EQUAL REPRESENTATION COALITION

MEDIA AND MESSAGING

CONTENTS

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 about best practice for inclusive advertising, messaging, and communication through the media. It also gives advice

about how to respond to negative media coverage about people from underrepresented groups in your party.

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

Messaging and press releases

Political parties have the influence and resources to put their ideas into the public domain and shape public opinion on issues. One of the ways parties do this is to send out press releases, statements, social media content and comment on their policies, issues and local activities. The topics you talk about and the angle your communications take is just as important as the language you use in promoting equality and achieving equal representation.

Some actions you should consider include:

- Regularly reviewing the types of stories you are putting out through your communication channels to check for unconscious bias

- Give equal communications coverage to different sections of your party. For example, if you are publicising the work and campaigns of your disabled person's network less than other committees and groups think about why and what you need to do to change this

- Write a communications and media policy which includes how you will promote equality and diversity

- Be aware of not staying silent on issues affecting people from underrepresented groups which people from overrepresented groups might think are less important

- Consider how people from underrepresented groups could input into communications strategies and influence how issues affecting them are communicated by the party

Speakers and panels

You will often be invited by media outlets, campaigns and community groups to speak on a panel or to do a media interview. One of the best ways you can show your commitment to equality and diversity is to send a wide range of spokespeople to media and public events. Having a wide range of spokespeople is important in enabling our political institutions to reflect the diversity of the Scottish population. When choosing who to send to panel events, try to choose people with lived experiences of the issues to speak, especially if the topic of discussion is about equality or diversity. If nobody from these groups is available or feel able to speak, encourage the spokesperson to speak to them or the peer-support network beforehand.

When choosing speakers for media appearances and panels, it is tempting to always pick the same people who you know have previously performed well. However, if you do this you might be missing out on other talented people in your organisation who can do just as good a job, but might not have had the opportunity to showcase their skills before.

To increase the diversity of your panellists, you should be using positive actions. For example, you should consider encouraging speakers from overrepresented groups in the party to always ask who else is appearing on the panel before accepting an invite. If, for example, it's an all-male panel, have a policy of suggesting a woman in the party to take their place. If it isn't possible to send an alternative speaker, for example if you need to send a particular person from a specific party, parliamentary or council committee, encourage the person to speak about equality and diversity in their statement.

Other actions you could take to increase the variety of spokespeople you have include:

- Running media training to develop public speaking and media skills in your members and reserving places for people from underrepresented groups
- Including a session in media training about issues people from underrepresented groups might face when doing media appearances. For example, techniques for challenging Islamophobia in media interviews

- Devoting some resource and staff time to promoting the work and campaigns of ethnic minority, LGBTI, women and disabled people's networks in your party through press releases, press events, receptions etc.

Negative and offensive media coverage

Unfortunately, there will probably be occasions where the media says something negative or inappropriate about one of your activists or candidates because of their identity. Some examples include: people being outed as LGBTI in the press without their consent, trans activists or candidates receiving online abuse because of their gender identity, racial stereotypes and assumptions, and the media's obsession with what women politicians wear to work.

People from underrepresented groups have told us that they would be much more encouraged to stand as a candidate if they felt that their party would effectively support them if negative or offensive media coverage happened. Make sure you have a communications policy which clearly sets out what your approach would be in different circumstances. Your selection process should also include an opportunity for candidates to voluntarily disclose any welfare issues or aspects of their identity they feel could be negatively or offensively used by the press and discuss actions you would take to support them. It should be made clear to the candidate and the selection panel that this information should not inform decisions about whether the candidate is suitable to stand, but is about supporting and protecting candidates.

More information about selection processes can be found in the ['Selecting Candidates'](#) guidance of this tool.

We describe below some good practice in responding to the media.

How should you respond?

