

## Scrutiny Review of Island Wide Voting

Submission from Women in Public Life  
March 2023

### Introduction

This is not a collective response from supporters of Women in Public Life. We have encouraged our supporters to make their own individual submissions.

Rather, it is a technical submission relating to demographic representation under island wide voting. We compare the demographics of the elections in 2020 and 2016 and suggest potential ways of countering reductions in representation.

### Representation in the States Assembly

A broad spread of demographic representation in the States of Deliberation is important because deputies don't just bring their skills and expertise to the decisions they make on behalf of our island. They also bring their values and their lived experience. Although both well-versed in dealing with numbers, a 70 year old male accountant, recently retired to Guernsey from the UK, is likely to view decisions differently to a 35 year old female accountant who was born in Latvia.

As Deputy Carl Meerveld told BBC Guernsey in December 2020: "You need that balance of skills, you need that balance of perspectives. Because any government needs to be representative of the community".

Comparing the current States Assembly with that of 2016:

- The number of **women** in the Assembly has reduced from 12 to 8.
- The number of people **70 or over** has reduced from 2 to 1.
- The number of people **under 30** has reduced from 1 to 0.

- The number of **men aged 50 – 69** has increased from 20 to 25<sup>1</sup>.
- There are still no elected members from the Latvian or Portuguese community (2200 people).

*[Note added after submission: the figures above are based on deputies' ages **at the point of election.**]*

Representation contracted in 2020 - fewer women, fewer older people, fewer younger people – leaving a greater proportion of deputies conforming to the ‘classic’ view of a politician (male, 50-69 years old). On the basis of just one election, it is impossible to prove that this representational shift was a direct result of the new island wide voting process. It could just have been a reflection of the calibre of candidates. Or the political mood of voters in 2020 – many of the female deputies who lost their seats ‘backed the wrong horse’ in the Education debate.

However, it is inevitable that having ten times as many candidates to choose from must lead to more perfunctory decision-making on a ‘time-per-candidate’ basis. Either consciously or sub-consciously, voters will be looking for short-cuts. Having the appearance of a stereotypical politician has to be an advantage in a thick brochure where the most impactful element is the photo. In the previous district system there was more opportunity for voters to get to know and appreciate someone who didn’t fit the standard mould.

## Impact on women

The lack of women in the 2020 election was noted by the CPA BIMA election observers:

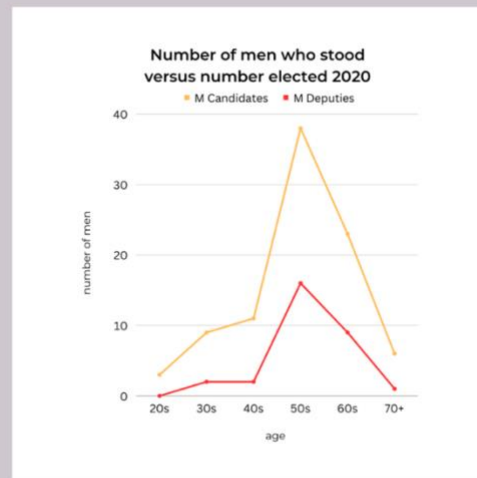
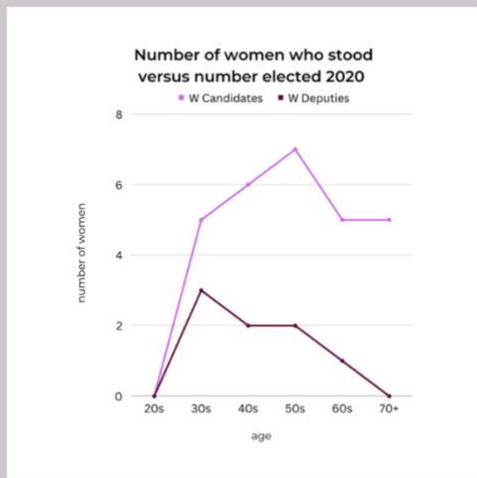
“Of the 119 candidates in this election, only 28 were women. Just eight of them were elected, among the total of 38 deputies representing Guernsey, amounting to 21%. This figure falls short of the minimum advocacy goal of 30% of women in parliament espoused in the Beijing Platform for Action, and very far short of the goal of gender parity of 50% men and women. This is a disappointing outcome from the perspective of gender equality<sup>2</sup>.”

