ISBN 978-1-9995951-6-6
9 781999 595166

£6.95

# the welsh agenda

iwa

Spring/Summer 2021
Issue 66


# Facing the Future

**Shahinoor Alom**
on provision for BAME youth

**Lucy Luca**
on the future for EU citizens in Wales

**Theo Davies-Lewis**
on our constitutional future

**Catherine Fookes**
on green, caring recovery

Image: Kamila Jarczak

+ **Grace Quantock** on ableism | **Hannah Watkin** on queer fiction | **Steven Lovatt** on Swansea | **Alex Myles** on political education

# Organisational members

The Institute of Welsh Affairs gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Books Council of Wales, the Carnegie UK Trust, CREW, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Friends Provident Foundation, the National Lottery Community Fund, the WCVA Third Sector Resilience Fund for Charities and the Waterloo Foundation. The following are organisational members:

Acuity Legal Limited
Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales
Arup
Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
Awel Aman Tawe
Bangor University
BBC Cymru Wales
Blake Morgan LLP
BMA Cymru Wales
Brewin Dolphin
British Council - Wales
British Heart Foundation Cymru
Bron Afon Community Housing
BT Cymru Wales
Building Communities Trust
Business in Focus
Business in the Community Cymru
Cadwyn Housing Association
Capital Law Limited
Cardiff Capital Region
Cardiff Council
Cardiff Metropolitan University
Cardiff University
Carnegie UK Trust
Cartrefi Cymru
CECA Wales Ltd
Chwarae Teg
CILIP Cymru Wales
Citizens Advice Cymru
Coastal Housing Group Ltd
Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru
Community - the Union for Life
Community Housing Cymru
Cymorth Cymru
Cynnal Cymru
Cynon Taf Community Housing Group
Deloitte LLP
Deryn Consulting
Disability Wales
Doopoll
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru
Energy Saving Trust Wales
Estyn
Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP
EYST Wales
Family Housing Association (Wales) Ltd
Federation of Small Businesses Wales
Ffilm Cymru
Friends of the Earth Cymru
Geldards LLP
Grayling Wales
Harvard College Library
Hendre Housing Association Limited
Historix Editions
Hodge Bank
Hugh James
Institute Of Chartered Accountants Of England And Wales
ITV Cymru Wales
Jardine Norton
Learning and Work Institute
Learning Disability Wales
Linc-Cymru Housing Association
Living Streets Cymru
Llamau
Macmillan Cancer Support
Merthyr Valleys Homes
Meyrick Estate Management Ltd
Mind Cymru
Morgan LaRoche
MS Society Cymru
National Dance Company Wales
National Theatre Wales
National Trust Wales
Natural Resources Wales
Newport City Homes
Newsdirect Wales
North Wales Fire & Rescue Service
OFGEM
Orchard Media
Oxfam Cymru
Parker Brothers Contractors Ltd
Parthian Books
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
People and Work Unit
Perago Wales Ltd
PLANED
Platfform
Pobl Group
Principality Building Society
Prospect Wales Cymru
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
PwC
Qualifications Wales
Ramblers Cymru
RenewableUK Cymru
Rondo Media
Royal College of Nursing in Wales
Royal Society of Architects in Wales
Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru
Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama
RSPB Cymru
RWE Innogy UK
S4C
Samaritans Cymru
Screen Alliance Wales
Shelter Cymru
Snowdonia National Park Authority
Sustrans Cymru
The Cathedral School Llandaff
The Learned Society of Wales
The Means
The Open University in Wales
Tidal Power plc
Trivallis
United Purpose
Universities Wales
University of South Wales
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Wales & West Utilities Ltd
Wales Centre for Public Policy
Wales Co-operative Centre
Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)
Wales TUC Cymru
Waterloo Foundation
Watts Gregory
Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA)
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Welsh National Opera
Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
Wrexham Glyndŵr University
WWF Cymru

**To become an organisational member of the IWA, please call 029 2048 4387.**

# Editorial
# *Auriol Miller*

Writing this editorial in mid April, over a year into the global Covid-19 pandemic, there is much on which to reflect in terms of its many and varied impacts. Over 5,500 people in Wales have now died because of the virus, health inequalities have been exposed and further exacerbated, and the intense grief of the families and friends of those who have died is also part of a wider collective sense of loss of our old way of life, where we took so much for granted. Visiting our loved ones, gathering with our friends to share a drink or a meal, working alongside our colleagues, having our children's friends over to celebrate a birthday, travelling to new places just for fun. There is no making sense of this collective loss, no coming to terms with it, it is too great and unfathomable. I'm struck, when meeting with others not seen for a while, of how we all need to share our own experiences first, of what has stretched and nearly broken us, in different ways. Of what has surprised us about our strengths and our failings. Of what we have learned. There is much careful listening to be done.

And yet. While we do not know how or when we can mourn these losses together, and mark them appropriately, some of them have – thankfully – been only temporary. We have all adapted. Found new ways to keep each other safe, to connect, helped our children adapt their expectations of what school or university is like, supported local businesses and communities in ways we couldn't have conceived necessary a year ago, and been reminded of the fundamental importance of wellbeing as the cornerstone on which all our lives depend.

So there is much to look ahead to as well, albeit with the distorting lens of the pandemic colouring that view so differently now, making the kaleidoscope unique for each of us. Some of the challenges I mentioned here a year ago seem particularly apposite: how different voices and experiences should shape what happens next; how our response to the pandemic must be intensely local, building on the assets and strengths of all our places; how we grip the opportunity to craft a greener, fairer economic future for all our citizens and have the will and the funding to bring it to life. Motherhood and apple pie? Maybe. Easy to say, far harder to do.

In May, Wales goes to the polls to elect Members of the Senedd for the next five years. Now that many more people here are aware of the breadth of decisions that can be made in Wales, for Wales, on so many of the everyday issues that make up the fabric of our lives, how loud will our voices be? We have choices in how we face the future. A higher turnout would be a good start. How clear and demanding will the voices of first time 16- and 17-year old voters be? And those of foreign nationals now also able to vote here, to shape their own future Wales too?

This edition explores how we might face that new future together, how we imagine and create a world post-Covid, and both new editorial group member Theo Davies-Lewis and Glyndŵr Cennydd Jones consider how we might navigate potentially choppy constitutional waters ahead. Alex Myles looks at young people's political engagement and we learn how many are already making hugely positive contributions towards society. Poppy Stowell-Evans considers how the pandemic has posed striking new challenges for those whose education has been interrupted or whose early careers have been stuck on the starting blocks. And Lucy Luca writes about how the future might look for EU citizens in Wales, facing a new precarity.

This issue highlights the work we have been doing at the IWA to encourage new voices. Two of our other new editorial group members Grace Quantock, Hannah Watkin write from personal experience. But in navigating the future, we must be careful also to listen to the wisdom of voices past; the work of Raymond Williams, for example, remains as relevant as ever, as outlined by Daniel G. Williams.

When we voted in 2016, we could not have imagined we were electing a government who would have to steer Wales through a global health crisis. We must hope the Welsh Government we elect in 2021, whatever its political colours, has the wisdom and humility to lead us safely through the next unknown unknowns. We must, as ever, face the future together.

**AM**

# Meet the Team

**Editor**
Dylan Moore
@_DylanMoore

**Editorial Manager**
Andy Regan
@AndyReganCDF

**Culture Editor**
Merlin Gable
@merlingable

## EDITORIAL GROUP

**Rhys ap Gwilym**
*Senior Lecturer in Economics, Bangor Business School*

**Noreen Blanluet**
*@noreenblanluet*
*Director, Co-Production Network Wales*

**Geraint Talfan Davies**
*@gerainttalfan*
*Ex-Chair, IWA & WNO*

**Theo Davies-Lewis**
*@TDaviesLewis*
*Chief Political Commentator,* The National

**Anwen Elias**
*@anwen_elias*
*Reader in Politics, Aberystwyth University*

**Gareth Evans**
*@garethdjevans*
*Director of Education, Yr Athrofa*

**Gerald Holtham**
*Managing Partner, Cadwyn Capital LLP & IWA Trustee*

**Auriol Miller**
*@auriol_miller*
*Director, IWA*

**Grace Quantock**
*@Grace_Quantock*
*Psychotherapeutic counsellor & writer*

**Marc Thomas**
*@iammarcthomas*
*CEO, Doopoll & IWA Trustee*

**Hannah Watkin**
*@HannahWatkin_*
*Journalist*

**Design**
Marc Jennings
marc@theundercard.co.uk

**Cover image:**
Newport Youth Futures, pictured at Friday Football Mania, April 2021. Picture Kamila Jarczak

# Inside this issue

## HIGHLIGHTS

04
**Facing the Future, Taking Back Control**
Theo Davies-Lewis argues for an All Wales Convention on constitutional options

16
**Community Champions**
Shahinoor Alom predicts a bright future for BAME Newport youth

24
**Where do we go from here?**
Poppy Stowell-Evans collects ideas for the next Education Minster's in-tray

40
**Our secret superpower**
Jenny Scott tells us sport is Wales' golden opportunity

44
**And now for the news where you are**
Dylan Moore interviews Ifan Morgan Jones, Huw Marshall and Sebastian Cooke

66
**What's unlocked?**
Grace Quantock reflects on a year without non-consensual touch

To advertise,
tel: 029 2048 4387

The publisher acknowledges the financial support of the Books Council of Wales.

**Institute of Welsh Affairs**
56 James Street, Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff, CF10 5EZ
Tel: 02920 484 387

Charity number: 1078435

The IWA is an independent think tank and charity dedicated to promoting the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

To become a member and receive benefits such as copies of *the welsh agenda*, early-bird notice of events, regular newsletters and free publications, from £30 a year, please call Maria Drave on 029 2048 4387.

## ARTICLES


08 **Facing the Future: The Centre Cannot Hold?**
*Glyndŵr Cennydd Jones provides a primer on constitutional options*

20 **The devolution generation** *Alex Myles on how young people are let down by poor political education*

30 **We certainly feel more plugged in** *Huw Edward Jones on teaching during lockdown*

32 **Homeschooling in lockdown** *clare e. potter gives a parental perspective*

36 **State of play** *Garmon Dyfri exposes the gap between elite sport and an inactive populace*

52 **A green, caring recovery** *Catherine Fookes says post-Covid recovery goes well beyond the economy*

56 **Regeneration within tradition** *Steven Lovatt imagines a new, more imaginative future for Swansea*

60 **Getting started in hospitality**
*Hannah Watkin talks to people whose careers had a false start due to Covid*

70 **Barriers and Belonging** *Lucy Luca gives an inside view of how Brexit has affected EU citizens in Wales*

74 **Strength in love: a community movement for Wales**
*Noreen Blanuet talks to Selwyn Williams about how community develops*

78 **Decarbonising social housing**
*Derek Walker and Adrian Webb say energy and ownership models go hand in hand*


## CULTURE


82 **Minority nationalism, decolonisation and the relevance of Raymond Williams**
*Daniel G. Williams marks the cultural critic's centenary, relating his work to BLM*

88 **Where are the Welsh novels on the new curriculum?**
*Dylan Moore talks to Parthian founder Richard Davies about the publisher's new list*

92 **The Mystery of the Missing Banners**
*Colin Thomas ponders a missing piece of Welsh history, and pays tribute to Hywel Francis*

96 **Queer fiction: Between Worlds and The Journey is Home**
*Hannah Watkin appraises two new books that shed light on the lives of gay men in Wales*

99 **Easy Meat** *Polly Winn enjoys Rachel Trezise's new novel, set on Brexit referendum day*

101 **From the Welsh Border to the World**
*Nia Moseley-Roberts joins Simon Gwyn Roberts on his Travels in Minority Languages*

104 **Miriam, Daniel and Me** *Eluned Gramich finds Euron Griffith's new novel a compelling read*

106 **Many Rivers to Cross**
*Angela Graham hails as an impressive achievement the debut novel from Dylan Moore*

108 **Q&A** *Lloyd Warburton chats about his interest in statistics and his thoughts on the election*





ISBN 978-1-9995951-6-6

# Facing the Future
## *Taking Back Control*

*The next Welsh Government must get a grip on the constitutional crisis. Launching an All Wales Convention on the options would be a good start, writes* **Theo Davies-Lewis**

Wales' political situation is almost unrecognisable since I interviewed Mark Drakeford in the summer of 2019. The stage was Oxford University. An ancient springboard for most of the British Cabinet and the ultimate symbol of English privilege so alien to the First Minister's own values and background. Saying that, the audience were enamoured by my interviewee: finding what the First Minister lacked in bravado and charisma he made up for in measured thought and intellect.

Mark Drakeford back then was just as thousands have come to know him over the last few months; calm, professorial, funny too – playing up to my quip about whether he was uncomfortable being interviewed in a building named after Mrs Thatcher – but when he got back into his ministerial car at the end of the evening many of those in attendance probably thought they'd never hear of or see him again.

How times change. The United Kingdom 'is over', he told the Welsh Affairs Committee in the House of Commons earlier this year. A media and political frenzy ensued. This was no longer a professorial and reluctant politician leading a forgotten nation; Mark Drakeford had become a widely recognisable national leader of a country experiencing rapid transformation through a global pandemic.