If you become aware of an unhelpful or offensive media story about one of your candidates, you should always discuss the situation with the candidate and talk to them about what they want to do. If, for instance, a journalist has used thoughtless language in their reporting, you and the candidate might feel that it isn't appropriate

to respond publicly. It could be more helpful for someone from the party to have a private discussion with the paper about why the language is inappropriate. Having a clear statement about your commitment to equality and diversity on your website can also be a helpful thing to point the public and the media to in these sorts of situations.

However, if the situation is more serious or the coverage deliberately offensive, you may want to respond directly to the media outlet. In your response, it is good practice to include:

- That abusive media coverage is unacceptable
- Your support for the candidate
- Your commitment to equality and diversity

Situations involving the media can be complex and there will probably be other actions you need to take which are specific to the situation and beyond the scope of this guide.

However, in all circumstances, the welfare of the candidate should be the most important thing. It is essential that they are involved in decisions about how to manage the situation and that they have somewhere safe to go, if for instance they are being harassed by journalists.

Responding to online abuse

Abusive comments and sharing offensive material online has become a common and difficult problem for political organisations. Examples include: people targeting abuse at the social media accounts of politicians, upsetting comments in online chat rooms, blogs and on social media, comments and activists using inappropriate language, sharing offensive memes, videos or pictures. People who perform this type of behaviour are commonly known as internet trolls. Candidates, councillors, MPs and MSPs are particularly vulnerable to online trolling, bullying and abuse due to their public facing role and because they frequently use social media to communicate with voters and members.

Online abuse can come from people that the victim has never met and that have nothing to do with the party. On the other hand, a situation might happen where people from your own party carry out online abuse against another member, candidate or elected representative, or share inappropriate or offensive material. In both cases, it is important to:

- Have a clear social media and online behaviour policy which includes: examples of behaviour which won't be tolerated, how people can report incidents, and your complaints and disciplinary procedures
- Have a public statement on your website about your commitment to equality and that abusive or offensive behaviour won't be tolerated. Include this statement in materials given to new members
- Use your disciplinary procedures to reprimand or expel remove members or supporters who carry out inappropriate online behaviour, online bullying or harassment
- Make sure that party staff and/or committee members are following the social media accounts of candidates and elected representatives so they can report online abuse and support the victims of it
- Provide training for people to block abusive comments or social media accounts
- Ask groups within the party who experience online abuse including LGBTI, disabled, ethnic minority and women's networks to input into strategies for tackling the problem

There is a tendency to try and deal with incidents of online abuse or trolling by keeping it within the party. However, many inappropriate online behaviours are actually illegal, for example, online harassment. If you think someone has committed a criminal offense, you should report it to the police.

For more information about what bullying and harassment is and how to tackle it, please see the 'Party Culture' section of the Equal Representation in Politics tool.

Showing your support

Women, ethnic minority, disabled and LGBTI people are more likely to experience online abuse and trolling which often makes them less likely to want to be involved in politics. Their experiences online can make people, particularly candidates, from these groups feel very isolated. They don't always feel fully supported by the party or that the party puts enough resources into tackling these issues. Parties should have a duty of care towards their candidates and a responsibility to respond quickly to internet trolling and be more explicit about how online abuse and discrimination won't be tolerated.

For example, if voters have been posting racist comments about one of your candidates, you should swiftly put out a public statement about how their comments are unacceptable, you are proud of diversity and you won't tolerate racism. This sends a message to other minority ethnic people who might be considering joining or standing for the party that you will support them effectively if they experience discrimination. By saying nothing, you are giving the impression that unacceptable behaviour is tolerated in the party.

Inclusive election materials

People from underrepresented groups tell us that they don't always feel represented in the materials, manifestos images and campaign videos produced by political parties. Not only does this reinforce structural barriers to involvement in politics, it can also be off putting for people interested in joining a party.

