

# EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

## EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND ELECTIONS

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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 practices and activities are and provides tailored advice, 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 to make your events, activities, and election campaigning more inclusive by removing physical barriers and better involving people from underrepresented groups in your party.

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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.

## **Barriers to attending**

Whilst few want to deliberately exclude people from events, all too often accessibility is not a priority for organisations. However, under the Equality Act organisations have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled people at any event which is open to the public. This includes making sure events are physically accessible.

What is considered a reasonable adjustment will depend on things like the size of the organisation and the type of activity you are doing. What is reasonable for a small local party in a rural area to do won't be the same as a larger association or branch in a city. In this section, we provide guidance on how to make your party meetings, events, and conferences accessible.

You don't just have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for people who are known to you and who you know will come to your events. The Equality Act states that you should also be anticipating the sorts of adjustments potential attendees will need. For example, when organising a local party meeting or AGM, you should be choosing a venue which has step free access throughout the building, accessible toilets, allows assistance dogs, and has a microphone and PA system available. If you are unsure whether your venue is accessible, [Euan's guide is a good place to look.](#)

Some other basic accessibility things you could consider include:

- Choosing a centrally located venue which is easily accessed by public transport
- Think about the timing of your meeting. Don't always hold your events in the evenings



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- Think about whether children are welcome to attend the event. If so, you should explicitly say this and ensure children really are welcome by doing things like providing a children's corner or putting up 'breastfeeding welcome' signs
- Name badges for all participants and speakers
- A welcome person/team
- Automatic doors throughout the venue
- An accessible entry system to the building and car park which is suitable for use by and within reach of people with sensory or mobility impairments
- Reserving parking for disabled people directly outside the venue
- A well-lit path to the venue and well-lit entrance hall
- If the venue does not have a hearing loop, you have hired a portable hearing loop
- Clear colour contrast between the walls and the floor
- Furniture is arranged in a way that allows easy movement around the room
- Emergency alarm systems cater for those with hearing impairment (e.g. flashing light)
- Gender neutral toilets. Your venue might have these already. If not, you can make toilets gender neutral by putting signs up which read "gender neutral toilets with cubicles" or "gender neutral toilets with urinals"

## **Communication barriers**

Reasonable adjustments should also be made to ensure that everybody involved in your events and activities can understand the information you provide and contribute to discussions. Some actions you could consider are:

- Having a sign language interpreter available
- Using a clear font such as Arial and having large print versions of documents
- Using a clear colour contrast on printed materials and presentation slides

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- Allowing people to ask questions via text message or social media rather than in person
- Providing easy read versions of documents
- Sending documents out to people in advance

For guidance on the language you should be using to address people from underrepresented groups please see the 'Party Culture' section of the equal representation tool.

## **Going beyond the basics**

While meeting basic accessibility requirements is a good start, you should be aiming to go beyond these and set a very high standard, particularly at larger events such as a national conference. For example, some wheelchair users are not able to use a standard accessible toilet. Finding a venue with a changing places toilet would make your event more inclusive for these people.

Having a poor experience at a national conference or event will probably make people from underrepresented groups less likely to attend again or get involved in other activities. Members often have to travel to these sorts of events and you should be thinking about making transport and accommodation inclusive and affordable for people from protected groups. This could include having a transport and accommodation fund to support people from underrepresented groups to attend, car share schemes, and taking local facilities and hotels into account when you choose your conference venue.

Some other beyond the basics actions you should consider are:

- Safeguarding and equality awareness training for event staff and volunteers
- A welfare/inclusion officer at the event who is responsible for handling accessibility and inclusion issues
- Asking disabled people in your party to give feedback on accessibility
- A quiet room at your events



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- Think about the diversity of your speakers and panellists. A diverse speaker list is more inclusive of people from underrepresented groups
- A crèche. Having a crèche means that women are more likely to attend
- Putting in adequate breaks. Recognise that a one or two day event can be exhausting and overwhelming for some people
- Display signs stating that racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic and ableist language won't be tolerated
- A venue located in an area without lots of street clutter and few dropped curbs
- Providing information in alternative formats such as audio CD or braille
- If you are providing food, think about religious or other dietary requirements. Ask people what their dietary requirements are
- Clearly state that people are free to not to participate. Be aware that it's possible not everybody will want to take part in all activities you have planned

This is not an exhaustive list and people who attend your events might have other access needs not listed above. To make sure you understand what people's accessibility requirements are, you should always ask people when they become a member or when they sign up to attend an event about the access requirements they have.

### **Participating remotely**

Party events and activities are often in the evenings, which can exclude people, particularly those with caring responsibilities or people on lower incomes who rely on public transport. Where possible you should hold your events in central locations which are easily accessed by public transport and try to hold events at a variety of times, not just in the evenings. You should also consider not always holding your events in venues which some of your members might be uncomfortable in, such as always in a church.

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When people are not able to attend a meeting, you could consider making adjustments to help people participate remotely. This might be through digital methods to facilitate discussions including:

- Filming or live streaming your events
- Using social media to facilitate a Q and A
- Setting up an online discussion facility on your website
- Allowing people to Zoom or Skype into meetings

If you have a digital skills gap, ask your members if they can help. You might be surprised at who volunteers their time. Digital methods can be particularly useful for local parties in rural areas where members might live large distances from each other.

You could also consider allowing people to remotely participate in formal decision making in the party. This could include actions such as allowing people to vote on decisions by post or by proxy. Enabling a greater number of people to be actively involved in your party will be beneficial for you. It will increase your reach and might create new links between you and members of the local community. Make sure minutes and key decisions are available online, via post, or email for people.