In 2020, the age distribution of the election candidates was much closer to that of the population for women than for men. However, voters strongly rejected older women. 10

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<sup>1</sup> Source of age data: Guernsey Press candidate supplements for 2016 and 2020. Note that a small proportion elected candidates did not give their age so some estimates have been used.

<sup>2</sup> [CPA BIMR election expert mission final report October 2020](#)



women aged 60+ stood and only one was elected (10%). Whereas 29 men aged 60+ stood and 10 were elected (34%).

Just 60 at the time of the election, Deputy Yvonne Burford is now the oldest woman in the States. That means the lived experience of Guernsey’s 5000+ female pensioners over 70 is not represented when decisions are made.

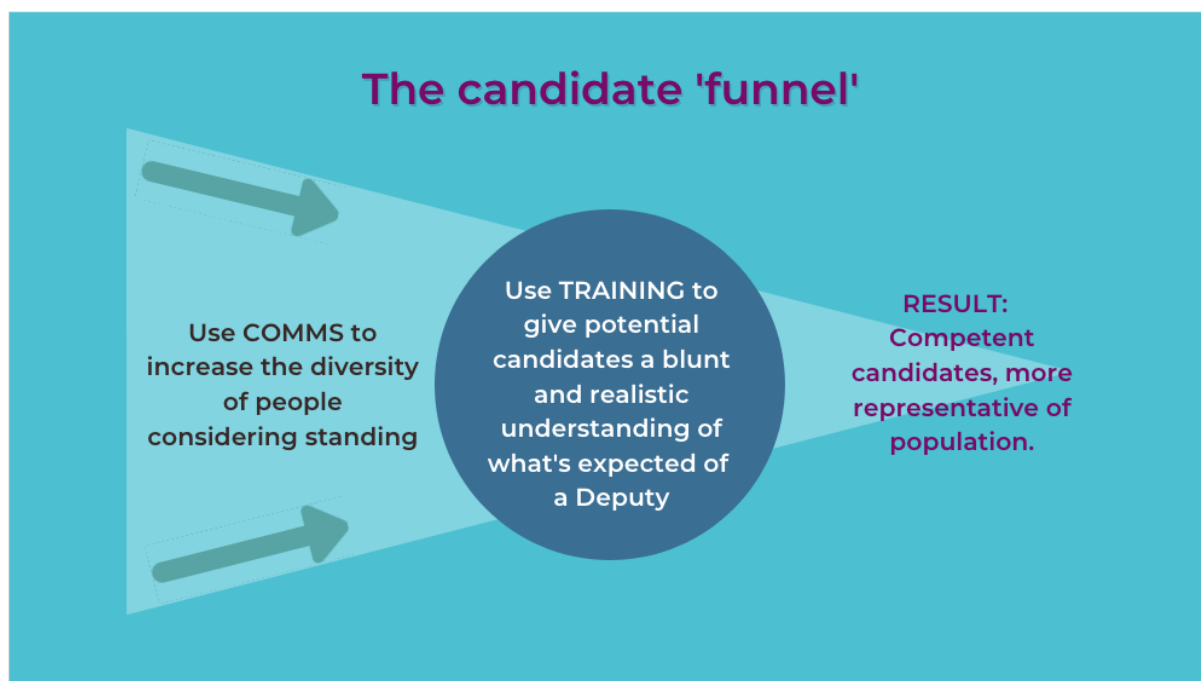
## Remedial action

In their report, the election observers pointed to: ‘an absence of any special measures to promote the increased participation of women in political life’ in Guernsey. The observers reporting criteria specifically focus on women but their statement could equally apply to any other under-represented group.

