

**Summary of individual respondents' submissions received in response to Ofcom's consultation *Review of Ofcom list of major political parties for elections taking place on 7 May 2015* ("the Consultation") published on 8 January 2015**

## Introduction

1. Ofcom received over 7,400 responses to the Consultation from individuals, political parties, broadcasters and academics. Respondents included the Electoral Commission; the English Democrats; the Green Party; the Liberal Democrats; Mebyon Kernow; Plaid Cymru; the Scottish Green Party; the Scottish National Party ("SNP"); Jonathan Edwards MP<sup>1</sup>; Molly Scott Cato MEP<sup>2</sup>; Bristol for Democracy<sup>3</sup>; a confidential response from a Welsh political organisation; and a combined response from Channel 4, Channel 5, ITV Plc and UTV Television. In addition we received two responses from different groups of academics: Nick Anstead of the London School of Economics and Political Science; and Chris Hanretty, Ben Lauderdale and Nick Vivyan of the University of East Anglia. The non-confidential responses to the Consultation have been published on the Ofcom website<sup>4</sup>.
2. In addition to those respondents named above we received 7,420 responses from individuals. This document summarises the responses from these individual respondents, in relation to the three questions we set out in the Consultation. Ofcom's views on these submissions is set out in our Statement of 16 March 2015.
3. Many of the individual respondents referred to the distinct issue of the parties invited to participate in any televised party leaders' debates in advance of the 2015 General Election. Many respondents expressed their objections to, in their view, Ofcom determining which parties might take part in any televised party leaders' debates.

**Question 1: Please provide your views on:**

- a) the evidence of current support laid out in Annex 2; and**
- b) whether there is any other relevant evidence which you consider Ofcom should take into account for the purposes of the 2015 review of the list of major parties.**

4. Approximately a quarter of the 7,420 responses that we received were from individuals who responded to this aspect of the Consultation. In large part these individual respondents echoed points made by the respondents named in paragraph 1 above. Respondents said that Ofcom should put more weight on evidence of current support rather than historical evidence of support. Respondents also suggested a range of factors that Ofcom should take into account in undertaking its review of the list of major parties, such as:
  - the number of members a party has;
  - support for particular policies of the Green Party, as shown by the website [www.voteforpolicies.org.uk](http://www.voteforpolicies.org.uk);

<sup>1</sup> Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr.

<sup>2</sup> Green Party MEP for South West England.

<sup>3</sup> Bristol for Democracy described itself as "one of Britain's foremost campaign groups for democratic reform".

<sup>4</sup> See <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/major-parties-15/?showResponses=true>

- the strong support in certain opinion polls for the Green Party to participate in any broadcast leaders' debates which might take place before the 2015 General Election;
- support for parties amongst 18 to 24 year olds;
- opinion polls which take account of the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system which respondents argued does not encourage people to vote for their first preference party
- the trajectory of recent opinion polls;
- levels of social media support for the parties;
- the number of candidates being fielded at the General Election;
- the fact that some smaller parties receive much less media coverage than other parties; and
- the structure of opinion poll questions. Some respondents also argued that minor parties, such as the Green Party, will see their support under measured in opinion polls, because polling organisations will not list the Green Party with the existing major parties when questioning individuals over voting intention<sup>5</sup>.

**Question 2: Do you agree with our assessment in relation to each of:**

- a) The existing major parties;**
- b) Traditional Unionist Voice in Northern Ireland;**
- c) The Green Party (including the Scottish Green Party); and**
- d) UKIP?**

**Please provide reasons for your views.**

5. A large number of the 7,420 responses that we received from individuals responded to this aspect of the Consultation. By way of summary, individual respondents said the following:
- 284 objected to the existing major parties being so designated with a minority of these specifically objecting to the Liberal Democrats being designated as a major party. 811 supported these parties' designation as major parties;
  - 192 objected to Traditional Unionist Voice ("TUV") not being a major party, with 271 supporting their non-designation as a major party;
  - 6,386 objected to the Green Party (including the Scottish Green Party) not being a major party, with 36 supporting their non-designation as a major party;
  - 954 objected to the UK Independence Party ("UKIP") being designated as a major party, with 696 supporting their designation as a major party; and

<sup>5</sup> These respondents said that opinion polls will typically ask individuals if they will vote for one of the named major parties or an "other" party. Individuals will only be able to indicate support for the Green Party in a follow-up question.

- 325 objected to the Scottish National Party (“the SNP”), not being a major party across all of Great Britain (as opposed to just Scotland), with 17 taking the contrary view.
6. The large majority of responses we received from individuals on this aspect of the Consultation stated their objection to Ofcom not proposing to designate the Green Party (and the Scottish Green Party) as a major party across the UK. However, many of these respondents linked their objection to the participation of the Green Party in any broadcast leaders’ debates that might take place before the 2015 General Election. In voicing support for the Green Party’s inclusion on the list of major parties, individuals echoed the arguments made by other stakeholders above. In particular, individuals variously said that Ofcom should: put less weight on evidence of past electoral support or not take that evidence into account at all; and/or put more weight on opinion polls. A range of other suggestions were put forward to justify the Green Party’s inclusion as a major party including: the fact that it has an MP, MEPs and elected councillors; that it like all parties with opinion poll ratings of over 5% should be considered to be a major party; that unlike the existing list of proposed major parties in England, the Green party was the only party putting an alternative left-wing viewpoint across; and broadcast coverage was important to the Green Party to get its message across.
  7. A minority of individual respondents commented on Ofcom’s proposal to retain all existing parties on the list of major parties. Of these, the large majority agreed with Ofcom’s proposals, with a small number objecting to the Liberal Democrat continuing to be designated as a major party, due to factors such as its recent opinion poll ratings and performance in some recent elections.
  8. A minority of individual respondents commented on Ofcom’s proposal to designate UKIP as a major party in England and Wales, with a majority of this group opposing Ofcom’s proposal. Arguments put forward for opposing UKIPs’ designation included that UKIP: was a single-issue party of protest; was extreme and too right wing; was less established than other parties such as the Green Party; and had received a disproportionate amount of media coverage.
  9. A small minority of individual respondents queried the concept of major parties, which some felt favoured the status quo and militated against smaller parties. Some of these respondents argued that all political parties standing for election should have equal access to broadcast coverage. In addition, some questioned Ofcom having a role in elections, and said that Ofcom’s proposals in the Consultation were political and undemocratic, and acted to limit discussion of key issues during elections.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed amendment to Rule 9 of the PPRB Rules Procedures outlined in paragraph 3.7 above? Please provide reasons for your views.**

10. A minority of the 7,420 responses that we received from individuals responded to this aspect of the Consultation. A majority of these respondents disagreed with the proposed amendment to the PPRB Rules Procedures, although a number of these respondents appeared to base their opposition to the amendment on Ofcom’s separate proposal not to designate the Green Party (and Scottish Green Party) as a major party. A number of respondents expressed concern that the proposed criteria would give too much discretion to Ofcom and the Chair of the Election Committee. The view was also expressed that given the importance of the democratic process, all complaints from parties should automatically be considered by the Election Committee as under the

existing rules. Other viewpoints expressed were that Ofcom had not provided sufficient evidence to justify the introduction of the proposed amendment, and that the proposed amendment lacked an appeal mechanism.