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Gender, diversity and good relations in a parliamentary context

Key points

- Research exploring the issue of gender-sensitive parliaments has gained traction in recent years.
- Organisations including the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Institute for Gender Equality have examined the issue closely. The IPU has produced a self-assessment toolkit against which legislatures can measure themselves to determine their gender-sensitivity.
- The IPU has stated that “a gender-sensitive parliament is founded on the principle of gender equality – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without recrimination”.
- Since the mid-1990s numerous countries have adopted gender quotas for legislative elections. Gender quotas have been implemented across a range of electoral systems and take numerous forms, including voluntary party quotas, government-mandated party quotas, alternating lists and reserved seats.
- An argument in favour of gender quotas is that they can enable the number of female representatives to reach a ‘critical mass’ which can effect cultural change and promote the interests of women in a legislature.

UK Parliament

- The *Good Parliament* report, published in 2016, contained 43 recommendations aimed at improving representation and inclusion in the UK Parliament. It focused on three broad areas - equality of participation, parliamentary infrastructure and culture.
- The House of Commons introduced measures to tackle bullying and harassment along with permanent proxy voting for parental leave.
- In February 2021 the current Women and Equalities Committee launched an inquiry to “assess recent progress and make recommendations to create a more ‘gender-sensitive’ Parliament”. To date, it has held several oral evidence sessions and published a number of pieces of written evidence.

Dáil Eireann

- The Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Eireann established a Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament on 23 March 2021. Its aim was to “generate practical

and achievable recommendations that could make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly and gender sensitive workplace.

- The Forum's report was published on 2 November 2021. It addressed a range of issues including the parliamentary sitting week, maternity and paternity leave, bullying and harassment, childcare and other caring responsibilities and improving diversity in the Dáil to better reflect Irish society. It also considered what additional resources might be needed to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating.

Welsh Parliament (Senedd)

- The Expert Panel on Electoral Reform was established in 2017 and was “tasked with making recommendations on the number of Members the Assembly needs, the system by which they should be elected, and the minimum voting age for Assembly elections.”
- One of the issues the panel looked at was the diversity of the National Assembly for Wales (as it was then known). It recommended that: “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.”

Scottish Parliament

- The Scottish Parliament's Standing Orders require that consideration be given to gender balance when making nominations to the Parliamentary Corporate Body. Similar consideration must also be given when making nominations to the Parliamentary Bureau.
- The Commission on Parliamentary Reform was established by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament in 2017 to examine ways in which the Parliament could better carry out its scrutiny function.
- The Commission made the following recommendations in relation to diversity including:
 - A systematic review of Standing Orders should be undertaken to ensure that it is diversity sensitive and inclusive to facilitate equal and effective participation by MSPs in all business;
 - As a first step, committee membership should reflect the gender balance of MSPs in the Parliament. This approach should then be expanded to other protected characteristics once better diversity in representatives is achieved

1 Introduction

This research paper has been prepared following a request from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC). The Committee asked for information on the following:

- initiatives in other jurisdictions to support women in parliament and profile their work;
- the work being carried out in other jurisdictions to create gender sensitive parliaments;
- how corporate bodies in other political institutions promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group; and
- the work being carried out by women's caucuses in other jurisdictions and details of any significant achievements.

Structure of the paper

Section 1 provides a brief introduction and some contextual statistical information.

Section 2 discusses the broader context of gender-sensitive parliaments.

Section 3 looks more closely at developments in the UK Parliament.

Section 4 examines attempts to implement changes in Dáil Eireann.

Section 5 provides information on the Welsh Parliament (Senedd).

Section 6 looks at the Scottish Parliament.

Section 7 provides information on women's caucuses.

Female elected representatives in the UK and Ireland

To provide context for the paper, the following is a breakdown of female elected representatives in the UK and Ireland:

- 35.5% (32) of MLAs in the Northern Ireland Assembly are women¹;
- 34% (220) of MPs in the House of Commons are women;
- 43% (26) of Members of the Welsh Parliament are women;
- 45% (58) of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament are women; and
- 22.5% (36) of TDs in Dáil Eireann are women.

¹ A number of these include members who were co-opted.

2 Gender-sensitive parliaments

The issue of gender-sensitivity in political institutions has gained traction in recent years. It moves beyond the focus on increasing female representation, which itself is important, to ask questions about the:

...nature of the parliament as an institution in which gender informs the norms, rules, conventions, processes, practices, and behaviours that surround political decision-making. Accordingly, more attention is shifting towards the gender-sensitivity of parliaments, with the fundamental premise that parliaments are 'gendered institutions'. The idea that institutions are gendered implies that institutions, in the broad sense of the term, are not gender neutral. They often produce and reproduce the gender order prevailing in society, to the advantage of men and the detriment of women.²

The research identified three organisations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), that have been at the forefront in promoting the issue of gender-sensitive parliaments. The IPU and EIGE were selected for further consideration and are discussed below.

Inter-Parliamentary Union

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the global organisation of national parliaments. It has 179 Member Parliaments and 13 Associate Members. It produced its report *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments* in 2011 following a two-year collaborative research project. The IPU had previously defined a gender-sensitive parliament as “one whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to the needs and interests of both men and women.”³ The 2011 report stated that:

A gender-sensitive parliament is founded on the principle of gender equality – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without recrimination. A gender equality policy provides direction for the setting of priorities and strategic, well targeted interventions to achieve them.⁴

An IPU action plan in 2012 set out what a gender-sensitive parliament should look like⁵:

² Yvonne Galligan, *The gender-sensitive parliament: recognising the gendered nature of parliaments*, conference paper, 2016: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313513095_The_gender-sensitive_parliament_recognising_the_gendered_nature_of_parliaments

³ IPU, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, 2008: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-07/equality-in-politics-survey-women-and-men-in-parliaments>

⁴ IPU, *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*, 2011: <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/gsp11-e.pdf>

⁵ IPU, *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*, 2012: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/plan-action-gender-sensitive-parliaments>

Figure 1: IPU action plan for gender sensitive parliaments

1. Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
2. Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
4. Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

This was then built upon in 2016 with a self-assessment toolkit against which legislatures could measure their gender-sensitivity. The purpose of the toolkit was not to rank legislatures but to “help them identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to determine priorities for strengthening the institution”.⁶ Questions were grouped around the seven policy areas listed in figure 1. There was a recognition that not all questions would suit every context and legislatures were encouraged to develop their own questions or tailor questions to suit their particular needs.

