



House of Commons

Making sure parliament speaks for everyone



This is an EasyRead version of
Speakers Conference
(on Parliamentary Representation):
Extended Summary

About this leaflet



This leaflet was written by a group of **MPs** who want to make sure **parliament** speaks for everyone. We asked lots of people to help us find out why this sometimes seems not to happen.



Parliament is the group of people who make the laws for the United Kingdom.



Members of Parliament (MPs) are chosen by people in each area of the United Kingdom to speak up for them in parliament.



It is important that the mix of people in parliament is the same as the mix of people who live in the United Kingdom.



This will only happen if everyone has the same chance to be an MP and to represent or speak for people in their **constituency**.



A **constituency** is the area that the MP represents.



At the moment some groups find it hard to do this. They include:

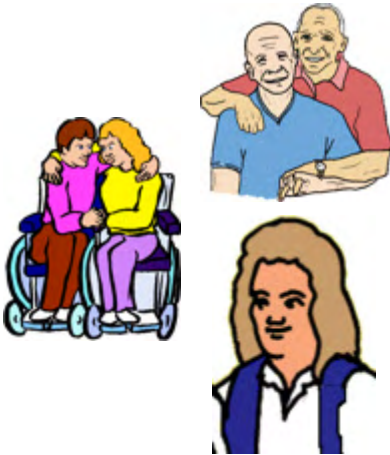
- women



- people from minority ethnic groups



- disabled people



- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.

There are lots of reasons why parliament does not have many MPs from these groups:



- in some areas the MP does not change for many years so new people do not get chosen



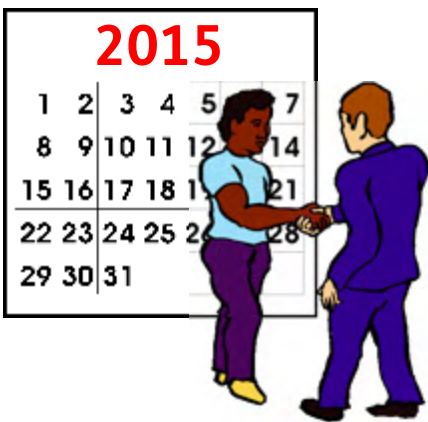
- people may not get involved in local groups that are often the first step to being an MP



- people might not have the information or support they need to get involved



- some people are bullied or not treated fairly when they try to become an MP.



We would like things to be changing by 2015.



This leaflet talks about what we found out and what we think would help make things fairer for everyone.

Getting more people involved

Learning how parliament works



Parliament needs MPs from lots of different groups to make sure its ideas and laws work well for everyone who lives in the United Kingdom.



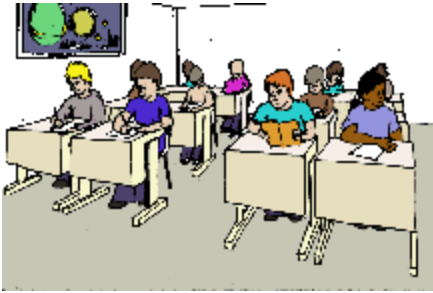
All adults have the right to vote or choose their local MP but many people do not bother to do this.



Lots of people think MPs cannot speak for them because they do not understand their needs or interests.



If people knew more about politics or how parliament works, we think they would have a better chance to get involved.



We have asked the government to:

- make sure politics is taught well in schools



- think about organisations that can give information to adults.

Local political groups



There will usually be more than one person who wants to be the MP for each area.



Most MPs belong to a political party. This is an organisation of people who have the same ideas and beliefs.



Local political groups support someone from their political party to become the MP for their area by telling other people about them.



Fewer people are getting involved in these groups and this means it can be more difficult for new people to become MPs.



The groups need money to get more people involved and to do the work.



We have asked the government to:

- think about how to give small amounts of money to support these local political groups



- make sure they do this fairly and check the money has been spent properly.

Involving new people in local political groups

People who are often left out might get more involved if local groups:



- meet in places that are easier for disabled people to access



- meet at times when carers can go



- make their meetings more relaxed



- listen to new members' ideas and answer their questions



- find things for new people to do.



We have asked each of the political parties to:

- write a plan to make sure everyone knows about their local groups and has the same chance to be involved



- find people whose job will be to involve more women, disabled people and other groups who get left out



- look for people in their community or local parties who might want to be more involved.

What is an MP and how can you be one?



Giving people clear information

A good MP will know about people in their area and speak up for them in parliament.



When they are not in parliament, they should be back in their area finding out what is important to people who live there.



A lot of people do not understand the job and this can stop them wanting to be an MP.



We would like there to be more information about:

- what an MP can do
- the rules about how an MP works.

Having an equal chance to be an MP



Local groups choose the person from their political party who they would like to be an MP.

