

Written evidence submitted by Compassion in Politics and 50:50 Parliament

Summary

The "Reset: [Blueprint for a 21st Century Parliament](#)" Report was previously submitted and produced by 50:50 Parliament and Compassion in Politics, providing an immediate starting point for modernising the UK Parliament into a more inclusive, supportive, gender sensitive and effective working institution. The report drew on a 2024 survey of departing MPs and provided both a qualitative and quantitative framework for the recommendations below. The report and suggestions have been devised by those of us already deeply passionate and embedded in politics -who believe firmly in our democratic structure as the best vehicle for social change and who want our democracy to be leading the way as a template internationally.

We welcome the resolve of this new Government and the cross party Modernisation Committee to furthering this aim for both those within the political arena and the public they serve.

Overview

The report's recommendations prioritise procedural and cultural reforms .

That it should be ***inclusive and representative:***

To deliver a House of Commons that reflects, and is able to represent, the diversity of the British public (including the 51% of the public that are women). To improve public trust in politicians and, by extension, the UK's democratic process. To meet the international democratic norms of gender sensitivity and gender equality, including the 2022 Kigali Declaration and the UN Sustainable development goals 5 and 16

That it should ***encourage best workplace practices:***

To create a modern, inclusive and healthy workplace that supports politicians in meeting the complex challenges our nation faces for the benefit of all. To role model non-violent conduct and cultures and lead on reducing hostility and aggression in the public political space. Promote active cooperation between MPs and parties around issues of common concern and interest. To inspire public trust that Parliament is 'modern', professional and fit for purpose . To meet the basic duty of care to support and protect British elected representatives and their staff. To address the worsening mental health crisis amongst MPs and to ensure that those with high levels of empathy are not driven out of the political space.

That it should **show that Parliament is responding to public concerns about transparency, honesty, and self-regulation.**

To reset public perceptions about, and enhance political engagement with, Parliament and its elected representatives.

Recommendations

- 1) Launch a consultation into flexible and inclusive working in Parliament with a view to demonstrating best practice
- 2) Bring forward a debate on the working culture in Parliament, to focus on gender and diversity sensitivity, the impact on family life and mental health
- 3) Modernise the language used in parliament
- 4) Increase the agency for MPs, particularly opposition members and backbenchers, by establishing a House Business Committee for clarity on working hours and taking measures to prevent the 'talking out' of private members bills
- 5) Establish an independent Human Resources (HR) function
- 6) Promote constructive, respectful debate
- 7) Return to electronic voting
- 8) Launch a consultation on the whipping system
- 9) Introduce legislation to promote honesty and transparent
- 10) Put the Members' and Ministerial Code on a statutory footing

What topic(s) do you think the Modernisation Committee should prioritise and how do they link to one or more of the strategic aims set out in the Leader's memorandum?

The Memorandum is clear that many of the reforms should be "*swift and show a commitment to acting decisively*". Our report's recommendations are largely ones that can be enacted promptly and, crucially, at low cost to the taxpayer, setting a standard that the public can visibly see and be reassured by.

Topic one: Strengthening public trust

We welcome the Leader's direction of ensuring we address the erosion of public trust and demonstrate that Parliament can "embody the high standards expected of us". The [latest Ipsos veracity survey](#) shows this is a vital issue to be addressed and should be a key priority across all of government:

"Politicians remain Britain's least trusted profession. Just eleven per cent trust them to tell the truth, scarcely higher than the 40-year low of nine per cent recorded last year."

To this end, our recommendations 3, 6, and 9 would clearly set the tone of reform and also ensure that "the house of commons looks open and accessible to people from all walks of life"

(3) Modernise the language used in parliament; (6) Promote constructive, respectful debate, (9) Introduce legislation to promote honesty and transparency

We have a vital opportunity with recommendation 6 to address the issue of public trust via a bill that Compassion in Politics has already drafted. In July of 2024 the Welsh Senedd committed to introducing legislation within the current parliament that would see politicians and candidates disqualified for deliberate factual misrepresentation without lawful excuse such as national security interests. As with its legislation for Future Generations, Wales has put itself at the forefront of moves to reform political practices and accountabilities. The introduction of the duty of candour on public servants through the Hillsborough Law means that without action, public servants will be under a legal obligation to tell the truth while Politicians are not. We would like to see similar legislation adopted by Westminster.

There is huge public support for this measure. It is easily understood and would provide a highly visible and tangible action to telegraph the reset that is so badly needed. Polling done by Opinium for Compassion in Politics shows that 72% of the public would support a law to prevent deliberate factual misrepresentation by politicians. A petition launched on Change.org gathered over [200,000 signatures](#) for such a Measure.

Topic two: A more diverse and inclusive politics

We also welcome the overall tone and specific call by the Leader of The House to make the commons more compatible with family life and to continue the trend of increasing diversity and inclusion of all elected members.

Recommendations one and two would provide clear leadership to push forward this agenda and prove essential for focused public engagement and involvement across all demographics and socio economic backgrounds thereby providing a strengthening of the bridge between Parliament and Politicians.

- (1) Launch a consultation into flexible and inclusive working and, with a commitment to adopting best practice (Bring forward a debate on the working culture in Parliament, to focus on gender and diversity sensitivity, the impact on family life and mental health

Why would the topic(s) benefit from the attention of the Modernisation Committee?

Both nationally, and internationally, it is of utmost importance that our democracy be strengthened and made fit for purpose to serve us all. Our political structures are in need of reform and the need for the public to feel a sense of trust, engagement and involvement has never been more urgent.

