

Scottish Women's Convention response to:
The Scottish Government Consultation on Electoral Reform:
April 2018

The Consultation

Under the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament and Government have new powers and responsibilities relating to elections to the Scottish Parliament. These complement their existing responsibilities for local government elections. Control over both sets of elections opens up new possibilities for democratic renewal and putting the voter first. This consultation is the first step towards these reforms. It includes a number of suggestions as to how the new powers could be used. The Scottish Government will use the results of this consultation process to develop policy proposals that may be taken forward in future legislation.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to elections and female political participation at both a local and national level within Scotland.

Qu1: Do you think the term length for the Scottish Parliament and local government should be:

-4 years

-5 years

-Other length (please specify?)

Women have reported overall that they believe term length should be extended to 5 years due to the continuous cycle of elections that go on. It was also felt that this might in a way encourage more women, especially younger ones, to turn out to vote. Many have noted feeling "*drained*" and "*switched off*" from the electoral process in general, often commenting that their vote is not that valuable to the democratic process given this issue or that the constant media stream concerning politics can be extremely off putting.

Qu2: Do you have any other suggestions on term lengths?

By extending term lengths by a further year, this might be beneficial to encouraging more grassroots women into politics, allowing for longer time periods to explore opportunities to stand for election and gain a foothold within their selected political party. Anything that can be done to encourage a greater pool in the diversity of candidates should be seen as a commendable action.

Qu 8: Do you agree that candidate's addresses should not be required to appear on ballot papers for local government elections?

Yes. Giving concerns around safety, most particularly in the past few years with the ongoing sexual harassment revelations and the pervasive use of the likes of threats to safety over social media it is highly recommended that having candidate's addresses on ballot papers should not be a requirement. Due to the alarmingly high level of violent gendered abuse aimed at women candidates, this can be a huge deterrent to standing in local government elections.

There have been a number of elections and referenda over the past few years which have led to an intensification of political opinions by society in general. This can often be stoked by politicians own heightened rhetoric and exacerbated through the likes of online platforms. Women have already spoken about the highly abusive nature they have received both in this sphere and in person due to their gender at present without the added significance of standing as a political candidate.

Local authorities also have a more intense problem in that all who can see the information provided most likely live within walking distance of the candidate, making it much more likely for women contemplating a political run to fear for theirs and families safety in the event of abuse. Not only is this a potential risk for prospective candidates, but also for other women that may wish to get actively involved in campaigning for their preferred political choice. Many who have done so have spoken about facing verbal abuse, both online and in person, simply due to their political opinions. This was thought to have a severely detrimental effect and impact significantly on the ways in which women become involved within the political system at a local level.

Qu 9: Other comments:

Intimidation or abuse, particularly levelled at women, has seen an exponential increase, heightened even more so by the intensity and divisive nature of the most recent General Election. Whilst this has been the case for a number of years due to a range of issues, a huge factor this time around is the move to online harassment and hatred. The increasing access to technology is even more pervasive now than ever before, allowing it to be able to ferment much more easily.

Qu 10: Do you agree that in order to counteract the list order effect, a change should be made to the way in which candidates are listed on election ballot papers?

A significant problem in terms of women's participation can come either directly through the form of discrimination and bias towards certain candidates not being selected "*because they*

are women” and indirectly through unconsciously selecting candidates through the list order effect. Upon discussion, a number of potential options have arisen raised for this to increase representation:

- All female candidates from all parties to be grouped first in alphabetical order.
- Female candidates to be higher than males from their specific parties.

Given this, however, the biggest perceived issue with rotation is the potential problems that might arise in reference to the likes of visually impaired women and those with other medical conditions in selecting if the list is not in alphabetical order. Many have noted that they already do not like asking for help in these situations. Given the low turnout of council elections already, this could be a serious flaw and thus would need to be counteracted.

[Qu 12: Voting Machines](#)

[Would you be happy to use an electronic voting machine in a polling place instead of a traditional ballot paper?](#)

[Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?](#)

[Would you like to be able to vote at any polling place in Scotland?](#)

In order to increase accessibility to elections and ensure women who are already severely over-stretched in everyday life do not miss the opportunity to participate in the democratic process, all opportunities that can differentiate the diversity of female voting should be encouraged and considered. Participation in the voting process is a fundamental human right, therefore, anything which seeks to increase female participation is to be welcomed.

