

ANNUAL
REPORT

Electoral
 Reform
 Society



ANNUAL REPORT

2015—2016

ELECTORAL REFORM SOCIETY

DECEMBER 2016

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FOREWORD

By Katie Ghose and Amy Dodd

For those working in and around politics, the last few years have been a rollercoaster. From the Scottish independence referendum to the European referendum, from the 2015 General Election to Donald Trump's surprise victory in the US, established truths have been upended and uncertainty reigns supreme.

Throughout this period, we at the Electoral Reform Society have sought to make sense of a rapidly-changing political landscape and to present positive solutions to the ever-widening gap between people and politics in order to pursue our goals. This year our focus on the quality of the EU referendum campaign (*see page 5*) put us at the heart of the UK's most significant political event. And throughout our work across the London, Edinburgh and Cardiff offices (*see pages 5-15*) we have continued to bring fresh perspectives and practical ideas to our campaign for a better democracy. But we have also looked at the global picture, keenly engaging with electoral reform efforts in Canada and the US state of Maine. At a time when politics everywhere feels unstable, when politicians are seeking new responses to uncertainty, and when more and more people are convinced that democracy is not working as it should, the Electoral Reform Society's work is more relevant than ever.

We also found the time to take stock and formulate a new strategic plan up to 2020. From late 2015 to summer 2016 we engaged in a wide-ranging conversation between staff, Council members, ERS members and supporters, external advisers and key political figures to refresh and renew our strategy.

Our three main goals are to build alliances for electoral reform, to deepen public involvement in our democracy and to win the policy pledges which will help to build a better democracy. If we

continue to work with the energy and clarity we have brought to 2016, we are confident that we will hit these goals.

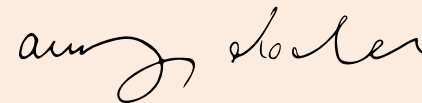
As always, thanks are due to all staff and Council members for their hard work over the year, to our Ambassador Dan Snow and advisory committee members and to our wonderful members and supporters, whose determination to build a better democracy spurs us on every day.



Katie Ghose
Chief Executive *Electoral Reform Society*

An extra message from the Chair

This year was my last as Chair of the ERS. It's a position I've had the honour to serve in for four years, and stepping down was a difficult decision. In the last four years the Society, through the work of our amazing staff team, dedicated members and Council colleagues, has progressed and developed in ways that would have been hard to imagine in the immediate aftermath of the referendum on the Alternative Vote. The ERS I see now is smart, strategic, influential and respected – an organisation which is changing politics, changing how our democracy works for the better and helping reconnect people back to power and politics again. It's an organisation I'm incredibly proud to have served, with people I feel lucky to have worked with.



Amy Dodd
Chair *Electoral Reform Society*



Wes Streeting MP and Jonathan Reynolds MP at the ERS Summer Reception

1 CAMPAIGNS

In a tumultuous year for British politics, the ERS has successfully kept itself at the heart of the political agenda, through careful targeting and timing of our campaigns and outstanding media coverage. We have been making great strides in building alliances for electoral reform, both publicly and behind the scenes. And we have continued to make a high-profile case in the media, in Parliament and among members of the public for the various policy changes which we want to see in order to build a better democracy.

EU referendum

Every month throughout the ‘short campaign’ of the EU referendum, the ERS published exclusive polling on levels of democratic engagement and how informed and interested the public felt. This meant we established ourselves as a trusted and leading voice on the biggest political issue of the year.

In collaboration with academic partners and with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust as well as our own members and supporters, we also launched *A Better Referendum*, an online toolkit designed to create a more informed EU referendum debate. The toolkit, which included filmed contributions from leading academics as well as the Remain and Leave campaigns, allowed members of the public to set up their own meetings and to have informed discussions about the issues surrounding the referendum. This exciting democratic innovation is an excellent springboard for future work on deepening and widening the democratic space.

On 1st September we launched our landmark report on the EU referendum debate, *It’s Good to Talk*. Based on our own polling and research, we concluded that the EU referendum debate left voters “totally in the dark”, with a third of voters feeling ill-informed just a week before the vote. And we set out how to make referendums

better in the future, with nine key recommendations. The report garnered widespread media attention and kicked off a national debate about the place of referendums in our democracy.