The First Minister now finds himself at the helm of a nation that is grappling with its constitutional future, polarised to an extent not seen since the devolution referendum in 1997. With only weeks to go until the most

Stefanik, CC BY-SA 4.0

significant election in modern Welsh history, the people of Wales are pulling in multiple different directions.

On the one hand, there is remarkable and ever-growing support for Welsh independence. The grassroots movement YesCymru has bulked its membership by around 15,000 in a year and Plaid Cymru hope that will translate into votes for them at the ballot box. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the enduring devo-sceptic phenomenon in Welsh politics, channelled with new vigour through Abolish the Welsh Assembly. Meanwhile, the Welsh Conservatives harbour their own Cymric blend of 'Rule Britannia' nationalism: it is no secret that they value London over Cardiff. Somewhere wedged in the middle of all this is Welsh Labour, uncomfortably jockeying its nationalist membership with a pledge to reform Wales' place in the UK – for want of a more popular soundbite, to implement 'radical federalism'.

**We should not pretend that we are not... aligning ourselves with the constitutional solution stirs our heart and that convinces our mind**

There is no doubt that this year's election will be a key juncture to test the mood of the public on the constitution. Yes, it is largely a Covid-19 campaign. And so it should be. It may also be a quasi-referendum on Welsh Labour's record over two decades and an opportunity to debate policy areas such as health, education, agriculture, Europe, and transport too. Though the one big difference this time round is that Wales' future in the UK is indeed at the front and centre of debate.

While you and I will of course be voting for specific party policy we should not pretend that we are not also aligning ourselves with which constitutional solution stirs our heart and convinces our mind.

However, the bigger picture is whether tinkering with our political framework is a longer-term issue, best left until way after 6 May. Most unionists say so, after all. Perhaps twelve months ago, I would have agreed. Now, after the most significant human event in modern history, I feel a profound sense of urgency to answer the constitutional question. (You can't say it didn't take much to change my mind, at least).

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the systemic dysfunctionality of British governance – as Downing Street's own Dunlop Review recently acknowledged – and how ever-deteriorating relations between Cardiff and London are not sustainable.

Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Credit: Doubledoppler, CC BY-SA 4.0

As well as being a health and economic emergency, the pandemic has exposed how we have been living in a lingering political crisis, for so long brewing just below the surface after fifteen years of turmoil: a financial collapse followed by damaging austerity, a divisive Brexit vote and later four years of Trump. Thankfully we are now looking at ourselves and assessing whether the current settlement works for us. The answer? No way.

For me, the turning point was the Wales-only lockdown in Autumn. A *firebreak* policy. Literally symbolic of the sharp political boundary that existed between Cardiff and London. I found myself asking: How could it have been right and just for the UK Treasury to refuse an extension of the furlough scheme in Wales? When London went into lockdown, help was granted immediately. For Adam Price, it is the moment that historians will look back on and see as the first step to an independent Wales. He might not be wrong.

We are also more broadly experiencing an existential cultural and political war, where Wales' constitutional foundation is being tested to the extreme. Westminster's militaristic flag enforcement decree does no more than to mask a greater campaign to force a unitary state on the people of Wales. The concerted attempts to undermine the powers of the Senedd via the UK Government's post-Brexit legislation – the result of a vote that was billed to 'Take Back Control' – sets a dangerous precedent for intergovernmental 'relations'.

**How could it have been right and just for the UK Treasury to refuse an extension of the furlough scheme in Wales? When London went into lockdown, help was granted immediately**

You may not agree with my assessment. But I challenge you to find those people who think the status quo is sustainable. It's just the solutions we have to the problems are different.

This edition of *the welsh agenda* is most conveniently titled *Facing the Future*. That's exactly what we have to do when it comes to the constitution. Why? Well, to borrow a recent line from Lord Wigley: you cannot separate the constitutional question from the everyday 'bread and butter' issues of politics. It is a live and real issue to the people.

Alas, nothing will be resolved in the run-up to the election. It will be divisive and toxic. Not a great advert for those fresh faced 16- and 17-year-olds with their hope and optimism for changing the world.

Yet there is a real opportunity after 6 May to get to grips with the constitutional mess we are in. At the moment it is a back and forth game: the battle of the political statements, snarky tweets, and press conferences. We are all just as guilty of being willing participants in this circus.

So rather than heading down the same well-trodden path, we need to try and bring as much as the country with us on a journey to set out the constitutional options at hand. To consult and to engage. To debate

**There is much to be said about having a conversation with yourself as a nation – to understand your differences, to work out the solutions, to compromise**

and agree-to-disagree (if we can). To truly understand the economics and politics of the options before us.

That's why need an All Wales Convention on the future of our nation.

*Another convention?* you cry, and I hear you. But is there really another meaningful way forward? We do love surveys and consultations in this country – as the first All Wales Convention during the third Senedd term illustrates – but given the opportunity, we should do it on our own terms and not wait to be dictated to by Westminster or influenced by events in Holyrood.

Mark Drakeford's government called for a constitutional convention in 2019, and a Welsh-specific convention was proposed this year by the de-facto leader of the Welsh Labour radicals, Mick Antoniw. As the member for Pontypridd explained, we must address the need to 'further devolve power not just from London to Cardiff, but also from Cardiff to the regions of Wales, and to develop a new invigorated role for local government.' He is quite right about that – and about how it must be the 'people's convention' too.

Glyndwr Cennydd Jones comprehensively outlines in these pages the constitutional menu for Wales. These options should all be explored in detail by an independent committee appointed by the First Minister, similar to the one led by Sir Emyr Jones Parry over a decade ago. This time round, however, it needs to go much further.

In some ways it is well-overdue that we re-engage the public on their views on the Senedd – whether that includes devolving more powers or more challenging views on its future as an institution altogether – but we must also ask questions on what a federal, confederal or an independent Wales looks like. The closest thing we have to serious engagement on these issues is from Plaid Cymru's independence commission in 2020, a publication which I doubt has found its way through the letterboxes of politicians from across the political spectrum.

Organisations and individuals in their thousands should be consulted to capture the plethora of ideas there are out there. The convention should submit its findings to the Welsh Government, to be debated in full by the Senedd. Its recommendations would be able to guide the Welsh Government on its approach to the constitutional question, which I fully expect would be welcome at the UK Governmental Council proposed by Lord Dunlop… Surely?

Some may shrug at the suggestion we move so brashly for another (and costly) public consultation. Please explain to me the alternative. We are sleepwalking to independence, but also to further powers for the Senedd within a broken UK system which increasingly disables the institution from functioning properly altogether. We're also heading ever-closer to abolishing the Welsh parliament itself, believe it or not. None of this is healthy for our democracy.

Therefore there is much to be said about having a conversation with yourself as a nation – to understand your differences, to work out the solutions, to compromise. Whoever is in government after this election should recognise that, and make one of its first decisions to launch an All Wales Convention into the future of our country. More powers. Less. None at all. Independence? Or perhaps federalism? Maybe an independent Wales within the EU. More of the same?

What is most important is that we now take the time to answer some of these questions. We have to understand what each option means and its implications for our country. Right now, the current constitutional debate is being fought over in column inches, flags, and social media. That will not lead to anything productive. Of course, there is no easy solution either. But let's make a start by taking back control of the debate around the future of Wales.

**Theo Davies-Lewis** is the Chief Political Commentator for *The National Wales*. He is a member of the Council of the Cymmrodorion and sits on the Institute of Welsh Affairs' editorial group. His podcast, What next for Wales?, tackles some of the biggest issues facing Wales in 2021

# Facing the Future

## *The Centre Cannot Hold?*

### *Reimagining the constitutional structure of the British Isles*

*As the debate over Wales' constitutional future – within or without the United Kingdom – intensifies,* **Glyndŵr Cennydd Jones** *provides a useful primer on the options, and the associated terminology*

Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament

Devolution as a governance model leaves Westminster parliamentary sovereignty, that most conceptual of constitutional principles, technically intact, hence its acceptance by most UK politicians. Wales and Scotland today hold legislative competence over all matters not explicitly reserved to Westminster, which implies a form of federalism, but without the usual sharing of sovereignty across parliaments.

With many asserting a multicultural Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or English character before claiming a form of dual nationality which also embraces a British personality, it is legitimate to reconsider the nature of Westminster's parliamentary sovereignty such that it more appropriately encompasses authority only over select key isle-wide functions held in mutual interest and regard by the nations. The consequential and pressing strategic issue going forward relates to whether sovereignty, as currently understood, should be shared across these five territorially defined identities (including that of Britain) in a traditional federal arrangement or instead assigned individually to the four nations – Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England – which in turn would delegate parts of their sovereign authority to common central institutions of a fundamentally British and/or European character.

Broadly speaking, British ideals and values are partly forged by geographic, historic and cultural influences which usefully bridge the demands of world interdependence and the desire for increased autonomy in the nations. The challenge is to capture these principles in a new framework which strengthens arrangements for self-government – through emphasising common respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and rule of law – within an isle-wide civic societal structure typified by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice and solidarity.

## It is legitimate to reconsider the nature of Westminster's parliamentary sovereignty... only over select key isle-wide functions

The most effective modern constitutions and treaties articulate the essential framework of governance and are open to appropriate modifications in time, such as the pooling of sovereignty in international agreements and bodies. They also balance the basic principles with current and developing demands which may necessitate an authority or responsibility of government to be reassigned from one level to another.

Creating such a written framework for these isles could prove invaluable across the political spectrum, with some finding reassurance in attempting to articulate the more distinctive elements of the UK's practices in a codified constitution, and others seeking to cement the sovereignty position of the four nations individually in relation to a common British structure.

The following illustrated options and exemplar principles condense the several applications of a partially sovereign and sovereign Wales in relation to a selection of potential isle-wide and European structures.

### Devolution

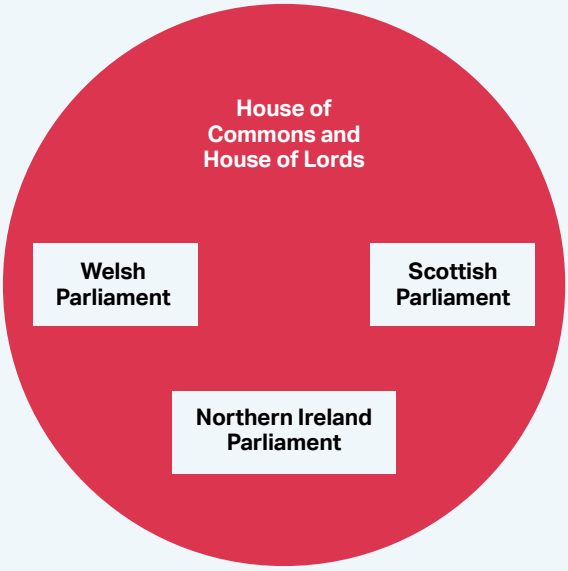
**A sovereign Westminster delegating, in effect, some sovereign authority to the devolved institutions within the United Kingdom.**

An individual is a citizen of the unitary state incorporating Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, which is formally known as the UK.

Central institutions are in place to implement most taxes, alongside some fiscal decentralisation to the devolved institutions. There is an official common currency and a central Bank of England.

The current statutes founding the devolved institutions provide for and limit powers of the legislatures and administrations, and divide responsibilities between the territories and the centre. These have legal basis in the Wales Act 2017, Scotland Act 2016, and Northern Ireland Act 1998. England continues to be omitted from the devolution reforms, without its own discrete parliament.

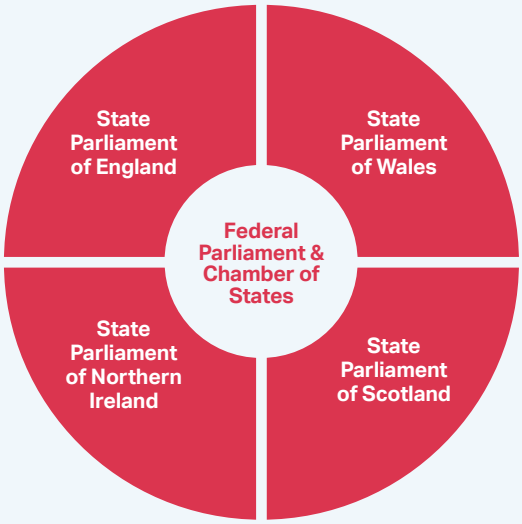
There are three distinct legal jurisdictions operating in the UK namely England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom is the ultimate authority.



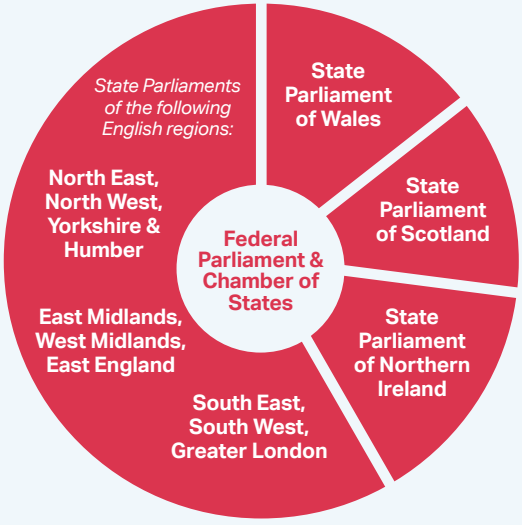
## Federalism

**A partially sovereign Wales sharing sovereignty within a UK Federation**

**i.** including England as a single unit




**ii.** including suggested regions of England




**The most effective modern constitutions and treaties articulate the essential framework of governance and are open to appropriate modifications**

An individual is a citizen of the central overarching structure and the constituent nation or state within which they reside, participating democratically in electing representatives to the legislative parliaments at both levels of government, and with rights of movement, residence, and employment across the whole.