European Institute for Gender Equality

The EIGE was established under Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006.⁷ Its website states that:

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union defined the grounds for the Institute's objectives and tasks in its Founding Regulation and

⁶ IPU, *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit*, 2016:

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2016-11/evaluating-gender-sensitivity-parliaments-self-assessment-toolkit>

⁷ Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on establishing a European Institute for Gender Equality: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1435768861022&uri=CELEX:32006R1922>

*assigned it the central role of addressing the challenges of and promoting equality between women and men across the European Union.*⁸

The EIGE “collects, analyses, processes and disseminates data and information on gender equality issues, whilst at the same time making them comparable, reliable and relevant for the users.”⁹

The EIGE began work on its toolkit in 2015 and draws on the work of the IPU along with other international organisations. It measures five specific areas of gender-sensitivity:

⁸ EIGE, *About our Work*: <https://eige.europa.eu/about/our-work>

⁹ As above

Table 1: EIGE toolkit

| Area | Domain | Example of good practice |
|--|--|--|
| Area 1 – Women and men have equal opportunities to enter the parliament | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first domain assesses whether and how electoral rules and procedures assure gender equality. • The second domain maps out political parties' measures that actively support equal access to parliament of women and men candidates. • The third domain considers recruitment procedures to ensure equal opportunities for all parliamentary employees. | <p>In 2007, Spain adopted a law that obliges political parties to ensure that women make up at least 40 % of every list for each election. Two features are crucial to the effectiveness of this law: effective sanctions – non-compliant lists are disallowed – and the fact that the 40 % quota applies not only to the list as a whole, but also to each group of five candidates (this prevents women being systematically allocated unwinnable places at the bottom of the list). The law has led to a steady increase in the number of women elected.</p> |
| Area 2 – Women and men have equal opportunities to influence the parliament's working procedure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first domain focuses on MPs' presence and capacity, by assessing gender balance in the parliament's composition. • The second domain refers to the parliament's working environment and work-life balance measures. • The third domain looks at the organisation, gender-equality procedures and working conditions of parliamentary employees | <p>The Administration Committee of the House of Commons commissioned a qualitative study on women MP's experience of being in the parliament. Participants explained that being a Member of Parliament and working into the Houses is not so easy and pose some challenges. Some of these challenges were felt to be more difficult for women or minority groups, either directly or indirectly, because of the roles or responsibilities that women were more likely to hold (such as caring for young children or elderly relatives).</p> <p>Participants reported that progress had been made in terms of the experience of being a woman MP, associated with an increasing number of women MPs in the House of Commons, as well as initiatives such as the nursery, and allowing children into the division lobbies, that are the corridors that run along either side of the Chamber in both Houses. Even so, participants described a model of service provision that assumes a male MP with a supportive partner in the constituency. Elements of the culture at Westminster remain challenging and those mentioned in the report included a general lack of diversity among Members and staff, behaviour in the Chamber during Prime Minister Questionings (MPQs), and networking in bars, both internal and external to the parliament.</p> |
| Area 3 – Women's interests and concerns have adequate space on parliamentary agenda | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first domain explores the presence and resources of gender mainstreaming structures, such as gender equality bodies or cross-party networks. • The second domain assesses the existence of gender mainstreaming tools for MPs, such as gender equality training, gender equality plans and gender budgeting. | <p>Both houses of the French Parliament – the National Assembly and the Senate – have had a 'Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men' since 1999, aiming at complementing each other. Their function is to mainstream gender throughout the legislative process. They are cross-party bodies, and each has 36 members, both women and men. The delegations can scrutinise proposed legislation and monitor implementation. They</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The third domain refers to the inclusion of a gender perspective in parliamentary employees' work. | <p>also conduct consultations and research to produce proactive reports aiming to influence future legislation.</p> <p>The delegation in the Assembly has drafted at least six reports on different aspects of the French electoral system and has been instrumental in introducing certain new measures – for example, the use of ‘twinning’ in the recent regional elections. Both delegations have played a crucial role in safeguarding and extending gender parity in politics.</p> |
| <p>Area 4 – The parliament produces gender-sensitive legislation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first domain relates to the general legal framework for gender equality in the country. The second domain assesses whether and how gender equality is mainstreamed into legislative work and legislation. The third domain measures if the parliament exercises a gender-sensitive oversight function and whether that includes the monitoring of gender equality laws and policies. | <p>Belgium’s Gender Mainstreaming Act of 2007 provides the legal basis for a compulsory identification of government funds earmarked for the promotion of gender equality and therefore lays the foundations for gender-sensitive budgeting. It also imposes a “gender test” for every new policy measure. Furthermore, it compels the federal government to define strategic objectives with respect to gender equality at the beginning of the legislature for every policy area falling under its remit. The act also provides for follow-up and evaluation of these actions.</p> |
| <p>Area 5 – The parliament complies with its symbolic function</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first domain focuses on gender-sensitive organisation of parliament spaces. The second domain focuses on external communication and representation. | <p>The President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies dedicated a room to women in 2016. The Women’s Room shows the pictures of the first women to be active in political representation in Italy at national, regional and local level. On a blank wall, there are three mirrors, one for each political position that has as yet not been held by a woman (President of the Republic, of the Senate and of the Council of Ministers). Below the mirrors, women visitors can read ‘You could be the first’.</p> |

Unlike the IPU, the EIGE ranked legislatures according to their gender-sensitivity. Its findings from 2019 show that Sweden, Finland and the European Parliament were ranked as the top three. The UK was fifth and Republic of Ireland was eighth.

The EIGE study assessed the extent to which gender was mainstreamed into parliamentary work. It found that while most EU Member States, 71%, (which at that time included the UK) had a dedicated gender equality body in their parliamentary structure, in only 12 states was it a parliamentary committee with full legislative capacity.¹⁰

It found that:

*In the remainder, the gender equality body takes the form of an advisory committee women’s caucus or cross-party network. Regardless of the type of gender equality structure in place, gender does not appear to be effectively mainstreamed in parliamentary work. Where parliaments have a strategic plan, gender equality is mentioned only infrequently, with few internal bodies with responsibility for gender budgeting.*¹¹

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. In June 2021 it published its report *Women’s political careers: Leadership in Practice*. The report focused on women’s experience of candidate selection and elections, “and their experience of political leadership in practice through the following questions:”

- How can women political leaders build their profile?
- What factors support and hinder women’s candidate selection and election success?
- How do women cope with, and adapt to, the realities of political leadership?
- How can programmes and policies effectively support women in political leadership roles?

The report’s authors interviewed 25 female political leaders in 15 countries, including female members of the UK Parliament. It made a number of key findings¹²:

Candidate selection and election

Women’s candidate selection and election success is supported by targeted training that enables women to build up campaigning skills, networks that provide guidance and mentorship based on previous campaigning experience, and effective relationships with local parties. Women also noted the importance of creative campaign strategies that helped to raise their profile, particularly through social media and utilising local party connections and skills.

¹⁰ EIGE, *Gender equality in national parliaments across the EU and the European Parliament*, 2019:

<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-national-parliaments-across-eu-and-european-parliament>

¹¹ As above

¹² WFD, *Women’s political careers: Leadership in Practice*, June 2021: <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Womens-political-careers-Leadership-in-Practice.pdf>

Political parties play a fundamental role in supporting women's selection and election, but they need to formalise and create adaptive and flexible selection procedures that reduce discrimination faced by candidates, particularly those with multiple responsibilities. In addition, targeted funding is essential to give women candidates independence and reduce the discrepancies they face in access to resources.

Campaign training should be long-term and, alongside building up specific political skills, it should facilitate connections with civil society actors and existing political networks that women can work with prior to and during elections and once they reach political office.

Coping with, and adapting to, the realities of political leadership

Women's approaches to coping to the realities of political life highlighted the importance of close-knit networks and communities that provided guidance and emotional support and strong teams with diverse skills to navigate challenges. These networks also meant that women retained motivation and set boundaries guided by their overall vision for leadership.

Sustained political mentorship and networks for political leaders and for their families are fundamental. Improved accommodation of caring responsibilities must be a priority for political parties, who should also consider providing practical resources, such as mental health support to address inequalities.

Gender quotas

Research has found that since the mid-1990s numerous countries have adopted gender quotas for legislative elections. Gender quotas have been implemented across a range of electoral systems and take numerous forms, including voluntary party quotas, government-mandated party quotas, alternating lists and reserved seats.

