

Cymdeithas Gweinyddwyr Etholiadol
Association Of Electoral Administrators
Cangen Cymru / Wales Branch



**FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION CONSULTATION
ON CANDIDATE'S NAMES ON THE REGIONAL BALLOT PAPER**

Introduction:

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has some 1,750 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services.

This paper sets out the comments of the AEA Wales Branch on the suggested options in the Electoral Commission's consultation on the use of candidate's names on the regional ballot paper to be utilised in the Elections to the National Assembly for Wales scheduled to take place on Thursday, 5 May 2016.

In preparing to respond to the Commission's consultation a short survey was prepared and circulated by the Branch Chair to all AEA Wales Branch Members at the beginning of October. In total, electoral administrators representing 13 out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities responded (59%). A list of respondents is attached at Appendix 1.

Summary:

Of the responses provided eight electoral administrators (61%) opted for Option A, while four administrators (31%) opted for Option B. One administrator (8%) selected Option D.

As such, the **majority view** of administrators was to support the 'status quo' position, whereby National Assembly for Wales regional ballot papers do not show candidate names within party lists but Returning Officers are required by election rules to display large size lists in polling stations.

Comments provided by administrators supporting Option A centred on three main themes:

Experience and Best Practice:

While there were some issues with the relevant regional candidate lists not initially being displayed during the 2011 elections to the National Assembly for Wales, which are highly unlikely to be repeated, the vast majority of Polling Stations were unaffected and the new arrangements worked well, were easily understood by electors and straightforward to administer for Returning Officers. In addition, it was highlighted that at regional elections to the National Assembly for Wales electors are voting for a political party, or independent candidate, **not** an individual candidate as is the case when they are voting for their constituency Assembly Member.

Design of the Ballot Paper:

The regional ballot paper template utilised for the 2011 elections to the National Assembly for Wales was regarded by administrators as being well designed and clearly understood by voters. By reverting back to a ballot paper design such as that used at the 2007 elections to the National Assembly for Wales would again result in an oversized, highly complex and confusing ballot paper for electors. In addition, such a ballot paper would also potentially cause difficulties for electors who suffer from any form of visual impairment. Furthermore, it was argued that this would not be placing the elector at the heart of the election process.

Combined Polls and Postal Vote Pack:

Administrators did also raise concerns over being forced to use an oversized, complex regional ballot paper during the forthcoming 2016 elections to the National Assembly for Wales particularly due to the fact that the elections are highly likely to be combined with the Police Crime Commissioner Elections also scheduled to take place on the same day.

This would result in a postal vote pack having to be sent to electors containing three different ballot papers, utilising three different voting systems (First Past the Post, Additional Member System and Supplementary Vote). It cannot be emphasised enough that producing a postal voting pack of this size and complexity would pose significant administrative risks for electoral administrators and Returning Officers, and be highly confusing for electors.

Minority View:

As mentioned above a minority view was also supported by some administrators. They argued that a 'compromise' position should be struck which would allow information on regional candidates being provided to all postal voters. In practice, it was felt that including additional information would be relatively straightforward to implement. In addition, this would also be consistent with the approach adopted by Scottish administrators at Scottish Parliamentary elections which already includes this information in postal packs as a matter of standard practice.

Alternative Suggestion:

One administrator did also put forward an alternative suggestion utilising 'Option D'. It was proposed that regional candidate names could be enclosed on the regional ballot paper but should be strictly limited to the actual number of regional seats being contested (i.e. Four seats, Four names). This could potentially result in a slightly larger ballot paper but would not pose the kind of administrative risks that would result from an oversized regional ballot paper containing up to twelve names.

Rhys George

**Wales Branch Chair – Association of Electoral Administrators
October 2014.**

APPENDIX 1

List of respondents to the AEA Wales Branch Survey -

Mid & West Wales:

Amanda Bebb – Carmarthen County Council

North Wales:

Gareth Evans – Denbighshire County Council

Lynn Phillips – Flintshire County Council

Gaynor Coventry – Wrexham County Borough Council

South Wales Central:

Mark Green – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Tom Evans – Vale of Glamorgan Council

Ann Philpott – Cardiff Council

South Wales East:

David Beecham – Caerphilly County Borough Council

Lyn Pask – Torfaen County Borough Council

Angela O’Leary – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

South Wales West:

Rhys George – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Huw Gruffydd Evans – Swansea City & County Council

Julie Cooper – Bridgend County Borough Council