SECTION 1 – BOUNDARY REVIEWS AND THE IMPACT OF WOMEN MPs IN 2020

How could the reduction in seats to 600 impact the representation of women in the House of Commons?

A reduction in the number and, or percentage of women MPs might occur due to:

- The overall reduction in the number of MPs disproportionately affecting sitting women MPs. With a reduction of 50 MPs in the House, parties committed to the representation of women will need to ensure that these losses are equally distributed between women and men MPs. Given the key role that parties play in the make-up of the House (see below) and the importance of parties’ attention to the gender composition of their parliamentary parties, the parties will need to explicitly take into consideration the impact of the reduction in the number of seats when they and their local parties select candidates for re-drawn or new seats.

- The nature of the seats that are redrawn may disproportionately affect sitting women MPs as a consequence of where women MPs sit, and the electoral geography of where seats are redrawn/abolished (namely cities). The House of Commons library and or academic political geographers should be asked to provide this data in the very near future.

Selection and Urban/Rural seats

2010: Conservatives and Liberal Democrat women MPs were more common in urban than rural constituencies\(^1\): 31.2 per cent of Conservative MPs in urban constituencies were women compared with 12.7 per cent in the most rural; 23.6 per cent of Liberal Democrat MPs in urban constituencies were women compared to just 4.2 per cent in rural constituencies. For Labour, 36.2 per cent of urban MPs were women (the highest proportion for all three main parties), but 60 per cent of Labour rural MPs are women suggesting that although Labour wins few seats in rural constituencies it disproportionately selects women candidates in those seats that it wins (Ashe et al 2010).

2015: Conservative women MPs were more commonly elected to urban than rural seats\(^2\): 29.5% of Conservative MPs in urban seats were women compared to 20.5% of Conservative MPs in rural constituencies, and 18.5% of Conservative MPs in mixed constituencies were women. The pattern is less clear when we consider Labour party members, 44.1% of Labour MPs in urban constituencies were women, in mixed constituencies women made up 39.3% of Labour MPs and the Labour party only elected nine MPs to represent rural constituencies of these six were women and three men. Using our proxy measure no Scottish constituencies were defined as urban. However, there is a small gap among SNP MPs; 42.4% of SNP MPs in mixed constituencies were women compared to 35.7% in rural constituencies.

- Competition between sitting MPs. There is a risk that there will be a ‘default’ to the archetypical MP.

- Fewer vacancies for ‘new’ candidates. When vacancies arise in the run up to the election, former MPs who ‘who’ lost their seats or who were not selected for their ‘new’ seats might be preferred over ‘new’ aspirant candidate. This reduces the openings to ‘add’ new candidates. This could mean that women MPs who have lost their seats are re-selected for a different constituency, but may reduce the opportunities for new candidates.

- A failure of all parties to sign up to The Good Parliament Recommendation 8: ‘secure a cross-party concord regarding candidate selection for the 2020 Parliament following the boundary review: all political parties should seek to increase the

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\(^1\) Urban/rural is measured using a proxy of low, middle and high levels of employment in agriculture, forestry or fishing.

\(^2\) Again using the percentage employed in agriculture, forestry or fishing as a proxy.
percentage of its women MPs at the **absolute minimum** all parties currently represented in the House should maintain existing percentages of women MPs.

**Are there any actions that can be taken to make sure the reduction in sets does not negatively impact the representation of women MPs?**

- Parties should sign up to Recommendation 8 of *The Good Parliament* (as noted above): ‘secure a cross-party concord regarding candidate selection for the 2020 Parliament following the boundary review: all political parties should see to increase the percentage of its women MPs at the **absolute minimum** all parties currently represented in the House should maintain existing percentages of women MPs.
- In the absence of such a cross-party concord individual parties should sign up to it.
- Given the success of party quotas in the Labour Party, AWS should be used in drawing up candidate selections in the redrawn/new seats – the number of ‘newly redrawn’ seats that should be designated AWS should seek to meet or exceed the current percentage of women in the PLP, 43%. Parties that currently reject quotas must take other measures, notably, strong measures to recruit women candidates, extensive support for women candidates (see below). This might include the creation of party staff (equality champions) whose responsibility it is to ensure that the parties see ‘no woman left behind’ - defined as the percentage of women MPs in a party.