An argument in favour of gender quotas is that they can enable the number of female representatives to reach a 'critical mass' which can effect cultural change and promote the interests of women in a legislature. There is no single agreed definition of what a critical mass might be, but a figure of around 30-40% critical mass is often cited. Previous research has suggested that small numbers of women in an organisation, including political institutions, can lead to unwanted consequences in relation to more numerous male counterparts:

- **High visibility** – fewer women attract greater attention and place additional pressures on how they perform
- **Polarisation** – the differences between male and female members are exaggerated
- **Assimilation** – women are seen more in terms of stereotypes rather than individuals.¹³

There are various kinds of quotas, including:

- Candidate quotas, legal or voluntary;
- Reserved seats in the legislature;
- Gender-neutral quotas, such as at least 40% of either sex; and
- Fast-track quotas, where representation is traditionally low.¹⁴

3 UK Parliament

In 2016 Professor Sarah Childs published *The Good Parliament*, which contained 43 recommendations aimed at improving representation and inclusion in the UK Parliament. The report followed the establishment of the 'Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion' by the then Speaker John Bercow MP and focused on three main elements:

- **Equality of participation:** The report asks how a diverse group of MPs might be selected for, and elected to, Parliament and how, once present they could be

¹³ Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), 'Some Effects of proportions on group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women' in American Political Science Review, 82(5), 965-990.

¹⁴ Drude Dahlerup (2005), 'Increasing Women's Political Representation: New Trends in Gender Quotas' in Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (eds), Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, Stockholm: IDEA, pp.141-

most effective in representing their constituents' interests, scrutinising laws and holding the government to account. Specific recommendations were made to the new Reference Group, the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, the House of Commons Commission, the Women and Equalities Committee, and the political parties.

- **Parliamentary Infrastructure:** This covered everything from the buildings and furniture of Parliament to the official rules and working practices. Recommendations were made to the Speaker, the House of Commons Commission, the Leader of the House, the Liaison Committee, and Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.
- **Commons Culture:** This dimension looked beyond the formal rules to examine Parliamentary culture and its effect on diversity. Recommendations were aimed at the Speaker of the House, the House of Commons Commission, the Women in Parliament All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), and the Works of Art Committee.¹⁵

Suggestions for “addressing these issues include: expanding crèche facilities; revising sitting hours; trialling remote voting systems and ensuring greater female representation and leadership on select committees; and commissioning a diversity and equality audit by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.”¹⁶

Following this report, a gender-sensitive audit of the UK Parliament was carried out in 2018, based on the IPU’s assessment toolkit (above). The audit panel consisted of four MPs, four members of the House of Lords and four members of senior secretariat, two from each House.

The report addressed a broad range of issues based on the IPU toolkit. It noted the steady progress made to increase female representation in the House of Commons, which then stood at 32% of all members. However, it identified barriers to equal representation in Parliament, including:

- the culture of Parliament as highlighted in recent reports of bullying and harassment, and sexual harassment;
- the challenges that working in Parliament poses for family life, including the unpredictability of business and potential long hours;
- the financial impact of standing for Parliament; and

¹⁵ University of Bristol, Gender Research Centre, *Creating a more gender and diversity sensitive UK Parliament*, 2016
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/grc/research/research-projects/good-parliament/>

¹⁶ University of Bath, *Barriers to Women Entering Parliament and Local Government*, 2018:
<https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/barriers-to-women-entering-parliament-and-local-government/attachments/barriers-to-women.pdf>

- online threats and threats to physical security, in particular gender-based intimidation, harassment and violence against female Parliamentarians and female candidates.¹⁷

The report made a number of recommendations to address gender barriers, including:

- concrete action in response to the report of Dame Laura Cox on the bullying and harassment of House staff and forthcoming reports on the experiences of Lords staff, Members' staff and Members; more predictability of Parliamentary business; and a new Parliamentary policy on children and families.
- measures to bring together the various sources of advice and expertise available to Parliamentarians and to ensure that select committees are proactive in looking beyond the "usual suspects" to include women's voices.

It welcomed "initiatives undertaken by both Houses to improve the diversity of staff but note(d) that the current pace of change to increase the number of women in senior positions in the House of Lords Administration in particular (21%) is unacceptable."¹⁸

Measures to tackle bullying and harassment

Press reports appeared in November 2017 detailing accounts of bullying and sexual harassment in Westminster. In response, the House of Commons established a cross-party Working Group on an Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy (ICGP). The Working Group provided two reports. Firstly, in February 2018 it recommended the development of a parliament-wide behaviour code and an independent complaints and grievance scheme to deal with allegations of sexual harassment, bullying and harassment.

The subsequent Delivery Report published in July 2018 "proposed a Behaviour Code; procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of bullying and harassment; procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of sexual harassment; and a system of training to support the Behaviour Code".¹⁹

In that same month, the Behaviour Code was endorsed by the House of Commons along with the policies and procedures relating to bullying and harassment and sexual harassment as set out in the ICGP report²⁰. A requirement to observe the principles set out in the Behaviour Code was incorporated into the Code of Conduct and an updated version of the Code was published in August 2018.

¹⁷ UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018, Report of the gender-sensitive Parliament audit panel to the House of Commons Commission and the House of Lords Commission, 2018:

https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-information-office/uk-parliament_-_gender-sensitive-parliament-audit-report-digital.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-information-office/uk-parliament_-_gender-sensitive-parliament-audit-report-digital.pdf

¹⁹ House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, *Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme*, 16 July 2019

²⁰ As above

The ICGS as a whole consists of the Behaviour Code, the Bullying and Harassment Policy and the Sexual Harassment Policy.²¹

Standing Order 150 was also amended “to give the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards the duty to consider cases arising from the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the power to rectify such cases”.²²

Women and Equalities Committee

In 2019 the Women and Equalities Committee of the House of Commons launched an inquiry into overcoming inequalities in the House. It held several evidence sessions before the December 2019 general election brought its work to a close.²³

In February 2021 the current Women and Equalities Committee launched an inquiry to “assess recent progress and make recommendations to create a more ‘gender-sensitive’ Parliament”.²⁴ To date, it has held several oral evidence sessions and published a number of pieces of written evidence.

The House of Commons has a number of Workplace Equality Networks (WEN), one of which is ParliGENDER. This group aims to “support Parliament and its people in achieving gender equality by identifying and challenging inequality and discrimination and seeking to improve and promote gender equality at every level and in every part of Parliament.”²⁵ Its membership is open to anyone working in Parliament including MPs, Peers, their staff and parliamentary staff.

Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021

The Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021 aims to make it easier for women to seek high office by providing adequate maternity leave within the context of the UK Government. The legislation was introduced because of the statutory limits on the number of ministers allowed at any one time, and governments usually operate close to or at this limit. Arrangements can be made for ministers to cover a post for a period of time, but the Government argued that this became complicated for senior positions such as Cabinet Ministers or Secretaries of State. In such circumstances, it was suggested, these post-holders may have to resign if they needed to take extended

²¹ Conduct in Parliament webpage: <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliaments-behaviour-code/>

²² Standing Orders of the House of Commons: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/commons/standing-orders-public11/>

²³ House of Lords Library, *Women in elected office in the UK*, February 2021: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/women-in-elected-office-in-the-uk/>

²⁴ Women and Equalities Committee, Gender Sensitive Parliament Inquiry: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1065/gender-sensitive-parliament/>

²⁵ ParliGender website: <https://old.parliament.uk/about/working/workplace-equality-networks/parliagender/>

maternity leave. The same might apply to other senior office holders such as the Leader of the Opposition.²⁶

Permanent proxy voting for parental leave

The House of Commons passed the following resolution on 1 February 2018:

That this House believes that it would be to the benefit of the functioning of parliamentary democracy that honourable Members who have had a baby or adopted a child should for a period of time be entitled, but not required, to discharge their responsibilities to vote in this House by proxy.

