

# Electoral Reform Society

## Annual Report 2011-12

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November 2012

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 Electoral  
 Reform  
 Society

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# Foreword

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## **In the last year we've had to ask ourselves some big questions.**

How does change happen? How can we maximise the prospects of real change in this generation? And how can we make the Society, its members and its supporters fundamental to achieving that change?

Soon we will share ambitious plans to take us to the next election. But the last year has already provided a taste of that emerging strategy.

For us, two campaigns best illustrate our approach. We seized the moment and led the call to prevent the government disenfranchising millions of voters through changes to voter registration. We got in early, assembled a coalition, and made the case to top brass of all parties. We came armed - both with the evidence illustrating the problem and a workable solution.

We prepared a public campaign - but we didn't need it. The law changed. We won the day without a shot being fired.

On Police and Crime Commissioners we've exposed probably the worst experiment in democracy in British history. We've been setting the terms of the debate in the media and in parliament, seeing our research and our ideas recycled - often verbatim - by the decision makers who are already seeking answers.

2011-12 has seen a transformation in the Society's campaign and media profile. Old enemies are new friends, and media outlets that had written us off are now in daily contact. We have re-established our credibility and relevance.

Our objective has always been fundamental reform of the way politics works in Britain, and winning victories for voters today helps us build towards that goal.

Over the past year, we have renewed our credibility, forged new relationships and become agenda-setters.

Now let's use this spring-board to go further and faster to win electoral reform.



John Ault  
**Chair**  
Electoral Reform Society



Katie Ghose  
**Chief Executive**  
Electoral Reform Society

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Bethesda  
Methodist Church



**POLLING  
STATION**



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# Campaigns

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## The year at a glance:

1 law changed

New online  
campaigns  
reaching 80,000  
supporters

Cited in 18  
parliamentary  
debates

Meetings secured  
with over 200 key  
decision makers

Averaging 50  
media hits per  
month in major  
regional and  
national media

**Whether lobbying politicians, running public campaigns or providing the ammunition for our supporters, the Electoral Reform Society is being transformed.**

In the last year we have been rolling out new tools, techniques and technology that have put our supporters in the hot seat and brought us to the forefront of the debate on our democracy. We've made ourselves a credible and critical partner to both government and opposition, and become a leading media commentator on democracy - beyond Election Day.

## Police & Crime Commissioners

The Government's flagship policy creating Police and Crime Commissioners has proved a lesson on how not to run an election.

### What we've done

We set the agenda by exposing the mistakes that could give us the lowest turnout in British history. We gathered over 5000 supporters and candidates from all parties and none to send a message to the Home Secretary. We helped supporters get the message out to local media.

## Voter Registration

10 million voters were set to be cast out from our democracy in the Government's plan to shift to individual voter registration.

### What we've done

We exposed what the New Statesman termed "the biggest political scandal you've never heard of".

We raised the issue on the national agenda and assembled a coalition including disability charities and youth organisations, and led an all-out blitz, lobbying key decision-makers in all parties.

We were recognised as leading the debate in parliament and in the media, and successfully changed the law. The Government's plans to let voters 'opt out' from their democracy were scrapped, and our calls for a safety net to ensure vulnerable voters would stay on the register were accepted.

## Voter Education

Voter education has emerged as one of the top priorities for our members and supporters.

### What we've done

We seized the opportunity presented by Votes at 16 in Scotland to make the case for a lasting investment in the political education of all Britain's young people. We emerged as the lead media commentator on Votes at 16, and are working to translate a one off into wins for citizenship education nationwide.

## Fair Votes for Westminster

Over a year past since the Alternative Vote referendum the broken First Past the Post system remains firmly in place at Westminster.

### What we've done

The vote against AV was not a vote of confidence in First Past the Post. Research commissioned by the Society in May has shown that just 1 in 5 people support the current system.

We have laid the groundwork for a long term project to demolish our Victorian voting system.

Both staff and council took time and effort to consult members and former campaign staff and volunteers to learn the lessons from the AV referendum, including an event for members in December 2011.

## Fair Votes for Local Government

There's a widening gulf between local democracy in England and Wales, and Scotland. Scotland abandoned First Past the Post for local government elections in 2007 and adopted the Single Transferable Vote form of Proportional Representation.

### What we've done

We've captured the evidence from the successful second set of local elections in Scotland using the Single Transferable Vote and commissioned research from leading academic Professor John Curtice on the difference it's made. We've been developing a credible case for political change – scoping out support from across the parties and showcasing the success of Scotland in films, publications and events. Now we're focusing on nailing down parties' commitments to reform ahead of the next General Election.