Central institutions implement many taxes, alongside a measure of fiscal decentralisation to the states. There is a formal common currency and a central federal bank.

Practices are confirmed through a written constitution, identifying those powers assigned to the centre, which may typically cover: the armed and security forces; border, diplomatic and international affairs; shared public services; cross-recognition of legal jurisdictions; currency and monetary policies; a single market, and select taxation. The remainder rests with the states.

In model **i**, each state operates its own legal jurisdiction. In model **ii**, the English regions are subject to the laws of England, with other states operating distinct legal jurisdictions. The constitution is enforced by a Supreme Court of the Federation.

EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND

# Helping your future take off

## Global lawyers powered by excellence

As a global top 10 law practice, Eversheds Sutherland provides legal advice to an international client base which includes some of the world's largest multinationals. With a long-established presence in Cardiff, we help Welsh businesses operate on a regional, national and international scale.

**68** offices

**5,000+** people

**32** countries

**3,000+** lawyers

In 2019 we acted for:
**113** of the Fortune 200
**75** of the Fortune 100
**42** of the Fortune 50

**Kathryn Roberts**
*Senior Partner, Cardiff*
**T:** +44 292 047 7211
**M:** +44 778 534 2898
kathrynroberts@eversheds-sutherland.com

**eversheds-sutherland.com**

Scottish Parliament, Holyrood

## Confederalism

**A sovereign Wales pooling a few agreed functions within a British Confederation**

National parliaments, not individuals, are represented in the Confederal Assembly. Citizens relate to their nations foremost, with rights of movement, residence, and employment in neighbouring countries subject to negotiation.

Joint budgetary funds are raised annually through each member nation's contribution of a defined proportion of their GDP. The nations operate distinct tax regimes. There is no central confederal bank, but nations may agree to use another member's currency, subject to the usual constraints.

Confederations are established by treaty, addressing limited shared interests such as internal trade, use of currencies, and security. Decisions made by a unicameral Confederal Assembly are not in the character of laws acting upon members, requiring implementation by each individual nation to take effect. The right to secession from the centre is implicit in the model as sovereignty rests with the nations.

Nations operate separate legal jurisdictions and Supreme Courts.

## Confederal-federalism

**A sovereign Wales delegating some sovereign authority to a confederal League-Union of the Isles of Britain, with aspects of federal-type control built into key shared functions**

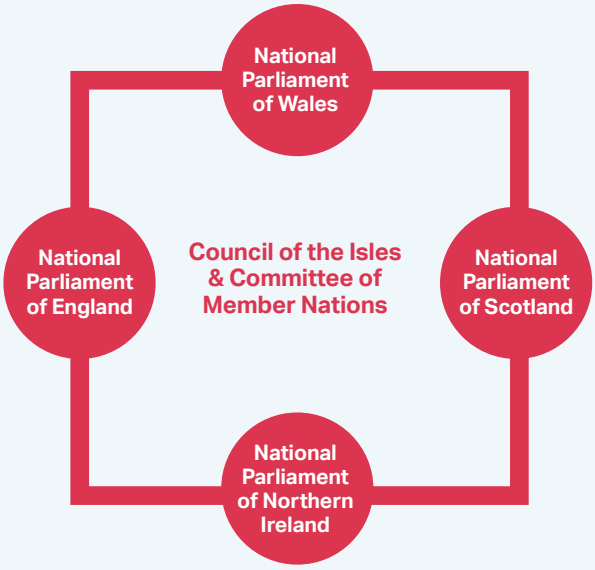
Individuals elect representatives to their respective National Parliament and a central Council of the Isles, relating to their member nation, initially, and to the League-Union next, and with rights of movement, residence, and employment in all nations.

The Council levies charges upon each member nation according to a defined proportion of their GDP annually. Joint controls support fiscal decentralisation away from the UK position, with nations operating distinct tax regimes unless centrally assigned, and borrowing monitored. There is an official common currency and a central Bank of the Isles.

Each nation holds all powers which are not delegated to the centre by treaty or constitution. The Council enacts clearly defined authority on matters involving defence, foreign policy, internal trade, currency, large-scale economics, and isle-wide affairs. A Committee of Member Nations promotes cooperation across borders.

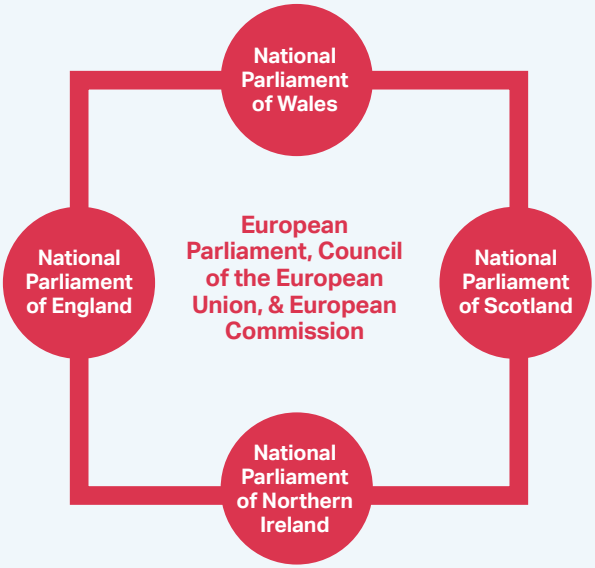
Each nation operates its own legal jurisdiction. A Supreme Court of the Isles is the ultimate authority on the legitimacy of any laws and rights assigned to the centre.

The sovereign nations of a League-Union independently hold four seats at the UN General Assembly but potentially still retain, subject to negotiation, the single collective permanent seat on the UN Security Council – strongly representing our shared geopolitical and geographical interests at the top diplomatic table, balancing change with continuity.




**Creating a written framework for these isles could prove invaluable across the political spectrum**

Northern Ireland Assembly, Stormont (Wikimedia Commons)




## European Union (EU)

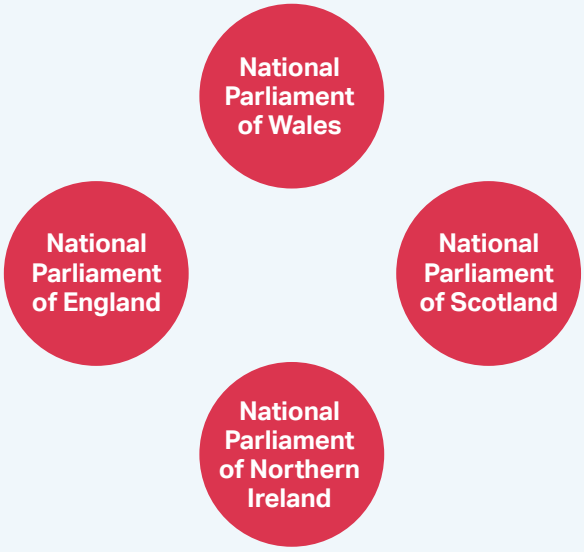
**A sovereign Wales delegating some sovereign authority to the confederal EU, with federal-type control built into select areas**

Individuals elect representatives to their respective National Parliament and a central European Parliament, relating to their member nation, initially, and to the EU next, and with rights of movement, residence, and employment in every EU nation.

The EU levies charges upon member nations, each of which operate distinct tax regimes. There is an official common currency and a central European Bank.

Nations hold all powers which are not delegated centrally. Shared concerns cover large scale economic factors, including monetary practices and a single market, as well as diplomacy, security, and social policies.

Each nation has its own legal jurisdiction. For certain interests an EU legal framework is in operation with an EU Court of Justice.




## Independence, acting unilaterally

**A sovereign Wales existing outside any isle-wide or European frameworks**

Individuals elect representatives to their National Parliament. Citizens relate directly to their nations only, with rights of movement, residence, and employment in neighbouring countries subject to negotiation.

The nations have distinct tax regimes and markets, operating their own official currencies and separate central Banks.

Nations are underpinned by written constitutions and act unilaterally in all areas, subject to any agreements with other countries, supra-national bodies, and international organisations such as the IMF, NATO, WTO etc.

Nations operate separate legal jurisdictions and Supreme Courts.

**Glyndŵr Cennydd Jones** is an advocate for greater cross-party consensus in Wales and for a UK-wide constitutional convention. A catalogue of his articles and essays can be found at constitutionalcontinuum.blogspot.com

PRIFYSGOL
BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

# UNIGRYW

ERS 1884

# EXTRAORDINARY

SINCE 1884

www.bangor.ac.uk

# Community Champions

Images by Kamila Jarczak

**Shahinoor Alom** *says that despite huge challenges, the future is bright for Newport's ethnic minority youth*

The week beginning 29 March 2021 marked a momentous point in history as the world witnessed a US police officer in court as a defendant facing charges of murder and manslaughter of a black man, George Floyd, on 25 May 2020. During a worldwide pandemic, this event became a catalyst for the Black Lives Matter movement to spread into Western Europe. Here in Wales, more questions were raised regarding race equality in wider society.

Approximately 6–8% of the Welsh population identify as Black, Asian or other Ethnic Minority (BAME), almost a quarter of a million people, most concentrated in the south of Wales. Over the past year the public would have read and viewed stories about the plight and affairs of the BAME community – the negative disproportionality in the criminal justice system, education, unemployment, public life and many other domains – while simultaneously witnessing rising racism and hate crime online, during an era in which many assume that racism is a thing of the past. This disproportionality indicated by the statistics shows that tensions between communities are rising and racism is being manifested in a variety of forms.

This is further emphasised when considering the fact coronavirus has also had a disproportionately negative impact on the BAME community. Reporting by UK media outlets has been irresponsible and has lacked nuance, to say the least. I recall a conversation with a white Welsh man in his fifties discussing the return to work of my mother, as lockdown restrictions were easing during the first wave. He assumed that my mother was at higher risk because of her ethnicity and, to his surprise, she scored a very low points total on the return-to-work risk assessment, in terms of vulnerability in comparison

to her white colleagues – even though having a non-white ethnicity was regarded a reason to acquire a point, increasing your risk of vulnerability.

The reporting of the media made it out that the colour of someone's skin or the different language they speak, or a different heritage is a reason that results in an individual being more vulnerable and at more risk of contracting Covid-19, and then at more risk of having severe symptoms. The reality of the issue is socio-cultural and economic. It is often due to the disproportionality indicated above or cultural reasons, the fact that certain BAME communities are living in overcrowded accommodation, working as taxi drivers or the takeaway industry, that means they have more exposure to the virus.

In analysis of the data available on Stats Wales, the proportion of young people (0–15) identified as BAME make up approximately 30% of the entire BAME population. A quick comparison to the approximately 17% of young people from a white background indicates that the disproportionalities mentioned earlier are further exacerbated on young people. To make things worse, since 2010, the number of youth workers in Wales drastically fell from around 2,000 to below 800, a result of funding cuts to youth provision in the post-recession climate and the austerity measures initially introduced by the 2010 UK coalition government.

While the Welsh Government promised to increase the amount spent on youth services in mid-2019, a mere eight months later the worldwide pandemic had caused the start of the infamous lockdown and the beginning of our new normal. With schools shut down and youth work in Wales almost non-existent during the restrictions, the need for targeted, tailored youth provision by people who care became ever more needed in order to tackle societal ills such as homelessness, drug abuse, unemployment and poverty. Youth work is not just firefighting social problems in our locality. When applied productively one sees our young people in Wales prosper. Dr Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, has been quoted saying 'youth services are vital as a first line of defence against serious problems like knife crime and drugs'.

## Youth work is not just firefighting social problems in our locality

Within the last three months, as a youth worker in Newport, I spoke to a researcher who was looking into BAME disproportionality, investigating reasons why younger people from a BAME background are more likely to gain police cautions. I asked the researcher how the 'caution' process works, to which he replied that it is at the discretion of a police officer. It was like the elephant in the room that was not to be discussed. When speaking to young BAME people, they say there is a concern that officers do not believe ethnic minority people when they report experiencing a hate crime – due to lack of empathy or understanding of the experience.

South Wales Police statistics show that in the year 2019–20, there were a total of 12,939 stop searches. A black person is 8.5 times more likely to be stopped and searched in comparison to a white person, and more likely to have no further action taken after a stop search. The likelihood of force being used upon a black person is much higher also.

> The proportion of young people (0–15) identified as BAME make up approximately 30% of the entire BAME population [compared to] 17% of young people from a white background

In Newport, it was also made clear that there is a lack of BAME staff involved in the Youth Justice Service, further amplifying that BAME young people have it much harder than their white counterparts. How is this so? Having BAME representation often helps with empathy, cultural awareness, and the reduction of white privilege in these settings, ensuring that BAME people are not disproportionately targeted.