The resolution had been informed by The Good Parliament report. The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion considered the recommendations of the report, and brought forward proposals reflecting *The Good Parliament's* recommendations on proxy voting for parental absence.

A May 2018 report from the Procedures Committee set out how proxy voting arrangements for parental absence might work in practice. That report did not find any procedural impediments to a proxy voting scheme for parental reasons.

A subsequent review by the Committee found that:

- proxy voting for parental absence has been “to the benefit of parliamentary democracy”, to quote the aspiration from the February 2018 resolution of the House which first endorsed the principle.

The committee highlighted the general success of the scheme:

The pilot has been popular and well used. 30 Members have claimed eligibility for proxy votes for parental absence to date: 12 expectant mothers and 18 new fathers. Among these are three women elected to the House for the first time in December 2019. Ministers, and Members who have gone on to become Ministers, have used the scheme, demonstrating that parental absence is not a barrier to achieving or continuing in Ministerial office.

It went on to say:

Our overall evaluation is that the system of proxy voting for parental absence has benefitted the House and the broader objectives of parliamentary democracy, by making the House a more inclusive place for new mothers and fathers. We recommend that provision for proxy voting for parental absence be made in the standing orders of the House, subject to the recommendations made in this report.

²⁶ For a detailed discussion on the Bill see the House of Commons briefing paper: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9133/CBP-9133.pdf>

On 23 September 2020, the House of Commons agreed to make voting by proxy for parental absence permanent.

Childcare facilities

The UK Parliament includes an on-site nursery and is open to Members, Members' staff, House of Commons and Digital Service employees, House of Lords Peers and staff, Press Gallery media pass holders, Whitehall parliamentary pass holders and contractors situated on the parliamentary estate.²⁷ It opens from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 6.00pm to 10.30pm on Monday, 6.00pm to 7.30pm on Tuesday and Wednesday and 6.00pm to 6.30pm on Thursday. The cost for a child under two years of age for five days is £1,278.33.²⁸ The facility has a capacity of 40.

The UK Parliament is the only legislature in the UK to have dedicated childcare facilities for Members and staff. The Scottish Parliament has a facility for external visitors and the lack of a similar provision for Members and a wider failure to adopt family-friendly policies was cited by several female MSPs for their decision to stand down at the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary election.²⁹

Gender quotas

Quotas are voluntary in the UK and this is provided for in legislation by the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 exempting electoral candidate selection from sex discrimination legislation.

Promoting good relations

The House of Commons Commission (HCC) is responsible for the administration and services of the House of Commons, including the maintenance of the Palace of Westminster and the rest of the Parliamentary Estate.

The HCC is particularly focusing on supporting existing and prospective staff as well as members of the general population from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community, those who identify as having a disability and Women.

i) The House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2022³⁰

The core Diversity and inclusion Strategy objectives for the period 2019-2022 are to:

²⁷ House of Commons Nursery: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/working/nursery/>

²⁸ As above

²⁹ The Scotsman, *Covid should force Scottish Parliament into being family friendly, say MSPs*, 21 March 2021: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/covid-should-force-scottish-parliament-into-being-family-friendly-say-mmps-3172597>

³⁰The House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2022. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/Diversity-Inclusion/HOC-DI-Strategy-2019-22.pdf?shiftFileName=HOC-DI-Strategy-2019-22.pdf&shiftSavePath=/documents/Diversity-Inclusion>

1. Increase the diversity of staff and public engaged in the work of the select and general committees, including monitoring the diversity of witness panels and specialist advisers and promoting mixed panels;
2. Continue to target hard to reach groups (young and marginalised) and communities across the UK;
3. Set targets for representation of House staff with regards to diversity, benchmarking the data against the economically active population; and
4. Ensure that consultation on Restoration and Renewal (R&R), the Northern Estate Programme (NEP) and other major programmes fully considers the needs and views of underrepresented groups.³¹

The Strategy is accompanied by a 'Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan' which is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group who review and assess progress. The Commons Executive Board reviews the action plan as part of their quarterly performance review and conducts an annual review of the programme of work for the HCC.³²

House of Commons Workplace Equality Networks

The HCC Workplace Equality Networks (WENs) provide 'a safe space' to represent the views of underrepresented groups and scrutinise the progress being made on diversity and inclusion goals (Table 3).³³

Table 2: House of Commons Workplace Equality Networks

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| ParliABLE | Supports disabled people in Parliament. It is open to both those who consider themselves to have a disability and those who have an interest in supporting disabled people. |
| ParliGENDER | Supports gender equality and aims to achieve gender equality across Parliament. |
| ParliREACH | Increases awareness and appreciation of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage issues in Parliament. |
| ParliON | Increases awareness of issues around socio-economic inclusion. |
| ParliOUT | Supports LGBT+ people across Parliament |

WENs are each run by an elected committee, which includes an appointed Chair and a Treasurer. The Diversity and Inclusion teams of each House allocate every WEN a small annual budget of £6,000 (paid for by the House of Commons and the House of Lords).³⁴

³¹ The House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2022. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/Diversity-Inclusion/HOC-DI-Strategy-2019-22.pdf?shiftFileName=HOC-DI-Strategy-2019-22.pdf&shiftSavePath=/documents/Diversity-Inclusion>

³² As cited directly above

³³ Workplace Equality Networks. UK Parliament Website. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/working/workplace-equality-networks/>

³⁴ Workplace Equality Networks. UK Parliament Website. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/working/workplace-equality-networks/>

Diversity and Inclusion Awards

The House of Commons Diversity and Inclusion Awards, which most recently took place in 2017, recognise individuals and teams for their contribution to promoting, delivering and embedding the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and wider inclusion-related work, which aims to create an equal, diverse and inclusive environment for all on the parliamentary estate. Award categories include:

- **Catalyst for Change:** an award for a person or a team doing things differently by incorporating EDI values into the way they work resulting in a positive shift in organisational culture
- **Inspiring Role Model:** this award is for a person who has taken the opportunity to engage with staff, speaking openly about their personal experiences in a visible forum that encourages and champions diversity and inclusion in a way that new and existing staff can relate to.³⁵

4 Dáil Eireann

Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

The Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Eireann established a Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament on 23 March 2021. Its aim was to “generate practical and achievable recommendations that could make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly and gender sensitive workplace.”³⁶ The Forum comprised TDs, Senators, members of parliamentary staff and external representatives. It considered the following matters:

- the relevant provisions of the Constitution, and Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders;
- the working arrangements of the Houses;
- the processes that enable the Houses to take account of gender and equality issues in its legislative and scrutiny functions;
- the relevant policies and procedures of the Houses and of the parliamentary administration; and

³⁵ House of Commons Diversity and Inclusion Awards. UK parliament Website. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/house-of-commons-commission/hoc-diversity-inclusion-strategy/house-of-commons-diversity-and-inclusion-awards/>

³⁶ Dáil Eireann, Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/office-holders/ceann-comhairle/forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament/>

- international parliamentary best practice in areas including family friendly policies, inclusivity, and gender-sensitivity, and such other matters as the Forum thinks fit, in relation to the above.³⁷

The Forum's report was published on 2 November 2021. It addressed a range of issues including the parliamentary sitting week, maternity and paternity leave, bullying and harassment, childcare and other caring responsibilities and improving diversity in the Dáil to better reflect Irish society. It also considered what additional resources might be needed to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating.