On consultation with women, the use of voting machines was met with general consensus that this was a major step forward in increasing young women’s interest in voting, with the ballot paper ideal often seen as outdated and more likely to be spoilt. Furthermore, implementation of such novel ways of participating would ensure extra help for those with additional needs such as sight and hearing impairments, most notably those who do not feel comfortable asking for assistance at polling stations.

Procedures and training, however, must be in place for those women wanting to vote but still finding technology uncomfortable. Therefore, use of both voting machines and ballot papers should be strongly considered, particularly for those not computer-literate or who may prefer more traditional means of partaking. Failure to do so may result in any imbalance in voter turnout for women that is corrected by more tech-savvy means being disproportionately affected by those who regularly vote failing to now turn up.

Many young women also question the validity of the security of voting machines and susceptibility to outside interference. It was thought that this could hopefully be counteracted by stringent security procedures.

[Qu 13: If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you choose to use that rather than vote at a polling place or by post?](#)

[If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you be more likely to vote?](#)

[Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?](#)

Women have commented on the inaccessibility of elections, especially the large number over the past few years. Making this available online or mobile would ensure that those who cannot get out can still participate, as well as those with visual or hearing impairments. Additionally, the fact that women bear the brunt of caring responsibilities and the likes of long hours in work means that polling places can often be disproportionately inaccessible to females.

This is also a major point in getting young women politically engaged as they are much more likely to if it is quick and easily available. At present, many report politics throughout the UK can be quite *“old fashioned and outdated”*, seeing it as something that they do not have the time to get involved in. A number of young women also pointed out the fact that cyber voting and voting on more than one day would be useful for the likes of women who may live away from home for the likes of university and college education but may still be registered at their parent’s address.

[Qu 23: What other action could the Scottish Government take to widen access to and remove barriers to voting and elected office?](#)

Consultation has illustrated that it often comes down to *“marginalised women”* that fail to be politically engaged and represented through no fault of their own and through a series of interwoven mechanisms that all play a part. It is seen that many initiatives do not take into account that these structures are incorporated together. For instance, simply highlighting the need to engage more women in political life fails to take into account just what kind of women this will be connected to. These initiatives often seem to be there to get women that are already politically engaged into the spectrum whilst negating those on the side lines who do not partake for a number of reasons.

What has arisen from taking grassroots women’s voices is that female representation and engagement is perceived from a societal point of view, between two polarising narratives that women have no agency over and must fit into either one. Many have vocalised that the issue is not about identifying oneself and engaging with a particular party, but that the whole process overall can often be seen as toxic to women and unwelcoming.

Women continuously discuss and emphasise how important that political participation is. Electoral turnout has lowered overall over recent decades, indicating less civic engagement and political awareness. However, this fails to take into account the move to new mediums such as social media and the gains and dangers that this has for political capital at a societal level. Aside from the horrendous abuse witnessed online aimed at female politicians, campaigners and journalists, this saturation of continuous online trolling leaves many women feeling unresponsive and isolated from the political system in general.

The need to ensure that effective inroads are made between politicians and grass roots women is of the utmost importance to ensure not only gender representation is achieved, but that the correct and most informed decisions are made, that are truly reflective of women at all levels of society.

“It’s not about getting people to vote for women that are on the ballot, it’s about getting the real women in there in the first place.”

Continuous emphasis of polling day voting in person as the only method of participating in the political process can leave many women feeling disconnected from the system and often unaware of other methods. All inroads to publicise and show the importance of other ways should be utilised. Additionally, alternative methods such as voting by proxy or postal votes are rarely publicised and used. Many have noted that they were unaware proxy voting, for instance, could be deployed for those working long hours, thinking it was just available for citizens overseas.

Whilst caring responsibilities for one’s own children is nothing novel in terms of gendered inequality facing women in all aspects of life, political participation carries its own problems in this arena. In terms of enabling women to vote, specific boundaries and voting polling stations mean that many women do not have the time to get out and make voting possible, despite a desire to do so.

One particular caveat that tends to be Scotland-specific is the confusion arising around reserved versus devolved matters pertaining to the country. This results in increased elections, voter fatigue and loss of confidence in many female voters. Clear cut guidance around what matters have been relayed to the Scottish Government compared to the UK is sorely needed as this can be seen as confusing and oftentimes mismatched.

