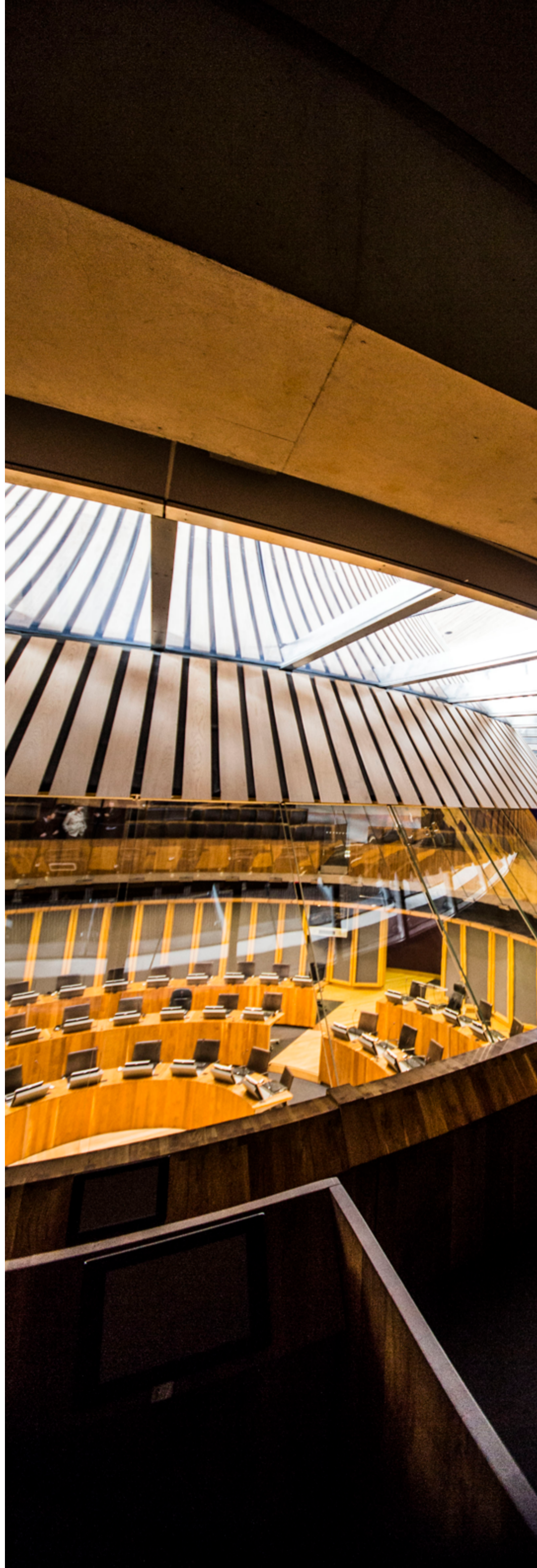
WHAT SHOULD THE MINIMUM VOTING AGE BE FOR ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS?

We have reviewed the existing evidence, research and literature, sought additional evidence and views from experts and key stakeholders, considered the current franchise and the wider context in Wales, the UK and elsewhere, and considered the risks and opportunities associated with any change.

The evidence we have considered suggests that **a reduction in the minimum voting age to 16 would be a powerful way to raise political awareness and participation among young people.** In addition, if the Welsh Government legislates to reduce the voting age for local government elections in Wales from 2022, it would be extremely anomalous, and create additional administrative and political issues, if the voting age for Assembly elections from 2021 were not also reduced.

The evidence suggests that higher salience elections are more likely to result in higher turnout and voter participation; it is therefore desirable that if the franchise is to be extended in Wales, it should first take effect at the higher salience Assembly election.

To ensure that young people are encouraged and supported to exercise their right to vote, any reduction in the minimum voting age should be accompanied by **appropriate, effective and non-partisan political and citizenship education.** Such education should be part of a broader range of actions taken by the Assembly, the Welsh Government and others to increase youth engagement and political participation. These actions may be more effective if targeted at the higher salience Assembly election in 2021 than the local government elections in 2022.