I work for Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales, set up in Swansea by a small group of ethnic minority young people in 2005 (in fact only a few short months after that the tragic events of 7 July that year took place). The aim was to fill a gap in much needed provision for BAME people aged between 11–25 at the time – by providing a targeted, culturally sensitive and holistic support service to meet the needs of the young people. Despite launching during a period when austerity measures were cutting funding, EYST grew as an organisation due to the real impact it had on the lives of young people.

EYST went from an organisation with only three youth workers as staff members at its inception to over 50 staff members today. It is a third sector success story. From Swansea EYST expanded out west to Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, east to Cardiff and north to Wrexham. In 2020 a project began in Newport (BME CYP) which aimed to work with children, young people and families, supporting them during the coronavirus pandemic by providing laptops and dongles for children so they do not miss out on schooling, and delivering food to the elderly and vulnerable. Jalal Goni, the youth worker on the project, was acknowledged and nominated by John Griffiths, MS for Newport East, to feature in the Senedd gallery of community champions.

In late 2019, EYST were awarded a grant to start a new youth focused project in Newport, funded by BBC Children in Need and Inspired Futures to work with young BAME people aged 11–18 – a critical period for young people. The project was called Newport Youth Futures (NYF) and officially started in January 2021. We have already engaged with over 60 young people during the lockdown restrictions, through an online homework club provision in partnership with Newport Yemeni Community Association, for those that do not have that support at home and are unable to afford private tuition. Fun online quizzes were arranged also in collaboration

Credit: Omid Armin

## Everyone thoroughly enjoyed being out in the sunny weather, a rare sight in Newport!

with [Newport] County in the Community with Amazon gift vouchers and goody bags provided to the winners.

The NYF project also seeks to improve careers awareness and increase connections between local employers and young BAME people, giving them confidence and the knowledge needed to make the best-informed choices for their future. The month of March saw a good turnout: over 20 young people attending the Become a Professional informational webinars, each week discussing a different profession with a Q&A session with a local BAME professional.

As Mark Drakeford announced on the 26 March that it was possible to have organised outdoor activities for children, we leaped at the opportunity to organise a 'Friday Football Mania' for young BAME boys. We had an unprecedented number of young people who arrived to play. Due to the sheer number of participants, not everyone was able to play for the amount of time they wanted to but despite that everyone thoroughly enjoyed being out in the sunny weather, a rare sight in Newport! In speaking to the young people during the session, there is an eagerness to participate in different sports, trips and have a safe space to socialise and engage.

The future is bright for Newport Youth Futures. Our project seeks to listen to the young people and provide youth-focused activities. We hope to facilitate young people to lead social action projects that they are passionate about, to develop their sense of belonging – and pride for their community too.

**Shahinoor Alom** is Youth Support Worker at Newport Youth Futures, EYST Wales

*To find out more about Newport Youth Futures, email: shahinoor@eyst.org.uk*

# The devolution generation

*An overwhelming majority of 16- to 17-year olds want to make themselves heard this May, but our education and political system is letting them down, argues* **Alex Myles**

We are the devolution generation. We know no different than a devolved Wales. But how many of us actually understand how politics works in Wales is less certain.

While Welsh politics may be complicated, we have all recently become more familiar with the considerable powers our devolved government has. Not without its shortcomings, the Welsh Government's distinct path in tackling coronavirus has set us apart from our neighbours in a way that's usually reserved for sport or culture – both admittedly more appealing.

How this Labour government has handled the crisis will firmly be in the mind of voters in May's election, not least among the newly enfranchised. This will be the first time 16- to 17-year olds can vote in Wales, after a law narrowly passed in the Senedd in 2019.

Enthusiasm isn't necessarily a problem for young voters – a YouGov poll shows that 69% of 16- to 24-year olds think the Senedd elections are important, higher than any other age group apart from over-65s. The BBC report that 72% of 16- to 17-year olds in Wales wanted the vote.

What does cause concern is the lack of knowledge among this cohort, not through any fault of their own but due to the wide gap that exists between our national policy and education system.

'I feel very unprepared. I have literally no idea what I'm doing,' says Ellie Sanders, a 16-year old from Swansea.

Ellie understands the importance of widening the vote and is keen to make her voice heard but she believes no one really understands the political system in Wales.

A report from Beaufort Research – commissioned by the government – backs this claim up, stating that most participants felt disconnected to politics.

'I'd argue that politics is seen by young people as something that goes on. It's not for everyday people like us. There's just no education or guidance that's easy to understand about Welsh politics,' she says.

Hoping to lower that barrier of engagement is Raise Your Voice, an awareness campaign formed by Boys and Girls Club Wales, one of Wales' oldest youth organisations, and Swansea Music Art Digital (MAD).

Grant Poiner is a figurehead of the campaign and says, 'We've always been keen to engage young people in politics, especially the ones we class as not the usual suspects. We know young people want better political education. At the moment, young people are leaving school without really knowing how politics works'.

Rhys Williams, a 17-year old from Bala, wants politics to be taught at school. He says, 'We aren't taught anything about politics, unless we're discussing the politics of Nazi Germany.'

Though Rhys comes from a small rural community, he doesn't see this as a barrier for young people to learn about politics. 'Wherever you come from, you can gain an interest in anything really – your resources


**'We aren't taught anything about politics, unless we're discussing the politics of Nazi Germany'**

Rhys, 17, Bala

are limitless,' he says. 'Age is not a guarantee that someone can't make an informed decision and seek out manifestos,' he adds.

This is largely a generation that are digitally native and used to finding information independently. 'I only know things (about the election) due to the research I've done myself and the information wasn't exactly readily available and easy to find,' says Ellie.

But independent research can only go so far. An open letter signed by thirty-two organisations and academics, including Race Council Wales, National Union of Students and Youth Cymru has urged party leaders to ramp up communication with younger voters, wanting accessible manifestos, targeted campaigns, and consideration of new voters when creating policies.

This is not to say political parties are totally overlooking young people, however. Labour have promised a Young Persons guarantee – an offer of work, education, or training for all those under 25. Plaid Cymru offer something similar. The Tories pledge an improved education sector – a 'cash boost' for schools, creation of more apprenticeships and more encouragement for young people to go to university.

Yet it would be disingenuous to say that 16- to 17-year olds are voting for policies that only directly affect them. On the whole, today's adolescents are more tolerant than older generations, openly concerned with social justice, equality, mental health, and the environment they live in.

The latter is of particular importance to Ellie.

'I'd like to think I'm a little bit of a climate activist,' she says. She has recently joined online communities dedicated to action on climate change. 'I thought I was in a real niche of young people who know about climate change, but it's really inspiring and refreshing to see that I'm not – and that other people care too,' she says.

Environmental policies are firmly in the political zeitgeist, with every major party in Wales offering a plan to tackle climate change with the creation of green jobs, building of carbon efficient homes, or measures to deal with pollution and plastic use.

Like climate change, the question of independence considerably piques the interest of young people in Wales. The most recent polling shows that 16- to 24-year olds are more likely to support independence than oppose it. Yet, only Plaid Cymru and Wales Green Party are advocating any policy on the matter, proposing a referendum if in power.

Coming from a Plaid stronghold and Welsh-speaking community, Rhys has witnessed the pull of the independence movement but remains ambivalent. 'Personally, I don't know enough to give my full verdict on it. I don't feel informed enough about the benefits of unionism. But we do need to look at devolution again to make sure it works for everyone."

Rising support for independence among younger generations can demonstrate that they are indeed capable of making political decisions, informed or otherwise. The internet and social media are nowhere near perfect resources, but as seen in the independence movement, climate activism and wider anti-discrimination movements, they can foster a sense of collectivism among young individuals that can have substantial impact.

Though communication and education about Welsh politics is lacking, age should not be seen as a barrier to engaging in politics. When the voting age was lowered in Austria in 2007, the criticism that adolescents will not engage in elections did not materialise – younger voters turned out in high numbers. Looking at Scotland, 16- to 18-year olds turned out in higher numbers than 18- to 25-year olds for the independence referendum in 2014 and continued voting enthusiastically in subsequent local elections.

## 16- to 24-year olds are more likely to support independence than oppose it

When it comes to Welsh politics, a lack of knowledge and a sense of confusion and disillusionment affects people of all ages. Politics in Wales is far from invigorating and getting the bulk of the population interested in elections is a herculean task. Overwhelmingly bureaucratic election processes mean that significant change and wide engagement are difficult to achieve. It's always worth noting that the turnout of Senedd/Welsh Assembly elections has never been above 50%.

But with nearly 70,000 16- to 17-year olds contributing toward a total of 103,000 newly eligible voters, all of whom have lived formative years in a period marked by crises and protests, this year's election *could* be quite different.

'Maybe young people aren't interested in politics, but they are interested in issues,' says Grant. It's thus high time young people in Wales are encouraged not only to put a cross in a box when the time comes but are given the right guidance, resources and communication to ensure they feel listened to and that their needs are met, not just know who's running where and who stands for what.

Lowering the voting age is a step towards better democratic engagement, but only with proper political education and a more transparent political process can we begin to embrace a healthy fully functioning democracy where everybody, from all ages and all demographics, are willing to take part. ➤

**Alex Myles** is a writer and freelance journalist from Gorseinon

EDUCATION IN WALES

# Where do we go from here?

**Poppy Stowell-Evans** *introduces a 'mood board' of ideas for the next Minister for Education, garnered from a seminar held at Chepstow School*

As we stand on the edge of a Senedd election that will bring with it a new Minister for Education – as Kirsty Williams steps down from elected life – our schools, our teachers and our pupils find themselves on the cusp of what could be an exciting new way of delivering and receiving education. But after the last year, to pupils and teachers alike, our current system may seem chaotic, unsuitable for the 'new normal' we eagerly wait to step into. So, where does education in Wales go from here – especially as climate change threatens more regular pandemics?

I joined a (virtual) seminar convened by Chepstow School, where educators and theorists presented insights into how education could and should unfold in a post-Covid Wales. As a sixth form pupil, I found the extensive brief intriguing: *What will the educational landscape look like post-Covid? What shall we keep from the last twelve months? What have we learned and what opportunities are there to change? How brave can we be?*

What follows could be described as a to-do list, or perhaps more like a 'mood board' of ideas for the incoming Minister for Education, who already has the monumental task of delivering a new curriculum. The challenge is like no other: to navigate a maze of uncertainty and a plethora of new ideas and new ways of working, along with the hangover of challenges left by the last twelve months: lost learning and, at least as significantly, the mental well-being of both staff and pupils.

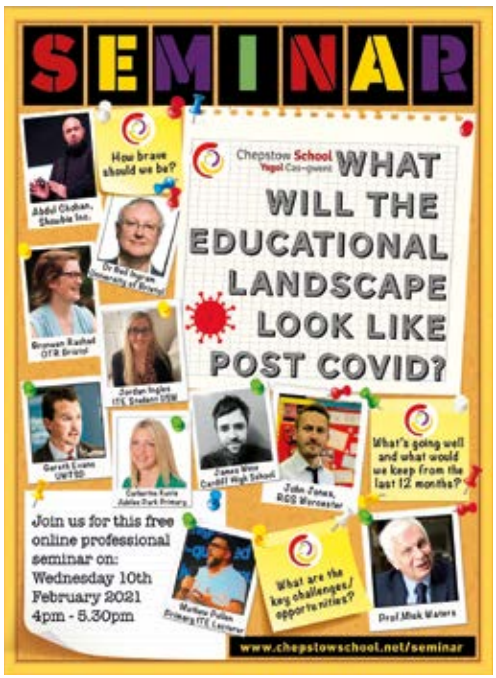
## A curriculum for wellbeing, delivered through the arts

Professor Mick Waters

*Associate at the Centre for Developmental and Applied Research, Wolverhampton University*

We know many youngsters are under pressure in terms of their well-being so they will need a rounded learning like never before – learning that makes sense in a world that can't have had much sense about it in the last twelve months. We know that they will need a curriculum that touches their heart. Music, Art, literature.

Professor Waters also talked around the idea that many children and young people have indeed thrived during the stint of homeschooling, pushing themselves to try things that wouldn't usually be assigned in class due to time limits or teaching pressures. And he talked of learners who were challenging themselves to learn things a year ahead of time, who managed their time and their responsibilities to continue to grow and thrive. 'The learner needs to see themselves as the driver of their learning rather than the passenger. Perhaps, we must step into an era of empowering learners through technology and independent means to reach their ability, to feel a sense of ownership.'




'Pen to paper is still important, but actually being able to annotate over (digital work) with voice... becomes really powerful and authentic'

## Using technology to help efficiency but not to completely kill off pen and paper

Abdul Chohan

*Vice President of learning at Showbie Inc., and a former Chemistry teacher*

I was intrigued to hear Mr Chohan's ideas of how technology could be further embraced by schools. As someone who desperately misses face-to-face teaching when Covid closes my year, or my school, his ideas around more authentic digital interactions appealed to me – as I am sure they would to many learners and teachers.