Heightened awareness and teachings around new mediums of political engagement

Attempting to legislate and provide safety for women online through old policies is unworkable and impossible. More must be done from a young age to tackle online abuse and implement frameworks emphasising the effect this can have on females, inhibiting them from many opportunities in life including becoming politically active.

Many women have been attacked online, not least politicians, but also those connected such as journalists. Consultation with women has provided many stories about the effects that trolling has had. It is impossible to think that women who already feel unsafe online would actively seek out a heightened public presence in order to face even more abuse. This was particularly apparent upon discussion with women facing *“double discrimination”* such as BME females, who have already pointed out the abuse they have faced online being aimed in both a racist and gendered manner. Social media provides anonymity and safety for trolls free from persecution. There is a feeling that perpetrators are numb to the idea that there is a victim at the other side they are targeting because it is not in front of someone physically and is somehow less threatening and thus dehumanises that woman. This has led to a number experiencing abuse online.

Courses on media ethics should be implemented in schools and educational institutions teaching the likes of journalism courses to outline best practices in the media with an

emphasis on gendered consciousness. Women have noted the aggression that can be directed if you are not a part of someone's own political argument, this goes above and beyond informed debating and can often spiral out of control and attacking political candidate's personally, often because of their gender.

Increasing accessibility of communication by Government at both a local and national level online, including information on political workshops and becoming politically active.

At present, many women feel that the democratic process can be somewhat outdated and fails to keep up with the pace at which society is changing. This should also include how to become politically active at a grassroots level and how this does not need to be time-consuming or take away from one's own resources and other commitments as well as succinct publications distributed detailing the gendered structure of increasing voter turnout for women and how this affects all aspects of life.

[Qu 24: As well as the above arrangements, is there anything else that could be done to increase the accessibility of elections?](#)

Young Woman and the Vote

Consultation with young women from a wide variety of backgrounds has centred around a pressing issue as to why this group continuously ascribe much lower turnouts despite arguably being affected the most by elections. This includes a number that have never voted before and with no political experience or who have never felt any inclination to join a party.

"It never feels like our vote or our election. They say 'young people are the next generation' but what are they actually doing to encourage us?"

A major point was that politics is often seen as something detached from young people, but notably young females, lives. It is not only the general issue that women in younger age demographics feel that politics overall seems out of touch with their own reality, but also the locality targeted by specific parties. For instance, many have commented that parties made less time and effort canvassing during elections in more lower class and deprived areas, or in areas with low voting turnouts.

"Why do parties campaign places where people are already politically active? What about knocking doors where the real issues are? It makes you feel their out of touch."

Another major issue is that young women who have only been able to vote for a short period of time already feel overlooked and saturated by the large number of elections and referenda over the past few years. The process is often seen as disheartening and intimidating to young women, not least with the amount of abuse that has only sought to grow exponentially year on year with the large amount of political campaigning. The online sphere is often seen as a very hyper-aggressive and masculine space. Given that young women use social media in much larger numbers and more frequently than other age groups, it is much easier to be exposed to this political mudslinging and be discouraged.

“It must take some amount of confidence to be a woman and go into politics. If you’re young, you’re already facing so many issues about mental health and sex without wanting to add this.”

“Politics should be taught in schools. Modern studies is too basic and it’s not even mandatory.”

It was noted that there was not enough information given to young women, despite continuous media coverage of topical political issues. Some noted that teachers preferred to ignore political discussions in order to prevent influencing student’s views during the likes of the independence referendum. Whilst this was seen to be a positive move, it meant that teachers would not answer student’s questions directly, seeming to be more anxious in case they landed in trouble.

“I get that they can’t tell us how to vote, but you ask questions about what you’d see all over Facebook and they were too scared to give you an answer.”

All endeavours to support young women must recognise the issues they face

Whilst it is understandable that this is a double edged sword. Young women are enthusiastic and want to be involved in challenging gendered norms about sexualisation and other issues they face. However, many are left unaware how to do so and are provided with little support. Talking to young women about how politics affects their lives is crucial. Political outreach must take into account underlying factors and how these affect young women in different ways.

“We need real experiences of real women. The last thing myself or my sister want is to be preached to by a middle aged man who doesn’t have a clue about my experience in today’s world.”

Additionally, the ways in which younger women feel they are perceived by society is a huge impediment to stop them becoming involved in electoral voting and participation. This is seen as frustrating and many have pointed to a generational gap which has been exacerbated by party politics.