EXPERT PANEL ON ASSEMBLY
ELECTORAL REFORM

RECOMMENDATIONS





The size of the Assembly should be increased to at least 80 Members, and preferably closer to 90 Members, to ensure that the parliament elected in 2021 has sufficient capacity to fulfil its policy, legislative and financial scrutiny responsibilities, and that Members can also undertake their representative, campaigning, political and other roles.

Page 28 of the full report



The Remuneration Board and Assembly Commission should consider how the total staffing support, services and financial resources provided to Members can be altered in the case of a larger Assembly, so that the cost of implementing our recommendations is kept to an absolute minimum.

Page 31 of the full report



The Assembly must exercise restraint in the way it makes use of any increase in the size of the institution—for example in relation to the number and size of committees, the appointment of office holders, and the maximum size of the Welsh Government—in order to ensure that the potential benefits for the quality and quantity of scrutiny are realised and additional costs are kept to an absolute minimum.

Page 89 of the full report



If our recommendations on legislative interventions to support and encourage diversity of representation are implemented, the Assembly should be elected by Single Transferable Vote with effect from 2021. If, however, these recommendations are not implemented, the Assembly should be elected on the basis of a Flexible List electoral system with effect from 2021.

Page 102 of the full report



We recommend that the multimember Assembly constituencies upon which a Single Transferable Vote or Flexible List system are based should return no fewer than four and ideally no more than six Members.

Page 106 of the full report



Should the Assembly implement either a Single Transferable Vote or Flexible List electoral system in 2021, we recommend that an Assembly of 89 or 90 Members should be elected on the basis of 20 Assembly constituencies formed by pairing the current 40 Assembly constituencies. A multimember constituency model based on combining or splitting local authority areas could be a viable alternative for the election of an Assembly of 83 or 84 Members on the basis of either STV or Flexible List, should the Assembly decide that variations in district magnitude were acceptable.

Page 106 of the full report

7

The Assembly should consider whether, in the apportionment of seats to constituencies or regions, additional weighting should be applied to voters in specific parts of Wales, for example on the basis of the distance from Cardiff Bay, rurality or deprivation of the area in which they are registered to vote.

Page 107 of the full report

8

The Welsh Government, in developing its proposals for local government electoral reform, should have regard to our recommendations and report, particularly in relation to the design and operation of the Single Transferable Vote electoral system.

Page 114 of the full report

9

The Assembly should request that the Secretary of State commences section 106 of the *Equality Act 2010* in relation to Assembly elections, or transfers the power to do so to the Welsh Ministers. Otherwise, legislation to reform the Assembly's electoral arrangements should include provision that would secure the availability of information regarding diversity.

Page 117 of the full report

10

In order to safeguard the achievements of the Assembly and political parties in Wales in relation to gender-balanced representation, we recommend that a gender quota is integrated within the electoral system put in place for 2021. If this does not happen—whether through lack of political consensus or the limits of the Assembly's legislative competence—we propose that political parties be expected to take steps to ensure their candidate selection processes support and encourage the election of a gender-balanced parliament for Wales. This should include voluntary adoption by parties of the quotas we have outlined.

Page 117 of the full report

11

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. The guiding principles of such arrangements should be that candidates clearly articulate the basis of their job sharing agreement to voters, that job sharing partners are treated as if they are one person, and that job sharing Members should give rise to no additional costs beyond those of a single Assembly Member.

Page 127 of the full report

12

Before making any order prescribing the design of ballot papers for use in Assembly elections, in addition to the consultation with the Electoral Commission required by section 7(1) of the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000*, the Welsh Ministers should also undertake such other consultation as may be appropriate, to ensure that the information included and the layout of the ballot paper is appropriate for the electoral system and for Wales.