**From witnesses’ own research, what do they see as the most important issues regarding representation of female MPs in the Commons? What issues are they most concerned about?**

- Whilst the percentage of women MPs overall is increasing, with significant progress achieved in the last 20 years, men remain over-represented and women under-represented relative to their percentages in the population, as this chart demonstrates.

![Percentage of women and men elected to the House of Commons 1918-2015](image)

- The upward trajectory of women MPs in the House of Commons is also not always linear, with some elections seeing fewer women MPs returned than previously (e.g. 2001). It is not guaranteed that the number of women will naturally increase.
- The critical election - which saw the numbers of women double overnight, from 60-120, 101 of whom were Labour women, was the 1997 general election when the Labour party used a party quota, All Women Shortlists (AWS), for the first time.

**Were any considerations or impact assessments on the representation of women undertaken by the Government at the time of changing the Rules of Redistribution?**

- According to the EIA, the Government ‘accepts that a greater proportion of vacancies arising’ may be reduced but adds that this ‘cannot be predicted with certainty’. Indeed they continue, ‘the influence of external factors, such as party behaviour and the decision of the electorate’ means that it cannot ‘conclude definitively’.
• All this is correct. We add simply that for those concerned with gender equality in the Commons it is parties’ responses that are important. They should recognize the need to first protect the current percentage of women MPs in the House and secondly acknowledge the new constituency boundaries constitute an opportunity to act to increase women’s representation.

SECTION 2 – THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN FEMALE REPRESENTATION

To what extent is the onus is on political parties to ensure the representation of women in the Commons?

• Political recruitment is often considered in terms of the supply- and demand-side model. The supply-side refers to the numbers of women in the parties’ supply pool for candidates and what can be done to maximise these, whereas the demand-side refers to what parties can do to create and signal that they seek more women as candidates and MPs. Importantly, these are interrelated, for example, the supply pool of women is not ‘fixed’ and can be increased by both supply- and demand-side interventions. (See the Irish case below).

• The number of women MPs in the UK Parliament is effectively determined by political parties who select candidates; voters in the UK are usually indifferent to the sex of a party’s candidate. This is why demand-side interventions are critical.

• The decisions that the political parties have taken in respect of creating and signalling their demand for women candidates explains the ongoing asymmetry in women’s representation in the House of Commons: Labour is currently 43% female; the SNP 36%, the Conservatives 21%, and the Liberal Democrats 0%.

• Supply-side interventions include encouraging women to participate in politics, supporting women as they seek to be selected. Such measures are important but they are less likely to guarantee significant and sustained increases in the medium term.

• A ‘quota-plus’ strategy is preferable. Quota-plus refers to the introduction of sex/gender quotas alongside supply-side interventions such as training, mentoring, and additional funding.3

What should political parties do to improve the representation of female MPs in the Commons, is the issue largely around selecting women for safe or ‘winnable’ seats or are there broader issues (such as recruitment) to consider?

Political Recruitment

• Given that this inquiry is linked to the Boundary Review which will affect party selections for the next general election, the focus of this inquiry should be more on what can be done on the demand-side of political recruitment. These are more likely to have an immediate effect, whereas many supply-side interventions take longer to bear fruit.

• Quotas for women in politics are the most effective means by which to increase the numbers of women MPs.

• Whilst there may be resistance to quotas, the global evidence demonstrates their effectiveness.

• There is a 10 percentage point difference in the number of women MPs between countries that do and do not employ sex quotas (Melanie Hughes forthcoming).

• Of those countries with more than 30 percent women Members of Parliament, over 80 percent use some kind of quota (www.ipu.org https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/OSCEReport_Gender_equality_Norris-Krook.pdf).

• The introduction of legislative rather than the voluntary adoption of party quotas in the UK would require all political parties to select more women. Depending on the precise rules of

3 Evans and Childs 2012; Campbell and Childs 2015.
the quota (not least the question of placement mandates and penalties), this would deliver higher numbers of women MPs at the next election.

