Pathways to politics

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Equality and Human Rights Commission

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In most cases it appears that, to be considered for a winnable seat, a campaigner would need to have been an active sitting councillor for many years or be in a very high-profile position in another walk of life. As under-represented groups in parliament are also under-represented in high-profile positions, this attitude would need to change.

In less winnable areas, a candidate can be expected to work tirelessly, with no expenses provision, little practical support and no chance of being elected to any position for many years - making the position seriously unattractive for those with any other commitments and those without significant personal wealth.

In some areas there are also long held ideas that 'a woman can't win here' (in a traditional labouring area) or 'standing an ethnic minority candidate will lose us votes' (in areas where the BNP have done well or with mostly white populations).

A prospective parliamentary candidate, general election 2010

Executive summary

Background

This report was commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) to explore the relationship between common pathways into politics and under-representation of groups protected by the Equality Act (2010). Despite some progress over the last 30 years, elected politicians in Britain still remain highly unrepresentative of the population as a whole. Following the 2010 election only 22 per cent of MPs are women and four per cent are from an ethnic minority. There is inadequate data to know for certain the true level of under-representation for other groups.

The all-party Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) was established in November 2008 to examine and make recommendations to address the causes of under-representation in the House of Commons. This study considers under-representation across all equality grounds and looks beyond the House of Commons to include the House of Lords, Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, the London Assembly and European Parliament (UK members).

Diversity of representation is important for reasons of justice, effectiveness and legitimacy. It may also have electoral consequences by connecting with a diverse electorate. The Speaker's Conference argued that fair representation requires that:

- under-represented groups are fully able to seek and achieve nomination, selection and election on a fair and just basis
- the composition of the population is broadly reflected to enhance the legitimacy of representative democracy
- a wide range of perspectives and experiences are represented thus improving policy and decision-making, and
- the appeal and relevance of politics and politicians to the whole of society is broadened, increasing both participation and representation of under-represented groups.

Methodology

This research explores the barriers faced by under-represented groups and brings together ideas for addressing and removing these barriers. This is the second stage of a two-part process to explore pathways to politics. The report of Stage 1, undertaken by Brand Democracy, which collated diversity information about UK political representatives and conducted an online survey in 2009, is an annex to this report. For this study, 32 interviews were conducted with sitting representatives,

interviews with or written submissions received from 30 candidates, and 19 interviews carried out with political parties and lobbying organisations.

A framework of prevent, push and pull factors is used to aid understanding of what influences diversity of representation:

- **Prevent factors:** The barriers facing diverse groups and individuals seeking nomination, selection and election, including prejudice and discriminatory practices.
- **Push factors:** Those factors which help people enter into politics, including early exposure to politics, personal motivation, family background, education, profession and previous political involvement.
- **Pull factors:** These cover the role of political parties and institutions in attracting, supporting and retaining diversity.

The Commission's remit covers age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender. Existing research has primarily concentrated on the representation of women and ethnic minorities and there is a lack of evidence about the extent to which under-representation exists for the other equality groups. This research identifies that gaps exist in the data and research relating to most equality groups in relation to political participation.

Findings

General
- Certain equality groups are disproportionately disenfranchised by prevent, push and pull factors.
- Combinations of different push and pull factors support 'traditional' and 'new' pathways into politics. Some barriers to getting involved in politics are widespread.
- The equality groups are at different stages in seeking political representation. There are more data and analyses available on women and ethnic minorities than for disabled people and other under-represented groups. Some equality groups may not perceive direct representation as the most effective route to gain influence, preferring to influence the policy agenda through campaigning and lobbying.
- Individuals within equality groups are not homogeneous, either in terms of their needs or in terms of their political views. Some politicians actively avoid being too closely identified with an equality group to prevent themselves being too narrowly labelled or 'pigeon-holed'.

Prevent factors

- The personal and financial costs of being in politics can be high and act as a barrier to those seeking involvement. This is a particular concern for those in under-represented groups, who are disproportionately concentrated in lower income social groups.

- The perceived ideal candidate is often male, white, middle aged, middle class and professional, often reflecting the characteristics of those selecting candidates and of previously successful candidates. The informal, unwritten rules and conventions governing politics, including 'knowing how to play the game', work to exclude those who do not meet this model of the archetypal candidate. Established cliques and systems of informal patronage within parties have the effect of reinforcing existing under-representation.

- Individuals from under-represented groups reported being asked inappropriate questions by their political party which, they felt, would not have been asked of other candidates. For example, women were asked about their family and marital situation and ethnic minorities asked about their religion or belief.

By equality group

- Women felt a perception remained that they lacked the appropriate gravitas and authority in politics. They perceived themselves to face a double bind of being seen as either not assertive enough or overly pushy. Their personal appearance was more of an issue than for men while their caring and domestic responsibilities limited their opportunities and were scrutinised by political parties. Women in national politics found it difficult to establish a work-life balance.

- A widespread lack of understanding persists about disability and the difficulties faced by disabled people in seeking selection and election. A lack of awareness and understanding about disability at the local party level was also identified, including by selection panels. Barriers include negative attitudes towards disability and obstacles that prevent disabled people's full participation in political life and discourage them from getting involved. Respondents felt that the public and the media wrongly perceived disability as inability.

- Ethnic minority candidates felt they were viewed by party selectors as more acceptable in areas with a relatively high ethnic minority population.

- Some politicians suggested there were few barriers to political participation by lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) people. However, there was evidence that LGB people seeking elected office still contend with homophobia not only from the media, but also from their own and other political parties. LGB politicians are often not visible as part of an under-represented group, unless they choose to disclose their sexual orientation.

- There are no openly trans politicians currently in local or national politics. Barriers to trans people participating in politics include outright hostility and a lack of

understanding about their lives. While trans politics has seen development, the community is small and lacks capacity to support trans candidates.

- Age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and social background can intersect to create multi-dimensional identities. This inter-sectionality can present greater barriers to people's involvement in national politics, for example, for younger mothers, ethnic minority women and lesbians.

Push factors: identifying common pathways

- The traditional pathway into politics has often been taken by older candidates and is well recognised by sitting representatives. It typically includes a long-standing involvement with the party and experience in politics at the local level; for example, chairing a constituency party, being a party agent or, most commonly, being elected as a local councillor. Common steps on the traditional pathway include political or civic activism, trade unionism and election as a local councillor.

- The new pathway is typically followed by those with work experience in politics, a university education, professional success, involvement in campaigning or an interest group, and a particular skill set drawn from professional experience, such as the debating, advocacy and scrutiny skills of a barrister. New pathways attract the student politician, the 'professional' politician, the issue-based activist and the politics-facilitating professional.

- The key differentiating factor between the traditional pathway and the new pathway seems to be age, with younger candidates more likely to take the new pathway. New pathways are arguably even more exclusive and are evidence of a trend towards greater professionalisation of politics. A university education and professional experience, particularly within politics, have become the defining features of the modern politician, as evidenced by the new intake of MPs following the 2010 general election.

- Where candidates from under-represented groups have been successful, there was a suggestion that this might be because they fell within the limits of 'acceptable difference'. This is where candidates possess certain characteristics which are seen to mitigate the electoral disadvantages of being from an under-represented group, for example, a black male candidate who is ex-armed forces and public school educated.

Pull factors: the role of political parties

- Despite ideological and historical differences between political parties in addressing under-representation, there was evidence of a 'disconnect' between the rate of progress and leadership shown at the national level and a change in outcomes and attitudes at the local level.

- Recruitment of a more diverse party membership is a key step to encouraging more diverse candidates. None of the British political parties have a membership

- Mentoring, informal peer networks and the activity of established interest and lobby groups were positive ways in which parties could, and sometimes did, use to recruit, elect and retain under-represented members.
- One member, one vote measures and all-women shortlists were seen as ways of opening up the candidate selection process and helping to overcome informal patronage.

Pull factors: the role of political institutions

- The political institutions included in this research have distinct traditions and practices. Devolution within the UK was widely seen as an opportunity to create a new politics, one that was more accessible and diverse. As such, newer institutions can offer good practice examples to older institutions, although there is still more work to be done to attract and support the participation of under-represented groups.
- The House of Commons has a reputation for not embracing difference and being a male-dominated environment. There are few, if any, pull factors visible which encourage diversity. The adversarial and 'yah boo' culture was seen as off-putting to under-represented groups and there was a sense that the House of Commons was reluctant to instigate radical change. Other problems included the lack of a family-friendly culture and the requirement to spend a long time away from home. The Speaker's Conference recommendations dealt with these barriers explicitly but are yet to be taken forward.
- The House of Lords remains unelected, although a programme or political and constitutional reform is planned. Concerted efforts have been made to improve the diversity of peers, although some felt there was still a lack of political will across all political parties to increase the presence of under-represented groups. The appointment process lacks transparency and there are no formal application procedures for two of the three main parties.
- The MEPs interviewed were generally positive about their experiences in the European Parliament and believed that the institution actively encouraged gender diversity. The proportional electoral system, together with equality measures from several political parties, has supported a greater gender balance. However, other equality strands have not necessarily benefited from the same measures, such as zipping of female/male candidates on the ballot paper (where men and women are placed alternately on the list of candidates). Political culture in the European Parliament was seen to be less combative and adversarial and more collaborative and consensual than the UK parliament.

- The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly were compared positively to Westminster by those in the study. The devolved assemblies started with a 'blank sheet' and are perceived to have embraced the opportunity for a new politics. They have adopted different working practices and a less adversarial and more collaborative culture has emerged. However, further progress is required to maintain or improve gender balance and to attract wider diversity.
- A significantly higher proportion of women have been elected to the devolved assemblies than to the UK parliament. This can be largely attributed to the use of positive action, such as zipping and twinning (whereby one man and one woman are selected for paired seats) but there are concerns about complacency and whether levels will be sustained if these measures are withdrawn. There are also concerns about the under-representation of other equality groups in the devolved assemblies.
- The London Assembly has also embraced a new political culture and is seen to value different skills. However, further measures are required to ensure greater diversity of representation across all equality areas and to support progression within the Assembly.

Ideas for change from respondents

Participants in the research put forward ideas and suggestions to encourage greater diversity in our political institutions.

- Arguments were made for greater diversity monitoring to provide a more robust evidence base and to support calls and measures for encouraging diversity.
- Education and training for under-represented groups within political parties and for groups within the community not already engaged in politics was supported.
- Support was given for extending the informal measures instigated within political parties around diversifying the membership, more actively recruiting and targeting under-represented groups, and reforming the process of candidate selection. Arguments were also made in favour of opening up political parties and institutions for work experience and internships.
- Positive action[1] raised significant debate. Supporters evidenced the progress made in women's representation in Britain and internationally since the adoption of such measures, including zipping and twinning, all-women shortlists and quotas. While there was acknowledgement of the difficulties of implementing such measures, they were perceived as the only way to radically address under-representation in our political institutions.
- Opposing arguments were that positive action would undermine the credibility and legitimacy of those elected by such means and that it deals with the symptoms

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[1] Positive action, as discussed by respondents, broadly covers what we would call positive action, positive discrimination and affirmative action.

but not the causes of under-representation. There was indecision about the form positive action should take and how prescriptive it should be, as well as who should be targeted and who should benefit.

- There were mixed views on the use of primaries. Some thought they were more democratic and encouraged more diverse individuals to participate, but there was also concern that they undermined party membership and party politics, lead to the selection of populist candidates and reinforced the focus on speech-making at the expense of other skills.

- Debates about diversity in representation often took place within the context of discussions about wider reforms of the electoral system. There was some support for moving towards a more proportionate system, as is already the case in some of the assemblies examined in this study.

- Changes to the funding of politics were put forward. These included the state funding of political parties or caps on the spending allowed at elections. The suggestions of an 'access to public life fund' received widespread support, not only to facilitate the candidature of disabled people but also to benefit those from less affluent backgrounds.

- A further set of suggestions was put forward about reforming the practices of political institutions, ranging from the long-standing argument for more family-friendly hours and childcare, to more radical suggestions about work-sharing and the greater use of technology to facilitate more flexible working.

- Many of the respondents' ideas for change are reflected in the recommendations made by the Speaker's Conference, although that did not include exploration of electoral reform. Many participants in this research raised concerns about the viability of recommendations across different parties and institutions and there was a lack of consensus about the balance between voluntary and statutory measures.

Implications

Our findings suggest focusing on three areas to promote diversity in representation: re-frame the debate to include the positive electoral consequences of having more diverse candidates; open up pathways and the political recruitment process; and initiate debate on electoral reform and diversity, responding to the current opportunity for change.

Justice, effectiveness and legitimacy arguments for diversity do not have significant purchase within UK politics, which is dominated by party and, most importantly, electoral concerns. A more effective framing of the arguments about diversity would acknowledge that fielding more diverse candidates and supporting under-represented groups has potential electoral consequences in individual constituencies, and at an aggregate level. A re-framing needs to include discussion

and better empirical data so that political parties can take effective action to improve their electoral appeal to a diverse electorate.

For candidates from under-represented groups who do put themselves forward, the barriers to their success are high, the pathways available are narrow, and the support they receive from institutions is limited. Significant change is needed to address this. While the composition of our elected administrations has diversified over the years, those elected still conform closely to the narrow pathways identified and show an increasing trend towards professional politicians. Push, pull and prevent factors act to reinforce each other. Reform needs to happen at many levels to widen opportunities to participate in politics, broaden existing pathways and potentially create new routes. Arguably, sustained and radically positive action and systematic change as well as education and training to influence attitudes are needed to improve outcomes and address under-representation.

The political system needs to be viewed as a whole in order for transformational change to take place. Participants in this study raised issues which the Speaker's Conference did not consider, for example, wider constitutional and electoral reform and a stronger role for the political parties. A serious and urgent debate which considers the scope and pace of change that is required to address under-representation in politics across Britain is needed, including the use of positive action, equality guarantees and electoral reform. The coalition government's plans for political reform represent an ideal framework for this.

1.   Background

Despite the significant progress made over the last 30 years, it is widely acknowledged that the elected institutions of government in the UK are still unrepresentative of the population as a whole. The Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) convened during the last parliament argued that change in representation was important for the reasons of justice, effectiveness and legitimacy (House of Commons, 2009). The Speaker's Conference recommendations argued that the case for widening representation was not only a matter of urgent concern, but that the current political situation presented an opportunity for change. Following the expenses scandal, the Conference members perceived a new mood for political and democratic reform and a once-in-a-generation opportunity, coinciding with the general election 2010 to influence the political parties and thus improve the diversity of our political institutions (House of Commons, 2009).

The general election has resulted in a new parliament, one which is marginally more diverse than before, but still not representative of the wider population of the UK[2]. Throughout the campaign and in the subsequent negotiations between all parties in the process of forming an administration and in the resulting coalition deal struck between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, political reform has risen to the very top of the agenda. This report is completed, therefore, at a time when the Speaker's Conference focus on the case for widening representation will be debated alongside constitutional reform more generally. The implications of our research for the wider debate on constitutional reform are outlined in the final sections of the report. This research as such makes a timely contribution to a topical and highly important debate. The arguments for wider representation and the scope and structure of this report are set out below.

This report was commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) to feed into the policy debate following from the Speaker's Conference

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[2] **Composition of the House of Commons 2010**

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP	PC	Others	Totals	%of total MPs
Men	258	177	50	5	3	14	507	78
(Of which)								
Ethnic minority	9	9	0	0	0	0	18	(3)
Women	48	81	7	1	0	5	143	22
(Of which)								
Ethnic minority	2	6	0	0	0	0	8	(1)
Totals	306	258	57	6	3	19	650	100

report. It presents in-depth research conducted from September to December 2009 which illuminates the pathways and barriers that people from under-represented groups described in seeking or maintaining a pathway to politics. The Commission has responsibility for seven equality strands - age, disability, race or ethnicity, gender, religion or belief, transgender and sexual orientation - as well as human rights. The Pathways to Politics project was commissioned to look across all these equality areas marking an important development from the previous academic focus on gender and ethnicity, and from the scope of the Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) on women, ethnic minorities and disabled people. Sexual orientation, gender identity and religious belief were considered wherever possibly within the project, as was age and socio-economic background.

1.1 Why is diversity in representation important?

For many of the audiences of this report and many of the individuals we spoke to, the importance of diversity in representation is clear. Yet, the experiences and reflections of those who participated in this research indicate that these arguments still need to be made. One politician commented that representation 'doesn't need to be diverse, but it benefits enormously from it'. The Speaker's Conference set out the case for widening representation on three interlinked grounds: justice, effectiveness and legitimacy, which serves as a useful framework for discussion:

Justice

Firstly on grounds of justice, the Speaker's Conference Report states 'there should be a place within the House of Commons for individuals from all sections of society' (2009: 17). If individuals from the under-represented groups are 'prevented from standing for parliament by reason of their gender, background, sexual orientation or a perceived disability, this is an injustice' (2009: 17).

Effectiveness

Beyond the necessity to ensure that injustice in representation is addressed, the Speaker's Conference also argues that more diversity in representation would provide improvements in the nature of policymaking. By drawing in a wider range of experience, a more diverse political representation is able to make more informed decision-making and thus becomes more effective. One female politician reflected on how her ability to make informed decisions was limited by the extent of her own experiences and background, 'With the best will in the world, I am still a white, middle-class, professional female and I can't speak on some issues with authority...' She continued by reflecting that uninformed decisions were often not engaged with or supported by the communities they affect, 'It is difficult to ascribe things to different communities and you will probably be treated with scepticism anyway.'

Diversity in politics can also have the impact of introducing new issues to the political agenda or providing a greater priority on existing issues. For example, policy developments on sex discrimination, childcare and domestic violence have had more legislative attention since the number of female MPs rose after 1997 (Childs, Lovenduski and Campbell, 2005). Diversity can also underpin a change in the culture and working of politics as evidenced in the devolved institutions (Feld, 2001; Busby and McLeod, 2002; MacKay, 2006).

Legitimacy

As well as improving the effectiveness of policymaking, the Speaker's Conference also argued a more diverse representation better reflecting the composition of the population would provide more legitimacy than a legislature where particular social groups dominate. Modern democracy demands diversity of representation, and trust in the political system will be enhanced if the electorate feels that politicians are somehow connected to their lives, understand or share in their everyday experiences and can adequately represent their perspectives in politics and decision-making. As one male ethnic minority politician commented:

> We are meant to be the representative, so if we do not look like the people we are supposed to represent, we are not representing [them].

Improved legitimacy, through better diversity in political representation, can help to address the justice arguments for change if politics becomes less remote from the everyday lives of communities and voters. Seeing a diverse array of politicians makes the prospect of being a politician appear more open and accessible to a wider range of people. In turn, more diverse representation may present positive role models able to challenge overt and latent stereotyping and discrimination against minority groups. As one female MP recognised, 'everyone needs to see people like them being part of the democratic process, that's the first and critical thing.'

Justice, effectiveness of policymaking, and legitimacy of democracy are all solid grounds for strengthening the diversity of politics. However, the reality of electoral politics means a focus on electoral advantage and winning votes. Our findings suggest a fourth set of arguments needs to be added to this debate – the electoral consequences of having (or not having) a more diverse range of candidates.

1.2   Scope of the research

The first stage of the Pathways to Politics project undertaken by Brand Democracy provided a brief review of the existing literature together with a programme of web extraction and an online survey of Britain's politicians which gathered details of the backgrounds and pathways of politicians across all national political institutions: the UK parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, European Parliament

and the London Assembly[3]. The aim of this second stage of the Pathways to Politics research is to explore – in depth – the barriers faced by under-represented groups, as defined by the remit of the Commission, and the common pathways taken by those seeking election through the main political parties[4] to UK national institutions. The research also considers the experiences of individuals from under-represented groups once elected.

The research is based on the experiences of candidates and politicians engaged in national level politics which provides an illustration of the issues and key insights. However, the research is not representative and should not be considered so. The research used a sample which focused on individuals from under-represented groups with the aim of drawing out the widest range of experiences from across the different equality strands, political institutions and political parties. Thirty-two interviews were conducted with politicians from across the political institutions included in the study, political parties and equality strands. Furthermore, 30 candidates from under-represented groups from across the main political parties were also interviewed or provided written submissions. The report has also drawn on recent published interviews and reflections from candidates and politicians from under-represented groups. In addition, 19 external stakeholder groups, lobby groups internal to political parties and party organisers were also interviewed. The report also draws on relevant research to contextualise our report in wider debates on representation.

Full details of the research design and sampling is given in Appendix 1[5]. The research design presented two challenges: firstly, the issues presented by working across several equality strands with differing characteristics; and secondly, how far individuals identify or can be identified with particular labels of diversity.

1.3   Researching diversity and inter-sectionality

Much of the existing research and policy responses from political parties has been concerned with the representation of women and, to a lesser extent, ethnic minorities (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). Much less is published about the under-representation of other diversity strands and social groups. Yet, the concerns of legitimacy, effectiveness and justice emphasised by the Speaker's Conference are applicable to other under-represented groups.

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[3] See Annex 1 to this report for Brand Democracy's findings from this exercise.
[4] Understood as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru although the research did engage to a lesser extent with the Greens and the UK Independence Party
[5] The research consulted and followed guidelines for ethical research at both De Montfort University and the University of Manchester. Particular emphasis was given to ensuring anonymity and confidentiality for those participating in the project.

It is important to note that in terms of proportion of the population, historical presence, level of organisation, profile and current level of representation, each equality group varies and, also, should not be seen as internally cohesive. While it is convenient to look at under-represented groups as discrete categories, this does not necessarily reflect the nature of identity or experience. Individual identities intersect: age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity and social background are not separate categories but intersect to create multi-dimensional identities (Ortbals and Rincker, 2009). This research has, therefore, attempted to explore intersectional issues also.

1.4   Self-identification and representation

Many individuals enter politics with the aim of advancing particular equality agendas and drawing explicitly on their own experience; indeed, this can be seen as part of their representative mandate. However, a notion of representation based solely on identity politics was argued to provide only a partial form of representation and not be able to address important challenges (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). One campaigning group powerfully argued that:

> We need to have 3D elected representatives, not 1D ones who you think can only talk about race, [or] 2D ones who talk about everything but race.

This is clearly an argument that resonates across equality strands. As suggested, diversity of representation is a complex issue. A complicating factor is whether individuals want to accept the label that may come with a particular diversity strand. In party-dominated politics, party loyalty is often the most important concern, as former MP and Minister Edwina Currie famously stated, 'I'm not a woman, I'm a Conservative' (cited in Abdela, 1989, 1). What does representation actually mean? Can one individual in any meaningful way speak and act for a group? What if an individual does not identify with the label assigned to them? Different social groups have varying positions in terms of political presence and organisation and the issues that face them in seeking political representation also differ.

Issues of self-identification and visibility have particular resonance in certain under-represented groups, for example lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people and disabled people. LGB people may choose not to disclose their sexual orientation in the public realm. There are multiple reasons for not being open about sexual orientation including fear of rejection or discrimination. This can have the impact of LGB individuals - as one campaigning group noted - 'self-select[ing] out' of politics. Disability in politics was widely seen as a 'hidden' issue as many politicians did not want to assume the label of 'disabled', perhaps through a concern that this would raise issues about their competence and capability.

Several politicians commented on how they did not want to be defined by an equality label. As one disabled MP commented, 'When I got here I was going to follow the David Blunkett model – in other words I was an MP who just happened to have a disability.' A peer noted that having a disability is 'not the main thing about you'. Others raised the political difficulties that being associated with an equality label could present. Politicians commented on the constraints of 'put[ting] yourself into a box' or being 'pigeon-holed'. One openly gay politician recounted a conversation where he was given advice, 'Don't go anywhere near this issue because people will just think you are the gay one.' Other female and ethnic minority politicians articulated similar experiences.

These discussions link a long-standing question of whether descriptive representation automatically leads to substantive representation (Durose and Gains, 2007). As Hall (1993) has argued, simply because people share a particular characteristic or experiences, this does not translate or guarantee a shared perspective. As one female politician commented:

> It is not enough to have women in politics, we must have women in politics who understand the barriers to other women's success and who are committed to helping them on.

Several politicians, however, reflected on the burden of representing particular groups (Childs, 2004a). Dawn Butler, a former MP with an ethnic minority background, argued in a recent interview, 'There is a pressure on black women to represent all black people in the country… that's because there's so few of us' (Fawcett Society, 2008, 35).

1.5 Understanding barriers and pathways

A number of factors can prevent, push or pull individuals into getting involved in politics:

- There is a perception of a number of factors which prevent individuals becoming involved in politics. Rao (2005) highlights prejudice, exclusionary networks and discriminatory practices.
- For those that do get involved, push factors include personal motivation (for example a political conviction, a desire to serve the community or to make changes in their locality) and socialisation (including, for example, family background, education and previous involvement with trade unions or political parties).
- A further push factor is the nature of employment that an individual may have, for example, solicitors, barristers, journalists or those working in further and higher education are considered to have politics-facilitating professions (Norris

and Lovenduski, 1995). Increasingly, sitting representatives come from a professional politics background, for example working for a political party, a representative or a think-tank (Butler and Kavanagh, 2005; Cairney, 2007[6]). Push factors, in part, reflect the agency of the individuals, what they can do to help themselves. These push factors work together to build the pathway of an individual into politics.

- Pull factors concern how an individual can be helped to get involved in politics. These include, for example, how individuals are recruited to political parties and the openness of local political structures and how they recruit, retain and promote individuals, and how political institutions work to encourage and facilitate more diverse representation (Lowndes et al., 1998; Childs, 2004b; John, Gains et al., 2007).

- Some barriers to getting involved in politics are widespread, for example a lack of awareness and interest in politics and, particularly in the contemporary climate, and the poor image of politics (John, Gains et al., 2007). However, the prevent factors can have the effect of 'disproportionately disenfranchising specific groups' (John, Gains et al., 2007). These groups can often face double barriers by not having push factors present in their socialisation and not being sought out, encouraged or 'pulled in' by political parties or political institutions.

1.6   Chronically excluded groups

Diversity and equality issues clearly extend beyond the broad groups included in this research. As noted, there is significant disparity within particular equality strands, for example within the broad label of ethnic minorities there are certain groups which are more marginalised and excluded. Such groups are often described as 'hard to reach' or 'chronically excluded' and require different strategies to increase their representation (Roberts Commission, 2007). These groups include Gypsy and Traveller communities, refugees and the street homeless.

Seeking candidature for a political party or standing in a national election reflects a high level of civic and political engagement. There are many under-represented groups in society, but only the proportionally largest, prominent and most organised have been able to begin to seek representation at the national level. Many chronically excluded groups are not represented at all at national level and are not yet in a position to contest for representation in national institutions. The object for many groups campaigning around the wider diversity strands is to influence the policy agenda by campaigning and lobbying rather than by achieving direct representation. These groups remain an important concern but additional research is required to reflect their levels of engagement, to understand the barriers they face and to develop strategies to facilitate greater civic and political engagement. These

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[6] Data for the new UK parliament on the background of MPs has not yet been collated.

important concerns are not possible to address within the scope of this research but there may be some overlap in barriers and enablers to their participation.

1.7   Structure of the report

The existing research evidence indicates that different under-represented groups face distinct barriers to becoming involved in politics. This report aims to give a voice to individuals from under-represented groups who are, or would like to be, involved in national politics and to present their experiences and reflections. Chapter 2 looks at the different prevent factors which individuals from under-represented groups have faced in seeking candidature and fighting elections. Chapter 3 considers the push factors which have characterised the pathways taken by these individuals in seeking to become elected representatives. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the role of political parties and political institutions encouraging candidates from currently under-represented groups. Chapter 6 of the report sets out various measures to improve diversity in national institutions, suggested by those who participated in the research. The report concludes by discussing the implications arising from the research.

2.   Prevent factors

This chapter explores the barriers faced by individuals from under-represented groups in seeking involvement in politics at the national level. It looks at the experiences of each of the under-represented groups with some presence in national level politics and identifies some of the barriers to their further involvement. These include the personal and financial costs incurred by engaging in national politics and in challenging the image of the 'archetypal candidate', and the double whammy of barriers faced by individuals who cut across more than one equality group, for example ethnic minority women.

2.1   Personal and financial costs

Sue Catling, a former Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) writing in *The Guardian*, reflected on her experiences of standing for selection as a candidate:

> The personal price was huge. I ran down my business. I cried off from family gatherings, I missed my children's parents' evenings, I lost touch with old friends - all to allow me the time to win Calder Valley for the Conservative Party. (17 January 2005)

The demanding and time-consuming nature of involvement in national politics was widely repeated, as former MP Edwina Currie noted:

> If you are going to get into parliament, whoever you are - male or female - there is only one way to do it and that is to be totally single-minded. *Everything* you do has to be directed towards that end. (Abdela, 1989, 4, author's emphasis)

A candidate also commented:

> I think people underestimate the sheer dedication and determination required. This is neither an easy life nor an easy choice.

Standing for election can also lead to intrusion into family and personal life and scrutiny of family and domestic arrangements to a level that may be off-putting. A former Conservative candidate reflected the comments of many female candidates by highlighting the questions about family status which are regularly targeted at female candidates.

> Local activists have no… right to… ask women candidates whether they have children, how they intend to look after them if they are elected [but] such questions are common… I have never heard any of them directed at male candidates, though I have heard men applauded for reassuring

> selection panels that 'My wife will, of course, be on hand to support me throughout the campaign'. (Luckhurst, 2009)

These questions also extended to the marital status and previous relationships of female candidates.

Candidates may also face extensive financial costs in order to stand. One MP commented:

> When there is a full-scale long drawn-out selection and you don't live and work in the seat you are going for, it is a very expensive difficult business.

One former candidate estimated the cost for campaigning for candidature in a UK parliamentary seat as around £5,000 to £6,000. One MP reflected, 'I spent every penny that I had… Cost possibly £100,000… It took two years as an MP to pay back my debts.' Costs can vary according to whether the candidate already lives or is based in the constituency and at what point in the parliamentary term the candidate is selected. Local candidates would arguably face lower costs, as do incumbents.

Many candidates, particularly those who did not live locally, had to give up work entirely or only work part-time during the campaign due to the time demands of seeking candidature or election. A report from ConservativeHome suggested that standing (and losing) an election can cost over £40,000 in lost earnings.[7] Some candidates who work in the public sector may have to resign in order to stand in an election which may challenge their neutrality or confidentiality. This situation may particularly affect women whose employment is more concentrated in the public sector. Candidates have reported taking out loans, dipping into savings or relying on the financial support of a partner. These options are clearly only open to a limited proportion of society. One female candidate commented:

> Financially unless you are wealthy, have union backing or a husband who can support you, it is difficult to fund being a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate... I have given up work now in order to concentrate on fighting the seat. Most people just can't afford to do this and pay the mortgage.

Cost is a particular concern for under-represented groups, who are disproportionately concentrated in lower income social groups, and has been identified as a prohibitive factor preventing individuals from engaging in politics. There are also additional hidden costs faced by particular groups; for example, a self-funded sign-language

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[7] www.conservativehome.com, 2006 cited in *Pathways to politics Stage 1*, the annex to this report.

interpreter may be necessary for a deaf or hearing impaired person at public meetings, and can be difficult and costly to arrange, especially for ad hoc meetings.[8]

The situation is made more difficult by the likelihood that in order to become selected and contest a winnable seat, candidates will have to go through the selection process more than once. One candidate summed up the situation stating that 'politics is sadly the privilege of those who can afford to work for nothing'. One MP commented, 'I think we're getting to a position where you're going to have to be quite wealthy even to get shortlisted.' One candidate commented, 'This means politics is full of people who can afford to be there and that's wrong.' It also limits the way in which politics can reflect the spectrum of society.

2.2   Informal rules and patronage

Our research has shown the extent to which informal and unwritten rules and patronage govern politics and how this can prove exclusionary; as one MP stated, 'You need to know how to play the game.' A female MP commented on her experiences with local party culture when trying to get elected:

> I had that very naïve view that if you were clearly good and you knew what you were talking about that you would get selected and it was very clear that the blokes that I was up against… were so much more on top of the machine you know, the process... But it was just that sense that it was the men who understood how to play that game much much more than the women.

Candidates commented on 'cliques who work consciously or unconsciously to keep others out'; one candidate said how this was aimed at 'fixing the result', an assertion reflected by other female candidates. A further candidate commented that a lack of this 'informal patronage' can undermine individuals from under-represented groups in seeking candidature and standing for election, unless they fit an acceptable mould. One MP argued:

> You've got networks in politics. The men have them: they have old boy's networks. They have ways of helping each other up. Women are just starting out on that path, just understanding the importance of serious networking. Black people are even further behind white women. We need to get ourselves organised as a community if we want to see more representation in politics. (Fawcett Society, 2008, 35)

Women have traditionally had supportive networks, however, these networks have not necessarily been focused on 'pushing' women in standing for candidature and election at the national level.

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[8] Approximate current cost is about £54 per hour.

2.3   The archetypal candidate

There is a widespread perception that local political parties are conservative when it comes to candidate selection. It has been widely repeated that parties have a 'particular picture', 'an archetype' of the ideal candidate who is invariably a white middle-class professional man often closely resembling a previous successful candidate or, indeed, those making the selection decisions. As one candidate commented, constituency parties 'look for people who are like them and who look like them'. As one representative commented, 'They weren't looking for somebody different. I think they were actually looking for the same people.'

