



50:50
PARLIAMENT

JOINT SUBMISSION | PUBLIC BILL COMMITTEE | CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Representation of the People Bill

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 • Online Harms • Mandatory Induction for New MPs

Submitted jointly by:

50:50 Parliament & Centenary Action (RPB14)

Introduction

This joint submission from [50:50 Parliament](#) and [Centenary Action](#) responds to the call for evidence on the Representation of the People Bill. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the vital discussion on strengthening democratic representation in the UK.

Our submission focuses on six key areas:

1. Commencement of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 to improve transparency and accountability in candidate diversity data.
2. Reinstating the Access to Elected Office fund for disabled candidates.
3. Support for the Jo Cox Foundation's proposals on addressing abuse, harassment and intimidation of candidates.
4. Endorsement of Elect Her's briefing papers and submissions, particularly on mandatory induction and support for new Members of Parliament.
5. Support for strengthened citizenship education to ensure all young people, especially girls, are prepared to participate fully in democracy when votes at 16 are introduced.

1. Commencement of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010

What is Section 106?

[Section 106](#) is a provision in the Equality Act 2010 that has not yet been brought into force. When commenced, it will require political parties to collect and publish data on the protected characteristics of candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, and Senedd.

Why Commence Section 106, and Why Now?

**Progress is
fragile**

Women's representation has improved but is not guaranteed

Progress on women's representation has been real but it is not guaranteed to continue and there is a real risk of regression.

**Transparency
as catalyst****Section 106 will shine a spotlight on candidate selection**

Section 106 will increase transparency, shining a spotlight on candidate selection. This would highlight disparities, enable greater scrutiny of selection processes, support targeted action to improve representation, celebrate progress, and hold parties accountable for advancing diversity.

**Critical
timing****The next general election is a pivotal moment**

The next general election, likely close to the centenary of equal franchise in 2028, will bring renewed scrutiny of progress towards equal representation. To mark this historic milestone with real progress on women's representation, the Government must act now to ensure that processes are in place in time for the next general election.

**Current
gaps****Representation deficits remain significant**

Women continue to face a persistent democratic deficit. Although they make up 51% of the population, they hold only 41% of parliamentary seats.

In the 2024 general elections, only 31% of candidates were women; 50 constituencies had all-male candidate lists, and none had all-female slates.

Only 10 MPs have declared a disability, despite one in five working-age adults being disabled. It was only at the last general election that Parliament finally came close to reflecting the ethnic diversity of the population.

Commencing Section 106

Bringing Section 106 into force would be a straightforward process, requiring a statutory instrument to be laid before Parliament using the affirmative procedure. Regulations would then set out the detailed publication requirements, including what data is published, the format and timing of publication and which parties are covered.

A new clause could be added to the Representation of the People Bill requiring the Secretary of State to commence Section 106 within three months of the Act passing.

How 106 could work

A detailed briefing on Section 106 from Centenary Action and the [Electoral Reform Society](#) can be found on the Centenary Action [website](#). The below summarises our recommended process for implementation:

- **Data collection:** An independent body (the Electoral Commission or EHRC) would develop a questionnaire for candidates with questions on protected characteristics. This would be aligned with best practice such as ONS harmonised standards. Administered during the application process.
- **Parties:** Applying the provision to parties standing in 30 or more constituencies would include smaller national parties, avoid placing a disproportionate administrative burden on small parties and enable large enough datasets to ensure anonymity.
- **Voluntary participation:** Candidates should be invited to complete the questionnaire with clear information on data use and confidentiality.

- Data protection: Strict safeguards to ensure data security, anonymity, and use solely for monitoring purposes.
- Publication: A standard publication template should be used to ensure consistency and comparability (provided by an independent body e.g. EHRC or Electoral Commission). Data should be published on a dedicated page on party websites and data submitted to an independent body to be published centrally. Publish within a set timeframe on a set date.

Benefits of Section 106

Commencement of Section 106 would:

- Enhance accountability and consistency in candidate diversity data across all parties.
- Enable targeted action to improve representation where deficits are identified.
- Support public scrutiny of candidate selection and celebrate progress where it is made.

2. Reinstate the Access to Elected Office Fund

What is the Access to Elected Office Fund?

The last government provided financial support to disabled candidates through the Access to Elected Office Fund, later known as the EnAble Fund, covering additional campaign costs for Westminster and local elections in England. However these pilot funds were not followed by a permanent fund and have since been discontinued.

Last year the Labour government established an Access to Elected Office steering group whose remit included advising on a fund for disability related expenses to level the playing field. However a new fund is still not in place.

Why should the fund be reinstated?

Address financial barriers

Disabled candidates face additional costs

In order to contest elections on a level playing field disabled candidates may have to pay for transport, assistants, assistive technology, or mobility aids.

Increase disabled representation

Disabled people remain underrepresented

With one in five working-age adults being disabled, a truly representative Parliament would include around 156 disabled MPs. Analysis following the July 2024 election, shows that just 10 MPs have disclosed a disability.

Proven benefits

Evaluation showed the benefits of the fund

Evaluation of the EnAble Fund found that it played an important role in supporting applicants. Survey respondents reported that the fund helped reduce the barriers they faced when seeking elected office.

