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Review of the extension of right to vote and change to qualification for membership of the Senedd

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Review of the extension of right to vote and change to qualification for membership of the Senedd

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Glossary

Candidacy rights

The legal right to stand as a candidate in an election, subject to eligibility requirements.

Dual candidacy

Standing as a candidate for election to the Senedd while serving as a member of a county or county borough council.

Dual mandate

Holding elected office in the Senedd and a county or county borough council at the same time.

Electoral franchise

The group of people legally entitled to vote in an election.

Political efficacy

A person's sense that they can understand, participate in and influence political processes.

Politically engaged

Regularly taking part in, or closely following, political or democratic activities, such as voting, campaigning, contacting representatives or discussing political issues.

Qualifying foreign citizen

A foreign citizen who meets the nationality, residency and immigration-status requirements to vote in devolved elections in Wales.

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

A structured, time-limited review of existing research and evidence.

Trusted intermediaries

Organisations trusted by members of the public to share information, including political information, and may include: community organisations, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) providers, faith organisations, local networks and local authority communications

1. Introduction and background

The Welsh Government commissioned Thinks Insight & Strategy to review the operation of provisions in the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 concerning voting rights and qualification for membership of the Senedd. The review considers the extension of voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds and qualifying foreign citizens, the extension of eligibility for Senedd membership to qualifying foreign citizens, and restrictions on county and county borough councillors simultaneously serving as Members of the Senedd ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020', Senedd Cymru, 2020).

Section 38 of the Act requires Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a report on the operation of these provisions, and to lay that report before the Senedd. The reporting period is five years beginning with the first Senedd election held on or after 5 April 2021. The report must be published within the following six months. This research forms the statutory review required under section 38. It is not solely a review of the 2026 election: participants and stakeholders reflect on relevant experiences since implementation, including the 2021 and 2026 elections and transitions between elected roles ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020', Senedd Cymru, 2020, section 38).

The voting changes applied to Senedd polls held on or after 5 April 2021. The first ordinary Senedd election under the extended franchise took place in May 2021. Separate legislation subsequently changed aspects of Senedd membership and elections, including the electoral system used in 2026 and the exceptions to restrictions on holding local and Senedd office. These changes form part of the context in which participants describe the provisions under review but are not interchangeable with the 2020 franchise reforms ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020', Senedd Cymru, 2020; 'Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024', Senedd Cymru, 2024b; 'Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024', Senedd Cymru, 2024a).

2. About this report

This report presents the findings of the review of the extension of voting rights and changes to qualification for membership of the Senedd. It draws together existing evidence, including published research and Electoral Commission data, alongside stakeholder perspectives and primary qualitative research with people affected by the reforms.

The review addresses four objectives:

1. Assess the existing evidence on outcomes of the reforms, identifying what can be concluded and where further evidence would be beneficial.
2. Explore awareness, understanding, misconceptions and information needs among people affected by the provisions.
3. Understand reported effects on attitudes, behaviours, participation, representation and confidence in democratic processes.
4. Identify contextual barriers and enablers shaping the operation and experience of the reforms.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the review. Chapter 4 brings together published research, relevant Electoral Commission data and contextual observations from stakeholders interviewed in this study. It distinguishes evidence about legal and administrative arrangements from evidence about awareness, behaviour, and perceived effects. Chapter 5 presents findings from young participants, the foreign citizen voting rights and candidacy groups, and councillors. Chapter 6 brings these findings together with the published evidence to answer the review questions and identify areas for further consideration.

3. Methodology

This review combines a rapid evidence assessment (REA), examination of available quantitative data, stakeholder interviews and qualitative fieldwork with the audiences covered by the review. These strands have different purposes. Published and administrative evidence establishes the wider context; stakeholder interviews provide implementation perspectives; and participant interviews explore experiences and decision-making in depth.

3.1 REA and stakeholder interviews

3.1.1. Evidence review and quantitative sources

The REA examined relevant legislation and policy documents, official statistics, published research and other evidence on electoral reform and democratic participation. Sources were selected in discussion with the Welsh Government. The review recorded key findings, relevance to the objectives, methodological strengths and limitations, and implications for primary fieldwork. It was a focused, time-limited assessment rather than an exhaustive systematic review.

Quantitative material includes Electoral Commission registration information and post-election public opinion evidence. Registration measures are reported with their population and reference period wherever these are established. The analysis distinguishes administrative estimates, respondents' reported registration, reported voting among registered respondents and official turnout. Differences between these measures are not treated as changes over time or as evidence that the reforms caused an observed outcome.

3.1.2. Stakeholder interviews

10 stakeholder interviews were conducted to explore implementation, communication, engagement and evidence gaps. The stakeholders included people working in electoral administration, youth participation, democratic education and reform, and organisations working with migrant or minority ethnic communities. This was a purposively selected sample, and the Welsh Government supported in identifying stakeholders to invite to research. Interviews were designed to last approximately 30 minutes and were conducted remotely. The discussions explored what stakeholders had observed through their work, how they had communicated the reforms, practical delivery challenges and priorities for further research.

3.2 Participant interviews

3.2.1. Research groups and recruitment

58 interviews were conducted across this research, including 10 interviews with stakeholders, 6 interviews with county or county borough councillors, and 42 interviews with members of the public. The members of the public included in this research consisted of 20 young people aged 16 to 21 and 22 foreign citizens, of which 6 were politically active (how this was defined is described below). A full breakdown of the sample is included in the annex.

Recruitment sought a range of experiences across age, geography, language preferences and political interest. The approach combined specialist free-find recruitment with direct contact and referrals through organisations or existing contacts where appropriate. This was

purposive recruitment, intended to include contrasting experiences, rather than probability sampling.

Young people aged 16 to 21 were included in the research to capture experiences of becoming eligible to vote at different points since the introduction of Votes at 16. The wider age range allowed the research to explore both the experiences of those currently aged 16 or 17 and the reflections of older young people on their earlier experiences of voting and political engagement. However, not all participants aged 18 to 21 would have been eligible to vote at 16 or 17 under the reforms, and their experiences are interpreted accordingly in this report.

The foreign-citizen groups were separated for research purposes. The politically active group includes current or previous direct political involvement, such as party membership, campaigning or considering standing, and regular engagement with public decision-making, for example through consultations or contact with representatives. The voting-rights group includes people who are not regularly involved in these activities but may still vote or follow political news. The recruitment label does not imply that they are non-voters.

Councillor recruitment sought current county and county borough councillors with relevant experience. The six interviews provide a small set of local perspectives. They do not include every type of political pathway and cannot represent councillors who declined to participate in this research project or people who had already relinquished local office.

3.2.2. Fieldwork and participation

The qualitative design used paired and individual depth interviews. Young people took part in friendship pairs or individual interviews; foreign citizens took part in paired or individual discussions and the politically active group and councillors took part in individual interviews. Researcher-led interviews were conducted remotely. The design also included the use of Tellet, an interview and translation platform, to enable some foreign citizens to participate in a preferred language other than English or Welsh.

Paired discussions were designed to last approximately 60 minutes, with individual interviews with politically active foreign citizens and councillors planned at approximately 45 minutes. Tellet interviews were planned at approximately 30 minutes.

Separate discussion guides covered each audience while retaining common themes: awareness and understanding; views of the changes; experiences of registration, voting or candidacy; perceived effects; and barriers and support. Questions explored participants' initial understanding before presenting information about the relevant provisions.

Participants were provided with study information and privacy information. Participation was voluntary and reporting was designed to protect confidentiality. Welsh-language participation and additional language options formed part of the approach. The report uses anonymised quotations; names of political parties, politicians and identifiable media organisations have been replaced with bracketed descriptions where relevant.

3.3 Limitations

The qualitative sample is small and purposively recruited. It provides depth and variation, not estimates of how common each experience is across Wales. Wording such as ‘some

participants’ refers to the interview evidence, not a measured population share. Absence of an experience within these interviews does not demonstrate that it does not occur elsewhere.

Recruitment may favour people who are easier to contact, more confident discussing politics or more connected to recruitment networks. Foreign citizens with limited English or Welsh, fewer established contacts or less confidence interacting with institutions may remain underrepresented despite the additional language route.

Qualifying foreign citizens are a diverse and difficult-to-identify population, meaning the research may not capture the full range of experiences, particularly among those with more limited English or Welsh language skills or fewer connections to community organisations and recruitment networks, despite interviews being offered in participants' preferred languages where possible. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of the experiences captured within the study, rather than representative of all qualifying foreign citizens in Wales.

Accounts of registration and past elections are self-reported and sometimes uncertain. Participants may not distinguish an invitation to register, a registration confirmation and a poll card. The research did not check individuals' electoral records.

The quantitative evidence referenced in this review has separate limitations. Published registration information does not identify all affected groups and, for the 2026 Senedd election, data is not complete for all constituencies. Registration also does not indicate whether an individual went on to vote. Some Electoral Commission evidence on registration and voting is based on self-reported responses to surveys or panels rather than administrative records. These measures may be subject to response and recall bias and should not be treated as equivalent to administrative registration data or official turnout. Different sources also use different measures and populations, meaning figures cannot always be compared directly or used to assess change over time. Whole-Wales turnout and candidate survey findings cannot be used as estimates for 16- and 17-year-olds or qualifying foreign citizens. The review identifies where direct evidence remains unavailable.

4. Rapid Evidence Assessment and Stakeholder Findings

4.1 Young people

4.1.1. Participation and political knowledge

Existing evidence does not suggest that 16- and 17-year-olds are uniquely disengaged or uninformed compared with other voters. 'A false start: Votes at 16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament | Senedd Cymru election', Griffiths et al., 2025 found that 16- and 17-year-olds had a reported likelihood to vote comparable with other voters under 55, and displayed similar levels of knowledge of Welsh politics to other age groups. However, this study shows that political knowledge, particularly around the electoral system and party politics, was relatively low across age groups. This points to a wider political literacy challenge, rather than one specific to newly enfranchised young people ('A false start: Votes at 16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament | Senedd Cymru election', Griffiths et al., 2025).