There were repeated assertions that political parties used the electorate as a means of legitimising the archetypal candidate by overestimating the negative electoral consequences of selecting a candidate different from the norm. Many contributors to our research have commented that there is often a disconnect between what the parties look for and what the electorate will accept. As one female peer commented:

> I think in the past, some constituencies thought that if they had a woman candidate they may run the risk that they wouldn't get elected, but actually there is no evidence of that and in fact, the evidence is slightly the opposite of that, that women candidates do marginally better than men do as more voters turn out.

The conformity of local party selectors to a norm seems to have induced pressure on candidates to also conform to the archetype and, if they are different, to be acceptably so. One candidate commented:

> It's how you fit in so they don't think you're a girl and so you can become one of the boys and with some people that's easier than others. Once one of my colleagues described me as one of the boys, I think he meant it as a compliment but I'm not sure that it is.

One representative argued:

> I think it has everything to do with the perception within our party about what a politician is and what 'he' looks like and what 'he' sounds like. We still have a long way to go to overcome that perception.

Many research participants argued that the perception of the archetypal candidate extended further to the value given to a particular skill set which may be exclusionary to someone without political experience. This skill set emphasises public speaking and debating; however many candidates and representatives highlighted that these skills were relevant to only a small proportion of the role of a representative and not to the key role of working with constituents. Candidates argued that party training could reinforce this situation by also focusing on a

particular skill set rather than welcoming and encouraging a wider range of skills. One representative argued that the composition of political institutions would change only when different skill sets are recognised and valued.

2.4   Gender: women

Women constitute more than 50 per cent of the population, but continue to be a severely under-represented group in politics and public life. The representation gap is evident for women in general but is more pronounced when looking at women from particular social groups and backgrounds. Much of the academic and policy research on under-represented groups in politics has focused on the position of women and strategies to challenge this. Despite significant progress in the last 30 years, women are still not seen to fit the model of the archetypal candidate.

While some candidates and representatives argued that sexism has waned, others maintained that sexism continued to be a problem in party politics. One candidate recounted the experience of a local party member 'hitting me on the bottom and asking me what a nice girl like me is doing in the Labour Party.' Other attitudes towards women were less overtly expressed but still exclusionary. Women in politics perceived themselves as facing heightened expectations to justify their presence in a way that men did not. Yet, women were not taken seriously or seen to have the gravitas of male politicians. Candidates and sitting politicians saw this dismissive attitude reflected in the suggestions put to them to 'have a go' in 'unwinnable' seats. Women saw their skills as undervalued because they did not conform to those of the archetypal candidate. As one candidate commented:

> The skills and competencies that women have are not necessarily recognised by the general population as having value: negotiation, multi-tasking, consensual behaviour etc. These are all effective in achieving results, but the skilled orator is often perceived to be more capable.

Women also perceived themselves to face a double bind in terms of assertiveness. If they were not assertive enough, they were often sidelined; if they were too assertive, they were considered to be pushy (see also Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). One female sitting representative argued 'behaviour that is seen as strong in a man is perceived as harsh in a woman'. While such aspects of political culture may potentially change over time, currently this situation is seen as 'very difficult to challenge'.

Women also commented extensively on the particular difficulties which the personal and financial demands of politics made on their personal life. While parenting responsibilities are now increasingly shared, women continue to predominantly assume the role of primary caregivers to children and elderly relatives. These caring

and domestic responsibilities limit the opportunities that women have to become involved in politics. In a revealing paraphrase, one candidate commented, 'Women in public life need a wife.' Women reported finding it difficult to establish a work-life balance.

Women were also perceived to face particular scrutiny about their personal appearance, as one female politician noted, '...being elected as a woman… there are comments about how you dress and how you look. Men don't really get those comments.' Women commented on how they felt under pressure to conform to male styles of dress in order to be taken seriously.

2.5   Disability

There is a widespread lack of understanding of both disability itself and the issues faced by disabled people in meeting the demands of seeking candidature for a political party and then standing for election. This lack of understanding is starkly illustrated by research conducted by SCOPE (2005) which found that at the 2005 general election, 68 per cent of polling stations presented one or more access issues to disabled people preventing disabled people exercising their basic democratic rights.

The term disability can refer to a wide range of conditions which include mental health problems or long-term health conditions such as multiple sclerosis or HIV. Disabled people may face a wide range of differing barriers to becoming involved in politics which, in turn, may require different responsive strategies. In addition, there is an issue of hidden disability, some conditions may be less immediately obvious than others (for example, autism, dyslexia or asthma) but nonetheless present significant barriers. Some individuals are more willing than others to identify as disabled and some who do not consider themselves as having a disability still need adjustments to allow for their full participation in political life.

According to the evidence submitted by RADAR to the recent Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), the current number of disabled MPs is unknown (2009). The number of openly disabled MPs is very low compared to the proportion of disabled people in the population. The suggestion from RADAR is that a minimum of 65 disabled MPs would be reflective of the wider population. One stakeholder group commented that, 'the fact that (disabled people) are so under-represented in parliament demonstrates that there is a barrier' (2009). The barriers discussed generally either fell in two categories: attitudes towards disability, and obstacles that prevent a disabled politician's full participation. One of the problems discussed was cultural. Specifically, an interviewee representing a political party's disability group was concerned about the public's incorrect perception about the capabilities of

disabled people. She pointed to inaccurate and disparaging media representation as part of the problem, saying that:

> Disabled people on television are not active; they are always looked after or cared for. This leads to questions about whether disabled people can manage and achieve things in positions of power.

Her belief is that increased visibility of and changing attitudes towards disabled people are central to positive change.

Questioning a disabled person's capability to be a politician appeared to be a recurring theme. One former candidate commented that:

> There's the challenge of convincing… that you can do the job and to be perceived as a person first and someone with a disability second. But if you have never had a directly positive experience with a disabled person then perhaps you have a negative perception.

One disabled male councillor who has sought candidature on several occasions but has been unsuccessful commented:

> People think if you have a disability you are unable. If you have autism, people think you are not capable because you don't have social skills. I have been called 'retarded' because of my lack of social skills.

This experience, while clearly lamentable, does not seem to be widespread. While there are attitudes which are 'far from benevolent', more often, as one male disabled candidate commented:

> People look at you and think 'poor bloke, can I help him?' [This] 'benevolent discrimination' [can] sap confidence, it takes a certain amount of sheer bloody-mindedness to deal with it.

One female disabled candidate who is also currently a councillor commented:

> My mobility goes up and down, getting out and knocking on doors can wipe me out, physically it can be very hard-going. At first I wasn't sure how others would react to me as the councillor with the disability… either 'what's wrong with that one?' or 'oh what a shame, how can I help you?' ". But to my surprise, I got a very human response and for most there was no issue at all. If I had known it was going to be like this I would have been a councillor 20 years earlier.

She commented however, that disability is more widespread than perceived and that there is a lack of understanding of some of the difficulties disabled candidates may face and a lack of support. One stakeholder group echoed these sentiments:

> ...There's not enough help for disabled people. There is a lack of readiness. People can't just slot right in with their access needs met such as alternative formats, toilets, etc. The preparation work isn't done.

One disabled politician recollected attempts at getting elected, 'There was the physical obstacle: I was in a wheelchair... There will be fewer meetings in inaccessible places now... there was still the attitude that if you can't get there, hard luck.' Another stakeholder group representative commented on the barriers faced by hearing impaired and deaf individuals:

> Some of the things are in place, but increasing the amount of deaf awareness training among the staff in the political parties would help. Booking sign language interpreters or a speech to text reporter should be really straightforward. These have not been normalised and are seen as only benefiting a small number of people... It is about making sure that these things are in place and working properly.

A further group commented that many disabled people are put off because they do not believe it will be possible to overcome the obstacles and argued that politics was exclusionary of those without particular communication skill-sets:

> A lot of people would not even consider going into politics because they think the barriers would be too huge. One of the ways that people get into professional politics is through first becoming a local councillor [but] they struggle to follow along in meetings because people are not turning to look at them when they speak… In central government, opportunities to get involved and be engaged are fewer as the barriers are even bigger. The House of Commons has a very confrontational style; it is all very much based around people making quips and being able to respond to things very quickly, verbal wordplay. It's all very fast. This can be very off-putting to people who may struggle with communication.

Thus, the obstacles described included, but were not limited to, physical barriers. They also extended to the cultures within which politicians perform their duties and the beliefs and perceptions about what disabled people are capable of and attitudinal barriers.

According to a stakeholder from a political party's disability group, the biggest obstacle to getting selected/elected are the people doing the selection.[9] There is a perception that when faced with individuals from under-represented groups, local party selection panels do not face up to their own concerns directly. For example, there is a perception that disabled people are not qualified for the job of being a representative. But there is also a fear or a reluctance to find out what the needs of disabled people are or how disabled individuals may meet the challenges of candidature and election: the idea that a dyslexic person would struggle with the reading, a reluctance to publish all the materials needed to apply to stand as a candidate in Braille, to provide a sign language interpreter at selection interviews, to make meetings accessible. Instead, there is the perception that local party selection panels prefer not to select candidates from under-represented groups.

One disabled candidate who uses a wheelchair commented that as each candidate had to face the same questions within his particular party's selection process, the panel were not allowed to ask about the wheelchair. The candidate understood that while the process was 'intended to be scrupulously fair' it was also 'artificial and uncomfortable' and he would have preferred a 'more flexible approach'. One disabled MP talked about how she had addressed the issue:

> I did have to put myself about a bit and show that I was as energetic as anyone else... I took it head on. They weren't going to ask me how I would manage... they don't ask but they're thinking it so if you don't say you don't get to put your side of the story if the person isn't asked.

However it is important not to address these issues in a way that could be perceived as pejorative or discriminatory, for example, re-framing questions so that the emphasis is on the party's responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments and be as accessible as possible, rather than on the individual. Diversity training was recommended by one stakeholder for those involved in candidate selection, to ensure that diversity is welcomed by the party machine and, particularly, by local parties.

The formal process of candidate assessments is not always perceived to be accessible to disabled people. According to a representative from one party's disability stakeholder group, disabled candidates are unsure about the kind of assistance they are entitled to. Assessments may involve writing, speaking, working

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[9] This stakeholder mentioned a Disability Now article where a disabled woman did not feel comfortable with how things progressed when she went up for selection. She felt that she would be limited to certain roles within her party because of her disability. She was asked to go up to a podium to speak, which was outside of her abilities, but she did not feel capable of challenging it because she wanted to fit in. The article portrayed the system as being inflexible for disabled people. She gave up in the end; she left her stick at the door and she didn't get selected.

on policy questions and interviews. Some of these might present barriers to disabled people. For example, for a deaf person who requires sign language, a timed interview can be a problem. A stakeholder group commented that they want to see a policy in place in parliament about organising communication support, including accessibility in parliament's buildings and public communication.

2.6   Ethnicity

Operation Black Vote's submission to the Speaker's Conference highlighted the high levels of non-participation from ethnic minorities both in terms of turnout and voter registration (2009). Many participants commented on the perceived disconnect between ethnic minorities and mainstream politics. One lobby group commented, 'They don't look like us, how can they represent us? They don't look or sound like me, what's it got to do with my life? They switch off and turn their back on it.' One politician agreed with this sentiment arguing that when 'parliament still looks [like a load of] white bald men', it is 'not going to engage anyone.' One ethnic minority MP commented:

> We need to lead more by example, not just calling for quotas but showing we support diversity. Having four or five Scottish white men in the [former] cabinet and not a single representative of any of the ethnic minority communities in the UK is unbelievable.

Ethnic minority politicians reflected on the difficulties they faced in being accepted by the political establishment:

> I did try to join mainstream political parties… But, I'll be very honest, I was not very welcome. We had to work 10 times harder to make a place. I couldn't break the shell to get into the political arena, I just couldn't.

While there was a counter-argument that this sort of exclusion had waned over time, one ethnic minority politician selected in a majority white constituency argued that there was still a sense that ethnic minority candidates did not fit the 'Identikit'. He commented, 'The local paper in my constituency said that [this area is] not ready for a "foreign" candidate; thankfully they were wrong, but they printed that.' These successes in majority white constituencies were seen to be limited and local parties were seen to be reluctant to select an ethnic minority candidate. One female MP commented, '[A] big barrier that BME [black and ethnic minority] candidates face is this pernicious assumption… that you don't put them into "normal" seats with white majorities.' Local parties - as commented by one lobby group - were seen to be 'uncomfortable with difference, they don't embrace it, it is seen as something negative.' Another lobby group argued that selection panels, 'feel that BME candidates are detrimental to the party's progress, the idea that "this county" is not ready for a black candidate and they don't want to lose their core vote.' Ethnic

minority candidates and politicians argued that the parties failed to give them sufficient support, 'to say you are a good candidate and we stand behind you'.

2.7   Religion or belief

Religion and belief is a diversity strand that often intersects but is not synonymous with race and ethnicity. It is, however, often less visible and less discussed in reference to representation. Indeed, it is difficult to find data or evidence of monitoring on the representation of different faith and religious groups in national politics. One politician commented on how religious commitments were not always accommodated and indeed, commonplace practices within politics could potentially exclude individuals with certain religious beliefs. One candidate noted that 'much of the socialising within the party, and hence decision-making and key networking goes on in environments that it is difficult for an observant Muslim to access such as pubs.' A campaigning group further highlighted how local party selection panels can ask 'shocking and inappropriate' questions to candidates, targeting their faith or religion. For example, a young Muslim woman was asked what she would do about 'problem Muslims'; it is not a question that candidates in general would face. Another black candidate was asked whether she was 'one of them happy-clappy churchgoers', referring to predominantly black Evangelical Christian churches. Diverse candidates are then put in a situation where they have to challenge these assumptions themselves, rather than local party selectors actively challenging the situation.

2.8   Sexual orientation: lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)

Overt discrimination based on sexual orientation was refuted across political parties, with many arguing that, 'sexuality was never an issue'. Attitudes were perceived to have changed significantly in the last 20 years. At the same time, there was a perceived need to 'support people from those communities who may feel intimidated or excluded in other ways'. Despite these positive views, there was also evidence that LGB people seeking elected office still contend with homophobia. One politician commented on the culture of her party group:

> People even in my own group can be terribly rude, we have a range of sexuality groups in this group, and there are jokes, banter ... you cannot take it too seriously, you have to take it in the spirit it was meant, if you cannot take it, politics is not for you.

This illustration of discriminatory banter highlights the latent acceptability of homophobia and the exclusionary impact it has. One openly lesbian politician talked about how she was warned about her chances as she was considering putting herself forward for office. When she was elected, some minimised her achievements and instead chalked it up to 'novelty'. Sexual orientation was also seen as a challenge to the 'archetypal' candidate, and one stakeholder group commented on

how, particularly in marginal seats, the attitude of the local party is often 'he's a good candidate but we're not sure… let's play it safe.'

One of the issues faced in tackling the under-representation of LGB groups concerns their visibility, one stakeholder group commented:

> Visibility is a barrier. Unlike many of the other equality strands, sexual orientation is something that you can choose whether or not to disclose.

One MP commented on the difficulties in addressing the question of visibility:

> We don't know how many gay and lesbian people there are in parliament. The only way you can find out is to 'out' people or to threaten to 'out' people and I wouldn't go along with that so I don't think we should be questioning a person's sexuality. I think it's entirely up to that person.

Another politician argued that politicians and decision-makers did have a responsibility to address this situation and simply arguing that sexual orientation should not be a basis for discrimination was an insufficient response:

> It is not enough just to say this; it has to be backed up by action… They spend so long saying that sexual orientation is not important that they are not creating a positive environment where people feel safe, comfortable and confident to come out and to put themselves forward.

The lack of a safe environment for LGB individuals to be open about their sexuality was seen by many to be compounded by the attitude of the media, as one openly gay politician commented:

> I think it would be exceptionally difficult for someone who had anything within their backgrounds that the press could potentially make something of. If that's maybe your sexual orientation or whatever, I think that is a sad state of affairs but something that would get picked up particularly by the media.

There was a sense that sexual orientation was newsworthy and that aspects of a gay politician's life would face disproportionate attention, as one stakeholder group commented:

> ... Even where there is no homophobia, the fact that someone is gay is still a story. The first time a gay person's children go to school, it will be a story… Things that a straight candidate doesn't have to think about.

2.9   Gender identity: trans people

Trans people face significant barriers in accessing political life. To our knowledge, there have been only been two openly trans representatives in the United Kingdom: two city councillors, one of whom was eventually appointed mayor. Both of these individuals have since retired from public life.

There were a number of concerns expressed about barriers to trans people's participation in national politics. These include outright hostility, a lack of understanding about trans people's lives and pejorative portrayals by the media (Trans Media Watch, 2010). As one stakeholder commented, 'It would take a really strong individual character to put themselves forward for political office as an openly trans person.' Gender identity was thought to be difficult to address because – as many stakeholder groups acknowledged - there is less understanding around these issues. The capacity of the trans community to support candidates was also discussed. Stakeholders pointed out that while trans politics has been developed to some extent in terms of lobbying power, the community is small. It seems that a sufficient framework of support for trans candidates is not in place.

2.10 Inter-sectionality

Individuals participating in the research highlighted how different aspects of their identity intersected to present greater barriers to their involvement in national politics.

Younger women and mothers

Younger women in politics were seen to face barriers in becoming involved in national politics both in terms of their age and of balancing their political life with domestic and caring responsibilities. Young women[10] involved in politics commented that they felt they 'didn't fit' in an environment dominated by older men and did not look like a 'stereotypical politician'. They mentioned the difficulty of being taken seriously and commented on the experiences of being mistaken for the secretary of a male colleague, being questioned about their experience and ability. As one younger female representative commented, 'We know we're being judged for our age and for our gender… so you've got to go that extra mile and find other ways to get that credibility.' Another commented:

> It's fighting to show that your experience can't be demonstrated in years. So it's not only being a woman, but also being a young person in politics that has made it difficult.

For women, age seems to be a particularly significant concern in reference to their decision to have children. As one female candidate argued, it:

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[10] It should be noted that in politics, 'young' is often regarded as under 40.

...can be hard for a woman to find 'the right time' in life to take on the role. If single, [you] could be seen as too young and naïve; if married, a family can deter entering this profession, and when older it can be seen that a woman could be past it.

Women with young children seemed to face the most significant barriers in balancing politics with family life and a primary caring role. One female politician noted that women are well represented in student and youth politics and in political internships, but do not choose politics as a career due to a perception of its incompatibility with family life.

Ethnic minority women
Ethnic minority women are a notably under-represented group (Moosa, 2009). In the 2010 UK parliament, eight ethnic minority women were elected, an increase of six on the previous parliament. Dawn Butler, a former MP from an ethnic minority, reflected during her time in office that, 'People generally don't believe I'm an MP. Because I'm black. Because I'm a woman. Because I'm quite young' (Fawcett Society, 2008, 31-32). Ethnic minority women are perceived to face a double whammy of discrimination. Butler went on to argue, 'As a black woman, you always have to work twice as hard and be twice as good just to get on par recognition. We're not even close to having a level playing field' (Fawcett Society, 2008, 36). One ethnic minority woman who stood as a candidate in the 2010 general election commented on the isolation of her position and the lack of support from ethnic minority men in her party. Yet, younger ethnic minority men also felt isolated, and one MP commented on how he felt he was subject to 'more spotlight, more scrutiny' due to 'being an ethnic minority, being younger than expected'.

Lesbians
Lesbians are particularly under-represented and face multiple levels of discrimination based on both their gender and sexual orientation. Lesbian women were seen to be disconnected from the archetypal candidate in terms of both gender and sexuality. Party training and selection were seen to reinforce this disconnection in, for example, questions about marital status and advice on image and dress.

2.11   Key findings: prevent factors
*   There are high personal and financial costs of being in national politics which are a barrier to individuals from under-represented groups seeking involvement. These costs can vary significantly if the candidate is based locally, at what point in the parliamentary term they are selected and whether they are an incumbent.
*   The informal and unwritten rules and conventions governing politics, including 'knowing how to play the game', work to exclude those who do not meet the model of the archetypal candidate. Established cliques and systems of informal

patronage within parties have the effect of reinforced existing disparities in representation.

- The model of the archetypal candidate still dominates politics where the perceived ideal candidate is often male, white, middle class, professional and middle aged, often reflecting the characteristics of those selecting candidates and of previously successful candidates.
- Political parties retain this model due to the perceived, if unfounded, negative electoral consequences of adopting a different candidate. For example, women and ethnic minorities have been shown to suffer disproportionately at the hands of selector hostility, often struggling to secure winnable seats. However, once selected as a candidate, there is no clear evidence of voter hostility to candidates based on their gender or ethnicity.
- Local political parties had, in some cases, asked inappropriate questions to candidates, targeting their gender, disability, faith, religion or sexual orientation.

Women
- There remained a perception that women were seen to lack the appropriate gravitas and authority in politics. Women perceived themselves to face a double bind of either not being assertive enough, or being seen as pushy if they were assertive. Their personal appearance was also more of an issue than for men.
- Women said that caring and domestic responsibilities limited their opportunities to become involved in politics, and that parties scrutinised their domestic arrangements, unlike those of men. Women in national politics found it difficult to establish a work-life balance.

Disabled people
- There is a widespread lack of understanding of the issues faced by disabled people in meeting the demands of seeking candidature for a political party and then standing for election. There is also hidden or unseen disability, and some individuals are more willing than others to identify as disabled. Some who do not identify as disabled still need accommodations for full participation in political life.
- The barriers identified were attitudes towards disability, and obstacles that prevent a disabled politician's full participation. Respondents felt that the public had an incorrect perception about the capabilities of disabled people, who were also inaccurately represented in the media as incapable. Physical and access barriers discouraged disabled people from considering a career in politics.
- Candidates feel that, when faced with individuals from under-represented groups, local party selection panels do not face up to their own concerns directly. For example, there is a perception that disabled people are not qualified for the job of being a representative, but there is also a fear or a reluctance to find out what the needs of disabled people are or how to address and meet those needs.

Ethnic minorities

- A barrier to ethnic minority representation identified by respondents was that constituency parties and some parts of the electorate only have limited contact with individuals from ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority candidates were seen by local party selectors as more acceptable in 'ethnic minority seats'.

Religion or belief

- Religion or belief is a less visible equality strand in discussions on representation.
- Political parties in some cases had asked inappropriate questions to candidates, targeting their religion or belief.

LGB people

- While the number of openly LGB politicians in national institutions has increased, LGB politicians are sometimes not visible and choose not to disclose their sexuality.
- While overt homophobia was seen to have decreased there is still a perception of hostile and homophobic attitudes and disproportional attention from the media, and of homophobic banter within political parties.

Trans people

- There are no openly trans politicians currently in national level politics. Barriers to the participation by trans people in national politics include outright hostility, a lack of understanding about trans lives and pejorative portrayals by the media. While trans politics has seen development, the community is small and lacks capacity to support trans candidates.

Inter-sectionality

- Gender, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender identity along with age and social background can intersect to create multi-dimensional identities. This inter-sectionality presented greater barriers to people's involvement in national politics, for example, for younger women and mothers and for ethnic minority women.

3. Push factors: identifying common pathways

As already acknowledged in the first chapter of this report, political representation at the national level in the UK is broadly homogeneous. Yet several social groups, while continuing to be under-represented, have established a presence in our political institutions and many individuals from those groups have been selected, elected and developed successful political careers. This chapter looks at the strategies used by these individuals to forge a pathway into national politics.

The concept of acceptable difference has already been highlighted in this report in the discussion of how individuals from under-represented groups have felt pressure to conform to the perception of the archetypal candidate. One ethnic minority politician highlighted how other aspects of his identity were able to make his ethnicity 'acceptable':

> I think my age and colour ticked certain boxes and ex-military, public school boy ticked others, so I ticked boxes that certain people wanted to project onto me.

We found that under-represented groups do not find their way into national politics on the basis of their difference but rather by their conformity to particular aspects of the archetypal candidate. For example, candidates from under-represented groups can conform to the stereotype of candidates by means of sharing the same political motivations, being from a political background, being university educated, being part of a professional elite or by being involved in local or national politics (see Pathways to Politics (PTP) Stage 1 report in Annex 1). These characteristics are both exclusive and excluding of individuals without the same social or economic resources. By sharing these characteristics, individuals from under-represented groups are given access to networks where becoming involved in politics is not seen as an impossible leap. By following these pathways these individuals are able to become acceptably different and circumvent certain barriers they are likely to face as part of an under-represented group.

Our research identified pathways which under-represented groups were able to take into national politics. It indicated the narrowness of these pathways; candidates from under-represented groups have to take the same pathways as everyone else in order to succeed. As noted, these pathways can exclude those not from similar class backgrounds. The restricted nature of these pathways reflects again the resonance of 'acceptable difference', UK national politics is premised on the archetypal candidate and deviation from that norm has to be minimised in order to achieve successful selection and election.

3.1   Common pathways to politics

Although pathways have remained narrow, our research has reinforced the understanding that pathways into politics have changed over time. Change over time is also reflected in wider changes in politics and the make-up of political institutions: a declining number of individuals from the manual working class, fewer people entering parliament from the trade union movement and an increasing number from the so-called 'politics facilitating' professions (Cairney, 2007). These 'politics facilitating' professions include barristers, solicitors, journalists and teachers, particularly in further and higher education. These professions are seen to involve useful transferable skills for politics. They are also skills which could be gained by people from more diverse backgrounds if, for example, training was provided by the political parties. There has also been the emergence of more professional politicians who follow university with working in the media, for a political party, for an elected representative or with a think-tank (see PTP Stage 1 report in Annex 1).

Involvement in national politics has traditionally been through long-standing activism within a political party, experience in the local party (for example, chairing a constituency party), being a party agent, serving as a local councillor or for the Labour Party, similar activity within a trade union. The traditional pathway is set out in Figure 3.1 on the next page.

As noted, the traditional pathway into politics has been largely superseded by a new route. Recent research by Elizabeth Evans (2009) on women's representation in the Liberal Democrats developed a formula for 'ideal' candidates based on an analysis of the women selected by the party in winnable seats ahead of 2010's general election.

White + no children + graduate + no previous experience

As Evans' formula illustrates, selection is now less based on long-standing local political activism but it is more likely to have university education as a prerequisite. Our research has also found that professional success and the associated development of particular skill sets along with civic activism (for example, involvement in campaigning or an interest group) are also factors for success. Figure 3.2 sets out the new pathway into politics.

Figure 3.1   Traditional pathway into politics

(adapted and developed from PTP Stage 1 report)

Higher socio-economic
background

↓

Early exposure to politics

Join a political party

↓

Join a trade union

Get involved in local
party

↓

Active involvement or position
within a trade union

Stand as a local
councillor

↓

Stand as an MP
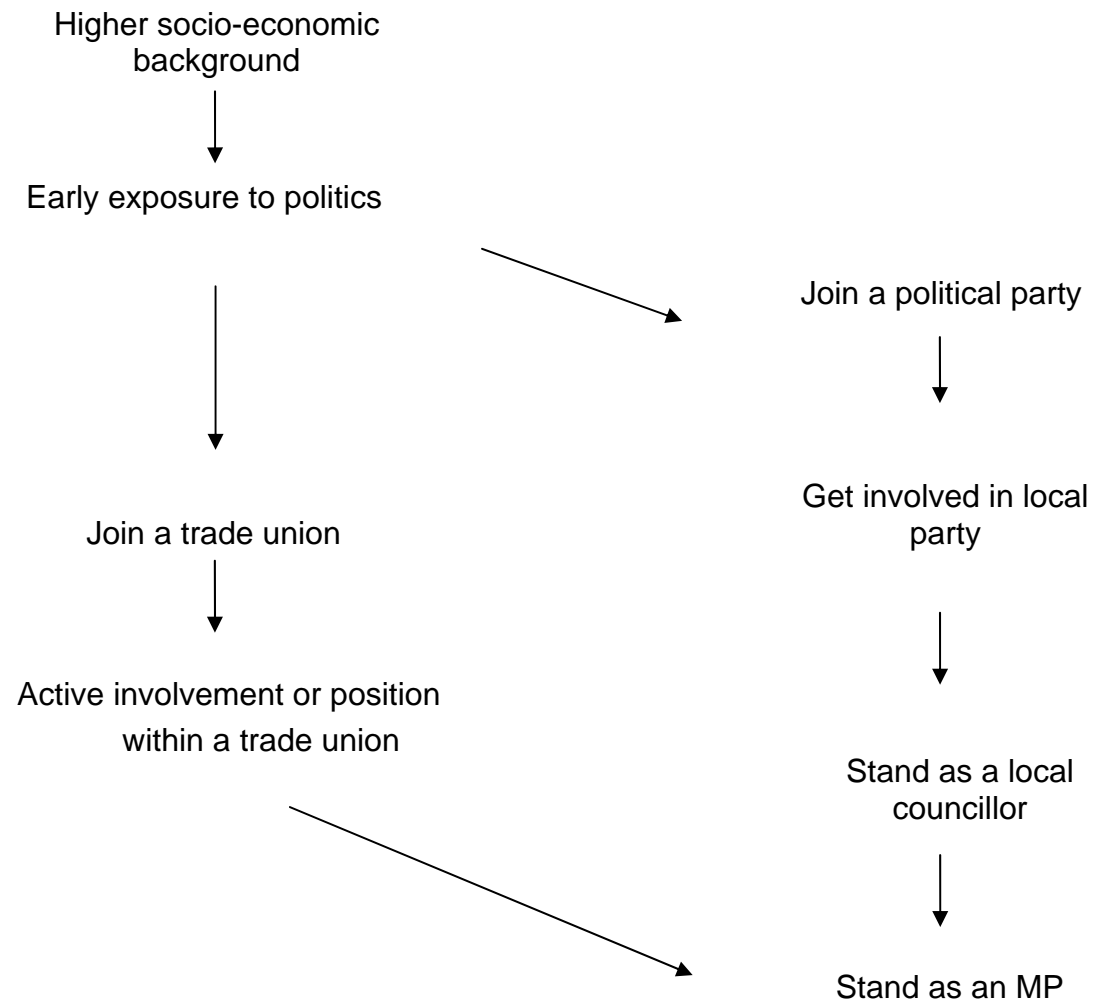
Figure 3.2   New pathway for under-represented groups into politics
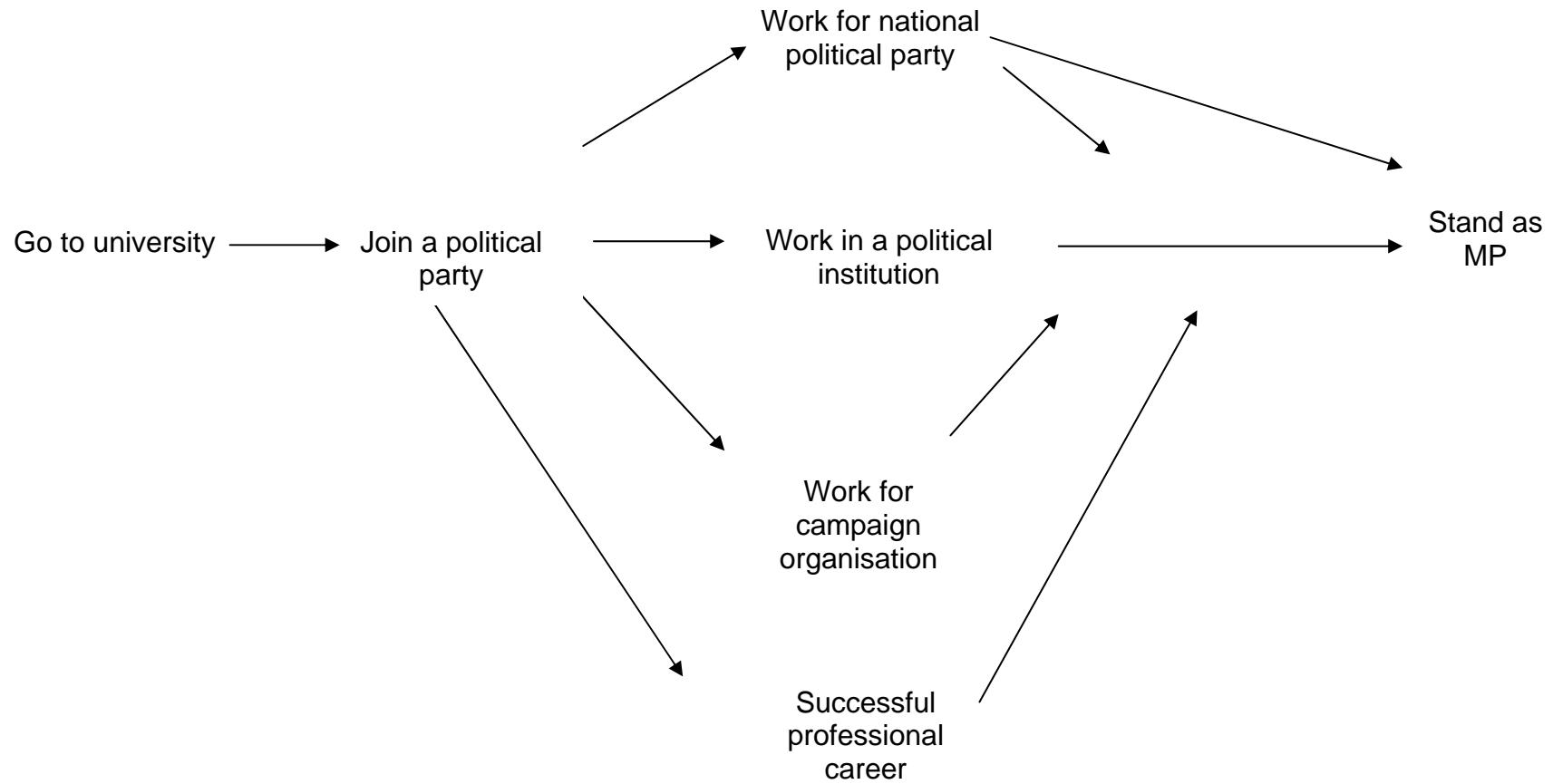
These pathways may differ across parties. Candidate selection in smaller parties is less competitive, so more diverse candidates may be selected more easily and more quickly. Those seeking to stand for selection and election may face more competition in areas where the party's electoral base is concentrated, for example Conservatives in the South East and Labour in the urban North. Particular pathways may also be more prominent within particular parties, for example, Liberal Democrat candidates may be more likely to come through local government as the party has well-developed local activist networks. Pathways may also vary according to the electoral system adopted by the political institution. For example, the devolved assemblies seemed more likely to be open to women candidates partly because of the more proportional systems of representation and election and due to the lack of incumbents. The representation of women in the devolved assemblies has also been aided by specific party measures which have not extended to other equality strands. Pathways may also be affected by the demography of the particular constituency; for example, there is a perception that ethnic minority candidates are more likely to be successful in a constituency with an ethnically diverse population. Conversely, diverse constituencies may prove more competitive.

