

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Politics and International Studies (19)		
Title of case study: Reshaping the Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament's franchise, size and electoral system		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Laura McAllister	Professor	01/10/2016 - present
Roger Awan-Scully	Professor	01/03/2012 - present
Richard Wyn Jones	Professor	01/02/2009 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/08/2013-31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Since the establishment of the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) in 1999, its size and voting system has been subject to intermittent debate. Cardiff research demonstrated that, at 60 members, the Senedd is small in relation to international comparators, undermining its ability to work effectively. This research put the Senedd's size and electoral arrangements back onto the political agenda, subsequently shaping legislative changes. These drove the Senedd's Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform in 2017, leading to the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and extension of the right to vote to 16-17-year-olds. The Panel's work also underpinned debate focused on increasing the number of elected Members of the Senedd and changing its voting system.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Following the 2011 referendum result in favour of more devolved powers for Wales, the UK Government established the Independent Commission on Devolution in Wales (Silk Commission). The Commission focused on Wales' constitutional and financial arrangements but precluded, however, consideration of the 'structure' of the Welsh legislature or 'issues relating to the election of [its] Members'.</p> <p>Cardiff research [3.1] demonstrated that a principle-based approach to constitutional design had been sacrificed in order to maintain party unity, leading to the instability characterising Welsh devolution. Subsequently, in 2012 Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre (WGC) established the 'UK's Changing Union' project (UKCU) [G3.1], which provided evidence- and principle-based recommendations to the Silk Commission aimed at establishing a stable and sustainable model of devolution for Wales.</p>		
2.1 Size Matters and Reshaping the Senedd [2013-2016]		
<p>Awan-Scully led the production of two reports in conjunction with the Electoral Reform Society (ERS). The first, 'Size Matters: Making the National Assembly More Effective' [3.2], submitted to the Silk Commission, argued that:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at 60 members, the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament, formerly 'National Assembly for Wales') was too small to operate effectively in the context of its (then) already extensive legislative competences and responsibilities; • based on international comparators, the Senedd should have at least 80 and closer to 100 members. 		
<p>Notwithstanding its restrictive terms of reference (which precluded structural or electoral arrangements), the Silk Commission's report made use of evidence from 'Size Matters' in recommending an increase to the size of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) so that it can improve upon its scrutiny role. Even though the UK Government's initial response to the Commission rejected this recommendation, the WGC, with the ERS, published a second</p>		

report, 'Reshaping the Senedd' [3.3], which evaluated options for increasing the Senedd's membership by assessing different voting systems. Drawing on international evidence, as well as survey data from the 2016 Wales Election Study (PI Scully), the report:

- delineated agreed principles for electing a representative body: proportionality, simplicity, sustainability and stability, broad-based consensus, strong and equal mandate, representativeness, and substantial support;
- demonstrated how different systems fared against these principles: Single Transferable Vote (STV) and Open List systems satisfied them; but the Senedd's current Additional Member System did not;
- modelled the electoral implications of change: evidence showed potential for large-scale vote transfers between centre-left parties, making them possible beneficiaries of preferential voting systems.

2.2 Research for the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform (2017)

The Wales Act 2017 devolved responsibility for the Senedd's internal arrangements and electoral matters. In anticipation of this, the Senedd Commission established the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, chaired by WGC's McAllister. This Expert Panel's remit was to review existing evidence and make recommendations on the Senedd's size, shape, electoral arrangements, and the minimum voting age. The decision to establish the Panel built on political consensus and Cardiff's evidence base that the Senedd was too small.

The WGC team undertook further research (partially funded by the Senedd) supporting the work of McAllister's Expert Panel. This included updated modelling of the implications of different electoral systems via a 2017 YouGov survey extension of the 2016 Wales Election Study [as contained in the Expert Panel's subsequent report, 5.3]. Additionally, the panel drew on McAllister's research into parliamentary structures, political representation and diversity which demonstrated that:

- while opportunities for women to gain elected office have improved in the devolved parliaments, mainly through voluntary interventions by some parties, unless this is sustained or protected, progress on gender representation is vulnerable [3.4];
- electoral system change provides a unique opportunity to enshrine gender balance through prescriptive, legislative quotas [3.5];
- newly established or substantially reformed democratic institutions present unique opportunities to instigate other changes, such as allowing 16- and 17- year olds to vote [3.6].