- The positive impact of legislative quotas can be seen in the March 2016 election in the Republic of Ireland. This saw 35 women Members (TDs) elected, resulting in an overall percentage of women TDs of 22 percent. Compared with 2011, when there were only 25 women TDs, this constitutes an increase of 40 percent.\(^4\) That there was also a 90 percent increase in the number of candidates demonstrates that the creation of an artificial demand for women candidates – via quotas – had a positive impact on the supply pool of women.\(^5\) In other words, women will put themselves forward in greater numbers when quotas are integrated into the system of candidate selection.

### The importance of selecting women for winnable seats

- The key to increasing the number of women MPs in the UK Parliament at any individual election – holding all other conditions constant – is for political parties to ensure that as many women as possible are selected for their vacant held and winnable seats; in other words, those seats that are most likely to successfully return MPs to Westminster.

- If women are disproportionately selected for the party’s unwinnable or less winnable seats then there will likely be a difference between the percentage of women candidates a party has at the election and the percentage of women MPs it has after the general election. Evidence from recent elections shows that in the Labour party this differences is bigger, with higher percentages of women MPs than candidates, whereas the Conservative party has had lower percentages of women MPs compared with candidates.

- In 2015 Labour had 43% women MPs and 33.9% women candidates; The Conservatives had 21% women MPs and 25.7% women candidates.

- In 2010 31.6% of Labour MPs were women and 30.4% Labour candidates were women; in total 15.7 of Conservative MPs were women and 24.3% of Conservative candidates were women.

### How effective has the use of different positive actions for women in political parties been in improving the representation of women in the Commons?

- The asymmetry of representation in the UK reflects Labour’s use of a party quota – All Women Shortlists (AWS) – in 1997, and from 2005 onwards and the fact that this policy was designed to ensure that the selected women candidates stood disproportionately for vacant party-held and target seats.

- Labour & AWS in 2010: there were a total of 64 AWS seats at the 2010 general election. Just under half – 31 – saw women candidates elected. AWS were largely directed at retirement seats. Of the 95 seats where a Labour MP retired and where the constituency was not abolished or replaced by a constituency in which notional results indicate that another party would have won in the 2005 election, 43 were AWS (45 percent).

- Labour & AWS in 2015: there were a total of 77 AWS seats allocated in the 2015 general election again 31 were elected to the Commons. Of the 40 seats where a Labour MP retired in 2015 24 were designated AWS seats (60%).

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\(^4\) [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europppblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europppblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/)

\(^5\) I’d like to thank Meryl Kenny for this observation.
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<th>All seats</th>
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(Source: Parliamentary Candidates UK)

- As a result of the landslide in Scotland the SNP increased its percentage of women MPs from one out of six to 36%. However, the SNP women MPs were somewhat disproportionately selected to stand in seats with larger majorities to overturn. For example of the seats where the party came second in 2010 the four candidates who had a margin of less than 10% to win were all men.
- The Liberal Democrats electoral defeat resulted in no women Liberal Democrat MPs being elected despite placing women in 35 per cent of their target seats. Historically the Liberal Democrats have tended to place men in safer seats than women (Campbell and Childs, 2010b; Campbell and Lovenduski, 2005) and this is probably the best explanation for why the residual Liberal Democrat MPs are all men.
- The Conservative party placed women in 28 per cent of their target seats, which was still considerably behind the other main parties, but was an improvement on previous elections, and slightly more than its overall percentage of women candidates at 26 per cent.
- In retirement seats, the Conservative party selected 38 percent women candidates and Labour 63 per cent.

The Conservative Party have increased the proportion of women within their own parties without the use of positive action. Do you think that this is gives credence to the argument that positive action is not necessary?

