

# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

## ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS

### CONTENTS

[What do we mean by assumptions?](#)

[The right person for the role](#)

[The problem with spokespeople](#)

[Undervaluing roles and progressing in the party](#)

[Microaggressions and how to overcome them](#)

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 assumptions and attitudes about people from protected groups can have an impact on them getting involved in a political party

There is a checklist at the end of this section which suggests actions that your party should take to improve your equalities practice in this area.

### **What do we mean by assumptions?**

# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

An assumption is something that you accept as true without question or proof. For example, people might assume that a disabled person isn't a confident public speaker without any evidence that that is the case. Stereotypes and unhelpful assumptions lead to unconscious bias where we make quick judgements and assessments of people without realising. Our biases are influenced by societal culture, our background and our personal experiences. We might not be aware of these views or opinions, or how they limit and create barriers for people in certain groups.

It can be uncomfortable for people from overrepresented groups to acknowledge that they have prejudices and enjoy certain opportunities and privileges because of their identity. However, stereotypes, negative attitudes and unconscious bias are many of reasons why there are fewer minority ethnic, women, disabled and LGBTI political party members, candidates and elected representatives in Scotland. It is essential that people from over represented groups take action to overcome unconscious bias.

## **The right person for the role**

People from protected groups tend to take on certain roles when they work or volunteer. For example, women are much more likely to take on secretarial, tidying, cleaning and caring roles which tend to be undervalued and have limited prospects for progression. Men are more likely to hold more senior or leadership roles even in female dominated sectors. LGBTI people, ethnic minorities and disabled people experience similar barriers to involvement.

There are many reasons for the undervaluing and segregation of roles, including negative stereotyping about the capabilities of people from these four groups, access to training and the culture associated with different types of roles in politics. You should not assume that people from these groups choose to do roles which are undervalued.

# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

Role segregation restricts people's choices, it also limits the available pool of talent for political parties. Role segregation means that people from protected groups are less likely to gain the experiences deemed necessary to advance into more influential or more political roles within the party including becoming: candidates, campaign organisers, staff and spokespeople. This ultimately results in parties which do not reflect the diverse population of Scotland.

There are a number of actions that your party can take to ensure assumptions and unconscious bias don't limit opportunities for people with protected characteristics including:

- Running an education session about privilege and unconscious bias at your local party meeting
- Taking positive action around recruitment of volunteers and staff. For example: creating specific roles on committees or reserved places on training courses for people from under-represented groups
- Creating fixed terms for length of service in influential roles and/or rotating roles on committees
- Creating taster and shadowing opportunities for people to try a new role
- Widely advertising roles for which you need volunteers in newsletters, websites, social media etc
- Running a survey with members to ask why they chose their particular role and if there are other roles they would like to take on in the future
- Running training sessions to help members develop new skills and feel confident taking on more prominent roles

## **The problem with spokespeople**

Even when people from a protected group achieve a prominent position within a party they might be limited to only pursuing policy areas or issues which match their identity. For example, an elected representative who identifies as LGBTI might be very knowledgeable about social security but feel under pressure to take roles

## EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

as a spokesperson on LGBTI issues. Whilst it is essential that statements and policy are influenced by the people they affect, it is important that you don't make assumptions about the roles or portfolios people from protected groups should pursue.

When identifying spokespeople and assigning roles you should always seek to identify the skills, experiences, knowledge and interests of people from protected groups rather than assuming they will always want to campaign on issues affecting their own community. Your assumptions might result in that person being limited in how they can progress in the party.

Having a wide range of competent spokespeople is a great way of communicating your party's priorities to the public. Providing training and increasing the number of people in the party who feel confident to do media comment and act as spokespeople could result in more people from protected groups feeling able to become spokespeople on a wider range of issues.

### **Undervaluing roles and progressing in the party**

In politics, public facing and campaigning roles are often seen as more important and are given a greater value than roles which are more administrative, internal or repetitive. Unfortunately, due to structural inequalities and assumptions described above, undervalued roles are often the ones which women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and LGBTI people end up taking on. This means they often find themselves less able to progress in politics or progressing slower than people who are not in these groups.

Not everybody in your party will have ambitions to hold political office or run political campaigns. However, for those who do it is important that they have equal access to progression opportunities and processes are transparent.

In some organisations, there may be unspoken requirements that a person has demonstrate before they will be accepted as a potential candidate or organiser. For

## EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

example, it might be necessary to attend certain social events, convince influential party members or demonstrate your loyalty by making donations to the party or always being available to canvass.

These types of requirements often exclude people, particularly people who have caring responsibilities, are disabled or have a lower income. While you may need volunteers and candidates to have particular skills, experience or qualifications to carry out the role, you should ensure that your requirements can be objectively justified.

