

## Response ID ANON-U81Y-YAFM-4

Submitted to **Consultation on Electoral Reform**  
Submitted on **2018-03-27 12:24:50**

### How Often Elections Should be Held

If you have evidence, supporting documents or other relevant files for your response, please add them here.

**Add files here:**

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**1 Do you think the term length for the Scottish Parliament and local government should be:**

Not Answered

**If other, please specify::**

**2 Do you have any other comments or suggestions on term lengths?**

**Comments or Suggestions:**

CRER believes that shortening term lengths from five years could lead to greater turn over in elected officials, and thus increase the potential for better representation of underrepresented groups in elected bodies. We are not necessarily arguing for this particular measure, but rather a measure which could address this issue and improve representation.

An action which is not addressed in this consultation, but which would likely lead to more diverse elected bodies is the institution of term limits for elected officials. As Scotland's elected bodies (and candidates for elected office) are disproportionately white, the presence of incumbent candidates on election ballots limits the opportunities for BME candidates, as well as other underrepresented groups, to be listed and elected. Restricting the number of times an individual can be elected within a given time period could facilitate more diverse candidates and, therefore, elected bodies.

### Who Runs Elections and How They Are Run

If you have evidence, supporting documents or other relevant files for your response, please add them here.

**Add files here:**

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**3 Do you agree that the Electoral Management Board and the Board's Convener should be given the same functions in relation to Scottish Parliament elections as they already have for local government elections?**

Not Answered

**4 Do you have any other views on the future role of the Electoral Management Board?**

**Any other views::**

The equality demographics of the Electoral Management Board should be monitored and published to measure the diversity of the Board. In the absence of a diverse Board, a consultation body consisting of individuals representing people with protected characteristics should be created. This body could provide information to the Board about equalities groups as needed, as well as raise concerns highlighted by equalities groups that would be of relevance to the Board.

**5 Should the Returning Officer appointment for Scottish Parliament elections continue to be on an appointment on a personal basis, independent from Scottish Government and local authority control?**

Not Answered

**6 Should the role of the Returning Officer become part of the job description of local authority Chief Executives? (This is not currently the case and would require renegotiation of terms and conditions.)**

Yes

**7 Do you have any other comments or suggestions about who should have the role of Returning Officer or how Returning Officers should be paid?**

**Any other comments::**

Outwith the issue of Returning Officers, CRER would like to raise an issue regarding local polling clerks and counters. We believe these posts should be filled by open recruitment and should not only be open to current council employees. As BME groups are underrepresented in local authority positions, they are therefore less likely to be selected for these roles. Efforts should be made to ensure these positions are as representative as possible.

**8 Do you agree that candidates' addresses should not be required to appear on ballot papers for local government elections?**

Not Answered

**9 Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

**Any other comments::**

**10 Do you agree that, in order to counteract the list order effect, a change should be made to the way in which candidates are listed on election ballot papers?**

Yes

Randomisation

**If other, please specify::**

**11 Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

**Any other comments::**

In addition to randomising lists for local government elections, we would also be supportive of adopting this approach for Scottish Parliament elections, if possible.

CRER notes that randomisation of names would likely benefit BME groups, who may have surnames which begin with different letters than a majority of Scottish/British surnames. Randomisation would ensure that these individuals are not unduly affected by the position of their name on ballot papers.

**12a Voting Machines: Would you be happy to use an electronic voting machine in a polling place instead of a traditional ballot paper?**

Yes

**12b Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?**

No

**12c Would you like to be able to vote at any polling place in Scotland?**

Yes

**12d Do you have any other comments?**

**Any other comments::**

CRER would be support the use of electronic voting machines.

Rather than voting being possible on more than one day, CRER believes that voters should be able to vote in any polling place in Scotland. BME individuals are more likely than white Scottish/British groups to work in unstable, part-time, and low-paid positions, and therefore may face additional challenges in going to their local polling place. Enabling individuals to vote at any polling place would increase the likelihood that those in insecure employment would be able to vote.

**13a If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you choose to use that rather than vote at a polling place or by post?**

Not Answered

**13b If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you be more likely to vote?**

Not Answered

**13c Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?**

No

**13d Do you have any other comments?**

**Any other comments::**

As with electronic voting machines, initiatives that make voting more accessible would improve the likelihood that those in insecure employment (which disproportionately affects BME groups) would be able to vote.