There are indications that voting at 16 may support earlier patterns of participation, but the longer-term impact in Wales is not yet established. Comparative evidence suggests that lowering the voting age can support political participation, with 16- and 17-year-olds in some contexts participating at higher rates than slightly older first-time voters ('Votes at 16 in Scotland: Political experiences beyond the vote itself', Huebner and Eichhorn, 2020; 'Lowering the voting age to 16 in practice: Processes and outcomes compared', Eichhorn and Bergh, 2021). Participation in a person's first eligible election has also been associated with subsequent participation, suggesting that voting may be habit-forming ('Lowering the voting age to 16 in practice: Processes and outcomes compared', Eichhorn and Bergh, 2021; 'Extending the Vote to 16', Electoral Reform Society, 2025). However, Welsh evidence currently covers only a relatively short period since implementation, so it cannot yet establish whether voting at 16 has produced sustained changes in participation as young people move into adulthood.

4.1.2. Registration and voting

On election day for the 2026 Senedd election, the Senedd Commission estimated, based on data submitted by local authorities, that approximately 20,896 local government electors aged 16 or 17 were registered to vote (Electoral Commission, 2026). This figure covers all constituencies except Pontypridd Cynon Merthyr, for which data on registered 16- and 17-year-olds were not available, and therefore does not represent the total number registered across Wales. The mid-year 2025 population estimate for 16- and 17-year-olds in Wales is 74,980. However, this represents the total estimated population in this age group, rather than the number eligible to register to vote, as some 16- and 17-year-olds may not meet the relevant eligibility requirements. In addition, not all those who are eligible will necessarily be registered. In 2021, 32,121 local government electors aged 16 or 17 were registered to vote on election day, with data available for all constituencies ('Report on the May 2021 elections in Wales', Electoral Commission, 2021). The corresponding mid-year population estimate for 16- and 17-year-olds in 2021 was 69,552. The 2021 and 2026 registration figures should not be directly compared as a measure of change over time, given the incomplete

constituency coverage, wider data quality concerns in 2026, and the limitations of comparing registered electors with overall population estimates.

The 2026 registration figures should be interpreted with caution as there are uncertainties about the accuracy of the constituency-level estimates. The figures are derived from data submitted by local authorities, and there may be limitations associated with the reporting and calculation of figures at constituency level from local authority data. The figures should therefore not currently be used to draw conclusions about changes in registration over time.

Separate post-election survey data provides further insight into reported registration among younger voters, although it should not be interpreted as an estimate of registration levels across all young people in Wales. In a YouGov panel survey conducted for the Electoral Commission in 2026, 80% of respondents aged 16 or 17 reported being registered to vote, compared with 88% of respondents aged 16 to 24 overall, over 93% of those aged 25 to 44 and around 99% of those aged 55 and over ('Report on the 2026 Senedd elections', Electoral Commission, 2026). There was also greater uncertainty among younger respondents, with 15% of 16- and 17-year-olds unsure whether they were registered, compared with 10% of those aged 16 to 24 overall and 5% of those aged 25 to 34. These figures are self-reported responses from a survey panel, rather than verified registration records, and may be subject to sampling and response bias.

Reported voting among younger respondents who said they were registered was comparable with other younger age groups. Among respondents to the same 2026 Electoral Commission survey who reported being registered, 78% of 16- and 17-year-olds said they had voted, compared with 74% of those aged 16 to 24 overall, 77% of those aged 25 to 34 and 75% of those aged 35 to 44 ('Report on the 2026 Senedd elections', Electoral Commission, 2026). These figures are not official turnout rates and cannot be generalised to all registered young people. Nevertheless, alongside the qualitative findings, they suggest that registration and feeling sufficiently informed to participate may be important challenges, rather than the practical act of voting alone.

4.1.3. Political education and wider influences on engagement

Young people's engagement is shaped by the wider contexts around them, particularly family, socio-economic background, Welsh language and education. The Electoral Commission found that family interest in politics and socio-economic group are important predictors of young people's political engagement ('Young People's Views on Politics and Voting', Electoral Commission, 2026). Research into Votes at 16 in Wales also found that Welsh-speaking 16- and 17-year-olds displayed higher levels of political engagement than their non-Welsh-speaking peers, with an association between Welsh-medium education and greater engagement. This relates to wider measures of political engagement, rather than turnout specifically in Senedd or local elections ('A false start: Votes-at-16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament | Senedd Cymru election', Griffiths et al., 2025).

Schools and teachers can be important sources of political information, but exposure to democratic education appears uneven. Electoral Commission data suggests political education remains a gap: only 35% of 16- and 17-year-olds say they have recently learnt about voting, elections or how democracy works at school or college, while 59% say they have not ('Young People's Views on Politics and Voting', Electoral Commission, 2026). Cardiff University research similarly found that only 28% of 16- and 17-year-olds surveyed recalled discussing Votes at 16 through a school, youth club or society, although the study notes this should be interpreted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting planned engagement activity around the 2021 election ('A false start: Votes-at-16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament | Senedd Cymru election', Griffiths et al., 2025). The Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform also noted that lowering the voting age should be accompanied by appropriate political and citizenship education and information ('A Parliament That Works for Wales', Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, 2017).

Parents appear particularly important in helping young people register to vote. Electoral Commission data shows that, among registered 16- and 17-year-olds, 59% say a parent or guardian told them how to register, compared with 15% who cite school or college and 15% who cite social media ('Young People's Views on Politics and Voting', Electoral Commission, 2026). This aligns with wider evidence that family interest in politics shapes young people's democratic engagement, and suggests that young people without politically engaged or practically supportive households may be less likely to receive the prompts they need ('A false start: Votes-at-16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament | Senedd Cymru election', Griffiths et al., 2025).

4.1.4. Stakeholder perspectives on political engagement among young people

Stakeholders interviewed for this study similarly suggest that the challenge is less about young people's willingness to participate, and more about the support available to help them participate confidently. Stakeholders working with young people described young people as interested in issues that affect them but not always connecting those issues to Welsh politics or elections. They also highlighted that awareness and understanding can depend heavily on the adults and settings around young people, including schools, youth organisations, teachers, parents and peers.

Social media is an important source of political information for young people, but it also creates challenges around trust and misinformation. The Electoral Commission found that young people encounter political content online even when they are not actively seeking it out, with many reporting exposure to misinformation and relatively low trust in social media as a source ('Young People's Views on Politics and Voting', Electoral Commission, 2026). Stakeholders also identified digital and social media as important channels for reaching young people, while emphasising that information needs to be accessible, relevant and grounded in young people's everyday lives.

4.1.5. What remains to be understood

While existing evidence provides a useful picture of young people's registration, political knowledge and engagement, less is known about how they experience becoming eligible to vote and what enables them to translate this right into meaningful participation. In particular,

there is limited evidence on how young people navigate the practical steps of voting, develop confidence in making political decisions, and draw on different sources of information and support.

The qualitative research therefore explores young people's awareness and understanding of Votes at 16, their experiences of registration and voting, and the extent to which eligibility influences their political engagement and sense of having a voice. It also examines the role of schools, family and social media in shaping confidence and informed participation.

However, the research cannot establish whether Votes at 16 has led to sustained changes in turnout or longer-term voting habits across Wales.

4.2 Qualifying foreign citizens

Section 11 of the 2020 Act extended voting rights in Senedd elections to qualifying foreign citizens aged 16 and over who are resident in Wales, with the change applying to elections held on or after 5 April 2021. Under the Act, qualifying foreign citizens are those who are not Commonwealth, Irish or relevant EU citizens and who either do not require immigration leave to enter or remain in the UK, or have been granted leave to do so. Other electoral eligibility requirements also apply (Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, Senedd Cymru, 2020).

4.2.1 Voting rights

4.2.1.1. Extension of voting rights and the existing evidence

The extension of voting rights to qualifying foreign citizens represents a broadening of formal democratic inclusion in Wales, although evidence of its impact in practice remains limited. The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 extended the Senedd franchise to qualifying foreign citizens, with the changes first applying at the May 2021 election (Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, Senedd Cymru, 2020). The accompanying Explanatory Memorandum set out the rationale for enabling people of different nationalities who had made their home in Wales to participate in Welsh democracy, framing enfranchisement in terms of inclusion, recognition and democratic responsibility ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill: Explanatory Memorandum, incorporating the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Explanatory Notes', Senedd Cymru, 2020. However, these were intended outcomes rather than evidence that the reform has subsequently changed participation or feelings of inclusion.

International evidence shows that broad voting rights for non-citizen residents remain relatively unusual. Comparative research identifies only 5 countries that had extended universal voting rights to non-citizen residents across all political levels, although this provides contextual evidence rather than a direct comparison with the devolved Welsh context ('Two paths towards the exceptional extension of national voting rights to non-citizen residents', Altman, Huertas-Hernández and Sánchez, 2023). Wider international evidence similarly highlights that non-citizen voting rights remain particularly limited beyond local elections, placing the Welsh reforms within a broader debate about the relationship between residence, citizenship and democratic rights ('Immigrants, emigrants and the right to vote: a story of double standards', Arrighi, 2021).

4.2.1.2. Electoral registration and participation

On election day for the 2026 Senedd election, the Electoral Commission estimated, based on data submitted by local authorities, that approximately 45,345 qualifying foreign nationals were registered to vote across constituencies for which data were available (Electoral Commission, 2026). Data for Gwynedd Maldwyn, Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd and Pontypridd Cynon Merthyr were not available, meaning this does not represent a complete Wales total and should be interpreted with cautioun given wider concerns about the quality of the 2026 data. Comparable registration data are not available for the 2021 Senedd election, limiting the extent to which changes in registration over time can be assessed for this group.

While this provides some indication of the number of qualifying foreign citizens registered to vote in 2026, the available data cannot provide a comprehensive picture of registration or participation among this audience. In particular, the incomplete constituency coverage and lack of a reliable estimate of the total eligible population mean that a registration rate cannot be calculated. There is also no equivalent audience-specific survey evidence to provide further insight into reported registration or voting, as is available for 16- and 17-year-olds. The available data therefore cannot establish how registration has changed since the reform or the extent to which eligibility has translated into electoral participation.