3.2   Traditional pathways into politics

The political activist

Many candidates and, particularly, existing representatives, detailed how their pathways into politics started in their childhood through their parents' and families' political involvement. This formative political experience seems to be less important now in national politics, but the following quotes are typical of the experiences of long-standing political representatives and older candidates:

> I delivered leaflets for the Labour Party from the age of about 15.
> My father was quite political. He was a union man and he had been
> a miner in his youth.

> My pathway into politics was from a very early age because my grandma,
> she was a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)
> and she was also a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP).
> Also my dad was a member of the ILP.

> My mother went into local politics... I suppose I just inherited it from
> her, really.

> I grew up in a small 'p' political family... I remember delivering leaflets
> at age seven so I had that sort of political background.

The Pathways to Politics Stage 1 research (see Annex 1) argued that 'if more of our politicians had early exposure to politics, then it seems likely that pathways would be widened'.

The trade unionist

Trade unionism was a particularly important path for many into the Labour Party given the history of the labour movement; less so for the other parties. In their evidence to the recent Speaker's Conference, UNISON argued that 'trade unions are the main route through which working-class people receive the support and mentoring that is necessary to become a member of parliament' (cited in the Stage 1 report in Annex 1).

One female MP commented on how involvement with trade unionism made her see politics as a realistic option:

> I still didn't think of myself as ever becoming an MP. I just thought that was so beyond my experience and background and I would not have had a clue how to go about doing it anyway… [but after getting involved in trade unionism] over the years – this is going to sound awful - but when I started to meet more MPs and occasionally a minister, I started to think, you know what, maybe I could do this, maybe I have got something to offer here.

The Pathways to Politics Stage 1 report highlighted that trade unions continue to sponsor Labour MPs but that this would not necessarily lead to more working-class MPs (see Annex 1). One female MP supported this evidence:

> The unions do have a role... what happened over several years now is the unions have been absolutely key in putting favoured sons and occasionally… favoured daughters in certain seats [but] the favoured sons are not always working-class shop stewards and working-class members. In the old days there were more genuinely lay trade union representatives.

The local councillor

Involvement in local politics and election to local government is seen as the traditional route into national politics. The Pathways to Politics Stage 1 research indicated that over half of politicians (52 per cent) elected to office in a national or regional body had prior experience as a local councillor. One former candidate commented on how being a councillor helps to 'get your face known' in the party. Another commented how being a councillor 'gives you an opportunity to prove yourself; you gain credibility and then you can stand as an MP'. A current candidate commented on how being a councillor gave her 'the confidence' to stand as an MP. Local government is a broadly homogeneous institution (white, male, middle aged

and middle class)[11] and unrepresentative of the wider UK population. The Councillors Commission (2007) examined the barriers and incentives to local representation and highlighted the need for political parties and local authorities to encourage civic activists to consider standing for election to draw in 'new and more diverse candidates to stand in local elections and to deliver better quality support to those elected' (Communities and Local Government, 2007).

3.3   New pathways into politics

The defining feature of new pathways into politics is a university education. According to the Sutton Trust, nine in 10 MPs in 2010 attended university including 94 per cent of the new intake (2010). Just under a third of MPs attended Oxford or Cambridge Universities (Sutton Trust, 2010). Of newly elected MPs, 69 per cent attended a leading research university with 28 per cent attending Oxbridge (Sutton Trust, 2010). While access to higher education is expanding, it is still only open to the minority and access for those from poorer backgrounds is limited. One unsuccessful candidate reflected on how her lack of higher education was used to against her in the selection process:

> When I was trying to become a parliamentary candidate I was asked
> on more than one occasion what my qualifications were and they meant
> academic qualifications. One woman even said it was a real shame
> because one of the other candidates was a lawyer and another one had
> a PhD and although I seemed like a really nice woman I wasn't really [of]
> their calibre.

Many of those from under-represented groups who were selected and then elected had previous involvement with some form of political activism. However, rather than being party political this activism was more likely to be civic, for example, associated with a local campaign or single issue. Many candidates and representatives also commented on their involvement with student politics which could be more party political in nature, but differs from the local party political involvement identified in the traditional route.

The civic activist

Several politicians talked about how specific events motivated them to get involved in politics, for example the miners' strike. Other talked about issues and causes, for example nuclear disarmament and the building of a nuclear power station. Other candidates talked about how particular identity issues motivated their involvement in politics, for example lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) rights. Increasingly however, there seems to be a trend that rather than civic activism leading to engagement

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[11] See Section 5.6 for further details on the equality characteristics of local government.

in party politics, focus is directed elsewhere, for example into think-tanks and lobby organisations.

The student politician

Several representatives and candidates commented on their involvement in student politics. At least 19 per cent of British politicians engaged in student politics, according to the Stage 1 report (see Annex 1). While activism could be party political, many candidates honed their skills through involvement in the National Union of Students (NUS). Within student politics, there are differing levels of involvement ranging from being an elected student representative to being a sabbatical officer in your own institution's student union to being an elected officer in the national union or in the student wing of a national party. This sort of activism was seen to help in developing 'confidence, experience and contacts' which individuals utilised in national party politics.

The 'politics-facilitating' professional

As the proportion of politicians from manual employment backgrounds has fallen, politicians from professional backgrounds have grown in number (see Kavanagh and Butler, 2005;[12] Keating and Cairney, 2006; Cairney, 2007). For the 2005 UK parliament, 39 per cent of MPs elected for Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had previously held 'professional' occupations: barristers, solicitors, doctor, civil service/local government, school teacher or university teacher (Cracknell, 2005, cited in PTP Stage 1 report). As manual occupations have declined in the wider population, a more acute decline has been seen in political representation to only six per cent in the 2005 parliament[13] (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Price and Bain, 1988; Butler and Kavanagh, see Annex 1 to this report for further details).

Cairney (2007) has commented how particular professions are 'politics facilitating' and generate particular skills sets that can be usefully transferred into politics, for example, working autonomously, commanding authority, verbal communication, presentation of a written argument, scrutiny and investigation. Candidates and politicians commented on how their employment, notably as barristers and teachers, provided a useful basis for a transition into politics. Particularly within the Conservative Party, business success was seen as providing useful transferable skills for politics.

With the increased number of Conservative MPs in the new parliament, business backgrounds have become more prominent. One in eight new MPs has a background as a private sector consultant compared with only one in 25 in 1997,

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[12] Data for the 2010 UK parliament has not yet been collated.
[13] See footnote 10 above.

while the number of new MPs with experience in financial services has increased from five to 10 per cent over the same period (Booth, 2010). The proportion of new MPs with experience in education fell from 17 per cent in 1997 to five per cent in 2010; representation from medical and public health backgrounds also fell, from eight per cent to four per cent (Booth, 2010). Representation from different backgrounds varies across the parties: 22 per cent of new Conservative MPs have a business background with only three per cent having a background in education; whereas six per cent of new Labour MPs have previously worked in health or education with 11 per cent having a legal background (Booth, 2010).

The 'professional politician'

So-called 'professional politicians' are a growing and significant group within national political institutions, for example of the new Labour MPs in the 2010 UK parliament, 34 per cent had previous professional experience in politics (Booth, 2010). Many candidates and politicians involved in our research commented on their involvement in politics at the national level - for example, working for an MP, working in a political institution, working for a party or working as a policy advisor – as an important step on the path to standing as a candidate. One female MP reflected:

> I'd been a councillor and [political] advisor and worked in think-tanks –
> a Westminster village person and perceived as such. It all went according
> to plan. And then: done – the standard political career.

Politicians commented on how this political experience helped them make contacts, build networks and understand the job better both in terms of party structure and the kinds of demands made on politicians. This experience acted as a valuable training ground encouraging individual to stand for national political institutions.

3.4 Key findings: push factors – common pathways into politics

- Individuals from under-represented groups are able to overcome the 'others' barriers they may face in order to be selected and then elected by: sharing the perceived characteristics of the archetypal candidate, for example through their political background and motivations; being university educated; working in a politics-facilitating profession, such as being a barrister, teacher or business person; being part of a professional elite, or by being involved in local or national politics.
- Where people from equalities groups have been successful, some felt this was partly because those individuals fell within the limits of acceptable difference. Acceptable difference refers to having some characteristics which are seen to mitigate the electoral disadvantages of being from a minority group, for example, being a women who adopts a 'masculine' style of behaviour, or a black representative being ex-military and public school educated.

- There are several common pathways to politics for under-represented groups, traditional and newer pathways, but all pathways remain narrow and tightly defined.
- These pathways are both exclusive and excluding of those with particular social and economic resources or who come from a different class background.
- Within these common pathways, smaller parties, less competitive seats, and the devolved assemblies offered more opportunities for under-represented groups.
- The 'traditional pathway' into politics still exists and typically includes a long-standing involvement with the party and experience at the local level, for example chairing a constituency party, being a party agent or, most commonly, sitting as a local councillor. There is some variation within these traditional pathways including: the political activist, trade unionist, civic activist and local councillor.
- The 'new pathway' typically involves work experience in politics, a university education, professional success, involvement in campaigning or an interest group, and a particular skill set drawn from professional experience, for example the advocacy and scrutiny skills of a barrister. New pathways include: the student politician, the professional politician, the issue-based activist and the politics-facilitating professional.
- 'New' pathways are arguably more exclusive and a university education and professional experience, particularly within politics, have become the defining features of the modern politician as evidenced in the new intake of MPs following the 2010 general election.
- The increased presence of Conservative MPs following the election has shifted the balance towards experience in the private rather than the public sector.

4.   Pull factors: the role of political parties

Given the dominance of political parties within the UK political system it is important to give some attention to how political parties can 'pull' or attract and encourage individuals into politics. The function of this report is not to conduct an equality audit or evaluation of the main political parties, but rather to capture the views of some of those from under-represented groups reflecting on their experiences with the party selection systems. While participants in the research have voiced strong criticisms of the current structures and operations of political parties, there is also acknowledgement of the steps they have taken in promoting diversity and equality. In addition, many have drawn attention to the informal mechanisms within political parties for supporting and encouraging the involvement of under-represented groups.

4.1   Party attitudes to equality and diversity

The differences in ideology, outlook and history across political parties do impact on the perceived workability of different strategies. Debate and tension on issues of equality and diversity were commented on across all of the main parties. Most political parties - to varying degrees - have developed initiatives to introduce greater equality within the party and in terms of representation (Durose and Gains, 2007; Lovecy, 2007). However, there are still ongoing debates about how far to push and advance issues of equality and diversity.

A key concern for many candidates and politicians from under-represented groups is the perceived disconnect between national party leadership and local parties who have a significant role in candidate selection. As one MP commented, 'At the top it's very open but at the local levels it's very shut.' National parties were seen to hold more progressive views on equality and diversity than their local counter-party, as one female peer commented:

> Until the political parties actually have a way of challenging, either dealing
> with the fact of local selection and how that is managed... I don't see that
> very much is going to change.

Local party attitudes have been seen by many commentators to constitute a significant barrier to able candidates from under-represented groups (Catling, 2005).

4.2   Membership recruitment

At the moment, none of the political parties in the UK have a membership which fully reflects the diverse composition of the UK population. Indeed, many commentators have argued that UK political parties are no longer mass membership organisations and joining a political party is a less popular form of political participation than it once was. Indeed, the recent Speaker's Conference suggested that less than two per cent

of the population are members of a political party (2009). However, membership recruitment is an obvious starting point for developing more diverse representation. Joining a political party is a crucial step on the pathway to national politics.

Many participants in our research emphasised how parties should actively encourage more diverse candidates while acknowledging that this is a difficult and inherently long-term goal. Several candidates and politicians cited community, civic and single-issue activists as a prime target for recruitment strategies. As noted in the discussion of the new pathways into politics, these activists often have the motivation and skill base which is central to successful involvement in national politics. One MP noted the transformational impact that drawing in community leaders and activists can have on political parties.

4.3 Mentoring and support networks

Many politicians and candidates from under-represented groups highlighted the importance of targeted support and encouragement once they had joined a party in making a decision to get involved in electoral politics. As one female politician commented, 'If it hadn't been for certain people picking me out, I wouldn't have got involved in this position.' Individual mentoring, informal peer networks and more established interest and lobby groups were all cited as important means of support. These different means of support helped individuals to see involvement in politics as something realistic and gain the confidence to put themselves forward. One female politician recounted her positive experiences of mentoring:

> I was lucky enough to have some experienced people in my branch who mentored me. It would be fair to say that they took someone who has an interest in politics but who is exceptionally shy and who would never have stayed in a political party or dared speak at a meeting, never mind speak in public – and developed her into a person who felt confident enough to talk on behalf of the party at public meetings and could become a candidate themselves.

Several candidates and politicians talked about the opportunities they were presented on joining the party by receiving active support. Through targeted support and being identified as a possible future candidate, new recruits were given access to important networks which enabled them to build a base of future support and to navigate party structures.

Such support was also seen as helping candidates and politicians 'stay the course' and go on to build a successful career. Many female politicians highlighted the importance of networks of women within political institutions. The three main political parties all now have established networks supporting women and candidates and politicians from other under-represented groups.

These include: in the Labour Party, Emily's List supporting female candidates and previously the Labour Women's Network and Dorothy's List supporting LGBT candidates; in the Liberal Democrats, Campaign for Gender Balance, Liberal Democrats for LGBT Equality, Liberal Democrat Disability Association; in the Conservative Party, Women2Win and previously the Conservative Women's Network and LGBTory; in the Scottish National Party, the SNP Women's Association; and in Plaid Cymru, Cymru X – Young Plaid. It seems that the women's networks have played a particularly important role, possibly due to their long-standing and now established status. However, it was acknowledged that these individual support strategies are highly resource intensive and could not, on their own, produce transformative change.

4.4   Opening up candidate selection

For many, transformative change is only likely to be realised through measures to reform the candidate selection process. In the Labour Party, the introduction of 'one member, one vote' (OMOV) was widely seen as a means of challenging informal patronage and developing a more inclusive selection process. Several MPs cited this measure as crucial in the success of their candidacy, as one female MP commented:

> It was saying there was space for people like me… it made me feel that the old boys' club was capable of being broken and... I could break down people's prejudices and barriers.

All-women shortlists (AWS) were a topic of discussion across political parties. Reflecting on the adoption of AWS in the Labour Party, one female MP argued that they 'kicked the door open' and could help to bring in a more diverse range of candidates. Others, while not actively supporting the measure, acknowledged that they were a 'necessary evil' to deliver radical change.[14] Several politicians and candidates commented on the need to sustain support and measures once introduced to avoid going 'backwards'.

4.5   Key findings: pull factors – the role of political parties

- Despite ideological and historical differences between political parties on equalities, there were commonly tensions between more progressive central policy by the national party, and less progressive attitudes by local party branches or associations.
- Recruitment of a more diverse party membership is a key step to encouraging more diverse candidates. However, none of the political parties in the UK

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[14] See Table 6.1 for details of the equality measures adopted by political parties affecting the candidate selection process.

have a membership which even closely reflects the diverse composition of the UK population. It is not clear whether this was openly acknowledged or perceived as problematic. Party recruitment was not seen to be proactive or to focus on spotting and nurturing talent outside the existing pathways.

- Individual mentoring, informal peer networks and more established interest and lobby groups were positive ways parties could, and did, encourage and retain under-represented groups to stand for selection and election and support them once elected.
- One member, one vote measures and all-women shortlists were seen as ways of further opening up the candidate selection process and mitigating against informal patronage.

5. Pull factors: the role of political institutions

Along with political parties, political institutions also have a role to play in attracting under-represented groups into politics. The reputation and organisation of political institutions are crucial in determining both the recruitment and retention of elected representatives from under-represented groups. The political institutions included in this research – House of Commons, House of Lords, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the London Assembly – have distinct traditions and practices. The UK parliament, the oldest of these institutions, has been perceived as slow to change and challenge existing working practices. In contrast, devolution within the UK was widely seen as an opportunity to create a new politics, one that was more accessible and diverse. Newer institutions can offer good practice examples to older institutions, although the ingrained traditions and culture may be partly tied to the adversarial set-up, not present in the newer assemblies. Many concede however, that the new politics has not gone far enough and more can be done to engage with under-represented groups.

Our research has indicated that political institutions can keep people out as well as pull them in. Although this chapter focuses on pull factors, many of the issues discussed below are, particularly in relation to the older institutions, examples of the ways in which political institutions have failed to encourage diversity.

5.1 House of Commons

The House of Commons is currently elected by a First Past The Post (FPTP) system in 650 constituencies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. While the House has been considered slow to change, the recent general election was widely seen as an opportunity for change, with over 150 MPs standing down. A total of 232 new MPs were elected to the House of Commons, of which 73 were women.

The House of Commons is arguably the least representative of all UK national political institutions in terms of gender balance. After the 2005 general election, women accounted for only 19.8 percent of all MPs (Fawcett Society, 2006). The 2010 election results have increased this proportion but only to 22 per cent (Centre for Women and Democracy, CfWD). This limited progress reflects that 16 more female MPs entered the elected House than in 2005 (CfWD, 2010). The number of Conservative women MPs has risen from 18 to 48, an increase from nine per cent to 16 per cent; the number of Labour women MPs has fallen from 94 to 81, but the overall losses mean that there is an overall percentage increase of four per cent to 31 per cent; nearly a third of the parliamentary Labour Party which is a significantly higher proportion than for other parties. The number of Liberal Democrat women MPs has fallen from nine to seven, a decrease from 15 per cent to 12 per cent.

In addition to the women elected from the three main parties, there was one woman elected for each of the Green Party, the SNP, Sinn Fein, the SDLP, the Alliance Party and one Independent (CfWD, 2010).

Representation in relation to ethnic minorities is better, however, than some other UK political institutions. Between 2005 and 2010 there were only 15 ethnic minority MPs;[15] of which only two were not from the Labour Party (Operation Black Vote, OBV, 2008). The 2010 results have led to an increase of ethnic minority MPs to 27, doubling of the proportion of ethnic minority MPs to four per cent (OBV, 2010). The Labour Party has the most ethnic minority MPs at 15, an increase of two from 2005; six per cent of Labour MPs. Of these, six are women and nine men with four of African Caribbean descent and 11 of Asian descent. The Conservatives now have 11 ethnic minority MPs, an increase of nine, two of which are women. This is four per cent of the parliamentary party (OBV, 2010).

In the 2005 parliament, women from ethnic minorities were particularly under-represented, with only two black women MPs and no Asian women. The new intake has eight ethnic minority women including two Conservative women: Helen Grant, the first black female Conservative MP, and Priti Patel, the first Conservative Asian female (OBV, 2010). Of the two ethnic minority Labour women with seats in 2005, Diane Abbott has retained her seat and has since gone on to put herself forward for the Labour leadership, but Dawn Butler lost her seat in Brent Central. Labour's new intake includes three female Muslim MPs: Rushanara Ali, Shabana Mahmood and Yasmin Qureshi, while Chi Onwuruah[16] was also elected for Labour, the first woman of African descent to be elected as an MP (OBV, 2010).

Early analysis shows that, as well as an increase in the proportion of women and ethnic minority MPs, the new intake is also younger and includes an increase in the number of openly gay and lesbian MPs. However, there are indications that the new intake has a significant proportion of political insiders and so-called 'professional politicians', indicating a further narrowing of the pathways being used to enter national politics (Smyth et al., 8 May 2010).

While the new composition of the House of Commons is slightly more diverse, it is still unrepresentative of the wider UK population. The impact of the new intake of MPs on the culture and practices of the House of Commons cannot yet

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[15] Labour MP Ashok Kumar died in March 2010 reducing the overall number of ethnic minority MPs to 14.

[16] Rushanara Ali, Bethnal Green and Bow; Shabana Mahmood, Birmingham Ladywood; and Yasmin Qureshi, Bolton South East. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/07/general-election-female-muslim-mps

be ascertained. As discussed on Radio 4's Woman's Hour[17] by high-profile former female MPs including Oona King and Edwina Currie, the House of Commons has a reputation for not embracing difference and being a misogynist environment. Its 'yah boo' yobbish culture has been widely commented upon (see Abdela, 1989). Dawn Butler, a former MP recounted an incident:

> A Tory MP actually said to me, 'What are you doing here? This is for members only'… And he turned around and said to his colleague, 'They're letting anybody in nowadays'. This man could not equate the image he saw in front of him with that of an MP. (Fawcett Society, 2008, 33)

Former Labour MP Oona King, now standing for the Labour candidacy for London Mayor, reflected in a recent interview with *The Guardian* on her early experiences in the House of Commons:

> I had to re-evaluate everything I thought was true about life. I basically thought that gender wasn't a huge issue... But when I got to Westminster I realised that, no, you are still judged, not on what you bring to the table, but whether you've got an Eton network, whether you're a woman, whether you're an ethnic minority... You could be a mediocre white man, and no one would bat an eyelid... But anyone who stood up who was a woman, or who was an ethnic minority, who wasn't excellent, would just get trounced. Savaged, basically. (Cochrane, 2010a)

Several female representatives in other UK political institutions made negative comments about the House of Commons. One MEP argued that in contrast with the European Parliament (see Section 5.3), it 'is a very male-dominated environment. Yes, it puts me off.' Even if individuals from under-represented groups are able to get selected and then elected, there is a strong argument that the culture and organisation of the House of Commons may mean that parties fail to retain such representatives.

A female member of the London Assembly noted that whilst she aspired to being an MP she argued that it would be difficult to create a work-life balance in the House of Commons. Several MPs agreed with this assertion and highlighted that the lack of family-friendly arrangements may make it difficult to retain women with young families. Different opinions were put forward to suggest how the Commons could be made more family friendly.[18]

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[17] Friday 5 February 2010.
[18] See Section 6 for suggestions put forward by research participants and the Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation). See also the Commission's submission to the Speaker's Conference, available at http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/parliamentary-briefings/

Another issue is whether women who enter the House are taken seriously and promoted. Durose and Gains (2007) argue that Blair did make a deliberate attempt to feminise the Cabinet (see also Chittenden and Grice, 1997). However, female ministers have since made the argument that this approach has not been maintained and women have not been able to access the influential inner circles of government. Several female MPs commented on the lack of front bench opportunities for women. Inner circles in government and within parliamentary parties were seen by many female MPs to be 'closed networks'. These networks, according to one MP, consist of:

> Who's been to Oxbridge, who are the ones who've been special advisors… You do obviously see that some people are part of a network. If you were to look back at promotions, it's quite interesting to see how these people are connected… it is quite hard to break through that.

The same MP argued, 'I know other people who've never had chance to be a minister, who have been really good colleagues and worked very hard.'

There was a widespread sense that the House of Commons was unlikely to instigate radical change. One female MP said:

> I think it is an insider-outsider problem. The people inside by definition have come to terms with it or they wouldn't be here. And the people outside can't get in because it hasn't been changed and so you don't get the majority inside for change.

5.2   House of Lords

The House of Lords remains, unusually for a second chamber in a modern democracy, an unelected chamber with the majority of its representatives appointed by political patronage. Whether a political institution that is not popularly elected ought to reflect the population is open to discussion. However, the argument that the House should reflect the population was used as an argument by the Conservative government with the introduction of life peers into the House in 1958. So the idea of descriptive representation and diversity has some resonance for the House of Lords although the present composition of the House of Lords does not reflect society. Women constitute 20 per cent of peers, comparable to the proportion of women in the House of Commons, and five per cent of peers are from a black or ethnic minority community. One peer recognised that the House of Lords had a 'sprinkling' of disabled people. There are 'several people with wheelchairs' and it was noted that a few individual peers were blind or deaf. In addition, there are four openly gay peers. Yet while many diversity strands do feature in the membership of the House of Lords, like other political institutions in the UK, many groups are grossly under-represented.

It will be important for any reform of the House of Lords to be equality impact assessed.

The culture of the House of Lords was deemed to be professional and generally courteous, on the surface at least. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2008, Baroness Young of Hornsey, a black female peer, emphasised that the culture of the Lords could be characterised as one of 'politesse that doesn't allow for overt sexist or racist comments to surface in an obvious way'. However, beneath the surface there were occasions when prejudiced attitudes were evident. It was suggested that the House of Lords could be regarded as a 'boys club' at times and 'old buffers' were occasionally discriminatory: 'I think there is sexism here, you still get it now. People talking about what people are wearing, such as was their top too low cut? But it has got better.' The changing acceptance of women in the House of Lords is represented by their occupation of many front bench roles across the parties. Baroness Hayman was elected by the House of Lords as the first Lord Speaker, illustrating an endorsement of women within the fabric of the Lords even if the title is still male (Lord, not Baroness, speaker). Four out of the last five leaders of the House of Lords have been women and Baroness D'Souza was elected as Convenor of the Crossbench Peers in 2007.

Baroness Amos was the first black woman to sit in cabinet and Baroness Scotland was the first black Attorney General. More recently, Baroness Warsi has become the first female Muslim member of the cabinet in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. In an anthropological study of the House of Lords, discrimination towards disabled peers was infrequent, partly because a significant proportion of peers have physical disabilities due to the higher than average age of peers (Crewe, 2005). Some peers highlighted how some factions of the Lords were prejudiced against LGB and trans issues, although Lord Alli was highlighted as being completely 'upfront' about his sexual orientation, which gave him an unassailable position and had highlighted some unacceptable attitudes in the chamber.

The unique way in which peers are appointed to the House of Lords, in that the leaders of political parties decide solely upon who becomes a representative in the second chamber, is distinct from procedures used to select candidates for elected institutions. There is a clear lack of transparency in this process and there are no formal ways in which people can 'apply' to be a member of the House of Lords for the Labour Party and the Conservatives. While members of the Liberal Democrats can apply to be considered as a future peer through the Peers Panel, the decision on who becomes a Liberal Democrat peer remains the gift of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

The peers interviewed accepted that there had been concerted efforts to improve the diversity of membership in the House of Lords. The appointment of more women over the past decade was highlighted as one advancement which had changed the diversity of the House of Lords:

> If it wasn't for the fact Labour has been very proactive in putting more women in here and belatedly the other parties as well, it would be predominantly old, middle- and upper-class males.

One female peer commented that the House of Lords 'is much more women orientated than it was when I first came in, and it shows: all the front benches have got women on.' Moreover, some peers emphasised that the House of Lords Appointments Commission, responsible for appointing crossbench members to the House of Lords since 2000, had played a part in bringing elements of diversity to the crossbenches in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability:

> They are more assiduous at trying to get a kind of balanced representation. There are certainly a number of very able black peers and disabled who come through that route.

However, the political elites were subject to some criticism. One MP expressed frustration that a former party leader had not exploited the facility of political patronage to appoint more women:

> He had an opportunity when doing peerages[19] to do 50:50 men and women and he never did that. There was always more men than women going into the Lords. I think 'Well heaven's sake, if you can't sort it out here where can you? Where's the will?' If you're serious you've got to use every opportunity you can and that has been squandered to a certain extent.

Another peer felt that efforts to challenge the white dominance of the House of Lords felt like 'tokenism' and the representational imbalances in the Lords demonstrated a 'lack of political will' across all political parties to remedy democratic deficits, especially when appointments can be used to foster the presence of under-represented groups.

There is some evidence to suggest that party leaders have deliberately used the appointments system to facilitate the presence of more female and ethnic minority representatives into Westminster politics through the House of Lords (Eason, 2009).

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[19] There are now a number of routes to join the House of Lords, but there are regular political lists of so-called 'working peers' determined by the leadership of the different political parties to boost the strengths of the three main parties. See http://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/about-lords/lords-appointment/

It was felt by one woman peer that while the Labour Party had made a 'fantastic effort' to advance women's representation they had 'lost the lead and initiative on bringing about greater representation of minority groups'. In contrast, the Conservative Party under David Cameron was seen to be 'prepared to go out on a limb… in terms of trying to change the face of the Conservative Party.' According to peers across the political benches, this was obvious in the House of Lords where 'minority women' such as Baroness Warsi and Baroness Verma had been appointed to the House and promoted swiftly to front bench roles to increase their visibility.

5.3 European Parliament

The United Kingdom is divided into 12 electoral regions for the European Parliament, each having between three and 10 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Since 1999, Great Britain has used the D'Hondt method of proportional representation to elect MEPs. Parties choose a 'regional list' of candidates then the electorate votes either for a party or an independent candidate. The overall share of the votes received by a party determines the number of their candidates elected.

Currently, there are 72 MEPs from the UK: 59 from the English regions, six from Scotland, four from Wales and three from Northern Ireland. The European Parliament has a larger proportion of women representatives, 33 per cent following the 2009 election compared to the 22 per cent of women elected in the UK parliament in 2010. While the supra-national nature of the parliament draws in people from across a range of countries, cultures and parties, this does not make it de facto diverse. As with the devolved institutions, the emphasis on diversity was not seen to go beyond a focus on gender and did not extend to other equality strands. For example in terms of ethnic minority representation, in the previous European Parliament of 785 MEPs – representing 492 million people from 27 countries – just nine were non-white (House of Commons Library, 2008a). At the 2009 European elections, only five of the 87 UK MEPs were from an ethnic minority background; while low proportionately, this figure is still high when compared to other EU countries.

The electoral system adopted for elections to the European Parliament is acknowledged to have contributed to the increased representation of women. As noted, some UK political parties have adopted positive measures aimed at increasing diversity in representation. These have included zipping, which is a system of alternating between male and female candidates on the regional list to ensure gender equity. Zipping is one way of ensuring that a proportion of candidates are women; it also increases the visibility of a gender balance to the electorate. Other studies have suggested that selection by parties - including the use of positive measures such as quotas - is a stronger factor than electorate preference in influencing the proportion of women in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 1997). There is a

concern, however, whether these measures would be sustained over time. While softer measures such as building support networks within parties and more training for diverse candidates were suggested, it was questioned whether such measures would have the same impact on representation as harder positive action.

Other influential factors in encouraging diversity are the selection processes adopted by political parties for European elections and the positive measures put in place by some parties. One female MEP highlighted how the selection process for European elections seemed to give greater emphasis to long-standing party activism rather than the short selection process. Skills assessments were seen to focus more on constructive work within the party which were assessed at interview, rather than speech-making at the hustings.

The differences in the candidate selection process are perhaps due to the European Parliament being more constituency-focused and less party-centred than Westminster. Other research has suggested that parties see European elections as more marginal in UK politics due to the UK's 'awkward partner' relationship with Europe (George, 1998) and so party selectors are more willing to support equality and diversity due to the perceived lower political costs (Marsh and Norris, 1997).

The MEPs involved in this research were generally positive about their experiences in the European Parliament; like the devolved institutions, the European Parliament was compared positively to Westminster (Footitt, 1998). The European Parliament is understood to be more collaborative, if constituency-centred, compared with the adversarial politics of the House of Commons. The challenge of creating a work-life balance when the parliament and constituency are a significant distance from each other is arguably exacerbated in the European Parliament.

5.4 Scottish Parliament

The Scotland Act 1998 resulted in the establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) have the power to make decisions over devolved matters such as health, education, transport and economic development. Two methods are used to elect the 129 parliamentarians; 73 are elected to represent individual constituencies by a FPTP method and 56 politicians are determined by proportional representation, that is, the electorate vote for a political party and the winners are chosen from that party's regional 'top-up' list. The use of a list system was seen as reducing the selection and election barriers faced by candidates from under-represented groups.

The Scottish Parliament is recognised as a central part of the 'new politics' established post-devolution, and set out to be accessible to under-represented

groups. The culture of the Scottish Parliament was compared favourably to Westminster which was criticised for its adversarial politics and the associated intimidating and aggressive attitudes. The creation of the Scottish Parliament was seen as a one-off, key opportunity to improve levels of representation (Russell, Mackay et al., 2002). As one peer said, 'It was a real opportunity to break the mould, which of course you can do when you have a clean slate and you are just beginning.'