CRER also notes inequalities in electoral registration across the UK. A 2015 study from Runnymede Trust ('Race and Elections') found that as many as 20% of BME people are not registered to vote, compared to 7% of white British people. The rate of non-registration is highest among the Black African group at 28%. Runnymede Trust has also reported that this disparity results, in part, from some BME foreign-born or non-UK citizens believe that they are not entitled to vote, although qualifying citizens of the Commonwealth, British Overseas Territories, and the European Union are eligible to vote in UK elections. Additionally, those who have recently changed addresses may have not re-registered, which particularly affects young people in the UK. With over 20% of 18-21 year-olds in the UK coming from a BME background, disenfranchisement of young people affects BME communities disproportionately. Concerns have also been raised following changes in the electoral registration process which require individuals to register on the new system, rather than the "head of the household." As one in six BME women stated that someone else in the household filled out their registration form, according to Runnymede Trust, this change may disproportionately disenfranchise BME women. This was a UK-wide study, but we have no reason to suspect the Scottish-specific context to be any different.

In Scotland, The Guardian reported in 2014 that 97% of eligible individuals registered to vote in the Scottish independence referendum. Statistics detailing the percentage of BME individuals registered to vote in the referendum, however, was not available.

More Scottish specific research and engagement with BME communities is needed to determine whether BME individuals are proportionately represented on the electoral register, and to address any barriers to registration and voting that become evident.

**14 Do you think that we should move to a rolling programme of reviews of local government electoral arrangements?**

Not Answered

**Any other comments::**

**15a Should Scottish Ministers be able to change the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland on Scottish Parliament constituencies and council wards?**

Not Answered

**15b Should the Scottish Parliament be able to challenge the recommendations of the Boundary Commission on Scottish Parliament constituencies and council wards?**

Not Answered

**15c Should the recommendations of the Commission be implemented without change?**

Not Answered

**15d Please comment on your answer.**

**Please comment::**

**16 Should the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland be allowed the flexibility to recommend wards which have between 2 and 5 councillors, instead of 3 or 4 councillors as at present?**

Not Answered

**Comments:**

Under the system of proportional representation, the more councillors who can be elected in a certain ward, the higher the potential is that any one party will stand more candidates for that ward. A larger number of candidates standing for each party could increase the likelihood that the candidates will be diverse.

As such, CRER would be supportive of flexibility to allow wards to have between 3 and 5 councillors, rather than between 2 and 5.

## **Who Can Register and Vote**

**If you have evidence, supporting documents or other relevant files for your response, please add them here.**

**Add files here:**

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**17 Do you agree that the franchise should be extended to include everyone legally resident in Scotland?**

Not Answered

**18 Do you have any views on how long should someone be resident in Scotland before they become eligible to vote?**

**Comments::**

CRER believes this should be dependent on reciprocal arrangements with other nations, i.e. if Scottish citizens are permitted to vote in national elections for a particular nation, citizens of that nation should be able to vote in Scottish national elections.

However, different arrangements may be beneficial for local and national elections. Whereas local elections primarily concern local governance and services, national elections concern the national government, and therefore legislation. A reciprocal agreement may not be necessary for a local election, as the outcomes will not directly affect the laws of Scotland.

The length of residency in Scotland before voting eligibility should also vary for local and national elections. For local elections, a resident could be eligible nearly immediately. However, for national elections, the time resident could be longer (e.g. between 2 and 5 years).

**19 Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

**Comments::**

As stated above, the franchise extension should be dependent on reciprocal arrangements with other nations, i.e. if Scottish citizens are permitted to vote in

national elections for a particular nation, citizens of that nation should be able to vote in Scottish national elections.

**20 Do you think that we should make it easier for individuals who may be at risk from any form of abuse to register anonymously, whilst maintaining the integrity of the electoral register?**

Yes

If this is an area in which you are particularly interested, we would welcome your views on our more detailed proposals. :

**21 Should a voter be allowed to register in more than one local authority area?**

Not Answered

Comments::

**22 Do you agree that a voter should only be allowed vote once in local government elections in Scotland?**

Not Answered

Comments::

## **Accessibility of Voting and Elected Office**

If you have evidence, supporting documents or other relevant files for your response, please add them here.

Add files here:

No file was uploaded

**23 What other action could the Scottish Government take to widen access to and remove barriers to voting and elected office?**

Comments::

Firstly, CRER would like to express its disappointment that there was no mention of race in the Ministerial Forward, given the significant underrepresentation of BME groups in elected office in Scotland.