The fight for fair votes

In line with our strategic goal of building alliances for electoral reform, the past year has seen us strongly develop our links with trade unions. In September 2015 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) passed a landmark motion to look again at the idea of electoral reform. This gave us a platform to reopen the issue of reform within the movement, which has historically been a bastion of opposition. We held successful TUC and Unite fringes and created our first leaflet directly aimed at unions. The signs are that trade unions' historic opposition is starting to melt away, which could have very positive effects on our electoral reform campaign in the future.

In October 2015 we published our report on *The Cost of One Party Councils* which showed that councils dominated by a single party could be missing out on savings of around £2.6bn when compared to their more competitive counterparts – most likely due to a lack of scrutiny. This will form a key plank of our evidence base for local voting reform for some time to come.

Our March 2016 study on the Irish election also provided useful fodder for our campaigning on voting reform, showing the huge benefits of an election conducted under the Single Transferable Vote.

Public involvement in democracy

In late 2015 we were proud to launch two citizens' assemblies in Sheffield and Southampton, along with academic partners in the *Democracy Matters* consortium. In each city we convened two weekend sessions for a representative sample of local residents to deliberate about devolution. These were important tests of the idea that people are more than capable of coming to informed decisions about complex constitutional issues and in November 2016 the project won a Political Studies Association Democratic Innovation Award. Combined with our *Better Referendum* project (see above) we now have a powerful case to make about the role of citizens in deciding where powers lie in this country.



House of Lords

Once again, we seized every opportunity to highlight the absurdity of an over-sized, unelected second chamber. October 2015 saw us publish key research on the House of Lords: *Fact vs Fiction*. It busted the myths on the Lords and gained a significant amount of coverage.

In the same month we released new polling showing that just 10% of people supported the upper house as it is – a tiny mandate for the status quo.

In August 2016 we published new research on the cost of David Cameron's appointments over the past six years. It made national headlines, and once again set off the debate on Lords reform.

Boundaries

In September 2016 the Boundary Commission for England and Wales published its first draft boundaries for the next election, based on a reduced number of MPs and the December 2015 electoral register 'snapshot'.

After pressure from ourselves and others on the need to use an updated register, the Commission agreed to take the updated register into account when looking at proposals to the consultation. However, we reiterated our call for the boundaries to be based on eligible population rather than simply registered voters and will continue to make this argument, at the same time as highlighting the cut in the number of MPs as being potentially damaging for scrutiny.

Voter registration

Ensuring voter registration is as extensive as possible has been an important ERS campaign this year. During the EU referendum, we combined with other civil society groups to ensure the government extended the registration deadline when the website crashed in June. This meant that millions more applications were able to be processed, improving the registration rate not just for the vote but for the canvass as a whole. We also spoke out against a government report which we felt exaggerated the risk of fraud and made the case for a push to remove barriers to participation. We will continue to call for a 'registration revolution', to stem the fall-off of younger people and other groups from the register.

Party funding

November 2015 saw a threat from the government to cut 'Short

money' – the funding for opposition parties in Parliament. We immediately launched a successful campaign against these changes as the wrong priority and potentially damaging for democracy. The proposals were significantly watered down.

Alongside this, the Trade Union Bill had significant implications for party funding in the UK. Our campaigning contributed to the formation of a new cross-party committee looking at party funding aspects of the Bill. Despite significant government concessions on the Trade Union Bill, there is still a lack of urgency about the problem of party funding from the main parties. We will be working hard to bring everyone round the table and ensure a fairer party funding settlement which can command public support.

Votes at 16

Finally, we continued our lobbying on votes at 16 through the passage of two Bills (one for local government reform and one for the EU referendum). While not successful this time, the Lords voted in favour of votes at 16 for both Bills following our lobbying work. This has set a precedent in the Lords and piles the pressure on the Government for future reform.



2 SCOTLAND

Scottish Parliament Elections 2016

In the lead up to the elections we made a number of important interventions. We published a report and held a successful event on Scotland's 'predominant party problem', asking questions about the dominance of single parties in Scotland both historically and now. We also published a report by Professor John Curtice explaining the operation of the Additional Member System and the possible effects of various voting patterns. This clarified the electoral situation for parties and voters. And we ran extensive polling on Scots' views of local democracy and produced a statement on the same issue that has fed into the rising debate on improving local democracy in Scotland (*see below*).

Post-election we collected and checked data from the election, and a full report written by John Curtice will be published in late 2016 analysing the vote and its effects.

Deliberative Democracy

At the end of last year, we completed our involvement with the Fairer Scotland Project along with a range of partners which has allowed citizens to feed into the Scottish Government's Social Justice policy, introduced to the Scottish Parliament in October.