The report made 51 recommendations, and a number of these were prioritised within five broader areas. If implemented, they would give effect to fairly radical change to parliamentary practice and procedures in the Dáil:

³⁷ Dáil Eireann, Ceann Comhairle hosts inaugural meeting of the Forum on a Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20210323-ceann-comhairle-hosts-inaugural-meeting-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament/>

Table 3: Priority recommendations of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Referendum to address remote working and proxy voting</p> | <p>During the 33rd Dáil, introduce a constitutional referendum to amend Article 15 of the Constitution that would enable the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce proxy voting (for Maternity, Paternity and Sick Leave) and arrangements for Members to participate remotely with parliamentary privilege in certain Oireachtas business.</p> <p>Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce hybrid sittings of some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business where Members can choose to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present.</p> <p>Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce regional hubs, located in other State buildings, for Members from surrounding constituencies to participate in certain Dáil, Seanad or Committee business without the need to be physically present in the parliamentary complex.</p> |
| <p>Increased representation of women on Oireachtas Committees</p> | <p>In the Committees established by the 34th Dáil and 27th Seanad, there must be at least one woman from each House on each Committee. After the following election, Committee Chairs are to be 50% men and 50% women and there is to be a 40% gender balance on all Committees. Additional Parliamentary Assistant support is to be provided for women Chairs until 40% of elected Members are women.</p> |
| <p>Reduce long, late and unpredictable sitting weeks</p> | <p>With immediate effect, Members and political parties and groups are to facilitate appropriate flexible working and remote working arrangements for their staff to address the long sitting hours, until other recommendations to eradicate long hours have been implemented.</p> <p>Houses of the Oireachtas Service to address areas where staff are working very long, late and unpredictable hours to serve sittings. This could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or role re-design.</p> <p>By March 2022, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to promote and facilitate flexible remote and hybrid working arrangements for civil service staff, when appropriate and in line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) guidelines.</p> |
| <p>Increasing diversity in the parliamentary community</p> | <p>At the next election, data on the age, gender and minority status of candidates and Members elected to the Dáil and Seanad to be collected on a voluntary basis and published with official election results.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | The Houses of the Oireachtas Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to include annual diversity reporting in line with National Inclusion Strategies (Gender, Disability, Traveller & Roma, Migrant Integration & LGBTI) (Oireachtas Annual Report) |
| Measures to ensure personal safety of Members and their staff | Provide appropriate personal security for Members and their staff. Establish dedicated supports for Members and their staff facing online abuse and harassment – technical as well as mental health supports. Additional supports to be made available for newly elected Members. |

In addition, it was recommended that by December 2022, Dáil Eireann should “undertake an IPU Gender Sensitive Assessment to be followed by a two-year plan of action including targets and reporting commitments.”³⁸

³⁸ Dáil Eireann, *Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament*, November 2021: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf

Remote voting

A Private Member's Bill, the Thirty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Remote Parliamentary Voting) Bill 2020, currently at Second Stage, aims to implement the recommendation of the Forum and amend the Constitution to allow remote voting. The Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill states:

This Bill enables each House of the Oireachtas to make provision in its rules for specified and limited circumstances in which members not physically present in the House may vote when any matter, or any class of matter as so provided for, is to be determined by a vote of that House. The purpose of the Bill is to enable enhanced flexibility for the working of the Houses of the Oireachtas in times of emergency.

It will also serve that by enabling remote or proxy voting, the Houses of the Oireachtas will be better able to accommodate members who cannot be physically present, either through temporary but enduring incapacitation or by virtue of maternity or paternity provision.³⁹

The Bill sponsor, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD, commented:

The first of the priority recommendations advocates for the introduction of a formal provision for various types of leave, including maternity, parental and adoptive leave, which would be facilitated by a proxy parliamentary voting system...

Since the introduction of my Bill in December 2020, we have seen the first Cabinet Minister in the history of this State, Minister Helen McEntee, take maternity leave. Whilst this was facilitated, the arrangement was by no means a permanent solution.

The implementation of this recommendation will have positive impacts on the second and fourth priority recommendations in particular; to increase the representation of women on Oireachtas Committees and to increase diversity in our Parliament, respectively...⁴⁰

Women for Election

Women for Election was founded in 2012 to provide women who were interested in standing for election with additional support. It offers a number of training programmes aimed at preparing women for roles in elected office. These include:

³⁹ Thirty-ninth Amendment of The Constitution (Remote Parliamentary Voting) Bill 2020: <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2020/73/eng/memo/b7320d-memo.pdf>

⁴⁰ Fine Gael press release, November 2021: <https://www.finegaele.ie/introduction-of-proxy-parliamentary-voting-system-can-be-achieved-through-enactment-of-remote-voting-bill-carroll-macneill/>

- **INSPIRE Campaign School:** delivered through three online training sessions over three weeks, INSPIRE focuses on key areas that women tell us they need help to build Confidence, Communication and Campaigns;
- **Master Classes** in the following areas:
 - Video for campaigning
 - Introduction to Local Government
 - Introduction to Political Systems and Structures
 - Safety and Resilience
 - Negotiation Skills
 - Public Speaking⁴¹
- **Mentoring Programme:** female politicians have generously offered their time to recount their experiences and offer insights and advice

Gender quotas

In the Republic of Ireland, Section 42 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 provides for the financial punishment of political parties that do not have 30% of either sex standing as candidates in the next election, and 40% of either sex in any election after seven years from the first election, by a 50% reduction in state funding.

In proposing the legislation, “the then minister with responsibility for electoral and franchise matters, Mr Phil Hogan, described the scheme as a ‘proportional response to address a significant weakness in Ireland’s democratic system’.”⁴²

The 2016 General Election was the first at which the gender quota law applied. At a lecture on the impact of the law, Dr. Fiona Buckley highlighted the changes brought about by the new requirements:

*Of the 551 candidates who contested the election, 163 (30 per cent) were women, the highest number and proportion of women candidates to ever contest a general election in Ireland, and the number of women candidates represented a 90 per cent increase on the number of women who contested the previous general election in 2011...The 2016 general election saw a 40 per cent increase in the number of women elected.*⁴³

⁴¹ A full list of current courses is available on the website: <https://www.womenforelection.ie/training-programmes/master-classes/>

⁴² Consulate General of Ireland, Sydney: *Ireland’s experience of parliamentary gender quotas*, May 2019: <https://www.dfa.ie/irish-consulate/sydney/news-and-events/latest-news/irelands-experience-of-parliamentary-gender-quotas.html>

⁴³ As above

The final report of the Citizens' Assembly addressed the issue of gender equality.⁴⁴ Addressing women in politics in the Republic of Ireland, the Assembly recommended that the following changes be made by the end of 2022:

(a) Extend the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections and review every 5 years.

(b) Increase penalties for parties that do not meet the statutory gender quotas.