There was a particular emphasis on achieving better gender balance. The Labour Party introduced twinning in the 1999 constituency elections, whereby one man and one woman were selected for paired seats. Smaller parties such as the Greens have adopted more radical strategies where a minimum 40 per cent of all candidates have to be of each gender and women candidates fielded in 50 per cent of all winnable seats. The list system arguably facilitates smaller parties, less represented in the constituency seats, to bring in more diverse candidates. While measures such as these led to a marked improvement in gender balance in the parliament and, arguably, pressured other parties to adopt similar tactics, many commented on how these measures did not go far enough. There were many comments on how parties did not introduce innovative measures for recruiting potential candidates.

The central concern of many was the sustainability and reach of existing measures. The Scottish Parliament has family-friendly hours and benefits - on average - from a closer geographic proximity to members' constituencies than Westminster. However, some MSPs argued that the current provisions are not always sufficient to address the needs of those with caring and family responsibilities; as one MSP commented, 'we are not as family-friendly as we make ourselves out to be'. One MSP noted the importance of retaining positive measures in order to retain and build on the gains in gender balance, arguing, 'If you take your eye off the ball, it'll go backwards again… it is an ongoing thing.'

The 'female face' of the Scottish Parliament has been widely regarded as one of the 'success stories' of devolution and placed Scotland as a world leader in terms of women's representation (Burnside et al., 2003; Mackay et al., 2003, cited in Mackay and Kenny, 2007). However, in the third set of Scottish elections in 2007, the representation of women fell from its high point of 40 per cent in the 2003 elections to 33 per cent. Mackay and Kenny argue that other levels of Scottish politics have 'proved resistant to the "contagion" of gender balance' and that the elections of 1999 and 2003 may be seen as the 'high tide of women's representation in Scotland' (2007: 91). Indeed, the progress in terms of diversity beyond gender has been far more limited. One MSP argued that 'there's something about the culture of politics, which is a bit less progressive than it could be and should be'. Mackay and Kenny argue that the progress made since 1999 has been 'brought more by chance than

design' and that a commitment to gender balance and diversity more widely has not been institutionalised within political parties (2007: 91).

5.5 Welsh Assembly

The National Assembly for Wales is a democratically elected body of 60 Assembly Members (AMs). During elections to the Assembly, each voter gets two votes - one for a local constituency member and one for a regional member. The constituency elections are determined by a FPTP system. The regional members are elected through an Additional Member System, whereby votes are cast for a political party. The individual winner is determined by a regional list of ranked candidates provided by each party. The five electoral regions of Wales have four regional AMs each. Like the European Parliament, the D'Hondt formula is used to calculate how many regional members each party will have in the Welsh Assembly, according to the number of votes they receive. The electoral system and the lack of incumbency inherent in a new political institution are perceived to have reduced the difficulties in 'breaking in' to politics in Wales, compared with longer-established institutions. The Welsh Assembly has always had a significant proportion of female representation and had the distinction of achieving gender balance in the 2003 elections.

Like the Scottish Parliament, the culture of the Welsh Assembly is seen to reflect post-devolution new politics as one Assembly Member describes:

> In terms of the politics here, it is different to Westminster. It's not as 'one-side-against-another' as Westminster. Our chamber is round; it's about consensus. Consensus politics is written into the Acts creating the assembly. Because of the PR [proportional representation] element of the regional top-up list, coalitions are going to be the norm in Wales, which means collaboration, consensus. You don't have fierce debates... you don't get that level of aggressive or macho politics that you get in Westminster. That might be more attractive to those people who are... not scared, but a bit put off by politics on a Westminster level. We are doing it differently in Wales!

The working practices of the Assembly were repeatedly linked to the diversity of its composition in the sense that the family-friendly working hours and accessible location were seen to encourage, particularly, women to come forward. In addition, the presence of a significant proportion of women was seen to have encouraged a style of politics premised on consensus and collaboration as another AM said:

> We had approximate gender balance in the Assembly since the beginning, it has made a big difference in how we communicate... we know it's made a difference to the style of politics.

There is ongoing debate about whether a different style of politics has had a substantive impact on policymaking (Feld, 2001; Busby and McLeod, 2002; MacKay, 2006). Several of our interviewees argued that the 'critical mass' of women in the Assembly has made a difference to the issues that make their way into the political discussions, with some topics being brought forward that may not have been fully addressed otherwise, such as eating disorders, rape and domestic violence.

Significant questions were, however, raised about the sustainability of the 'new politics'. Many saw the diversity of the institution as being dependent on positive electoral mechanisms such as quotas or zipping.[20] Another AM echoed this concern, 'What gets me is when people say "We've done it now; we need to get rid of these mechanisms". It's because of these mechanisms!' One AM voiced concern that the Assembly could 'find ourselves at square one' in terms of female representation if the mechanisms were removed. A further AM reflected that without action, promises on diversity are empty:

> Some political parties say that they treat everybody the same, but there
> are no mechanisms to promote or try and encourage, try and positively
> discriminate against different groups. I have a view on that. You say
> you are treating everyone the same, but it is the male, middle-class
> professional in a suit who will always dominate.

One Assembly Member succinctly commented that 'however much training we do is not enough for making sure that we are diverse', reflecting the argument that diverse representation is required in order to bring real experience to bear on policymaking. While the Welsh Assembly has made significant progress in terms of gender representation, it is severely limited in terms of wider diversity with only one ethnic minority member. The Assembly has introduced further initiatives to promote diversity, such as a mentoring scheme for minority groups and training for young people but, as one AM said, 'Whilst the shift has begun, there is still some way left to go... it would be harmful to rest on our laurels.'

5.6   London Assembly and local government[21]

As a newer institution, the London Assembly is somewhat set apart from local government. The London Assembly uses the same Additional Member System as the other devolved assemblies (House of Commons Library, 2008b). Women's representation is relatively high in the Greater London Assembly: after the 2008 election 32 per cent of Assembly Members were women. Of the 25 members of the Greater London Assembly, there are four non-white members, forming 17 per

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[20] Zipping is a system where if a man is at the top of the regional list, a woman will come second and if a woman is on top of the regional list, a man comes second.
[21] Local government is not covered in this research.

cent of the total. While this proportion is lower than the ethnic minority population of London, it is far greater than in any British national political institution (House of Commons Library, 2008b).

The London Assembly is perceived to have taken the opportunity to develop a new politics and is now in a position to 'offer some good practice' to the more established national institutions. The Assembly was designed to have more family-friendly hours and sessions, and one female AM commented, 'I wouldn't be able to do the job without.' The function of the London Assembly differs to the other devolved assemblies in terms of the scope of its powers, and has a greater focus on scrutiny. This emphasis requires skills in collaboration and consensus-building. The lack of an adversarial culture was perceived to be more welcoming toward women and to value their skills more highly.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) evaluation of the Local Government Act (2000) suggested that there had been little significant change in the diversity of councillors (Stoker, Gains et al., 2007). The latest findings from the 2008 Census of Local Authority Councillors support this, revealing that 68 per cent of councillors in England are male while only 31 per cent were female,[22] compared to 51 per cent of the population. The representation of women has, however, increased since the first census of councillors in 1997 when the proportion of women was 28 per cent. The average age of councillors has increased from 55.4 years in 1997 to 55.8 years in 2008. In 2008, 87 per cent of councillors were aged 45 and over compared to 52 per cent of the population. Councillors were also not diverse in their ethnic composition: 97 per cent of councillors are white with only three per cent from an ethnic minority background compared with around 10 per cent of the adult population. The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillor's Taskforce (2009) highlighted that ethnic minority women account for less than one per cent of councillors in England. And there are no ethnic minority women councillors in Scotland and Wales. Councillors were also better educated than the wider population with 51 per cent of councillors holding a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 and above compared to 29 per cent of the population (NFER, 2009).

5.7 Key findings: pull factors – the role of political institutions

- The political institutions included in this research – House of Commons, House of Lords, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the London Assembly - have distinct traditions and practices. Devolution within the UK was widely seen as an opportunity to create a new politics, one that was more accessible and diverse. As such, newer institutions can offer good practice examples to older institutions, although there is still more work to be done.

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[22] 0.8 per cent did not reply to the survey.

House of Commons

- The oldest national political institution has a weak record on diversity. The 2010 general election has seen 232 new MPs entering the House, increasing the proportion of women to 22 per cent and ethnic minorities to four per cent. While this represents slight progress, the House still does not represent the wider population.

- The House of Commons has a reputation for not embracing difference and being a male-dominated environment. There are few, if any, pull factors visible which encourage diversity. An adversarial and 'yah boo' culture in the House of Commons was seen as off-putting to under-represented groups. There was a sense that the House of Commons was reluctant to instigate radical change.

- The lack of a family-friendly culture in the House of Commons was seen to contribute to the difficulties of retaining representatives from more diverse groups, particularly women.

- There were also questions about whether under-represented groups faced greater challenges in being promoted due to their lack of membership of closed informal networks and faced greater scrutiny and the chance of marginalisation, if promoted.

House of Lords

- The political culture of the House of Lords was overtly professional and courteous. However, there were occasions when prejudiced attitudes were evident. It was suggested that the House of Lords could be regarded as a boys club at times, with some discriminatory attitudes.

- The appointment process for the House of Lords lacks transparency, and there are no formal application procedures for two of the three main parties.

- Concerted efforts have been made to improve the diversity of membership in the House of Lords, although some felt there was still tokenism and a lack of political will across all political parties to use appointments to their fullest extent to foster the presence of under-represented groups.

European Parliament

- Gender representation in the European Parliament is better than in the UK parliament, with women making up a third of MEPs.

- The proportional electoral system - together with equality measures from several political parties - have supported greater gender balance.

- On other measures however, noticeably in terms of ethnicity, the European Parliament lacks diversity.

- In the UK, party selection processes for European elections differ to those for the UK parliament with different skills assessment processes, valuing more diverse skill sets focusing on inter-personal communication. Wider research suggests that

political parties are more willing to support diversity in European elections. This is because they are more marginal in UK politics due to the UK's often difficult relationship with Europe and, therefore, potential political costs are lower.

- The European Parliament was compared positively to the UK parliament and was seen as less combative and adversarial and more collaborative and consensual.

- While there were strong support networks between women, establishing a work-life balance can be more difficult due to the geographical distances between the parliament and constituencies.

Devolved assemblies

- The MSPs and AMs who we spoke with made a positive comparison between the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, and the UK parliament.

- The devolved assemblies are perceived to have embraced the opportunity for a new politics and adopted different working practices. A less adversarial and more collaborative culture has emerged.

- Although the representation of women is significantly proportionately higher in the devolved assemblies than in the UK parliament, there is a still a perception that the newer institutions are not as family-friendly as they could be.

- The increased representation of women can be largely attributed to the use of positive mechanisms, but there are questions about whether this advancement will be sustained as the use of mechanisms such as zipping and twinning are questioned.

- There are still concerns about the lack of diversity in representation in the devolved assemblies, for example, there is only one ethnic minority representative across both institutions

- The London Assembly has also embraced a new political culture and is seen to value different skills. There are still questions about how far diversity is encouraged in the Assembly but it compares favourably with local government more widely.

6. Ideas for change from respondents

This report has highlighted the experiences of activists, candidates and representatives from the main political parties. We also asked people for their suggestions for change, made on the basis of their direct experience. Participants put forward some specific suggestions about change they would like to see and how this may be achieved. In this section of the report, we outline the suggestions made by participants. These suggestions should not be read as formal recommendations, nor do they necessarily reflect the views of the authors, and we make no judgment about the feasibility of these suggestions.

Indeed, there are clear questions about the viability of recommendations across different parties and institutions, and about the most appropriate balance between formal statutory requirements and more voluntary or informal reforms. Broadly, the first suggestions centre on improving the current system; the latter are ideas for more radical change. The chapter concludes by reflecting on these ideas for change in relation to the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference and the shifting political context after the 2010 general election.

6.1 Diversity monitoring

Diversity monitoring was seen as an essential part of building an evidence base to support arguments for diversity and to support action to address under-representation. It was argued that closer scrutiny of not only the composition of representation but of the candidate selection process would 'shame' parties into supporting diverse candidates. As one MP humorously commented:

> To say, 'Well, party leader, I know you have five fabulous loyal white men who you would like to parachute into those safe seats but it is going to look very bad'. And you hope they might come to those conclusions themselves but I think a little bit of external re-enforcement might be very helpful.

The Equality Act 2010[23] has now outlined requirements for political parties to monitor diversity and collect data on diversity.

6.2 Education and training

Several candidates and lobby groups argued that politicians should 'get out of their comfort zones' in order to encourage interest and participation in politics. Schools, colleges and youth groups were all suggested targets along with areas with lower voter turnout. Alongside education measures, various training initiatives were

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[23] Introduced after the conclusion of the primary research for this report.

suggested, both for building skills and confidence among potential candidates and for raising awareness and value of equality and diversity among party selections.

6.3   Championing and mentoring

Chapter 4 outlined several informal measures taken by or within political parties to support candidates and party members; there was clear support for the extension of some of these areas.

Both internal and external lobby groups argued for the creation of diversity champions within political parties to encourage and offer support for diverse candidates. A key suggested target for recruitment was individuals already active in their communities. It was suggested that one way of doing this was to offer financial recompense for local elected members to make this a 'far more realistic prospect for many'.

Repeated calls were made for parties to make 'even more effort on outreach' in order to target and encourage more diverse candidates. One MP argued:

> We should be out there talent-spotting, recruiting them, getting them active, pulling them through into supporting, joining, then becoming MPs or councillors.

Active recruitment measures would have the benefits of being able to 'tap into a wealth of talent' not currently accessed by political parties, which would offer rejuvenation and the financial input of a renewed and expanded membership. It could also offer greater legitimacy for wider representation. One MP argued for a halfway membership where interested individuals could register as a supporter without the financial commitment of being a full member.

The process of pulling candidates through was, for many, importantly premised on mentoring. Mentoring involves one-to-one pairing with an elected member or politician and is seen to be effective as part of a wider programme of support. This could involve workshops aiming to build particular skills and support key activities, such as making speeches and preparing campaign literature. Further, important skills and experience could be built through leadership training and engaging with successful individuals in other fields.

Mentoring could also take the form of shadowing, internships or work experience with politicians. As noted in Chapter 3 of the report, having worked for an elected representative or political party at the national level was one of the important factors pushing individuals to seek candidature. Currently, however, these opportunities are

restricted to those able to work for free (see below for suggested changes to the funding of politics).

6.4 Opening up politics

There was a recognised need for an 'open discussion' about politics and to 'review it with a blank sheet'. As noted in Section 4.4, in the Labour Party measures like one member, one vote (OMOV) and all-women shortlists have proved effective in opening up the candidate selection process and bypassing influential local party elites. There was significant support for increased transparency in candidate selection. Suggested measures included: openness on conflicts of interest; opening up of branch meetings to candidates; limits on postal voting which is seen to reinforce informal patronage; not restricting disabled people and carers; enforceable limits on individual candidate spending, which may allow for greater equalisation between candidates, excepting reasonable adjustments; and proportional representation. Linked to arguments for transparency are demands for greater accessibility to the candidate selection process by providing information in more varied formats, reflecting language and disability issues. Current restrictions on individuals who have previously been sectioned under the Mental Health Act were widely criticised.

Repeated arguments were given that the candidate selection process should be made to be 'more like looking for a job' and be based on clearly set-out criteria and competencies; diversity monitoring forms might also be part of the process. In order to make this system work effectively, training was seen as a requirement for candidate selection panels in order to be able to adequately assess applications. This perspective may exacerbate the professionalisation of politics which - as discussed in Chapter 3 - could be seen to narrow the pathway into national politics. Further arguments were made about reconstituting candidate selection panels to be more diverse, as it was thought that this would make them more open to candidates who were less like the archetype described earlier.

6.5 Positive action

Discussions on electoral reform were often coupled with debate on positive action. Positive action can broadly be defined as measures taken in order to provide greater equality of opportunity or outcome in a given field. The question of whether to use positive action raised significant debate. Perhaps reflecting the sample used in our research, there was a broad consensus in support for more diverse representation. But questions arose over whether action is required or not. One female MEP argued, 'You have to keep the pressure on, it's not going to happen on its own.' In contrast, a candidate argued 'You can't force this… the only way is to work hard on people's attitudes over time.'

However, many candidates and sitting representatives supported positive action. Arguments were strongly made that without such measures, those who most closely conformed to the model of the archetypal candidate would continue to dominate. Others asserted that change simply cannot be left to 'accident'. Drawing on international evidence, many argued that the only quick way to achieve greater diversity is through positive action (Norris, 2004; Paxton et al., 2009). One candidate said, 'Middle-class white men may complain about it, but it's the only mechanism that is able to guarantee the representation of women.'

Even among supporters of positive action, debates continued about what form and for whose benefit action should take. Positive action can either be prescriptive, taking, for example, the form of quotas; or non-prescriptive, allowing parties to take different paths. In the context of this research, respondents offered broad brush suggestions rather than specific worked-out proposals. Most of the discussion referred to measures which have already been used to some extent within the UK political system: all-women shortlists, twinning, zipping and primaries. One former candidate argued for 'agreed diversity quotas… and a commitment to 50 per cent women within four parliaments'. One lobby group argued for statutorily enforced quotas, 'a requirement that 40 per cent of candidates are women and 40 per cent are men, and the remainder can be whatever'.

There is currently no legal requirement in the UK for parties to field a quota of women candidates. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 made it possible to introduced minimum quotas for equality reasons. Positive measures have been introduced in particular political parties, notably the Labour Party and within the devolved assemblies, as shown in Table 6.1. Many sitting representatives warned of a potential 'high water mark' in terms of women's representation and the need to sustain positive measures over time.

Primaries were a further focus of discussion. Some saw primaries as a way of challenging incumbency and powerful cliques within parties, by drawing in individuals who may not be successful through the traditional route of candidate selection. Primaries were also perceived as more democratic and giving decision-making influence to the wider community beyond party members. They were, however, also seen to undermine party membership and, indeed, party politics; and to lead to the selection of populist candidates rather than those who share the values of the party. Primaries were seen to reinforce the focus on speech-making rather than other skills. Furthermore, they were seen as an extremely expensive option, which may exacerbate the financial demands on candidates and restrict who is able to come forward for selection.

Table 6.1   Examples of equality measures and their usage by British political parties

Guarantee	Definition	Examples of use in UK
All-women shortlists	A certain percentage of local constituency parties must select their candidate from a list composed only of women aspirant candidates.	Labour Party in 1997, 2005 and 2010 general elections; Labour Party for Welsh Assembly election 2003.
Twinning	Constituencies are 'paired'; one male and one female candidate are selected for the twinned constituencies.	Labour Party for elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, 1999.
Zipping	Men and women are placed alternately on the list of candidates.	Labour Party and Liberal Democrats for the 1999 European elections.
Party list quota	A party decides that a certain percentage of candidates on its list will be female.	Plaid Cymru for the 1999, 2003 and 2007 Welsh Assembly elections; Conservative Party for the European Elections 2009.

Source: PTP Stage 1, Annex 1 to this report, adapted from Lovenduski (2005) and Childs and Evans (2009).

The main target for positive action within the electoral system across political institutions has been women, with many people talking positively about how all-women shortlists had opened up the political system for women. As noted earlier, however, many others are sceptical about such benefits, particularly for ethnic minority women. The debate about positive action has now widened to include action for ethnic minorities and lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) candidates. Operation Black Vote have argued for time-limited use of ethnic minority shortlists in two per cent of UK parliamentary seats (OBV, 2008). The broadening out of positive action and use of structural measures have been perceived as potentially regressive and to raise political difficulties, due to the prospective media reaction (Katwala, 2008). In our research, some respondents questioned the legality of such measures and how viable they are given the size and diversity of such groups. One female MP argued that diversity shortlists are unjustifiable:

> Women are 51 per cent of the population and ethnic minorities don't have that kind of size - you can't justify it. So all you can do is get to the stage where you can support and mentor people and we will make some gains at the next election.

The invisible or hidden nature of sexual orientation may also make LGB shortlists less workable; however, they may also encourage openness.

Arguments in favour of positive action and debates about the scope of such action have to be balanced by arguments against such measures. Repeated assertions were made about the need for candidate selection to be based on ability with the underpinning assumption 'if you are good enough, you will make it'. Others argued that positive action simply dealt with the symptoms but not the cause of under-representation of certain groups. One argument which came through strongly was that positive action was seen to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of those elected by the process. As one female politician commented, 'You feel slightly devalued. You feel that it is not done on merit.'

6.6   Funding politics

There were several suggestions for an 'access to public life fund'. Some of these suggestions mirrored the Access to Work Fund, which covers the costs of reasonable adjustments of employing a disabled person. Clarification on the allowances for disabled people during the selection and campaigning process were also suggested.

There was also support for widening the remit of an access fund beyond disabled candidates to candidates from lower income households and other under-represented groups. These funds were seen to counteract the financial costs of standing for selection and then election. Clearly these suggestions have resource implications. Individual parties and the Electoral Commission were seen as possible sources of funding along with the trade unions for the Labour Party; as was the transfer of resources from the allowances of elected politicians.

Several different suggestions and ideas were put forward to alter the funding of politics, either in terms of how parties were funded or to support candidates directly. There was a clear link made between the funding of politics and the types of people likely to come forward and get involved in politics. Caps on campaigning for individual candidates were also suggested. Fixed-term parliaments were also seen to ease the financial burden on candidates, as financial planning would be easier within a fixed timeframe.

6.7   Reforming political institutions

Chapter 5 outlined the different practices taken by the devolved assemblies which are seen not only to develop a different kind of politics, but also to make political institutions more accessible; for example, the family-friendly working arrangements introduced in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament. The working arrangements of political institutions are important, not only in terms of

reputation and pulling in a more diverse range of individuals, but also in terms of retention and encouraging diverse politicians to stay in politics.

Focusing on Westminster, several long-standing suggestions were repeated, notably a crèche and more family-friendly working hours (for example, starting on Monday afternoon to allow politicians to travel from their constituencies on Monday morning and for sittings to fit more closely to school hours).

Other suggestions were more radical and aimed at reshaping the role of the MP while maintaining the valued constituency link. Many of these suggestions used technology, for example, live-streamed online or video conferencing to allow MPs to participate in debates remotely. Further suggestions included job-sharing; this may be most workable in a multi-member constituency system. Job-sharing would assist with maternity leave and, potentially, a more viable work-life balance.

6.8   Recommendations from the Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)

Many of the ideas for change outlined above are reflected in the recommendations made by the recent Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation). The conference made recommendations to address the factors which act to prevent under-represented groups accessing national politics particularly, the utilisation of a 'democracy diversity fund' based on the Access to Work model, the provision of parenting and caring leave and support, along with the development of more family-friendly arrangements. Recommendations also related to push factors, encouraging individuals from under-represented groups to seek election, suggesting both institutional and party measures to encourage access through buddying, mentoring and internships. The conference also suggested stronger equality measures by political parties and the UK parliament to pull individuals from under-represented groups into politics. These included diversity championing and reporting, training and support for those involved in candidate selections, and targets and quotas (Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2010: 5-16).

However, some of those involved in the research argued that the Speaker's conference did not go far enough and that change should be more far reaching. One MP argued:

> I don't think it is radical enough, there are some practical measures… but really too much is about developing awareness and interest in politics, but it is not radical in terms of changes to the parties and political institutions.

As acknowledged in Section 1.1, political and electoral reform has risen to the top of the political agenda of all three main parties since the completion of interviews for

this research and the publication of the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference. Suggestions and perspectives voiced in our research have clear relevance to this topical policy debate, for example the experiences of those from other institutions working with different electoral systems such as the European Parliament and the devolved assemblies.

6.9 Key findings: ideas for change from respondents

- Many respondents raised concerns about the viability of change across different parties and institutions. There was also a lack of consensus about the balance between voluntary and statutory measures.

- Arguments were made for greater diversity monitoring to provide a more robust evidence base and support calls and measures for encouraging diversity.

- Education and training, both for under-represented groups within political parties and also for groups within the community not already engaged in politics, was supported.

- Support was also given for extending the informal measures instigated within political parties around diversifying the membership, more actively recruiting and targeting under-represented groups, better mentoring and support of candidates, and reforming the process of candidate selection.

- Arguments were also made in favour of opening up political parties and institutions for work experience and internships.

- Positive action raised significant debate. Supporters evidenced the progress made by the adoption of such measures in terms of women's representation both in the UK and internationally. While there was acknowledgement of the difficulties of implementing such measures, it was perceived as the only way to radically alter the composition of our political institutions.

- Those challenging the adoption of positive action argued that it would undermine the credibility and legitimacy of those elected by such means and how it deals with the symptoms but not the causes of under-representation.

- There was indecision about the form positive action should take and how prescriptive to be. The question of who should be targeted and benefit from positive action was also hotly debated. Women were the obvious target but there was a lack of consensus if measures should be extended to other under-represented groups, notably ethnic minorities.

- There were mixed views on the use of primaries. Some thought they were more democratic and encouraged more diverse individuals to participate; others felt they were an unnecessary expense which reinforced the focus on speech-making at the expense of other skills.

- Changes to the funding of politics were also put forward. These included the state funding of political parties or caps on the spending allowed at elections. An 'access to public life fund' was a suggestion with widespread support, not

only to facilitate the candidature of disabled people but also those from less affluent backgrounds.

- A further set of suggestions was put forward about reforming the practices of political institutions, ranging from the long-standing argument for more family-friendly hours and childcare, to more radical suggestions about work-sharing and the greater use of technology to facilitate more flexible working.

- Many of the respondents' ideas for change are reflected in the recommendations made by the Speaker's Conference. Its recommendations to overcome prevent factors included a 'democracy diversity fund' and the development of more family-friendly arrangements. The Speaker's Conference advocated institutional and party measures to facilitate push factors and encourage access, for example buddying, mentoring and internships. It recommended stronger equality measures by political parties and the UK parliament to pull individuals from under-represented groups into politics such as diversity championing and reporting, training and support for those involved in candidate selections, and targets and quotas. The recommendations from the Speaker's Conference did not include electoral reform or equality guarantees.

7.   Implications of the research

Despite a small improvement in the diversity of MPs elected at the 2010 general election, the UK national parliament is still a very unrepresentative institution. To a lesser extent there is a lack of diversity also in the other national institutions, the Greater London Assembly and the European Parliament. This lack of diversity is identified by the Speaker's Conference as problematic on justice, effectiveness and legitimacy grounds. Our research examines the barriers faced, and pathways taken, by representatives and would-be representatives from under-represented groups in seeking election to national political institutions. Our interviews highlight shared experiences but also nuanced differences and inter-sectionalities in the pathways taken.

The report identifies three important sets of factors that shape these pathways. First, it considered the various attitudes and experiences seen by those involved in the process to 'prevent' representatives from under-represented groups coming forward, being successful and progressing. Second, the report looked at how individuals from these groups overcome such barriers and 'pushed' their way into politics. Third, it gave further consideration to the positive ways in which political parties and institutions can 'pull' representatives from under-represented groups into politics. As noted, diversity debates play out differently across and between political institutions, parties and the electorate.

Our analysis of the 'prevent', 'push' and 'pull' factors show that candidates from under-represented groups feel that there are many barriers against their participation as representatives at a national level. There continue to be only very narrow pathways into such positions, and political parties and political institutions still struggle to draw in talented individuals from under-represented groups. For those individuals from under-represented groups who do come forward to get involved in national politics, the barriers to difference are high, the pathways available are narrow, and the support they receive from institutions is limited.

These different factors work together and reinforce each other. The way in which politics is organised creates 'structural' constraints. For example, financial and time costs for candidates seeking election and the long working hours of representatives in parliament create barriers for those with caring responsibilities, especially those seeking to represent seats away from London. Similarly, there are numerous access barriers faced by disabled people. So those who are selected and elected reinforce the stereotype of the 'archetypal candidate', by being predominantly white, male, professional and university educated. This then adds 'symbolic' barriers for those from under-represented groups seeking a pathway to power as the majority of

politicians fit this stereotype. When opportunities arise for local parties to select new candidates for election, selections tend to conform to the stereotype. The idea of what a representative should look like and how they should act is not sufficiently challenged.

A key finding from our research is that in order to bring about diversity, the political system has to be recognised as a self-perpetuating whole which requires substantive overhaul rather than piecemeal change or tinkering on the peripheries. The previous chapter highlights ideas and suggestions for how to rebalance democratic representation, made by those with direct experience. These ideas and suggestions are reinforced in many cases by the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation, 2010), which was ongoing when this project began. We do not repeat these arguments and recommendations here. The debates over and case for measures like funding for access to politics, positive action and equality guarantees, more family-friendly working conditions, recruitment of more diverse party members, buddying, mentoring and internships along with diversity championing and training have been well made already. It is, however, important to acknowledge that participants in our research raised issues which the Speaker's Conference did not consider, for example, wider constitutional and electoral reform.

Instead, in this final chapter, we draw together our findings to develop core areas of debate about how this agenda might be taken forward. Here we set out three implications arising from our research findings. First, the way the diversity debate should be reframed to discuss the electoral merits of having more diverse candidates and politicians; second, how to open up pathways to politics and political recruitment; and third, how to respond to the current opportunity for change.

7.1   Re-framing the argument for diversity

Debates about equality and diversity in political representation are usually framed around arguments for justice; or less prominently about effectiveness and legitimacy. While the power of these arguments should not be underestimated, the pace of change indicates that these arguments do not have sufficient purchase within UK politics which is dominated by party and, most importantly, electoral concerns.

One finding of our research is that political selection often rests on how far a candidate conforms to the archetypal model of a candidate, rather than valuing the difference from the norm which a candidate from an under-represented group may bring. One of the factors underpinning the political selection process is a perceived overestimation of the negative electoral consequences of selecting a diversity candidate and an underestimation of what the electorate will tolerate. This electoral argument is used to legitimise and underpin the conservative attitudes and decisions

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of political parties in selecting and supporting candidates. One ethnic minority MP argued that 'the [local] party tried to block me, arguing that the electorate in a predominantly white constituency would not tolerate an ethnic minority MP'. However, once selected as a candidate, there is no clear evidence of voter hostility to candidates based on their gender or ethnicity. Our research also suggests a significant disconnect between the perspectives of the national and local parties on these issues, with local parties taking a more conservative attitude.

Our research has suggested that in order to induce individual and institutional change beyond the party leadership, arguments for diversity need to engage with the new political landscape post the 2010 general election, and be reframed so as to address more explicitly the key priority of politics: winning votes. Reframing the argument for diversity in representation in such a way could have the effect of galvanising change in politics. This reframing needs to include honest discussion about the very real debates that take place in the pragmatic world of politics. That is, whether choosing and fielding more diverse candidates will have no effect on vote share, or will lose or gain votes. In order to effect change, assumptions about the electoral impacts of diversity need to be challenged and debated; one important way of doing this is through evidence and empirical data to enable political parties to take effective action to improve their electoral appeal to a diverse electorate.

There is limited diversity data available on our politicians. For example, Norris and Lovenduski (1995) concluded that it is the lack of women incumbents and strong challengers, not voter discrimination, which accounts for the under-representation of women. There is a so-called incumbency factor, where people in seats have an advantage over challengers. The evidence about ethnic minority candidates is less clear, perhaps due to the limited cases available for comparison. The belief that ethnic minority candidates lost votes, despite winning, is widely held, with the case of black Conservative candidate John Taylor in the 1987 general election often cited (Norris and Lovenduski ,1995: 235). From limited evidence on the 1992 election, Conservative challengers were seen to face a slight electoral penalty and Labour incumbents did well (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995: 235). More recent evidence on these issues is limited but with changing social attitudes, the negative personal effects of diverse candidates may have become even more marginal. The Speaker's Conference recommendations include a regular survey of public attitudes to parliament, in part looking at public attitudes to diversity in parliament to test if this has a positive impact on approval ratings. The diversity monitoring evidence suggested both by participants in our research and in the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference could be used to explore further the motivations and outcomes of voting.

Political parties are clearly aware of the importance of improving attitudes towards equality and diversity, as evidence in the training opportunities offered to constituency selection panels. Evidence from our research indicates that this training is not having the desired impact and a revitalised dialogue based on evidence may help to achieve the objectives. A possible source for good practice would be to look at the voluntary and community sectors which often also rely on a volunteer base, but have a better record of diverse recruitment.

Participants in our research argued that fielding more diverse candidates and supporting under-represented groups is electorally beneficial for political parties, even if not in individual constituencies, but at an aggregate level. Political parties can derive electoral advantage from appearing to be more inclusive and progressive. The example of the Conservative Party in the recent general election is relevant here. As one peer commented about the Conservative candidate selection, 'he [Cameron] will reap the rewards of that [standing diverse candidates] at the election because… they will look more like a people's party than they have done in the past'.

7.2   Opening up politics

A further key finding from our research was that pathways into politics were narrow and increasingly professionalised. While the composition of the House of Commons has become more diverse, those elected conform closely to the new but still very narrow pathway of the professional politician that we have described in this research. For example, *The Times* reported the election of three young Scottish MPs:

> All three are Labour Party insiders. Ms Nash served as parliamentary researcher to John Reid. Ms Doyle was a political officer for the Parliamentary Labour Party. And Mr Sarwar, an NHS dentist, is also an experienced political campaigner and succeeds his father Mohammed in the seat. (Smyth et al., 2010)

We have already argued that these narrow pathways are linked to the idea that prior political experience, certain politics-facilitating professions and elite family or educational backgrounds all mitigate the perceived negative effects of being from a diverse group. We have used the term 'acceptable difference' to describe this effect. Therefore, in order to encourage a more diverse range of candidates which will subsequently provide more diverse representation, it is important to widen the tolerance or acceptability of difference and, indeed, to value difference.