Having worked nationally and internationally, Chohan has a unique perspective on this notion, and while technology might be limited by demographic in some areas, as we look to the future, a more digitally cohesive curriculum, with digital devices as commonplace as exercise books has to be in the mix of things. Now that technology is not only reliable but could benefit a learners development more than our former way of education, perhaps now is the time to step into a newly integrated digital age as many nations across the world have.

He talked around digitised feedback – being able to annotate work to provide comments using the recorded voice instead of notes on a slide or in an email – or with notes scanned in copy of a piece of coursework or essay. I thought Abdul's notions of adding voices to work – both comments from teachers and students, brought a new dimension to the digital school world, making it feel more connected and 3D. He stressed: 'Pen to paper is still important, but actually being able to annotate over (digital work) with voice... becomes really powerful and authentic.'

## Approach learning with 'slowliness' and well-being really does matter

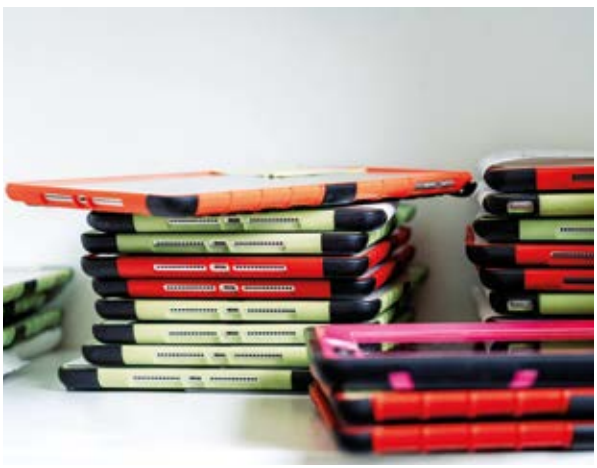
Cat Kucia

*Head Teacher at Jubilee Park Primary School, Newport*

Ms Kucia's passion for learning and the nurture of younger pupils was inspiring. With a clear deep care for how children progress, grow and will come out of the pandemic in educational terms, her 'slowliness' approach – encouraging children to thrive at their own pace, rather than that dictated by agenda or governance – seemed to chime with much of Professor Mick Waters' thinking.

With a whole-school mission statement of 'igniting a passion for learning, not only in children, but in staff and across the wider community', Ms Kucia's plan is to focus on learning while being brave and embracing the 'world-leading' national educational reform agenda here in Wales.

She expressed that post-Covid education should not be about 'catch-up', and explained it is about ensuring children can thrive. This could not be achieved through an extension to the academic year, but rather by creating an inspiring and nurturing environment – allowing children time to play and laugh and significantly engage to a point where they can reflect on where they are as learners, and in order to flourish and form into who they can be. 'They need time to play, to laugh, to fall out and to argue and to be outside in the fresh air. And most of all they need the time to think about learning.'



## A change to qualifications and a rapid review of the Curriculum for Wales

Gareth Evans

*Director of Education Policy at the Centre for Education Policy Review and Analysis, Yr Athrofa, University of Wales Trinity Saint David*

Clearly keen for change and progress, Gareth Evans was robust and concise in his answer to the brief. He is not a great fan of GCSEs and proposed that now is time to think of a new form of qualifications: 'something more in keeping with our new purpose-based curriculum and something that takes a more holistic view of learner progression.'

A decade ago, he said, that in its last major consultation on the future of post-16 qualifications, the Government chose to retain GCSEs and A levels, but noted that in the longer term 'there is a case for new types of qualification.' Despite the dramatic change to the world, nine years later Qualifications Wales prolonged the life of GCSEs but instead called for a change in their content and assessment. 'The main rationale for keeping GCSEs appears to be the value of the brand,' he continued. GCSEs remain as tried and tested qualifications. Yet surely the diversion in policy and the erosion of public and professional confidence in the qualification, resulting from last year's grading fiasco indicated that now is as good as time as ever to reimagine GCSEs and their place in our education system.

Presenting a wish list of changes he'd like to see for the 'new normal', such as a better use of technology to support teaching and learning, considering the approach to learner progression and a review of school structures, and a targeted approach to reducing inequality, I felt it was a common sense suggestion for Evans to advocate for a rapid review of the Curriculum for Wales.

'They need time to play, to laugh, to fall out and to argue and to be outside in the fresh air. And most of all they need the time to think about learning'

## Post-Covid, ICT is not just for lockdowns and snow days

Dr Neil Ingram
*Senior Lecturer in Science Education, Bristol University*

In a post-Covid world, Dr Ingam believes there's an argument for retaining digital learning, combining it with in-person teaching, and even using both mediums in the same session. Using the new-found confidence and awareness of both pupils and teachers, a blended learning approach should empower teachers to know when to give control and how to take it back again.

'What will remain after Covid?' he pondered. 'I think ICT is not just for lockdowns and snow days, but if it's going to be effective we need to understand how the technology is impacting on students' learning and how we can use it to our best advantage.'

## Put youth voice at the centre of a post-pandemic world

Bronwen Rashid
*Head of Training and Enterprise at Off The Record Bristol and Youth Mental Health Service across the South West*

Unquestionably one of the biggest issues that will need addressing in a post-Covid world is the well-being of children and young people. 'Well-being is fundamental,' stated Rashid. 'In my view, it is as important as literacy and numeracy. People don't learn if they don't feel mentally well and safe'. Without mental stability and security, pupils are unable to flourish academically, regardless of potential. The pandemic has provided the rare opportunity to fully appreciate the significance of well-being and it is important we see this with an open mind.

She talked about a pre-pandemic report by the Co-op that found 16-25 year olds report the highest levels of loneliness in society, and how well-being needs to be at the centre of everything post return to school. 'What I also think is sometimes missing is putting young people's voice at the centre of this – asking them what they actually need. The youth voice should be at the centre of what we do.'

'Technology should not be a barrier or just access to stuff: it should be a window to explore the world in new ways and share learning like never before'

## Beyond emergency solutions to long-term transformation

Matt Pullen
*Senior Lecturer at University of South Wales and Company Director at Think Creative Consultancy*

Discussing the ways that technology can take us away from traditional learning and routines, Pullen is an advocate for technology as a tool to be used right through education, not just for distance learning; for some, it may be a medium through which barriers to education are broken down and a voice is found. 'Technology should not be a barrier or just access to stuff: it should be a window to explore the world in new ways and share learning like never before,' he began.

Pullen described the way we all learn as being like a fingerprint, unique to each of us. He talked about how many learners thrived in lockdown, how some found the lack of timetable freeing, and about how students with high levels of self-motivation, persistence and independence have thrived.

If a the new Education minister were to take anything from these ideas, it should be the notion that 'when [pupils] play an active role in deciding what and how they will learn, they tend to show greater motivation... and are more likely to define objectives for their learning. These students are also more likely to have learned *how to learn*, an invaluable skill that they can use throughout their lives.'

## Pupils' sense of ownership as the key to engagement

Jordan Ingles
*Student Teacher*

Miss Ingles talked about how she approached home learning with Foundation Phase learners during the first lockdown. Using friendly graphics, such as a 'smiley scale', to allow younger children to express their feelings on homeschooling, she came up with an approach that offered reward and gave even the youngest of learners the ability to choose their learning and tailor their sessions to provide pupils with ownership over their own learning.

She reported that once she gave the power to the learners, she turned around engagement (from less than 15% partaking in home learning, to more than 80%) and learners moved from sad and angry to happy on the smiley scale. Simple ideas such as certificates for Home Learner of the Week, Dojo Points and animated posters really engaged and motivated younger pupils – and this is key to engagement – at all ages; not just primary.

The key... is to replenish the educational diet by revisiting essential concepts before moving forward: 'If pupils understand their fractions, they'll understand percentages better'

## Replenish the educational diet

James Wise
*Assistant Headteacher at Cardiff High School*

Mr Wise argued that the loss of learning through the lockdowns will impact all. Based on the theory that 'our ability to think is dependent on the quality and quantity of what we know', he argued that a diminished educational diet will have had a negative impact on learning; that pupils will lack certain knowledge and understanding, which will lead to less capacity for critical thought.

Without addressing the issues from the diminished educational diet, learners cannot move forward, he continued, before focusing on the social justice issue of disadvantaged pupils suffering the most.

The key, believes Mr Wise, is to replenish the educational diet by revisiting essential concepts before moving forward: 'If pupils understand their fractions, they'll understand percentages better.' By using the new curriculum and its freedoms to develop this 'diet', Wise believes we can ensure successful future learning. We need to make sure all pupils and students have all of the pieces of the puzzle in their armoury – to be able to grow and move forward, to be able to understand concepts, and to be able to develop well-informed ideas and opinions.

---

**Poppy Stowell-Evans** is 16, and a pupil at Llanwern High School, Newport. She is Youth Climate Ambassador for Wales, Newport East CLP Youth Officer, a Welsh dressage team rider and co-hosts the @YFO_Podcast

TEACHING IN LOCKDOWN

# *We certainly feel more plugged in*

**Huw Edward Jones** *reflects on the challenges of a year teaching during the pandemic*

As a headteacher and Years 5 and 6 teacher in a primary school on Anglesey, my best hope for the future is well educated children; they are after all the world's most valuable human resource. Yet overnight, when the pandemic hit, my sole initial focus became the protection of families and the school community. Fortunately, I soon saw the benefits of decisive actions from the Local Authority, both in the form of strategic support for home learning and in the effective measures taken in response to local Covid-19 outbreaks.

A year later I see a world that has come closer together; we certainly feel more plugged-in at Ysgol Henblas. The pandemic and the power of the internet has meant an increase in the frequency and range of connections online. At Ysgol Henblas we've valued sharing resources with pupils, staff, school governors, school clusters, and even further afield – with schools in Cardiff, Paris and India.

Last March, the immediate questions were: How would we set the tasks? How would the pupils access the tasks? What would be the structure of the week?

I had been experimenting with Google Classroom for a few months, but at that point I was thrust into using the platform on a daily basis. Sure, there were a few teething problems but twelve months later the words 'shared drive' are uttered regularly at Ysgol Henblas. Never has collaborating been so effective.

Likewise, to families without Welsh, learning through the medium of Welsh seemed like some kind of magic that schools achieve behind closed doors, until Covid-19. Suddenly, parents were plunged into the challenges of supporting their children's bilingual education. Yet they responded well, gaining a deeper understanding of how immersive Welsh education works in the early years, and how the older children's bilingualism enhances their education and understanding of language as well as concepts. A child will far sooner grasp the concept of a quadrilateral if it's introduced as a *pedrochr* (four sides).

## *Listening to parents has been vital*

Listening to parents has been vital. Lessons have been learnt from the first lockdown, primarily the call for regular online interaction. Come second lockdown, we were better prepared, with a timetable of live sessions focusing on specific curriculum learning. Live sessions have evolved through consultation and feedback, with evidence showing increased pupil confidence and enjoyment of the learning process. Pupil-focused learning in the new curriculum, and their own choices of the Olympics and India as themes, made for interesting content and independent learning opportunities, as well as a professional reboot in teaching methods for me as an educator.

Regular online sessions have provided the opportunity to truly develop pupils' skills within the curriculum. My prior knowledge of technology was a tremendous help, but also, as a team, we supported and motivated each other to use new technological ideas to enhance pupils' learning. The use of tutorial videos has been popular with both pupils and parents. Through partnership with parents, we have also been able to establish home environments conducive to pupil learning. Nothing was too much effort for them; they've been superb in conforming to our requests – made in the children's best interests.

Any school day is full of activities. The school day during lockdown has been no less frenetic. Tasks are set at 9:00am followed by Teams class sessions between 9:30am – 10:30am, by which time pupils' work starts trickling through. Response to work is then continuous, between online tutorials. Of course, in parallel is the teaching that occurs on-site with the children of key workers and vulnerable children. Lengthy teaching input on screen is followed by the additional workload of a headteacher.

Distance learning has certainly opened doors to new opportunities. Webcam and online platforms have meant a range of guest contributions to learning; including World War memories, a focus on Fairtrade, safety advice from a police education officer, not to mention interaction with Indian pupils in the Himalayas. Fostering a link between our school and Mount Stuart Primary School in Cardiff has also expanded our shared learning about diversity within Wales. On a personal level too, I gained from becoming a Wales representative at the online Five Nations Network Conference, focusing on empowering children through citizenship education.

*It goes without saying that the pupils are longing for their friends – no online team session can overcome the physical power of social interaction*

The great hope is that the situation will soon return to normality, but what the pandemic has meant is that our technological readiness has been accelerated. Education as a collaborative effort involving staff, pupils, parents, and governors is here to stay.

It hasn't been all positives. It goes without saying that the pupils are longing for their friends – no online team session can overcome the physical power of social interaction. Similarly, not all pupils have been able to use online resources, receiving hard copy resources instead. Internet lagging and malfunctioning webcams have further hindered the process. Online platforms will never be a true reflection of a classroom; nothing will replicate the vibrancy of a classroom and the emotional intelligence teachers use to pick up cues from the children.

Whereas on one level the pandemic has enhanced collaboration, it has also driven a physical wedge between us, as pupils and staff are driven to their separate sections in the school building. Isolating in bubbles of four contradicts the ethos of Ysgol Henblas – the ethos of any school – we are one family. Before March 2020, the staff room was a place for laughter and uplifting support; since March, it's been quiet and empty, with staff dispersed. Yet despite the forced physical isolation, the staff have been outstanding in their efforts to reach out to all pupils with their learning and welfare.

