



PARTY CULTURE

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This guidance is for political parties and their regional structures and branches in Scotland who want to increase the diversity of their membership, candidates and staff. It accompanies the Equal Representation in Politics online self-assessment tool. The free online tool enables you to assess how inclusive your current practice and activities are and provides tailored advice and guidance and an action plan of the steps you can take to advance equality and diversity in your activities.

Equality in our politics and our political institutions is beneficial for everyone. Being fair and inclusive will allow you to attract a diverse range of members to your party and will enrich your policy discussions. Diversity improves democracy at all levels of communities and could have a positive impact on the success of your political party.

This guidance provides parties with information and advice about how the organisational culture of your party can have an impact on the number of people from protected groups who want to be involved in a political party.

There is a checklist below which suggests actions that your party should take to improve your equalities practice in this area.



What do we mean by organisational culture?

Every organisation has its own personality just like people do. Organisational culture is the personality of your political party and how that influences the behaviours, actions and words used by members and elected representatives.

The importance of language

The language we use to describe people and discuss issues really matters. Our words can be used to challenge stigma but they can also reinforce discrimination and increase barriers for people. We know that sometimes, when abusive language isn't challenged, it can turn into more serious bullying. Make sure you know what language is acceptable and not acceptable when describing people, think about how your tone and words affect other people and always challenge abusive language. We describe below some of the most common errors people make in their language use and actions you can take to address these.

Describing disabled people

The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the barriers which arise because society fails to take account of people's impairments. A disabled person's impairment might be physical, mental or neurodiverse (e.g. autism spectrum, dyspraxia, dyslexia etc). The social model states that ways in which society operates is the problem for disabled people and the solution is to adjust society. Once barriers are removed, even if a person has an impairment, they don't experience disability. For this reason, you should always talk about and refer to disabled people rather than 'people with disabilities'.

It's important to note that not everybody who experiences disabling barriers will describe themselves using the social model. They might say "I have a disability" or not identify as disabled at all. Whilst it is fine to respect how an individual might want to identify themselves, when discussing issues affecting disabled people you need to use language which recognises that



society disables people, not their impairment. You should also never use offensive words like handicapped, differently abled, retarded or invalid.

For an explanation of more terms relating to disabled people please see our glossary.

Sexist language

Many women tell us they have experienced sexist language whilst being involved in a political party. This might include feeling patronised by labels like 'girl' or feeling dismissed when they are assertive in discussions or don't behave in a stereotypically feminine way. Be aware that subtly sexist language is often normalised in society and people might not recognise their behaviour. Actions such as encouraging people to use gender neutral terms like spokesperson not spokesman when addressing a meeting or describing activities can help to create a more inclusive culture and challenge gender stereotypes. Using gender neutral language is also more inclusive for gender non-binary people who might not define as either a man or a woman.

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language

Whilst attitudes and legislation relating to LGBTI issues have changed, the language we sometimes use has not. Casual homophobia such as using words like 'gay' to describe negative things is never acceptable.

When addressing or referring to trans or non-binary people, it is important you use the gender pronoun that the person identifies with (he/him, she/her, they/them - some people might use other pronouns, for example Xe, Ze or Hir). If you aren't sure, ask the person what pronouns they would like you to use. If you are introducing people in a roundtable, it is good practice to ask people what pronouns they would prefer or ask people to write their preferred pronoun on a name tag.

If you are in a position of leadership and hear someone using the wrong pronouns, have a quiet word with them and explain why they should be referring to the



person using different language. In these situations, some people aren't intentionally being transphobic but don't realise the harm that misgendering can cause. Talking to them should sort things out. Always apologise if you use the wrong gender pronouns. In situations where people are being intentionally abusive, it is essential you have a clear bullying and harassment policy which you can use to challenge this behaviour.

For guidance on bullying and harassment please see the bullying and harassment section of this guidance.

Discussing issues affecting people from a minority ethnic group

There are a number of terms in use around race and ethnicity and some people are nervous about making sure they use the right ones. While some words are commonly understood to be racist other offensive terms might be less well known to you. As a general rule, if you are unsure whether a word is offensive don't use it. You should also think about whether it is relevant or necessary to draw attention to a person's race or ethnicity because it often isn't.

Using the word 'coloured' to describe people of non-white descent is discriminatory and you shouldn't use it when referring to or discussing issues affecting a minority ethnic group.

People of African descent do often describe themselves as Black and this can be an acceptable term to use (although it is important to note that not all people of African descent would describe themselves like this. If you are unsure, ask the person what they are comfortable with). In the UK, Black is sometimes used in a political sense by other minority ethnic groups, especially people of Asian descent, who share a common experience of racism because of their skin colour. Other terms you might come across include BME/BAME which stands for Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Both of these terms are regularly used by people of non-white descent to describe themselves. The Scottish Government and a number of race equality organisations in Scotland use the term minority ethnic.



Not everyone from a minority ethnic community will necessarily define as BME or BAME, for example people from the Roma community or Irish travellers. If you aren't sure about what is the most appropriate word, it is always better to ask someone from that community what language they are comfortable with.

