



REFERENDUM COMMISSION

What is the Referendum Commission

Any member of the States Assembly can propose that a question be put to the public in the form of a referendum. There have been three referenda in Jersey, on the adoption of Central European Time in 2008 and on the composition of the Assembly in 2013 and 2014. A proposal for a referendum on further proposed changes to the composition of the Assembly was recently rejected.

The Referendum Commission is a newly-established body, the relevant legislation being adopted by the States Assembly on 28th March 2017. It will comprise a chairman and four other commissioners.

The Commission will have two functions:

- to consider and give an opinion on the wording of a proposed referendum question, and
- to designate the lead campaign groups in relation to a referendum (lead campaign groups can spend more money on a referendum and also have access to electoral registers).

Supplementary functions may be conferred on the Commission in respect of specific referenda.

In the first instance, the incoming Commission will be required to establish its working practices, drawing on best practice in other jurisdictions. There will also be a need to raise awareness of the new arrangements amongst Assembly members and the general public and to build trust and confidence in the Commission, to ensure that its advice on proposed referenda questions is highly influential with States Members.

Advising on the wording of a proposed referendum question is likely to entail designing and overseeing a process of consultation with the public and publishing the results of that consultation with clear advice to the Assembly. Designating lead campaign groups is likely to entail hearing representations from different campaigners and deciding which of the groups is likely to be able to represent to the greatest extent those supporting the outcome for which they are campaigning. Decisions would be published, with reasons.

The work of the Commission will be supported by the States Greffe.

What skills and attributes should have Referendum Commissioners have?

Successful candidates have an exciting opportunity to create a new political institution which will enhance the standing and integrity of Jersey's political system.

Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of:

- Jersey's political system,
- the importance of dealing effectively with conflicts of interest and how this can be achieved,
- why referenda take place and why oversight by a Referendum Commission is desirable

Candidates will also demonstrate:

- Good judgement and integrity and the capacity to be independent and impartial when dealing with contentious political questions
- The ability to participate in committee meetings, making a contribution listening to other views, and compromising where necessary
- Good oral communication skills

In addition, candidates for the role of chairman will have a successful, board-level or equivalent, track record within the public, private or not-for-profit sectors that demonstrates experience of:

- chairing meetings effectively and undertaking media and ambassadorial work on behalf of an organisation
- building and managing relationships with multiple stakeholders
- handling conflicts of interest, and
- working effectively with politicians and influencing people at the highest level.

Candidates for the role of chairman must also have a personal style which demonstrates personal integrity, authority, commitment, consistency and fairness.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee (which will formally appoint the commissioners) will wish to ensure that the Commission has a diverse membership with a balance of skills and experiences to ensure that it is equipped to perform its functions.

Remuneration and time commitment

The time commitment required will depend on the number and frequency of referenda proposals. When a referendum is proposed the Commission will be expected to act quickly to advise the Assembly on the proposed question. Swift advice will also be required on proposed amendments to a referendum question, which may be lodged with just two weeks' notice. The Commission will also be required to meet after a referendum has been agreed in order to designate lead campaign groups. For each referendum the Commission can be expected to meet at least 4 or 5 times, with the number of meetings depending on the complexity of the issues raised. Commissioners will also be expected to participate in public consultation exercises on proposed referendum questions.

The Commission is likely to meet on a number of occasions when first appointed in order to agree its working practices.

The Chairman of the Commission will have additional workload, for example in relation to dealing with the media.

Commissioners will serve on an honorary basis, but expenses are payable.

Appointments will be for a term of up to five years, which may be extended up to ten years in total.

Applicants should write to the Greffier of the States, States Greffe, Morier House, St. Helier, JE1 1DD (or by e-mail to m.egan@gov.je) no later than 3rd November 2017 giving brief details of their personal and working background and setting out why they believe they could make a useful contribution to the work of the Referendum Commission.

Further information for applicants can be obtained by contacting the Greffier of the States (telephone 441013 or to m.egan@gov.je.)