



Elin Jones AC, Llywydd

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

Elin Jones AM, Presiding Officer

National Assembly for Wales

David Rowlands AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

10 January 2018

Dear David

Petition P-05-794 Lowering the Voting Age to Sixteen

Thank you for your letter of 21 November 2017 in relation to petition P-05-794, which calls for the minimum voting age for elections within the competence of the National Assembly for Wales to be lowered to 16.

The Fourth Assembly Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler, led a consultation in 2015 on whether 16- and 17-year-olds should be entitled to vote. Over 10,000 young people from across Wales took part in the consultation, of whom 53 per cent said that the voting age should be lowered, 29 per cent said it should not, and 18 per cent were unsure.

As you will be aware, in February 2017 I appointed an Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, tasked with considering what the minimum voting age should be for Assembly elections, as well as matters relating to the Assembly's size and electoral system.

In December 2017, the Expert Panel published its report: [*A Parliament that Works for Wales*](#). It concluded that a reduction in the minimum voting age to 16 would be a powerful way to raise political awareness and participation among young people. The Panel noted that the Welsh Government intended to legislate to

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reduce the minimum voting age for local elections in Wales to 16 with effect from 2022, and suggested that:

“...it would be extremely anomalous, and create additional administrative and political issues, if the voting age for Assembly elections from 2021 were not also reduced. The evidence suggests that higher salience elections are more likely to result in higher turnout and voter participation; it is therefore desirable that if the franchise is to be extended in Wales, it should first take effect at the higher salience Assembly election.”

Issues relating to the minimum voting age are set out in chapter 15 of the Panel’s report, which makes three recommendations (included in the annex to this letter for ease of reference).

The Expert Panel’s report is part of the Assembly Commission’s wider Assembly reform work. As you will be aware, I announced last year that, following the unanimous agreement of the Assembly and a period of public consultation, the Assembly Commission had decided to introduce legislation to change the name of the institution to Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru.

In isolation, this change aims to achieve a better understanding among the public of the work of the Assembly, as well as encouraging greater engagement between the institution and the people and communities it serves. However, by encompassing wider reforms, any Assembly Reform legislation could also be an opportunity to:

- ensure that the institution truly has the capacity that it needs to serve the people and communities it represents;
- invigorate our democracy, and enthuse and engage young people;
- ensure that the Assembly’s other electoral and internal arrangements, while robust, also provide the flexibility which is appropriate for a mature legislature.

It was on the basis of exploring these wider opportunities that I announced in June that the scope of the Assembly reform legislation would be considered once



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the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform had reported and the degree of political consensus was clearer.

As I set out in my [Written Statement of 12 December 2017](#), fundamental constitutional issues of the nature considered by the Expert Panel cannot be separated from the political realities of representative democracy in Wales. Delivering change will require the building of political consensus within the Assembly and outside. The next phase of the Assembly reform work will therefore include wide engagement with all Assembly Members, with civic and political society, and, above all, with the people of Wales. To this end, the Assembly Commission will consult in early 2018 on how the Panel's recommendations and the wider programme of reform should be taken forward.

Yours sincerely

Elin Jones

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



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Annex: Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform relating to the minimum voting age

Recommendation 14. The minimum voting age for Assembly elections should be reduced to 16 with effect from the 2021 election.

Recommendation 15. If the Assembly does legislate to lower the minimum voting age for Assembly elections to 16, the Assembly Commission should work with the Welsh Government, the Electoral Commission, political parties and others to support and encourage young people to exercise their right to vote, most importantly through appropriate political and citizenship education and public awareness-raising, but also by such other means as may be appropriate.

Recommendation 16. The citizenship education put in place to accompany any reduction in the minimum voting age must:

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