So yes, I've enjoyed seeing the benefits technology has brought through collaboration and outreach, and witnessing the continued progress of each individual pupil. Yet I look forward once more to sharing the same physical space with the school family, as so succinctly expressed by the Football Association of Wales; we are still *Together Stronger*.

**Huw Edward Jones** is headteacher at Ysgol Henblas, Anglesey

HOMESCHOOLING IN LOCKDOWN

# *'By the way, the birds are chittering their hearts out, I'll tell you all about it now...'*

**clare e. potter** *gives a parental perspective on managing during lockdown*


As a child, I played school all the time. My Whimsies, teddies and Steve-Bionic-Austin liked to sit and listen to me read stories I'd written, ask them questions, tell them off in a Mrs T (who used to hit us on the palm with 'the plastic whacker') voice. I liked doing the register, and writing up their work so I could mark it with a big fat red pen. Eventually, I did become a teacher – but then left and then missed it.

So, this time last year when we discovered that the school would be closing, I cracked my knuckles and thought I'd be able to ace this homeschooling with my super-teacher-power muscle memory. But of course, like many of you reading, I didn't ace it. I failed on many accounts. We only did Joe Wicks once – my living room was like a comedy club: *Your bum is in my face*, *This is making my verrucas hurt*, *Urghh*, *who fluffed?* This was going to be such a magical time, we were going to have so much fun, weren't we . . .?

Day One began with me and my 9- and 14-year-old on the – for once – cleaned off dining table. We dissected a whelk egg and were amazed at the microscopic shells in each sac. That wonder-filled activity lasted fifteen minutes. By mid-morning, the kids were on Xbox and I was eating Turkish Delight in bed wondering how I was going to manage. All my insecurities and fears began to surge; we were only weeks out of catastrophic flooding in our local Pontypridd area, my friend in Malaga had

been giving me updates on the dreadful Covid death-count that was inevitably on the way to us, so my right ear did what it always does when I'm stressed, it closed down. I turned to the only thing I knew as a tool for coping: journaling.

I've long experienced the transformative power of journaling, and was fresh out of a second run of Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* morning pages, but morning had gone, 'Right,' I told my two, 'we are going to write a journal every night.' And so began almost a hundred nights of writing in one another's company. I couldn't deal with maths or 'iaith', or handle laptop squabbles, and I began to unravel in other small ways, too. All I could offer in terms of consistent input was the hour we sat every night and wrote, and then shared (if we wanted) and listened. My first sentence in my lockdown diary was capturing a conversation between the two children as they began to write in theirs:

*I couldn't deal with maths or 'iaith', or handle laptop squabbles, and I began to unravel in other small ways, too*

**9-year-old:** I can't write my ideas in a good order!
**13-year-old:** What do you mean you can't write your ideas in a good order? Your ideas *are* the order!

My little girl's first entry: 'I have a wobbly tooth. I wonder if it will fall out. I wonder also if I will fill this book by the end of all the weeks that will go by?' She filled more than one book and wrote to an imagined reader: 'By the way, let me tell you . . .' As the weeks passed, she looked forward to our journaling; it became almost ceremonial. My (older) son was less sold, often reluctant; therefore, I had to be creative with prompts, ensure he knew these were *his* pages, that it was *not* school, that he could write wild and unkempt, draw, say whatever he wanted, and not read if he didn't want to, and so he persisted. I'm prouder of my children for sticking with these journals than I am of them completing work from school. This was their sense-making, well-being, family-uniting, self-learning tool that might only be recognisably of value when they read and reflect on it in adulthood.

During lockdown, we experienced common lows that other families will relate to: struggling to juggle work (applying for funding in the absence of work) while baffled children asked for help with fractions; nightmares (mine and the children's); hairdressing disasters; increasingly late nights; worry over

*'today me and Mam just went for a walk in the woods . . . I heard a bird tweet – it sounded like a typewriter'*

grandparents; comfort eating and binge tv-watching; arguments and tears. But the highs in this house sustained us through all that: the walks in the woods, the sound of new piano compositions from my son's room; my little girl knitting when she was supposed to be on live school; and time.

Time being together. Time away from after-school activities. Time to work through things, to help one another as we each soared and dipped in mood and outlook. Time to explore deeper connections with ourselves, with one another, and spiritually. All this was captured and worked through in our journals. I'm really glad that we three have these books that document events: 'today me and Mam just went for a walk in the woods... I heard a bird tweet – it sounded like a typewriter,' and feelings, 'Mam's really, really, moody,' 'I don't want to be doing this.' They allowed us to say things we otherwise might not have, to see poems forming, to laugh, but more valuable than the content, is that these children learned to articulate their feelings and in so doing were their own – and one another's – best teachers.

**clare e. potter** is a writer and performer from a south Wales mining village

*Journal excerpts shared with permission*

British Heart Foundation Cymru

# A New Heart and Circulatory Disease Plan for Wales.

**2021 Manifesto Ask: Parties to commit to a bold heart and circulatory disease plan and promise to provide sufficient dedicated resources to deliver on clear and effective actions.**

## Summary


Heart and circulatory diseases remain a significant cause of ill health and death in Wales. They cause more than 1 in 4 deaths and there are around 340,000 people in Wales living with these conditions[1].

Our team at BHF Cymru carried out extensive research and worked closely with clinicians, patients and the public to produce a *New Heart and Circulatory Disease Plan for Wales*. This plan identifies three priorities to improve heart and circulatory disease care in Wales:

1) **To greatly improve detection and support people to manage conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol which often precede heart and circulatory diseases.**

2) **At present there is a lot of variation in care across Wales. The next Welsh Government must ensure easy and equitable access to All Wales Cardiac Pathways, which provide patients across Wales with the best possible care from diagnosis and treatment, to recovery and support services. And end of life care if needed.**

3) **Any improvements in care can only be underpinned by data. Wales needs better collection, dissemination and use of data. This must be used on a local and national level to highlight unwarranted variation in treatment and really drive improvement for patients.**

Given the extent of the engagement, the Plan that BHF Cymru has produced, and the priorities it puts forward represent the consensus of everyone interested in improving care for patients with heart and circulatory diseases and would fit well under any NHS structure which prioritises Wales' biggest killers.


**Action: Call on political parties to commit to a bold heart and circulatory disease plan and promise to provide sufficient dedicated resources to deliver on clear and effective actions.**

1. BHF estimate based on National Survey for Wales 2018/19 data

SPORT IN WALES

# State of play

*Five years on from the heady days of Euro 2016 and ahead of the delayed 2021 tournament,* **Garmon Dyfri** *assesses the disconnect between elite level sport and an inactive society*


**Sport is... the heartbeat of Welsh identity for it represents a rare avenue where Wales can be Wales and not a segment of the UK**

credit: Chris Angle CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Never before had the Welsh footballing dragon roared so triumphantly. Through Chris Coleman's leadership, Gareth Bale's sparkling brilliance and that Hal Robson-Kanu goal, a nation became engrossed in the improbable exploits of its heroes at Euro 2016. Yet five years later as another European championship beckons, the euphoria of 2016 feels like a lifetime ago. The pandemic continues to mandate empty stadiums, closed gyms and fixtureless amateur sports clubs. What better time, then, to reassess the state of Welsh sport.

For Wales, sport in all its forms is more than just a game. It is the heartbeat of the Welsh identity for it represents a rare avenue where Wales can be Wales and not a segment of the UK. When Alun Wyn Jones or Jess Fishlock don the red shirt, it is not 'Team GB' that they represent, but Wales. Consequently, for a century and more sport has ringfenced and reaffirmed the Welsh identity as other political, economic and cultural forces sought to swallow it into a sea of Britishness.

Indeed, set against a constant discursive synonymity of England and the UK in the media – as evidenced by the 'That's Devolved' Twitter page – sport remains Wales' principal armour in sustaining its own voice. After all, how often do you see the Welsh and English rugby teams being conjugated into one – when compared to, say, the two nations' education policies?

Sport emboldens this Welsh identity most prominently when the goals are flowing and the titles stacking up. And during this lockdown-induced sporting hiatus, it is easy to forget that this is a golden era for Welsh sport at the professional level. Since Euro 2016, the men's football team qualified for another European Championship, Geraint Thomas won the *Tour de France*, and the men's rugby team marched to a World Cup semi-final and sealed one – and so very nearly two – Grand Slams. For a nation of three million, the sporting achievements of the past five years are astounding.

However, one weakness to Wales' approach on a governmental level is that it has failed to comprehensively exploit the economic benefits which such sporting achievements can bring. That is, given the international visibility which it is afforded through its sporting successes, Wales has unbounded, but currently untapped, potential to utilise sports as a tool through which to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). By single-handedly raising Wales' international profile, its sport teams constitute ideal 'diplomats'. After all, if you were to travel anywhere in the world, it is likely that the first thing a stranger you might meet would associate with Wales is Gareth Bale! Sport is therefore Wales' strongest outstretched hand to the world and should therefore be central to Welsh Government's international strategy.

To illustrate the power of sport as an investment attracting tool, consider the example of Chinese basketball superstar Yao Ming. By signing for one of the top US teams and becoming a Sino-US cultural bridge, Ming single-handedly brought the NBA to China and facilitated Visa and Pepsi's subsequent market entry – copious FDI. Granted, Wales is incomparable to China in market power terms, but this mould of attracting investment undoubtedly suits Wales' sporting assets. Indeed, Welsh Government has already experimented with such ideas through a series of trade-related events in Japan during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Such efforts must now proliferate so that this golden era of victories on the pitch and elsewhere translate to off-pitch triumphs too.

Nonetheless, not all is rosy within Welsh sport. Beneath the golden shine of the men's professional game, there is plenty of sporting rust lingering which the pandemic only threatens to compound.

Firstly, consider elite female sport. The past five years have been a revolution for female athletes. 5,000 tickets for the football World Cup qualifier against England in 2018 sold out within 24 hours. Gwenan Davies and Alex Griffiths became Wales' first full-time female professional cricketers. However, for all this progress, the pandemic marks a giant step back. Whilst male athletes were back playing last summer, Celtic Dragons netballers only returned this February.

**Welsh sport remains intrinsically dependent on commercial interests which in turn greatly disadvantages women**

Similarly, as the conclusion of the men's 2020 Six Nations was rearranged for the autumn, the women's iteration was left unfinished and its 2021 tournament postponed until April. What both examples highlight is that Welsh sport remains intrinsically dependent on commercial interests which in turn greatly disadvantages women. Deep gender inequities thus prevail and plenty of work remains to rectify this.

Secondly, and even more alarmingly, Wales' population is polarised between those who regularly exercise and those who do not participate in sport at all. A pre-pandemic report by Sport Wales, for example, highlighted that 41% of Welsh adults had not done any sporting activity, a term which encompasses a simple two mile walk, in the four weeks prior to being interviewed. That's 1.04 million inactive adults in Wales, the equivalent of fourteen Principality Stadiums filled to the rafters. Furthermore, a survey conducted during the October 'Firebreak' suggests that lockdowns have only consolidated such patterns with those already active becoming more so and inactive citizens becoming even less likely to step into trainers.

The social repercussions of such inactivity are enormous. 375,000 Welsh adults live with cardiovascular disease, almost 600,000 are obese, and 210,000 are diabetic. Covid-19, a virus which preys on those with underlying health conditions, has highlighted all too clearly the link between such statistics and Wales' high death toll.

Granted, there are other societal issues such as poverty which contribute to this eye-opening portrait of Welsh health, but even so, Welsh sport cannot truly be said to be thriving when so many of its citizens suffer from preventable illnesses linked to inactivity. A nation can proudly beat its chest for reaching Euro and World Cup semi-finals all it likes, but if its people are struggling to walk two miles once a week to maintain their physical health – without even mentioning their mental health – those achievements are paltry. Therefore, there has been a more urgent time to re-engage the inactive 41%.

**Welsh sport cannot truly be said to be thriving when so many of its citizens suffer from preventable illnesses linked to inactivity**

Government has a role here. For example, classifying the contributions some companies make to discounting gym memberships for their employees as tax-deductible investments – it is an investment in their workers' health after all – could be one idea. However, government cannot do everything; they cannot come knocking on our door every time we turn to Netflix rather than the treadmill. Consequently, the onus is on Welsh citizens to channel our game-day sporting passions into fitness endeavours. In the ringing truism of John F Kennedy, when it comes to sport, the Welsh must ask what we can do for our country.

As gyms prepare to reopen and amateur sports teams congregate once more, for all the successes at the professional level, the state of Welsh sport is fragile. To rectify this, Wales must capitalise on its golden era in male professional games to reap FDI through sports diplomacy – and urgently re-engage inactive members of society so as to nurture a healthier Wales. Sport has always played a prominent role in Welsh life and in 2021, it holds the key to unlocking a healthier, wealthier and more prosperous Wales.