They often choose people who are white men with good jobs who do not look disabled. This might be because:



- they look like people who are already MPs



- other people do not say they want to be an MP



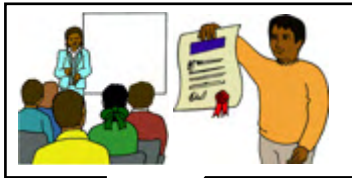
- people choose a person they think is like them



- they pick someone they think other people will vote for and choose as an MP.



Most people who become an MP have the same kind of education and jobs. We want people from different backgrounds to have an equal chance.



We have asked the political parties to:

- write up information about the education and jobs of all new MPs



- make sure people see MPs from different backgrounds and communities working in parliament to show it is a job lots of people can do

What stops people being an MP?

People might not say they want to be an MP because:



- it costs too much money



- they have a disability



- they think their community might not support them



- spending a lot of time in parliament can be difficult for parents or other carers



- they do not feel this is something they or someone from their group or community can expect to do



- parliament is a difficult place to work for many people.



People might feel more confident if:

- they were buddied with someone with more experience who could support them and give them advice



- people were told about volunteer roles that would help them learn about the job.



People might say they want to be an MP but the local party might not choose or support them because they are a woman or from a different community or background.



We have said:

Local parties need training in including people from different backgrounds and communities.

Rules about including different people



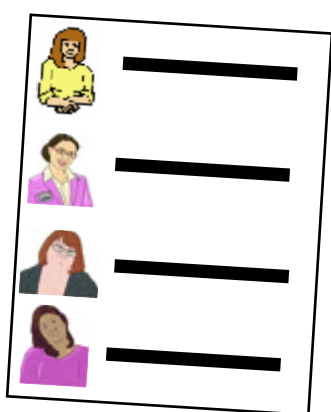
It is important to have MPs who come from different groups and communities.



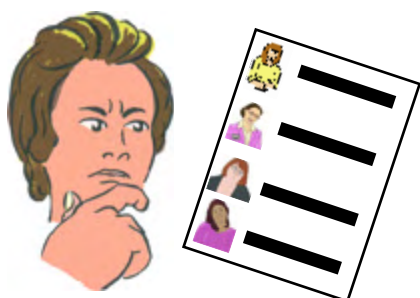
We might need to use rules to make this happen.



For example, more than half the people in the United Kingdom are women but only 1 in every 5 MPs is a woman.



In some areas, the Labour party has rules that say the local party can only choose their MP from a list of women.

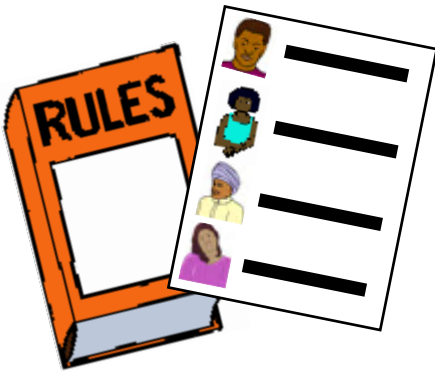


Some people do not like the idea of telling people who they can choose, but this is one way of helping more women to be an MP.

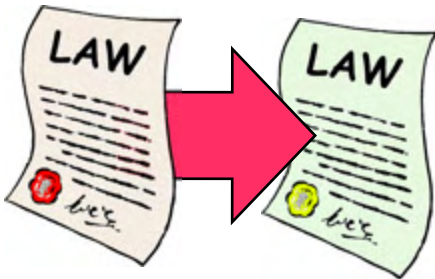
We have said:



- everyone might have to use these rules if there are not more women MPs after the election in 2010



- we need new rules to say local parties can choose their MP from a list only of people from minority ethnic groups if this is right for their area



- the law about treating everyone equally should change so political groups have to tell everyone how they choose their MP



- by 2010, political parties must tell everyone how many women, disabled people or people from minority ethnic groups they will include and how they will check this is happening



- there should also be rules about what you can say when you try to get others to choose someone as an MP.



This would stop people saying someone else would not be a good MP because they are a woman or from a different community or background.

Including people who are disabled



There are not enough disabled people in all the different jobs in local and national government.



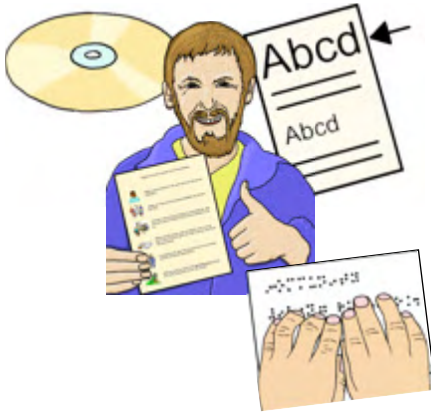
This can make it difficult for them to move on to be an MP because they do not have the skills or because other people do not think they will be able to do the job.