4.2.1.3. Barriers to democratic participation

Wider UK evidence suggests that lower political participation among immigrant and ethnic minority populations should not simply be interpreted as a lack of political interest. Research identifies barriers including registration, uncertainty about eligibility, information environments and experiences of exclusion, with recent migrants, private renters and younger people particularly affected ('The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK', Sobolewska and Barclay, 2021). This provides useful context for understanding potential barriers facing qualifying foreign citizens in Wales, although immigrant and ethnic minority populations should not be treated as direct proxies for those eligible under the Welsh reforms.

4.2.1.4. Stakeholder perspectives on political engagement among qualifying foreign citizens

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research similarly highlight that awareness and confidence among qualifying foreign citizens can be uneven. Those working in electoral administration describe instances where qualifying foreign citizens do not realise they are entitled to vote in Senedd elections, while stakeholders working with migrant and minority ethnic communities report that some residents assume they cannot vote without British citizenship. Stakeholders also emphasise that qualifying foreign citizens are a diverse audience, with experiences likely to vary according to length of residence, language, local networks and familiarity with Welsh institutions.

Trusted intermediaries are identified by stakeholders as potentially important in supporting awareness and participation. Community organisations, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) providers, faith organisations, local networks and local authority communications are suggested as useful routes for reaching people who may be less familiar with Welsh democracy or less connected to formal political information. These perspectives align with wider evidence on the importance of information environments and

uncertainty about eligibility ('The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK', Sobolewska and Barclay, 2021), although they do not establish which communication approaches are most effective for qualifying foreign citizens in Wales.

4.2.1.5. What remains to be understood

Evidence on the wider impact of enfranchisement on qualifying foreign citizens' sense of representation, inclusion or political efficacy remains limited. While the Explanatory Memorandum identifies inclusion and recognition as intended outcomes ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill: Explanatory Memorandum, incorporating the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Explanatory Notes', Senedd Cymru, 2020), existing research does not establish whether the extension of voting rights has changed qualifying foreign citizens' feelings of belonging, representation, political efficacy or trust in democratic institutions.

The qualitative research therefore explores how qualifying foreign citizens become aware of their voting rights, their understanding of eligibility and Welsh democratic institutions, and their experiences of registration and participation. It also examines whether the opportunity to vote influences their political engagement, sense of belonging or representation, and what barriers and enablers shape participation.

However, the research cannot establish the population-level impact of the reforms on registration or turnout, and findings must be interpreted in the context of the diversity of qualifying foreign citizens and the limitations of the qualitative sample.

4.2.2 Candidacy rights

4.2.2.1. Extension of candidacy rights and the existing evidence

The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 extended eligibility to stand for election to the Senedd to qualifying foreign citizens who meet the relevant criteria, with the changes first applying at the May 2021 election ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020', Senedd Cymru, 2020). This means qualifying foreign citizens can participate not only as voters but also, where eligible, as candidates and elected representatives.

However, there is particularly little evidence on how this reform has operated in practice. Existing research does not establish how aware qualifying foreign citizens are of their right to stand, whether eligibility has influenced consideration of candidacy, or how accessible elected office is perceived to be.

4.2.2.2. Electoral data and evidence gaps

Electoral Commission data does not provide a direct picture of whether candidacy rights are being understood or exercised. Available electoral data provides some context on registration and voting, but cannot identify the size of the qualifying foreign citizen population eligible to stand, or establish whether the extension of candidacy rights has influenced political pathways or representation over time. There is therefore no equivalent quantitative evidence base for candidacy rights to the registration data available for 16- and 17-year-olds.

4.2.2.3. Barriers to political participation and representation

Wider evidence suggests that formal political rights do not necessarily translate into participation. Research identifies awareness, information, registration, trust, political efficacy and practical circumstances as influences on democratic engagement ('The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK', Sobolewska and Barclay, 2021). However, this evidence relates primarily to voting and wider political participation, rather than candidacy specifically. It therefore cannot establish which barriers are most important for qualifying foreign citizens considering standing for the Senedd.

Previous research in Wales has also identified barriers and incentives to standing for election, providing relevant context for understanding political pathways and representation ('Unpacking diversity: Barriers and incentives to standing for election to the National Assembly for Wales', Awan-Scully et al., 2018). However, this research is not specific to the extension of candidacy rights to qualifying foreign citizens, and its findings should not be assumed to apply uniformly to this audience.

International evidence places the extension of political rights to non-citizen residents within a wider debate about the relationship between residence, citizenship and democratic membership ('Two paths towards the exceptional extension of national voting rights to non-citizen residents', Altman, Huertas-Hernández and Sánchez, 2023; 'Immigrants, emigrants and the right to vote: a story of double standards', Arrighi, 2021). These studies provide useful conceptual context, but do not directly examine whether extending candidacy rights changes political representation or decisions to stand for elected office in Wales.

4.2.2.4. Stakeholder perspectives on awareness and representation

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research suggest that awareness of candidacy rights may be lower than awareness of voting rights. Those working with migrant and minority ethnic communities describe limited awareness of voting eligibility among some residents, alongside even less familiarity with the possibility that qualifying foreign citizens may be eligible to stand for the Senedd. These accounts suggest that candidacy rights may be less visible than voting rights, particularly among people who are not already engaged in political or civic networks.

Stakeholders working in democratic participation and electoral reform also highlight the limited evidence available on the impacts of the reforms so far. They suggest that changes to political representation are likely to develop over time, rather than follow immediately from the extension of eligibility. They also emphasise the diversity of qualifying foreign citizens, with potential pathways into political participation shaped by factors including length of residence, language, local networks, confidence and previous political engagement. These are stakeholder perspectives on potential influences, rather than established effects of the reform.

4.2.2.5. What remains to be understood

Existing evidence provides limited insight into whether qualifying foreign citizens are aware of their right to stand for the Senedd, whether the reform has influenced their political ambitions, or what barriers and enablers shape consideration of candidacy.

The qualitative research therefore explores these questions with politically active qualifying foreign citizens, including their awareness and understanding of candidacy rights, previous political involvement, perceptions of elected office and the factors that may encourage or discourage them from standing.

However, the research cannot establish whether the reform has increased the number of qualifying foreign citizens standing for election or changed political representation across Wales.

4.3 Dual mandates

4.3.1. The Legislative changes and the existing evidence

There is limited existing evidence on the practical impact of restrictions on holding local and Senedd office at the same time. The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 introduced restrictions preventing county and county borough councillors from simultaneously serving as Members of the Senedd, subject to specified exceptions (Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, Senedd Cymru, 2020). The accompanying Explanatory Memorandum set out the rationale for the reform, including concerns around accountability and the practical demands of holding elected roles at both local and national level ('Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill: Explanatory Memorandum, incorporating the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Explanatory Notes', Senedd Cymru, 2020). However, this provides evidence of the policy rationale rather than how the restrictions have operated in practice. There is much less evidence on whether the restrictions are affecting councillors' decisions about standing, political progression, local representation or party recruitment.

4.3.2. Stakeholder perspectives on implementation and political progression

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research suggest that the effects of the reform may be most visible at specific points in the political pathway. Those working in electoral administration highlight practical questions around what happens when councillors stand for, or are elected to, the Senedd, including the potential for by-elections, uncertainty around timing and administrative pressures when vacancies arise. These perspectives suggest that the restrictions may become particularly relevant during candidacy, election and transitions between local and national roles, rather than affecting all councillors in the same way.

Stakeholders interviewed also raise questions about the potential implications for local representation and political recruitment. In particular, they highlight whether restrictions could influence councillors' willingness to stand for the Senedd and the implications of moving from local to national office. This points to possible consequences for candidate pipelines, succession planning and the relationship between local and national political experience. However, these are potential effects identified by stakeholders, rather than established outcomes of the reform.

4.3.3. What remains to be understood

Existing evidence does not establish how the restrictions are influencing councillors' decisions to stand for the Senedd, their political progression or the continuity of local representation.

The qualitative research therefore explores councillors' awareness and views of the restrictions, their experiences of political progression, and perceived implications for

constituents and councils. However, it cannot quantify the national scale of these effects or establish whether the restrictions have changed candidate recruitment or political representation across Wales.

4.4 Summary of existing evidence and remaining gaps

Overall, the existing evidence confirms that the legislative provisions have been introduced and provides some insight into their operation in practice. The evidence base is strongest in relation to young people, particularly electoral registration, reported participation, political knowledge and engagement. Some registration data is also available for qualifying foreign citizens, although incomplete coverage limits the conclusions that can be drawn. Evidence is more limited in relation to the extension of candidacy rights and the effects of the dual-mandate restrictions.

Important gaps therefore remain in understanding the wider impact of the reforms. Available evidence does not provide a consistent basis for assessing changes in participation or representation over time, or for establishing whether observed patterns are attributable to the legislative changes. The nature and extent of these limitations vary across the different provisions and affected groups.

These gaps informed the primary qualitative research undertaken, which explores how the reforms are understood and experienced by those affected. In particular, it examines awareness of rights, experiences of voting and candidacy, perceptions of representation, and the barriers and enablers shaping participation. The research therefore provides additional insight into how the provisions are operating in practice, while recognising that qualitative findings cannot provide population-level estimates or establish causal impacts.

5. Qualitative Research Findings

This chapter presents the qualitative findings by audience and provision. It focuses on what participants know, how they interpret the changes and what they report about participation.

5.1 Young people

This section explores the experiences of young people aged 16 to 21 in Wales, focusing on their awareness and understanding of Votes at 16, experiences of registration and voting, and the impact of the reform on political engagement and participation. It also considers the barriers and enablers to meaningful participation, including the role of political education, family influence, and access to trusted information.

5.1.1. Awareness and understanding

Most young people in the sample are aware they have the right to vote, although awareness can come late. A minority report finding out they are eligible after the registration deadline had passed, or even after election day. Some young people do not recall registering, or said a parent had registered them, and only realised they were on the register when poll cards arrived, or they turned up to vote. As a result, some may not have actively engaged with their right to vote before election day. Some, whilst aware of their right to vote, did not recognise this to be a recent reform, reflecting the fact the reform had already come into effect as they became of voting age.