**Garmon Dyfri** is a third-year student reading International Relations at the University of St Andrews

The Open University
Y Brifysgol Agored
WALES CYMRU

## ADEILADU CYMRU DDEWR NEWYDD

Wrth i Gymru ddechrau adfer o'r pandemig, rhaid i ddysgu hyblyg gydol oes fod yn bosibilrwydd i bawb, beth bynnag eu cefndir. Ochr yn ochr â chynllun buddsoddi mewn isadeiledd sgiliau a dysgu, mae angen newid sut rydym yn meddwl am ddysgu – nid rhywbeth mae gennym un cyfle ato, ond proses gydol oes. Dyna ein cenhadaeth yn y Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru.

**MWY O WYBODAETH**

**Ewch i** open.ac.uk/cymru

## BUILDING A BRAVE NEW WALES

As Wales begins to recover from the pandemic, flexible learning throughout life must become a realistic prospect for everyone, no matter what their background. Alongside a programme of investment in skills and learning infrastructure, we need to change how we think about learning – not something we have just one chance at, but a lifelong process. That's what we stand for at The Open University in Wales.

**FIND OUT MORE**

**Visit** open.ac.uk/wales

Geraint Thomas

SPORT IN WALES

# Our secret superpower

**Jenny Scott** *outlines a British Council Wales report that sees sport as a golden opportunity for Wales to muscle onto the global stage*

If I were to ask why Chelsea Football Club, UNESCO, Sony, Natural Resources Wales, the European Commission and Wales Millennium Centre would all be in a room together, you might assume it was the start of a joke. As it turns out, they got together to discuss Welsh sports diplomacy, which in its purest form co-opts the unique power of sport to bring people, nations and communities closer together via shared love of physical pursuits.

At British Council Wales, we launched our latest report, *Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy*, in November 2020 – with a live panel event featuring, amongst others, the First Minister of Wales, multi-Olympian Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson and broadcaster Bryn Law. We were not entirely surprised that this innovative, fun and (relatively) low cost area of international relations interested such diverse audiences. Whilst the British Council doesn't work in sport per se (though notably we do manage a few brilliant sport for peace and development programmes), we do work in soft power and as the report showed there are huge gains to be made in this area for a 'small nation with a large sporting footprint' like Wales.

Soft power is briefly defined as the ability of a country or a region to build international influence through culture, public diplomacy and positive global contribution. Soft power is a particularly crucial tool for devolved and regional governments, who do not have the hard power levers of international relations, including military or economic influence (such as sanctions), which remain solely in the purview of sovereign governments.

We already knew that sport was a powerful tool for Welsh diplomacy. Two years ago, British Council Wales commissioned a report into the soft power of Wales and other small nations, the *Wales Soft Power Barometer* (see *the welsh agenda*, issue 60). This report polled 5,000 people in ten countries around the world, including the US, China and Germany. The researchers asked questions directly comparing perceptions of

Wales to nine other countries/regions, including Catalonia, Quebec, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

It revealed some interesting findings. Wales scored well for its use of digital technology, taking third place behind Scotland and Jeju in South Korea. The country also did well for enterprise, sitting in fourth place and outperforming larger regions such as Catalonia and Hokkaido. But it was with sport that Wales did best, ranking second out of the ten countries. Sport does seem to be Wales' super soft power.

*Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy* was intended to further our understanding of the soft power opportunities through sport – how can we maximise the exposure Wales gets as a nation when we qualify for the football Euros, or when 15,000 Japanese rugby fans sing the Welsh national anthem in Kitakyushu? The report looks at international best practice, quantifies Welsh sporting assets and gives a series of recommendations as a platform to enable deeper thought on how to leverage sport as an effective method for engagement with international governments, publics, business and trade partners.

It's important to note that the researchers found Wales already had a few good 'runs on the board' in this area, such as the sports diplomacy surrounding a 2018 Wales versus South Africa rugby union test match in Washington DC, where Baroness Eluned Morgan met trade, business and political partners at a Welsh Government hosted reception. And of course there was the high-profile glamour of Wales' public diplomacy campaign during the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan. This appreciation and understanding of sport is echoed in the Welsh Government's 2020 *International Strategy*, which states that sport is a key lever for Welsh cultural relations. However, as Neil Ward, former CEO of the Football Association Wales Trust stated when interviewed for the report, ultimately the recent narrative was one of missed opportunities. The report found the need for an approach which was more strategic, more joined up with the wider sports sector and looking beyond mega-events and elite sports teams.

After all, it's not only our top football and rugby teams that help raise Wales' profile internationally. There are a variety of sports diplomacy opportunities in growing or niche sports – including Wales' world-renowned mountain biking, e-sports, the Island Games in Anglesey and Wales' top-flight coaching schemes and athletic exchanges. Participation in global sports governance is another facet of sports that offers an opportunity for Wales to raise its international profile. Currently, Welsh academic and former international sportswoman Professor Laura McAllister is deputy chair of UEFA's women's football committee and is standing for the FIFA Council.

Individual athletes are also powerful 'diplomats in tracksuits' – consider international footballer Gareth Bale with his 18.6 million Twitter followers, superstar tennis table protégée Anna Hursey, as well as Nigel Owens, Jess Fishlock and Gareth Thomas, who are changing the face of sport – seen as worldwide

Jess Fishlock


Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson (Tom Dulat/Getty Images)

**Participation in global sports governance is another facet of sports that offers an opportunity for Wales to raise its international profile**

inclusivity champions – something which chimes so well with the values Wales wants to project. The iconic moments generated through sport are beamed into the homes of millions, inspiring people to find out more about Wales and reminding those who know us already. There can't have been many Welsh hearts that didn't swell with pride seeing Geraint Thomas wearing the Tour de France winner's yellow jersey, while proudly flying Wales' instantly recognisable Y Ddraig Goch flag. It's not hard to see why the report terms Welsh sport 'an embarrassment of riches'.

If Wales were to develop a sports diplomacy strategy, it would be the world's first substate government to do so. It would join countries like Australia, France, the USA and China who either have sports diplomacy strategies or departments tasked with the responsibility. This may feel like exalted company, but consider that Wales, through a quirk of history, often participates as a nation at global mega-events – a status that is generally only afforded to sovereign nation states. These countries have discovered the power of sports and the report says Wales should use the popularity and global recognition of its athletes, teams and other sporting assets in the same way.

This isn't a job for Welsh Government alone; rather the report recommends a partnership approach, where Welsh sporting associations and organisations such as Sport Wales come together with government to develop and implement a sports diplomacy strategy for Wales. Is it a job worth doing? I think Professor McAllister put the case very well in the report: 'Sport generates opportunities to engage with people across the globe. It builds the informal networks that create and strengthen formal and official relationships. Sport not only plays a key role in expressing who we are, but also what we stand for politically, as an open and accessible trading partner, a good global citizen with an inclusive and welcoming people.'

The report is clear that the future for effective Welsh sports diplomacy is to cultivate a strategic and collaborative approach; citing working groups, partnerships and mapping the landscape as the most important next steps. And, while this is a marathon not a sprint – we do need to be nimble. The post-pandemic world will regenerate, sporting calendars will be packed with rescheduled events, each offering a platform for sharing Welsh culture, developing business and trade links and encouraging international partnerships.

Eyes will be on the Euros and Summer Olympics this year, and I hope Wales looks to opportunities afforded by the Nitro World Games in Cardiff, the ICC World Cup 2023, the Island Games, and many other opportunities presented by opening ceremonies, friendlies and qualifiers to create wrap-around diplomatic visits or cultural events. I hope we explore athletic and coaching exchanges and sports envoy programmes. Wales can learn from the best practice of other nations and integrate sports into the fabric of our international engagement in an innovative and wide-reaching way.

British Council Wales' sports diplomacy work hasn't ended with this report and we're continuing to explore this area with our partners. We believe that cultural relations, including international sporting activity, helps to build trust and friendship between nations, and, as we begin a different relationship with Europe and come to terms with a new Covid reality, sports diplomacy offers one way to leverage and nurture international partnerships vital for growth. As the report says: 'Wales is a small nation with a very large sporting footprint. It has the players, coaches and superstars. It has the will, creative energy and the determination to be different…The Team just needs a sponsor, a captain and a game plan.' ➤

---

**Jenny Scott** is Director of British Council Wales

*This spring, British Council intends to bring together international experts for an open panel to discuss sports diplomacy from a policy and practice perspective. For further information contact rosa.bickerton@britishcouncil.org*

# And now for the news

**Dylan Moore** *talks to* **Ifan Morgan Jones, Huw Marshall** *and* **Sebastian Cooke** *about the sudden uptick in news coverage of Wales*

The weakness of Wales' media and the democratic deficit that ensues is not an unfamiliar theme in these pages. The IWA itself has produced multiple audits and reports, and held summits on the matter. Each has outlined a familiar story. A slide in spending and output by both BBC and ITV, together with the well-documented decline in print media, especially local and regional titles, created 'black holes' in news coverage. That year's report lamented: 'At a time when Wales as a democratic entity has never been more clearly defined,

# where you are...

the sources of information for debate and scrutiny about our government, culture and identity are drying up. This represents a major challenge to our society and democracy. Wales has seen market failure writ large.'

In many ways, it could be said that the paucity of the country's media has been the leitmotif of the devolution era. Cardiff Bay has been less a 'bubble' than a vacuum, Senedd Cymru deprived of the oxygen it needs for its work to grow and have resonance in the lives of ordinary people across Wales.

But things are changing. The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on devolved decision making like never before. Mainstream UK media outlets have paid a rare degree of attention to 'the four nations' – and the sometimes stark differences in approach of governments in Westminster, Holyrood, Stormont and Cardiff Bay have been a feature of political debate across 'these islands'. And still more significantly, perhaps, Wales has the beginnings of a truly plural indigenous news media.

Nation.Cymru, an independent start-up founded in 2017, has quickly established itself as a go-to source of political news and trenchant opinion. On 1 March this year, Newsquest Media Group, the second largest publisher of local and regional news in the UK, launched *The National (Wales)*, with a mission statement: 'to hold all political parties and those in power in Wales to account, to explain how our devolved government works and challenge the pros and cons of greater powers for the Senedd and open a frank discussion around independence.'

The arrival of such a major organisation in the Welsh media space has ruffled feathers and fuelled knock-on activity. Herald.Wales, a pan-Wales title launched by Herald News UK, publishers of the *Pembrokeshire Herald*, brought its launch forward, with its political editor Jon Coles saying he was 'surprised and disappointed' to find out about the partnership between New Media Wales and Newsquest, which changed the plans for his title. 'We were a founding patron of New Media Wales whom we were looking forward to working with to provide independent news online,' he said.

Meanwhile, there has been a spate of activity in the independent media space in Wales, with online platforms making it easier for start-ups with clear ideas about audience to fill the huge 'black holes' that had been left in the failed market. While it remains to be seen how each outlet will fare in the longer term, with a range of different business models now operating across the market – from the advert-driven *Wales Online* through *The National's* paywall to Nation.Cymru's reliance on paying supporters – it is exciting to see the new breadth and depth given to Wales' media by titles like the radical Voice.Wales.

And all this before Welsh Government Culture Minister Dafydd Elis-Thomas announced there had been discussions at the highest level exploring a mechanism to support English-language journalism in Wales (perhaps similar to the way the Welsh Books Council funds publications like *Golwg* in the Welsh language). All of a sudden, whatever lies ahead for Wales, it looks like we might be able to know a little more about it.

Ifan Morgan Jones

Having previously worked as Deputy Editor for *Golwg* and its online sister *Golwg 360*, Nation.Cymru founder Ifan Morgan Jones was in a good position to diagnose the problems that existed within the English-language national media. His PhD tracked the growth of a Welsh press in both languages during the nineteenth century, finding that English-language titles tended to be regional, and heavily linked to individual towns or cities. 'You have the *Western Mail* in the south and the *Daily Post* in the north, and because they're both owned by Reach, there was no incentive for either to go beyond their area and cover the whole of Wales.'

Despite the strongly nationalist tone of much of the content on Nation.Cymru, Jones insists that first and foremost the aim of the site was to build Wales' public sphere, rather than to make the case for independence, although he does acknowledge that the pro-indy campaign group Yes Cymru and his website have 'fed off each other' in what he calls 'a chicken and egg type scenario'. He says Nation.Cymru is not explicitly pro-independence and points to the inclusion of conservative and devo-sceptic voices as evidence for this.

'The whole point I started Nation.Cymru was to strengthen the national media. The Overton window has shifted a little bit – now *Wales Online* is discussing independence. The impact has been in terms of showing there's an audience for it.'

'The Overton window has shifted a little bit – now *Wales Online* is discussing independence'
Ifan Morgan Jones

Jones claims that a side effect of more media attention, from both within Wales and outside, is a growing confidence within Welsh Government itself to do things differently. 'There's a symbiotic relationship between the press, the public and politics… and during the coronavirus pandemic, the public have liked what [Welsh Government] have done differently.'

He says the public appetite for a site like Nation.Cymru was evident from the very start. Jones' initial crowdfunder, for the £200 cost of hosting the website, raised £5,000 in a week. 'It showed there was a desire for that kind of service [covering politics from a Welsh perspective]. We jumped into the water straight away with coverage of the 2017 General Election, and since then we've gone from publishing five stories a week to between fifteen and twenty news articles a day, with two members of staff; one to look after the business, and a part-time editor.' Nation.Cymru also recently advertised for a Weekend Editor, so this growth is clearly set to continue.

