

POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTIONS AND
REFERENDUMS ACT 2000



**THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE
ON THE ELECTORAL
COMMISSION**

SECOND REPORT 2021

**Appointment of an Electoral Commissioner with
responsibility for Northern Ireland**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 7 July 2021*

The Speaker's Committee

The Speaker's Committee is appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to perform the functions conferred on it by that Act.

Membership

[Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP](#), Speaker of the House of Commons (Chair)

[Rt Hon Michael Gove MP](#), Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*

[Luke Hall MP](#), Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government in the Members section

[Craig Mackinlay MP](#)

[Christian Matheson MP](#)

[Karl McCartney MP](#)

[Cat Smith MP](#)

[Owen Thompson MP](#)

[William Wragg MP](#), Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Previous Publications

First Report 2021 was published 3 March 2021 as HC 1276 of Session 2019–21

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* Michael Gove's membership of the committee is exercisable concurrently with any Minister in the Cabinet Office with responsibilities in relation to the constitution

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Report

Introduction

1. The Electoral Commission was established by Parliament as a body independent of Government. The Chair of the Electoral Commission and the other Electoral Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen, following an Address from the House of Commons. The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission is required to oversee the procedure for selecting candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission by section 3 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. Candidates' names are put before the House with the agreement of the Speaker.
2. This report provides information about the procedure followed by the Speaker's Committee during the selection of a candidate to replace Anna Carragher as Electoral Commissioner with responsibility for Northern Ireland. Anna Carragher's term of office came to an end on 31 December 2020. We are grateful to Anna for her contribution to the work of the Commission during her term in office.

The process

3. We asked Mr Speaker to appoint a panel to assist with identifying possible candidates for the post. Mr Speaker appointed the following people to the panel in July 2020:
 - Professor Dolores O'Reilly, Independent Chair
 - Sir John Holmes, Chair of the Electoral Commission
 - Chris Matheson MP, Member of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission
 - William Wragg MP, Member of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission
4. Sir John Holmes' term as Chair of the Electoral Commission ended during the process. Therefore, following the shortlisting stage, John Pullinger CB, Chair-designate of the Electoral Commission, replaced Sir John Holmes on the appointment panel.
5. The budget for the recruitment was set and managed by the Electoral Commission. The role description and person specification for the role is set out at Appendix A.
6. The post was advertised between 14 September 2020 and 14 October 2020. The advertisement appeared in the following media:
 - Belfast Telegraph
 - Irish News
 - Ulster Newsletter
 - Recruit NI

- Commission for Public Appointments Northern Ireland
- Diversity Jobs

7. The panel met on 20 October 2020 to consider the applications received by the closing date. Having reviewed progress with the competition, the panel was keen to ensure the process attracted the widest possible range of capable candidates. It therefore agreed that recruitment consultants should be appointed to assist with the process and that the competition should be re-launched. Gatenby Sanderson were appointed as recruitment consultants, and the competition was re-launched in December 2020.

8. The Panel met on 2 February 2021 to consider the report from the recruitment consultants and to agree which of the applicants should be longlisted for a preliminary interview with the recruitment consultants. The Panel agreed longlist of 10 candidates, one of whom subsequently withdrew from the process.

9. The Panel met again on 23 February 2021 to consider the consultants' reports on the nine remaining candidates, which included a summary of their interviews with the candidates. The Panel also consider the outcomes of a 'due diligence' exercise which had trawled the internet, social media, and Companies House and Charity Commission records for information about the candidates. This exercise did not identify any issues of concern. The panel agreed on a shortlist of six candidates to go forward to interview.

10. Each shortlisted candidate was offered the opportunity to speak to the outgoing Commissioner with responsibility for Northern Ireland to discuss the role.

11. The panel interviews were held on 19 and 20 April 2021. Candidates were told that they would be asked to give a 5-minute oral presentation on the following question: "What do you think will be the main challenges facing you, as Northern Ireland Commissioner, and the Electoral Commission over the next three years and what would you bring to the Commission to address them?"

12. The interviews each lasted around 50 minutes. Questioning addressed each of the criteria in the person specification in turn. At the end, the candidates were asked about how they would handle the time commitment, any potential for perception of conflicts of interest, and whether there was anything else in their backgrounds that the panel should be aware of.

13. The Committee is entirely satisfied that the selection process was rigorous and that the panel discharged its duties conscientiously and with all due regard to the requirements of thoroughness, fairness and propriety. The Committee is grateful to Professor Dolores O'Reilly and her fellow panel members.

The candidate

14. The unanimous view of the Panel was that Dr Katy Radford MBE should be recommended for appointment as Electoral Commissioner with responsibility for Northern Ireland. A summary CV can be found at Appendix B.

15. The Committee met on 12 May 2021. It agreed to put Dr Radford's name forward for consultation with the party leaders.

16. Dr Katy Radford is a social anthropologist who currently serves as a Commissioner at the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. She recently completed terms as Vice Chair of the Arts Council for Northern Ireland and as a Member of the Commission for Flags, Identity, Culture, and Tradition convened by The Executive Office. From 2011–2020, Katy was Acting Director of the Institute for Conflict Research. Katy was awarded an MBE in 2011 for her contribution to community relations in Northern Ireland.