“It's one of them things where everyone talks about it, you think it'd be a massive deal, but I didn't even realise it was happening until that morning … It was very much just like, Mum turned and said, ‘right, do you want to go vote now? Yeah, okay, let's go.’” – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

“I wasn't really like told much about it. I didn't even really know that I could vote at the time. Like, I turned 16 and I got a letter saying that I could vote, and I was like, okay.” – Male, 18 to 21, North Wales

“Honestly, I did not know it was lowered from 18 to 16. I thought it was 16 for, like, ages.” - Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Although young people can clearly articulate issues affecting their lives, they do not always connect these to politics. Young people talk about politics as something quite distinct from their daily lives, and frame learning about politics as an academic task that they would need to dedicate time to. This means developing a political opinion can feel like a daunting task, and it can be difficult to know where to begin, and who to trust.

“It doesn't feel like it directly affects you when you don't sort of read about it or like keep up to date with it. It just feels like stuff just happens in the background. And then you hear from older people complaining, and that's about as much as I learn really.” – Male, 18 to 21, Rural Mid and West Wales

5.1.2. Views of voting at 16

Enthusiasm for having the right to vote is tempered by concerns around their peers' maturity and political education. 16 and 17-year-olds who *are* politically engaged view themselves as an educated minority amongst their peers; some older participants question whether they were mature enough to vote at that age, now they've had time to reflect. Some also note that gaining the right to vote at 16 feels out of sync with other milestones that indicate the transition into adulthood, most of which take place at 18.

"When I was 16, I wasn't really educated on anything. I feel like I just went with, like, the flow of what other people were doing. But at 18, I think I've got a bit more knowledge about different parties, what to vote for, how to do it, like, all of that." - Male, 18 to 21, North Wales

Political engagement (and persuasion) appears to be primarily determined by the engagement of older adults within the household. Participants often feel their political outlooks and voting decisions are directly shaped what their parents think and do. Therefore, those whose parents are *not* politically engaged are usually less 'educated' on politics. For these young people, peer influence is felt to be stronger. Politically engaged young people are critical of this approach to forming a political opinion, describing it as lacking independence.

"I think I know one of my friends just voted for who her parents told her to vote for because she didn't know who to vote for. I know a lot of the boys who went to my school in my year group just voted for [PARTY X] because they've seen a few things online and thought, 'I'll do that.'" – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

"We had something in the boys' toilets actually, we'd seen a photo and it was like a tally on the toilet. It was like 'Did you vote for [PARTY X], Yes / No'. Everyone that uses that toilet is now going to be thinking like, 'oh my God, 40 people have voted for [PARTY X]'." – Female, 16 to 17, East Wales

"I Ie, dwi di siarad i rai o'r bechgyn a dwi'n credu bod nhw'n mmm jyst fel [PLAID X], dwi'n hoffi'r [PLAID X] a dwi'r pwy dwi'n gofyn i nhw beth ydy'r [PLAID X] yn mynd i wneud a wyt ti'n deall y effaith mae'n mynd i gael ar genod? Ac maen nhw fel, oh dwi ddim actually yn gwybod be maen nhw'n mynd i wneud ond maen nhw jyst yn clywed off TikTok a phopeth o hynna fel gwybodaeth … Mae nhw'n pleidleisio beth maen nhw'n meddwl yn cŵl ar yr amser. [I've spoken to some of the boys and I think they're funny about [PARTY X]—'I like [PARTY X]'—and I ask them what [PARTY X] is going to do and whether they understand the impact it's going to have on girls. And they're like, 'oh, I actually don't know what they're going to do', but they're just hearing it off TikTok and all of that as information … They take on what they think is cool at the time]." - Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

Education in schools is felt to be a helpful tool for levelling the playing field in terms of political education, having the potential to engage those who don't come from engaged households. However, most young people in the sample feel the political education offered to them at school is insufficient, and in some cases non-existent. Most describe it as brief and superficial, delivered in a short assembly as a one-off, and covering little more than the fact they can vote.

“[The Senedd election is] all about like the seats and power and the different members in it. Like, I only knew that like recently. There's not a lot of education on how voting actually works and how you get your parties in Parliament, because I only recently found out about that when I was 20. Like, there's people who are 16 voting, they need to know that.” - Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

“I think it needs to be taught in schools. I just think people are so uneducated. Like, they've allowed us to vote, but there's nothing to back that.” - Female, 16 to 17, East Wales

There is appetite amongst young people to learn more about Welsh politics in school. Participants feel schools can offer as close to an unbiased political education as possible, which feels particularly important in the context of concerns around misinformation or bias on social media. Most importantly, young people want clear, unbiased, comparable information about parties; this is felt to be the hardest information to reliably find through their own research. Young people also say schools should begin educating students on politics before they become of voting age, and that information should be shared across multiple sessions to solidify understanding. Some more politically engaged young people are beginning to make connections between politics and their own lives and feel that understanding this connection and the importance of using the right to vote could help their peers to engage.

“I feel like from the second [people turn] 16 [we] need to be given some unbiased information on what each party actually is offering and their aims. Like, we need a good idea on how to actually vote … I feel like it all needs to be done in such an unbiased way so we can make our own views and opinions and not be influenced by other people … I feel like it all needs to be so unbiased, otherwise I won't trust a word of it.” – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

“If you know nothing about it, you're not going to be interested. But explaining the importance behind it and what effects it's actually going to have on the country [is important], because I feel like once you understand that your vote is actually going to be counted and have an effect on what happens to this country, then it will influence you to do it.” – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

“I think that when I was younger, what I thought when people were trying to talk about [politics], like, ‘Oh, I don't care about politics, I have no idea what you're on about’. I’m thinking like numbers and charts. When it actually is as simple as, ‘Oh, I need money for school dinner’. That's politics.” - Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Young people say information should be delivered without any assumption of prior knowledge. As engagement at this point is so heavily determined by parents’ political engagement, some young people will reach 16 with little to no knowledge of how politics works in Wales. Education should also cover the practicalities of voting, what impact elected representatives can have on Wales, and information on manifestos of local parties / candidates.

“Coming into this [research], I had literally no idea about it because my family don't really take an interest. It's not really like an everyday chat. I feel like learning it in different places

would be much better to like help people decide whether to vote or not." – Male, 16 to 17, North Wales

"Like, do you have to register online? You know, [tell people] where to go. I'm sure if you ask the majority of people at our school, they couldn't even tell you where to go … You know, just like a quick assembly or like a notice during form time, I think, would have made a lot of difference." – Female, 16 to 17, East Wales

In the absence of comprehensive political education, many view social media as an important channel for learning about politics. Almost all have gained some political knowledge this way, through TikTok or Instagram in particular. However, there is wide acknowledgment that short-form content is not enough to feel fully confident in their understanding. Social media can therefore feel like a difficult place to engage for those without a background level of understanding of Welsh politics; it feels to them like they are 'joining the conversation too late'.

"I would say all of the information I get for voting is from social media apps like TikTok, Instagram, and I feel like there's a problem in that because the videos are short, they're snappy, they don't hold your attention when these subjects should have more information." – Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Participants report that the political content they see on social media mainly comes from the far-left or far-right wings of politics. They see less balanced or mainstream political views. Some also report encountering 'ragebait' content that directly opposes their own political views and is often extreme in its messaging this is felt to be shown to them to generate engagement. Content is also felt to be mostly focused on UK politics, rather than local politics, which can lead to confusion.

"I watch stuff on politics, especially American and UK politics, basically every single day because it's always on my phone … It's very much like all very, you are left or you are right, you know, you want immigrants out, you want immigrants in, that kind of thing. And it's very, very definitely followed like the blue-red state sort of mindset of America." – Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

"Wel pryd yn dod o BBC, ni'n ymddiried yno fo. Wedyn weithiau ni'n gweld pethau fel TikTok, so fel ni'n dweud, oedd e'n pethau'n Lloegr, dim Cymru, a'r pobol jyst yn cael'n mixed up rhwng y ddau. A wedyn byswn i'n gofod, byswn i'n search pethau o fewn i fy hun i checio fo. [When it comes from the BBC, we trust it. But then sometimes we see things like on TikTok, so as we were saying, it was things about England, not Wales, and people just getting mixed up between the two. And then I'd have to go and search things myself to check it.]" – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

Misinformation is top of mind for the young people spoken to as part of this researcg and something they are consciously thinking about whenever they encounter news, whether that be on social media or traditional media outlets. Whilst there is wide awareness that not everything they see online is real, there is also distrust in mainstream media, and a sense that social media can offer a more candid perspective. Young people feel that their peers take information at face value and are susceptible to fake news and clickbait style

dramatised headlines. They rarely see themselves as being similarly susceptible, even though they report gaining most of their political information from the same sources as their peers.

"I do find a lot of [NEWS OUTLET A] does start coming up on my For You page recently. [...] I can see the propaganda in it sometimes..."- Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

"I don't tend to trust the news because I know a lot of news can just kind of be bought out, and that's through research. So, it's usually just reading through transcripts, taking my own thing from it, or talking to my peers about it to see what they think of anything that's happened. I'm trying to get the most unbiased view I can possibly get." – Male, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

"I think it is harder for generations now because [...] you don't really get like the local news, you know, [NEWS OUTLET B] stations, stuff like that, where you get like a proper more in-depth version of the story instead of just scrolling on your phone for 20 seconds." - Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Young people feel that parties and representatives should be embracing social media as a channel to communicate with the electorate, especially younger voters. This is also felt to have the potential to counter misinformation from unofficial sources that are already embracing these platforms.

"I do think if you're going to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote, I do think social media is going to be the way that you need to, like, inform them." - Female, 16 to 17, East Wales

5.1.3. Experience and impact

The young people spoken to as part of this research generally describe the process of registering to vote as straightforward. Similarly, the practicalities of where they can vote and what to do on the day feel fairly easy. This is not universal; one young person living in a rural area reported her poll card arriving the day after the election, and another struggled to find the polling station where she was registered after moving for university. However, the majority do not describe these steps as presenting a challenge.