For more information and definitions of words about race and ethnicity please see our glossary.

Reclaiming language

There are some words which have been used as slurs against particular oppressed groups in the past but which that group now regularly uses to identify themselves. This is called reclaiming language and is often used as a protest or resistance against discrimination which a group has faced. For example, some members of the LGBTI community would refer to themselves as Queer. This word has been and still is used as an insult against LGBTI people. However, in using it to identify themselves, for some individuals Queer has become an empowering label. It is important to understand that not everyone from a particular group will feel as positive about using a reclaimed word to describe themselves. In addition, reclaimed words are only usually acceptable when they are used by a person from that community to describe themselves and in a context which isn't discriminatory.

Inclusive debates

Sometimes the way people say things is more off-putting than what they actually say. If left unchallenged, members who are overly aggressive during debates and questioning can make people feeling excluded, bullied and less likely to stay in the party. This can lead to parties missing out on possible talent and can stifle productive policy discussions.

When organising a debate or discussion, you should think in advance about what would make people feel more comfortable and enable more people to contribute. For example, people from majority groups often speak for longer and can speak over people from minority groups. To address this, you could consider actions such



as having timed contributions from people during discussions and ensuring the chairperson chooses a diverse range of people to contribute.

The language checklist:

- Abusive language is unacceptable and should be strongly challenged
- Work with members of minority groups to develop a guide of normalised offensive words which shouldn't be used in meetings and make this available to members
- Encourage members to think about what they are saying and how they are saying it during debates and questions
- If you aren't sure about what language or pronouns people prefer, it is ok to ask
- If in doubt use people's names not physical descriptors of people

Bullying and harassment

Bullying is any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended. It is not necessarily always obvious or apparent to others, and may happen within the party without people in positions of leadership realising. Harassment is bullying that occurs because of a person's gender reassignment, age, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or because they are disabled. Under the Equality Act, harassment is unlawful and organisations have a duty to take action against it.

Bullying or harassment can occur between two individuals or it may involve groups of people. It might be obvious or very subtle. It may happen over a long period or be an isolated incident. Bullying and harassment don't just happen face to face, they can also take place in written communications, by phone or through email. Some examples of bullying and harassment include:

- Spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone in words or behaviour
- Copying emails that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know



- Ridiculing or demeaning someone - picking on them or setting them up to fail
- Unwelcome sexual advances - touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials, asking for sexual favours, making decisions on the basis of sexual advances being accepted or rejected
- Preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities

Stopping bullying and harassment

To help your members, staff, and elected officials feel safe, you should produce a clear bullying and harassment policy which states your zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment including sexual harassment. This policy should be widely available to members and include:

- Information about what harassment is with examples of what it can include
- Ways people can report bullying and harassment
- How reports of bullying and harassment will be investigated in the party
- The disciplinary procedure outlining the actions that will be taken against people who bully or harass
- Support available for people who want to report an incident

Supporting people to report harassment

Providing good support for victims of bullying and harassment is important in creating a culture where people are willing to report it. It is good practice to have several different ways for a person to report incident and for these be widely publicised to members and staff. For example, it shouldn't just be the chair or secretary of the local branch who is able to receive and act on a report of bullying or harassment. In some circumstances, these individuals might be involved in the incident or be close to people who are. This can sometimes cause concern for people who have experienced bullying and prevent them from reporting an incident or progressing a complaint.



Where possible try and work with the national organisation to develop a range of methods for reporting harassment including anonymous, email, online, and face to face reporting. It can also be helpful to appoint someone at a local branch level who is not involved in the day to day activities of the party and can act as an additional and independent person to report bullying or harassment to. All reports of and complaints about bullying and harassment should be treated confidentially.

After reporting an incident of harassment, the victim might be unsure about what will happen next or be scared about how they will be treated in the party. Training some of your members to provide peer support to victims during the process of making a complaint could enable people from minority groups feel more confident about coming forward. This support might include: explaining the complaints process, supporting people to make their report into a formal complaint and providing advocacy support during the complaints process. Make sure that there are enough members trained in this support, so somebody can seek an alternative person to speak to if needed (for example where the member providing support is a friend of the person accused of bullying).

Investigating complaints and disciplinary procedures

There is a temptation to always deal with incidents of bullying and harassment within the party and not involve the police. However, whilst bullying itself isn't illegal, harassment because of a person's race, religion, impairment, gender identity or sexual orientation is classed as a hate crime. If someone has been a victim of a hate crime, you should help and encourage them to report this to the police.

However, party members who have been a victim of bullying or harassment may also want to report or make a formal complaint about it to party officials or they might decide they don't want the police involved. It should be up to the individual to decide whether they want to report incidents, but making it clear that individuals will be supported through the process will increase the number who do. Your party will probably have a complaints procedure in place already and it would be helpful to familiarise yourself with in. You should make sure that up to date information about your complaints process is available to all members.