Making your images representative of the diverse population of Scotland is important. When picking campaign photographs and making materials such as a leaflets or a party election broadcast, you should be showing:

- A variety of family groups. For example, not all couples are heterosexual couples
- Race and ethnicities which reflect the diversity of the Scottish population
- Women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community being activists, speakers and involved in your activities
- A variety of locations and constituencies across Scotland

However, be aware that these images shouldn't be tokenistic. It is essential that the people used in your images either are or look like they might be involved in your activities. If you can't find anyone from an under represented group to feature in your materials, reflect on why that is the case. There is no point creating inclusive materials if you are not taking other actions described in this tool. For example, don't ask minority ethnic members to appear in your photos and then not take proactive steps to remove barriers for them to fully participate in your activities.

Manifestos

There is often a lot of content to fit into a manifesto which can mean that topics such as equality are cut from the document or are not as prominent as they should be. When writing your manifesto make sure that you consider from the beginning how your commitment to equality and diversity will be reflected. This could mean you have a specific section of your manifesto devoted to your equalities policies; or you could include relevant commitments throughout the document. You could also consider producing specific LGBTI, woman, ethnic minority or disabled person manifestos which detail policies relevant to each group.

Accessible election materials

People in Scotland should be equally able to access information about and get involved in political activities. To achieve this, it is essential that campaign and membership materials are easily understood by all your members and potential voters.

It is good practice to produce your campaign materials, manifestos and leaflets in a variety of formats, for example: Easy Read, on audio, and using Braille. You should also always add subtitles to videos to enable people with a hearing impairment to engage with your online content and Party Election Broadcasts.

In some areas of Scotland, lots of people won't speak English as a first language. It is important that parties anticipate this and where appropriate produce materials

in languages other than English. You might want to consider making your campaign materials available in the 3 most spoken languages in that constituency or area. National parties should think about providing extra assistance and funds to local parties in areas where they know there are several languages spoken other than English. If you are unsure about which languages are most commonly spoken in your area, you can contact BEMIS or CEMVO for advice and information.

When translating materials and documents, you should use a reputable translator who is fluent in both English and the language you want to translate materials into. It is better to use a professional for this work rather than a volunteer.

The accessible materials check list:

- Produce materials, leaflets and manifestos in a variety of formats including Easy Read
- Always put subtitles on campaign films and Party Election Broadcasts
- Include images of women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community being activists and speakers on all of your printed and online materials
- Consider translating materials into the 3 most common languages in the constituency
- Always use a reputable translator who is fluent in the language

CHECKLIST

Messaging and press releases	
• Data is collected and analysed on the number of press releases and social media posts on issues affecting underrepresented groups	☐
• Equal communications coverage is given to all sections and networks within the party	☐
	☐

• The party doesn't stay silent on issues affecting people from underrepresented groups which people from overrepresented groups might think are less important	
Speakers and panels • The party has a wide range of spokespeople • Media training is available • Media training contains discussion of issues people from underrepresented groups might face when doing media appearances. For example, techniques for challenging Islamophobia in media interviews • Positive action is taken to increase the number of disabled, LGBTI, ethnic minority and women speakers on panels and media appearances	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Negative and offensive media coverage • Parties have a communications and media policy which addresses how they would respond to offensive media coverage • Candidates are involved in conversations about responding to negative or offensive coverage • Where appropriate, the party has private discussions with media outlets about why particular language is inappropriate • If candidates are harassed by the media, their safety is prioritised	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Responding to online abuse • There is a clear social media and online behaviour policy which includes: examples of behaviour which won't be tolerated, how	☐

people can report incidences and your complaints and disciplinary procedures • Members who are found to be behaving inappropriately online are disciplined or expelled • Incidents of online harassment are reported to the police	☐ ☐
Inclusive election materials • Images show a variety of family groups and ethnicities • Manifestos include references to equality and diversity • Materials show images of women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community being activists, speakers and involved in activities	☐ ☐ ☐
Accessible election material • Election materials are produced in languages other than English • A reputable translator is used to produce materials in languages other than English • Subtitles are used on campaign films	☐ ☐ ☐