In summary, WGC researchers provided critical evidence on the size and shape of the Senedd both before and during the 2017 Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform. The research showed that the Senedd's comparatively small membership limits its ability to work effectively. The WGC also provided detailed modelling of options for changing the Senedd's size, shape, and electoral system which directly informed the Panel's final recommendations.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Awan-Scully, *Wales Says Yes: Devolution and the 2011 Welsh Referendum*, 2013, University of Wales Press.
DOI.10.1111/1478-9302.12016_103

[3.2] Roger Awan-Scully, Richard Wyn Jones, and Electoral Reform Society, *Size Matters: Making the National Assembly more effective*, 2013.
<http://www.law.cardiff.ac.uk/ukcu/papers/05/Size%20Matters%20ENG.pdf>

[3.3] Roger Awan-Scully and Electoral Reform Society, *Reshaping the Senedd: How to elect a more effective Assembly*, 2016.
https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1288287/Report-Senedd-ENG-FINAL.pdf

[3.4] Diana Stirbu and Laura McAllister, 'Chronicling National Assembly committees as markers of institutional change', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 24 (3), pp. 373-393. 2018. DOI: 10.1080/13572334.2018.1516606

[3.5] Laura McAllister, 'Has devolution improved gender diversity in politics?', in Paun, A. (ed), *Has Devolution Worked? The first 20 years*, 2019, Institute for Government, London, pp.134-145.

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/has-devolution-worked-essay-collection-FINAL.pdf>

[3.6] Diana Stirbu, **Laura McAllister** and Jac Larnier, 'Gender Representation in Wales: New Approaches to Candidate Selection in the UK's Devolved Legislatures and Beyond', in (G. Cordero and X. Coller, eds.) *Democratising Candidate Selection: New Methods, Old Receipts?*, 2018, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-3-319-76550-1. Available from HEI on request.

Selected grants:

[G3.1] Richard Wyn Jones, 'The UK Changing Union', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 01/01/2012-31/12/2014, £130,000

[G3.2] Richard Wyn Jones, 'The UK Changing Union', Nuffield Foundation, 01/04/2012-30/05/2016, £150,000

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research shaped legislative debate in Wales and the UK, through influencing the outcomes of the Silk Commission in 2014, and the final report of the Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament's Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform (chaired by McAllister). The Expert Panel's 2017 report led directly to the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, with provision of the right to vote to 16 and 17 year-olds in Wales (from the Senedd elections in 2021). The report's recommendations continue to underpin the next stage of political debate and operational planning for the Senedd, including a focus on increasing the Senedd's size and changing its electoral system.

Elin Jones MS, the Llywydd/Presiding Officer (Speaker) of the Senedd, noted: "*the contribution made by Professor McAllister and the Expert Panel has been, and continues to be, central to Senedd reforms aimed at ensuring the Senedd fully reflects the communities and people it serves*" **[5.1a]**.

4.1 Influencing legislative debate

a. The Silk Commission (2014)

Despite the exclusion of the 'structure' of the Welsh legislature and electoral processes from the 2014 Silk Commission focus, the Commission's final report used WGC research to recommend changes to its size: "It is our clear judgement that, without its enlargement, the National Assembly [Senedd] cannot serve the interests of the people of Wales as it ought" **[5.2, p.156]**. The report cites **[3.7]** as evidence for this conclusion, noting that:

- the National Assembly of its current size is more stretched than its international comparators, and cannot provide an appropriate level of scrutiny **[5.2, p.154]**;
- support for the proposal for an Assembly of between 80 and 100 members **[5.2, p.156]**.