Over the summer we worked with Scottish Government and other partners in organising a successful experiment in citizens' involvement. We set up a 'ting' – a forum that allowed citizens to get involved in helping to design Lanarkshire Health Board's community involvement processes.

Open Government and Transparency

We continued our campaign for a register of lobbying activity, which was passed into law in March. This campaign made very

effective use of our members and supporters, using highly targeted email campaigns to MSPs and ministers to apply effective pressure. We are still monitoring the implementation of the legislation.

Scotland has been awarded 'open government pioneer status'. We are now working with the lead partners on potential projects that promote transparency in governing.

Electoral Reform of Westminster

As part of our overall focus on changing Labour's policy on electoral reform for Westminster, we worked with the Scottish TUC (STUC), Unison, Unite and the PCS to ensure STUC adopted an open position on the issue. We will continue to engage right across the trade union sector in Scotland, where experiences of proportional systems in operation bring valuable perspectives to our influencing work elsewhere.

Future Citizens

This year, we have gained the support of Scotland's biggest teacher's union EIS and a range of academics to do work around citizen education and political literacy. We look forward to refining and launching our plans in 2017.

'Act as if you own the place'

Over the year we have helped build a broad coalition of organisations and individuals to take forward a campaign on improving Scotland's local democracy. We held successful fringe meetings at the autumn party conferences and a formal launch took place in November 2016. The campaign is built around towns and villages across Scotland holding half-day deliberative events for their local residents imagining what it would be like if they themselves ran the town or village. The objective in the lead up to the Scottish local elections in May 2017 is to grow understanding and enthusiasm within local communities for local power and to get their input into how structures and systems might best be designed to support them to run their own places. The Scottish government is bringing forward a decentralisation Bill in this Parliament, which we hope this project will inform.



Willie Sullivan at the Govanhill Baths Better Referendum Event

WALES

Our work in Wales has continued to focus on three aims: strengthening devolution; achieving STV for local government; and promoting diversity, engagement, and participation in politics.

The 2016 Assembly elections offered a fantastic opportunity to engage all the parties and saw us launch four mini-manifestos, including *Making our Elections Work Better* and *Shining the Light In: Opening up Welsh Politics*, that outlined a series of asks of the parties developed over the previous Assembly term.

Devolution

Following years of engagement, the Electoral Reform Society's work with many others has paid off and the Wales Bill is set to pass control of key issues to Wales. ERS has worked particularly hard on securing for the Assembly powers over its size and electoral system, with changes subject to a two-thirds majority of all AMs. Other reforms in the Wales Bill include:

- Powers over the franchise so the Assembly can vote for votes at 16 in Welsh-only elections and referendums
- Powers over electoral administration of Welsh elections, opening up the opportunity to pilot new ways to reach voters such as weekend voting, same-day registration, 'motor voting' and e-voting

Following our 2013 *Size Matters* report (with the UK's Changing Union project) which made the case for a larger National Assembly, in November we launched our report *Reshaping the Senedd: How to Elect a More Effective National Assembly* in partnership with Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre. The report moves from the question of why we need more Assembly Members to how we should elect them. Drawing on a framework of seven

core principles, it assesses the merits of several electoral systems, concluding that there are three feasible options.

Local Government

We have strengthened support for STV within Plaid Cymru. This was reflected during negotiations following the Assembly elections when STV was given strong and prominent public priority by Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Wood.

Diversity

This past year, our work on the voice of younger people in Welsh democracy helped to ensure a number of victories, including passing control of the franchise to the Welsh Assembly (in the new Wales Bill). This follows our ERS Cymru manifesto asks for the Assembly election, and builds on our previous report on young people.

Our ERS mini-manifesto *Making Every Voice Heard* outlined our series of asks on democracy and gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief, and race.

We produced a report on *Women in the National Assembly* projecting possible scenarios for the Assembly election, underlining how dependent gender representation in the Assembly is on factors such as party performance and incumbency.

We have consistently pressed all Welsh parties on the need for a Young People's Parliament for Wales over the past few years, and last month following a unanimous vote in the Assembly chamber, the Presiding Officer has pledged that it will happen. We are now in conversation with key partners about how to ensure that body will provide a link to real decision-making with the Assembly, a connection to local communities and youth groups, and a structure that ensures all young people are represented.

Following the Donaldson Review of the Welsh curriculum, there are opportunities to press for better citizenship education, and we will be looking to work with partners to ensure that Donaldson's commitment to nurturing "critical, informed citizens of Wales and the world" is followed through.