- Positive action in academia is usually understood as measures short of sex quotas; we suspect however, that this question is asking whether the Conservative party’s recent improvement in its women MPs means that the party does not need to adopt quotas for the Commons.
- The distinction between legislative and party quotas should be noted. The former are required of all parties, and are usually part of electoral or constitutional law. The latter are permitted under the law but it remains up to the parties to decide whether they take up this opportunity. This is the situation in the UK, under the Sex Discrimination (Electition Candidates) Act. As amended by the Equality Act 2010 this permits parties to use sex quotas for the House of Commons until 2030.
- The Conservative party is significantly lower in terms of the representation of women than the main UK opposition party. Notwithstanding recent improvements in 2010 and 2015 by the Conservative party Conservative parliamentary party is at 21 percent women, roughly half the percentage achieved by the Labour party, which is 43% women.
- That said, it Conservative party’s efforts following the 2005 general election have produced positive results, and the role played in this particularly by Women2Win and vocal women MPs and Peers (and some men, including David Cameron) should be acknowledged.
- The continuation of these mostly supply-side interventions by the Conservative party is absolutely necessary to ensure that the supply pool continues to contain excellent women
aspirant candidates; ditto, the work the party has down vis a vis training/attitudinal change, the selectorate.

- Such approaches suffer from being insufficiently institutionalized; in other words, many of the party’s efforts rely on the political will of key individuals, who themselves often expend considerable amounts of personal capital, as well as relying upon the voluntary resources of others. If these actors were no longer present, or had fewer personal resources, then confidence that these Conservative successes would contain in the future would need to be reduced.

- It should also be noted, that one year prior to the last general election, key actors concerned with gender equality in the Conservative party were worried that given the selections that had taken place, the number of Conservative women MPs might decline at the general election. There was talk of ‘all options’ being on the table – this implied that the party should consider quotas. The ultimate increase in the numbers and percentages of women MPs reflected both enhanced effort by the party in the run up to the general election and some fortuitous wins.

The Importance of encouragement from others versus on motivation, candidates standing in 2015 by party and sex.

How important for your candidacy was the encouragement of others in comparison with your own motivation?

0=own motivation 10=encouragement of others

Source: The Representative Audit of Britain 2015®
The figure above shows that there is a small gender gap among candidates for all parties with women giving slightly more priority than men to encouragement from others to stand than their own motivations. This finding is in keeping with the international literature which suggests that equally well qualified women might be less likely to consider standing than men without verbal encouragement (Lawless and Fox 2010).

Additional Note: The reference to AWS women and quality, asked by Jess Phillips MPs is Allen et al, 2014.

SECTION 3 – THE GOOD PARLIAMENT REPORT

What are the key recommendations of The Good Parliament report? Are they likely to bring results? How workable are they?

The Good Parliament Report made the following statements about the House of Commons:

In the House of Commons, as is the case for many of the world’s parliaments, individual, institutional, and structural features constitute significant barriers for securing diversity amongst elected representatives.

A Gender Sensitive Parliament (GSP) is a political institution that responds to the ‘needs and interests’ of both women and men in terms of its ‘structures, operations, methods and work’. A GSP is one that has removed the ‘barriers to women’s full participation’ and offers ‘a positive example or model to society at large’.

Three dimensions critical to realising a representative and inclusive House of Commons guided the development of the recommendations in The Good Parliament Report:

Dimension 1: Equality and Participation within the House. Dimension 1 asks the question of how a diverse group of MPs might be selected for, and elected to, Parliament and how, once present, they are enabled to become effective participants across Parliament’s core activities: representation and interest articulation, legislative scrutiny, and executive accountability. This dimension addresses in particular the composition of the House of Commons, and MPs’ participation across the House leadership, and in its various committees.

Dimension 2: Parliamentary Infrastructure. Dimension 2 takes a critical look at the way in which Parliament facilitates the work of Members and whether this privileges a particular type of MP – explicitly or implicitly. It covers everything from the buildings and furniture of Parliament to the official rules and working practices that underpin the array of Members’ parliamentary activities. It includes provisions for MPs by IPSA, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Dimension 3: Commons Culture. Dimension 3 acknowledges that the official, written-down rules never tell the whole story about how institutions function on the ground – this is what might be thought of as the ‘normal way of doing things’. It is, admittedly, frequently hard to pin down

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6 http://parliamentarycandidates.org/project/representative-audit-of-britain/ Survey of all candidates who stood for the Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP and UKIP parties in mainland UK in 2015. 57% of candidates provided a full or partially completed survey. N=1798 (3174).
7 IPU 2012, 2011.
8 IPU 2012, 40.
9 These are informed by the IPU’s seven dimensions of a gender sensitive parliament, see Appendix 2.
10 Recommendations in this Report are limited to what the House of Commons might do to. See Childs (2013), Childs and Evans (2012), and the Speaker’s Conference (2010) for more comprehensive discussion of party reform and regulation.
informal institutional norms, practices and culture. That said UK parliamentary culture, as elsewhere, is not fixed but an evolving phenomenon, subject to change.