b. The Expert Panel on Assembly Reform (2017)

The Senedd Commission announced in November 2016 that it would take forward work, via the Senedd's Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, to explore the potential use of the powers devolved by the Wales Act 2017. The Presiding Officer described **[3.3]** as "*a vital influence*" in this decision as "*this paper showed workable options underpinned by rigorous research*" **[5.1a]**. The Expert Panel's remit was to provide evidence to inform political consensus around reforms to the Senedd's size, its electoral system, and the minimum voting age. McAllister, invited to chair the Panel "*on the basis of her academic expertise*", worked with the Presiding Officer to select the Panel's membership (academic and parliamentary experts) and to agree terms of reference **[5.1b]**. The WGC team's modelling of potential electoral systems provided a critical, informed evidence basis for the principal recommendations in the Panel's December 2017 McAllister report. These included the

following recommendations [5.3] :

1. increase the number of Members of the Senedd (MSs) from 60 to at least 80, and preferably closer to 90;
2. elect the Senedd by Single Transferable Vote (STV). A gender quota (prescriptive and enshrined in law) should be integrated within STV to retain the Senedd's relatively high percentage of women MSs and to make gender balance more secure and sustainable. A job share scheme for MSs should also be considered;
3. lower the minimum voting age for elections to 16 years from the 2021 Senedd election.

4.2 Lowering the minimum voting age in Wales to 16 years

The McAllister Report's recommendation to lower the minimum voting age was passed into law by the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 [5.4]. The change was described by the Electoral Reform Society as *"a boost for our democracy as a whole – strengthening citizenship and boosting political engagement"* [5.5a]. Senedd Clerk/CEO, Manon Antoniazzi noted: *"The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, informed by the work of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform and Professor McAllister's ongoing advocacy for the Panel's recommendations, will give around 70,000 young people aged 16 or 17 the right to vote for the first time, offering them the chance to directly shape the institution which represents them and their interests"* [5.1b].

4.3 Influencing change to the size, shape, and diversity of the Senedd

Following a debate on the McAllister Report's findings in February 2018, the Senedd resolved that further cross-party work was needed. This was taken forward by the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform, established in September 2019. Committee Chair, Dawn Bowden MS noted that the Panel's recommendations *"provided a framework"* for *"the Committee's inquiries into the capacity of the legislature, its diversity and its electoral system and boundaries"* [5.6]. The Committee used Cardiff research [3.4, 3.5, 3.6], as well as the McAllister report, to inform discussions through technical briefings and oral evidence [5.6]. The Committee's final report and recommendations, published in September 2020 (delayed from Spring 2020 due to Covid-19), found *"clear and compelling evidence"* for electoral reform [5.7]. It explicitly supported the McAllister report's key recommendations, including:

- increasing the size of the Senedd to between 80 and 90 members;
- introducing the Single Transferable Vote electoral system;
- a commitment to electing a more diverse Senedd and recommendations for a number of actions, including more cross-party work on how job sharing for MSs and diversity quotas for protected characteristics, including gender, could work in practice.

During a Senedd plenary debate (October 2020), Huw Irranca-Davies MS (Labour) stated the report *"sets out the path to take for the next stages for reform...to ensure we have the democracy and the legislature we need and that we deserve in Wales"* [5.8]. Legislation cannot be brought forward until after the 2021 Senedd election (when the Sixth Senedd will commence), but the Presiding Officer committed to ensuring that it is part of the Fifth Senedd's legacy work [5.1a].

The McAllister Report also influenced operational considerations for changes to the Senedd. For example, the Independent Remuneration Board determines the remuneration, support and allowances for MSs. The McAllister Report has *"been a recurring theme in the Board's discussions"* [5.9], with McAllister providing three expert briefings for the Board between May 2017 and September 2020. These have influenced the Board's workplan for the Sixth Senedd from 2021, with the inclusion of considerations for *"how the current levels of staffing, service provision and financial resources provided to support Members should be altered in the case of a larger Senedd"* [5.9].