We also recognise it is no longer the case that only 4% of individuals living in Scotland are BME; the current figure will be much higher than it was for the 2011 Census.

In contrast, representation rates for BME groups have declined. There are fewer BME councillors now than there was following the 2012 election. By CRER's analysis, of the 1227 local councillors in Scotland, only 15 are BME (1.2%), with only 3 BME women elected (0.2%). Furthermore, just 7 local councils have a BME member, leaving 25 local authorities without an elected BME voice. This includes Edinburgh City Council – the local authority with the second highest BME population (8.0 % as of 2011). BME groups are underrepresented the other three local authorities with an above-average BME population (using the out-of-date 2011 Census figures): 2.2% compared to 8.0% in Aberdeen, 3.4% compared to 6.0% in Dundee, and 8.2% compared to 12.0% in Glasgow.

These statistics have derived from CRER's own work, as information about ethnicity of local councillors is not centrally collated and published. We note that the consultation document referenced 2012 figures, further highlighting the need for accessible and up-to-date published information about the ethnicity of elected bodies.

The problem of underrepresentation of BME groups in elected office is largely an issue for political parties themselves. In the 2017 elections, only 1.9% of Scottish National Party, 3.4% of Scottish Labour Party, 0.5% of Scottish Conservative Party, 1.6% of Scottish Liberal Democrat, and 0.5% of Scottish Green Party candidates were BME. If ballots are not diverse, how can elected bodies be? Direct work with political parties is desperately needed to tackle this issue.

However, there are a few things the Scottish Government can do. Firstly, it can put pressure on UK Ministers to enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. This would give Ministers the power to make regulations requiring political parties to publish data on the protected characteristics of all their candidates at a relevant election. This would allow for increased transparency and demonstrate the level of underrepresentation for key equality groups.

Beyond this, there is a real need for a national BME-specific mentoring and training scheme. We welcome the development of the Access to Elected Office Fund and would encourage the Scottish Government to put in place a similar scheme for BME groups. CRER has successfully managed a BME Political Shadowing Scheme in Glasgow for over a decade and would be delighted to have the opportunity to expand this nationwide.

While we welcome the commitment made in the Race Equality Action Plan 2017-2021 pertaining to elected office, the absence of commitments to look further into the electoral participation of BME groups is concerning. We would encourage the Scottish Government to consider putting forward an action for this in a future plan, considering the lack of Scottish-specific information available and the evidence at a UK-level that BME groups are underrepresented in voting and electoral participation (as addressed previously in this consultation document).

Furthermore, we know that action taken to increase representation in elected office will not be effective unless the pipeline which leads to this type of position is also considered. Individuals do not normally successfully run for elected office without first having gained political experience within a party. A focus on elected office is welcome, but it must be supported by a focus on encouraging parties to monitor membership, increase diversity, and recruit more diverse staff teams (including parliamentary assistants and researchers). Action to increase elected office on its own will not be effective.

As such, CRER would also ask the Scottish Government to consider developing race-specific initiatives and policies focused at improving democratic participation

and engagement, in addition to representation in elected office. Initiatives that seek to benefit multiple equalities groups may fail to create lasting change, as particular barriers may be overlooked in favour of common challenges.

**24 As well as the arrangements below, is there anything else that could be done to increase the accessibility of elections?**

**Comments::**

**25 How can the Scottish Government best support gender balance in those elected as MSPs or local councillors?**

**Comments::**

CRER raised concerns during the parliamentary scrutiny of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill, as many sections of the Bill could have been expanded to address underrepresentation experienced by other equalities groups.

Similarly, while we welcome the work taken forward, we would encourage the Scottish Government to not just think about the gender balance of the parliament and councils, but also the race balance. BME groups are significantly underrepresented in the Scottish Parliament. Furthermore, a BME woman has never been elected and current and previous BME MSPs have only come from the Asian ethnic group.

In addition to work being undertaken to improve the gender balance, initiatives to improve the race balance should also be considered. This could include considering reserving places on candidate shortlists, encouraging positive action measures, and lobbying the UK Government to enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.

**About you**

**What is your name?**

**Name:**

Rebecca Marek

**What is your email address?**

**Email:**

rebecca@crer.scot

**Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?**

Organisation

**What is your organisation?**

**Organisation:**

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

**The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:**

Publish response with name

**We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?**

Yes

**Evaluation**

**Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)**

**Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:**

Slightly satisfied

**Please enter comments here.:**

**Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:**

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

**Please enter comments here.:**