"When you got your polling card, it just gave you a location to go to, and like for me it was my old school, which is like 2 minutes down the road. So, it was just for me really easy to find out where to vote and how to vote." – Male, 18 to 21, North Wales

"I didn't get my [poll card] in the post, so I didn't end up voting. It came like the day after [the election]." – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

"This election was like so frustrating and confusing because my parents live in Llantyglo, but I think I registered to vote in Cardiff, but now I live in Ponty for uni [...] So it was actually really, really confusing, and I didn't know where I could vote or how I could vote and when I registered or where I registered my vote." – Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

The most difficult part of engaging with elections is working out who to vote for. A lack of knowledge of politics coupled with a sense that voting is a 'big deal' can prevent young people from voting, due to anxiety around voting for the 'wrong' thing. A strong sense that

not everything they read and hear can be trusted makes it harder to reach the point of forming an opinion, as there is an additional step of verifying the information they encounter.

"Even though they told me I could vote, [my parents] were never really very good at explaining the whole thing, so in some cases I just wouldn't [vote] because I'm like, well, if I don't know enough about it, in my mind I'm like, I could be doing more harm with my vote than without it." – Female, 18 to 21, Rural Mid and West Wales

Becoming eligible to vote can make politics feel more relevant and important. For those that are politically engaged, finding out they had the right to vote stood out as a clear turning point after which they began to pay attention to what they were hearing about politics. Some describe feeling proud or excited, and a responsibility to understand what they were voting for.

"I feel like since being able to vote, I've looked a lot more into [politics] because, like, before being able to vote, it was, 'I don't have a say in it anyway, why do I need to know about it' kind of mindset. Now I know I've got a voice, and I can voice my opinion, I've been more interested in wanting to know what's going on because I know I'm kind of a part of it, or I can be." – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

"[When I got the right to vote I was] very, very excited. I felt like I could just make some change, and just like try and help people in this country." – Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

There is a strong sense amongst young people that voting is a big responsibility, but levels of confidence and political education determine whether this is a motivator or barrier to actually using the right to vote. Where confidence in political knowledge is limited, young people are hesitant to use their right to vote, feeling the consequences of the 'wrong' choice to be high. Conversely, those with a clearer idea of how politics works often feel compelled to utilise their democratic right.

"Part of me didn't want to vote because I didn't want to make the wrong decision. I didn't want to vote because … I learned most of what I know off TikTok and YouTube videos. Like, I didn't want to vote off that. Because I felt like I didn't know it properly." – Female, 16 to 17, Rural Mid and West Wales

"I learned in history about suffragettes and women being able to vote, and I was proud, like we've got this far. And I was like, 'I'm not letting that be wasted, these women fought for me just to have a vote'." – Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

5.1.4. Enabling meaningful participation

Participants' accounts suggest that participation becomes more meaningful when young people know an election is happening, understand what their vote can affect, can navigate the process, and have enough trustworthy information to form their own view. These conditions do not always manifest as a package as some participants found voting itself straightforward but wanted better preparation for deciding who to vote for. Others were interested in taking part but missed (or struggled with) a practical step.

Preparation appears most effective when it is delivered before young people first become eligible to vote. School can provide a shared starting point, especially for young people who do not regularly discuss politics at home. Some participants recalled lessons, school elections, or assemblies that helped make voting feel more familiar. However, provision appears uneven. Others felt there had been little education to support Votes at 16, or remembered hearing about the change when it happened but not being reminded when they actually became eligible. Participants therefore want timely, balanced education covering registration, how to vote, what different parties stand for, and how to assess political claims.

"I feel like you've got to be somewhat interested in the topic to vote. That's why I feel like they should teach it more in school so you have better knowledge about it as it is a really big thing. It should not just be down to people to find out on social media." Male, 16 to 17, North Wales

Clear practical guidance helps turn vague knowledge of eligibility into confidence in undertaking the action of voting. Polling information works well when it tells young people exactly where to go and what to expect. Some participants described poll cards or letters as making the process straightforward, with the act of voting itself often feeling simple once they reached the polling station. However, earlier stages in the process were less clear for others. Some had not known they needed to register, did not know where to register, or only realised they had been eligible after voting had ended. Practical support also needs to account for different circumstances, including accessibility needs, studying away from home, moving address or uncertainty about where someone is registered.

"I think working out where and how to vote, because people can sit there and they can go, 'oh yeah, I'm gonna vote this party, yeah, this is gonna be awesome', but they might just not know where to go for it or what to do for it." Male, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

"I didn't know where to vote at all. I was Googling it, where to vote in my local area, and it was loads of different places, and then I just went to every single one and found my name at one. It was very confusing. When I first voted in 2021, it was easy because they sent a letter, I registered to vote, then a few weeks later they sent us a letter being like, go to this one, take this card there. So we went to that one, took the card there, voted within 10 minutes." Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

"With education too, like traveling to different countries in the UK for it, it can be very difficult. It's like, do I need to re-register everything, or do I have to make the effort to travel 3 hours back home just to vote?" Female, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Participants value explanations of what parties propose and opportunities to compare them. Some describe looking at manifestos or materials from different parties as important ways to form their own standpoint. However, several want concise, balanced explanations instead, particularly those who are starting with limited knowledge. Understanding what a Senedd election decides also matters. Participants call for clearer explanations of the Senedd's powers and how these differ from Westminster, so that they understand what their vote is being used to influence.

“I think we need more in the schools. If it's people from parties going in, even if it's the wrong parties, there should be more information available to the teenagers in school, especially in the higher years doing their GCSEs. They should be getting told information about each and every party from, in my opinion, 15.” Male, 18 to 21, North Wales

“I think encouraging people to actually read through manifestos would be good. I don't think it's encouraged enough, because these parties do publish what they want to do and how they want to do it online for people to read, but a lot of the time people just don't want to read it and will just listen to someone else talk about it out of kind of laziness.” Male, 18 to 21, South Wales Valleys

Familiar channels and everyday conversations can open the door, but they need to leave room for judgement. Social media and family are frequent sources of information but participants feel there is a lack of sources that they can rely on for impartial or unbiased information. In particular, they are looking for information that will help them form their own opinions, rather than telling them what to think.

“I feel like it all needs to be done in such an unbiased way so we can make our own views and opinions and not be influenced by other people." Female, 16 to 17, Mid Wales

5.1.5. Summary of young participants' experiences

Overall, the findings suggest that extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds can encourage greater political interest and a sense of having a voice, but this does not necessarily translate into confident participation. While the practical process of voting is generally straightforward, young people can lack the knowledge and confidence needed to make an informed choice. Political education, family engagement and access to trusted information all play an important role, but the support available is inconsistent. This highlights the importance of providing young people with clear, impartial information and opportunities to develop their understanding of Welsh politics before they become eligible to vote, helping them to exercise their new rights independently and confidently.

5.2 Qualifying foreign citizens

This section explores the experiences of qualifying foreign citizens in Wales, focusing on both voting rights and the right to stand for the Senedd. Findings are presented separately for those interviewed primarily about their experiences of voting and those who are more politically active, with whom we explored candidacy rights in greater detail. These are research groupings rather than differences in legal eligibility.

5.2.1 Voting rights

5.2.1.1. Awareness and understanding

Participants’ awareness of their voting rights is uneven, and awareness of the reforms themselves is generally lower. Some foreign citizens know they can vote in Welsh elections, often having registered following a council registration letter or household form. Others are less clear about which elections they are eligible to participate in, particularly the distinction between Senedd, local and UK general elections. This points to a distinction between knowing they have the right to vote and understanding which elections that right applies to.

“For me, it was quite easy. I didn't realise I could vote, and I got the letter in the post saying register to vote. That was it for me. But I imagine if English isn't your first language or you struggle to speak English, that might be a barrier, because if you don't know what the post is saying, you probably wouldn't realise that you could vote” - Female, 31 to 45, American, North Wales

“When I first come to this country, the first thing I do is to register to vote in the next election. And then you receive the poll card that you can go to vote in a certain station.”- Male, 31 to 45, Hong Kong, Cardiff

Familiarity with a current voting right does not necessarily mean awareness of the reform that introduced or changed it. Several participants do not recognise or recall the extension of the franchise as a distinct reform, while some are aware of one element of the reforms but not others. This suggests participants may know they are currently eligible to vote without having followed, or remembered, the legislative changes behind that right.

Participants are more likely to recall communications about voting than communications about the reform itself. For some, awareness arises through the ordinary mechanics of an election, such as receiving a registration letter, poll card or other voting information, rather than through a memorable explanation of the reform. However, these are not the only routes into awareness. Across the sample, participants were generally more likely to remember practical prompts to vote than information explaining how or why voting rights had changed.

“My bank said one of the possibilities for improving my credit score would be asking for a credit card or registering for local elections. But I was not fully aware of being able to vote for the Senedd.” - Male, 31 to 45, Portuguese, North Wales

“I know years and years ago I would get letters to vote, but I think that was about European Parliament elections. So I knew I was eligible to vote, but I wasn't too sure what for.” Male, 31 to 45, Romanian, South-West Wales

Practical familiarity with voting is not the same as understanding what a Senedd vote is for. Some participants can navigate registration, polling cards or the act of voting while still describing uncertainty about the Senedd’s role, what policy areas it is responsible for, or how its decisions are made. Others are clearer about their eligibility for Senedd elections, showing that uncertainty is not shared by everyone. For this group, the evidence points to two separate information needs: clarity about which elections an individual can vote in, and a clearer explanation of what the Senedd does and what voting for it can influence.

“We vote in the Senedd but we have to know how the Senedd works, how many members there are, how they design policies, whether the majority rules or you have to pass through like 2/3 or the whole Senedd. Which part of the public issues are under the determination of the Senedd for instance? We don't have a very clear idea before we vote.” - Male, 31 to 45, Hong Kong, Cardiff

5.2.1.2. Views of extension of franchise among foreign citizens

The extension of voting rights is welcomed by several participants when discussed, although views about who should qualify varied. Support was often grounded in the idea that people who live in Wales are affected by decisions made here and should therefore have a say. For some, contributing through taxes also formed part of this argument. However, support for the broad principle did not always mean participants agreed on the details of eligibility. Some questioned whether voting rights should apply immediately, particularly for people who had arrived more recently, while others suggested that a minimum period of residence may be more appropriate.