The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) also has excellent guidance about how to carry out a fair investigation of complaints and what your legal obligations are if a staff member complains about harassment. It is good practice for investigations to be carried out by someone who is independent of the incident and people involved. To achieve this, you could think about using someone from another section of the party to help you investigate and run the disciplinary process.

To understand whether bullying or harassment is a problem in your party, it is a good idea to record the number of reports and complaints each year and have this information widely available. You can also use the information to investigate whether you need to make further changes to your complaints procedures. For example, if a very low number of people who report an incident of bullying then go on to make a formal complaint, it could be because your procedure is complex or people don't have enough confidence that the outcome of the process will solve their complaint. In this instance you might want to consider simplifying the process.

Why people leave

Each year, political parties will attract new members. You will also have people leave your organisation without necessarily telling you the reasons why, and you shouldn't assume their reason was because they disagreed with policy of the party. Many people who leave parties will have faced significant barriers to involvement in politics. They may actually feel that changing the party and challenging barriers wasn't possible or be angry at the discrimination they received.

To create a supportive culture, you should be surveying ex-members to find out more about the reasons why they don't want to be involved anymore and what might have prevented them leaving. You can use this information to identify trends in the barriers to involvement in the party and take actions to make your activities and culture more inclusive.

Creating a supportive culture

EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

Joining a political party can be intimidating, especially if you have never been involved in politics before. To enable new members to feel at ease and get involved in activities quickly, it can be beneficial to invest in induction and training. This will be beneficial for the party because you will increase the number of active members who feel confident campaigning for you.

To prevent cliques and make your organisation welcoming and inclusive, make sure that jargon is explained and you discourage people from making 'in jokes' and talking in acronyms. Hold a regular, free social event where people can get to know each other and avoid making party decisions in the pub. Remind high profile people in the party that they have a responsibility to call out discrimination and behave in an inclusive way.

For more information about running inclusive events and socials please see the 'Events, Activities and Elections' section on the Equal Representation in Politics tool.

Additional actions to create a supportive culture might include:

- Holding a new members morning on the first day of your annual conference to explain how debates are organised and how members can vote on motions and resolutions
- Organising training sessions on things like: explaining party policy, how to do canvassing and answering tricky questions from voters
- Holding regular political education sessions to discuss policy, different perspectives on policy and challenge assumptions and attitudes members might have
- Holding a regular social event which is inclusive, advertised to all members and is free
- Giving each new member an induction pack, with information about and contacts at the local party
- Asking local party committee members to introduce themselves to people they don't recognise or haven't met before



- Asking your party leader to attend a local event and meet new members
- Running a survey of members about what support they might need

Investing in peer support

Peer support is when people use their personal experience to provide knowledge, advice, emotional or practical support to each other, in a way that is mutually beneficial. There are lots of different forms of peer support you could consider setting up including:

- Befriending and buddying schemes
- Peer mentoring: for example, women in the party being able to shadow women MSPs or councillors
- Establishing peer networks or representative groups (for example a dedicated Women's Forum or Disabled Members Group)
- Online question or discussion forums
- Training

People who have been involved in providing or receiving peer support frequently say that it has helped them develop skills, feel more confident, and pursue roles they are interested in. There is also evidence to show that peer support networks and mentoring programmes have a positive impact on increasing the number of women, minority ethnic, LGBTI and disabled people in influential roles.

The content of a peer support network should always be chosen by the people from that underrepresented group. Several parties already have a peer support scheme of some sort. However, to increase the effectiveness of these networks, they need to be supported and resourced by the party leadership and properly funded, so that they don't become an additional burden on underrepresented groups within your party or tokenistic. You should prioritise these networks and make sure they are seen as a valued part of your organisation. For example, you should enable these networks to propose policy on issues affecting people from that group,



give time at your conference for sessions run by peer support groups, and provide opportunities for them to feedback on their activities at local party meetings.

Finally, although peer support and mentoring networks provide great support to people from underrepresented groups, they won't change the overall culture of the party. To do that you need to take actions to change the ways you organise and remove barriers to involvement. All of the sections of this tool will equip you to do that effectively.



CHECKLIST

Language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abusive language is strongly challenged • Members are aware of language which isn't acceptable to use in meetings and debates • People are not aggressive during debates • A diverse range of people contribute at meetings and debates • The party uses the term 'disabled people' not 'people with disabilities' • Casual sexist, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language isn't used • Racist language isn't used 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying and harassment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The party has a clear bullying and harassment policy which is widely available • People in the party know what bullying and harassment is and how they can report it • Hate crimes are reported to the police • There are multiple ways a person in the party can report bullying or harassment and these are communicated to volunteers and staff • Support is available for people who want to make a complaint about bullying or harassment • The party records the numbers of reports of bullying and harassment and the outcomes of these reports 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Creating a supportive culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who leave the party are surveyed to ask why they left • Induction and training is available to new members • There are regular, inclusive social events • Funded peer support networks are available to people from underrepresented groups • There are opportunities for peer support networks to contribute to policy discussion, events and meetings 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>