### Campaigning activities

Election campaigns can create barriers to participation for people in underrepresented groups. There are many tasks which need doing during an election, however, canvassing is often the main activity which parties ask activists to do. There will be people in your party who will need adjustments to be made to enable them to canvass door to door, or who are unable to do canvassing. These people may feel excluded during these periods. These people include: disabled people with a physical impairment, people with a mental health condition, and women with caring responsibilities. In some constituencies, your ethnic minority or LGBTI members might be anxious of doing door to door canvassing because of poor experiences of racist or homophobic abuse.

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Always keep in mind that some of your members will have an impairment which is not visible or otherwise obvious to other people, and that traditional ways of campaigning will be inaccessible for them. They might not feel comfortable telling other people in the party why they can't canvass. Reasonable adjustments should be considered and other tasks offered in place of canvassing which would allow a wider range of people to participate in election campaigns. These different activities might include:

- Phone canvassing
- Coordinating some of your digital campaign activities
- Fundraising
- Administrative tasks such as preparing mailouts or emailing candidates

By giving people choices in the activities you offer, you are able to use their skills for the good of the organisation, whilst making them feel valued. You may also free up other members who would really rather be out on the doors. However, in all these circumstances, you should not assume what roles a person might or might not be comfortable with based on their identity and you should always value different roles equally. You may wish to consider creating volunteer job descriptions or role briefs so that all members can gain a clear understanding of what is involved in a particular activity or role.

For more information about how to value different roles equally please see the 'Attitudes and Assumptions' section of the Equal Representation in Politics tool.

### **Challenging presenteeism**

Presenteeism is used to describe a culture where people feel they will only be rewarded or progress in the party if they put in longer and longer hours.

Presenteeism can be particularly apparent during an election period which is often the most intensive time for parties. There is overwhelming evidence that a long-



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hours culture can be harmful to your members and your productivity. Presenteeism can be especially harmful to people from already underrepresented groups in politics, particularly those who are disabled or have caring responsibilities, and acts as disincentive to putting themselves forward for roles. It also leads to some roles being less valued as people perceive that those not doing intensive activities like canvassing are less committed.

Taking action to develop a wider variety of tasks for people during elections and promoting a culture where taking a break is encouraged will remove barriers to participation for some people. You need to clearly state to members that their value isn't in the amount of hours they put in or the number of years they have been involved in the party.

## **Recruiting new members**

The information in this tool will help you take positive action towards equal representation in your party. However, equal representation at all levels will be very challenging for all parties in Scotland without an increase in the number of new members who are LGBTI, ethnic minority, women and disabled. Occasionally a flux of new members happens spontaneously because of an election or political event. However, more often parties need to prioritise recruitment in order to increase the number of members from these four protected groups.

Some actions you could try include:

- Contacting people who indicated they would vote for you and asking them to join
- Placing advertisements in publications which are popular with underrepresented groups
- Running online or social media advertisement
- Be open about the equality and diversity practices you want to improve on and clearly state that new members will be valued in helping you achieve





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this. If new members do give you things you need to improve make sure you acknowledge this

- Highlighting your equalities policies, for example producing an LGBTI manifesto at election time

Different areas of Scotland have different demographics and therefore not all of the actions above will be relevant to every part of the country. In circumstances where it is challenging to recruit new people, you could consider focussing on valuing and increasing participation from current members who might be facing barriers to involvement.

### **Outreach activities**

Outreach activities are a great way to promote you party, speak to voters, and encourage people to get involved in your activities. Face to face outreach can be particularly effective at engaging with people from underrepresented groups who might be interested in your policies but sceptical that they would feel welcome in the party.

When thinking about outreach activities try and be innovative in where you go and who you reach out to. For example, if you want to attract more people from a minority ethnic community don't just approach the local religious leaders and ask for a meeting. Hold a stall at a local community centre, play group, youth project, or festival. You could consider varying the times that you run the stall. You could also approach an organisation like [CEMVO](#) or [BEMIS](#) for information and advice or get involved in issues affecting that underrepresented group. Prioritising outreach activities will help you recruit new, talented individuals and can be a helpful way to train current members be more confident in communicating the aims and work of the party.

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## CHECKLIST

<p><b>Barriers to attending and participating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venues are physically accessible and accessible by public transport <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Gender neutral toilets are available <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• It is clearly stated whether children are able to attend the event and actions are taken to enable people with caring responsibilities to fully participate <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Meetings aren't always in the evenings <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• There is a welcome steward and name badges for participants <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Reasonable adjustments are anticipated <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• There are no communication barriers for people attending. Everyone can understand and contribute to discussion <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Beyond the basics-conferences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and volunteers have received safeguarding and equality awareness training <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• The event has a welfare and inclusion officer <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Additional services are available such as a crèche and quiet room <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• The event programme has adequate breaks and a diverse speaker list <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Information is available in alternative formats such as braille or on CD <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Dietary requirements are considered <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• It is clearly stated that abusive language will not be tolerated <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration has been made about the accessibility and facilities in the area around the venue including: street clutter, transport, and accommodation <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• There is financial assistance to help pay for accommodation and transport <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• People are free not to participate if they don't want to <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Participating remotely</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members are able to participate in meetings via digital methods such as skype or social media <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Events are filmed and shared <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• People are able to vote via post or by proxy <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Campaigning activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A variety of campaigning activities are available <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• People are offered tasks which match their skills and experience <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Volunteer job descriptions/role briefs are available to members <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Challenging presenteeism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenteeism and a long-hours culture is challenged. Breaks are encouraged <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• All roles are equally valued <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Recruiting new members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action is taken to recruit more LGBTI, ethnic minority, disabled people and women to the party <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• Outreach activities are held at diverse range of events and locations <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>