



**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: Ulster Unionist Party	Telephone Number: 028 9047 7630		
Stakeholder Address	Stakeholder Type (Include one or more X)		
Strandtown Hall 2-4 Belmont Road BT4 2AN	Registered Political Party	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Local Government
	Academic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Government
	Legislature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Government
	Other (Please Specify)/ Member of the Public		
Please provide some background information on your role as a stakeholder			
<p>The Ulster Unionist Party is one of the oldest political parties within the United Kingdom. The historical ruling body, the Ulster Unionist Council recognised the importance of the role of women since its early days. The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council was established in 1911 to encourage women to development and contribute politically and to ensure representation of women at the highest levels within the party.</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			
<u>Introduction</u>			
<u>Powers</u>			
<p>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:</p>			

- 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.

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

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.

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/RaISe/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?

The Ulster Unionist Party has recognised the under representation of Ulster Unionist women within elected bodies and has been actively supporting female members to increase their representation and encouraging more to put themselves forward for selection and election.

The Ulster Unionist Party values all its members, male and female. We are committed to delivering inclusive and balanced representation for the people of Northern Ireland and we want to offer candidates who – female or male – can best represent and best serve their constituents.

Key challenges in increasing female representation. include increasing the confidence and fine tuning the skill sets of potential candidates.

(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?

Sandra Overend MLA in her role as the Party Officer with responsibility for Women's Development launched the Dame Dehra Parker Programme in 2009. It was designed to encourage more Ulster Unionist women to play a greater role in political activism and to become elected representatives.

The Dame Dehra Parker Programme has successfully developed the skills and increased the confidence of female members. Whilst there has been a number of participants who have been successfully elected to local government and to the NI Assembly, we recognise that further work needs to be done and are committed to building on the good work that has already been done.

(3a) Question

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

This is a decision for individual political parties.

Ulster Unionists believe in supporting and encouraging female activists. Tailored female support programmes are important to increase the skills and confidence of women considering standing for election.

Further empowering female elected representatives with positions of responsibility can boost electoral performance and encourage other women to step forward.

For example, after just 2 years as a Councillor on Larne Borough Council, Cllr Maureen Morrow was put forward by her Ulster Unionist colleagues as Mayor. She was highly successful during her Mayoral year in which she was recognised by all as playing an exemplar role as Mayor. It came as no surprise when she significantly increased her personal support and UUP support in the recent local government elections.

(3b) Question

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

Ulster Unionists believe in supporting and encouraging female activists.

In addition to the Dame Dehra Parker programme which we outlined earlier, we continue to highlight successful women role models from the world of business and community at our annual conferences to encourage more women to step forward and play a full role in the Party and election politics.

Tailored female support and training programmes are important to increase skills and confidence of women considering standing for election.

Empowering women with positions of responsibility can boost electoral performance and encourage other women to step forward.

(4) Question

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

We would recommend the provision of Training and support programmes to encourage and increase the skills and confidence of prospective female candidates. The progress of Jo-Anne Dobson's Organ Donation Bill to date has shown that a first term female MLA, supported by colleagues, motivated by personal experience and working closely with a range of charities can be a very effective political force and an inspiration to other women to get involved with the party and seek selection.

We also believe that NILGA could play a key role of encouraging more capable women councillors to consider standing for election to the NI Assembly.

We also value the role played by privately funded training programmes such as Politics Plus in encouraging female political volunteers and activists to step forward and play their part in elected politics.

(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)?

The Media should be encouraged to highlight positive female role models

The provision of training and support programmes to enhance skills and confidence

(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.

We would suggest that the Assembly's authorities utilise Assembly Research and Politics Plus to engage with women and undertake research to discover why they are not coming forward in sufficient numbers and what game-changing initiatives could be brought forward as a result.

In short, begin by listening to the stakeholders.

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.

It is extremely important that the Assembly better reflects the society it represents. Women make up approximately 51% of the population and it is clear that all political parties have work to do to increase the number of women being selected and elected.

Section 6

Contact Details

All responses should be sent by email please to:

The Committee Clerk
Assembly and Executive Review Committee
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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