"I feel like it does make sense for a foreign citizen if they actually live in Wales. Because if you're a resident of a certain place, all of the policies would apply to you. But then how does it make sense - at least make it like a half percentage of an actual vote, something like that." Female, 31 to 45, Filipino, South-West Wales

"I myself cannot vote in national elections, which I sort of understand because I'm not a citizen of this country, although I have lived here all my life and some of those changes would affect me that someone in power would maybe place. But in terms of local elections, I think I have just as much of a say as anyone else in this country just because I've lived here all my life and those changes, especially locally, will affect me just as much as they will affect someone else." Male, 18 to 21, Finnish, Rural Mid and West Wales

"For instance, there's been 2 instances in the past couple of years where I've gone to vote, and one time I couldn't vote because I wasn't qualified, which I thought was fair. And the second time I could vote. Which I was a bit like, oh, I don't know if I really should have been able to vote because technically I've only been here since 2020." Female, 31 to 45, American, North Wales

Some participants feel the right to vote contributed to a sense of recognition that they are part of Welsh society, but this effect on belonging was not uniform. Participants often described belonging through established relationships, family, work and everyday life in Wales, rather than attributing this solely to the extension of voting rights. For some, the right to vote affirmed an existing connection to Wales and made them feel more recognised as part of Welsh society. For others, it appeared to add a stronger sense of voice, responsibility or willingness to speak up. However, some participants said the change had not altered how they felt about living in Wales. The impact of the reform therefore varies from affirming an existing connection to creating a more active sense of voice or belonging.

"And I guess as a result, because I feel a higher sense of belonging, I've been more inclined to take more responsibility and speak out and share my opinion. For example, I went to contact the council about the this traffic improvement suggestion" - Male, 46 to 60, Italian, South Wales Valleys

"Yeah, this is some kind of recognition that we are also part of Wales, It's just another level." - Male, 46 to 60, Latvian, South-West Wales

Having the right to vote does not, by itself, resolve questions of political representation. Some participants value the principle of being able to participate but still question whether

the available political choices represented their priorities or experiences. For these participants, the barrier is not only whether they had the formal right to vote, but whether voting felt meaningful in the context of the parties, candidates or options available to them. A small number also see potential for candidacy rights to bring different perspectives into Welsh politics, but this should be understood as a possible benefit identified by some participants, rather than as a widely stated priority across the group.

“Whenever I was looking at the offering, I couldn't really see something that could represent me. So [not voting] was mainly because of this, I didn't feel represented and I would not vote for something I don't believe in, rather than looking and delving into whether I have the right to vote or not.” - Male, 31 to 45, Romanian, South-West Wales

“People feel maybe more involved in those things. And so maybe somebody will decide that if he's going to election, maybe somebody will turn and say, oh, okay, why not? I want to be MP.” - Male, 46 to 60, Latvian, South-West Wales

5.2.1.3. Experience and impact

For qualifying foreign citizens, barriers to participation are not confined to legal eligibility. Several participants describe gaps in their understanding of the Senedd, Welsh governance or the choices available at an election, without identifying foreign-citizen status itself as the direct cause. However, these issues should not be treated as entirely separate from participants’ experiences as foreign citizens. For some, arriving from another country means navigating unfamiliar institutions, party systems and electoral rules, which can make participation feel more complex. The evidence therefore points to a need for clearer explanations of Welsh democracy, alongside information tailored to people approaching it from a different national context.

“I had an understanding that we had Conservatives and Liberals. Or whatever they're called. I knew that that was a thing, that they were kind of 2 different spectrums, but I didn't really know the nuances about the fact that you had a percentage of votes could determine a percentage of seats in Senedd kind of thing.” - Female, 31 to 45, American, North Wales

“And for example, you know, I'm an immigrant, so I don't even know which one is more open to immigrants. So yeah, it needs a bit of research or in my case, discussing with my wife.” - Male, 46 to 60, Italian, South Wales Valleys

Some barriers are more directly connected to navigating eligibility across different elections. As mentioned previously, participants’ accounts suggest that it is not always clear which elections foreign citizens can participate in. Some knew they could vote locally but had not realised this extended to Senedd elections. They feel that a clearer explanation is needed about what their voting rights apply to and in which elections they can and cannot vote. To most, the different layers of local and national Government in the UK drive confusion. These are questions about the franchise itself, rather than about wider political understanding or the mechanics of voting.

“I was not fully aware of being able to vote for the Senedd. I was aware that I could vote locally, but not to a higher level.” - Male, 31 to 45, Portuguese, North Wales

Experiences of registration and voting vary, with practical steps straightforward for some but more challenging for others. Some participants describe the process as relatively easy once they received a letter or prompt to register. Others describe missed deadlines, uncertainty or unresolved steps. Language barriers are identified by some as a potential challenge for other foreign citizens, rather than something they have experienced directly. This suggests that practical processes can work well where people receive and understand the right prompt, but still leave room for uncertainty where eligibility, timing or communication is less clear.

"I was looking into trying to vote, but it was too late, I feel like. Okay, like, I, I— the deadline for registration had passed and everything went— because I was just busy with work at the time as well." - Female, 31 to 45, Filipino, South-West Wales

"I sent the form over that I filled in and then something came back and then it still wasn't finalised. And then in the meantime I then changed address. So then when I changed address, they asked me to kind of update the registering details, but I'd already done that, I just moved the address." - Male, 31 to 45, Portuguese, North Wales

Eligibility can encourage closer engagement with an election, but this is not uniform. For some participants, knowing they could vote made the election feel more relevant and prompted them to research parties, ask others for information and follow the campaign more closely. However, this should not be read as a universal experience of eligibility leading to increased engagement with voting. Participants' accounts of participation and non-participation varied, with different barriers shaping different decisions.

"I hadn't followed it nearly half as much when I was younger in the 2021 elections in comparison to these 2026 elections where I knew that I could vote and could actually maybe make a change. So I believe I've had a lot greater involvement in these elections in 2026." - Male, 18 to 21, Finnish, Rural Mid and West Wales

5.2.1.4. What enables meaningful participation

Personal relationships help some participants navigate political information, but the type of support varies. Some participants describe discussing parties, candidates or voting decisions with a partner, family member or friend. These accounts show the value of trusted informal support, particularly where someone has limited prior knowledge of Welsh politics or is unsure where to look for information. However, the evidence does not suggest that wider community networks, neighbours or formal community organisations routinely help participants register or vote within this sample.

"I was talking to a friend who's very Welsh and very politically involved, and he was the one that directed me to that website to read about the different parties. So I found it easy because of friends and family. But I think, again, if you're not integrated, you'd probably struggle to find a good source because I knew I could trust the link that my friend sent me." - Female, 31 to 45, American, North Wales

Official letters and poll cards can provide a useful starting point, but they do not necessarily support confident participation. For some participants, official communications prompt registration or clarify practical arrangements, such as where to vote. However, receiving a letter or poll card does not necessarily mean understanding which elections someone is eligible for, who the candidates are or what a Senedd vote will decide. Experiences also vary; while some find registration straightforward, others encounter unclear communications, missed deadlines or unresolved steps.

"I do remember because I've gotten the letter to register to vote but I don't know the people to vote for. I don't know any of the candidates. I don't know how it's supposed to work even." - Female, 31 to 45, Filipino, South-West Wales

"Work out how and where to vote is quite easy because they send you a poll card or they send you a form that you can, you can ask for a postal vote… it is hard to work out what the election is about." - Female, 35 to 44, China, South-East Wales

Participants who feel more established within Welsh society sometimes describe finding the system easier to navigate. Those who have lived in Wales for longer or who have stronger local networks generally report greater confidence participating in Welsh democracy. This suggests confidence is shaped not only by electoral information, but also by wider familiarity with Welsh institutions and everyday participation in community life.

"It's sort of because we've been here for so long now that you just get sent the voting cards. We know, we know that if it's a Senedd election, we can vote. So you can kind of like start following up the conversation or the candidates before." - Female, 46 to 60, Finnish, Rural Mid and West Wales

5.2.1.5. Summary of foreign citizens' experiences of voting rights

Overall, the findings suggest that extending voting rights to qualifying foreign citizens can strengthen feelings of inclusion and encourage greater political engagement, but this does not necessarily translate into participation. While the extension of voting rights is generally welcomed, awareness of eligibility and understanding of Welsh democracy vary considerably. Some participants find registration and voting straightforward, while others are unclear about which elections they can participate in, how the Senedd works or which political choices best represent their views. Familiarity with Wales, access to trusted information and support from family and friends can help people navigate these challenges. The findings highlight the importance of clearer communication about eligibility across different elections, alongside accessible information about Welsh politics and the choices available, to help foreign citizens exercise their rights confidently and meaningfully.

5.2.2 Candidacy rights

5.2.2.1. Awareness and understanding of the reforms

Awareness of voting rights is generally stronger than awareness of the right of qualifying foreign citizens to stand for the Senedd. Participants have often voted themselves and, in some cases, supported others to stand, but knowledge of their own right to stand is vague or non-existent. There is generally awareness of Votes at 16 and foreign citizen voting

rights, but the right to stand as a candidate is often not acknowledged without prompting, and even then, participants show uncertainty. One participant has worked at polling stations and delivered democratic engagement sessions for refugees but did not know about the candidacy rules until this research.

> "I was aware of the changes around voting rights, including younger people and foreign citizens having the right to vote, but I wasn't really aware of the changes around who could stand as a candidate. I didn't know that foreign citizens had the right to stand." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

This reflects a wider perception that communications about foreign citizens' political rights are relatively limited. This is felt to be in contrast to the prominent advertising around Votes at 16, especially in 2021 when there was lots of publicity about young people's right to vote. However, participants are aware of foreign citizens who have stood at the most recent election, meaning there is some recognition of the new rules, even if vague. Participants therefore tend to understand candidacy rights at a high level once prompted, rather than having detailed knowledge of who is eligible or how someone goes about standing.

