



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Assembly and Executive Review Committee

**Stakeholder 'Call for Evidence' Paper on Review
Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

Section 1
Stakeholder Details

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Stakeholder Name	Telephone Number		
Sinn Féin			
Stakeholder Address	Stakeholder Type (Include one or more X)		
Ard Oifig 44 Parnell Square Dublin 1	Registered Political Party	x	Local Government
	Academic		Government
	Legislature		Non-Government
	Other (Please Specify)/ Member of the Public		
Please provide some background information on your role as a stakeholder			
<p>(This box will expand as you type)</p> <p>Sinn Féin / political party in Ireland.</p>			
Guidelines for Completion of Submissions			
<p>The Committee would ask that stakeholders submit <u>electronic</u> responses using this pro forma.</p> <p>Stakeholders should be aware that their written evidence will be discussed by the Committee in public session and included in the Committee's published Report.</p> <p>Stakeholders should also be aware that if they decide to publish their submissions, the publication would not be covered by Assembly privilege in relation to the law of defamation.</p>			

Section 2

Introduction

Powers

- 2.1. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee is a Standing Committee established in accordance with Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (“the 1998 Act”) and Standing Order 59 which, amongst other powers, provide for the Committee to:
- I. make a report to the Secretary of State, the Assembly and the Executive Committee, by no later than 1 May 2015, on the operation of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and
 - II. consider such other matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive as may be referred to it by the Assembly.

Assembly and Executive Review Committee’s Terms of Reference for and approach to this Review

- 2.2. The Committee agreed the **Terms of Reference** of this Review on **24 June 2014** as follows:
- i. **Analyse the key challenges / barriers facing women in relation to entry into politics in Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**
 - ii. **Examine potential existing initiatives which would assist women in relation to entry into politics in this Assembly**
 - iii. **Examine what are the merits of ‘positive actions’ that have been successful within the United Kingdom and Ireland and within other jurisdictions, and to consider their potential impact in the context of Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**
 - iv. **Provide recommendations / conclusions on i to iii above, including initiatives / mechanisms to enhance the role of women already active in the political arena in Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**

Phase 1 – Review Evidence Gathering

The Review will take evidence on **Women in Politics in the Northern Ireland Assembly** in relation to the (i) to (iv) above. This will include evidence from **Assembly Research and Information Services, expert / academic witnesses, a**

public 'Call for Evidence' and from visits to other legislatures.

Phase 2 – Consideration and Report

The Committee will consider all evidence received in relation to **Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly** and report and provide recommendations / conclusions to the Assembly on these matters by in **late autumn 2014**.

Matters Outside the Scope of the Review

- 2.3. The Committee has agreed that the following issue is outside of the scope of the Review:
- **Alternative electoral systems / models**

Section 3

BACKGROUND

This section provides some background information on some issues being considered by the Committee as part of this Review.

3.1. The following sections provide information relating to **Women in politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly** drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly Research & Information Service Research paper NIAR 570-13.¹

3.2 Statistical Outline

The Northern Ireland Assembly currently has 22 female Members out of a total of 108 (22%), although 20 women were elected in 2011, the net increase being due to two more female than male co-option by a party and independent Member replacing Members since the election. 38 female and 180 male candidates stood in the 2011 Assembly elections (17.4%).

If placed in international perspective alongside national legislatures, the Northern Ireland Assembly would rank 70th in the world. Apart from the Italian regional legislatures, the Northern Ireland Assembly has significantly lower female representation than comparable Western European legislatures.

The following figures place the Assembly in the perspective of female political representation in Northern Ireland and in general.

- 23.5% of Local Councillors in 2011 were women (compared with 31% in England)
- With 5 of 26 Mayors /Chairs of Councils were women
- 4 of 18 MPs are women (compared with 22% in GB)
- 2 of 3 MEPs are women (compared with 30% in GB)
- 4 of 15 Ministers and Junior Ministers are women
- 4 Chairpersons and 2 Deputy Chairperson of Committees are women out of 18 Committees

The representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland has a direct association with candidate selection. An examination of the 2011 Assembly elections indicates that female candidates generally fared better than their male counterparts in terms of votes won, but the lower numbers elected were more reflective of lower numbers of candidates.

