

Senedd Women's Caucus

Annual Report 2023-2024

October 2024

The Senedd's Women's Caucus was officially launched in June 2023, and is chaired by Joyce Watson MS. A steering group for the Caucus is made up of representatives from each group. All women Members of the Senedd are, by default, members of the Caucus, and secretarial support is provided by the Llywydd's Private Office, where appropriate.

In its inaugural year, Members of the Caucus have contributed to high-profile and wide-reaching events on the Senedd estate and beyond, all as part of its mission to promote and support women's participation in politics. The Caucus's work also links with Senedd Business, from contributions to Committee inquiries to Members reflecting on their experiences with the Caucus in both Plenary and Committee sessions. The Caucus has fostered new international connections, provided valued peer support for its members, and has quickly established itself as a respected forum for consultation and engagement with women members of the Senedd. This inaugural year of the Senedd Women's Caucus has been a highly productive one, and this is thanks to the personal commitment of its members.

At its inception, the Caucus agreed a terms of reference, vision and mission that would shape its work going forward. The Caucus has also launched [a webpage](#) that hosts updates and resources related to its work.



Our vision

A gender equal and fully inclusive Wales, where:

- everyone is empowered to engage with politics (as citizens and as elected representatives) regardless of their gender and other protected characteristics, including socio-economic status, and
- policies, laws, programmes and budgets are designed to be sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of the population.

Our mission

To bring together women Members of the Senedd from across the political parties to:

- work purposefully, promoting and supporting women's participation in politics and identifying current barriers within our parliamentary system.
- develop and advocate policy and practice initiatives that address issues affecting our women parliamentarians and society.
- advance the agreed agenda of the Caucus within political parties and other spheres of Senedd influence.

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Meetings, Governance and Support

- 1.** The Caucus is chaired by Joyce Watson MS and a steering group made up of representatives from each of the political groups. This steering group was selected from members already involved in another women's parliamentary network, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).
- 2.** In its terms of reference, the Caucus committed to publishing an annual report to reflect on its activities. As well taking part in events and visits, the Caucus also meets privately to provide peer support and to share updates and opportunities arising. The personal commitment of Members to the Caucus has ensured that its meetings and events have been well-attended and supported across political parties.
- 3.** Secretarial support is provided by the Llywydd's Private Office, however on more political or policy-focussed activities (such as providing evidence to Committees) the Chair and other members have received support from their groups.
- 4.** The secretariat, as well as convening the Caucus for meetings and events, collates and circulates opportunities and resources to the Caucus including learning resources, relevant literature, and opportunities to engage with stakeholders.

Official Launch

- 5.** The Senedd Women's Caucus was launched on 7 June 2023 at an event in the Senedd.
- 6.** The event explored the role of parliaments in driving gender equality in society, experiences of women parliamentarians, and how women citizens engage with the work of parliaments.
- 7.** Attendees, including members of the caucus and some of its key stakeholders, heard from Caucus Chair Joyce Watson MS and Llywydd, Elin Jones MS who both spoke about their experiences in elected life and in the various positions they have held throughout their political careers.
- 8.** The Caucus then welcomed Senator Fiona O'Loughlin, Chair of the Irish Women's Caucus in the Oireachtas, who gave an inspirational keynote speech and shared lessons from the Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus. The Irish Women's Caucus was launched in 2017, and Senator O'Loughlin drew on this experience to provide useful advice about political commitments and support available to women's caucuses.

9. The Senedd's Women's Caucus looks forward to learning more and continuing this relationship between our parliaments and caucuses.



We Belong Here

10. The Women's Caucus were pleased to support an extraordinary takeover event of the Senedd on 21 October 2023. The event, hosted in partnership with WEN Wales and Elect Her, was designed to connect and mobilise the next generation of women in politics in Wales.

11. An inspiring session was held in the Senedd Siambr, where attendees heard from keynote speakers including Joyce Watson MS, Jane Hutt MS, and Councillor Sara Pickard. Caucus Members Sioned Williams MS and Hannah Blythyn MS also took part in a discussion with Fatmanur Aksoy (Welsh Youth Parliament), Cllr Dr Bablin Molik, and Fay Jones MP about their lived experiences and journeys into politics.

12. The event also included workshops on activism, taking the first steps into politics, and identity and experiences in public life. Throughout the day, Members of the Caucus contributed to sessions and met with women from across Wales at various steps of their political careers.



International Women's Day

13. To mark International Women's Day 2024, the Senedd hosted a morning of activity for local schools, focussed around the theme of #InspiringInclusion. The programme included:

- Panel discussion hosted by Jess Hope Clayton with Jess Davies, Molly Fenton, and Taylor Edmonds
- Roundtable event with the Senedd Women's Caucus
- Feedback & networking
- Tours of the Senedd and opportunities to observe Plenary

14. As part of the programme, members of the Women's Caucus participated in roundtable discussions with students from Fitzalan High School, Cardiff West High School, Ysgol Gwent Is-Coed, Cantonian, Bro Edern, and Ysgol Plasmawr. These discussions drew connections between the importance of gender equality, wider democratic representation and the work of the Senedd, as well as encouraging students to think of ways they can inspire change in their schools and wider communities.