As noted in the report, 'new' professionalised pathways into politics are beginning to dominate. While professionals have a valuable contribution to make to politics this route is often exclusive and excluding of those from different socio-economic backgrounds who may not have access to the same resources. Recruiting more

candidates locally can have the benefits of reducing the costs (and barriers) of candidature and election and potentially 'open up' politics to a wider range of people as well as further developing the constituency link in national politics. While the 'traditional' pathways into politics were previously dominated by local government, one important way of challenging the currently narrow acceptability of difference is to draw in candidates from a wider pool and encourage more civic and issue-based activists into politics. This suggestion was made by the Councillor's Commission (2007). Such activists bring not only important skills but also an authenticity currently seen to be lacking in politics as they are often community leaders in a constituency. These pathways are already in evidence, but need to be supported and strengthened.

7.3   Responding to opportunities for change

A key finding of our research is how newer political institutions have achieved greater diversity in representation (although, it can be argued, this does not go far enough) and developed a more open, collaborative and accessible political culture. Respondents spoke more positively about diverse representation being encouraged in newer institutions and Europe than they did about older institutions such as the House of Commons. Part of the reason for these developments is that the newer political devolved institutions started with a blank sheet and were in response to a radical refiguring of UK politics. Radical change on this scale can provide a catalyst for ongoing change. Older political institutions were seen to have extremely entrenched political cultures, systems of patronage, cliques, and a need to know the 'rules of the game' that exclude under-represented groups. Interviewees were sceptical about the possibilities for change in the older institutions.

The expenses and lobbying scandals which have marred British politics in the last year have arguably created an opportunity for radical change to our political system that would be supported by the electorate. The post-election public climate seems to be receptive to the promotion of greater diversity in politics, accelerating a general trend. As one female peer contributing to our research commented, '[the] parties are thinking along these lines [all women shortlists], which would have been a complete anathema a few years ago.' For example, the low number of women in the cabinet has attracted significant media coverage and anger from the public. This ranged from women's magazines more usually dedicated to fashion and tabloid columnists from right-leaning newspapers, to lobbying organisations devoted to campaigning for equality. Ceri Goddard, chief executive of the Fawcett Society campaign group quoted in *The Times*, said:

> No party will be able to govern with authority or democratically without women or without immediately addressing the shocking state of women's

representation in politics that this election campaign has exposed.
(Smyth et al., 2010)

Goddard has also commented that with electoral reform now on the agenda and a renewed interest in representation, the political situation following the recent general election 'is the first big opportunity for a generation to fundamentally challenge the gender imbalance in parliament' (Cochrane, 2010b).

The recommendations put forward by the Speaker's Conference focus on altering the existing political culture rather than transforming the structures which facilitate and perpetuate it, but a debate about the scope and pace of change is required.

As noted earlier in the report, in the wake of the 2010 general election, electoral reform has risen to the top of the political agenda and a referendum on electoral reform is planned within the current UK parliament. The FPTP electoral system for the House of Commons encourages political parties to go for, what they regard as, the surest bet in every constituency which our research has indicated establishes barriers for those individuals who do not conform to the archetypal model of a successful candidate. While electoral reform is not a panacea, a debate on electoral reform does provide an opportunity to discuss and debate diversity, fairness and the nature of representation. Electoral reform on its own is unlikely to bring about the transformational change needed to open up politics to under-represented groups. But evidence from the devolved assemblies suggests that moving towards a more proportional system coupled with political parties developing appropriate mechanisms to encourage diversity, can lead to change in representation, although there are limits to this change. While women are better represented, other equality groups are not.

Our research has indicated the reinforcing, interlinked factors which work to exclude under-represented groups from politics. They can only be challenged by reframing the arguments about diversity in representation, by opening up politics and by grasping the opportunities for debate. Only then may it be possible to bring about the transformative change required to create meaningful diversity in our political system.

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Appendix 1: Research design

The research design targeted four groups:

- Stakeholder organisations involved in supporting under-represented groups.
- Political parties including internal lobby organisations for under-represented groups and party organisers involved in candidate selection.
- Current, former and unsuccessful candidates for party selection and election.
- Sitting representatives from across political parties and UK national institutions.

Stakeholder organisations

A list of organisations was drawn from the Commission's Stakeholder group list and groups that gave submissions to the Speaker's Conference. The groups selected for interview were those with the clearest links to representative politics.

The organisations were: Scope, Women's National Commission, Stonewall, Trade Union Congress, Operation Black Vote, Fawcett, Mencap Cymru, Royal National Institute for Deaf People, Lesbian and Gay Foundation, RADAR, Friends Families and Travellers, LGBT Cymru and Women Making a Difference.

These interviews were conducted in October 2009. All interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Notes were taken from the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured.

Political parties

Interviews were sought with the lobby organisations for under-represented groups internal to the political parties. Interviews were conducted with Plaid Cymru, LGBT Labour – Dorothy's List, BAME Labour, Liberal Democrats for LGBT Equality, Liberal Democrat Disability Association and LGBTory.

Candidates

Current, former and unsuccessful candidates were sampled as far as possible and invited to give written submissions reflecting on their experiences. Table A.1 overleaf shows a breakdown of these participants according to party and characteristics.

Table A.1   Candidate submissions according to party and characteristics[24]

Party	Women: of which				Men: of which				Totals
		Ethnic minority	LGBT	Disabled		Ethnic minority	LGBT	Disabled	
Lab	7	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	9
Con	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Lib Dem	9	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	10
PC	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
SNP	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Totals	26	2	0	3	4	2	0	2	30

Sitting representatives

The scope of this research did not allow for a representative sample nor is this necessary to produce recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. A purposive inter-selective sample was more appropriate to fulfil the aims of this research; such a sample acknowledges individuals' multiple identities and experiences.

Our research sought to sample across several different factors including political institutions and political parties. We also aimed to include representatives across under-represented groups: women, ethnic minorities, LGB and trans groups, disabled people; within these selections we sought to sample to reflect a range of age and political experience.

A total of 32 face-to-face in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with sitting and former elected representatives across the institutions sampled. The interviews drew on elite and life history interviewing techniques[25] but also used a pathways mapping tool where the interviewees were asked to 'tell a story' about their pathway into politics. This tool provided us with a different quality of data and a more dynamic understanding of the trajectory, junctions and milestones in the individual's political experiences and career. The interviews were each up to an hour long.

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[24] Two additional female former Labour Party candidates – one unsuccessful candidate from an ethnic minority and one successful openly lesbian woman – were interviewed in their role as organisers of internal party lobbies.
[25] Life history interviewing is an established qualitative and interpretive research tool and provides a means of providing longitudinal and retrospective analysis. However, it is acknowledged that memory fades with time and recollection can become increasingly difficult. Measures will be taken to overcome this problem, for example by triangulating with other sources of data (Robinson et al., 2007).

Table A.2   Sitting representatives according to political party, institution and characteristics

		Women	(of which) BAME	(of which) LGBT	(of which) Disabled	Men	(of which) BAME	(of which) LGBT	(of which) Disabled	Totals
House of Commons	Labour	9	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	10
	Conservative	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Liberal Democrats	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
House of Lords	Labour	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Conservative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Liberal Democrats	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
European Parliament	Labour	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Conservative	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Liberal Democrats	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	UKIP	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Scottish Parliament	Labour	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Conservative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Liberal Democrats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Scottish National Party	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Green	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Welsh Assembly	Labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Conservative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Liberal Democrats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Plaid Cymru	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4
London Assembly	Labour	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Conservative	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	Liberal Democrats	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Totals		28	3	1	1	6	3	2	0	**32**

Table A.3   Purposive sample of sitting representatives by institution

Institution	Number of interviews
House of Commons	13
House of Lords	3
European Parliament	4
Scottish Parliament	4
Welsh Assembly	4
London Assembly	4

Table A.4   Purposive sample of sitting representatives by party

Party	Number of interviews
Conservative	5
Labour	15
Liberal Democrats	5
Plaid Cymru	4
Scottish National Party	1
Green	1
UKIP	1

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Annex 1: Brand Democracy research

Pathways to Politics Stage 1

A research report exploring the characteristics and life experiences of Britain's politicians beyond local politics

Conducted by Brand Democracy on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

Contents

Tables and figures

1.   Executive summary

This report presents findings from a research project carried out by Brand Democracy on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission). This research represents the first phase of a two-stage project. The project has helped to inform the Commission's Submission and response to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation (hereafter referred to as the Speaker's Conference), established by the House of Commons in November 2008. The Conference was asked to examine why women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and disabled people are under-represented in the House of Commons, and to recommend ways to remove barriers to their representation. The Conference has also looked at issues relating to the representation of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) and transgender communities.

In its submission to the Speaker's Conference, the Commission suggested that an important first step to understanding how to widen access to elected office is to identify the current make up of our elected institutions and the pathways that these politicians followed to arrive at their current positions.

Three research approaches were developed:

- **A brief review of existing literature**, including an overview of current thinking about representation and representativeness; a review of trends and changes in the profiles of particular under-represented groups in Britain over time; and an account of any initiatives or proposals to improve the representation of particular groups.

- **A programme of web data extraction** which classified biographical information available online for each of the 911 politicians covered by the study. Using a number of reputable sources, data was collated on the demographics of politicians, their career history, and the steps that they took on their route towards elected office.

- **An online survey of Britain's politicians** designed to provide information where the online biographical data was absent or incomplete. 113 of the 911 politicians completed the survey. The results should be treated with caution as the sample cannot be taken to be representative of the experiences of the broader population of politicians.

The research is limited to the 911 politicians in Britain's regional and national-level elected bodies – Members of the House of Commons (MPs), Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), Members of the Welsh Assembly (Welsh AMs), Members of the Greater London Assembly (GLA Members) and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The Commission's remit does not include Northern Ireland, so this research excludes those MPs and MEPs who were elected to represent Northern Irish constituencies or regions. Elected politicians at the local-government levels were also excluded from the sample of politicians investigated here.

This report focuses on the following 'underrepresented groups' among elected politicians: women; transgender; ethnic minorities; disabled people; people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). We have used the Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability, which is: "Someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". The terms 'disability' and 'disabled person/people' will be used throughout to refer to impairments and conditions that fall under this definition.

The results of the study show that many equality groups are highly under-represented in Britain's national and regional elected bodies. Additionally, there is a traditional pathway into politics which may present barriers to people from under-represented groups. This pathway includes: having parents from the top socioeconomic tiers; having politically active parents; early exposure to politicians; university education and a career in a profession like law; and, long standing involvement in a political party and experience in local government.

Three recommendations emerged from this research. These seek to address some basic mechanisms which could enable the potential pathways into politics to be widened to more diverse groups and individuals in Britain.

1) Confidential diversity data collection

This research project was compromised by the lack of a comprehensive data set across the seven protected equality grounds.   The lack of a comprehensive data set prohibits sampling and statistical weighting to allow for missing data from politicians online profiles. Confidential data collection at the point of nomination, and non-identifiable publication, would allow transparency and effective monitoring of underrepresentation as well as providing information to institutions on employee support, access needs.

2) Opening up politics

If so many of our politicians had early exposure to politics, then it seems likely that pathways would be widened if more people could come into early contact with politics and politicians. This can be achieved through more imaginative and interactive Citizenship classes which involve inspirational local leaders or arrange tours of Parliament or other elected assemblies.   The research also shows a tendency towards greater professionalisation in the career path of politicians, with most having worked in Parliament or politics.

3) Accessible flexible workplaces
It seems likely that one of the reasons for the underrepresentation of equality groups within Parliament is the physical and attitudinal barriers faced by women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, or others based on faith, sexual orientation, age or gender identity. Further research has been commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to explore the barriers and enablers, including the financial and personal costs of candidature.

2.   Literature review

Introduction

The extent to which our politicians reflect the makeup of wider society is a complex issue which should be at the heart of discussions on how our democratic system functions. This report examines how far a range of different groups within British society are represented within Britain's national and regional representative bodies. For the purposes of this report, the terms 'representation' and 'under-representation' refer to the extent to which a particular group's numbers in a given population are reflected in the composition of its representative body. For example, while women make up 52 per cent of the British population, they only make up 20 per cent of Members of Parliament (MPs) sitting in the House of Commons, and could therefore be said to be 'under-represented' in that representative body.

Readers should note that this 'demographic' understanding of the meaning of representation is subject to much dispute among political theorists, with some arguing that elected bodies lack legitimacy where particular groups within society are not present, while others suggest that a strict adherence to representativeness raises questions about which groups need to be represented, and how far asking women to represent women, and black people to represent black people is either realistic or desirable (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

The potential pitfalls of simply counting the numbers of each group within representative bodies were eloquently expressed by Simon Fanshawe in his oral evidence to the Speakers Conference:

> I went to something recently where an extremely brilliant middle-aged Asian man stood up and said, "If you think that getting me on your charity board is in some way a sign of diversity and difference, you are wrong. I am an Oxford educated, middle-class man. I am more of the same when it comes to charity boards." The point I am trying to make is, yes, it is extremely difficult to enforce, but what you are asking people to do is articulate a process through which they went in order to look for candidates of considerable difference and spread so that the party organisation then has a real choice of different kinds of people to choose, because you could easily end up with five middle-aged, middle-class men who are, nonetheless, highly diverse because apparently they are gay, they are black, they are whatever; I am saying you need to think to the next level of diversity.[26]

The literature review, in some cases, does not cover Scotland, Wales or London specifically as no evidence has been found, but where this is available the report sets out the key findings and differences within the United Kingdom at large.

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[26] Quoted from an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and reported to the House of Commons. Neither witnesses nor Members have had the opportunity to correct the record. The transcript is not yet an approved formal record of these proceedings. The transcript is available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/uc167-x/uc16702.htm (*accessed 25 Februrary 2010*)

2.1 Gender

The under-representation of women in British politics has received more attention than any other equality strand relating to political representation. It is also the case that more political parties have put in place selection procedures to increase the number of women candidates – and therefore the number of women in elected office – than for any other group. While trans-gender people do fall within the remit of the Commission, our review did not uncover any data on trans-gender people and political representation. Therefore, the discussion that follows draws primarily on research focusing on the representation of women.

Representation of women: the current situation

In the 2005 General Election, of the 646 MPs elected, a record 128 (or 19.8 per cent of all MPs) were women (Kavanagh and Butler 2005).

The proportion of women representatives in Westminster is lower than in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. The 2003 Welsh Assembly elections saw women secure 50 per cent of the seats in the Assembly. In 2006, after a by-election, it became the first legislative body in the world to have a majority of women members. The 2007 elections saw the proportion fall slightly to 47 per cent (Electoral Reform Society 2007a).

While levels of representation in Scotland are lower than in Wales, the proportion is still considerably higher than in Westminster. In the Scottish Parliament, women constituted 40 per cent of members in 2003 and 33 per cent in 2007 (Electoral Reform Society 2007b).

Following the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, 33 per cent of Britain's MEPs were women (Centre for Women and Democracy 2009).

Changes in the number of women politicians over time

Historical reviews of the number of women politicians in Britain have focused primarily on the numbers of women in the House of Commons. Table 2.1 sets out the number of women MPs returned after each General Election since 1918.

The Commission has estimated that at the current rate, it will take around 200 years, or another 40 general elections, for there to be fair representation of women in Parliament (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2008).

Women have been able to stand for the House of Commons since 1918, but until 1983 there was 'remarkably little progress' made in terms of representation (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 101). While there was a slight overall increase in the number of women in the House of Commons throughout this period, the proportion was never higher than 5 per cent (Craig 1989, cited in Norris and Lovenduski 1995). It was not until the second half of the 1980s that the rate of change began to improve. The general elections of 1987 and 1992 saw the proportion of growing beyond the 5 per cent mark to 6.3 per cent and then to 9.2 per cent, a shift which was caused by two interrelated factors: the Labour party selecting more female candidates; and

improvements in the Labour party's performance in the 1987 and 1992 General Elections after a particularly poor 1983 election result (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

The impact of Labour's success at the polls, combined with the higher number of female Labour candidates, resulted in further increases in the numbers of female MPs in 1997, when 120 women were elected as MPs (Childs et al 2005) and 2001, when the number fell slightly to 118. In 2001, women MPs accounted for 18 per cent of the House of Commons and this rose to 20 per cent when 128 women MPs were returned to the House of Commons in 2005 (Kavanagh and Butler 2005). At the time of writing there were 126 women MPs in the House of Commons. As illustrated in table 2.2, women MPs are disproportionately drawn from the Labour party. 28 per cent of women MPs are Labour representatives; 9 per cent are Conservatives and 16 per cent are Liberal Democrats.

Table 2.1   Women MPs elected at general elections, 1918-2005

General Election	Total number of seats	Number of women MPs	Women as a proportion of all MPs (%)
1918	707	1	0.1
1922	615	2	0.3
1923	615	8	1.3
1924	615	4	0.7
1929	615	14	2.3
1931	615	15	2.4
1935	615	9	1.5
1945	640	24	3.8
1950	625	21	3.4
1951	625	17	2.7
1955	630	24	3.8
1959	630	25	4.0
1964	630	29	4.6
1966	630	26	4.1
1970	630	26	4.1
1974 Feb	635	23	3.6
1974 Oct	635	27	4.3
1979	635	19	3.0
1983	650	23	3.5
1987	650	41	6.3
1992	651	60	9.2
1997	659	120	18.2
2001	659	118	17.9
2005	646	128	19.8

Source: Adapted from Tetteh (2008)

Table 2.2   Women MPs by political party, 2010

Political party	Number of women MPs (total MPs in ())	Percentage of all women MPs	Change from 2001 to 2005 election
Labour	97 (350)	28	+ 2 (up 4.9%)
Conservative	18 (194)	9	+4 (up 0.5%)
Liberal Democrats	9 (63)	15	+ 4 (up 6.1%)
Others*	2 (40)	5	- 2 (down 8.7%)
Total	126 (646)	20	+ 7 (up 1.6%)

Notes: Adapted from Childs and Evans (2009). Figures exclude three deceased women MPs (2 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat) returned in the 2005 General Election

Barriers to increased representation of women in Britain's elected bodies

When investigating the causes of under-representation in general, a number of recent studies have made the distinction between the 'supply' of applicants wanting to stand for election and the 'demands' of the selectors who choose which applicants go forward as candidates for election (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). In the case of women, 'supply-side' barriers refer to the entrenched attitudinal and societal barriers that might affect the number of women with the skills and desire to become political candidates. These include: the effects of socialised traditional gender roles (which might result in a lack of confidence); reduced access to education (compared to men); and the gender division of labour (whereby women are likely to have less access to the money required to stand for office, or enough free time to do so) (Childs et al 2005). The inflexibility of the timetable in the UK Parliament has also been cited as a major disincentive for women, with some commentators arguing that it is incompatible with the range of family and domestic responsibilities that, in Britain, are still more often undertaken by women than by men (see McRae (1995) and Hansard Society Commission (1990) for further discussion of the underlying causes of under-representation).

Despite the impact of these systematic or structural factors, recent literature on the under-representation of women in elected office has been marked by the increasingly prevalent view that the main barriers faced by women are 'demand-side' – arising from problems and barriers in the ways that candidates are selected and elected - rather than 'supply-side'. Focusing on the demand-side means recognising that the selection processes for candidates in the UK are almost exclusively controlled by political parties. Any prejudices or organisational discrimination towards women in either the structure of a party's selection process, or among the selectors themselves, will have an impact on the number of women gaining political office in the UK (Childs et al 2005).

Two forms of discrimination have been noted by Childs et al (2005): direct discrimination and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination includes openly hostile attitudes towards women, which some have claimed is particularly prevalent among older party members. For example, interviews conducted for a study on women candidates in the 2001 General Election revealed clear evidence of open discrimination encountered by some candidates (Shepherd-Robinson et al 2002). Some women in that study reported being asked sex discriminatory questions during selection.

Indirect discrimination is not founded on the belief that women per se make inferior candidates. Instead, it results from selectors having a set of ideas about what makes a good candidate which are more likely to count against women than men. For example, it has been argued that there are preferences among party members for candidates with attributes often associated with masculinity such as being "ambitious" or "tough"(Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Another example of indirect discrimination faced by women potential candidates is that some selectors may believe that a woman has less chance of winning an election than a man, and so selecting a female candidate would harm the party's chances (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

Certain subgroups of women are particularly under-represented. Moosa (2008) has highlighted the position of ethnic minority women representatives in Britain. In Westminster, there are currently only two black women MPs, and there has never been an Asian woman MP to date. Moosa (2008) cites a significant absence of institutional support and established educational pathways for ethnic minority women, as well as the demands of family responsibility impacting negatively on the recruitment, career progression and quality of working life for women, which may have a more powerful effect on ethnic minority women compared with those not from ethnic minorities.

Methods of increasing the proportion of politicians who are women

Some commentators have argued that electoral systems that involve an element of proportional representation (PR), such as those used to elect members of the devolved institutions (in Scotland, Wales and London) can have a positive effect on the numbers of women elected (Paxton et al 2009). In Germany, New Zealand and Hungary, all of which use the Additional Member system, women are more likely to be elected on the party lists than in constituencies (Norris, 2004).

Bird (2003) states that there are 45 countries where quotas for the number of women candidates are ensured either by national law or the country's constitution. Paxton et al (2009) have carried out a cross-country, longitudinal analysis of the effectiveness of national quotas and found them to increase the proportion of women in political office. Countries as diverse as Denmark, Pakistan, Mozambique and Rwanda have implemented national quotas in their histories (Paxton et al 2009). It is noteworthy that Rwanda now ranks highest in the world for its representation of women (Centre for Women and Democracy 2009).

In contrast, there is currently no legal requirement in Britain for parties to field a certain number of women candidates. Changes in the law have made it possible for British political parties to implement 'specific equality guarantees if they so choose. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 makes it legal for [arties to put minimum quotas on the number of women candidates who stand in an election, providing that quotas as 'adopted for the purpose of reducing the inequality in the numbers of men and women elected, as candidates of that party, to be members of the body concerned'.

In the UK, therefore, various different types of equality guarantee have been used by different parties and at different times in an attempt to address the gender imbalance in Britain's elected assemblies. Table 2.2 sets out the range of equality guarantees

identified in the literature, alongside examples of their use by British political parties where appropriate.

As noted above, legislation in the UK does not force parties to apply any kind of equality guarantee – it simply allows them to enforce their own quotas if they wish. In the absence of legal requirements, the implementation of specific equality guarantees by British political parties has been patchy, with different parties choosing to implement different systems in different elections.

Table 2.3 Examples of equality guarantees and their usage by British political parties

Guarantee	Definition	Examples of use in UK
All Women Shortlists (AWS)	A certain percentage of local constituency parties must select their candidate from a list composed only of women aspirant candidates	Labour party in 1997, 2005 and 2010 general elections; Labour party for Welsh Assembly election 2003
Twinning	Constituencies are 'paired'; one male and one female candidate are selected for the twinned constituencies	Labour party for elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, 1999
Zipping	Men and women are placed alternately on the list of candidates	Labour party and Liberal Democrats for the 1999 European elections
Party List Quota	A party decides that a certain percentage of candidates on its list will be female	Plaid Cymru for the 1999, 2003 and b2007 Welsh Assembly elections; Conservative party for the European Elections 2009

Source: Adapted from Lovenduski (2005) and Childs and Evans (2009)

It has been argued that the recent numerical improvement in the representation of women has been dependent on strong Labour performances in the elections of 1997, 2001 and 2005 (Childs et al 2005) due to the number of women candidates selected by the Labour Party in winnable seats. Women MPs are described as disproportionately from the Labour Party, and, more importantly, over half of the women MPs in 2005 were candidates selected from All Women Shortlists (AWS) used by the Labour Party in 1997 and 2005. The Electoral Reform Society has shown that when, in 2001, the Labour Party chose not to use AWS to select candidates, the number of Labour women MPs fell by 5. In 2005, Labour reinstated AWS and, despite returning to government with a much reduced majority, managed to increase the number of Labour women MPs by four (Electoral Reform Society 2005).

The reasons for the higher levels of representation of women in the devolved elected bodies are more complex. The presence of a proportional representation element in the form of the 'additional member' electoral system offers political parties the opportunity to implement approaches such as 'zipping' to ensure gender parity among politicians elected from regional lists. For example, in 2007 Plaid Cymru took the step of allocating first place on each of its lists to a woman candidate in order to

ensure that the first assembly member elected from any Plaid Cymru list would be a woman (Electoral Reform Society 2007a). 11 of the first 25 council members elected to the Greater London Authority in 2003 were elected using a PR system, and 40 per cent of the total were women (Bashevkin 2006).

The higher proportion of women in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly is also likely to be due to the makeup of the devolved assemblies in terms of parties. Since the inception of the devolved assemblies a decade ago, it has generally been the case that parties that have actively sought to increase the representation of women have also fared better in elections. In Wales for example, Labour and Plaid Cymru – the two largest parties in the Welsh Assembly – have used equality guarantees to boost the number of women candidates so that they field a roughly equal proportion of men and women. Their electoral strength has led to a higher representation of women in Wales.

2.2   Ethnicity

Estimates of the ethnic minority population of the UK vary according to source. Census data is generally regarded as the most reliable source of data, and the 2001 census shows that 7.9 per cent of the UK population is from an ethnic minority. This figure is expected to rise to 11-12 per cent in the 2011 census (Smith, 2008). Recent estimates based on the 2004-2008 Labour Force Survey suggest that 9.1 per cent of the UK population are from a non-white ethnic minority, with a further 5.1 per cent coming from an 'other white' ethnic minority grouping (Platt 2009). Despite making up at least 7.9 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom, ethnic minorities have historically been under-represented in Britain's elected bodies.

Table 2.4   Ethnic minority population in Britain and its elected bodies

United Kingdom (%)		Scotland (%)		Wales (%)		London (%)	
UK	House of Commons	Scotland	Scottish Parliament	Wales	Welsh Assembly	London	Greater London Authority
7.9	2.3	2	0	2.1	1.7	28.8	16

Sources: Census data (2001) and Smith (2008)

Representation of ethnic minorities: the current situation

It should be noted at the outset that analysis of the representation of ethnic minorities in the UK's elected bodies is difficult because ethnicity is difficult to define and relies on self-definition (Smith 2008). Bird (2003) argues that as ethnic minorities in any country are usually highly heterogeneous, with huge variances between how well represented different minority groups are, making a broad study which treats different groups under the same 'ethnic minority' heading may be too simplistic an approach. Nevertheless, table 2.4 compares the ethnic minority population of the UK, Scotland, Wales and London with the ethnic minority representation in the respective elected institutions. According to Operation Black Vote (OBV), there are currently 15 non-white MPs in the House of Commons, which is equivalent to 2.3 per

cent of the total number of Members (OBV 2008)[27]. Smith (2008) points out that if the number of ethnic minority MPs reflected the proportion of the population belonging to an ethnic minority, even judging by the conservative figures of 7.9 per cent in the 2001 census, there would be 51 ethnic minority MPs in the House of Commons. Operation Black Vote suggested that a numerically representative figure would be 58 ethnic minority MPs (OBV 2008). At the current rate of progress, they estimate that it will take 75 years for the House of Commons to reflect the ethnic minority population of the United Kingdom (OBV 2008).

Women from ethnic minorities are particularly poorly represented in the House of Commons. There are currently just two black women Members and, at the time of writing, there has never been an Asian woman MP (Smith 2008). According to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillor's Taskforce (2009), women from ethnic minorities account for less than one per cent of the 20,000 local councillors in England, despite comprising more than five per cent of the population, and there are no ethnic minority women councillors in Scotland and Wales. The Taskforce claims that it could take more than 130 years for the number of women local councillors from ethnic minorities to be fully representative of the population.

There are very few representatives from ethnic minorities sitting in the devolved legislatures, but it is important to note that the ethnic minority populations of both Scotland and Wales are far lower than that of the UK as a whole. According to the 2001 census, 2.1 per cent of the population of Wales and 2 per cent of the population of Scotland are from ethnic minorities (Office for National Statistics 2003). The Scottish Parliament elected just one ethnic minority MSP at the 2007 election, representing 0.7 per cent of the 129 MSPs. The death of this MSP means that there is currently no non-white representative in the Scottish Parliament. The Welsh Assembly also elected one ethnic minority Assembly Member in 2007, representing 1.7 per cent of the 60 Assembly Members (Smith 2008). By comparison, ethnic minorities comprise 2.1 per cent of the Welsh population.

There are four non-white members of the Greater London Assembly, which is equivalent to 16 per cent (Smith 2008). The 2001 Census showed that almost 29 per cent of the city's population were from an ethnic minority group (ONS 2003).

Additionally, there are currently five ethnic minority MEPs representing the United Kingdom, 6.9 per cent of the total UK delegation of 72 MEPs. In this sense, in terms of ethnic minority composition, the UK delegation to the European Parliament is in fact the most representative body of the polities examined in this review.

Changes in the number of ethnic minority politicians over time

The first non-white Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom was as a Radical Whig elected in Sudbury in 1841. Three further ethnic minority MPs were elected before 1950, two in the late 1890s and the last in the 1920s (Smith 2008).

From the 1920s onwards, no ethnic minority MPs were elected until the 1987 General Election, at which four ethnic minority Labour MPs were elected (Smith 2008). In the four subsequent General Elections, the number of ethnic minority MPs

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[27] During the time of writing, one ethnic minority Labour MP died, so that there were then 14 non-white MPs in the Commons.

has risen slowly, increasing to five in 1992, nine in 1997,12 in 2001 and 15 in 2005 (Tetteh 2008).

The number of ethnic minority MPs is reflected in the low numbers of ethnic minority Parliamentary candidates, with only 95 ethnic minority candidates for the House of Commons selected across the three main parties in all General Elections between 1950 and 1992 (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). As Kavanagh and Butler (2005) note, the 2005 General Election saw a large rise in the number of ethnic minority candidates with 117 ethnic minority candidates fielded by the three main parties (Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative). However, despite almost doubling the number of candidates compared to the 2001 election, the result was that only three more ethnic minority MPs were returned to the House of Commons, from 12 in 2001 (all Labour MPs) to 15 in 2005 (13 Labour and two Conservative). This is related to the seat winnability where these candidates were placed, with ethnic minority candidates running in constituencies where their Party was less likely to win (Kavanagh and Butler 2005).

Barriers to increased representation of ethnic minorities in Britain's elected bodies

Bird (2003) argues that, as is the case for women, political opportunities for ethnic minorities are constrained by 'macro-level factors', such as the electoral system used, how domestic political parties are organized and widely held cultural beliefs about the nature and role of ethnic communities. She claims that in addition, ethnic minority groups are also constrained by important 'micro-level factors' which include '…the degree of ethnic concentration in a particular constituency, collective political mobilization within ethnic communities, the existence of ethnic rivalries and other ethnic-related disturbances within the local community; as well as the characteristics of individual candidates and the nature of his or her ties to a given ethnic community' (Bird, 2003: 8). This echoes Saggar and Geddes (2000: 28) who argue that '…it is at the local level that the complex tapestry of British race politics has been woven'.

The Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Phillips, has argued that despite a willingness to publically advance the 'general idea' of the cause of (ethnic) minorities, 'institutional racism' in the machinery of political parties prevents them from selecting more ethnic minority candidates (Times 2008).

Kate Bell (2003) argues that ethnic minorities suffer from 'imputed prejudice' in politics similar to the indirect forms of discrimination discussed above in relation to the representation of women. On this understanding, discrimination on the part of selectors in political parties reflects not only their own prejudices, but a view that the electorate are not ready for an ethnic minority candidate. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) argue that while in marginal seats the voters choose their representative, in safe seats the party selectorate make a de facto choice on whom the representative will be, and, as long as the ethnic minorities tend to be absent from the selectorate, ethnic minority representation is unlikely to increase.

As stated above, ethnic minority women are especially under-represented in politics. Gervais (2008) argued that ethnic minority women are prevented from reaching their potential as they are being 'streamed into specializing in ethnic minority or gender issues' because of typecasting. She further argues that ethnic minority women believe they face severe discrimination in politics which acts as a deterrent to

involvement. The Fawcett Society has suggested that ethnic minority women face 'double discrimination'. They face barriers to involvement in politics in their roles as mothers, often unable to attend evening meetings due to childcare commitments, as well as facing those barriers which are common to other potential candidates from ethnic minorities. Moosa (2009) argues that this sex discrimination is coupled with racial discrimination as parties continue to recruit from within a narrow pool of people.

Importantly, some analysis suggests that the barriers to greater participation are becoming less prominent. Sunder Katwala, General Secretary of the Fabian Society has argued that there has been progress in Parliamentary selections, with more ethnic minority MPs being selected, and in 'winnable' seats (Katwala 2008). Katwala argues that the proportion of new Labour candidates from ethnic minorities for the 2010 General Election exceeds the proportion of the population that belongs to an ethnic minority, especially in 'winnable' seats. Katwala also argues that the Conservatives have made progress in selecting more ethnic minority candidates 'from a low base' particularly in 'winnable seats.