3.3 Policy

The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, which consists of a range of commitments by governments to address structural disadvantages experienced by women internationally, includes specific measures to increase women's participation in power and decision-making.

¹ http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf

These include:

Strategic Objective G.1: Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

Strategic Objective G.2: Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

The Belfast Agreement 1998 includes a commitment to *'the right of women to full and equal political participation'*.

The vision for the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland states:

Men and women will be able to realise their full potential to contribute equally to the political, economic, social, (including caring roles) and cultural development of Northern Ireland and benefit equally from the results.

One of the Key Action Areas of the Strategy is *'representation in public life/decision-making'*, which is associated with the following strategic objectives:

- To achieve better collection and dissemination of data;
- To achieve gender balance on all government appointed committees, boards and other relevant official bodies;
- To actively promote an inclusive society; and
- To ensure the participation of women and men in all levels of peace building, civil society, economy and government

3.5 Legislative Frameworks

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly are provided for in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. There are no provisions for gender equality relating to elections in the Act.

The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 amends the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to exempt the selection of election candidates from the provision of the Order. This enables political parties to use positive discrimination for the promotion of women candidates over men. This provision has been extended to 2030.

Further information on barriers to women's participation within legislatures; examples of proposals, mechanisms to overcome barriers; quotas and support mechanisms to increase the political participation are set out in paper NIAR 570-13.

www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaSe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf

Section 4

Questions to consider

(1) Question

What are the key challenges / barriers facing women in relation to entering politics in Northern Ireland, and in particular the Northern Ireland Assembly, and what evidence can you provide on this?

There are many barriers facing women entering politics in Ireland including the five C's. Cash, confidence, Culture, Childcare, Candidate Selection. Women are under represented at local councils in public appointments, at senior levels of the Civil Service, in the Judiciary, in the media. This has led to the creation of a culture that is very adversarial for many women especially women who strive for equality. In Stormont there are no women directors in the senior management group.

At times the culture of the Assembly is very hostile to women and slow to deal with the sexism and misogyny that women politicians have to endure on a regular basis. On many occasions the authority of women in positions of power is challenged and undermines women in senior political roles. (one of the most recent examples was Gregory Campbell's, MP, MLA intervention during question time when Minister Ní Chuilín was answering questions) The sad thing about this was the failure of any of his colleagues to speak out publicly following these comments.)

On another occasion a woman MLA was reduced to tears in the chamber during a debate by bullying behaviour of some male MLA's. This bullying behaviour leads many women (young and old) to say politics is not for them. It is too adversarial, too personal when it comes to women.

Candidate selection is one of the areas that mitigates against women entering politics. It is seen as jobs for the boys and if women are not part of the networks it is difficult to get a foot in. Lack of quotas, or financial penalties for failing to elect a certain percentage of women lets the system off the hook time and again.

An analysis of media shows that on a consistent basis women do not get fair share of coverage and this has an adverse impact on opportunities in a very competitive electoral arena.

Girls also need to have strong female role models, the messages sent to girls early by the rows of men in suits, generally older men is that politics is for older men and not for women.

The under representation of women on Boards and other areas of public life also affects the number of women in politics.

(2) Question

Can you provide evidence on initiatives which demonstrates positive outcomes to encourage more women to pursue a career in politics which could be applied to the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Sinn Féin take a very proactive approach to Women in Politics. Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle is elected on a list system, whereby there are two lists a women's list and men's list. This ensures 50% women elected from the floor of the Ard Fheis.

Sinn Féin's vice president is a woman
3 out of 4 of Sinn Féin's MEP's are women
9 out of 29 MLA's are women
1 out of 5 MP's are women
2 out of 14 TD's are women
1 out of 3 Senators is a woman
3 out of 5 Ministers are women
Chief Whip in the North is a woman.
Ard Rúnaí is a woman.

Sinn Féin take a proactive approach to promoting women into positions of leadership and supporting them in those public positions.

Sinn Féin is leading in terms of political parties but it has a way to go and the women in Sinn Féin and many of the men want to see continuous improvement in relation to representation of women at all levels of the party.