It was felt that the media sought to perpetuate a “*young v old divide*” which has become more entrenched since both the Scottish and EU referendum, with older people being portrayed as “no” and “leave” voters and young people on the opposite side. This was noted as extremely stereotypical and perpetuated by the media.

Political manifestos further emphasised this, with both old and young people alike feeling “*displaced*.” This alleged divide tended to be perceived as arrogance by one generation for the other due to feeling forgotten about within society.

“Brexit is a good example. The media puts you into two camps: young people voted to remain, older people voted to leave. So you’re pitted against one another when this isn’t the case. Not everybody in one age group voted a particular way, but that’s how it’s made out. That’s why generational differences happen.”

However, many young women pointed to the positives of the Scottish Government campaign

when the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm Act (Scotland) 2016 came into place. The use of the likes of Instagram and other social media sites commonly used by young women in a visual rather than word format was extremely effective in getting people's attention for legislation they would have otherwise missed. Many spoke up about this piece of legislation due to the way in which it was publicised towards young people as being a way in which they took notice of legislation, rather than just seeing it as legal jargon.

Engaging young women to talk to young women.

Mentorships are seen as invaluable in encouraging young women to become politically active and engage. However, many have spoken about having someone of their own age and background that they can talk to and be encouraged by. On the other hand, many young politically active women often feel they aren't giving the opportunity to talk to other females their own age about politics, being perceived as too inexperienced despite the wealth of knowledge they possess.

The lower confidence that young women have in themselves by today's standards goes hand in hand with lower political participation. Women cannot feel empowered to take a stand about an issue they feel passionate about if feeling disengaged and separate due to gendered inequality. Some commented that their age is often seen as something to be overlooked in terms of political canvassing due to the low turnout of young voters compared with their older counterparts. Thus, parties often spend more time and resources engaging with the latter, leaving the former feeling disenfranchised.

Workshops, including outreach in more rural areas, to inspire confidence:

Increase in workshops targeted at young women in rural areas is needed. SG should consider looking at implementing educational tools and resources in all schools around essential political skills such as political history as well as debating and oration skills. This should also include funding for organisations to conduct seminars and outreach programmes on becoming involved within the political sphere.

Another factor that was thought to encourage this is open days in communities with local female politicians, including getting schools involved in what it means to politically organise, as well as the likes of hustings events around elections specifically aimed at young women. These should also outline the differing methods of voting such as by postal or by proxy.

[Qu 25: How can SG best support gender balance in those elected as MSPs or local councillors?](#)

Representation in public life, political engagement and public board membership still fails to take into account the gendered imbalance of the societal narrative pushed upon women. One of the most pressing issues is that legislation and other initiatives which seek to correct this will fail to carve out a place for those women in society who still often fail to be recognised. These often take into account women as an all-encompassing category with little to no recognition of societal structures such as race, sexuality, class or age.

The SWC has examined and researched on an overarching range of women, taking cross cutting approaches that promulgates and emphasises sub sets and characteristics. From previous events and consultations, women have emphasised using research that encompasses differing characteristics and not merely applying the same formula to all women as one large body or seeing diversity as a mere formality.

The financial toll of standing is a problem that many women face. Taking away the personal funds that need to be acquired for campaigning and campaign materials to the side, time off from work and costs of childcare are huge factors that press on potential women candidates to stay away from the political process. This is also particularly acute in terms of the “chronological” factor, where the amount of time needing to be devoted to campaigning, either for oneself or one’s parties’ candidate, can be daunting and unachievable given the high volume of other commitments that women face in their day to day lives.

Whilst historical factors are seen to be disappearing in terms of gendered penalties such as a closing of the education gap in gender terms and females entering higher education in increasing numbers, this merely scratches the surface and does not delve into further analytical reasoning for why political participation is still so low. The need for a clearer gender consciousness in all aspects of life is fundamental and is a huge reason for many women not being actively involved at a political level.

Social Media

Whilst understanding that legislation concerning media regulation is essentially a reserved issue to Westminster, it is still felt strongly that the SG can do more to ensure that mechanisms are in place around how female politicians are perceived online and in the press. The way in which these outlets paint and distort women is seen as a major factor in discouraging female participation. Vocal proponents have ranged from the way in which many female politicians either act in an aggressive and aggravated style, somewhat emulating the traditional “masculinised” view of politics or, conversely, conform to a stylised ideal of womanhood that is impossible. The pressure on women to conform to stereotypes is seen to be insurmountable, exhausting and like fighting a losing battle.