Baroness Dorothy Thornhill, Mayor of Watford at our Liberal Democrat Conference Reception

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MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

The ERS's audience reach goes from strength to strength, both in terms of membership and wider support.

Our core audience

Our work highlighting the unfairness of the First Past The Post system has struck a chord with many disenfranchised by our broken electoral system and this year has seen continued growth of the Society's membership and consolidation of our supporter database.

Over the last year our paying membership has increased to just under 4,000. This year we have focused on cleaning our database of subscribers of incorrect, no longer used and bounced email addresses, as well as historic addresses transferred from our old database system. This has cancelled out growth and caused our list to stabilise at around 144,000 subscribers.

Activity surrounding the 2016 local elections in May and the European Union referendum in June were the main drivers for recruitment, with hundreds of members joining after 23rd June and after the subsequent publication of our referendum report.

Campaigns

This year over 6,000 people wrote to their MPs asking them to support Jonathan Reynolds MP's motion for proportional representation. A further 1,000 people in the same week wrote to their MP to ask them to extend the franchise for the EU referendum to 16 and 17 year olds.

As well as creating topical 'write to your MP' actions, we've been using pre-created petitions to better allow us to take advantage of political events quickly. Following Caroline Lucas MP's motion for electoral reform and extending the franchise to 16 and 17

year olds, 6,000 people added their names to our standing petition for Votes at 16 and 1,500 found out how their MP voted in the division. Likewise 5,500 people added their names to our call for a fully elected House of Lords later in the year.

We've made greater use of surveys this year to find out more about our membership. In line with our strategies for influencing political parties and trade unions, we've been building up data on our members and supporters. We now know of 1,000 trade unionists and 4,300 party members on our database. As we grow this list we'll be better able to make use of the talent and networks of our members.

In the run up to the EU referendum 300 small donors got behind our crowd-fundraiser to create a deliberative tool for the EU referendum (*Better Referendum*). Thanks to them hundreds of people around the country attended deliberative events and thousands more watched our content online.

Social Media

Last year's growth on social media has continued, with another 4,000 Facebook likes (taking us to 40,500) and our posts were seen 3,221,000 times across the year. Without a general election our reach was lower on Facebook, but posts such as Jonathan Reynolds MP's speech in favour of proportional representation still reached nearly 90,000 people and, along with shares on various pages, it was viewed over 115,000 times.

Our Twitter audience has grown from 21,000 to 32,000 in the last year. With the EU referendum, boundary review and the two pro-PR motions we had some real Twitter successes. Nearly 1,000 people retweeted the news that Caroline Lucas was proposing her Votes at 16 and proportional representation motion, which resulted in over 136,000 impressions of the tweet. With the EU referendum in June our tweets received 2.3 million impressions across the month.

Data protection

This year we've made moves to simplify our data protection permissions, introducing the option to opt in to postal communications and third party permissions. We've also simplified how we communicate with supporters who would rather receive Welsh language email.

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STAFF

The Society's team is based in our offices in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

We were pleased to welcome several new members to our Scotland team over the last 12 months. Phil Connor and Katie Gallogly-Swan joined the Scotland team at the end of 2015 and Jonathon Shafi in October 2016.

Many thanks to Stephen Brooks, Director of ERS Cymru, Juliet Swann, Campaigns and Research Officer, ERS Scotland and Rory Scothorne, Campaigns Organiser, ERS Scotland, who left us during the year.

Current staff

Katie Ghose
Chief Executive

Campaigns, Research & Policy

Darren Hughes
Deputy Chief Executive
Will Brett

Head of Campaigns & Communications

Doug Cowan
Digital Communications Officer
Jess Garland (part-time)

Research Adviser
Charley Jarrett
Policy & Public Affairs Officer

Edward Molloy
Research Officer – Democratic Innovations

Josiah Mortimer
Communications Officer
Chris Terry
Research Officer

Operations

Kate West
Chief Operating Officer
Stuart Thomas
Operations & Membership Officer
Davina Johnson (part-time)
Finance Officer

ERS Scotland

Willie Sullivan

Director

Phil Connor (part-time)

Campaigns Organiser

Katie Gallogly-Swan (part-time)

Campaigns Organiser

Jonathon Shafi (part-time)

Campaigns Organiser

ERS Cymru

(Vacant)

Director

Owain Llyr ap Gareth

Campaigns & Research Officer

Thanks to all staff for their hard work and dedication. Thanks also to the staff of Electoral Reform Services Ltd for their work during the year.