Sinn Féin support Quotas (mandatory, Voluntary)
Sinn Féin support zipping, twinning.
Sinn Féin proactively approach and encourage women to stand in local council, MLA, TD,

MEP and for party positions.

Sinn Féin support a cross party caucus

Sinn Féin takes a very strong stand in challenging sexism and misogyny whether it is internal to the party or externally.

Sinn Féin supports quotas for women on public boards.

Sinn Féin supports women in press.

Sinn Féin support equality legislation (which includes gender)

Sinn Féin supports financial penalties

Sinn Féin supports family friendly hours and would be open to looking at job sharing for elected representatives.

Sinn Féin believe there should be a zero tolerance approach to sexism in public life.

(3a) Question

What policies should political parties have in place to increase the number of women candidates in Northern Ireland elections?

Quotas

Twinning / Zipping

Financial penalties

Putting women candidates in winnable seats

Appointing women to senior positions internally and within the Assembly/ Executive, Leinster House, European parliament, Councils.

Support women who are in senior positions.

Tackle gender inequality at all levels within the party

Tackle head on sexism and misogyny

Build strong role models for younger men and women coming forward.

Gender budgeting.

Education around gender equality for male and female party activists and elected representatives.

Sinn Féin believe that we need to listen to women politicians and activists and see what they identify as obstacles and difficulties.

(3b) Question

Political Parties are asked to specify what policies and initiatives they have in place to increase women in political life?

Sinn Féin has a Proactive approach to putting women into winnable seats.
Sinn Féin has a proactive approach to putting women into senior positions internally and in public life.
See above for the positions that are held by women in Sinn Féin.
Sinn Féin support the list for men and list for women for election to the Ard Chomhairle
Sinn Féin provide specific training for women candidates and elected representatives.
Sinn Féin supports legislation that imposes financial penalties against parties that do not have a percentage of women as candidates.
Sinn Féin uses the offices to encourage and promote more women into public life.
Sinn Féin has proposed that the Assembly Commission carry out a Gender Action Plan.
Sinn Féin proposed that the AERC carrying out an inquiry into Women in Politics in the Assembly the North.

(4) Question

What 'positive actions' would you recommend to increase women's representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Quotas
Zipping / twinning
Financial penalties for parties who do not select specified percentages of women.
Promoting women to public office
Cross party Caucus
Open to examining job sharing
Gender equality strategy
Raising the issue of gender equality in committees

(5) Question

What recommendations would you put forward to enhance the role of women already active in the political arena in Northern Ireland (providing evidence for recommendations as applicable)?

Active support from their party to carry out their duties
Listen to their concerns in their role and see what support is needed.
Promote them in the media and show a positive role model to younger and older women and men.
Promote them as Ministers, Chairs of Committees and other offices.
Ensure Women get to speak in debates and other duties of the Assembly.
Ensure women do interviews and major public events.

(6) Question

Do you consider there are specific initiatives / actions that the Northern Ireland Assembly as an institution should take to enhance the role of women in politics, including a gender sensitive environment – and if so please include your recommendations.

Need to ensure that there is gender equality amongst staff in the assembly at every level.
Promote the women who are in the Assembly.
Speaker could play a role in promoting gender equality (if we had a Speaker)
Inquiry that AERC is carrying out is very important in this regard.
Continuous challenging of sexism.
Monitoring employment of women
Gender equality training for all MLA's in order to enable them to carry out their functions at committee level.

Section 5

Additional Information

Please provide any additional information which you believe will be of assistance to the Committee during the course of the Review.

Sinn Féin welcome the AERC initiative. Sinn Féin welcome the proactive approach taken, and confirm that we will play our role to do everything within our power to ensure that our institutions are equal in terms of gender – Houses of the Oireachtas, Assembly, North South Ministerial Council, British Irish Council, North South Interparliamentary Association, British Irish Association and Constitutional Convention.

Section 6

Contact Details

All responses should be sent by email please to:

The Committee Clerk
Assembly and Executive Review Committee
Room 241
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Tel: 028 90521787 or
028 90521928

To arrive no later than Wednesday 3 September 2014 please

Email: committee.assembly&executivereview@niassembly.gov.uk

Thank you for your submission