The necessity of an institutional response to the ongoing diversity insensitivities and deficiencies in the House of Commons was the reason that one key recommendation was made to the Speaker, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP prior to the publication of this Report: the establishment of a new parliamentary body, The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion.¹¹

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS,**

**OVERALL SPEAKER**

- **Recommendation 5: initiate the IPU Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit**
  - Involves a self-assessment audit, with the CRGRI as the monitoring body; IPU will provide assistance.
  - Provides framework to hold those responsible for the individual recommendations made in The Good Parliament Report to account. WEC should support the CRGRI in this.

**SUPPLY THE COMMONS REFERENCE GROUP ON REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION**

- **Recommendation 6: Publish a series of statements detailing and promoting the role and work of MPs, to both educate the public more about what it is that MPs do, and to explicitly signal the range of characteristics, skills, dispositions, and experiences relevant to the job of being an MP**
  - Longer term effect; to increase and diversify the supply pool, speaks beyond existing party members; easily achievable.
- **Recommendation 7: Engage in various parliamentary and other activities to enhance the supply of, and demand for, diverse parliamentary candidates, e.g. seek bi-annual parliamentary debates at the time of International Women’s Day to discuss the diversity of parliamentary candidates selected by political parties for the subsequent general election¹²**
  - Medium term, easily achievable to hold the debate; relies on parties to supply data.
- **Recommendation 7: Engage in various parliamentary and other activities to enhance the supply of, and demand for, diverse parliamentary candidates, e.g Ask the Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security to report on what more can be done to protect MPs from social media violence, and what more can be done to protect the children of MPs from media intrusion.**
  - Some changes may well have been made over the summer but any changes should be reviewed, and as far as possible, made transparent, so that recent concerns about MP safety that gender activists and women MPs are concerned might reduce the numbers of women in the supply pool and affect retention, can be addressed.

**THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION**

- **Recommendation 18: Support the production of comprehensive website materials showing that a diversity of people are, and can be, MPs**
  - Longer term effect; to increase and diversify the supply pool; easily achievable with the House administration working with Members
- **Recommendation 19: Support the development of a residential ‘Introduction to being an MP Programme’ for under-represented groups**
  - Medium term effect; to increase and diversify the supply pool; requires funding by Parliament and, or parties.

¹¹ See the section ‘The Commons Reference Group for Representation and Inclusion’ in the main body of this Report for more details.

¹² Speaker’s Conference Recommendation 27.
• Recommendation 21: Maximise Member opportunities, capacities and capabilities via Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
• Short term; administratively easy for Staff within the House but requires party buy-in.

DEMAND
THE COMMONS REFERENCE GROUP ON REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION
• Recommendation 8: Introduce prior to dissolution for the 2020 general election statutory sex/gender quotas to take effect for the 2025 general election if, three months prior to the 2020 general election, political parties currently represented in Parliament have failed to select at least 50 percent women in a party’s ‘vacant held’ and ‘target seats’. Introduce permissive legislation to allow for party quotas for other under-represented groups, where parties have failed to select proportional percentages of candidates from these groups
• Requires leadership by a Conservative government and needs a parliamentary majority – there are advantages for all parties, although this recommendation will likely to be contested by Conservatives, and some Labour men – it should find support from some Conservative women, and a good number of Labour women, SNP and Liberal Democrats. If introduced it would likely have significant effect at the 2025 general election.
• Recommendation 7: Engage in various parliamentary and other activities to enhance the supply of, and demand for, diverse parliamentary candidates, e.g Amend the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 either: (i) to remove the sunset clause; or (ii) to revise the sunset clause so that it is triggered only when women and men constitute no less than 40 percent of MPs for two consecutive Parliaments.
• This would need cross-party support, legislative opportunity, and a parliamentary majority.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES
• Recommendation 22: Immediately commence Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 (which requires political parties to provide data relating to parliamentary candidates) (see below)
• This simply takes the Secretary of State of make the decision to ‘commence’ the Act; the powers are all in place. Would immediately require parties to provide the information and should, as a transparency measure, encourage parties to act to redress women’s under-representation (see below). Quick win.