4.4. Shaping the debate to establish cross-party and public support for the reforms

Prior to the publication of the McAllister Report, the Senedd Commission clearly stated that, for any recommended reforms to take place, political and public consensus was required [5.2]. Antoniazzi noted *"McAllister play[ed] a critical role in communicating the Panel's*

recommendations” by developing political support and influencing the debate in public and civil society” [5.1b].

a. Developing cross-party political support

A Political Reference Group, chaired by the Presiding Officer and made up of representatives from each party in the Senedd, ran alongside the 2017 Expert Panel to keep parties informed of progress. McAllister gave regular updates on the Panel's work and specific technical briefings, seeking party perspectives and testing the Panel's emerging conclusions. The Group played an important role in building support for the proposals, and its *“effective operation...as an engagement mechanism was facilitated by the respect Members from across the political spectrum have for Professor McAllister’s academic expertise”* [5.1b]. Following publication, the report was referenced positively by nearly every party, for example, said: *“we believe in a strong Wales...to do that, our party does support the arguments made in the McAllister review”* (Jane Hutt MS, Welsh Labour) [5.10a] and *“this [votes at 16] is the first phase of a package of reforms following the excellent reports produced by the working group chaired by Laura McAllister”* (Siân Gwenllïan MS, Plaid Cymru) [5.10b].

b. Influencing public and civic society support

The Senedd Commission’s consultation on reforms ran from February-April 2018. McAllister participated in public consultation events across Wales, as well as Facebook and Twitter Live sessions, briefings to major civil society organisations like the Confederation of British Industry, Public Affairs Cymru, and the Law Society, fringe meetings at all political party conferences, and sessions at the National Eisteddfod [5.1b]. 59% of the 2,300 respondents to the consultation said that the voting age should be lowered to 16, and 56% that the Senedd should have more members [5.1b]. This public support *“was an important factor for MSs to consider”* and *“helped the successful passage of the Bill”* [5.1a].

Extensive media coverage of the McAllister report demonstrates widespread civic society engagement and support for the recommendations. For example, Catherine Fookes, Director of Women’s Equality Network Wales, noted that the recommendations *“would ensure that the 52% of the Welsh population that are women feel properly represented”* in the electoral process [5.5b]. Over 20 blogs (many written from outside Wales), using the research or supporting the report’s findings, were published by significant civil society organisations and think tanks, for example the Electoral Reform Society, the Institute for Welsh Affairs and the UCL Constitution Unit. The Managing Director of Positif, one of the largest public affairs companies in Wales, stated: *“I have accepted the case for the increase of the number of members of the National Assembly for Wales...The publication of the report by Professor Laura McAllister and her team of experts has helped change my view”* [5.5c].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] a. Testimonial: Elin Jones, Llywydd/Presiding Officer of the Senedd b.

Testimonial: Manon Antoniazzi, CEO/Clerk to the Senedd

[5.2] Commission on Devolution in Wales (2014), *Empowerment and Responsibility: Legislative Powers to Strengthen Wales*

[5.3] McAllister, Laura et al (2017), *A Parliament that Works for Wales* (Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform report)

[5.4] Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 (became law on 15 January 2020)

[5.5] Selected media coverage: a. Electoral Reform Society (1 June 2020) b. Wales Online (12 December 2017); c. Positif (10 January 2018)

[5.6] Testimonial: Dawn Bowden MS, Chair of the Senedd Committee on Electoral Reform

[5.7] Final report of the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform (September 2020)

[5.8] Senedd Plenary Debate on the Committee for Electoral Reform Report – ‘Senedd reform: The next steps’ 07/10/2020 (para 262 and para 288)

[5.9] Testimonial: Dr Elizabeth Haywood, Chair, Senedd’s Independent Remuneration Board

[5.10] Selected plenary sessions referencing the McAllister report: a. 10/07/2019 (para 447) b. 10/10/2020 (para 333)