**Bearing in mind the likely impact of island-wide voting on representation, the observers call for more government action to increase diversity of candidates is particularly salient.**

Women in Public Life met with the States Assembly and Constitution Committee in April 2021 to discuss ways to increase the number of women putting themselves forward for election. A copy of the presentation is available [here](#).

Our key recommendation is summarised in this chart:

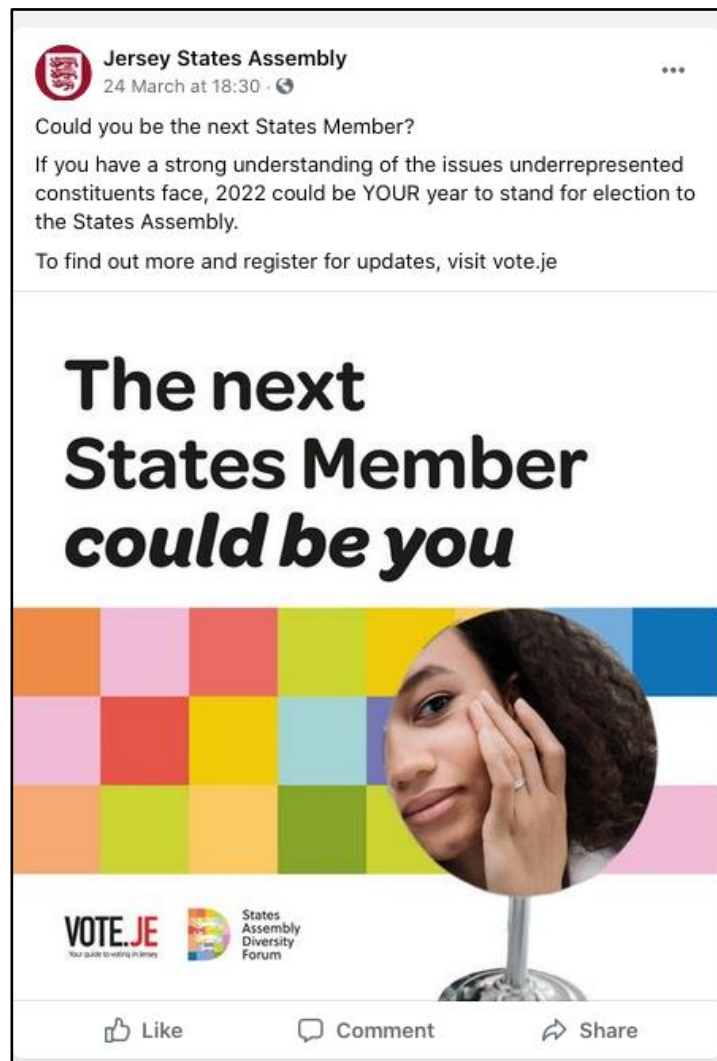


At the meeting, SACC's President, Deputy Carl Meerveld, explained that the committee intends to run a publicity campaign starting two years prior to the Election2025 to help demystify being a deputy for both potential candidates and voters. He hoped this would increase the diversity of candidates.

This initiative is very welcome but a campaign targeting everyone and stopping short of explicitly encouraging people from under-represented groups to stand seems likely to perpetuate the current demographic mix of candidates.

However, we accept that, in the current States, there is resistance to encouraging members of under-represented groups to stand. The perception seems to be that this not a government role and indeed, that it equates to government putting its finger on the scale.

This perception persists despite the election observers clear disappointment at the absence of government-led special measures and the fact that the States of Jersey ran a diversity campaign prior to their recent election:



## Conclusion

Encouraging a greater diversity of candidates is important in any election. But under our unusual island wide system - which shows some evidence of reducing representation - it is even more pertinent. The Third Sector can help, but the health of our democracy is a government responsibility.

The current States is unlikely to be persuaded take any direct action to encourage under-represented groups to stand but we felt it important to highlight this issue to the review panel for the benefit of future States.