

Report: How the 2011 National Assembly for Wales elections were run | Electoral Commission    Search    Report: How the 2011 National Assembly for Wales elections were run    You are in the Senedd elections section Home    Senedd elections On this page About this report Facts and figures Did people feel informed People's experience of voting Lessons learnt: what we should change Costs of the election Download our full report First published: 9 July 2019 Last updated: 7 August 2019 About this report Our report is about the administration of the National Assembly for Wales general election, held on 5 May 2011. It identifies and comments on key issues that emerged and on voters' experience of the election. It also reviews the impact of combining the election with the referendum on the UK Parliamentary voting system. Facts and figures Our report focuses particularly on the experience of voters, based on public opinion research and other research data. In total 2,289,735 people were registered to vote in Wales and 41.8% of them did so. Overall 17% of electors asked for a postal vote and a high proportion of those, 71%, used their postal vote. Postal votes accounted for 28% of all votes cast at the election. Our report reviews people's experience of voting in polling stations or by post. A total of 176 constituency candidates campaigned to be elected and 13 political parties nominated lists of regional candidates. This was 21 fewer constituency candidates and three fewer political parties than in the Assembly elections in 2007. Our report gives more detail on campaigning in the election. Did people feel informed We undertook a public information campaign to increase people's awareness of the Assembly elections and the UK-wide referendum. We sent an information booklet to all households in Wales and used television, radio and online advertising to inform people about the elections. We evaluated levels of people's awareness by conducting public opinion research before and after our campaign. Of those surveyed, 78% recognised at least one element of our campaign. After polling day, when asked if they had been aware of the Assembly elections, 82% of people said they were. Seven in 10 people surveyed said they had enough information to make an informed decision on how to vote in the election, with 79% of those aged 55 or over feeling informed compared with 60% of those under 35. In terms of people feeling informed, the prominence of the Assembly elections in the media continues to be an issue. Our public opinion research found a difference in Wales, compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland, in people's views of the amount of media coverage of the elections. Over half of people surveyed in Wales thought there was a lot of media coverage of the Assembly election, whereas 72% of people surveyed in Scotland and 70% of people in Northern Ireland thought there was a lot of media coverage of the elections being held there. People's experience of voting People in Wales continue to have very high levels of satisfaction with the voting process. Of those who voted in polling stations, 97% said they were satisfied with the process of voting and 98% of those who voted by post were satisfied. Full details of our research findings are contained in the report. A key priority for the Commission is that voters are able to vote easily and confidently, knowing that their vote will be counted in the way they intended. The Assembly election ballot papers, prescribed in legislation by the Secretary of State for Wales, were designed according to our good practice guidance on accessibility. In public opinion research, nearly all voters (96%) said they found their ballot papers easy to complete. Of those who voted in both the Assembly election and the UK-wide referendum held on the same day, meaning they completed three ballot papers, 96% said they found it easy to fill in more than one ballot paper. Lessons learnt: what we should change Timing of elections The timing of the Assembly election count became a controversial issue at the end of March, when it

became publicly known that Returning Officers in the North Wales electoral region had decided to count votes the day after the close of poll rather than overnight. Our report explains the background and reviews the issue, as well as containing data on when results for each constituency and electoral region were announced. By the end of November 2011, we will circulate an Issues Paper on the timing of election counts, identifying issues that have arisen at elections across the UK in recent years. We will seek views from those with an interest in the timing of election counts, including governments, political parties, Returning Officers, broadcasters and voters. Following analysis of views received, we will seek to make recommendations in early 2012 on the timing of election counts and the way in which they are organised, taking account of the type of elections and a range of relevant circumstances.

Disqualification of two candidates returned as elected Two weeks after the election, an issue of significant public interest arose. Two candidates who were returned as Assembly Members in regional elections were found not to have been validly elected because of offices they held, meaning that they were 'disqualified'. This became the subject of investigation by the police and, after the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that no criminal offences had been committed, by the National Assembly for Wales. The Commission's own actions came under public scrutiny as a result of an error in the Welsh language version of our guidance to candidates and agents, which had a bearing in one of the cases. We apologised to the Assembly and to the person concerned. Our report covers this issue in detail. We have been working with the Welsh Language Board since this incident and are glad to implement a series of recommendations they made to us in September 2011. These include improving our processes for dealing with documents and guidance in Welsh, in order to avoid any future difficulties. In particular, we have thoroughly revised our processes for publishing information in Welsh and online on our website.