The move to ever increasing digitalisation means that politicians now are accessible 24/7. This puts a huge amount of pressure for candidates to be seen at as many events as possible within their constituencies, despite juggling their own life as well, and having to travel and be seen in Parliament a number of days out the week. Many women have voiced that this is a major obstacle stopping them from even thinking about running for political office.

“There’s no way about it, you will be scrutinised more if you are a woman in politics. It happens all the time online and gathers momentum, you see it every day. You miss an event, you know there will always be those saying ‘well she shouldn’t be doing this if you have kids, but then you do go and you’re seen as a bad mother.”

In addition, a huge problem that stops women from entering politics is fear to theirs and their families’ wellbeing concerning threats both physically and in cyber space. The move to digitalisation and social media platforms over recent years has generated an exponential rise in abuse directed at females just for their gender. Seeing the threats that female politicians

have encountered online, especially during high profile campaigns. These were seen as a constant stress with no way to get away from it.

“You can’t be a politician without being on social media though. If you disable comments then you’re also disabling those ones from women who need you.”

“There’s enough distress being a women on social media and getting trolled without being a women politician.”

Publicity campaigns should be used to combat this. Despite the increasing abuse hurled at female politicians, it is very rarely reported on, increasing the risk that it will become normalised. The extent to which this impacts on females physical and mental health must be shared widely through public drives in order to make perpetrators understand that they are dealing with a human being. Legislation must also be used and treat online hate crime as no different in order to make those concerned aware of the seriousness of this matter.

Motherhood Penalty

Societal habits and expectations dictate even today that a woman who takes time away from her child is seen as a bad mother who is undervaluing her perceived ordained role as the dominant caregiver. On the other hand, however, failing to devote time to political campaigning and engagement, is seen as giving a lacklustre response that one is penalised for despite the various other commitments women have. This is seen as a “*catch-22*” and often fails to recognise the diverse and pressured responsibilities that characterise many women’s lives.

The SG should do the utmost to encourage parties to view candidate’s experiences rather than “on paper” qualifications such as degrees and promote these widely.

The SWC has often heard from women in terms of public life, such as politics and public board appointees how candidates that look good on paper tend to be chosen over those women with essential life skills. Many women may not have the “appropriate” qualifications due to a number of factors such as precarious employment or caring responsibilities. A shift is needed away from seeing the likes of university qualifications or more affluent backgrounds as more important than essential skills for politics. However, seeing the value in these life experiences and what this can bring to the job of public office is essential. Failure to do so negates a wide population of our society and discourages other women from engaging.

“If you see more women from more diverse backgrounds and those that have worked their way up, you’d be more likely to go out and vote too. When there is women there but it’s all degrees and private schooling it just puts you off. That’s not representative of me or my community.”

“What it fundamentally comes down to is that men have more free time. Women who are in higher positions already have free time to be political and get appointed to boards. It goes over the head of so many women in the most unreasonable way.”

This unequal distribution of power leads to a lack of diversity in more than just explicit gendered terms and has a hugely adverse effect in the way women engage with the political system.

Increased female representation in other organisations under the SG's influence:

Representation at a public level is extremely beneficial for society as a whole, however, this needs to be seen as working elsewhere. Organisations such as trade unions, educational establishments and voluntary organisations have to play their part to create an inclusive democracy.

“It’s not just politics, judiciary, board of directors, all these are all men – often old white men, what does this say to women of different backgrounds? It’s intimidating and off putting.”

SG to put pressure on Scottish parties to publish data on diversity, including frameworks to increase diversity amongst candidates which are analysed and refreshed on a regular basis.

Whilst equality law is technically still a reserved matter, and holds the direct power over the enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act to ensure parties collect diversity data on their own candidates, this should be actively encouraged at a Scottish level by all in politics.

Furthermore, there is limited research conducted on political turnout for women from a variety of backgrounds and protected characteristics at both a UK and Scottish level. Research should be conducted to identify more intersectional gaps and to analyse why women are less inclined from backgrounds to become politically active at a qualitative level rather than just subscribing individuals to general categories which fail to find positive solutions to inequality at all aspects of society.

“We need real stories of real female politicians and those involved in politics, not statistical data. That encourages no one.”