(c) The 30% threshold should be increased to 40% for women (and 40% for men) for all elections.⁴⁵

Promoting good relations

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission is the governing body which oversees the delivery of services to the Houses of the Oireachtas, their members and members of the public by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

A key goal cited in the 'House of the Oireachtas Strategic Plan 2019-21 is to foster a culture of dignity and respect, diversity and inclusion. Developing an 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy' for the Oireachtas Service is cited as a key action to achieve this goal. Work on this strategy is underway.⁴⁶

The Commission also established the post of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer (EDI) in 2020. The EDI identifies actions to be taken to address inequality on any of the grounds set out in the Employment Equality Act 1998-2015 of age, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion, civil status, gender, membership of the Traveller community, civil status and family status. The EDI officer supports the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas to meet its obligations under section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.⁴⁷

5 Welsh Parliament (Senedd)

The Expert Panel on Electoral Reform was established in 2017 and was "tasked with making recommendations on the number of Members the Assembly needs, the system

⁴⁴ Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, June 2021: <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf>

⁴⁵ As above

⁴⁶ House of the Oireachtas Commission. Strategic Plan 2019-2021. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/corporate/strategy/2019/2019-09-03_houses-of-the-oireachtas-commission-strategic-plan_en.pdf

⁴⁷ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. House of the Oireachtas Website. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/how-parliament-is-run/houses-of-the-oireachtas-service/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

by which they should be elected, and the minimum voting age for Assembly elections.”⁴⁸

One of the issues the panel looked at was the diversity of the National Assembly for Wales (as it was then known). It recommended that:

*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...*⁴⁹

The Expert Panel’s preference was that a requirement for gender quotas should be set out in legislation, but in the absence of this (due to uncertainty around the Senedd’s competence in this area), then political parties should implement quotas on a voluntary basis.

In its consideration of the Panel’s recommendations, the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform undertook its own work on diversity quotas, including from stakeholders who favoured the introduction of quotas and those who were more cautious. This was reflected in the views of political parties with:

*some being broadly supportive, some firmly opposed to quotas, and others noting that their parties had not yet established policy positions. Particular issues raised by political parties included the view that candidates should be selected and elected “on merit” rather than as a result of their identities, concern that quotas in respect of some characteristics could limit parties’ flexibility to select candidates from other underrepresented groups.*⁵⁰

It also heard evidence from Professor Sarah Childs who emphasised that “women as a group are diverse: they may or may not be carers or parents, they may or may not have disabilities, and they will come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.”⁵¹

Professor Childs commented that:

We know that there are enough women who already fit the candidate profile to go into Parliament, but what about all the others who don’t currently think of themselves as being able to participate? I think that’s a slightly different

⁴⁸ Report of the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, A Parliament that Works for Wales, November 2017: <https://senedd.wales/media/eqbesxl2/a-parliament-that-works-for-wales.pdf>

⁴⁹ As above

⁵⁰ Welsh Parliament Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform, *Senedd reform: The next steps*, September 2020: <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13452/cr-ld13452%20-e.pdf>

⁵¹ As above

*question. Just counting bodies doesn't always tell us how lacking in diversity an institution can be.*⁵²

The Committee also looked at voluntary quotas adopted by political parties in Sweden, Norway and Austria. Table 2 reproduces the Committee's findings.

Table 4: voluntary quotas in Sweden, Norway and Austria

| Country | Voluntary quotas | Minimum and maximum percentage of women MPs between 1997 and 2019 |
|---------|--|---|
| Sweden | Elected by Closed List PR. At least three of the largest political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas. Two commit to their lists comprising 50 per cent women candidates, and the third to zipping its lists (alternating women and men candidates). The Social Democratic Party and Left Party introduced quotas in 1978. Other parties adopted quotas during the 1980s and 1990s | 40-47 per cent |
| Norway | Elected by Closed List PR. At least four of the largest political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas committing to their lists comprising proportions of women candidates ranging from 40 to 50 per cent for different parties. The Socialist Left Party adopted a quota in 1975. Other parties adopted quotas during the 1980s and 1990s. | 36-41 per cent |
| Austria | Elected by Open List PR. At least three of the largest political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas committing to their lists comprising proportions of women candidates, ranging from 33 per cent to 50 per cent for different parties. The Social Democratic Party of Austria adopted a quota in 1985. Other parties adopted quotas during the 1990s. | 26-39 per cent |

The Committee on Senedd Reform was “persuaded by the clear and compelling evidence that gender quotas, whether legislative requirements or voluntarily adopted by political parties, can increase the diversity of candidates and elected Members.”⁵³ It did raise the issue of the legislative competence of the Senedd in this regard and recommended more work to clarify this when consideration is given to take a bill forward on this matter.

Promoting good relations

The Senedd Commission serves the National Assembly for Wales providing property, staff and the services required by the Welsh Assembly to effectively fulfil its functions.

The Commission has identified a set of seven diversity and inclusion values including one which aims to:

⁵² Welsh Parliament Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform, *Senedd reform: The next steps*, September 2020:

⁵³ As above

*Promote positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion and foster good relations between different groups of people.*⁵⁴

The Commission has a range of policies and actions in place to promote these diversity and inclusion values which are set out in further detail below.

i) Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2021

The recently concluded 'Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2016-2021 produced by the Senedd Commission was designed to build on the work already undertaken by two previous equality plans aimed at embedding diversity, inclusion and equality considerations at all levels within the Senedd Commission.⁵⁵ The Strategy ran from 2017 until after the end of the Fifth Assembly term in April 2021 and work has begun on a new strategy for the sixth Senedd.

The 2016-2021 strategy identified several priority areas it wanted to address including:

- Supporting existing staff and attracting prospective staff from the widest pool of talent;
- Reflecting diversity at all levels of the organisation particularly at a senior decision-making level where there is an underrepresentation of black minority ethnic (BME) and disabled staff;
- Ensuring that the Assembly continues to be accessible to all the people of Wales making it relevant, easy and meaningful for people to interact with it; and
- Ensuring the Commission complies with the duties placed on it by the Government of Wales Act 2006 and also by the Equality Act 2010 covering each of the protected characteristics.⁵⁶

The strategy outlined five specific objectives related to the priority areas above. A separate action plan detailing the specific activities needed to meet the objectives of the strategy was developed with teams across the organisation in order to align with their service area plan.⁵⁷

The Commission drew on key performance indicators (KPIs) and other key data to measure the success of the strategy and reported regularly via dashboard reports to Management Board to track progress on implementing the strategy. Furthermore, an Annual Diversity and Inclusion Report was published at the end of each financial year as well as information relating to any equality impact assessments that have been undertaken.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ National Assembly for Wales (2017) Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-21. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/2x114amg/final-di-strategy-e.pdf>

⁵⁵ As above

⁵⁶ Protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation

⁵⁷ Senedd Commission - Diversity and Inclusion - Our Strategy. Welsh Parliament Website. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/commission/work-for-the-senedd-commission/diversity-and-inclusion-at-the-commission/our-strategy/>.

⁵⁸ As above

ii) Workplace Equality Networks

The Senedd Commission has developed six Workplace Equality Networks aimed at promoting equality, fostering good relations and removing discrimination. The work of the Equality Networks includes offering advice on diversity, inclusion and equality issues and impact assessing policies to ensure they are fair and inclusive.