Methods of increasing the proportion of ethnic minority politicians

Although there are some legislatures which reserve seats for indigenous populations, and new democracies that reserve seats for ethnic minorities in order to preserve peace, there are currently no established democracies that have adopted quota laws for ethnic minorities (Bird 2003).

In terms of legislative routes to greater ethnic minority representation Operation Black Vote (2008) oppose constitutional or legal measures to guarantee ethnic minority representation laid down in statute. Instead they recommend that the law be changed to allow political parties to use positive discrimination such as ethnic minority only shortlists or a preferred candidates list, should they so wish. In a similar manner to the change in the law which allowed parties to employ All Women Shortlists (AWS), positive discrimination for ethnic minorities in the selection of candidates for elected office could be introduced by either passing a short Bill through the House of Commons exempting political parties from certain sections of the Race Relations Act, or by an amendment to future equalities legislation such as the Equality Bill now in the UK Parliament (Operation Black Vote, 2008). They go on to argue that no more than 2 per cent of Parliamentary seats need be considered for all ethnic minority shortlists at one General Election, and in this way "in less than 20 years, or four elections, Parliament would be transformed, and the use of all-BME [Black Minority Ethnic] shortlists could be stopped" (OBV 2008: 5) Alongside these structural measures, political parties must prioritise 'recruiting, retaining and promoting' people from ethnic minority backgrounds (OBV 2008: 5).

There are, however, a number of commentators who disagree with the principle of positive discrimination. All ethnic minority shortlists have been criticized by Sunder Katwala (2008) who questions their '…necessity and their potentially regressive effects on race politics'. Furthermore, Katwala argues that such shortlists could lead to a 'ceiling effect' by which it becomes harder for ethnic minorities to get selected in seats that have not been designated as an ethnic minority only short list. In their submission to the Speakers Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), Unlock Democracy expressed concern that ethnic minority only shortlists could lead to a

policy of 'ethnic faces for ethnic voters' which would be injurious to the cause of ethnic minority candidates (House of Commons 2009: 171).

In the absence of a legal change allowing parties to use ethnic minority shortlists, a number of Britain's major political parties have taken steps to increase the numbers of ethnic minority politicians within their ranks. In 2005, the Labour party offered selectors a shortlist comprised solely of black party members for the Brent South Parliamentary seat after Paul Boateng MP announced he was to stand down from the Commons at the 2005 General Election (Kavanagh and Butler 2005). However, the Labour party denied it was an 'all-black shortlist' with an unnamed spokesman claiming that 'This is just a coincidence. The decision was taken that it would not be an all-women shortlist but four ethnic minority candidates being selected was just a coincidence' (BBC 2005).

The Liberal Democrats created 'Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats' in 2001 to increase the involvement of ethnic minorities in the party. In 2006 the Liberal Democrats set up a £200,000 fund which women and ethnic minority candidates could access for their campaigns. Operation Black Vote (OBV) claim that only one ethnic minority candidate drew on these funds (OBV 2008). More recently, Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg MP has said in a speech to Liberal Democrat activists in Manchester that he will not rule out using all ethnic minority shortlists if necessary (Clegg 2008).

The Conservatives 'A-List', which many constituency parties were forced to select from, included a number of ethnic minority candidates, of which three had been selected at the time OBV wrote their report (OBV 2008). The Conservatives are also engaged in intensive mentoring activities to help potential ethnic minority candidates develop the skills necessary to be successful candidates (OBV 2008). OBV suggest that the Conservatives had considered going even further, introducing a rule that shortlists must include a woman and an ethnic minority candidate but that this was 'parked' because the Conservative party feared a legal challenge from a local Party.

2.3   Disability

The representation of disabled people in Britain's elected bodies has received much less attention than either the representation of women, or that of ethnic minorities. In part, as the Royal Association for Disability Rights (RADAR) suggest in their written submission to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation (House of Commons 2009), measurement of the number of disabled representatives is complicated by the fact that politicians may not always be open about their experiences of disability. Further to this, many impairments and conditions that fall under the Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability (see below) are not 'observable' and as such are difficult to count in the absence of an open acknowledgement from politicians themselves. The brief review below, therefore, draws primarily on evidence provided to the Speakers Conference by three organisations: RADAR, Scope, and Leonard Cheshire Disability.

Representation of disabled people: the current situation

Gauging the extent to which the proportion of disabled people in Britain is represented among Britain's elected representatives is complicated by the fact that estimates of the general disabled population vary. Using the Disability Discrimination

Act (DDA) definition of disability (which includes people with long-term ill-health, as well as those with mental health problems, physical, sensory and learning impairments), there are at least 11 million disabled people in Britain, around 20 per cent of the population (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005). Other, more restrictive, definitions of disability which count only those with more severe impairments, suggest that the proportion of disabled people in Britain is nearer to 10 per cent. Furthermore, according to the Department for Work and Pensions, 52 per cent of those who are defined under the DDA as having a disability, do not consider themselves to be 'disabled' (Department for Work and Pensions 2002).

Despite these difficulties, RADAR (House of Commons, 2009) point out that even on the more restricted estimates, which place the number of disabled people in Britain at around 10 per cent, a representative House of Commons would contain 65 disabled MPs, 'but disability organisations are not aware of numbers anywhere near 65' (House of Commons 2009). The disability charity, Scope, also note that 'disabled people make up approximately 20 per cent of the population but there are only a handful of self-identified disabled politicians within the House of Commons' (House of Commons 2009).

Two separate surveys of MPs asking about their experiences of mental health issues were conducted in 2006 and 2008 (Rethink 2007; APPG Mental Health 2008). From a self-selecting survey of 94 MPs, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health found that 19 per cent of MPs who responded to their survey said they had personal experience of a mental health problem (APPG Mental Health 2008). This figure is eight percentage points higher than that revealed by Rethink's survey of 74 MPs, conducted in 2006, which found that 11 per cent of respondents said they had 'experienced mental illness myself' (Rethink 2007). Both of these surveys need to be treated with caution as each involved a self-selecting sample and those who chose to answer the survey may not be representative of the population of MPs more broadly. By way of comparison, however, estimates of the prevalence of mental illness in the UK population as a whole vary from 17 per cent (Office of National Statistics, 2001) to 25 per cent (World Health Organisation 2001).

Barriers to increased representation of disabled people

The issues described above point towards two broad challenges for increasing the representation of disabled people in politics. Firstly there are the possible barriers that prevent disabled people from becoming elected politicians and secondly there may be barriers which prevent politicians with a disability from being open about this.

Internal, unpublished, research conducted by Scope in 2007-8, in conjunction with the three main parties in Westminster (referenced in House of Commons 2009), identified four main barriers that prevent disabled people from seeking selection as a candidate. These are: 'financial barriers' faced by candidates whose disability incurs extra costs over and above those faced by other candidates; the extent to which political parties at both the central and local level are prepared to meet the 'reasonable adjustments' of candidates; the lack of training and support offered to disabled people who might consider standing for election and to party members, staff and officials who are responsible for selection processes; and finally, the 'disconnect' that may exist between a political party's announcement of the intention to recruit more disabled candidates and the provision of resources and support to local parties to realise that aspiration.

Leonard Cheshire Disability's submission to the Speaker's Conference suggests that, despite the high numbers of disabled people who are involved in politically active groups and societies, these same people perceive a range of barriers which exclude them from seeking selection and standing for election (House of Commons 2009). These include a lack of information and outreach, particularly about the processes involved and the qualifications that are needed to stand; alongside a concern that their impairment may mean that they receive a negative response from selectors and voters. Leonard Cheshire Disability also suggest that the low numbers of openly disabled politicians itself contributes to a sense among disabled people that the political system is not welcoming to, or accepting of disabled politicians (House of Commons 2009).

Research into the barriers that prevent politicians with conditions or impairments from being open about them is scarce. RADAR argues that there is still 'a significant cultural barrier to being an openly disabled MP particularly where the impairment is more stigmatised as in the case of a mental health condition or HIV' (House of Commons 2009: 13). Looking in particular at the barriers that prevent MPs from talking about their personal experiences of mental health issues, the project conducted for the All Party Mental Health Group (APPG Mental Health 2008) included statements from MPs which revealed a number of barriers that prevented them from being open about their experiences. These include a general perception that mental health issues would be seen as a sign of weakness, the concern that being open about their experiences could lead to suspicions of incompetence, and a concern that coverage of any revelation by the press would negatively affect their chances of re-election.

Methods of increasing the proportion of disabled politicians in Britain's elected bodies

Proposals for removing the barriers that prevent disabled people from becoming elected politicians include: ensuring that the Equality Bill which is currently before Parliament makes explicit that protection from discrimination and the duty to make reasonable adjustments applies in relation to all elected assemblies; repealing Section 141 of the Mental Health Act, which states that a politician who is sectioned under the Act can be removed from office, which has been recommended in the final report of the Speakers Conference (House of Commons 2010); establishing an 'Access to Public Life' fund to support individuals with conditions or impairments to stand as prospective Parliamentary candidates, providing training and support to prospective candidates with disabilities to help them gain skills such as public speaking, dealing with constituents and working with the media; and training to local party selectors to ensure that party staff are aware of the issues and barriers facing people with impairments or conditions (House of Commons 2009).

Proposals for removing the cultural barriers that may prevent existing disabled politicians from being open about their disability include making it explicit that anti-discrimination legislation is applied to MPs, promoting role models that have overcome disability in politics and more Government support for outreach and leadership measures showing disabled people the different paths to leadership available (House of Commons 2009).

2.4   Sexual orientation

There is very little research into the levels of representation of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people in elected public office in the UK. What follows draws primarily on written evidence supplied to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation from campaigning organisations such as Stonewall and the Lesbian and Gay Foundation (House of Commons 2009).

Representation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people: the current situation

Identifying the extent to which the number of LGB politicians reflects the broader UK population is impossible for two reasons. Firstly, there is no agreed estimate of the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the population as a whole (Aspinall 2009). Secondly, it is impossible to accurately quantify the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people elected to public office in the UK because unless that politician chooses to 'out' themselves we cannot classify them as such. In the absence of standardised, confidential, equality monitoring, estimating the number of LGB politicians will continue to be problematic.

According to Stonewall's evidence to the Speaker's Conference, lesbian gay and bisexual people are under-represented in the House of Commons, with just 13 openly gay, lesbian and bisexual MPs (House of Commons 2009). Stonewall state that if 6 per cent of the UK population are lesbian gay or bisexual, then for the House of Commons to truly reflect the population there would be 39 lesbian gay and bisexual MPs, trebling the current number. In their evidence to the Speaker's Conference, the Lesbian and Gay Foundation suggest that there are 11 openly LGB MPs (House of Commons 2009).

Stonewall also argue that the under-representation of women in the House of Commons compounds the lack of lesbian MPs. There is currently only one lesbian MP representing an estimated 1.8 million lesbians in the UK population (House of Commons 2009).

Barriers to increased representation of LGB people in Britain's elected bodies

There is some evidence to suggest that perceptions of prejudice among party selectors can deter LGB from participating in politics. In a 2008 report, Stonewall argues that the current lack of LGB MPs undermines the confidence of LGB people that they might be successful if they stood for the House of Commons (Hunt and Dick 2008). According to research by YouGov conducted in 2007 as part of Stonewall's 2008 report, three in five LGB people think they would face barriers to selection to stand for Parliament in the Labour Party, half think they would face barriers to Parliamentary selection in the Liberal Democrats and nearly nine in ten think they would face barriers to Parliamentary selection in the Conservative Party. Even where respondents were themselves active supporters of a particular party, perceptions of prejudice remain, with YouGov's research revealing that seven in ten active supporters of the Conservative Party who are LGB felt that they would expect LGB people to face barriers to selection (Hunt and Dick 2008).

In their evidence to the Speaker's Conference, Lesbian and Gay Action argue that many LGB politicians choose to keep their sexuality private in order to avoid jeopardising their future chances of promotion, losing the support of the electorate or

being pigeonholed (House of Commons 2009). Moreover, they claim that because the 'Party faithful' who dominate selection meetings are generally older people, they are more likely to hold discriminatory views on LGB people (House of Commons 2009). The Lesbian and Gay Foundation suggest that because some media outlets 'perpetuate the belief that homosexuality is essentially deviant' it makes it harder for LGB people who are in the public eye, and that homophobia remains a serious barrier to gay people who aspire to being elected to public office (House of Commons 2009: 85).

Interestingly, there is some evidence that LGB people's perceptions of barriers to candidacy may not be shared by the wider public. In their evidence to the Speaker's Conference, Stonewall make reference to a further survey of the general public carried out for them by YouGov in 2006 which shows that nine in ten voters would be 'comfortable' if their MP were LGB, although half of the sample believed that LGB people were likely to conceal their sexuality in politics (Cowan, 2007). Despite this, Stonewall suggest that some LGB candidates still believe they will be undermined by their opponents on the basis of their sexuality, citing abuse directed at Ben Bradshaw MP in Exeter during the 1997 General Election campaign (House of Commons 2009).

Methods of increasing the proportion of LGB politicians

Evidence to the Speakers Conference offers a number of suggestions to overcome the barriers that prevent LGB people from being elected as politicians. Stonewall urge political parties to do more to attract and select LGB candidates, particularly in 'safe' seats, to address the current under-representation (House of Commons 2009).

Stonewall do not favour using positive discrimination through all LGB shortlists to address the lack of LGB MPs (House of Commons 2009). Instead, they argue that political parties should develop a 'pool' of LGB candidates whom they should offer mentoring and support.

LGBT Labour, the Labour Party's representative body for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender people now operates a fund called 'Dorothy's List' which provides modest funds to LGB Labour candidates. They also argue that any 'positive action' measures within the Equality Bill should cover LGB people too, in order to increase the number of lesbian and gay people in public life including the House of Commons.

The Lesbian and Gay Foundation have argued that political parties should have a spokesperson for LGB issues, and that the Government and all political parties should mount a joint campaign against homophobia (House of Commons 2009). They also argue that in London, the "LGB community and civic infrastructure is considerably more developed" and as a consequence current Government engagement with LGB people is unfocused and London-centric. Thus, LGB communities need more support in areas outside London.

2.5 Religion or belief

Since there is little published information on beliefs available, the discussion below focuses on religious representation.

Representation of different religions or beliefs: the current situation

Table 2.5 provides a breakdown of responses on religious affiliation in the 2001 Census.

There is very little published research on the religious or other beliefs of politicians in Britain to compare against the national estimates. In part, as with disability and sexual orientation, this is because there is no systematic, confidential system of equality monitoring which is applied to everyone who holds an elected role in Britain. Given this, unless politicians choose to openly profess their faith, building an estimate of the prevalence of different religious views among politicians remains problematic.

Some data does exist in relation to the number of Jewish MPs in the House of Commons. At the 2005 General Election, 26 Jewish MPs were elected; 11 Labour, 12 Conservative and three Liberal Democrat (Kavanagh and Butler 2005). This suggests that, in terms of the number of MPs who share their religious views, Jewish people are proportionately over-represented in the House of Commons.

No data on religious representation in the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Greater London Authority or European Parliament was found.

Table 2.5   Religious profile of the population of Britain

Religion	Great Britain (%)	England/Wales (%)	Scotland (%)
Christian	71.8	77.7	68.9
Muslim	2.8	3.2	0.9
Jewish	0.5	0.5	0.1
Buddhist	0.3	0.3	0.1
Hindu	1	1.2	0.1
Sikh	0.6	0.7	0.1
Other	0.3	0.3	0.6
None	15.1	16.1	29.1
Religion not stated	7.8	Not available	Not available

Source: Census 2001

Barriers to increased representation of different religions and beliefs in Britain's elected bodies

Literature on the barriers to religious diversity in elected institutions is lacking. However, in the course of their research, the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors' Taskforce held a series of nationwide events aimed at attracting and engaging aspirant women councillors. Of the 1,100 women attending these events, 48 per cent described themselves as Christian, a quarter were Muslims (25 per cent), 6 per cent were Hindus, 3 per cent were Sikhs and Judaism and Buddhism were both represented by 1 per cent of the sample. 9 per cent of attendees were of no faith (9 per cent), 5 per cent did not wish to disclose their religion and a further 3 per cent selected 'any other religion'. These figures suggest a great deal of religious diversity in potential local representatives.

The National Muslim Women's Advisory Groups reported in their submission to the Speaker's Conference that some Muslim councillors have claimed they were not

selected as Parliamentary Candidates because they did not fit the 'stereotype' of being white and middle class (House of Commons 2009). It is also suggested that Muslim women were undermined by 'poor networking, public speaking and political skills and a general lack of understanding' because they do not have mentors, especially mentors who are Muslim women, to help them overcome these barriers (House of Commons 2009: 107).

Methods of increasing the proportion of politicians with different religions and beliefs

In their evidence to the Speaker's Conference, Operation Black Vote argued that when political parties arrange their meetings they should give consideration to whether people of particular faiths may be put off attending if the venue serves alcohol (House of Commons 2009).

The Equality and Human Rights Commission recommended in their evidence to the Speaker's Conference that the UK Parliament itself should ensure prayer facilities cater for all faiths, as lack of prayer facilities may be a barrier to retention of non-Christian politicians (House of Commons 2009).

The National Muslim Women's Advisory Group reported to the Speaker's Conference that they are running a 'Civic skills project' called 'Make your Mark, Play your Part' which aims to recruit thirty Muslim women from around the UK and help them to become more involved in civic life (House of Commons 2009).

The 2009 report of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors' Taskforce recommended that all political parties gather information and produce a database of candidates standing for local election by religion, as well as gender and race.

2.6 Age

Representation of younger and older people: the current situation

As table 2.6 shows, most MPs are aged 45 and above, and this is true across political parties.

Figure A2.1 shows the median age of members of the House of Commons at general elections since 1951. It shows that, apart from a short-term fluctuation in the median age of Liberal Democrat MPs, the median age of the House of Commons has remained almost constant since 1951. For example, after the 2001 election, the median age of Conservative MPs was one year older than in 1951, and the median age for Labour MPs was two years younger (Tetteh 2008). There are no historical data on the age profile of MSPs, AMs, GLA members or MEPs.

The stasis of the national and regional polities in terms of age is particularly interesting in the context of current debates about youth and political engagement. According to Sloam (2007) the average young person does not trust the main political institutions, does not belong to a political party and does not vote. Sloam argues that it is partly the ageing of party memberships that has contributed to this state of affairs. Contrary to the belief that politics is irrelevant for young people, Sloam and colleagues (Sloam 2007; Kisby and Sloam 2009) argue that young

people are engaged in politics. For example, the number of students taking political science 'A' Levels increased by 24 per cent between 2003 and 2008, and the number taking political science undergraduate degrees increased 69 per cent in the same time period (Kisby and Sloam 2009). This suggests that youth disengagement is not a significant barrier to the increased representation of younger people among politicians.

Table 2.6   MPs, by age group, July 2007

Age Group	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP/PC	Other	All	Share of total (%)
25-29	-	-	2	-	-	2	0.3
30-34	-	2	3	-	-	5	0.8
35-39	17	16	5	3	1	42	6.5
40-44	27	25	12	-	1	65	10.1
45-49	35	52	12	2	5	106	16.4
50-54	43	67	12	3	4	129	20
55-59	28	91	5	1	6	131	20.3
60-64	24	57	9	-	3	93	14.4
65-69	19	28	3	-	2	52	8
70-74	1	9	-	-	3	13	2
75-79	1	5	-	-	-	6	0.9
80-84	-	1	-	-	1	2	0.3

Adapted from Tetteh (2008)

Figure 2.1   Median age of MPs at elections, 1951 – 2005
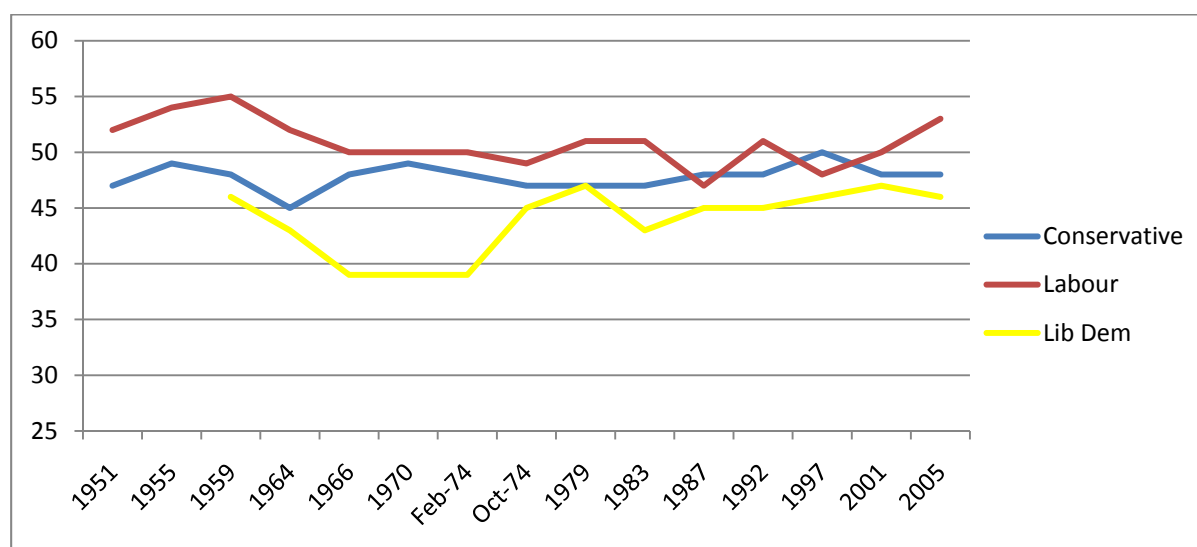
Source: Adapted from Tetteh, 2008

Barriers to increased representation of younger people in Britain's elected bodies

In their submission to the Speakers' Conference on Parliamentary Representation, the UK youth parliament made reference to a poll of its members which showed that 87 per cent of them felt it was important that there were more MPs elected under the age of 30 (House of Commons 2009). They argued that 'young people make up a very large percentage of the UK's population and this needs to be reflected by having young MPs in Westminster'.

Methods of increasing the proportion of politicians from different age groups

Citizenship education became a compulsory part of the national curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 in 2002. The aim of this change was to improve young people's level of involvement in public life and affairs (Kisby and Sloam 2009). It is too early to tell the resultant effect of citizenship education on the age of politicians.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 reduced the age of candidacy at which a person can stand to be elected to any public office from 21 years to 18 years of age. There is no available evidence as to whether the median age of Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) has fallen as a result of this reform. The British Youth Council and the UK Youth Parliament are also encouraging young people to engage in politics and gain experience in debate and decision making.

2.7   Socio-economic and occupational groups

Much of the research into the representation of different socio-economic groups in political office has been focussed on the under-representation of the 'working class' electorate in Westminster and the associated over-representation of the more socially privileged groups in society (see for example Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Alongside this, analysis of the occupational backgrounds of politicians supports the view that elected politics in Britain have undergone a process of professionalisation, with a class of 'career politicians' being drawn from a shrinking range of occupations (Keating and Cairney 2006; Cairney 2007).

It should be noted here that there are some methodological issues involving the data surrounding occupational background. As Norris and Lovenduski (1995) note, there are two problems when classifying the occupational background of politicians. Firstly, there is a lack of detailed information on the subject. Secondly, it is difficult to study occupational background over time because there is a lack of consistent categorisation over different periods. In the analysis below, we reflect the categories deployed by the various authors in their research.

Socio-economic and occupational backgrounds: The current situation

In general, those in manual employment are under-represented across Britain's elected bodies. Figures presented in Kavanagh and Butler (2005) show that by 2005, the proportion of elected MPs from manual occupation backgrounds in the three main parties – Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats – was just 6 per cent. Taken together, these three parties represent over 95 per cent of MPs. The proportion of the population in manual occupations at this time was 36.5 per cent (National Readership Survey 2006).

In contrast, other sections of society are proportionally very well represented in the House of Commons/Westminster. Cracknell's study of the 2005 election found that 39 per cent of members elected for the three main parties had held 'professional' occupations (barristers, solicitors, doctor, civil service/local government, school teacher or university teacher) (Cracknell, 2005). By comparison, the proportion of the population who come from households where the highest earner is employed in a professional or management capacity is estimated to be 25.9 per cent (National Readership Survey 2006).

In the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election, 56 per cent of Labour and Conservative MSPs came from a professional occupational background, while only two per cent of Labour MSPs and six per cent of Conservative MSPs were 'blue-collar or junior white collar' workers (Keating and Cairney 2006). No Scottish National Party or Liberal Democrat MSPs in 2003 was found to belong to this latter category. This has led Keating and Cairney to conclude that 'devolution has accelerated the trend towards professional middle-class leadership' (Keating and Cairney 2006: 56) and thus reduced the pathways into politics for people in 'blue collar or junior white collar' occupations in Scotland.

Changes in the socio-economic backgrounds of politicians over time

The proportion of politicians from 'working class' occupational backgrounds appears to have decreased over time. Drawing on data from a range of sources, Norris and Lovenduski (1995) show that, while the proportion of Conservative MPs whose 'main occupational background' could be classified as 'worker' declined from around 4 per cent to around 1 per cent in the period 1918-1992, the proportion of Labour MPs who came from a working class occupations fell from 72 per cent in 1918, to 22 per cent by 1992 (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995).

By 1992, the proportion of the working population employed in manual occupations was 48 per cent (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). However, the number of MPs from these backgrounds was just less than ten per cent of the total (63 out of 651 MPs). There is also evidence to suggest that the proportion of MPs from a 'working class' occupational background is continuing to fall, representing just six per cent of all MPs across the three main political parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat) in the 2005 in-take (Butler and Kavanagh, 2005).

These figures lend support the widely held view that elected politicians – like other Western political elites – is dominated by members drawn from the socially privileged in society, who are more likely to be from professional backgrounds (See for example, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981, cited in Norris and Lovenduski, 1995).

While the proportion of Conservative representatives, from working backgrounds has always been low, changes in the number of Labour politicians from these backgrounds are significant (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Perhaps not surprising given the party's traditional links with workers, a far higher proportion of MPs from manual occupational backgrounds represent the Labour Party. For example, between 1918 and 1935, 72 per cent of Labour MPs came from what Norris and Lovenduski (1995) classify as 'rank-and-file workers'. Historically, therefore, representation of manual occupations has been highest when Labour has controlled a majority of seats at Westminster. However, Norris and Lovenduski have shown that Labour has become less representative of manual workers over the last 90 years. In 1950, the proportion of Labour MPs from 'working class' backgrounds fell below 40 per cent for the first time. By 1992, only 22 per cent were working class and at the last general election this had fallen to 10 per cent (Cracknell 2005). See also Kavanagh and Butler (2005) for further analysis of the proportions of MPs from the three main parties from various occupational backgrounds.

Barriers to the increased representation of people in manual occupations in Britain's elected bodies

Changes in the makeup of society have been cited as contributing to the fall in the proportion of MPs from manual occupational backgrounds. Price and Bain (1988) concluded that around 70-75 per cent of the workforce held manual occupations between 1911 and 1931. By 1991, this had fallen to 48 per cent. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) suggest that this overall demographic shift may have affected the proportion of MPs from this background. Even in this context, however, representation of people from manual working backgrounds has consistently been at a level below the proportion of the broader population they comprise.

Across the political spectrum, the barriers facing candidates can be divided into two broad categories: supply barriers, which affect the number of potential candidates who come forward from an under-represented group, and; demand barriers, which are created by the beliefs and attitudes towards 'working-class' candidates of those who select political candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Indeed, these barrier categories could be applied across all equality areas and under-represented groups. There have been a number of arguments advanced that can be described as 'demand-side'. Ranney (1965) argued that party selectors across all the main parties fail to select working class candidates from manual employment backgrounds due to a sense of social deference. Similarly, Bochel and Denver (1983) suggested that party members see manual workers as less articulate and capable than middle class potential candidates. Greenwood (1988) has argued that the attempts made by Conservative Central Office to encourage working class trade union candidates to stand for election failed due to hostility to the idea from local party members.

While these 'demand side' explanations offer a partial explanation for the persistent under-representation of manual occupations in Britain's elected bodies, Norris and Lovenduski (1995) suggest that, in the case of occupational background, supply factors are considerably more important. In support of this argument, they cite evidence that the socio-economic status of MPs, candidates and applicants is 'almost identical'. In 1992, for example, 99 per cent of Conservative MPs had previously had non-manual occupations, compared with 98 per cent of candidates and 98 per cent of applicants. The figures quoted for Labour are only a slightly lower: 87 per cent of MPs, 94 per cent of candidates and 90 per cent of applicants. In contrast, non-manual workers constituted only 36 per cent of the population. This evidence suggests that the most important factor underlying the under-representation of manual workers in the House of Commons is the low level of manual workers being selected to stand for election to the House of Commons by political parties.

For Norris and Lovenduski (1995), under-representation is a function of the very low numbers of manual workers applying for candidature; it is more than a prejudicial selection process. They argue that professional occupations – such as barrister, lawyer or journalist – provide the prospective candidates with the best means to win candidacy and therefore election. They cite 'flexibility over time, generous vacations, interrupted career paths, professional independence, financial security, public networks, social status, policy experience and technical skills useful in political life' as enabling Parliamentary careers. Professional occupations provide the greatest opportunities to develop the skills and contacts which are often essential to politics. They also allow potential candidates to mitigate the career risks and financial costs which are associated with political candidacy.

Cairney (2007) however, has argued that the explanation offered by Norris and Lovenduski requires greater refinement. He agrees that certain professions are frequently stepping stones on a pathway to political equality, but contends that the category of 'brokerage occupations' or 'politics-facilitating occupations' is too broad. Cairney suggests that while jobs such as law or teaching should still be considered advantageous to aspiring politicians, these should not be lumped together with jobs in industries such as public relations and journalism, or those in trade unions or interest groups, which relate more directly to politics. He terms this second category 'instrumental occupations', since they play a more active role in preparing a candidate for the political environment. Cairney (2007) concludes that in recent years, the rise of the career politician has coincided with an increasing emphasis on instrumental politics-facilitating careers – such as party workers, PR and the media and a decline in the importance of brokerage occupations.

Methods of increasing the representation of people from manual occupational backgrounds

There is little information in the literature of any formal attempts made by political parties to address the under-representation of manual occupational groups. It is interesting to note that the Labour party, which has a much stronger tradition of fielding candidates from manual occupations, has seen the proportion of candidates from this group fall at a much greater rate than the proportion of manual workers in the general population. Yet we found no evidence that the Party has put any formal structure in place to remedy this trend.

Norris and Lovenduski (1995) cite two examples of efforts by the Conservative parties in the 1940s to broaden the recruitment of candidates. Firstly, the Conservative Trade Unionists' Organisation was set up in 1947, to encourage more working class members to join the party. Second, the Maxwell Fyfe Report of 1948-9 led to control of electoral funding being exercised by the central party rather than the candidate, with the intention of increasing diversity amongst Conservative candidates.

There were also hopes that devolved institutions – such as the Scottish Parliament – would be more representative in terms of occupational background. However, while women are better represented in the Scottish Parliament, Keating and Cairney (2005) state that in terms of occupational representation the legislature is no more representative than the House of Commons, and indeed may even be less representative (see above).

In their evidence to the Speaker's Commission, Unison state that, "Trade Unions are the main route through which working class people receive the support and mentoring that is necessary to become a Member of Parliament." They argue that Government should increase opportunities for mentoring by MPs and provide training to demystify the political process whilst also using the Parliament website to give clearer information to describe the stages of the legislative process, using "plain English" (House of Commons 2009). In their evidence to the Speaker's Commission, the Young Foundation recommended using local role models to increase aspirations of young people from working class backgrounds, along with individual mentoring (House of Commons 2009). The issue of spending by candidates seeking nomination from their Party to stand for the House of Commons was raised by the Fawcett Society in their evidence. They recommended a spending cap for selections,

so there would be a level playing field (House of Commons 2009). However, it should be noted that Trade Unions do already provide significant financial support to members who are seeking nomination as a Labour party candidate, and have their own lists of preferred candidates, although the data would suggest such processes have had minimal effect on the number of working class Labour MPs elected.

3.   Methodology

This research project was carried out in 2009. It involved two separate elements which were designed to work together in order to build a picture of the key steps that elected politicians take on their pathway into politics:

- **Web extraction data** was used to ensure that the information used is readily available about Britain's politicians.

- **An online survey** was used to supplement the online data and provide, for those aspects of the pathway for which politicians tend not to offer information in their online biographies, an account of the experiences of the politicians who completed the online survey.

3.1   The web data extraction

The web extraction involved using a range of reputable online sources to extract and categorise publicly-available biographical information about each of the 911 elected politicians in Britain's national and regional representative bodies (the House of Commons, the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Assembly). The online sources used were:

- Dods Online – which features standardised information on each politician, alongside a short authorised biography of each
- Politicians' own website
- *BBC* and *Guardian* profiles
- Parliament homepages

There are 911 politicians representing Britain in its national and regional elected institutions. These include:

- 628 Members of the House of Commons (MPs)
- 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)
- 69 UK Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)
- 60 Members of the Welsh Assembly (Welsh AMs)
- 26 Greater London Assembly Members (GLA Members)

N.B. The above figures total 912 because one politician holds two of the above roles. The elected representatives are split accordingly, by political parties

- 261 Conservatives
- 445 Labour
- 99 Liberal Democrats
- 55 Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP)
- 18 Plaid Cymru
- 33 Others (Green Party, UK Independence Party, British National Party, Independent MPs)

3.2   The online survey data

For clarity, the findings, results and analysis from the online survey are presented in grey text-boxes throughout this report in order to distinguish these findings from those of the web data extraction.