Page 150 of the full report

13

Legislative action must be taken to put in place boundary or seat apportionment review mechanisms which provide for a full review before the 2026 election, whether or not our proposals for reform are implemented. Such mechanisms must take account of any changes to the Assembly franchise, as well as other demographic or population changes.

Page 175 of the full report

14

The minimum voting age for Assembly elections should be reduced to 16 with effect from the 2021 election.

Page 199 of the full report

15

If the Assembly does legislate to lower the minimum voting age for Assembly elections to 16, the Assembly Commission should work with the Welsh Government, the Electoral Commission, political parties and others to support and encourage young people to exercise their right to vote, most importantly through appropriate political and citizenship education and public awareness-raising, but also by such other means as may be appropriate.

Page 204 of the full report

16

The citizenship education put in place to accompany any reduction in the minimum voting age must:

- ▶ Recognise the diversity of settings within which 16- and 17-year-olds may receive education and training, to ensure that those outside traditional school settings are also supported and encouraged to exercise their vote;
- ▶ Go beyond simply outlining democratic structures and formal processes, to engage and inform young people about the issues which matter to them;
- ▶ Ensure that young people have opportunities to learn about a full range of political opinions in a non-partisan way;
- ▶ Be delivered by teachers and educators who have themselves received high quality training in order to ensure that citizenship education is taken seriously, and to avoid both political bias and the perception of political bias;
- ▶ Be subject to review after a suitable period to ensure its design and delivery met its objectives.

Page 204 of the full report



IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We were asked to make recommendations which could, if the necessary degree of political support is achieved, be implemented in time for the next Assembly election in 2021, as well as being both sustainable and appropriate for the Welsh context.

We believe that we have done this. Our analysis of the role, capacity and size of the Assembly leads us to believe that the recommendations set out in our report should be implemented within this timescale.

The Assembly's role and responsibilities have been evolving since 1999, and are about to go through another period of significant change. The reserved powers model of devolution established by the *Wales Act 2017*, the devolution of taxation, borrowing and other policy areas, Brexit—each of these developments alone would be challenging for any legislature. If the Assembly is to be able to respond effectively over time, and become the parliamentary body which Wales needs as it establishes its place in the constitutional landscape of a post-Brexit UK, then the capacity issues outlined in our report should be addressed without delay.

Evidently, whether this happens is a matter for the Assembly and for political parties in Wales. We understand that it is not, and never will be, popular to call for more politicians, particularly against a challenging economic backdrop. Neither is it easy for politicians to do what the Llywydd and the Assembly Commission have done, namely to acknowledge openly what our analysis of the evidence has shown to be the

case—that an Assembly of 60 Members is overstretched, and that all the alternatives to an increase in size have been tried and tested without adequately addressing the problems we have identified.

However, the question is, if not now, then when? There is never a perfect moment for significant constitutional or electoral change. The Assembly is, without doubt, undersized and overstretched. The Richard Commission emphasised this thirteen years ago. The Silk Commission repeated the message in 2014. The Assembly Commission highlighted it two years ago. We are saying it just as clearly now. This issue will not simply resolve itself. If the Assembly does not take action to address the capacity gap, then it is only a matter of time before it is unable to fulfil its responsibilities to work for and represent the people of Wales effectively.

The earliest our recommendations could be implemented is 2021. At best, therefore, the Assembly must, for the next four years, attempt to meet the enormous challenges it faces with only 60 Members. If the Assembly accepts the case for change, then the time to act is now. The Assembly Commission announced earlier this year that, following unanimous agreement by all parties in the Assembly, it would introduce legislation to change the name of the institution to the Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru. Our challenge to the Assembly is, therefore, to take this opportunity to reform the institution, to invigorate Welsh democracy, and to enthuse and energise voters by extending the franchise and establishing an electoral system founded on the principles we have identified, so that the 2021 election delivers a legislature with the capacity to represent the people and communities it serves.

Our report is a call to action to the Assembly to ensure that it becomes a Welsh Parliament that truly works for the people of Wales.