THE WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE
• Recommendation 24. Call the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities before the Committee regarding commencement of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010
• WEC simply need to take the decision to call the Secretary of State before the Committee; they might seek to speak with her beforehand to try to persuade her of the importance of commencing Section 106. Quick win.

POLITICAL PARTIES
• Recommendation 43: engage in various activities to increase the supply of and demand for diverse parliamentary candidates. For example:
  • In the absence of the Minister for Women and Equalities commencing Section 106 (see above), comply with its spirit, as recommended by Speaker’s Conference (Recommendation 25).13
  • Publish, no later than six months after a general election, a target for the percentage of the candidate characteristics listed in Section 106 of Equality Act 2010 for the next two general elections, and to set out their ‘action plan’ to achieve these.14 Parties might add ‘parenthood’ to the Equality Act 2010 list of candidates.

13 Parties would by so acting fulfil Speaker’s Conference Recommendation 27.
14 This would fulfil Speaker’s Conference Recommendation 26.
- Publish on the public pages of their party website an agreed set of expectations for candidates setting out the role, and the reasonable demands which may be made, of both prospective parliamentary candidates and local party associations.\(^{15}\)
- Publish a list of party national and regional equality champions.
- Implement Speaker’s Conference Recommendation 32 ‘All political parties should place a ceiling upon the expenses which candidates can incur during any single selection process’\(^{16}\)
- These will all require parties to engage in additional administration which will likely incur costs on the parties, although it is expected that most parties will have much of the information already, engage in some activities that would support this recommendation and should not be overly onerous. This recommendation is mostly about political will and leadership by the parties.

**Retention**

The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion (CRGRI)

- **Recommendation 11:** Commission a comprehensive diversity and equality audit of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), and submit its findings to the IPSA consultation (October 2016). (See The Good Parliament Report for more details). It should in particular (i) Defend the principle of the family and support sufficient funds for family accommodation in the constituency and Westminster, and for familial travel between Westminster and the constituency (ii) Defend the principle that ‘connected parties’ can be legitimately employed by MPs as part of a wider commitment to the principle of family (iii) Seek the equitable publication of costs incurred by MPs in respect of their children. That is, like the additional costs incurred for reasons of disability or additional security, these should be published at the aggregate and not individual level.
- Time is short. The new Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion is in the process of being established. As part of its early work it should respond to IPSA’s review of expenses by drawing on The Good Parliament Report.
- **Recommendation 12:** Produce a ‘House Statement’ on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave.
- There is a significant ‘motherhood gap’ in Parliament. 45% of women but only 28% of men MPs do not have children. To become a truly inclusive institution, the Commons must accommodate and facilitate both the pregnant MP and co-parenting and caring MP.
- This will require cross party cooperation, and may face some resistance internally from those who think informal party provision is acceptable. This should be quite easily overcome. The CRGRI should work with external organizations, and draw on best practice elsewhere.
- Likely symbolic and substantive effects: showcasing Parliament as a family friendly institution, expanding the supply pool, and enhancing the experiences of parent MPs already in the House.

**Procedure Committee**

- **Recommendation 29:** Ensure that House rules and structures, institutions, nomenclature and culture are diversity sensitive and inclusionary
- Symbolic effect, medium term vis a vis composition of the House; immediate for existing members. Suggested by Clerk that would take 3 months of so to complete.
- **Recommendation 31:** Introduce greater predictability in the scheduling of House Business
- Requires leadership from the Government and Leader of the House; immediate effect for sitting MPs, medium term effects on supply.

