

Response to the Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform inquiry into electoral systems and boundaries

18 February 2020

1. This response provides information to inform the Committee's inquiry into electoral systems and boundaries.
2. We are responding to this consultation as part of our statutory role to keep electoral law under review and to make recommendations we think are needed. It reiterates our views on the size of the Assembly, and how Members are elected, that we set out in our response to the National Assembly of Wales consultation document 'Creating a Parliament for Wales' in [April 2018](#). It also addresses specific points from the Committee's Terms of Reference, where these are appropriate to our remit.

How Assembly members are elected

3. Decisions about which voting system is used for different elections are significant constitutional issues, and therefore matters for Governments and Parliaments, not for the Electoral Commission. Our role is to ensure that voters understand the electoral system used so they can cast their vote in the way they intended and that appropriate administrative planning is undertaken by the relevant Returning Officer.
4. The potential impact on electors in Wales of a new electoral system could be significant and it will be important to ensure voters are aware of the new system, particularly in relation to understanding how to cast their vote. The Assembly Commission should also consider the impact on Returning Officers and their staff to ensure they would be able to effectively plan for, and resource, any electoral change.
5. If the system were changed, the Electoral Commission would also need to consider how it supports the election. Areas of activity that would be likely, and which would require additional funding include:
 - Organising a public awareness campaign ahead of the Assembly election;
 - Developing education and partnership resources;
 - Providing advice and training for political parties, candidates and agents and non-party campaigners;
 - Providing advice and guidance to Returning Officers and their staff.

6. All legislation should be in place at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with so that campaigners, Returning Officers or Electoral Registration Officers can put in place plans to deliver any changes to processes.

7. The Commission is committed to working with the electoral community in Wales in implementing any new electoral system. A consistent approach to the arrangements and management of elections in Wales has been developed through the Wales Electoral Coordination Board. This Board should be the vehicle to effectively plan and manage major electoral change across Wales.

Specific points from the Committee's terms of reference:

Understanding of the Assembly's current electoral arrangements

8. In 2016, after the National Assembly for Wales election, our public opinion research suggested that most voters believed the elections were well-run (83% confident) and were satisfied with the process of registering to vote (91% satisfied) and voting (87% satisfied). In terms of the election itself, the majority of respondents said that they knew a great amount or a fair amount about these elections, with 80% agreeing that they had enough information on how to cast their vote. This represented an increase since the 2011 Welsh general election.

Political parties and candidates

9. In our post-election survey of candidates, again in 2016, 77 percent of candidates agreed that it was easy to find out what to do to become a candidate. The majority of candidates (73%) understood the rules for becoming a candidate and how to follow them. Under half the candidates agreed that the rules on spending and donations were clear, which was much lower than other elections.

Boundary changes

10. The Electoral Commission does not have any views on boundary changes but we would recommend that any changes to the current system are agreed in plenty of time to allow changes to processes to be made so that they do not adversely affect the election.