Statutory Consultation

17. Section 3(2)(b) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended, requires that the proposal to appoint (or re-appoint) a member of the Electoral Commission be the subject of consultation with the registered leader of each registered party to which two or more Members of the House of Commons then belong. Mr Speaker accordingly wrote to the leaders of the qualifying parties giving them a deadline by which to respond. Mr Speaker indicated that if he did not receive a reply by this date that he would proceed on the basis that the leaders were content for the appointment to be made. No objections were received.

Appointment

18. Appointments to the Electoral Commission are made by Her Majesty on an Address from the House of Commons. The Committee invites the House to approve the appointment of Dr Katy Radford MBE for a four-year period.

Appendix 1: Role description and person specification

Role description

As a Commission Board member you will be helping to:

- set the overall strategic direction of the Commission across the UK and ensure delivery of its strategic goals within the statutory framework and with the resources determined by the UK, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments to ensure public confidence in democracy
- set the Commission's priorities and monitor its activity in the areas of both party and election finance and electoral administration—including, for example, approving strategy and expenditure on promotion of public awareness of UK electoral arrangements, and the oversight of the publication of statutory election reports
- from time to time, consider key issues within the Commission's remit—this may include for example matters relating to maintaining compliance with the regulatory framework for political parties and candidates, as well as decisions relating to the conduct of elections and referendums; oversight of statutory schemes such as policy development grants to political parties; and review of the overall framework of performance standards for local authority electoral registration and returning officers
- ensure efficient and effective use of public funds, that the Commission operates within the limits of its statutory authority to high standards of governance, and that it manages risk effectively
- contribute to the Commission's role as a UK-wide body, understanding the issues faced on a UK-wide level and effectively supporting the work of the devolved governments

You will be an important ambassador for the Commission in Northern Ireland, building relationships with senior political and local government stakeholders, and providing local expertise and knowledge to the Commission on issues in Northern Ireland. As appropriate you may appear before Committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and possibly the UK Parliament, and from time to time as required represent the views of the Commission to the media. You will work closely with the Head of the Northern Ireland Office to develop our strategy, acting as a sounding board for the team.

You may also be asked to:

- serve as a member on the Audit or Remuneration and Human Resources Committees and participate in informal groups from time to time
- perform other related roles or functions which the Commission asks you to discharge personally

Person specification

All candidates are expected to meet the criteria listed below.

You must not be disqualified by law from being appointed as an Electoral Commissioner. That would be particularly if, in the last five years, you had been an elected politician (other than a parish or community councillor), an officer or employee of a political party, or a reported donor or lender to a political party. In addition, Electoral Commissioners, other than those nominated by the political parties, once appointed, may not be members of a registered political party. The relevant legislation can be found in section 3(4) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and section 74 and Schedule 1 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

You should have an established and well respected personal profile in Northern Ireland and be able to demonstrate substantial knowledge, skills and experience and significant achievement to meet as many as possible of the following criteria:

- proven experience in contributing to the leadership and strategic direction of a complex organisation operating in a political environment, including experience in a non-executive role, reviewing financial and other resource plans, and the ability to scrutinise and challenge from a non-executive perspective
- evidence of excellent interpersonal and communication skills and first-hand experience representing an organisation with a high profile in Northern Ireland to the media or to political stakeholders, and the ability to build and/or maintain strong networks across Northern Ireland on behalf of the Electoral Commission
- demonstrable understanding of the regulatory and political landscape—from either a regulator or regulated perspective—based on excellent analytical ability and a capacity to think clearly about regulatory decisions from a principles-based perspective
- track record operating in an environment subject to significant scrutiny from a range of quarters, including from the regulated community, from politicians, and from the media
- demonstrable understanding of the relevance of equality and diversity to the work of the Electoral Commission
- clear evidence of complete integrity and commitment to transparency in decision making, and of independence and objectivity – including the need for the Commission to be perceived as completely unbiased when fulfilling its responsibilities
- highly developed political understanding and awareness including the ability to work closely with colleagues from within political parties and strong understanding of the political environment in Northern Ireland

For this role we welcome candidates whose previous experience has been gained through the private, public or not for profit sector, or from any combination of these.

Appendix 2: Dr Katy Radford: summary CV

Previous and current public appointments

- Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Vice Chair of the Arts Council for Northern Ireland (completed December 2020)
- Member of the Commission for Flags Identity Culture and Tradition convened by The Executive Office (completed June 2020)
- Chair of TEO's Race Equality Group (completed December 2019)

Dr Radford was made MBE in 2011 for her contribution to Community Relations in Northern Ireland.

Employment

July 2020 - present

Acting Head of Research and Policy at the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland.

August 2011 - March 2020

Project Manager and Senior Researcher, Institute for Conflict Research

Dr Radford worked previously at The Irish School of Ecumenics Trinity College Dublin, Queen's University Belfast, Save the Children and, prior to turning to study as a mature student, worked as an Associate Producer for the British Film Institute.