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GOVERNANCE

The Council

The Council is the Electoral Reform Society's governing body. It is made up of 15 members who are elected by our membership every other year and serve for a two-year term.

Elections took place last year and a newly elected Council took office at the close of the Society's AGM on 5th September 2015.

Between 5th September 2015 and 3rd December 2016, the following members served on the Society's Council:

Amy Dodd, *Chair*

Jon Walsh, *Vice Chair (Management)*

Sara Hyde, *Deputy Chair (Campaigns and Research)*

Clare Coatman, *Treasurer*

Crispin Allard

Kevin Coaker (until 15 September 2016)

Justina Cruikshank

Stephen Curran

Chris Finlayson

Lisa French (from 15 September 2016)

Wera Hobhouse

Paul Pettinger

Ken Ritchie

Keith Sharp

Rob Telford

Owen Winter

No Council member received any remuneration for services as a Council member during the year.



The ERS Advisory Committee

Our Advisory Committee draws on a wide pool of highly talented individuals to provide intellectual vitality and advice to our organisation. The following members served on the Society's Advisory Committee between 5 September 2015 and 3 December 2016:

Fi Glover, *journalist and presenter*; Billy Hayes, *former General Secretary, Communication Workers Union*; Deborah Mattinson, *founder of BritainThinks*; Jonathan Porritt CBE, *environmentalist and writer*; Alan Renwick, *political scientist*; Esther Robertson, *Scottish political affairs specialist*.

We are also proud to have the historian Dan Snow as our official Ambassador. The following members served on the ERS Scotland Advisory Committee:

Shelagh McKinlay, *Chair of the Advisory Committee*; Prof. Jim Mather, Amy Dalrymple, Prof. Paul Cairney.

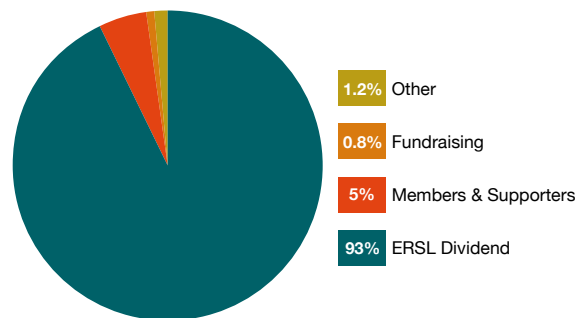
In 2017, we will launch ERS Cymru's first advisory committee and as we develop our work in Northern Ireland, look to introduce a similar initiative there.

Finances

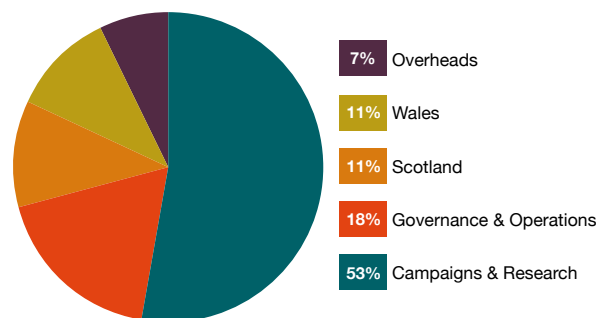
2015 saw the Society make further strides towards securing a sustainable financial foundation for the future. We saw a significant rise in membership fees and donations from members and supporters (over £80k in-year) and received funds from the Economic & Social Research Council and Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to support our various efforts at deliberative democracy.

In 2015, ERS Scotland received payment from NCVO for our work in researching and writing a report seeking to understand the changing nature of democracy in Scotland and the role of civil society. Funds were also received for ERS Scotland's participation with the Scottish Government and other partners to their social justice policy development process ('Fairer Scotland').

Income (2015) £1.49m



Expenditure (2015) £1.13m



On 20 July 2016 (falling outside the scope of our 2015 accounting period), the Society used the proceeds from the sale in 2014 of our building in Chancel Street to purchase a new building in Borough, near London Bridge. The new property comprises an office building arranged over ground, mezzanine and first floors and is in a prime location, just off the highly desirable Bermondsey Street in SE1. Following a period of refurbishment, we plan to occupy the building from mid-2017 and to lease out a significant proportion of it to tenants, thereby further diversifying our income sources.

We would like to say a huge thank you to all our donors – individuals and organisations – for their generosity and support throughout the year.

□ Electoral
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□ Society

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