For example, expecting candidates to actively campaign in several elections before they put themselves forward as a candidate could exclude women who have recently been on maternity leave or people who have physical barriers which prevent them from being able to canvass. This type of requirement can contribute to why many people from protected groups. It is important to consider the impact a person's contribution has had on the organisation not just the amount of hours they have put in.

To find out more about how to make your recruitment and selection processes more inclusive visit the 'Selecting Candidates' module of the Equal Representation in Politics Tool

### **Microaggressions and how to overcome them**

Microaggressions are everyday comments, assumptions actions or insults which, often unconsciously or unintentionally, express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a minority group. You might also have heard these actions referred to as Everyday Sexism, Everyday Racism or Everyday Homophobia.

Individually these negative messages might not seem discriminatory, but collectively and over time they can create huge barriers to involvement and leave the recipient feeling angry, frustrated and exhausted. This might prevent ethnic minorities, women, the LGBTI community and disabled people

## EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

from joining and succeeding within a political party or might cause them to leave the party.

Some examples of microaggressions include:

- People from minority groups being talked over, given less speaking time or trivialised during meetings
- Minority ethnic people being asked questions about where they are from or repeatedly being confused as another person from the same minority ethnic group
- Speaking to a deaf person's interpreter rather than the deaf person themselves.

It is important to understand that microaggressions are subtle forms of prejudice and the person initiating them might not always be aware of the impact of their comments or actions. It is easy for those of us who don't experience these to dismiss microaggressions as not a big deal but this attitude only reinforces subtle discrimination as being acceptable. It is essential to understand what microaggressions are, where they exist and how to overcome them.

Some actions you could take include:

- Including a commitment to inclusivity and equality in the documents or welcome pack new members receive
- Rotating roles at you meetings
- Asking your members to share examples of the microaggressions they have experienced in the party and openly discussing how these could be challenged
- Including a session on assumptions and microaggressions as part of your political education programme
- Proactively creating opportunities for people from the 4 protected groups to contribute in meetings and on panels

# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

## Creating a supportive culture

We all want to join group where we can be comfortable with the people around us. In order to recruit the best talent and increase the diversity of your party it is vital you create a supportive culture where people can be open about their identity. Many LGBTI people in particular have fears about how they will be perceived if they come out to their fellow party activists, whether this will hinder their ability to progress in the party and also whether coming out will have an impact on their personal safety.

You can make people feel safer by:

- Having a clear welfare policy which is available to be read by all members
- Having a welfare officer in each local branch
- Creating a buddying scheme where members can offer each other peer support
- Creating opportunities for members of these communities to meet in women, LGBTI, ethnic minority or disabled only spaces
- Holding your meetings in well lit, central locations which are easily accessible by public transport
- Having a discussion with your members about what creating a “safe space” means to them and developing a set of safe space principles for meetings and events
- Having a clear complaints procedure which people can refer to if they experience prejudice



## CHECKLIST

<b>Assumptions and unconscious bias</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An education session about privilege and unconscious bias is run</li> <li>• Unconscious bias is openly discussed and challenged</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Roles in the party</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential roles such as chairperson have fixed terms of service</li> <li>• Roles on committees are rotated</li> <li>• People in roles which are less public facing are thanked and feel valued</li> <li>• There are taster and shadowing opportunities for people to try new roles</li> <li>• Volunteer opportunities are widely advertised in newsletters, websites, social media etc</li> <li>• Members are regularly surveyed about their experiences and asked if there are different roles they would like to do in the future</li> <li>• Training is provided for members to develop new skills and take on more prominent roles</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Progressing in the party</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spokespeople are chosen because of their skills, experience, knowledge and interests not just their identity</li> <li>• Media training is provided to help potential spokespeople develop confidence</li> <li>• Requirements to become a candidate or campaign organiser are reasonable, clearly stated and widely available to members</li> <li>• People are promoted because of the impact of their contribution not the number of hours they have put in</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Microaggressions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When microaggressions are identified they are challenged</li> <li>• A commitment to inclusivity and equality is clearly stated in party resources and information for new members</li> <li>• Roles at meetings are rotated</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>



# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members are asked to share examples of the microaggressions they have experienced and there is an open discussion about how these can be challenged</li> <li>• A session on assumptions and microaggressions is included in your political education programme</li> <li>• Actions are taken to enable people from under-represented groups to make a bigger contribution in meetings and on panels</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>   <input type="checkbox"/>   <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Creating a supportive culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear welfare policy is available to all members</li> <li>• There is a welfare officer in each local branch</li> <li>• There is a buddying scheme where members can offer each other peer support</li> <li>• There are opportunities for members of these communities to meet in women, LGBTI, ethnic minority or disabled only spaces</li> <li>• Meetings are held in well lit, central locations which are easily accessible by public transport</li> <li>• Members discuss what creating a “safe space” means to them and develop a set of safe space principles for meetings and events</li> <li>• A clear complaints process is available for all members to use</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>