\(^{15}\) See also WIP APPG 2014 Report; Crewe 2015a, 25.

\(^{16}\) Included in the WIP APPG Report 2014, 27.
What are the most important changes in the Commons need to be made to improve the situation for women? Is there any opportunities for quick wins?

Most important (in light of the Boundary Review)

- **Recommendations 8, 22, 24**
  - Recommendation 8: ‘secure a cross-party concord regarding candidate selection for the 2020 Parliament following the boundary review: all political parties should see to increase the percentage of its women MPs at the absolute minimum all parties currently represented in the House should maintain existing percentages of women MPs.
  - 22 and 24 relate to Section 106 of the 2010 Equality Act and are dealt with below.

Quick wins

- **Recommendations 5 (IPU Gender Audit), 8 (cross party concord), 12 (maternity and paternity leave), 22 & 24 (Section 106, see belwo)**

The report criticised the political parties’ diversity of candidate’s data as unsatisfactory. How would commencing section 106 of the Equality Act help with this?

As noted in *The Good Parliament*:

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 was intended to ensure that all political parties provided full diversity data regarding candidate selection in advance of each general election. Transparency is the means by which the public and civil society would be able to hold parties to account as the process of candidate selection took place. In other words, it would no longer be left until the day after the general election to ‘total’ up the numbers of women MPs, or the number of BME candidates, and lament the homogeneity of the House. At the Speaker’s Conference evidence session in 2010 with each of the then leaders of the three main parties, Gordon Brown MP, David Cameron MP and Nick Clegg MP, all agreed to the provision of such data. These promises have only been periodically and incompletely delivered upon, and frequently only after repeated pressure from senior MPs.

Speaker’s Conference Report Recommendation 25 made explicit the nature of the information which was to be supplied by the parties, as outlined in the Box below.

**Speaker’s Conference Report Recommendation 25**

Political parties registered under part 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 should be required to publish details of their candidate selections online every six months, on 31 March and 31 October, setting out, for each potential candidate at each stage of the selection process, the following information:

- (a) the administrative region in which the selection took place;
- (b) the method by which the candidate was selected;
- (c) whether the party:
  - (i) currently holds the seat for which the candidate was selected; or
  - (ii) came second or third in the seat at the last general election within a margin of less than 5% of the votes cast; or
  - (iii) came second or third in the seat at the last general election within a margin of more than five per cent but less than ten per cent of the votes cast;
- (d) the sex of the candidate;
- (e) the ethnicity of the candidate; and
- (f) whether the candidate is willing to identify as a disabled person.

The reports might also include the following information:

- (a) where a candidate is willing to identify as a disabled person, the nature of the impairment;
- (b) where a candidate is willing to state his or her sexual orientation, the sexual
orientation of the candidate;
(c) the age of the candidate;
(d) the occupation of the candidate at the time of selection; and
(e) the highest level of the candidate’s educational attainment.

Given the 2010-15 data demonstrating the size of the motherhood gap in the UK Parliament, noted above, but not known at the time of the Speaker’s Conference, parenthood status and child/children age should additionally be sought. The diversity data should also detail the selection method under which candidates are selected: the formal ‘rules’; dates when these were in operation; and detailing which candidates were selected by which method at which point. The Minister might consider including religion as an additional characteristic, given that it is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act.

Finally, to ensure transparency and easy public access to this data, the Minister should empower the Electoral Commission to host the data collected under Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. It would henceforward become a duty of the Electoral Commission to publish (i) parties’ candidate diversity data by seat safety every six months (31 April and 31 Nov) on a dedicated webpage. The data would be structured by party and by seat safety,¹⁷ and (ii) publishes parties’ selection methods, rules, and outcomes, by seat safety. The Electoral Commission should also be asked to investigate what measures, if any, might be necessary to support smaller parties in the collection of such data.

September 2016

¹⁷ Seat safety refers to whether a party holds the seat; came 2nd or 3rd within a margin of less than 5 percent of the votes; 2nd or 3rd within a margin of more than 5 percent but less than 10 percent; and, other.
Bibliography


