

HELP US SUPPORT JOB SHARING FOR MPs!

Access to elected office for disabled people

The Government Equalities Office is running a consultation on access to elected office for disabled people.

The number of Members of Parliament who have declared themselves as disabled are very low compared to the proportion of the population as a whole. To be representative of the population as a whole, Parliament would need to have 65 disabled MPs. Only a handful of MPs have declared themselves as disabled: David Blunkett MP who is blind, Ann Begg MP who is a wheelchair user and Paul Maynard MP who has cerebral palsy.

The consultation document suggests a variety of ways of increasing the numbers of disabled MPs – more public awareness campaigns, training for potential disabled political candidates and an access to elected office fund to support disability related costs.

We are collecting signatures in support of the need to change the law to enable Members of Parliament to job share the office of Member of Parliament.

Election of Members of Parliament – What is the law?

The United Kingdom Parliament currently elects Members of Parliament on the basis of a single Member of Parliament for each constituency.

The presenting of 2 or more candidates for election for one constituency seat is currently not possible. The legislation always refers to "the candidate" or "the return of a Member of Parliament". The royal writ of election also uses the singular - it reads:

"[...] Whereas by the advice of Our council We have ordered a Parliament to be holden at Westminster on X We Command you that due notice being first given you do cause election to be made according to law of a Member to serve in Parliament for the said Constituency and that you do cause the name of such Member when so elected whether he be present or absent to be certified to Us in Our Chancery without delay."

The actual legislative reference that says that each constituency is to return to the House of Commons a single member. Section 1(1) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 reads:

"There shall for the purpose of parliamentary elections be the county and borough constituencies (or in Scotland the county and burgh constituencies), each returning a single member, which are described in orders in Council made under this Act."

Flexible working is better for lots of groups of people – job sharing can create access and a truly representative Parliament

Enabling Members of Parliament to job share would enable more disabled people to get elected and help to create a truly representative House of Commons. For people with some disabilities, working a full week is not possible, particularly after travelling long distances on public transport to get to Parliament.

Job sharing would also make it easier for members of other groups to become or remain Members of Parliament:

- Parents of young children
- Carers
- Older MPs who want to ease themselves into retirement gradually
- People who have a second job and who want to keep it. At present some MPs seem to have 2 or 3 jobs and think that being an MP is not a full time commitment; in which case, let them job share and get half the salary!

How would it work in practice?

Only one half of the job sharing pair would vote. The vast majority of votes in Parliament are on the basis of 'whips' or orders from a political party based on an election manifesto. This means there would be no difference in voting between the two job sharing MPs.

Conscience votes – if you ever read election literature, MPs don't set out how they would vote on conscience issues, so if there were to be a vote without a whip on a conscience matter, job sharing MPs could toss a coin to decide who voted.

Pay and expenses – only one salary and one set of allowances would be paid, so it would not cost any more than electing one MP.