



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 46/14

19 March 2014

NIAR 210-14

Michael Potter

Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly - Update

1 Introduction

This note has been prepared for the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) in the context of the Committee's consideration of topics for review. The note updates the Research Paper *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly*¹, presented to the AERC on 10 September 2013².

The Northern Ireland Assembly debated a motion on women in politics on 10 March 2014 and resolved³:

That this Assembly recognises the lack of female representation in politics and public life; further recognises the positive outcomes that result in tackling this inequality, when support and training programmes are put in place to encourage more female candidates to stand in elections; and calls for the introduction of a training and support programme to encourage more female candidates to stand for election.

¹ Research and Information Service Research Paper 09/14 *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly* 3 September 2013: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf.

² Assembly and Executive Review Committee meeting 10 September 2013: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Committees/Assembly-and-Executive-Review/Minutes-of-Proceedings1/>.

³ Northern Ireland Assembly debate 10 March 2014: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-13-14/10-March-2014/#5>.

A brief summary of actions in the National Assembly of Wales and the Scottish Parliament with reference to encouraging more women into politics is outlined below.

2 National Assembly of Wales

Forty percent of Assembly Members (AM) in the National Assembly for Wales are female⁴. In 2012, the Presiding Officer for the National Assembly for Wales, Dame Rosemary Butler, instigated an initiative to encourage more women into public life for the 2016 elections. The initiative, 'Women in Public Life', began as a series of seminars to examine the barriers women face to participation⁵.

The initiative has included the following actions:

- Creation of a Women in Public Life Portal, with relevant information to encourage women into public life⁶
- Lecture series, including women in science and technology, sport, positions of power and media⁷
- Women in Public Life conference to end the seminar series⁸
- Women in Public Life Development Scheme for 10-12 women to receive training and development with a view to participation in public life⁹

3 The Scottish Parliament

Thirty five percent of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) are female¹⁰. On 15-16 March 2014, the Scottish Parliament hosted the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Inaugural Conference¹¹. This conference takes the theme 'Enhancing the Participation of Women in Politics' and explores issues around challenges to women parliamentarians, how barriers can be addressed, selection issues and the portrayal of women in politics in the media¹².

⁴ House of Commons Standard Note SN/SG/1250 *Women in Parliament and Government* 13 November 2013, p.3: <http://www.parliament.uk/Templates/BriefingPapers/Pages/BPPdfDownload.aspx?bp-id=SN01250>.

⁵ 'Women in Public Life' initiative, National Assembly for Wales: http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/wipl-home.htm.

⁶ Women in Public Life Portal: <http://www.wmad.org.uk/wipl>.

⁷ Women in Public Life lectures: http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/wipl-home/women_in_public_life_-_lectures.htm.

⁸ Women in Public Life conference: http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/wipl-home/women-in-public-life-conference.htm.

⁹ Women in Public Life Development Scheme: <http://www.wmad.org.uk/powipl-scheme>.

¹⁰ House of Commons Standard Note SN/SG/1250 *Women in Parliament and Government* 13 November 2013, p.3.

¹¹ Parliament to host international conference on political perspectives of women, Scottish Parliament news release 10 February 2014: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/newsandmediacentre/72945.aspx>.

¹² British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Inaugural Conference draft programme: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/POandUKandIRO/Programme.pdf>.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians group of the BIMR region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been newly established to consider issues for women parliamentarians within the region.