All 911 representatives were invited to take part in an online survey (lasting approximately 15 minutes) to tell us about their pathway into politics. This report presents results from the 113 respondents, including:

- 50 MPs
- 28 MSPs
- 11 MEPs
- 13 Welsh AMs
- 11 GLA members

- 50 Labour
- 25 Conservative
- 18 Liberal Democrat
- 20 Other

The survey included closed questions asking respondents to report which of a range of statements about their past applied to them, and open-ended questions inviting respondents to expand upon their experiences and describe various aspects of their 'pathways' into politics.

The survey was conducted online between 20th July and 23rd October 2009. The questionnaire is included as appendix 5 to this annex.

3.3   Limitations of the two data sets

Each of the methods has limitations to its usefulness to building a robust picture of the backgrounds of Britain's politicians.

Web extraction data

Online resources such as Dods offer a fairly uniform set of "basic" information on Britain's elected politicians, providing us with key biographical information including: work history; educational history; electoral history; date; place of birth and club memberships. Where this data is available for all, or almost all, politicians, it can be said with a reasonable level of confidence that the results are a true representation of the profile of elected politicians at the time the research was conducted.

In other areas of interest, however, data is available in some politicians' biographical data and not others. For example, just under 50 per cent of politicians' online biographical data includes information on the occupations of their parents. Similarly, some mention Trade Union membership, while others do not mention Trade Unions at all. Where online data is incomplete in this way we are unable to estimate the likely incidence of a characteristic or experience among the population as a whole. This is because, the fact that a politician's biographical data does not mention a

particular factor does not necessarily mean that they did not in fact take that action, possess that characteristic, or have that particular experience.

Furthermore, some of the 'steps' along the pathway may be more likely to be mentioned in the biographies of some types of politicians than others, according to their party membership and its associated preferences regarding the information that they publicise.

As a result of the 'patchiness' of this data, the web extraction data tells us the **minimum** proportion of politicians who had a particular experience. So, for example, at least 20 per cent engaged in student politics (because this is mentioned in their online biographies), but it cannot be assumed that the remaining 80 per cent did not engage in student politics, just that information on the subject is not included in their online biographical information.

Where the data is incomplete in this way, it is reported as "at least XX per cent of politicians did XX".

This caveat is particularly important when considering the prevalence of particular characteristics such as ethnicity or sexual orientation. For example, while some politicians' biographies declare their identification with an ethnic minority or LGB status, very few state that they are 'White British' or heterosexual. Therefore the report states the minimum number of politicians whose online biographical information identifies them as belonging to an ethnic minority or as LGB. It is not possible to determine the accurate number of politicians who identify themselves as 'White British' or heterosexual. Similarly, it is possible only to report the minimum number of politicians who have a long term illness or disability.

Online survey data

The survey is, necessarily, self selecting. As such the findings represent only the experiences and opinions of the 113 politicians who chose to take the survey, and cannot be treated as a robust account of the whole population of Britain's regionally and nationally elected politicians.

Given the opt-in nature of the survey, there are some important limitations that should be borne in mind:

1. The sample is self selecting. It is likely that the 113 participants represent, for whatever reason, those who are most keen to take part.

2. 113 surveys were completed; this represents just over 12 per cent of the whole population of elected politicians in Britain's nationally and regionally elected bodies. Statistically this is a small sample size in terms of the actual numbers and the proportion of politicians. As such, the total number of responses is reported alongside the percentages wherever we report findings from the online survey.

The survey results should, therefore be interpreted with considerable caution because of the small sample size and potential biased nature. However, they do offer additional insight into the pathways into elected office beyond what is available on online biographies.

3.4 How the datasets work together

For a number of questions, we have data from both datasets which complement each other in that:

- The web extraction data can tell us the minimum number of politicians who did X. This constitutes the lowest possible number of actual occurrences.

- The survey data provides the actual reported incidence within the sample of politicians who completed the survey.

Alongside the statistics from the two datasets, we have also used politicians' responses to the open question within the online survey to add colour and depth to the findings where applicable.

3.5 Reporting the data

Where possible we have attempted to maintain comparability between the two approaches, so that the results can be compared and interpreted together. Appendix 1 sets out the areas on which we collected data in each of the two approaches.

To avoid potentially identifying the source of responses to the open survey questions, quotations are only noted by gender of respondent, and any identifying information within the quotation has been removed.

For the purposes of the analysis of the socio-economic background in which politicians grew up, we have use the National Readership Survey Socio-Economic Grading (SEG) system – commonly known as the A to E system – which classifies households according to the profession of the head of household or principal wage earner (NRS 2006). The broad groups are shown in Table 3.1.

In order to develop a picture of the socio-economic profile of politician's family backgrounds, we used the job-by-job classifications offered in the Market Research Society (MRS) code-book (Market Research Society 2002) to classify the occupation of each politician's highest earning parent.

Where the description of a parent's career was generic – for example 'civil servant' – this has been classified with the lowest possible grade so as not to overestimate the incidence of the higher professions. In this example, a senior civil servant, such as a Permanent Secretary, would be classified in the highest socio-economic grouping (A). However, fewer senior civil servants fall into B and C1 categories.

Table 3.1   Classifications of socio-economic groupings

Classification	Title	Definition	Per cent of the population (approx.)
A	Higher professional	Professional people, senior managers in business or commerce, or top civil servants or military service people	3
B	Professional or management	Middle management executives in large organisations with appropriate qualifications. This classification also includes top management or owners of smaller business concerns, educational and service organisations	20
C1	Lower management or clerical	Junior management, owners of small establishments, other non-manual positions	28
C2	Skilled manual	All skilled manual workers and manual workers with responsibility for other people	21
D	Semi-skilled/ unskilled manual	All semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, apprentices and trainees to skilled workers	18
E	Those at lowest level of subsistence	All those entirely dependent on the state long-term (i.e. for more than six months), through sickness, unemployment, or other reasons. This groups includes casual workers without a regular income and retired people who do not have a private pension	10

Source: NRS 2006

4. Who are Britain's elected politicians?

This section uses data from the web data extraction and online survey to develop a picture of the demographic characteristics of Britain's politicians.

Key findings:

- 38 per cent of Britain's politicians were born between 1950 and 1959.

- 75 per cent of Britain's representatives are male; 25 per cent are female.

- In comparison to the population as a whole, women are under-represented in all elected bodies. The body which comes closest to an equal representation of women is the Welsh Assembly, where 47 per cent of Assembly members are female.

- The picture is similar across Britain's political parties, where male politicians are overrepresented in each of the parties.

- Female politicians were much more likely to have been elected in the 1990s or 2000s than in the preceding decades.

- Only three per cent of Britain's politicians come from an ethnic minority background.

- Of the 113 politicians who completed the online survey, 12 reported that they have a long-term limiting illness or disability.

- Of these 12, nine reported having a long-term limiting illness or disability at the time of their first election to a national or regional body.

- 15 (just under two per cent) of the 911 politicians in the web data extraction are described as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual in their online biographical data.

- 18 per cent of Britain's politicians provided information on their religion or belief on their online biography.

4.1 Age

Table 4.1 sets out the age profile of Britain's politicians. It shows that the largest numbers of politicians are aged between 50 and 59 years old; with at least 38 per cent of elected representatives having been born between 1950 and 1959.

Table 4.1   Age of Britain's national and regional elected politicians

Decade of birth	Number of politicians	Percentage of politicians
1930-39	36	4
1940-49	237	26
1950-59	347	38
1960-69	204	22
1970-79	62	7
1980-89	5	1
No information found	20	2
Total	**911**	**100**

4.2   Gender

The web extraction data revealed a significantly higher number of male politicians than female politicians within the elected bodies of Great Britain; 75 per cent are male, while only 25 per cent are female.

As shown in table 4.2, with the exception of Plaid Cymru, more than two thirds of politicians representing each of Britain's main political parties are male.

Table 4.2   Gender of Britain's national and regional elected politicians, by party

Party	Male (%)	Female (%)
Labour (n=445)	68	32
Conservative (n=261)	88	12
Liberal Democrat (n=99)	78	22
SNP (n=55)	75	25
Plaid Cymru (n=18)	56	44
Other (Green, UKIP, BNP, Independent) (n=33)	76	24

Table 4.3 illustrates the gender of politicians by elected institution. It shows that, of Britain's national and regional bodies, the House of Commons is the body which features the greatest gender imbalance; only 20 per cent of MPs are female. The Welsh Assembly comes closest to be numerically representative of the population in terms of gender, with 47 per cent of Welsh Assembly Members being female.
As discussed earlier, the higher proportion of women politicians in the Welsh Assembly, and to a lesser extent the Scottish Parliament, is likely to be the result of the use of 'equality guarantees' deployed by the main parties in the 1999 and 2003 elections.

Table 4.3   Gender of Britain's national and regional elected politicians, by elected institution

Representative type	Male (%)	Female (%)
MPs (n=628)	80	20
MSPs (n=129)	65	35
Welsh AMs (n=60)	53	47
GLA Members (n=26)	69	31
MEPs (n=69)	68	32

Table 4.4 shows the gender of politicians by date of election.

Table 4.4   Gender of Britain's elected politicians, by date of election

Date of election	Male (%)	Female (%)
1950-1979	97	3
1980-1989	87	13
1990-1999	70	30
2000+	73	27

Notes: n=911

Examining the decade in which politicians were first elected to a regional or national body reveals a sharp rise in the number of female politicians who were elected during the 1990s compared to earlier decades. This reflects the significant cohort of female MPs elected in 1997, and the impact of the inception of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In both the web data extraction and the online survey, no politicians identified themselves as being transgender.

4.3   Ethnicity

Biographical information about Britain's elected politicians rarely includes a clear statement of ethnicity. In particular, many politicians who are from a white background do not offer a clear indication as to whether they consider themselves to be 'White British', rather than a member of another white ethnic group such as 'White Irish'. As such, the web data extraction has only reported instances where a politician's biographical data contains an unambiguous written indication that the politician is a member of an ethnic minority. Therefore, the data presented on ethnicity should be treated with caution as there is likely to be a higher number of politicians who are from an ethnic minority background.

Of the 911 politicians in the web extraction sample, only 24 (3 per cent) included a statement of their ethnic background, If these, 21 are male and three are female. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the UK population from an ethnic minority is 7.9 per cent (ONS 2003). Tables 4.5 and 4.6 present the figures on politicians indicating an ethnic minority background by political party and elected institution respectively.

Table 4.5   Politicians indicating ethnic minority background, by party

Party	No. of ethnic minority members	Percentage of total number of members
Labour (n=445)	17	4
Conservative (n=261)	6	2
Liberal Democrat (n=99)	0	0
SNP (n=55)	0	0
Plaid Cymru (n=18)	1	6
Other (Green, UKIP, BNP, Independent) (n=33)	0	0

Table 4.6   Politicians indicating ethnic minority background, by institution

Elected institution	No. of ethnic minority members	Percentage of total number of members
House of Commons (n=628)	15	2
European Parliament (n=69)	4	6
Greater London Assembly (n=26)	4	15
Scottish Parliament (n=129)	0	0
Welsh Assembly (n=60)	1	2

The Labour party has the highest number of ethnic minority politicians, but this translates to just 4 per cent of the total number of Labour party politicians. In contrast, Plaid Cymru has just one ethnic minority member, and there are no ethnic minority politicians that are members of the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Liberal Democrats or other parties. With regard to the elected institutions, the House of Commons has the largest number of ethnic minority politicians at 15 (2 per cent of the total), but the Greater London Assembly has the highest percentage (4 members, or 15 per cent of the total).

4.4   Disability

Online biographies rarely include information about disability. As discussed in section 2.3, this can be partly attributed to a political culture of non-disclosure: politicians may be concerned that being open about impairments may incur negative responses from selectors and voters. Therefore, the web extraction data should not be thought of as a reliable estimate of the number of politicians who are disabled.

Box 4.1: Survey results for disability

Of the 113 politicians who completed the online survey, 12 stated that they have a disability. Of these 12, nine said they had this disability at the time of their first election.

4.5   Sexual orientation

Using online biographical information to access data about the sexual orientation of Britain's politicians poses a particular methodological problem. It has been possible to identify a number of politicians whose biographies describe them as being lesbian, gay or bisexual. However, not a single biography explicitly stated that a politician was heterosexual. As such, this report provides the number of LGB politicians within the data set who have chosen to identify their sexual orientation publicly; it cannot presume the remaining politicians are heterosexual.

Across the web extraction sample, 15 politicians (just under two per cent) were described as openly LGB.

Box 4.2: Survey results for sexual orientation

Of the politicians who completed the online survey, 89 (79 per cent) stated that they are heterosexual. One identified as gay/lesbian and one as bisexual. The remaining 22 did not answer the question.

4.6   Religion or belief

Politicians' online biographical data rarely makes mention of their religion or belief, with no information found for 82 per cent of politicians. Table 4.7 shows the breakdown of religion or belief within the web data extraction:

Table 4.7   Politicians' religion or belief data and religious profile of the UK population

Religion or belief groupings	Minimum number of politicians	Minimum percentage of politicians	UK census data
Christian	144	16	71.6
Jewish	7	1	0.5
Muslim	4	0.4	2.7
Hindu	1	0.1	1
Sikh	1	0.1	0.6
Atheist/Humanist	4	0.4	n/a
No information found	750	82	n/a

Notes: 'Christian' category includes Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Church of Scotland

Box 4.3: Online survey results for politicians' religion or belief

Of the 113 politicians who completed the questionnaire, 57 (50 per cent) described themselves as Christian. A further 27 (24 per cent) said that they have no religion or belief. 4 respondents answered 'don't know' and 23 (20 per cent) selected 'prefer not to answer'. None of the respondents described themselves as a member of any religious grouping other than Christian.

5.   Early life

The web data extraction contains information on the parental occupations of 48 per cent of Britain's politicians; while limited, this dataset offers a way to estimate the socio-economic background of just under half of Britain's politicians. However, it cannot effectively capture the subjective events that may influence a politician's early years, such as the political engagement of family members. In order to provide some insight into the experience that features on the various pathways into politics, this chapter draws on data gathered in the online survey of 113 elected representatives. As previously noted, this data must be treated with caution as the survey respondents are a self-selecting sample rather than a random sample, and thus cannot be considered representative of all elected politicians.

Key findings

- The web data extraction showed that, for at least 24 per cent of politicians, the occupation of their highest-earning parents was in the top two socio-economic groupings. The online survey revealed that 40 percent of respondents had a highest earning parent in an occupation that would place them in the top two socio-economic groupings.

- Politicians from all parties had parental households categorised as higher socio-economic groups. This is most prevalent among Conservative politicians and least apparent among Labour politicians.

- Just over half of survey respondents (58 out of 113) had politically active family members or family friends when growing up. 60 out of the 113 politicians who completed the online survey had come into contact with a politician or political party by the age of 18.

- 70 of the 113 survey respondents had joined a political party by the age of 24.

5.1   Socio-economic background of politicians

This data is taken from the parental occupations reported from the web extraction sources. Where this data contained information about a politician's parents' occupation, this took the form of a statement about their main career – for example, 'civil servant' – rather than a full career history. As such, it is possible that these do not accurately state the occupation that parents were employed in while the politician was growing up (for example, they may have embarked upon their 'main career' later in life and been employed in a different occupation or level of seniority earlier in the politician's life). Despite this limitation, the data is of great interest as an indication of the socio-economic backgrounds of Britain's politicians.

By classifying occupations with the lowest grade where there was any uncertainty, we have sought to ensure that our findings do not overstate the bias towards the 'higher' social grades amongst Britain's politicians. However, this does pose a risk in that the results may underestimate the number of politicians who were in the higher socio-economic groups (A or B) prior to election, and overestimate the proportion who were in the middle or lower grades (C1, C2, D, E).

It is possible that politicians from some socio-economic backgrounds may have been more likely than others to detail their parents' occupation in their online biographies. For example, a politician who comes from a working class household may have more reason to highlight this aspect of their biography, than a politician whose parents were employed in a profession.

Taking the caveats above into account, it is striking that 50 per cent of politician's family backgrounds were classified as A or B grade.

Table 5.1   Socioeconomic classification of politicians' family background, from web extraction data

Socio economic grade	Percentage *
AB	50
C1	19
C2	22
DE	8

Notes: *Column does not add up to 100 due to rounding. N=433

Box 5.1: Socioeconomic classification of politicians' family background, from online survey
Table 5.2   Social classification of politicians' family background

Category	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses
AB	47	42
C1	18	16
C2	14	12
DE	8	7
No response/prefer not to answer	26	23

Source: Q. Please describe your parent's main occupation. N=113. Brand Democracy categorisation of chief income earner's occupation using MRS codebook

5.2   Parents' socioeconomic classification by political party

The proportion of politicians for whom no information was found on parental occupation varies greatly across parties and elected institutions. As such, it is difficult to make comparisons across the parties. Table 5.3 shows the socioeconomic classification of politician's parents by political party, but excludes all those cases for whom no information was found about parental occupation.

As with the data presented in table 5.2, above, these figures must be treated as indicative estimates. Nevertheless, it is clear that politicians from all political parties have parents that are disproportionately drawn from the two highest socio-economic groupings.

Table 5.3   Socioeconomic classification of politicians' parents by political party, from web extraction data

Party	Percentage of members for whom data was available	A or B (%)	C1 or C2 (%)	D or E (%)
Labour	50	36	50	14
Conservative	48	71	28	1
Liberal Democrat	49	53	47	0
SNP	38	57	33	10
Plaid Cymru	56	80	10	10
Other (Green, UKIP, BNP, Independent)	18	50	17	33

Notes: N=433

5.3   Interaction with politically active people

Online biographies do not capture the extent to which a politician's home life during the time they were growing up involved contact with politics. Thus, the online survey asked politicians about the level of political engagement that they experienced during their childhood and adolescence. Box 5.2 sets out the findings. Overall, the data suggests that most politicians had considerable degree of exposure to politics during their youth.

Box 5.2: Online survey findings relating to politicians exposure to politics, campaigning and civic participation while growing up
The survey asked respondents about their experiences growing up. In total, 70 (62 per cent) of those who completed the survey selected at least one of the statements below: A member of my family was an elected politician in the past two generations At least one of my parents was active in party politics At least one of my parents took part in non partisan campaigns (e.g. for a charity or issue campaign) At least one of my parents was a member of a locally active organisation (such as the Women's Institute, a Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, a local branch of a charity) At least one of my parents held a public appointment (an appointment to the board of a public body such as a museum, an NHS Trust, a regulatory body) At least one of my parents was a member of a union At least one of my parents held office in a union When I was growing up, I had family friends who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues When I was growing up, I had family members who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues

We next separate these response options into two types of experience:

- Exposure to politics or political campaigning when growing up

- Exposure to Trade Unionism, locally active clubs are societies and other forms of civic participation.

Box 5.3: Exposure to politics or political campaigning

The survey asked politicians to state which, if any, of a range of statements about their exposure to political activities growing up applied to them. Just over half (58) said that, growing up, they had family members or family friends who were engaged in party politics or political campaigning in one of the ways detailed in fig. 5.4. Eighteen had a family member who had been an elected politician in the past two generations.

Table 5.4   Contact with politicians in early life

Question	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses
When I was growing up, I had family friends who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues	31	27
When I was growing up, I had family members who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues	27	24
At least one of my parents took part on non partisan campaigns (e.g. for a charity or issue campaign)	26	23
At least one of my parents was active in party politics	25	22
A member of my family was an elected politician in the past two generations	18	16

Source: Online survey. Q: Thinking about when you were growing up, please say which of the following applies to you? N=113 (75 selected one or more of the above statements)

Box 5.4: Relationship between family engagement in politics and becoming a politician

In their responses to the open-ended questions, politicians offer an insight into how their family's engagement with politics led to their own engagement from an early age:

> Accompanying my father when he was campaigning as a General Election candidate (not for the Party I eventually joined). (Female)

> Both of my parents were involved in local activities (both political and community) and MPs (occasionally) and Councillors (regularly) visited our house. (Male)

> My mother was a local councillor, and as a result I was involved in the local party and in her election campaign when she stood for Parliament when I was 17. (Female)

Box 5.5: Exposure to Trade Unionism, locally active clubs are societies and other forms of civic participation

Table 5.5 shows that of the 113 who responded to the survey, 38 had a parent that was a member of a union, and a similar proportion had a parent who was a member of a locally active organisation.

Table 5.5   Political activity of politicians' parents

Statement	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses
At least one of my parents was a member of a union	38	34
At least one of my parents was a member of a locally active organisation (such as the Women's Institute, a Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, a local branch of a charity)	36	32
At least one of my parents held office in a union	9	8
At least one of my parents held a public appointment (an appointment to the board of a public body such as a museum, an NHS Trust, a regulatory body)	6	5

Source: Thinking about when you were growing up, please say which of the following applies to you? N=76. Respondents could agree with more than one of the statements.

5.4   First contact with a politician or political party

Box 5.6: Age of first contact with a politician or political party

60 (53 per cent) respondents, out of 113, reported having contact with political party or a politician by the age of 18. By the age of 25, this number rises to 84 (74 per cent).

Table 5.6   Age of first contact with politics

Age Category	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses
Before the age of 11	26	23
Aged 11 – 18	34	30
Aged 19 - 24	24	21
Aged 25 – 34	8	7
Aged 35 – 44	5	4
Aged 45 – 54	0	0
Aged 55+	1	1
No response/Prefer not to answer	15	13

Source: Online Survey. Question: At what age did you first have contact with a politician or political party? N=113

5.5   Age of joining political party

Box 5.7: Age of first joining political party

Of the 113 politicians 70 (62 per cent) had joined a political party by the age of 24. A substantial minority (33) became party members between the ages of 11 and 18.

Table 5.7   Age first joined political party

Age Category	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses
Before the age of 11	0	0
Aged 11 – 18	33	29
Aged 19 - 24	37	33
Aged 25 – 34	20	18
Aged 35 - 44	7	6
Aged 45 – 54	1	1
Aged 55+	1	1
No response/Prefer not to answer	14	12

Source: Online survey. At what age did you first join a political party? N=113

6. Life before election 1: education and career

This chapter draws on information uncovered in the web data extraction and online survey to describe the post-16 education and careers of Britain's elected representatives.

Key findings

- At least 73 per cent of elected representatives hold an undergraduate degree or higher.

- At least 19 per cent of politicians engaged in student politics. Looking only at those who have a degree or higher degree, at least 26 per cent were active in student politics.

- At least 12 per cent of politicians hold a professional qualification above degree level.

- The most common is a legal qualification. At least 20 per cent of Conservative politicians hold a legal qualification, and five of the 24 ethnic minority politicians are qualified to practise law.

- The minimum proportion of politicians whose educational qualification is below degree level is only five per cent (no qualifications, O levels/GCSEs, or A levels).

- No data on educational qualifications was found for 19 per cent of politicians.

6.1   Education

Overall, the findings suggest that most of Britain's elected representatives are highly educated. Data from the web extraction shows that at least 73 per cent of elected representatives hold an undergraduate degree or higher. As shown in Box 6.1, the survey revealed a similar figure.

It is interesting to note that the number of sitting politicians who possess a university degree or higher qualification does not vary significantly when analysed in terms of the decade in which they were first elected – even though the proportion of degrees within the British population as a whole has increased dramatically (Census 2001).

Among the 12 per cent of politicians with a postgraduate professional qualification of some kind, legal qualification were by far the most common; at least 11 per cent of politicians are qualified to practice as a solicitor.

Among Conservative politicians, the proportion is double that; at least 20 per cent of the Conservatives are qualified to practice the law.

Box 6.1: Online survey results for highest educational qualification achieved
Of the 113 who completed the survey, 86 (76 per cent) have a degree or higher. There are some differences according to gender. 80 per cent of males have a degree or higher compared with 71 per cent of females. 3.1 per cent of men and 12.6 per cent of women have a qualification lower than a degree. The proportion of politicians with a degree or higher does not vary between those with a disability and those without.

It is difficult to compare the highest levels of education achieved across different elected bodies because of the different amounts of information available online among the different types of representatives. For example, online biographies for MPs were generally a good source of data on education, with information available for all but 13 per cent of MPs. In contrast, no information could be found for 32 per cent of MEPs and 78 per cent of London AMs.

Box 6.1 provides some information on educational achievements by gender and disability. However, it should be remembered that this is a small sample and the results may not be reliable. Because it was difficult to find demographic data on politicians across equality strands using the web extraction data, it is not possible to learn more about whether educational achievements vary according to equality area using this approach.

6.2   Involvement with student politics

Data from the web extraction also shows that engagement in student politics is a relatively common step on the pathway to politics, with just under one in five (19 per cent) of British politicians noting their involvement in their biographies. This figure represents the minimum proportion of representatives who participated in student politics, as no information was found for the remaining 81 per cent.

Box 6.2: Involvement in student politics
The web extraction can tell us the minimum proportion of politicians who took part in student politics (because politician's biographies do not categorically state whether or not a politician did so). Of the 113 who completed the survey, 35 (31 per cent) reported that they had participated in student politics.

6.3   Socio-economic group immediately prior to entering politics

In total, 27 per cent of the sample were employed in the higher professional occupation (category A). In comparison, according to the Market Research Society classifications, approximately three per cent of the general population can be classified within this group (MRS 2002). See table 3.1 for an explanation of the classifications used for socio-economic groups.

It should be noted that in the tables below, the socio-economic classifications we have used have erred towards the lowest possible grade.

As shown in tables 6.1 and 6.2, while there are some differences in socio-economic groups immediately prior to being elected across the political spectrum and elected institutions, the overall pattern is the same: the majority of Britain's elected representatives come to office via top tier occupations.

Table 6.1   Socio-economic group classification of last occupation prior to election, by party

Party	A (%)	B (%)	C1 (%)	C2 (%)	D (%)	E (%)	No info
Labour (n=445)	15	44	34	5	1	0	1
Conservative (n=261)*	47	37	11	0**	0	0	4
Liberal Democrat (n=99)*	29	38	28	1	0	1	2
SNP (n=55)*	22	33	42	2	0	0	2
Plaid Cymru (n=18)*	33	28	28	0	0	6	6
Other (Green, UKIP, BNP, Independent) (n=33)*	24	39	18	0	0	3	15

Notes: *Row does not add up to 100 due to rounding. ** Less than 0.5%. N=911

Table 6.2   Socio-economic group classification of last occupation prior to election, by representative type

Elected institution	A or B (%)	C1 or C2 (%)	D or E (%)	No Information provided (%)*
MPs (n=628)	71	27	1	1
MEPs (n=69)	60	32	0	9
GLA Members (n=26)	40	8	0	42
MSPs (n=129)	57	40	0	3
AMs (n=60)*	55	42	2	2

Notes: *Row does not add up to 100 due to rounding

6.4   Socio-economic group prior to first election, by gender

Analysis of web extraction data for all elected representatives shows that women are twice as likely as men to have held a lower management/clerical (SEG C1) classified occupation prior to election (42 per cent compared to 22 per cent), and less likely to have been in a higher professional occupation (SEG A) or professional or management occupations (SEG B) classified occupation (43 per cent compared with 70 per cent).

It should be noted that we did not collect any data on the occupations of representatives' partners. Therefore, we cannot be certain of the household socio-economic group, which is defined by the highest occupation held in the household by either partner. It is therefore important to note that these figures relate to the type of work undertaken by the politician, and not necessarily to the chief income earner in the household.

6.5   Socio-economic group, by cohort

In order to get a sense of change over time, the web data extraction has been analysed according to the time period in which sitting politicians were first elected.

The web extraction data, illustrated in the table below, revealed that politicians first elected between 1990 and 1999 were more likely to have been employed in lower management or clerical (SEG C1) positions before their election. This may be due to the fact that the 1990s saw a record Labour landslide in the 1997General Election, creating a large number of new Labour MPs. Since it is more common for Labour

representatives to have worked in lower management or clerical (SEG C1) occupations before taking office, the effect of the 1997 General Election on the 1990s cohort cannot be underestimated.

Table 6.3   Decade of first election

Decade of first election	Number of politicians	Percentage of politicians
1950-59	1	0*
1960-69	6	1
1970-79	52	6
1980-89	135	15
1990-99	404	44
2000 -	314	34

*Less than 0.5%

Similarly, the 1997 election intake also included a large number of female politicians. As indicated above, female politicians are more likely than male politicians to have been in a lower management or clerical (SEG C1) grade occupation prior to their election.

Table 6.4   Socio-economic group classification of last occupation prior to election - by decade of first election

Socio-economic grade	Decade of first election			
	1950 – 1979* (n=60)	1980 – 1989* (n=135)	1990 – 1999* (n=404)	2000 + (n=311)
A or B (Higher professional)	72%	71%	65%	66%
C1 (Professional or management)	17%	21%	30%	27%
C2 (Lower management, clerical)	2%	5%	4%	1%
D or E (Semi skilled/Unskilled manual/Lowest level of subsistence)	3%	2%	0%	0%**
No Information provided	7%	1%	0%	6%

Notes: *Column does not add up to 100 due to rounding. ** Less than 0.5%

7.   Life before election 2: political engagement

This chapter focuses on a range of political, campaigning and civic participation activities to look at politicians' level of involvement prior to election. The extraction did not reveal any significant differences in political engagement between the whole sample and protected equality groups within the sample.

Key findings:

- From the web extraction, at least 89 per cent of the 911 politicians had been politically active prior to being elected.

- At least 43 per cent of politicians had held a formal role in politics –employed by a politician or political party, or holding a formal role in a party at local or national level.

- At least 55 per cent of politicians were members of a Trade Union.

- Union activity is much more likely to be mentioned in the biographical information of Labour politicians than those of other parties.

- Over half of politicians in the web data extraction had experience as a local councillor prior to their first election to a national or regional body.

- Experience of standing in an election for a national or regional seat is also a common experience for politicians on their route to election to a national or regional body. At least two in five (42 per cent) of politicians in our web data extraction had experienced losing an election prior to being elected.

- From the online survey, there is some evidence to suggest that for politicians from under-represented groups being a local councillor is an important step on the pathway to becoming an elected representative.

- Local council experience is especially prominent amongst ethnic minority politicians, with 13 of the 23 politicians of ethnic minority politicians surveyed having experience of local government prior to their election.

- Similarly, a large proportion of the LGB politicians who responded to the survey had local council experience – with at least ten of the 15 LGB politicians having been local councillors.

7.1   Overall experience of political, campaigning and other civic activities

Table 7.1   Reported political activities, from the online survey

Activity	Number	Percentage
Been an active member of a political party	101	89
Held office in a political party locally	80	71
Taken part in a non-partisan campaign	76	67
Engaged in community activism	67	59
Been a member of a union	63	56
Been a member of a locally active organisation	56	50
Unsuccessfully contested an election to a regional or	55	49

national body		
Been a councillor in Local Government	51	45
Served on a school board	44	39
Held office in a political party at a national level	36	32
Been active in student politics	35	31
Held office in a union	34	30
Held a public appointment	21	19
Voluntary work for an elected representative	19	17
Been employed in the office of an elected politician	19	17
Been employed by a charity or other campaigning organisation at a national, regional or head office level	14	12
Been employed by a union	9	8
Been employed by a political party	8	7
Been employed in public affairs or as a lobbyist	6	5
Been employed in a think tank or policy organisation	3	3
Proportion reporting at least one of the above in their online biographical data	110	97

7.2 Formal political roles held before election

This section look at some of the activities listed in section 7.1 in greater detail; in particular, at those that refer to working for a politicians or a political party, or holding a formal role in a party at the local or national level.

Taking on a formal role in a political party is a stepping stone for many representatives. The web data from personal biographies showed that at least 43 per cent of representatives had direct experience of holding one or more of the above formal roles in politics prior to their first election to a national or regional body.

The formal political roles that politicians choose to include in their biographies do seem to vary across parties. In particular, it appears to be more important (or perhaps simply more common) for Conservatives to detail a formal political role than labour representatives, especially at a local level. This may in part be an effect of the large influx of relatively young and less experiences Labour MPs in the 1997 election victory.

It is likely that the proportion of politicians who have held one or more formal roles in politics is higher than the minimum percentage revealed by the web data extraction; since being affiliated to a political party is almost a prerequisite for becoming an elected politician in Britain. However, it seems that formal political activities such as these may not be regarded as significant for inclusion in a politician's online biographical details.

Box 7.1: Online survey results relating to politician's experience of formal political roles prior to election to a national or regional body

As may be expected, the figure is much higher amongst the 113 politicians who chose to complete the survey – with 105 (93 per cent) of respondents reporting undertaking a formal role in politics prior to their first election.

Table 7.2 Experience of a formal role in politics prior to first selection

Category	Number	Percentage
Held office in a political party locally	80	71
Held office in a political party at a national level	36	32
Been employed in the office of an elected politician (e.g. as a case worker or researcher)	19	17
Been employed by a political party	8	7
Source: Online Survey. Q: 'Prior to your selection as a candidate for election to a national or regional body, had you ever done any of the following political activities? (If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected) Please select all that apply'. n=113		

7.3   Union membership

For some politicians, Union involvement forms an important part of their pathway to elected office. Of the elected representatives, the biographies of 56 per cent revealed Union activity prior to election, with no data found for the remaining 44 per cent.