## House of Lords

This year we saw the first legislative action to bring democracy to Britain's Upper House.

### What we've done

The Society led the call for democracy in the Lords, exposing attempts by self-interested









politicians to bring in appointments through the back door.

We assembled leading lights from the Liberal Democrats, Labour and the Conservatives to make the case for change in a joint project with the New Statesman. We've pushed for the use of STV as the proposed voting system. We're now working to keep reform of this medieval chamber on the agenda.

## Women in Politics

In all nations and at all levels women's presence in frontline politics is facing stagnation or decline. This key dimension of political representation has emerged as a big theme when we've spoken to members.

### What we've done

We joined forces with leading equality and democracy groups to launch Counting Women In, a bold new initiative to demand equal numbers of women and men running the country. We've been working with women's organisations in all parties, taking practical steps to get female representation. We've garnered national media exposure for revealing Prime Minister David Cameron's empty promise to bring more women to the top table.

## Political Engagement

We know that a large part of our success relies on our ability to engage and persuade people for whom electoral reform is not their top-tier issue. As enthusiastic advocates for building a better democracy, it is a task we readily undertake.

### What we've done

We've met with over 200 politicians in the last

year, taking up issues with them in their roles as legislators and also policy formulators. We had a strong presence at several party conferences – hosting and participating in fringe events on local government, women in politics, pluralism, class representation and an elected second chamber. At Westminster we organised seminars on proportional representation in local government, Individual Electoral Registration, class in politics and the consequences of boundary changes.

We launched our inaugural annual conference, "Navigating the New Democracy", and were pleased to have the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Shadow Leader of the House as two of our keynote speakers as well as many distinguished speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from delegates highlighted the Society's role as a go-to organisation on democracy matters.





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# Work in Scotland and Wales

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Our offices in Edinburgh and Cardiff are central to our strategy of engaging in democratic debates at all levels.

In the last year, both have led the debate on devolved matters and focused attention on the impact of Westminster policies in their respective nations.

## ERS Scotland

The Independence referendum debate has offered an opportunity to challenge our political system to change; to confound the low expectations voters have of politics, and to deliver on the high hopes they still have for democracy in Scotland.

### What we've done

2012 saw ERS Scotland launch an ambitious programme of debates and events entitled Democracy Max, an independent inquiry into what makes a good Scottish democracy. We're now midway through a series of major events engaging the Scottish public and opinion formers, with a final manifesto due next summer.

ERS Scotland has become a lead commentator on the independence debate, and from Votes at 16 to the single yes/no question, our Scottish office has emerged as a go-to commentator. Boundary changes have also given ERS Scotland a platform to show the local consequences of laws made in Westminster.

## ERS Cymru

In the wake of the successful referendum for more powers, ERS in Wales has been steadily gaining ground, coverage and profile on how local government is failing the nation's voters and women in politics.

### What we've done

We've exposed the 140,000 electors that had been denied a vote in uncontested local elections, with briefings used and credited in debates in the National Assembly. We worked with the Changing Union project to get civil society involved in the constitutional future in Wales. Reports on the gender deficit in Welsh politics have reached a UK-wide audience. Our work showing exactly what a proposed two member First Past The Post system might mean for the National Assembly gained widespread attention and visceral reactions from the high command of the Welsh Labour Party.





Electoral  
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# Members

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The Society's membership stands at over 5000, with significant growth following a free membership offer following the Yes Campaign.

The Society is now transforming its approach to membership by improving the quality and frequency of communications, reaching out to retain those who joined after the referendum as well as long-standing members.

## Listening to our members

We've recently rolled out ambitious plans to ensure our members have a bigger say on the direction of the ERS now and into the future.

This year, our members have been given the opportunity to:

- help shape the direction of the Society's policy and campaign priorities
- participate in local events around the UK
- express their views via our online surveys
- attend the Society's national events

Most importantly the feedback we've gained from contact with our members has helped define the strategy that will take us to the 2015 General Election and beyond.

## Investing in our members

We have transformed our approach to membership, by investing in dedicated staffing and new systems to offer strong foundations for future growth.

We're committed to developing the tools to offer supporters the opportunity to campaign

for a better democracy. Our supporters have helped bring the debate on Police and Crime Commissioners to the top of the political and media agenda. That's just the start.

## Winning the argument in your community

This summer we launched our new Challenge Fund. Grants of up to £500 are now available for groups with great ideas for improving democracy locally.

The Fund has already supported local projects aimed at improving democracy – from helping local groups set up election hustings for police elections to providing the technology for political podcasts to engage more people in debates about democracy.