The six networks, set out in table 3, are self-managed and are inclusive of Commission staff, Assembly Members and their staff and onsite contractors. They identify opportunities to enhance inclusion in the Commission, where they work in partnership with management and Trade Unions to bring about positive change and improvements. Each network is supported by a Workplace Equality Network Co-ordinator, a Senior Network Champion and a Network Chair.⁵⁹

Table 5: Senedd Commission Workplace Equality Networks⁶⁰

| | |
|--|---|
| PLWS – LGBTQ+ workplace Equality Network | TEULU – Working Parent and Carer Network |
| REACH – Race, ethnicity and Cultural Heritage Network | INSPIRE - Women’s Workplace Equality Network |
| EMBRACE – Disability Workforce Equality Network | MINDFUL – Mental Health Support Network |

An example of the types of activities undertaken in 2020/21 by the Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage Network (REACH) are set out below:

- A podcast was produced featuring two network chairs and the REACH senior champion, discussing race equality in the Senedd and wider society;
- Members from the network attended the Race in the Workplace Conference 2021;
- Reviewed several policies;
- Members attended a training session on ‘Being a better ally to LGBTQ+ People of Colour’; and
- Members produced blog articles for Black History Month.⁶¹

iii) Diversity and Inclusion Week

In 2021 the Commission hosted its first virtual Diversity and Inclusion Week which consisted of a variety of information and training resources on topical issues, including:

⁵⁹ National Assembly for Wales (2017) Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-21. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/2x114amg/final-di-strategy-e.pdf>

⁶⁰ Senedd Commission Workplace Equality Networks. Welsh Parliament Website. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/commission/work-for-the-senedd-commission/diversity-and-inclusion-at-the-commission/workplace-equality-networks/>

⁶¹ Senedd Commission (2021) Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2020-21. Available at: <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s118101/PAPAC6-03-21%20P1A-%20Senedd%20Commission%20Diversity%20and%20Inclusion%20Annual%20Report%202020-21.pdf>

- New online training with a particular focus on understanding race bias and trans inclusion;
- Business in the Community (BITC) 'Let's talk about race' training for staff and a session for Leadership Team;
- Perspectives on Allyship⁶² with members, allies and chairs contributing across networks;
- Worked with the Official Languages Team and Welsh Learners' page to ensure there were Welsh-medium D&I resources promoted for the first time; and
- Intersectional Parenting blogs from three networks: PLWS, Embrace and Mindful.

6 Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament's Standing Orders require that consideration be given to gender balance when making nominations to the Parliamentary Corporate Body. Similar consideration must also be given when making nominations to the Parliamentary Bureau.⁶³

The 58 women returned at the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary election was the highest number ever. Discussing this figure, the Centre on Constitutional Change noted:

One of the biggest takeaways from these numbers is that strong equality measures like gender quotas work. These record numbers have not been achieved by accident – they highlight the impact of quotas measures (particularly the use of all-women shortlists by the SNP in key constituency seats where sitting MSPs were retiring). While most of the main parties used equality measures this time around, and the SNP, Greens and Labour achieved close to gender parity or better in their parliamentary representation – the Scottish Conservatives remain an outlier, lagging well behind the other main parties on the adoption of equality measures and women's representation, with only 26% women MSPs elected and only one woman candidate topping a regional list.⁶⁴

The Commission on Parliamentary Reform was established by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament in 2017 to examine ways in which the Parliament could better carry out its scrutiny function. It stated that:

Parliament should take a greater role in promoting the policies and behaviour others should adopt and can take a lead by encouraging all political parties to

⁶² Allyship is the practice of emphasising social justice, inclusion, and human rights by members of an ingroup, to advance the interests of an oppressed or marginalized outgroup. Allyship is part of the anti-oppression or anti-racist conversation.

⁶³ Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament: <https://www.parliament.scot/about/how-parliament-works/parliament-rules-and-guidance/-/media/2148205a789a4a83b81f0f0c01e6971f.ashx>

⁶⁴ Centre on Constitutional Change, *A record-breaking election, but what next?*, May 2021: <https://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/record-breaking-election-what-next>

work on increasing diversity amongst their candidates. Having a truly diverse pool of representatives would enable Parliament to represent all the people of Scotland more effectively.

It did not make an explicit call for the introduction of gender quotas, but did say that:

If sufficient progress is not made in the long-term, we suggest Parliament considers the extent to which party funding provided by Parliament (and therefore tax payers) should be linked to each party's progress in selecting a more diverse range of candidates for Scottish Parliamentary elections.⁶⁵

The Commission made the following recommendations in relation to diversity:

- A systematic review of Standing Orders should be undertaken to ensure that it is diversity sensitive and inclusive to facilitate equal and effective participation by MSPs in all business;
- As a first step, committee membership should reflect the gender balance of MSPs in the Parliament. This approach should then be expanded to other protected characteristics once better diversity in representatives is achieved;
- Parliament should report on key aspects of parliamentary business and MSPs by protected characteristic. Subsequently the Parliament, political parties and others should work together to agree benchmarks for what is desirable in terms of diversity in candidates for Scottish Parliamentary elections and set a realistic timetable for achieving this; and
- Parliament should also be proactive in promoting a range of measures to bring diversity into the Parliament.⁶⁶

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, in response to the Commission's recommendation that a review of Standing Orders be undertaken, "considered a range of approaches that had been adopted in other legislatures and agreed to focus on work to ensure that the Standing Orders were inclusive and facilitate the equal and effective participation of Members with parenting responsibilities, particularly those nursing infants, in parliamentary proceedings."⁶⁷

In a subsequent letter to the Presiding Officer, the Committee Chair advised:

...there should be specific provision to ensure that Members with childcare responsibilities, particularly nursing mothers, were able to participate in Chamber business. I would therefore be grateful if you would give consideration to Members being allowed to breastfeed in the Chamber should

⁶⁵ Commission on Parliamentary Reform in Scotland:

<https://test123582.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/commissiononparliamentaryreformreport-june20171.pdf>

⁶⁶ As above

⁶⁷ Commission on Parliamentary Reform, Scottish Parliament:

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/108084.aspx>

*the need arise. In addition, the Committee considered it important that there should be sufficient flexibility in the arrangements for caring for children in the Parliament's crèche so that Members could use the creche, if necessary, to facilitate their participation in parliamentary business.*⁶⁸

The Presiding Officer supported the proposals from the Committee.⁶⁹

Promoting good relations

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) supports the work of the Parliament and its members. Its staff provide the day-to-day services that Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP's) need to carry out their roles.⁷⁰

Similar to the approach taken by the Senedd Commission in Wales, the SPCB has developed an Equality and Diversity Strategy and established a network of Equality Groups as well as seeking external recognition for their work in promoting diversity and fostering good relations.

i) Scottish Parliament Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which was published in 2017 and runs until the end of 2021, identifies three priority outcomes to be achieved over its term:

- A diverse workforce that reflects a modern Scottish society;
- An inclusive working environment where all staff are valued and respected; and
- Deliver services that are accessible and meet the needs and expectations of the diverse groups who connect with the Parliament.⁷¹

In particular, the SPCB are focused on including and supporting members of ethnic minority groups, young people and those from disadvantaged social backgrounds.