Encouragement of females in the political process to account for how this affects all women, rather than just seeing it as a representative equal opportunities issue:

Enabling women to be politically conscious, particularly those new to the system or those who have become disenfranchised, is a pressing issue and one which remains to be addressed. Women desperately need to be fairly represented at the very least, not just as an equality issue, but one that affects all manners of life. This should include detailed information presented on the likes of how politics affects the most fundamental aspects of female life such as health care, public services and the justice system in which women are arguably far higher stakeholders.

It is believed that taking a qualitative approach to these will empower and encourage many that would have previously just seen it in terms of political parties and allegiances, thinking that politics is merely the domain for a certain type of woman. Gender representation can often be seen as a *“tick box exercise”* which does not take into account a wide variety of factors including class, race and sexuality.

More understanding of politics at a local level:

At present, in much part due to nationalised media coverage, the vast array of what is portrayed as politics is fundamentally at a national level. Not only does this not take into account how women can be empowered to get out locally and engage but detracts from the vital importance of this. It can often lead many to see politics as something alien to their own lives and has having no specific impact on the day to day. Presently, parties and politics are often defined in terms of national leaders with little coverage of local councillors and constituency figures, meaning there is a gap in many ways of empowering women to vote. Furthermore, it can heighten confidence issues that many may already have about going into politics, especially without the likes of an educational degree or the perceived experience needed.

Greater inclusion for women with no family history or no perceived “background” knowledge of politics.

This is a major issue which has come up over and over again for many women. At present, many of the women entering the political system have come from families and community backgrounds with political awareness and experience. This is also appropriate in the likes of other organisations linked with campaigning and organising. Whilst women are aware this is not always the case, to many females it can be a major impediment to participation. Often feeling they are inexperienced and with little knowledge or not the right connections to progress.

All drives and initiatives to increase female participation must take this into account heavily and adapt to these particular women. There is too often a feeling that candidate selection and policies are driven by interests that do not take into account inequality issues. Failure to include women and those with protected characteristics only heightens and intensifies this problem. This should include national and local directives and campaigns aimed at increasing diversity and what voting really means.

“There can be a sense it’s not the right place for some people if you’re face doesn’t fit.”

Implementation of policy to ensure at least equal gender balance on Scottish Parliament committees.

The Scottish Parliament has unequal distribution in terms of gender on the overwhelming majority of committees at present, including in the distribution of gender amongst convenors. Not only is this a severe impediment to ensuring legislation is always conscious of women’s inequality, it also entails that witnesses may not be gender balanced when giving vital evidence to said committees. Given the passing of the recent Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act, it is unfitting to have the highest democratic institution in the country not leading by example to ensure all committees are gender aligned appropriately to ensure representation of 52% of the Scottish population.

SG to commission research specific to Scotland, including advantages and potential legal and societal challenges and how these can be overcome concerning job sharing for MSP’s to encourage a greater range of diversity of candidates.

This could also include research on other means of party selection of candidates and sharing of best practices, including the use of political primaries. It should be fundamentally emphasised that diversity in voter turnout is the most crucial issue, this not only leads to more empowerment in groups that are not currently represented at a political level but encourages more diverse candidates to become involved in the political process in the long term. The diversity of those voting must be addressed in order to ensure that politics and political representation is more reflective of the actual population of our society.

Greater transparency to be encouraged in the selection of candidates by political parties and in procedures and reporting mechanisms overall. The SG to look at independent bodies to regulate parties in Scotland at a local and national level over diversity.

This is particularly crucial at present in the wake of the continuous sexual harassment allegations. Whilst the number of women coming forward to tell their stories is commendable, the scale of cover ups and volume of women that have failed to see justice occur has led to much distrust in politics by many. There is a worry that this will soon be swept under the rug without the correct legislation and reporting mechanisms in place to counteract this at all levels in society. It must be shown that all parties and Government are taking a zero tolerance approach to such behaviour. Failure to implement such procedures will not only lead to discouragement of females in the political process, but also reinforce gendered inequality.

Conclusion

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to comment and have women's voices heard in relation to political representation within Scotland. Until women of all ages are represented at both a local and national level within Scottish politics and issues identified here rectified, women's inequality will persist throughout society.

For further information, please contact

The Scottish Women's Convention

Email – info@scottishwomensconvention.org

Telephone – 0141 339 4797

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

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