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# Governance

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## 2012 has seen a root and branch reform of the Society's governance.

The vote for our governing council in 2011 was the most contested election in the Society's history – with over 50 candidates.

a new governance framework for the Society was adopted in July, with 78.7% of members voting in favour.

This has made the Society more effective, efficient and accountable across the board and has transformed our ability to deliver professional membership services and internal administration.

## The Council

John Ault  
Chair  
Jonathan Bartley  
Vice Chair (Management), *Resigned*  
*September 2012*  
Amy Dodd  
Deputy Chair (Campaigns)  
Keith Sharp  
Deputy Chair (Group Relations)  
Chris Carrigan  
Treasurer

Jessica Asato  
Keith Best *Appointed July 2012*  
Andrew Burns  
Clare Coatman  
Arnie Craven *Resigned July 2012*  
George Gabriel  
Amisha Ghadiali  
Annabelle Harle  
Benjamin Lille *Appointed September 2012*  
Andrew May  
Michael Meadowcroft  
Anthony Tuffin

No Council Member received any remuneration for services as a Council Member during the year. Travelling and subsistence expenses of £7,400 were reimbursed to Council members.

## Constitution

The Council undertook a comprehensive review of the Society's governance system in 2012 and



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# Staff

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## Since the last AGM the Society has welcomed talented new recruits to the team.

Following a major staffing restructure in summer 2011, the ERS reduced staff numbers from 23 to 13 and introduced new, joined up ways of working.

A new Campaigns and Research Director, Darren Hughes, was appointed in March 2012 to head up our Campaigns, Research and Policy work and establish closer links with our colleagues in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Katie Ghose  
Chief Executive

### Campaigns, Research & Policy

Darren Hughes  
Director of Campaigns and Research  
Ashley Dé  
Director of Strategy & Communications  
Jess Garland  
Policy and Research Officer  
Claudia Laidlaw  
Campaigns and Membership Officer  
Chris Terry  
Research Officer  
Nick Tyrone  
Senior Adviser, Public Affairs & Head of Resources

### Operations

Kate West  
Chief Operating Officer  
Stuart Thomas  
Operations Officer & Executive Assistant to the CEO

## ERS Scotland

Willie Sullivan  
Director  
Juliet Swann  
Campaigns and Research Officer

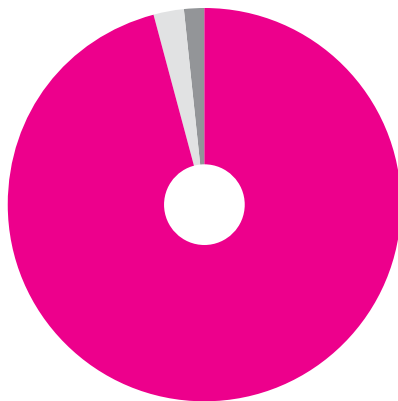
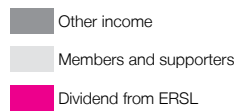
## ERS Cymru

Stephen Brooks  
Director  
Owain Llyr ap Gareth  
Campaigns & Research Officer

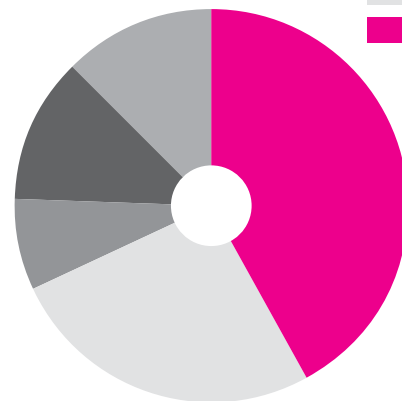
Thanks to all staff, current and former and our interns for their hard work and support in 2011-2012. Thanks also to the staff of Electoral Reform Services (ERSL).

# Finance

**Income (2012)**  
**£1.13 million**



**Expenditure in 2012 (forecast to year end)**  
**£1.03 million**



We've focused on wholesale renewal of our internal operations. We've invested heavily in systems, to make the Society leaner, faster, and more effective for the long term.

Moving forward we are now committed to diversifying our income, and developing our fundraising capacity.

The introduction of Direct Debit brings the Electoral Reform Society's administrative functions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is now cheaper and easier for staff to maintain and grow our committed base of paying members and ensure we can sustainably fund future campaigns.

Full accounts are available online at:

[www.electoral-reform.org.uk/finances](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/finances)



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**The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning for a better democracy.**

This report covers the period September 2011 to November 2012.

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