> "In 2021 there were signs everywhere saying there was an election and that young people could vote, and there were adverts on Spotify. There was very little publicity about foreign nationals." – Male, qualifying foreign citizen

This distinction is important because formal eligibility can only influence consideration of candidacy where people know the opportunity exists. Limited awareness, even among this relatively politically engaged audience, suggests that the impact of the reform may currently be constrained by its visibility.

5.2.2.2. Views of extension of candidacy among foreign citizens

Participants are broadly positive about extending candidacy rights to qualifying foreign citizens. They commonly feel that people who live and contribute in Wales, and are affected by decisions made by the Senedd, should be able to participate in its democracy. Voting is equated with standing, with the right to being able to do one linked to the other.

> "I'm happy with the changes. If people are allowed to vote, they should be able to stand. Foreign citizens contribute to the economy and society, and the decisions that are made – around things like education and the NHS – affect them. It's fundamental that they have a right to participate." Male, qualifying foreign citizen

> "It makes me feel significantly more positive about living in Wales and about the Welsh Government and its institutions. I feel as if I'm on the agenda and I have a say in my country. It makes it feel more serious – there is a duty to represent and listen to me." – Male, qualifying foreign citizen

For some, the significance of the reform goes beyond the practical opportunity to become a candidate. Being eligible to participate politically on similar terms to other residents can reinforce feelings of equality, acceptance and belonging in Wales. Participants describe feeling more welcome, more equal or more recognised as part of Welsh society. This can be meaningful where previous political experiences have left participants feeling excluded.

One participant, who has lived in Wales since 2014, describes feeling disempowered following the Brexit referendum. Gaining political rights in Wales has subsequently 'given some power back'. Indeed, the lack of voting or candidacy rights in the UK at general elections act as a point of comparison and a reminder that help foreign citizens feel like they have a say in Wales.

"It feels significant to me. It's important to be able to put forward my ideas. I can't do that in England, where I've lived for most of my life. It makes me feel incredibly optimistic and confident about the country I live in." – Male, qualifying foreign citizen

"It gives us a more welcome, connected feeling – higher confidence levels and less isolation. Because we are being listened to now, it doesn't feel like it's just tick-box anymore." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

However, support for the principle does not necessarily translate into a desire to stand personally. Some participants remain more comfortable exercising influence through voting, campaigning, advocacy or their professional and community roles. One highly engaged participant is clear that standing is not for them, despite strongly supporting the rights of others to do so. The clearest early impact of candidacy rights among this audience may therefore be on feelings of inclusion and political legitimacy, rather than directly changing political behaviour.

"I don't think standing is for me. I'm happy doing other work where I can have influence. You have to be brave to stand for election because your private life becomes public, and politicians can face horrible harassment." – Male, qualifying foreign citizen

5.2.2.3. Experience and impact

While the reform makes candidacy possible, there is limited evidence that eligibility alone creates new pathways into elected office. Participants generally regard standing for the Senedd as something foreign citizens can do, but candidacy is more commonly discussed as a possibility for the future. For some, learning they are eligible widens their sense of how they might participate in the future. For others, their preferred forms of political engagement remain unchanged.

"At the next election I might think a little more about my role and about standing, for example. I might even consider it. I don't know where I'll be in five years' time, because my circumstances will also depend on the situation in my home country." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

"It would take a lot of work, but it's a good feeling to know that I could do it. I don't really have concerns about whether I could do it well – I would just need to have the conviction and the support around me." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

Where candidacy feels more realistic, existing relationships and encouragement appear important in bridging the gap between eligibility and standing. One participant who has considered becoming a candidate already has heavy involvement with their local political party. It is via this relationship that there is encouragement and support to stand. Other participants, whose involvement is through community advocacy, campaigning or

professional roles, have a less clear route into candidacy. This group are unsure about standing in the future and tend to feel they would need more support or encouragement from those already involved in politics in Wales, likely reflecting other citizens' potential route into Welsh politics.

"I got connected with the local [PARTY Y]… the campaigns manager encouraged me to go for it. There was a desire for certain demographic targets, like women and young people. I felt more supported in becoming a candidate."- Male, qualifying foreign citizen

This suggests there is an important distinction between removing the formal barrier to candidacy and creating an active pathway into it. While some of the barriers to closer involvement with political parties and broader engagement with politics in Wales are now removed, most participants feel their potential journey into Welsh politics would be a slow one. Importantly, some are open to the idea and feel empowered by the fact they could stand in the future.

5.2.2.4. What enables meaningful participation

Networks, practical support and a sense of belonging help determine whether candidacy feels achievable. Participants identify several factors beyond eligibility that can influence whether a foreign citizen feels able to stand. Having established networks or a local base is particularly important. Participants describe needing people who can encourage them, help them navigate the system or provide practical support. Some also identify financial backing and clearer information about how someone becomes a candidate, what the process involves and what support is available.

"The route into candidacy needs to be more realistic and easy. Lots of people don't know this is open to foreign citizens. There needs to be clearer information about who can stand, what support is available and what the practical realities are. We also need to see more examples of foreign citizens who have been involved in political life." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

Visible role models can help make this pathway easier to imagine. Seeing foreign citizens participate publicly or be elected demonstrates that candidacy is possible, while direct relationships with politically active people can provide practical encouragement. These findings suggest that representation may have a cumulative effect. As more foreign citizens become visible within Welsh politics, candidacy may begin to feel more realistic to others.

"Seeing [a foreign citizen politician] was very empowering for me and a great example. Seeing a foreign citizen participate like that can be incredibly encouraging for people who might otherwise think that politics isn't for them." – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

Feeling entitled and accepted as a participant in Welsh politics is also important, although experiences vary here. Some participants do not feel that being a foreign citizen creates a particular disadvantage. They feel broadly welcome and accepted by their communities. However, others describe feeling less welcome, especially when posting publicly on social media. Here, they can receive hostile and xenophobic comments suggesting that because they are not from Wales, they are less entitled to express political opinions. One participant

expresses the concern that if they stand, they will primarily be viewed as a ‘foreign candidate’ rather than being judged on their political views and merit as a candidate.

> “Given the political climate in the UK and the hostility towards migrants, it might be hard for foreign citizens to feel comfortable putting themselves forward and opening themselves up to public scrutiny. I think that could put a lot of people off, particularly ethnic minority candidates or women.” – Male, qualifying foreign citizen

Exposure to public scrutiny can consequently feel higher risk for some foreign citizens. One participant feels that hostility towards migrants could discourage people from putting themselves forward, particularly alongside other characteristics such as ethnicity or gender. Participants feel strongly that political parties have an important responsibility to play in ensuring foreign citizens are not recruited tokenistically, while providing appropriate support in response to risks of racism and or xenophobia.

> “I share my opinion quite often, and I get so many comments saying that I’m not entitled to have an opinion on Welsh politics because I’m not from here. The barrier isn’t just about access; it’s about feeling that I’m actually part of the community and the country, and how I’m seen by other people.” – Female, qualifying foreign citizen

5.2.2.5. Summary of foreign citizens’ experiences of candidacy rights

Taken together, these findings suggest that extending candidacy rights creates formal opportunity and can strengthen feelings of inclusion and political possibility, but translating this into greater representation is likely to be a longer-term process. Awareness of the right to stand, established networks, practical and political support, visible role models and a wider sense of belonging all appear important in determining whether formal eligibility becomes meaningful participation.

5.3 Dual mandates

This section explores the experiences and perspectives of county and county borough councillors, focusing particularly on the restrictions preventing councillors from simultaneously serving as Members of the Senedd. Interviews were conducted with 6 councillors, including those who have stood or considered standing for the Senedd, to understand awareness and views of the reforms, their impact on political careers and pathways into the Senedd, and any wider consequences for local representation and accountability. Findings reflect the experiences of this small group of politically engaged participants, rather than the views of councillors across Wales more widely.

5.3.1. Awareness and response to the reform

Awareness of the dual-mandate restriction is generally strong, although the extent to which councillors regard it as a significant change varies depending on previous local practice. Where Senedd members already tended to resign their council seats after being elected, the reform is seen as formalising existing good practice rather than representing a significant change. By contrast, councillors from areas with previous experience of representatives holding both positions are more conscious of the change and its rationale.

Participants generally support the principle of preventing dual mandates. Both council and Senedd roles are seen as substantial commitments, and there is concern that holding both can limit the time available to represent constituents effectively. One councillor whose council has previously experienced several dual-mandate members is particularly supportive of the restriction, describing how councillors holding both positions can struggle to fulfil their local responsibilities, with the resulting workload falling to others, particularly those from the same party. Another participant, who previously knew a councillor who simultaneously served as an MS, supports the reform on similar grounds, arguing that there is no time to do both roles.

> “There's no time to do both roles.” — County/county borough councillor

Some potential benefits of holding both roles are recognised, including stronger knowledge of how the Senedd operates and closer relationships between local and national government. However, participants generally feel these connections can be maintained without one individual holding both positions. One also feels dual mandates risk creating the impression that some councillors have a privileged or prioritised route into national politics.

> “Conceivably, it would be useful if you're on the council to know how Welsh Government works and have contacts. But it's better to achieve that in other ways. Otherwise, it feels a bit like some have special privileges that others don't.” — County/county borough councillor

5.3.2. Impact on decisions about standing for the Senedd and political careers

The restrictions do not appear to fundamentally disrupt pathways from local government into the Senedd. Participants continue to see local government as a potential route into national politics. The reform changes what happens when someone is elected to the Senedd, rather than preventing councillors from using their local experience as a pathway towards it. Participants recognise an established route into national politics, progressing from community councils through county councils and potentially into the Senedd.

None of the participants interviewed identify the requirement to relinquish a council seat as a significant deterrent to standing for the Senedd. Instead, decisions about progressing towards the Senedd appear to be influenced by wider factors, including personal ambition and the support available through political parties. One participant notes that councillors within parties with a strong local infrastructure may find progression easier because they have access to established networks and practical support, while those in smaller parties can have fewer people to draw on.