15. All members of the Senedd were invited to hear feedback from the morning's activities, and some of those Members involved in the roundtables made reference to the event in their [Plenary contributions on 12 March](#), as part of the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership's statement on International Women's Day.



Evidence to Reform Bill Committee

16. In April 2024, the Women's Caucus was invited by the Senedd Reform Bill Committee to give evidence as part of the Committee's scrutiny of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill.

17. Joyce Watson MS, Rhianon Passmore MS, Sioned Williams MS, and Janet Finch-Saunders MS represented the Caucus and gave their views on gender quota systems, the different models in consideration, and good practice around encouraging women into elected politics.

18. The Committee has since published its [stage 1 report](#) on the General Principles of the Bill, which made 25 recommendations and a Plenary debate was held on [16 July 2024](#).

19. In his foreword to the report, the Committee Chair David Rees MS said:

“The majority of Committee members are persuaded by the international and academic evidence that legislative quotas are an effective mechanism for increasing levels of women’s representation in parliaments, and thus agree with the general principles of the Bill. In doing so, we recognise that the Bill cannot guarantee parity, and will require a commitment from political parties to place women in winnable places on lists in winnable seats. The Bill must also be supplemented by other, non-legislative action to address the barriers that women often face when seeking selection and election to the Senedd.”

20. As of September 2024, the Welsh Government has withdrawn the Electoral Candidates Bill. The Caucus intends to engage further with the Government to understand steps being taken to encourage diversity and better representation of women at the 2026 election.

International Engagement (Networks & Inward visits)

21. This year, members of the Caucus have undertaken dedicated engagement with international networks and delegations this year, sharing their own personal experiences, lessons from the Senedd and Wales, as well as learning from international experiences and best practice.

22. Three members of the Caucus continue to sit on the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee for the British, Irish and Mediterranean Islands Region. Natasha Asghar MS, Delyth Jewell MS, and Rhianon Passmore MS represent the Senedd on the Steering Committee, and contribute regularly with updates from the Senedd and Wales on gender-related matters, as well as contributing to the ongoing work-programme of the CWP BIMR. Rhianon Passmore MS’s tenure as vice-chair of the CWP BIMR came to an end in July 2023, and the caucus is grateful for her contribution to the network.

23. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association also provided another opportunity for Members of the Caucus to network internationally, with the Senedd sending 2 representatives to the CWP BIMR Conference in March 2024. Held in Valetta, Malta between 6-8 March, the Senedd was represented at this year’s conference by Janet Finch-Saunders MS and Rhianon Passmore MS.

- 24.** The conference heard from elected members across the commonwealth, including very personal contributions from colleagues who reflected on their experiences of online abuse, their journeys into elected politics and, in the case of Malta, their experiences of balancing part-time political careers with family and professional life.
- 25.** Colleagues from Malta also presented an interesting discussion on the gender quota mechanisms currently in place, with contributions from Helena Dalli, the current European Commissioner for Equality and one of the architects of Malta's gender quota system, and Eve Borg Bonello MP, one of the youngest members of the Maltese Parliament who was elected under the gender quota mechanism.
- 26.** Janet Finch Saunders MS contributed to a session where selected Members reflected on their journey into politics, and spoke about being encouraged and encouraging other women into elected life, as well as the picture from the Senedd in having a female presiding officer and an active women's caucus.
- 27.** Rhianon Passmore MS co-chaired a session the International CWP Strategy, where members discussed attracting and retaining women in political roles and how key issues of interest to women parliamentarians are covered at Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences. A full report of the conference is currently being drafted by the CWP secretariat.
- 28.** The Caucus's international reputation continues to grow, with updates on our work appearing in the CPA's journal, *The Parliamentarian*, and international delegations expressing an interest in hearing from our members.
- 29.** Following the UK General Election, the Senedd's Women's Caucus contributed to a session led by the CPA and the Fawcett Society that looked at best practice from the BIM region to encourage the foundation of a Westminster Women's Caucus.
- 30.** The Caucus has been involved in a number of inward visits to the Senedd this year, as visiting delegations look to learn about the experiences of women parliamentarians in Wales and share good practice around encouraging and retaining women in politics. Members of the Caucus recently met with visiting delegations from the Canadian Federal Parliament and the Assemblée Nationale du Québec to compare notes on Caucuses, family friendly parliaments, and gender equality measures.

Looking Ahead

- 31.** The Caucus will meet in the Autumn term to agree its first annual report and share updates from their networks.
- 32.** The Caucus will also seek further information from the Welsh Government to understand steps being taken to encourage diversity and better representation of women at the 2026 election following the Government's withdrawal of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidates) Bill.
- 33.** Going forward, the Caucus will look to continue building its international network to learn best practices and forge connections, as well as build on its engagement work with stakeholders and its mission to support women's participation in politics.