Bring into line with Scotland and Wales**Funding is available in Scotland and Wales**

Disabled candidates in Scotland contesting elections to the Scottish Parliament in 2026 and the 2027 Scottish council elections can access support through the [Access to Elected Office Fund](#) paid for by the Scottish government. Similarly in Wales disabled candidates contesting Senedd elections in 2026 and Local government in 2027 can apply to the [Access to Elected Office Fund Wales](#) paid for by the Welsh government. Candidates in England don't have access to a similar fund.

Reinstating funding

Including funding for disabled candidates in the Representation of the People bill would be an important step to increasing the accessibility of our democracy and levelling the playing field for disabled candidates.

It could be added as a new clause or an amendment to Section 4 on the conduct of elections.

3. Support for the Jo Cox Foundation on Addressing Abuse of Candidates

We support the [Jo Cox Foundation's proposals](#) for the Bill to address the harassment, abuse and intimidation of candidates in the electoral process. [50:50 Parliament submitted evidence](#) to the Speaker's Conference on the security of candidates, MPs and elections which demonstrated the high number of women who face harassment, abuse and intimidation as candidates and how that can negatively impact the number of women standing for election. As such, we endorse the Foundation's three calls:

Codes of Conduct**Embed Standards of Conduct Through Requirements for Political Parties**

Jo Cox Foundation

Mandate political parties to publish codes of conduct governing the behaviour of their members, candidates and elected representatives creating a baseline standard as a condition of party registration.

Resources**Standardise Dissemination of Candidate Safety Resources**

Jo Cox Foundation

Ensure that up-to-date candidate safety resources are consistently disseminated to all candidates standing for election, rather than being provided inconsistently or reactively.

Online harms

Address Online Harms Through a Code of Practice for Social Media Platforms*Jo Cox Foundation / Online Safety Act Network*

Amend the Online Safety Act to introduce a duty on Ofcom, in consultation with civil society and others, to produce a code of practice for social media platforms to address potential harms during the electoral process.

The [RPB Joint Civil Society Briefing](#) coordinated by [Fair Vote](#) also includes suggestions for improvements to Clause 7 on Harassment and Candidate Protection which we endorse:

- Ensure protections are broad enough to address modern harassment patterns.
- Embed practical enforcement and guidance obligations.
- Consider structured standards of conduct and complaints reporting mechanisms for parties.

We consider the current provisions in clause 7 to be a foundation, not a ceiling, and urge the Committee to build on it using the work of The Jo Cox Foundation, Elect Her, [Compassion in Politics](#), the [Online Safety Network](#) and other sector experts.

4. Endorsement of Elect Her's Briefing Papers on Mandatory Induction and Support for New MPs

We endorse [Elect Her's call](#) for mandatory induction and ongoing support for new MPs to help them navigate parliamentary life effectively and sustainably. Introducing mandatory inductions for new representatives after each election would help to professionalise public office, reduce preventable misconduct, strengthen wellbeing, and improve retention. The induction framework should cover:

- Ethical standards and codes of conduct within Parliament.
- Preventing and responding to harassment and abuse, including online.
- Work-life balance and the support mechanisms available to representatives in their roles.

Without structured support, attrition among women and diverse representatives, who face additional barriers in parliamentary life, is likely to continue.

5. Strengthen Citizenship Education

The Bill includes a provision to lower the voting age to 16. We believe this must be accompanied by strengthened citizenship education to ensure all young people, especially girls, are prepared to participate fully in democracy. The planned curriculum reforms will not be in place until 2028 which will be too late for the children now in their early teens who will be voting at the next election. We support calls to amend the bill so that improved political literacy education is rolled out to coincide with the extension of the franchise.

[Research](#) by Professor Bryony Hoskins at the [University of Roehampton](#) shows that, on average, girls' confidence in their ability to engage in traditional or formal politics is significantly lower than boys' by the age of 14 across almost all countries where it has been measured. This gap begins to emerge between the ages of 10 and 16. Without the right educational support, there is a risk that introducing votes at 16 could widen this inequality.

The G-EPIC (Gender Empowerment through Politics in Classrooms) project has developed and rigorously evaluated a five-lesson educational intervention for Year 9 students. The programme aims to address the political confidence gap, strengthen political self-efficacy, and foster active citizenship, with a particular focus on girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. Embedding G-EPIC within the national curriculum would scale up this approach, helping to ensure that lowering the voting age genuinely empowers all young people to engage confidently in politics.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The next general election represents a pivotal opportunity to advance diversity and inclusion in UK democracy. We urge the Committee and Government to take three clear steps:

Ask 1

Commence Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 without delay

Ensure candidate diversity data is collected and published in time for the next election, via a Statutory Instrument using the affirmative procedure.

Ask 2

Reinstate the Access to Elected Office Fund

Establish a new fund so that disabled candidates are able to contest elections on a level playing field.

Ask 3

Implement the Jo Cox Foundation's calls on candidate safety

Embed safety mechanisms more robustly in the electoral process through party conduct requirements, consistent dissemination of safety resources, and a code of practice for social media platforms.

Ask 4

Adopt Elect Her's recommendations on mandatory induction

Introduce mandatory induction and robust support systems for new MPs, covering conduct standards, harassment response and wellbeing — to ensure Parliament retains the diverse representatives the public elects.

Ask 5

Strengthen citizenship education

Ensure that the introduction of votes at 16 is accompanied by strengthened citizenship education to ensure all young people, especially girls, are prepared to participate fully in democracy.

Together, these measures will promote a Parliament that truly reflects the UK's rich diversity and strengthens democratic participation for generations to come.

50:50 Parliament

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