> “It depends on what your party supports. If you're in a party that has a big local infrastructure, you might benefit from the extra support. Smaller parties have less support to draw on.” — County/county borough councillor

Participants also tend to see the transition from one elected role to another as manageable. Existing casework may need to be transferred, for example, but this is regarded by one participant as part of the normal turnover associated with elected office, rather than a significant drawback.

“You might be in the middle of casework, but you can hand it over, pass on your notes and brief whoever is taking over. That's the nature of elected office; people move on.” — County/county borough councillor

5.3.3. Wider perceived impact and consequences of reforms

The main potential consequences relate to temporary gaps in local representation, but these are seen as a worthwhile trade-off in restricting 'double jobbing'. When a councillor is elected to the Senedd and relinquishes their council seat, a by-election may be required, and constituents can temporarily be left without a local representative. Participants note that this can last several weeks and potentially create practical issues where particular functions, such as advice on local planning matters, depend on the involvement of the ward councillor. One councillor also noted that these new councillors need time to become effective in their role, exacerbating the effect of this gap.

“Mae'r mecanics wedyn, mae'n mynd i gymryd tua chwych saith wythnos, yndy di? Felly os oes yna bethau penodol, er enghraifft cynllunio, lle mae'r bobl sydd yn eu cais cynllunio isai ti'n cefnogi nhw, wel bydd hwnna wedi mynd, bydd y cyfle yna wedi mynd achos, ti'n gwybod, gweud bod yna rhywbeth yn yr ysgol lle mae angen i ti Siarad dros yr ysgol. Mae'r pethau yma'n symud yn eitha' cloi yndi nhw. Fi'n gwybod yn gyffredinol efallai bod hi wedi bod yn digwydd mewn 6-7 wythnos, ond da pethau penodol allai fe fod ag oblygiadau.

[The mechanics then [of replacing a councillor], that’s going to take about six or seven weeks, isn’t it? So if there are specific things, for example planning, where the people with planning applications want you to support them, well, that opportunity will have gone … These things move quite quickly, don’t they. I know in general it may have been happening over six or seven weeks, but with specific things it could have implications].” — County/county borough councillor

There is also potential for a by-election to have wider political consequences. If the seat changes party, this could alter the balance of a council and, in a closely divided authority, potentially result in a change of administration. Participants recognise that this could create some short-term instability.

However, these consequences are generally considered preferable to councillors continuing to hold both positions after being elected to the Senedd. Participants with experience of dual mandates are particularly conscious that 'double jobbing' can transfer workload onto other councillors and leave constituents with a representative who has insufficient time to fulfil their local role. The restriction is therefore generally seen as strengthening accountability and ensuring councillors can devote sufficient time to their responsibilities, with temporary gaps in representation regarded as preferable to prolonged periods of inadequate representation under a dual mandate.

There may also be some benefits associated with turnover. One participant feels that councils can become dominated by long-serving members and established ways of working and sees opportunities for new people to enter local politics as potentially positive.

“People have been there so long that bad practice has become accepted. It's important to have input from people who don't have that history.” — County/county borough councillor

5.3.4. Summary of participant experiences of dual mandate restriction

Overall, participants broadly support the dual-mandate restriction, seeing it as a way to ensure elected representatives can devote sufficient time to their roles. While its significance varies depending on previous local practice, there is little evidence that it affects decisions to stand for the Senedd. Temporary gaps in local representation and potential by-elections are recognised as drawbacks but are generally seen as preferable to prolonged 'double jobbing'. The main consideration is therefore how transitions between elected roles are managed.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Overall assessment of the reforms

The evidence indicates that the provisions introduced by the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 have been implemented, widening formal opportunities to participate in Welsh democracy. The reforms are generally welcomed by those who took part in this research. Young people and qualifying foreign citizens generally support the extension of voting rights, politically active qualifying foreign citizens broadly welcome the extension of eligibility to stand for the Senedd, and the councillors interviewed generally support the restriction on simultaneously serving as a county or county borough councillor and Member of the Senedd.

There is also evidence about how the provisions are operating in practice, although the strength and coverage of this evidence vary. Existing evidence is strongest in relation to young people, particularly electoral registration, reported participation and political engagement. Evidence relating to qualifying foreign citizens is more limited, while there is particularly little quantitative evidence on the extension of candidacy rights or the effects of dual-mandate restrictions.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the reforms have created opportunities for democratic participation, but that formal eligibility does not necessarily translate into meaningful engagement. Awareness and understanding vary across affected groups, and access to information, confidence and wider political circumstances continue to shape whether and how people exercise their rights. Some of the wider impacts on participation, representation and political engagement may also take longer to become apparent.

The following conclusions bring together the existing evidence, stakeholder perspectives and primary qualitative findings to identify the main considerations emerging from the review.

6.2 Awareness of eligibility and understanding of democratic participation

Across both audiences, the research found that knowing you have a right to participate doesn't necessarily equate to understanding the wider system and feeling equipped to make an informed decision. Young people can know they can vote without understanding the different options presented by political parties or what their votes will actually go towards deciding. Foreign citizens can receive a poll card without understanding why they are eligible or which elections they can participate in, or that they can stand in the election themselves. In both cases, this can act as a barrier to choosing to vote or stand for election.

The findings from this review align with existing evidence on political literacy and uncertainty around eligibility. 'A False Start: Votes-at-16 in Wales in the 2021 Welsh Parliament / Senedd Cymru Election', Griffiths, J. D., et. al, 2025 identifies limited understanding of electoral systems and party politics, while 'The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK', Sobolewska and Barclay, 2021 highlights eligibility and

information barriers, although its populations are not directly equivalent to qualifying foreign citizens. Stakeholders also anticipate lower awareness of candidacy than voting rights. The primary research in this review adds concrete examples of people knowing they can participate without understanding the system or their choices.

Communication needs to build on awareness of participation rights to explain how to participate in practice and equip people to find the information they need to feel confident in making an informed decision when voting or standing for office.

6.3 Trusted intermediaries

Across audiences, the Welsh public rarely navigate democratic participation alone, instead relying on ‘intermediaries’.

For young people, parents, teachers and schools are important. For foreign citizens, family, community organisations and established local networks can provide support, information and explanation. For prospective candidates, political parties, community networks and existing activism can make standing feel realistic.

'Young People’s Views on Politics and Voting', Electoral Commission, 2026 identifies family political interest as an important predictor of engagement, and Electoral Commission data shows that parents or guardians helped 59% of registered 16- and 17-year-olds understand how to register. Stakeholders identify community organisations, ESOL settings and faith groups as potential routes to foreign citizens. The primary research in this review strengthens the evidence for personal relationships and party encouragement, but does not show community organisations routinely supporting voting within this sample.

A single national information campaign is unlikely to help those to whom the franchise has been extended to feel like they are participating meaningfully and have a sufficient understanding of the system in which they are involved. Engagement should combine national information with trusted people and organisations wherever possible, helping to bridge the information gap for these audiences.

6.4 Wider impacts on participation and representation

Both young people and foreign citizens feel that the impacts of the reforms extend beyond increasing turnout or the number of candidates from these groups. Becoming eligible to participate can make politics feel more relevant, strengthen people’s sense that they have a voice, and reinforce feelings of belonging to Welsh society. This is particularly significant for foreign citizens, who are now able both to vote and to stand for election.

The inclusion and recognition described by participants align with the rationale in the *Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 / Explanatory Memorandum*, but provide new experiential evidence where earlier evidence was limited. 'Votes at 16 in Scotland: Political experiences beyond the vote itself', Huebner and Eichhorn, 2020 and Extending the Vote to 16, Electoral Reform Society, 2025 suggest potential longer-term participation benefits, while Welsh evidence remains too recent to establish sustained effects. Stakeholders similarly expect representation to develop gradually, although “several electoral cycles” is an expectation rather than an evidenced timescale.

The full impact of these reforms is unlikely to be realised immediately. The existing evidence cannot yet establish whether extending the franchise will translate into a substantially greater political voice or representation for these groups over the longer-term. It is likely to take several electoral cycles for these effects to become clear, as new forms of representation become more visible and changes to political education and engagement among young people have time to take effect.

7. References

The sources reviewed for this report were identified through the Rapid Evidence Assessment, which brought together relevant legislation, policy documents, published research, Electoral Commission data, Welsh Government evidence, academic literature and wider evidence on democratic participation and inclusion. Sources were selected for their relevance to the research objectives, including evidence on Votes at 16, qualifying foreign citizens, democratic engagement, candidacy and representation.

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8. Annex

Annex A. Recorded sample breakdown

Table A1. Sample breakdown

Research group	Number of participants	Main focus
Young people aged 16 to 21	20	Experience of becoming eligible to vote at 16 or 17
Qualifying foreign citizens: voting-rights group	16	Understanding and experience of voting rights
Qualifying foreign citizens: politically active group	6	Awareness and experience of candidacy rights
County and county borough councillors	6	Experience and perceived effects of dual-mandate restrictions
Total participant sample	48	Excludes stakeholder interviews

Table A2. Public sample: demographic counts

Characteristic	Category	Number
Gender	Female	20
Gender	Male	17
Gender	Other	1
Age	16 to 17 (young people group)	9
Age	18 to 21 (young people group)	11
Age	18 to 24 (foreign-citizen groups)	3
Age	25 to 34	2
Age	35 to 44	4
Age	45 to 54	6
Age	55 and over	3

Characteristic	Category	Number
Citizenship grouping	British, Irish or Commonwealth	20
Citizenship grouping	Another country	18
Neurodivergence	Yes	7
Long-term illness, disability or impairment	Yes	7

Table A3. Public sample: region and preferred interview language

Characteristic	Category as recorded	Number
Region	North Wales	10
Region	Rural Mid and West Wales	12
Region	South Wales Valleys	7
Region	South-West Wales	5
Region	Cardiff and surrounding areas	3
Region	South-East Wales	1
Preferred interview language	English	30
Preferred interview language	Welsh	6
Preferred interview language	Language other than English or Welsh	6