The significance of Union activity is very different across the political parties. Whilst mention of Union activity is notably low in the biographical information about Liberal Democrat and Conservative politicians, it features prominently in the details of Labour politicians. Union membership is more prevalent among SNP and Plaid Cymru politicians than Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, but still well behind that of Labour Party politicians. This may be due to two explanations: firstly, the historic link between the Labour and Trade Union movements and its importance to Labour voters and Labour elected representatives. Secondly, Union membership plays an instrumental role in the careers of many Labour politicians; Many Trade Unions are affiliated to the Labour Party, and some of these Unions hold their own preferred lists of candidates whom they support in seeking nominations for candidacy for elected office. Unions who are not affiliated to the Labour Party rarely support would-be politicians from other parties.

7.4   Local government experience

Over half of politicians (52 per cent) elected to office in a national or regional body had prior experience as a local councilor. This suggests that the experience of campaigning and winning elections at a local level, and consequently serving as a local representative, is a common stage on route to higher elected office.

Across the different parties, Conservatives are less likely to report having served as local councillors; a minimum of 37 per cent compared with at least 62 per cent of Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians.

7.5   Experience of unsuccessfully contesting an election

At least two in five (42 per cent) of elected representatives have experienced electoral defeat according to our analysis of web data, making it a frequent stage on the pathway to politics for Britain's politicians.

Box 7.2: Online survey results for politicians' previous experience of

standing for office

The proportion of politicians who report losing an election prior to being elected is higher amongst those who completed the survey, with just under half of participants (55) having fought unsuccessful campaigns.

The open-ended question in the survey allowed participants to detail some of their experiences prior to election, there is some evidence that standing in seats which are described as "unwinnable" is considered beneficial to developing politicians.

> I was encouraged to stand, in an "unwinnable" area to gain experience, and subsequently was given more voluntary roles to take on to gain more experience and develop my knowledge. (Female)

This process of standing in an unwinnable seat may serve as a disincentive for those who wish to reach elected office due to the potential cost of candidature. For example, a 2006 Conservative Home report suggested that standing (and losing) an election can cost over £40,000 in lost earnings (Conservativehome.com, 2006).

8.   Becoming a candidate

This chapter draws only on the online survey data to examine the factors that influence politicians in choosing to stand for election.

Key findings

- 58 per cent of the 113 politicians had begun to consider standing for elected office by the age of 34. Almost one-third had begun to consider standing for elected office by the age of 24.

- 66 per cent of respondents received either 'a lot' or 'a moderate amount' of encouragement to stand from their party.

- The qualitative responses suggest that this encouragement often took the form of party members or friends suggesting that they stand, alongside receiving the support of the local party machine.

- More than a quarter (30 per cent) of respondents reported facing barriers from within their party to their standing as a candidate.

- The qualitative responses suggest that this often took the form of prejudice from local party active members; from a general 'stuffiness' to clear opposition to having a female or ethnic minority candidate.

- Almost half of respondents (56) said they had caring responsibilities when they were first elected, with male politicians more likely than female politicians to report having caring responsibilities at the time of election.

- It is important to note the aforementioned limitations of this data set.

8.1   Age at which politicians consider public office

Box 8.1: Online survey data on the age at which politicians first considered standing for elected office

The data below suggests that nearly 60 per cent of the politicians who completed the survey had considered becoming a candidate by the time they reached the age of 34 and one third had considered it by age 24. By the age of 44, the idea has occurred to at least 80 per cent of the sample.

Table 8.1 Age at which politicians first considered standing for elected office

Category	Number of survey responses	Percentage of survey responses*
Before the age of 11	3	3
Aged 11 - 18	5	4
Aged 19 - 24	27	24
Aged 25 - 34	31	27
Aged 35 - 44	24	21
Aged 45+	9	8
No response/Prefer not to answer	14	12
Notes: *Column does not add up to 100 due to rounding.		

Source: Online survey: Question. When did you first consider standing for elected public office? N=113

Box 8.2: Factors that prompted politicians to first consider standing for elected office

The most commonly cited reason for considering election to a national or regional body was a personal desire to make an impact – either in a specific policy area, or a broader interest in political issues in general:

> I was involved in the campaign against top-up fees … and was inspired to stand to give a voice to younger people. (Male)

> If you want to get things changed on the big stage you have to stand for election. (Male)

Alongside a desire to make a change, politicians who responded to the survey often cited the encouragement they received from family, friends and party members as an important spur to considering standing for election:

> I was a voluntary Chairman of the local Community Centre association and we had a useless councillor. People urged me to stand against him to give the community a voice. (Female)

> I got involved with local campaigns by the Liberal party and was asked to stand as a candidate in local elections. (Male)

> A Borough Council by-election came up in the ward where I lived and I was "persuaded" to stand by friends who were active in the Party of which I am now a member. It sort of grew from there. (Male)

A further theme that emerges from the responses is the importance of institutional changes in prompting politicians to consider election for the first time. In particular the establishment of the Scottish parliament was cited as a motivating factor for a number of female politicians as it offered an opportunity to ensure better representation of women in a national body:

> There was a feeling of a new beginning for Scotland with the reconvening of the Scottish Parliament/wish that women were well represented/view that Parliament should have members from many walks of life. (Female)

> The establishment of the Scottish Parliament - I had campaigned for equal representation of women and was approached to stand. (Female)

8.2   Barriers to candidacy

Box 8.3: Politicians' experience of barriers to selection as a candidate for election

Of the 113 survey respondents (64 per cent) reported that they did not encounter any barriers to being selected within their party. However, more than a quarter (30 participants) did experience barriers, a number of which are brought to life in the participants' own words.

The nature of these barriers varies considerably, from the "standard" challenges which are seen to go with the job – such as gaining support from a range of sub groups within the party – to structural "barriers" in candidate selection processes and difficulties created by gender or disability.

> Only the standard barriers facing any candidate in any party, which is the need to gather support (in Labour's case from branches, unions and affiliates and members etc) which had been much more difficult before Labour opened up the list system. (Male)

> Selection as an approved candidate was still dictated too much by subjective perceptions and stereotypes. I also suffered from hearing loss which penalised me in certain selection exercises. (Female)

> Many women, including myself, have to deal with caring arrangements - for children and elderly relatives. This is on top of the usual prejudice sometimes shown to women by constituents as well as party members. (Female)

> The Conservative Party has a policy of positive discrimination towards female candidates in its selection processes. This harmed my chances in at least two selection processes that I was involved in. (Male)

8.3   Caring responsibilities at time of first election

Box 8.4: Online survey respondents caring responsibilities at the time of election

Politicians were asked whether they had caring responsibilities at the time of their election. Nearly half the participants (56 out of 113) stated that they did.

Table 8.2   Family responsibilities during election

Category	All Number	%	Men Number	%*	Women Number	%*
No – I didn't have any caring responsibilities at the time I was elected	40	34	19	29	21	45
Yes – any caring responsibility	56	50	36	55	20	43
No response/Prefer not to answer	17	16	11	17	6	13

*Column does not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Online Survey. Q: At the time you were first elected, did you have any children age 0-18 and/or any other caring responsibilities? (If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected to a national or regional body)   Please select all that apply (n=113)

Interestingly, fewer than half the women (21 out of the 47) who responded said they had caring responsibilities at the time they were first elected. While the small sample means that this finding should be treated with caution, the fact that male politicians are more likely to report that they had caring responsibilities at the time of their

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election than female politicians, suggests that having a caring responsibility may present less of a barrier to a male politician than to a female politician.

8.4   Encouragement from party organisation to stand for office

Until recently, being a candidate has largely depended upon gaining the support of a local party organisation. Experience of receiving support or facing barriers from the local or national party, therefore, are likely to be an important element of the pathway into politics.

Box 8.5: Online survey findings on respondents experiences of support from their political party

66 per cent of the 113 participants reported that they felt at least a moderate amount of encouragement to stand for selection from their local party.

Table 8.3   Party encouragement to stand for election

Category	Number	Percentage
A lot	47	42
A moderate amount	28	25
A little	16	14
None	7	6
No response/Prefer not to answer	15	13

Source: Online survey. Q: How much encouragement did you receive from your party organisation to stand for election? N=113

Descriptions of the nature of encouragement received by respondents varied considerably. Most respondents refer to encouragement from friends and acquaintances. However, some referred to specific structural changes (such as quotas for women):

> Lots of encouragement from party officials, but little actual help - just saying 'you should do it'. Some helpful phone conversations. At a local level, encouragement from some, but outright hostility from others (older men and their wives!) (Female)

> For both local council and Parliament, a range of different people nagging me to stand, offering help in completing the forms, and then identifying seats I could go for and encouraging me to try. (Female)

> 50 per cent of candidates for Scottish Parliament were to be women and this created a completely new range of possible options. (Female)

9. Conclusions: equality and the pathway to politics

9.1 Overall findings

Diversity in political representation is important because, in a democratic society, it is vital that voters feel that their elected representatives connect to their lives, experiences and difficulties and that there is at least someone in Parliament that is like them. Elected assemblies need not mirror exactly the communities they represent but express some element of them. This research has collected a variety of biographical material on Britain's politicians and attempted to describe their pathways into Britain's elected institutions. We have found that, despite some indication of gradual changes towards more equal representation (for example, increases in the proportion of women elected), the majority of Britain's politicians are still white, male, Christian, heterosexual middle-aged or older, middle class, and do not have a disability. Of the 911 politicians analysed in the web data extraction, just 3 per cent are identified as belonging to an ethnic minority, three quarters are men, and at least two thirds had professional or management occupations immediately prior to being elected. This picture appears to have changed very little in the past two decades - when the majority of Britain's current politicians were first elected.

The questionnaire data revealed evidence of a conventional 'pathway to politics' which is depicted in figure 9.1. This pathway is not typical of all politicians, and there are stages where some do deviate from the pathway, but, in general, it is one which many do adhere to. The pathway is as follows. The typical British politician grew up in a household in which the highest earning parent was in the top two socioeconomic groups. Their parents were politically active and they had first come into contact with a politician or political party by age 18 joining by age 24. They are university educated, usually in the law or other 'politics facilitating' profession (such as politics or journalism), and the time at university is used to develop an involvement in student politics. By age 34 the decision to stand for political office has normally been made. The time prior to standing for election is used to gain formal experience in politics, often by being employed by a politician or political party, holding a position in a trade union or, for national politicians, by acting as a local councillor. Finally, experience of previously running for election in an unwinnable seat or unsuccessful election, is a common experience for politicians on their route to election in a national or regional body.

Figure 9.1   The conventional pathway to politics
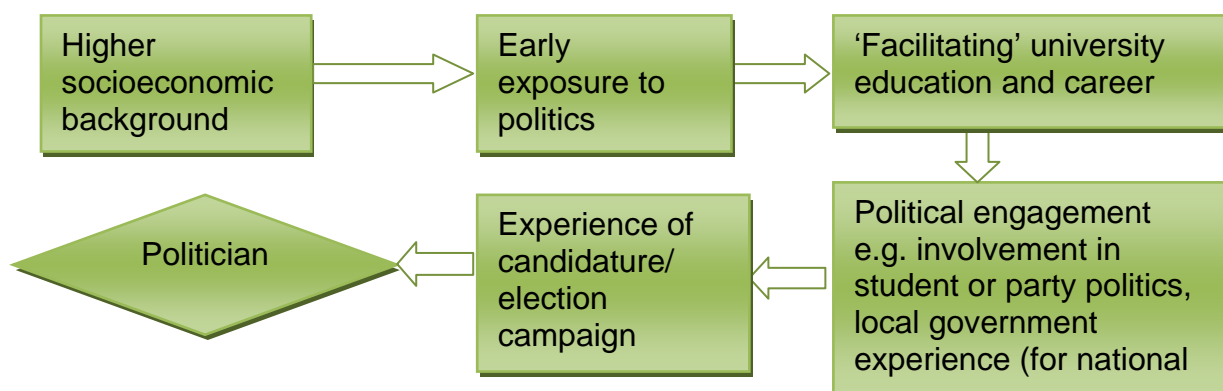
In its interim report, the Speaker's Conference (Parliamentary Representation) states that the core reasons for considering the representativeness of the House of Commons are effectiveness, justice and enhanced legitimacy. It further states: "the House of Commons will work most effectively if it holds within its membership the same diversity of life experience as are presented in wider society" (House of Common 2009). Our research indicates that many politicians from under-represented groups display similar life experiences. For example, the proportion of ethnic minority politicians who have been employed in professional or management roles prior to election is similar to that for the general population of politicians, if not slightly higher. Similarly, while women politicians are somewhat more likely to have been employed in a semi-skilled or clerical occupation prior to election, the majority are still drawn from among the ranks of the higher professions.

Now that we have a clearer idea of the possible pathways, it is important to learn more about whether people from under-represented groups experience barriers at the various stages. For example, large numbers of politicians are university educated and have professional experience in 'politics facilitating' professions, such as the law. Occupational segregation and the exclusion of people from ethnic minorities from these professions might be having secondary effects on the diversity of political representatives. Additionally, there is a lack of data regarding the sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or belief and disability status of politicians, as well as differences in the detail of data according to elected institution. The absence of uniform data across each of the equality strands has a limiting effect on the ability to assess and address levels of representation. It is also very difficult to compare changes in the levels of representation over time and across the institutions. Thus, a clear recommendation emerging from this research is the need to establish a mechanism for collecting data on all Britain's elected politicians in a uniform manner. Confidential data collection would help to encourage open responses, particularly in areas that people may fundamentally choose not to disclose such as disability, sexual orientation, religious views and beliefs.

9.2   Ways forward

While the research reported here offers some insights into the barriers that politicians may experience on their pathway to election, understanding those barriers more fully demands an approach which engages not only with those who were successful, but also with all of the other elements of the political recruitment process. In their study of the 1992 election, Norris and Lovenduski conducted a large-scale research project which encompassed research with applications for selection, party members and selectors, unsuccessful candidates, voters and sitting MPs, alongside participant observation at selection meetings and analysis of selection documents from across the parties. Their research, which would benefit from updating, represents the only known attempt to fully understand the ecology of institutional and personal choices, systems and prejudices that are at work in determining who considers a career as a politician. If we are concerned with ensuring that Britain's representative institutions better reflect British society, there needs to be a similar scale programme of research conducted in order to fully understand how selection and election occurs in Britain today.

9.3　Recommendations

Three specific recommendations have emerged from this research. These seek to address some basic mechanisms which could enable the potential pathways into politics to be widened to more diverse groups and individuals in Britain.

1) Confidential diversity data collection

This research project was compromised by the lack of a comprehensive data set across the seven protected equality grounds. Although some data exists, like the House of Commons Research Paper published following each General Election with details on gender, age and occupational background, there is no uniform data collection across equality grounds and political institutions. The lack of a comprehensive dataset prohibits sampling and statistical weighting to allow for missing data from politicians online profiles. Confidential data collection at the point of nomination, and non-identifiable publication, would allow transparency and effective monitoring of underrepresentation as well as providing information to institutions on employee support, access needs. Forms could allow space for disclosure of pathways or tick boxes for known stepping stones and a space for other significant milestones. This would allow better understanding of what public policy interventions might help to widen pathways to more diverse groups in society.

2) Opening up politics

If so many of our politicians had early exposure to politics, then it seems likely that pathways would be widened if more people could come into early contact with politics and politicians. This can be achieved through more imaginative and interactive Citizenship classes which involve inspirational local leaders or arrange tours of Parliament or other elected assemblies. Political institutions often have education departments and members organise tours and question and answer sessions for their constituents of all ages. However, there could be an improved focus on outreach by institutions to ensure it is not a postcode lottery decided by which school is attended or the enthusiasm of the local politician to engage them, which can be linked to seat marginality. The research also shows a tendency towards greater professionalisation in the career path of politicians, with most having worked in Parliament or politics. As well as the role of political parties in encouraging a more diverse membership pool from which politicians will choose their staff, and mentoring and shadowing schemes run by Third Sector organisations, there could be centrally available money to fund an internship programme across elected institutions which could monitor and encourage diverse applicants across Britain.

3) Accessible flexible workplaces

The research indicates that women in politics do not generally have caring responsibilities which, given the proportion of women who do in the general population, indicates that this may be a significant barrier to public life. While data on disability was limited from the study of online biographies due to non-identification in these profiles, it is not possible to provide robust evidence on the impact access for disabled people has on their ability to enter public life. However, there is a wealth of evidence, most recently to the Speaker's Conference itself, which points to the physical and attitudinal barriers to disabled people becoming politicians, despite representing around one in five of the population. It seems likely that one of the

reasons for the underrepresentation of equality groups within Parliament is the physical and attitudinal barriers faced by women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, or others based on faith, sexual orientation, age or gender identity. Further research has been commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to explore the barriers and enablers, including the financial and personal costs of candidature.

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Annex Appendix 1   Data collected in each approach

The table below sets out the information that we collected in each element of the project. Neither data set is complete for every politician in the samples – some who completed the survey skipped questions, while some online biographical information is fuller for some than for others. In general, however, we have attempted to identify information in all of these areas for every politician that we have included so far.

Topic	Web Extraction	Online Survey
ID number	Yes	Yes
Title	Yes	
Name	Yes	
Surname	Yes	
Type of Politician (e.g. MP, MEP etc)	Yes	
Party	Yes	
Constituency or list	Yes	
Name of Constituency / List area	Yes	
Constituency region	Yes	
Year of election to current role	Yes	Yes
Year of first election to a national/ regional body (if different)	Yes	Yes
Age of first election to a national/regional body		Yes
Previous national or regional body	Yes	Yes
Previous role(s) elected		Yes
Union involvement	Yes	
Local government experience	Yes	Yes
Political experience before being elected	Yes	Yes
Gender – inferred from use of he/she	Yes	
Ethnicity	Yes	Yes
Religion or belief	Yes	Yes
Sexuality	Yes	Yes
Current relationship status	Yes	
Disabilities current		Yes
Disabilities at the time of election		Yes
Year of birth	Yes	
Place of birth	Yes	
Secondary School	Yes	
Highest qualification	Yes	Yes
University	Yes	
Professional qualifications	Yes	
Career before election	Yes	Yes
Employment status during election		Yes
Job title during election		Yes
Social classification before election to national/ regional body	Yes	
Mother's occupation	Yes	yes
Father's occupation	Yes	Yes
Parent's social classification	Yes	Yes
Family involvement in politics	Yes	Yes

URLs used in this record	Yes	
Age of first political contact		Yes
First contact with Politician (open response)		Yes
First consider standing		Yes
Prompt to consider (open response)		Yes
Encouragement received from party		Yes
Form of encouragement (open response)		Yes
Participation in mentoring scheme		Yes
Barriers to participation		Yes
Barriers to participation (open response)		Yes
Age of children during election		Yes
Personal journey (open response)		Yes

Annex Appendix 2   Comparison of web extraction and online survey findings for gender, ethnicity, sexuality, politician type and party affiliation

| | Categories | Survey | | Percentage in Web Extraction |
		Number in sample	Percentage in sample	
Gender	Male	65	58	75
	Female	48	42	25
Ethnicity	White (British and Other)	91	81	
	Ethnic Minority	1	1	3
	No Information / did not answer	21	19	97
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual / Straight	89	79	
	Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual	2	2	0*
	No Information / did not answer	22	19	98
Type of politician	MP	50	44	69
	MSP	28	25	14
	MEP	11	10	8
	AM (Wales)	13	12	7
	AM (GLA)	11	10	3
Party	Labour Party	50	44	49
	Conservative Party	25	22	29
	Liberal Democrats	18	16	11
	Scottish National Party (SNP)	10	9	6
	Plaid Cymru	4	4	2
	Other	6	5	4

*Less than 0.5%

Annex Appendix 3   Classifications of socio-economic groupings

Occupation Group	Title	Definition
A	Higher professional	These are professional people, senior managers in business or commerce, or top-level civil servants or military service people Approximately 3 per cent of the UK population
B	Professional or management	These are middle management executives in large organisations with appropriate qualifications. Principle officers in local government and the civil service. The B classification also includes top management or owners of smaller business concerns, educational and service organisations. Approximately 20 per cent of the UK population
C1	Lower management, clerical	Junior management, owners of small establishments, other non-manual positions. Approximately 28 per cent of the UK population.
C2	Skilled manual	All skilled manual workers and manual workers with responsibility for other people Approximately 21 per cent of the UK population
D	Semi skilled/unskilled manual	All semi-skilled and un-skilled manual workers, apprentices and trainees to skilled workers Approximately 18 per cent of the UK population
E	Those at lowest level of subsistence	All those entirely dependent on the state long-term (for more than six months), through sickness, unemployment, or other reasons. This group includes casual workers without a regular income and retired people who do not have a private pension. Approximately 10 per cent of the UK population

Annex Appendix 4   Survey response rate

The survey was sent to 911 elected representatives in the following elected assemblies, with 113 members (12 per cent) completing the survey. Response rates and percentages rounded to the nearest figure are given below:

> House of Commons: 50 of 628 MPs (8 per cent)
> London Assembly: 11 of 26 GLA AMs (42 per cent)
> Scottish Parliament: 28 of129 MSPs (22 per cent)
> Welsh Assembly: 13 of 60 Welsh AMs (22 per cent)
> European Parliament [UK Members]: 11 of 69 MEPs (16 per cent)

The lowest response rate to the survey across all national elected assemblies was from the House of Commons with just 50 out of a total 628 (8 per cent) Members responding. This was despite follow up with MPs offices from Brand Democracy, Commission contact with politicians at party conferences and communication from the Vice Chair of the Speaker's Conference urging Members to respond to this important survey. An equivalent letter was sent from the Deputy Chair of the Greater London Assembly (GLA) to all members with almost half of assembly members responding to the survey. Despite no additional chasing of UK MEPs other than emails, the response rate from this group of politicians was double that of Members of Parliament.

Response by Party
No party responded to the survey in significantly greater proportion to others. However, details of the response rate by party is given below. The first column indicates total numbers of representatives across the political institutions included, the second gives the response rate. Respondents are given in brackets as a percentage by party:

Party	Number of MPs	Survey Respondents
Labour	445	50 (11%)
Conservatives	261	25 (10%)
Others	106	20 (19%)
Liberal Democrats	99	18 (18%)

Annex Appendix 5   Text of online survey

<u>Welcome</u>

Thank you for taking part in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Survey of MP's, MSP's, AM's, MEP's and London Assembly Members.
This survey is part of a project to look at the different pathways through which people become elected to national or regional bodies in Britain. The project is focusing on politicians in national or regional bodies, rather than local government.
Data collected through this survey will be anonymised and no identifying information will be published.
The survey is being conducted by Brand Democracy, an independent research agency, on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The questionnaire is divided into four sections and should take 10- 15 minutes to complete.
If you have any questions about this survey, please call James Hallam on 020 7861 3246.

1. Please enter the four digit number from the email that you received inviting you to take part in this survey. This will be used for sampling purposes only – to ensure that we include a good cross section of elected representatives in our survey.

| |
| |

If you cannot find that number, please call James Hallam at Brand Democracy on 020 7861 3246 and he will email it to you.

<u>About this survey</u>

When answering this questionnaire, please think about your experiences before you were first elected to one of the following national or regional bodies:
the House of Commons
the Scottish Parliament
the Welsh Assembly
the European Parliament
the Greater London Assembly

<u>Section1: Before you were elected</u>

The next three questions are about different things you might have done before you were elected to a national or regional body.

2. Prior to your selection as a candidate for election to a national or regional body, had you ever cone any of the following political activities? (if you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected)

Please tick all that apply

Voluntary work for an elected representative (for example as an intern, or for work experience)	
Been a councillor in Local Government (including a town or parish	

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councillor)	
Unsuccessfully contested an election to a regional or national body	
Been active in student politics	
Held office in a political party at a national level	
Held office in a political party locally	
Been an active member of a political party	
None of these	
Prefer not to answer	

3 .Prior to your selection as a candidate for election to a national or regional body, had you ever worked in any of the following jobs? (If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected)

Please tick all that apply

Been employed in a think tank or policy organisation	
Been employed by a charity or other campaigning organisation at a national, regional or head office level	
Been employed in public affairs or as a lobbyist	
Been employed in the office of an elected politician (eg as a case worker or researcher)	
Been employed by a political party	
Been employed by a union	
None of these	
Prefer not to answer	

4. Prior to your selection as a candidate for election to a national or regional body, had you ever done any of the following? (If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected)

Please tick all that apply

Taken part in a non-partisan campaign (for example for a charity or issue campaign)	
Been a member of a locally active organisation (eg the Women's Institute, a Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, a local branch of a charity)	
Held a public appointment (an appointment to the board of a public body such as a museum, an NHS Trust, a regulatory body)	
Served on a school board (for example as a governor)	
Engaged in community activism (eg joined a campaign to save a hospital)	
Been a member of a union	
Held office in a union	
None of these	
Prefer not to answer	

5. Thinking about when you were growing up, please tick which of the following applies to you?
Please tick all that apply

A member of my family was an elected politician in the past two generations	
At least one of my parents was active in party politics	
At least one of my parents took part on non partisan campaigns (eg for a charity or issue campaign)	
At least one of my parents was a member of a locally active organisation (such as the Women's Institute, a Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, a local branch of a charity)	
At least one of my parents held a public appointment (an appointment to the board of a public body such as a museum, an NHS Trust, a regulatory body)	
At least one of my parents was a member of a union	
At least one of my parents held office in a union	
When I was growing up, I had family friends who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues	
When I was growing up, I had family members who were active in politics or campaigning around political issues	
None of these	
Prefer not to answer	

6. At what age did you first have contact with a politician or political party?

Please tick the relevant box

Before the age of 11	
Between the ages of 11 – 18	
Between the ages of 19 – 24	
Between the ages of 25 – 34	
Between the ages of 35 – 44	
Between the ages of 45 – 54	
Aged 55+	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

7. Please describe your first contact with a politician or political party.

Please write your answer in the box below

8. At what age did you first join a political party?

Please tick the relevant box

Before the age of 11	
Between the ages of 11 – 18	
Between the ages of 19 - 24	
Between the ages of 25 – 34	
Between the ages of 35 – 44	
Between the ages of 45 – 54	

Aged 55+	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

Section 2: Your journey into politics

9. When did you first consider standing for elected public office?

Please tick the relevant box

Before the age of 11	
Between the ages of 11 – 18	
Between the ages of 19 – 24	
Between the ages of 25 – 34	
Between the ages of 35 – 44	
Between the ages of 45 – 54	
Aged 55+	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

10. What first prompted you to consider standing for elected public office?

Please write your answer in the box below

11. How much encouragement did you receive from your party organisation to stand for election?

Please tick the relevant box

None	
A little	
A moderate amount	
A lot	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

12. What form did that encouragement take?

Please write your answer in the box below

13. Before you became a candidate for election, did you participate in any mentoring or shadowing scheme to gain experience of life as a politician?

Please tick the relevant box

Yes – a scheme run by an organisation not aligned to any political party	

Yes – a scheme run by my political party or an affiliated group	
No	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

14. Before you were selected as a candidate, did you encounter any barriers to participation an/or advancement within your political party?

Please tick the relevant box

Yes	
No	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

15. If yes, please describe the barriers you faced

Please write your answer in the box below

16. Prior to your current role, had you ever held office in a different national, regional or local elected body?

Please tick the relevant box

Yes – I previously held elected office in a different representative body	
No – This is my first publicly elected role	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

17.Please select the role(s) you were elected to prior to your current one

Please tick all that apply

An MP	
An MSP	
A Member of the Welsh Assembly	
An MEP	
A Member of the London Assembly	
A Local Councillor	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

18. Please write in the relevant bow the year you were elected to your previous role(s)

An MP	
An MSP	
A Member of the Welsh Assembly	

An MEP	
A Member of the London Assembly	
A Local Councillor (including town or parish councillor)	

19. Prior to standing for election what was your main career?

Please write your answer in the box below

20. In the run up to being elected, some politicians change jobs so that they can campaign alongside working. How about you, did you change jobs?

Please tick the relevant answer

No – I carried on in the same job until I was elected	
No – I stopped working when I was a candidate for election	
Yes – I changed jobs while I was a candidate for election	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

21. If yes, what was your occupation immediately prior to being elected?

Please write your answer in the box below

22. At the time you were first elected, did you have any children age 0 – 18 and/ or any other caring responsibilities? (If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected to a national or regional body)

Please tick all that apply

Yes : Children aged 0 -5	
Yes : Children aged 6 – 12	
Yes : Children aged 13 – 18	
Yes : Other caring responsibilities	
No - I didn't have any caring responsibilities	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

23. If you had 'other caring responsibilities' at the time you were first elected to a national or regional body, please describe these in the box below.

If you did not have other caring responsibilities, or would prefer not to answer this question, please leave the box blank.

Section3: Your personal journey

24. Please use the last page to describe your journey to becoming an elected representative in a national or regional body. What were the most important factors that led you to decide to stand for election?

We are particularly interested to hear about the following:

- How you first became interested in politics
- Your first experience of working in politics
- When you first thought about becoming an elected representative yourself (if this role was at the local level, when you first decided to go for a national or regional role)
- Who encouraged you along the path to being elected

If you have been elected to more than one national or regional body, please think about the first time you were elected.
Please write your answer below

Section4: About you

25. What is the highest educational qualification you have received?

Please tick the relevant box

No formal qualifications	
O level or GCSE equivalent	
ONC / National level BTEC or equivalent	
A levels or Highers	
Higher educational qualification below degree level	
First degree (eg BA, BSc LLB0	
Higher Degree (eg MA PhD)	
Other qualifications – including professional qualifications or foreign qualifications (please describe in the box below)	
Don't Know	
Prefer not to answer	

26. If you selected 'other qualifications' please describe these

If you did not select 'other qualifications' or would prefer not to answer, please leave the box blank

27. Please describe your parents' main occupation

Father	
Mother	

28. Do you have any long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability?
By long-standing we mean anything that has affected you over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to affect you over a period of at least 12 months?
Please tick the relevant box

Yes	
No	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

29. Thinking about when you were first elected to a national or regional body, did you have any long-standing physical or mental impairment , illness or disability? By long-standing we mean anything that affected you over a period of at least 12 months?

Please tick the relevant box

Yes	
No	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

30. To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

Please tick the relevant box if you would prefer not to answer this question, please leave it blank

White	
Mixed	
Asian or Asian British	
Black or Black British	
Chinese	
Any Other Ethnic Group	

31. If you selected 'Any other Ethnic Group' please describe this in the box below

If you did not select 'Any other Ethnic Group', or would prefer not to answer this question, please leave the box blank

32. What is your religion or belief, even if you are not currently practicing?

Please tick the relevant box

Christian	
Buddhist	
Hindu	
Jewish	
Muslim	
Sikh	
Any other religion or belief (please write in the box below)	
No religion or belief at all	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

33. If you selected 'Any other religion or belief' please describe these.

If you did not select 'Any other belief or religion' or would prefer not to answer this question, please leave the box blank.

34. Which of the options below best describes how you think of yourself?

Please tick the relevant box

Heterosexual/Straight	
Gay/Lesbian	
Bisexual	
Other	
Don't know	
Prefer not to answer	

Your final thoughts

35. We realise our survey can't cover everything, however we would like to hear from you on any ideas you may have for increasing diversity amongst elected politicians, or any particular aspects of your 'pathway' into politics which you think may be of interest to us in making recommendations on how to increase diversity.

Please use the box below to give us any further comments

36. We are currently planning to conduct a small number of face-to-face interviews with elected representatives on this topic. Please tick the box below if you would be prepared to take part in that research. If you would like to take part, we will use the ID number you entered at the start of this survey to identify your contact details. We may also look at your responses tot his survey to make sure we conduct interviews with people with a range of pathways into politics. Your data will remain anonymous – we will not publish any information about any individual politicians.

Please tick the relevant box

Yes I would like to take part	
No I would not	

Contacts

England

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline
FREEPOST RRLL-GHUX-CTRX
Arndale House, The Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3AQ
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Textphone: 0845 604 6620
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Fax: 0845 604 5530

Wales

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline
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Fax: 0845 604 8830

Helpline opening times:
Monday to Friday 8am–6pm.
Calls from BT landlines are charged at local rates, but calls from mobiles and other providers may vary.

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www.equalityhumanrights.com

Despite progress over the last 30 years, elected politicians in Britain still remain highly unrepresentative of the population as a whole. This report explores the relationship between common pathways into politics and under-representation of groups protected by the Equality Act (2010). The report finds that there are barriers which prevent nomination, selection and election including prejudice and discriminatory practices; that early exposure to politics, personal motivation, family background, education, profession and previous political involvement all help to push individuals to seek election; and that both political parties and political institutions can take measures to pull individuals from diverse groups into political life.

The combination of prevent, push and pull factors currently creates narrow pathways into politics. Three ways forward are suggested: a re-framing of the debate to include the positive electoral consequences of having more diverse candidates; opening up pathways in the political recruitment process; and initiating debate on electoral reform and diversity, responding to the current opportunity for change.

**Equality and
Human Rights**
Commission