A delivery plan, developed on a yearly basis, sets out the activities required to allow Parliament to deliver the priority outcomes set out in the strategy. The Diversity & Inclusion Board oversee the activities included in the delivery plan and also monitor progress.⁷²

ii) Diversity Staff Networks

The Scottish Parliament has a number of Diversity Staff Networks which are led by interested members of staff and seek to offer peer support to colleagues. Each network meets regularly and has its own remit, roles and forward work plan. Two Chairs from

⁶⁸ Correspondence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, December 2018: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/S5_Standards/Inquiries/20181212ConvPO.pdf

⁶⁹ Commission on Parliamentary Reform, Scottish Parliament

⁷⁰ Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. The Scottish Parliament Website. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/about/how-parliament-works/parliament-organisations-groups-and-people/scottish-parliamentary-corporate-body>

⁷¹ Diversity & Inclusion. Scottish Parliament's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. Available at: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/StaffAndManagementResources/Diversity_and_Inclusion_Strategy_2017-21_3.pdf

⁷² As above

the networks sit on the Diversity and Inclusion Board where issues can be addressed at a higher level. Additional time is supported for Chairs and people with a more active role in any of the networks.⁷³

The purpose of the networks, set out in table 4, are to:

- Make underrepresented groups visible;
- Provide people with new skills and experiences, peer support and better collaboration across business areas;
- Build connection with local communities;
- Help develop and improve policies and services; and
- Creates a more diverse workforce.⁷⁴

Table 6: Scottish Parliament diversity Staff Networks⁷⁵

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>BAME Network</p> <p>Support the Parliament to become an employer of choice for people from the BME community, support under-represented groups, and encourage involvement of all colleagues.</p> | <p>Mental Health Network</p> <p>Information on the remit of the Mental Health Network is not currently available.</p> |
| <p>SPOut LGBT+ Network</p> <p>Develop awareness and understanding of the experiences and challenges of (LGBT+) communities, who want to work for, visit or engage with the Parliament.</p> | <p>Women's Network</p> <p>Provides a safe, open forum for people to discuss issues pertaining to women including health, working patterns and personal development.</p> |
| <p>YP @ SP</p> <p>To create a motivating and supportive space for all staff who work with, or are, young staff members and contribute to approaches on how to target barriers young people face.</p> | <p>ParliAble</p> <p>The disability staff network is open to all staff and seeks to explore disability issues for all those that work at, visit or engage with the Scottish Parliament</p> |

7 Women's caucuses

In 2012 the IPU published *Guidelines for Women's Caucuses* which aimed to provide a step-by-step guide for the establishment of caucuses and to improve the effectiveness of existing caucuses, focus the attention of parliamentarians on the key issues and all of the various aspects entailed in creating and running a caucus and achieving its objectives.⁷⁶

Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Dáil Eireann

⁷³Diversity Networks. The Scottish Parliament Website. Available at:

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/abouttheparliament/diversity-staff-networks.aspx>

⁷⁴Diversity & Inclusion. Scottish Parliament's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. Available at:

https://archive2021.parliament.scot/StaffAndManagementResources/Diversity_and_Inclusion_Strategy_2017-21_3.pdf

⁷⁵ Diversity Networks. The Scottish Parliament Website. Available at:

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/abouttheparliament/diversity-staff-networks.aspx>

⁷⁶ IPU, *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*, 2012

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established in 2017 and is open to all female parliamentarians in the Houses of the Oireachtas. All female members are members unless they choose to opt out. Its mission is to:

bring together women members of the Oireachtas from all parties and none. To work purposefully, promoting and supporting women's participation in politics, nationally and locally; to develop and advocate for legislation, policy and other initiatives that address issues affecting women and society. To advance the agreed agenda of the Caucus within political parties and other spheres of influence.⁷⁷

In 2018 the Women's Caucus hosted the first International Congress of Parliamentary Women's Caucuses. The Congress published the 'Dublin Declaration' which set out six aims:

- 1) working towards the establishment of a Women's Caucus in every parliament by 2020;
- 2) the creation of a network of women's caucuses which can meet on a regular basis to further the aims of the Congress;
- 3) that all parliaments encourage the continuity of their caucuses by investing in institutional memory and adequate resourcing which would support their work;
- 4) that each caucus would develop a clear plan of action aimed at influencing policies and actions which encourage greater participation by women in politics and other areas of relevance to each society;
- 5) that each caucus would strengthen links with civil society groups working in areas that affect women; and
- 6) that each caucus and parliamentarian will continue to strive in their representative roles to improve the lives of women throughout the world.⁷⁸

Also in 2018, it was reported that a referendum to remove the constitutional reference to a 'woman's place in the home' was delayed to allow consultation with the Women's Caucus.⁷⁹

In 2019 the Caucus moved motions on period poverty in the Dáil and Seanad.

⁷⁷ Dáil Éireann, Women's Parliamentary Caucus Constitution, July 2017:

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/communications/other/2018/2018-07-12_constitution-of-the-irish-women-s-parliamentary-caucus_en.pdf

⁷⁸ Declaration of the International Congress of Parliamentary Women's Caucuses Dublin, September 10th 2018:

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/interparliamentary/2018/2018-09-10_dublin-declaration-international-congress-of-parliamentary-women-s-caucuses-2018_en.pdf

⁷⁹ The Times, *Caucus wanted more talks on 'woman's place'*, 1 July 2018: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/caucus-wanted-more-talks-on-womans-place-85vcwkrqtg>

United States Congress

The Women's Caucus in the United States Congress has a long history of legislative achievements since its establishment in April 1977. Some of its accomplishments over the years include the introduction of:

- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978)
- The Women's Business Ownership Act (1988)
- The Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act (1990)
- The Mammography Quality Standards Act (1992)
- The Violence Against Women Act (1994)

More recently, "the Women's Caucus has introduced legislation signed into law to address the needs of women serving in the military and women veterans, combat the domestic and international trafficking of women and girls, end sexual harassment and violence, increase the number of women and girls in STEM, and address women's preventative health."⁸⁰

In 1995 the House of Representatives voted to cut funding for all caucus groups. Since then, the Women's Congressional Policy Institute has worked closely with the Women's Caucus to advance their agenda, although the two organisations are not formally linked.

Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Pakistan

A well-established and productive caucus is the Women's Parliamentary Caucus in the National Assembly of Pakistan. It was established in November 2008 and performs the following functions:

- **Legislation:** Developing gender-sensitive legislative responses
- **Oversight:** Review and Supervision of gender-inclusive programs and policy
- **Representation:** Serving the cause of the women of Pakistan and amplifying their voice
- **Awareness:** Raising Awareness on gender issues of urgent importance

The caucus has a consistent record of hosting events and producing accompanying reports, including the following:

- Challenges and impediments against Women in Politics, Seminar, July 2019

⁸⁰ Women's Congressional Policy Institute: <https://www.wcpinst.org/our-work/the-womens-caucus/caucus-history-and-accomplishments/>

- Reflecting on the Legislative, Representative, and Oversight Role of Women Parliamentarians, March 2018
- Roundtable Conference on Women Policing, November and 2014.

The Caucus also undertakes visits to external organisations and cooperates with groups from other parliaments.⁸¹

Other international examples

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Women's Parliamentary Club supported the adoption of a law establishing a 30 percent parliamentary quota for women. This women's caucus also contributed to drafting the Law on Equal Opportunities and supported a new chapter in the Law on Families to protect victims of domestic violence.

In Rwanda, the Women Parliamentary Forum advocated for constitutional quotas for women in parliament and other electoral mechanisms, which allowed a rapid increase in women's parliamentary representation, going from 16 percent in the lower house in 1996 to 61.3 percent in 2018.⁸²

⁸¹ Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Pakistan: <https://wpc.org.pk/news/>

⁸² Electoral Knowledge Network, Women's Parliamentary Caucuses: <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge10/women2019s-parliamentary-caucuses>