Research underpins how diversity in representation, and gender balance, lead to better outcomes for all. Gender balance in business boosts profit and - in governance of nations, it creates safer and more caring societies. It is almost 100 years since the Equal Franchise and, although we have made huge strides forward, Parliament is still not representative of the people it serves. Signalling to the public that you are creating changes that will make Parliament more inclusive and gender/diversity sensitive - and that being an elected representative need not come at the cost of having a family or your mental health will be integral in recruiting and retaining the next generation of MPs - from all backgrounds.

The clear priorities of the modernisation committee should therefore be inward focused (reform of structure, process and tone) and outward focused demonstration of this agenda whilst clearly and accessibly engaging with the public.

Are you aware of examples from other Parliaments relevant to the topic(s) which may be interesting for the Modernisation Committee to consider?

Wales is considering job shares for MPs: <https://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/MP-Job-Share> as is Australia.

The Swedish Parliament is often held up as a benchmark on gender sensitive structures and culture, including adequate childcare (for example, a creche as well as a nursery); a designated substitute when they go on parenting leave; set working hours to enable more predictability around family life; and a hybrid working pattern (Mon and Fri in constituency).

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08038740.2023.2174184#d1e475>

Is there any existing work relevant to the topic(s) which you think the Modernisation Committee can build on?

[Fawcett Society a house for everyone](#)

Recommendations

- Parliament to establish an accountability mechanism that oversees and reports publicly on progress against recommendations made to date to create a more inclusive parliament
- Parliament to investigate changes to sitting hours, online and proxy voting options with IPSA to look at increased budget allocations for MPs' staffing, office running costs and childcare needs, so that MPs can fulfil the increasing demands of the role both in Westminster and their constituencies
- Government to ensure the Electoral Commission and local police are sufficiently resourced and equipped to enforce legal sanctions for intimidating candidates, campaigners, and representatives during election periods
- Government to amend the Online Safety Bill to better address the disproportionate levels of online abuse experienced by women, especially those from Black and minoritised backgrounds, and increase the accountability of tech companies
- Political parties to introduce quotas to increase women's representation and ensure women, especially disabled women and women from Black and minority backgrounds, are being selected in winnable seats

[The Governance project](#)

Recommendations based around four themes

a. Restoring high standards of integrity in public office: our aim is to heighten public confidence in the perceived and actual behaviour of those, elected or unelected, exercising power in the UK, providing clarity of expectations and a stronger and more supportive structure for integrity in public office together with effective and independent investigation and enforcement (Recommendations 1-6).

b. Reinforcing the role of Parliament: we seek to improve the standard of national debate and the quality of legislation, by strengthening Parliament's powers as regards (i) transparency and accountability of executive action; (ii) ensuring adequate debate on matters of public importance; and (iii) the effective scrutiny of legislation, both primary and secondary. This will bring substantial benefits to any Government and to the public in the form of better decisions and legislation and enhanced democratic legitimacy (Recommendations 7 and 8).

c. Better working between Ministers and Civil Servants: we have made specific proposals to contribute to re-establishing the reputation of the Civil Service as the world's most highly regarded Civil Service, providing a better SpAd framework and increasing the quality and effectiveness of internal processes and relationships. We have also concluded that a Royal Commission should establish, following more detailed analysis, inter alia what the roles, capabilities and responsibilities of the Civil Service should be and whether it should be put on a statutory basis (Recommendations 9 and 10).

d. Protecting our democracy: we propose enhancing the role of the Electoral Commission (EC) as an effective watchdog on our electoral democracy, through an increase in the responsibilities, powers, effectiveness and independence of the EC (Recommendation 11).

[The Good Parliament Report](#)

1. New formats for PMQS
2. Remote voting
3. Trial sittings of the House based around 'normal business hours'
4. Introduce greater predictability in the scheduling of House Business
5. Undertake a review for the provision of a crèche facility on the Parliamentary Estate
6. Produce a House Statement on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave. All parties represented in the Commons would be expected to sign up to this
7. Sex Gender Quotas

/Amongst many other wide-ranging recommendations

[The Wright Committee](#)

1. The Reform Committee recommended that backbench business should be organised by a Backbench Business Committee, responsible for all business which was not strictly ministerial. That committee would then join with the representatives of the Government and Opposition in a House Business Committee which would be obliged to

come up with a draft agenda for the week ahead. This agenda would then be put to the House for its agreement.

[50:50 Parliament submission to Women and Equalities Committee](#)

Recommendations included: [The Electoral Reform's Society Women in Parliament Report](#) identifies the 'incumbency effect' as being "One of the biggest barriers to change when it comes to women's representation". It also highlights that 'Seat Blockers' prevent women from gaining access to Westminster. In 2004 [Leslie Schwindt-Bayer reported](#) that " term limits, although not designed to promote the election of women, have a positive side effect for women's representation." Maybe term limits could counteract incumbency bias against women.

Finally: The Improving Parliament Report, 2014

Conclusion

We at 50:50 Parliament and Compassion in Politics welcome the leadership and resolve of the Modernisation Committee and the Leader of the House, Lucy Powell MP, to proactively assess what reform is needed and the steps forward to implement this. Our report will stand alongside many of our colleagues in the sector and others who fundamentally believe in the importance of our political structures. It will also stand alongside reports produced over the years who have urged us to be bold and brave with our recommendations and to modernise, reform and update our politics . At a time when the global political landscape is volatile, it is crucial to act boldly, decisively and quickly to ensure our democratic processes and institutions are robust. We must endeavour to attract the widest pool of talent for future elections, and create an honest, civil, inclusive, accountable and efficient working culture in Parliament.

With public mistrust of politics at an all time high and with voting turnout at an all time low now is the time to listen to the voices of the public and to those working within politics itself , to create a blueprint for a 21st Century Parliament.

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