We found disabled people who had the right support to be an MP can do the job as well as those who are not disabled.



The first step to being an MP is to be involved in a local political group.



We think all political parties should:

- give their information in different formats for disabled people



- help local groups to support disabled people to get involved. The Labour Party Disabled Members Group has written some ideas for doing this that we think everyone should use.

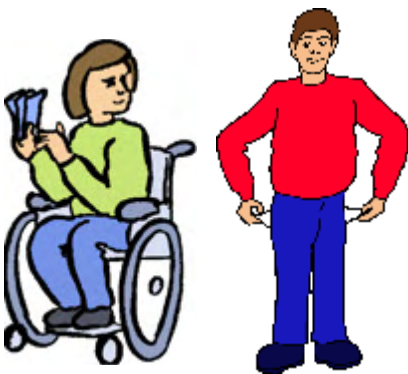
Including people who do not have a lot of money



People do not have to pay much to put their name on the list to be an MP.



But they can lose money when they have time off work to go round the area talking to people and telling them why they would be a good MP.



Disabled people can find this really difficult. They are often in jobs that do not pay much or have to spend extra money on special transport or extra support.



We think:

- there should be rules about the most money people can spend trying to get chosen as an MP



- there should be extra money to help people who might be a good MP but cannot afford to try. Some of this money should be just for disabled people



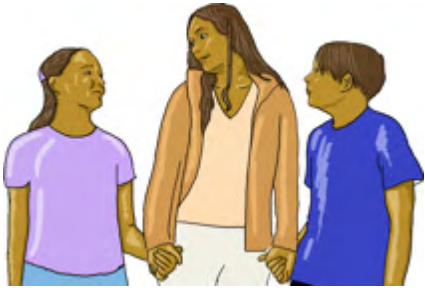
- people who are trying to be an MP should be able to ask their employer for time off work or to work different hours



- the government should look at ways of giving money to people who want to be an MP to make up for the wages they lose.



Including people who have families



We need people who have families to be MPs because they know how services work and can say what needs to change. But it is not an easy job for them.



An MP has to work in parliament and also in the area they are speaking up for. This might be a long way from London.



They have to decide where they are going to live and this can mean they spend a lot of time away from their family.



An MP works long hours in parliament and in their local area.



An MP has to be in parliament to speak up and vote for what local people want. No one can do this for them.

This means it is difficult to take time off to have a baby, care for their children or look after someone else in their family.



We have asked for these things to be done:

- political parties must write rules about giving an MP time off to have a baby or care for someone



- the group that thinks about MPs pay will write rules for when MPs need time off



- for MPs to have vouchers to pay to have their child looked after where they choose



- for parliament to work hours that are better for parents who want to spend time with their children.

Changing the way people think



We need to change the way people think if parliament is to include people from all the different groups and communities in the United Kingdom.



People must see that parliament treats everyone fairly.



We think this will start when:

- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered can have a 'civil partnership' in the parliament building
- parliament has good information about how many MPs think of themselves as disabled or from a group that often gets left out or treated differently





- parliament can show that it is sticking to the laws about making the changes disabled people need to do their job.



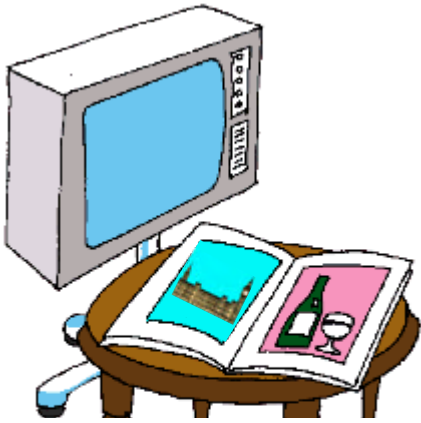
This includes looking at buildings, support, travel, how much things cost and the equipment people need.



The law says a person has to stop being an MP if they are kept in hospital for more than 6 months because of problems with their mental health.



We think this part of the law should be changed and mental illness should be treated the same as any other illness that stops an MP doing their job.



Many people only know about parliament and MPs from what they see or hear in newspapers, radio or television. This might put them off the idea of being an MP.



They might think that MPs are always shouting at each other.



The news often has very personal information about MPs' families or private lives.



We would like:

- parliament to show people all the work that MPs do, not just the arguments



- newspapers, radio and television to stop telling stories about MPs when these are not stories about their work and when they hurt their families.

How to find out more

You can contact the group who wrote this leaflet:

Write to:



**The Joint Secretaries of the Speaker's
Conference
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA**



Telephone:

020 7219 0654



Type Talk:

020 7210 1587



Email:

spconference@parliament.uk

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