Regional ballot paper The format of the regional ballot paper had been revised for the 2011 election, so that it contained the names of political parties who had nominated candidates, together with any independent regional candidates who were standing, but not the names of party regional candidates. However, the names of candidates were required to be displayed in polling stations so that voters could see them. Early on polling day, there were complaints that regional candidates' names were not displayed or were displayed inadequately by some Returning Officers. There were also a small number of complaints from postal voters that they did not have access to the names of regional list candidates other than by consulting notices in public places or local authority websites. Our report explains the background and the actions that were taken on polling day to resolve this issue. We conclude that, following the experience at the elections, the question of whether candidates' names are included on the regional list ballot paper should be reconsidered. However, before certain relevant matters are resolved (which our report explains), it would be premature to make decisions on the regional ballot paper. We will revisit this issue no later than December 2014. We will seek further views and make any necessary recommendations to the Secretary of State for Wales in sufficient time for a decision not later than one year before the Assembly election in 2016. That would allow any change to the ballot paper to be prescribed in legislation at least six months before the 2016 election.

Invalid postal votes In common with trends at previous elections, just under 5% of returned postal votes had to be rejected as invalid by Returning Officers, for one of the following reasons: the postal vote statement which must accompany the ballot paper was missing; the ballot paper was missing; or because the signature or date of birth supplied by postal voters could not be matched with their postal vote application.

Our report contains more information and data about invalid postal votes. Allowing Returning Officers to request a refreshed identifying signature, and also to provide electors with feedback if their postal vote has been rejected would help address this problem. We first made this recommendation to the UK Government in 2007 and have since reiterated it. In September 2011, the UK Government said that it would work with the Commission and electoral administrators to avoid the problems we have highlighted with the current postal voting system, while taking into consideration the need to ensure it remains secure against fraudulent applications for postal votes. We will work with the UK Government to ensure the right changes are in place by the next UK Parliamentary general election. Collecting postal votes Part of ensuring that every postal vote is counted involves ensuring that all postal votes are collected from mail centres by the time polls close. Individual Returning Officers are responsible for arranging and paying for Royal Mail 'sweeps', where any remaining postal votes are collected from mail centres so that they can be included in the election count. In May 2011, the Commission took responsibility for arranging and paying for the cost of the 'sweeps' in respect of the UK-wide referendum. Royal Mail delivered all postal votes resulting from the sweeps directly to referendum counting areas, rather than Counting Officers having to collect them. This meant that, for the Assembly election, the same service was available and used by all Returning Officers. Feedback from referendum Counting Officers and election Returning Officers about the sweep has been broadly positive, but there remains scepticism about its value, with only a small number of postal votes being returned as a result. We aim to develop a better model for working with the postal service. Campaigning in the election Returning Officers offered and held briefing meetings with candidates and agents to iron out any difficulties in advance of nomination, and police representatives often attended to provide advice on electoral integrity issues. However, Returning Officers and the police have told us of poor attendance, with election staff and the police sometimes outnumbering candidates and agents or meetings being cancelled. We continue to encourage candidates, agents and parties to attend briefing meetings offered by Returning Officers to ensure they are fully informed about the nomination process and the requirements of law. We will consider further with Returning Officers and political parties what more could be done to improve the attendance of face to face local briefing for candidates and agents. The new format of our candidates and agents guidance was welcomed in the feedback we received, but party officials that deal with compliance issues felt they would like in addition a comprehensive, 'one-stop' volume containing all of our guidance, with legislative references. We will consider how we can meet that request for future elections. We received feedback from certain political parties and some candidates who indicated that they were unclear about whether their election leaflets, delivered under freepost arrangements with Royal Mail, could include messages calling on people to vote for party candidates in both constituency and regional elections. We have referred these issues to Royal Mail, who agreed to look at their guidance again. We will follow this up with Royal Mail and seek to ensure that the parties in Wales are consulted on any revisions to the guidance in good time before the next Assembly elections in 2016. Our materials and resources for Returning Officers We received positive feedback from Returning Officers about the materials and resources and the direct support we provided to them, but there was also negative feedback. Some felt that the Commission 'micro-managed' the UK referendum, with consequent impact on the combined elements of the election. There was also some negative feedback about presentational issues, with some electoral administrators saying they found our

website difficult to navigate, preferring to have the guidance in one printed volume and not to receive updates by email, in case these were missed. We have taken account of the feedback we received on the planning of our guidance and resources for elections in 2012 and how we present that information on our website. Costs of the election Our report gives detail on how much the election cost. The Welsh Government meets the costs of local Returning Officers in delivering the election. Although the actual costs of Returning Officers are not yet known, since the Welsh Government has set a deadline of 5 January 2012 for the submission of accounts, the maximum recoverable amount for all 40 constituencies and 5 electoral regions is £4.7 million. The Welsh Government also met the costs of Royal Mail, almost £3.4 million, in delivering over 16.5 million freepost election communications from candidates and political parties. Download our full report Related content Results and turnout at the 2011 National Assembly for Wales election View the results and turnout at the 2011 National Assembly for Wales election Report on the May 2021 elections in Wales Read our report about how the 2021 elections in Wales were run Results and turnout at the 2016 National Assembly for Wales election View the results and turnout at the 2016 National Assembly for Wales election Report: How the 2011 National Assembly for Wales elections were run Read our report about how the 2011 National Assembly for Wales elections were run