Jones is clearly proud of the site's rapid expansion, and he cites the pandemic as a major turning point. 'Since March [2020], visitors have shot up sixfold,' he says, quoting 639,000 hits in the year to date. 'December was our best month, with 140,000 site visits.'

He says that the business plan was 'easy' and, as a not-for-profit, 'really simple… we put up content, attract readers, who become subscribers, and the more readers we have, that attracts advertising. It's a virtuous loop.'

Ifan Morgan Jones says he fears for the commercial media model, and predicts further weakening of the big media organisations – despite wishing them well. 'Newspapers that are part of large conglomerates are having to move from daily to weekly.' Although he welcomes *The National* as it hosts what he calls 'another part of the conversation', he cites the fact that its parent company, 'Newsquest cut 25 staff in Wales last year, so there's no guaranteed future.'

He says there is a 'tendency in Wales toward fake plurality' and claims that although it is positive to have further start-ups on the scene, 'they are all short staffed and none of them have the capacity for good investigative journalism'. Jones would prefer there to be 'fewer platforms' and hints that what he'd really like is 'to get going on more co-working and cooperation' between different parts of the Welsh media.


Although Huw Marshall, as former Head of Digital at S4C, was coming from a different angle, and his journey toward finding solutions was somewhat different, he essentially identified the same problem as Ifan Morgan Jones, and at around the same time.

Being from Wrexham, Marshall was perfectly placed to see how Welsh 'national' news tends to focus on the Senedd and the south. Again citing the north/south divide, the fact that 'Reach publish the *Western Mail* out of Cardiff and the *Daily Post* out of Liverpool,' Marshall says 'it's entirely understandable they want to protect their titles, but it does create this artificial split.'

Explaining the problem faced by Welsh media, Marshall also outlines the age-old issue – *that's devolved*. 'The most popular papers in Wales, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, and the most popular radio station – BBC Radio 2 – have no incentive to serve the 15% of their audience that's in Wales when the other 85% of their readers and listeners are in England. So you're still getting news from an Anglo-centric point of view.'

Describing his motivation for setting up New Media Wales, the organisation that eventually gave birth to *The National*, Marshall again draws on his own personal experience. Having moved from Gwynfryn outside Wrexham to Pontycymer outside Bridgend, he cites these places – 'ex-agricultural and altered by collieries and the steel industry' – as examples of 'the lots that unite people in Wales, north and south', a narrative neglected by decades – indeed, centuries – of media fragmentation.

Like Ifan Morgan Jones, Marshall began with a crowdfunder, which paid him for four or five months to work on a business plan; unlike Jones, this was a much more strategic affair. His conclusion was that 'the only way to do it is subscription based'. *The National* is relying on the quality of its provision being something that readers will value and invest in. He points to the 'very bad experience of trying to access news' on the Reach websites, with the offputting nature and prevalence of pop-up advertising.

He was also somewhat surprised to find, during research and development, that 'print is still a viable option'. Newsquest, who eventually became the preferred partner of New Media Wales, had 'fourteen or fifteen titles already in existence': ready-made capacity, and proof that the industry was not dead yet.

When *The National* launched on St David's Day 2021, they sold exactly half of the 20,000 copies that were printed, purely via word of mouth and social media promotion. The hope is that having seen the title on newsstands – next to *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian* et al – the print edition gives the digital brand currency. *The National* have since announced that the success of its two trial editions means the printed paper will now appear as a weekly paper, every Saturday.

'All money from subscriptions will go back into the service,' says Marshall. 'We're planning to have more staff.' Initial subscriber numbers are higher than expected, and *The National* will soon launch a campaign to find 1,000 subscribers who will directly fund a dedicated political correspondent. Further subscribers will then pay for dedicated business and culture editors, and so on.

Despite his criticism of Reach, Marshall is full of praise for *Wales Online's* Welsh Affairs Editor Will Hayward, who he says has done a 'fantastic job' of providing 'accountability and scrutiny', something he clearly believes Wales and its institutions need much more of.

Part of the mission of *The National* is educational. Although Marshall himself is a former Plaid Cymru candidate, the title's political stance is neutral. 'We are in the process of appointing an editorial board – it's not about my views; our job is not to tell people what to think.'

He characterises much UK-level political coverage in a simple formula that many will recognise: 'The Conservatives have made an announcement, and Labour say it's rubbish because of this'. Marshall suggests *The National* will take a more nuanced, and educational approach: 'We want people to be able to make educated decisions. We're behind Scotland in terms of powers, but also in terms of awareness – of how Wales works. We want to start national conversations.'

Having moved from Gwynfryn outside Wrexham to Pontycymer outside Bridgend, Huw Marshall cites these places as examples of what unites people in Wales, north and south


Huw Marshall and Sebastian Cooke

Even with the looming Senedd election aside, it is an interesting time in Welsh politics. Marshall offers a quick resume of the kinds of questions *The National* will now be in a position to pose. Addressing calls from the Abolish the Welsh Assembly Party, he says the title will offer a platform, but also a challenge. 'We can ask, *What would Wales look like without a Senedd?* We can look at the challenge to Labour, that 51% of their supporters now favour independence; the challenge to the Plaid Cymru vote from some of the smaller parties [like Propel and Gwlad]; challenge the Conservatives' shift toward centralising more powers at Westminster; and think about how the Liberal Democrats might fare after losing Kirsty Williams, who Marshall says, 'in a government of Labour ministers – and one independent – the single Lib Dem has been the best one!'

Huw Marshall thinks the long term future of the media in Wales is about businesses. 'Businesses generate revenues and generate profits'. And having spent two and a half years working on the business side of establishing *The National*, Marshall's own role will now switch to developing audio and visual media to enhance the title's online presence, utilising his experience at S4C. He is excited at the prospect of bypassing traditional media through setting up channels available, for example via smart speaker.

'Despite the fact that many people in Wales know that *that's devolved*, they listen to Radio 4 in the morning because Radio Wales and Radio Cymru both offer a softer, magazine type approach, so there's space for a kind of Welsh *Today* programme, which we could offer via smart speaker.'

The advantage of the historic paucity of coverage is conversely that there's clearly plenty of room for new media enterprises to grow into.


A third Welshman who surveyed the wreckage of the nation's media landscape a couple of years ago and has subsequently done something about it is Sebastian Cooke. Coming from a radical but non party aligned political perspective, his diagnosis of the problem was not only around the infamous 'democratic deficit' – the idea of a political class hamstrung by a weak media – but that 'both politics and journalism [were] not responding to the social crisis in a way that is necessary.'

Initially teaming up with Veronika Mekova, then a final year student at the University of South Wales, Cooke saw *Voice.Wales* as a potential platform for 'serious journalism; long form writing and quality photography'.

Their first attempt at a story came in January 2019 when the pair decided to drive to the Amazon warehouse in Swansea to ask workers about conditions. Cooke describes pitching up in the carpark at seven in the morning, and eventually getting removed by security after nobody would speak to them for fear of the company 'having their guts for garters'.

So with no success and a whole day ahead of them, Cooke and Mekova decided to stick a pin in the map and pitch up somewhere in the valleys to explore local stories. 'We found Cymmer [halfway between Port Talbot and Treorchy], where the high school had been shut down, library funding had been cut so volunteers had instituted a community-run replacement, and there just seemed to be a lot of loss and anger.' Cooke describes the community as 'once thriving, now depleted', quoting one man who said: 'They might as well flood the valley, turn it into a reservoir and have done with it.'

*Voice.Wales* has carved a niche identifying and exploring in some detail the local and national fallout of major global issues: Islamophobia, the climate crisis, Black Lives Matter

Cooke found there was appetite among ordinary people who had been worst affected by the politics of austerity to have their voices heard. He describes what he perceives as the BBC editorial position at the time, which was 'these cuts needed to happen' despite that leading economists and more consensus around spending and stimulus has since shown that to be untrue. 'The media failed to scrutinise [austerity] and locate it as a political choice,' he says.

Since then, *Voice.Wales* has carved a niche identifying and exploring in some detail the local and national fallout of major global issues: Islamophobia, the climate crisis, Black Lives Matter. It specialises in interviewing people on the sidelines of street movements about their experiences – for example of racism – and therefore has positioned itself, in Sebastian Cooke's words, 'outside the normal media club', although he is keen to stress the site prides itself on professional standards of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ).

He describes his hope that the platform would spring from 'socialist, egalitarian' values but also his diagnosis of 'most left-wing media' as 'comment and analysis'. By contrast, 'we wanted to be news... voices from the ground, from the street.' For Cooke, this makes the site appeal to 'people not tuned in to the normal bubble of left media', and also to those far beyond Wales.

He is ambitious to gain an international audience by thinking about Wales in a much wider context. Pressed on the types of stories he would like to cover elsewhere, he talks about the yellow vests protests in France, and similar struggles in the United States and elsewhere, that are rooted in a post-industrial context akin to that of Wales. He talks about other places further afield where big economic restructuring has left people marginalised, the state of the left in Latin America and the farmers' protests in India.

Interestingly, for someone so clearly involved in left-wing activism, Cooke waxes lyrical about the quality of the feature writing in the *Financial Times*, which he calls 'the best journalism in Britain.'

Cooke is proud of creating a media outlet, entirely supported by Patreon-subscribers, that has as its mission holding big business to account; he is also proud of the site's investigative work to date, and the pressure that

its coverage has been able to bring to bear on public institutions like South Wales Police and the IOPC in the still unresolved case of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan, the 24-year-old Black man who died after a night in custody at Cardiff Bay police station.

Asked whether this sort of work has caused any problems for the site and its journalists as they hold power to account in a way rarely seen in the Welsh media before, Cooke says there have been no problems with the police – 'and if there's one institution you don't want to feel the heat from, it's probably the police!' – but that some of the site's early investigative work did result in some useful learning.

*Voice.Wales* made some explosive claims about former Brexit Party candidate and evangelical church leader Richard Taylor exploiting ex-offenders, and were threatened with libel action. These 'early scrapes' taught Cooke some valuable lessons as he worked with solicitors pre-publication to ensure the story was 'watertight'. But the experience also confirmed his opinion that 'libel law is weighted against journalism and in favour of the rich and powerful. If you've got money, you can pursue claims made against you and have them shut down.'

Despite that *Nation.Cymru* and *The National* have much more obvious links to the movement for Welsh independence, Cooke is the only one of my three interviewees to be first to bring it up. He admits: 'We haven't reported enough on the prospects for independence and that's probably down to Covid – which has pushed the Welsh indy movement online.'

He predicts far more coverage once the movement returns to the streets, and says he is supportive of 'the radical potential of Welsh independence – a different Wales... if there's ever a Scotland 2014 style standoff, in which the BBC toes the line of the British state, there will be a real place for alternative radical media.'

Whatever happens next, it looks set to be a dynamic and interesting time for the press in Wales. That can only be good for a better informed public, and a political sphere held more regularly and robustly to account. ➤

**Dylan Moore** is Editor of *the welsh agenda*


The future of connectivity
in Wales has arrived
New technology means improved digital connectivity for agricultural businesses across Wales. And a brighter future for us all.
Smart technology is creating new opportunities for rural communities. BT's intelligent connectivity can keep your business connected and help you improve performance and efficiency. While actively adapting to the future.
Stay agile, and transform your business with SD-WAN.
Visit bt.com/business/intelligentconnectivity
Call 0800 916 0233
BT
BEYOND LIMITS

# A Green and *Caring* Recovery

**Catherine Fookes** *says that Covid-19 has exposed a crisis of inequalities and 'building back' must go beyond the economy*

Covid-19 has both exposed and exacerbated the longstanding inequalities that exist in Wales and the UK, making our work at WEN Wales – campaigning to end gender discrimination – even more important.

In terms of evidence for the impact of the crisis on women – the Women's Budget Group reported that women of colour in the UK face a 'double crisis'. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women are three times more likely to be in precarious work, so are less likely to qualify for furlough or Statutory Sick Pay, and they are more likely to be low paid and already living in poverty. Office for National Statistics figures show the shocking fact that disabled people accounted for 68% of all deaths involving Covid-19 between March and July 2020 here in Wales. The death rate is two times higher for disabled men and almost two and a half times higher for disabled women. So, the health crisis is beyond doubt an inequality crisis, laying bare the structural racism and ableism at the heart of our country.

In terms of the economy and jobs, WEN Wales commissioned polling in December 2020 to investigate what the economic impact of the crisis is. It found that disabled people and BAME people were more likely to have lost working hours (BAME 48% versus 23% for white people). For disabled people, these figures were 31% as against 23% of non-disabled people. The polling also found that women in Wales were more likely than men to have lost their jobs due to a business closing (18% versus 11%) and BAME people were more likely than white people to feel that they were unfairly chosen for furlough (28% versus 6%).

Across the UK, the data shows that school closures will hit women on low incomes particularly hard, with those on incomes less than £20,000 almost five times more likely to lose their jobs or working hours due to childcare responsibilities in comparison to women on higher incomes. What is obvious is that to stop many more women leaving work, we must invest in the childcare sector in our recovery plan.

As Dame Louise Casey so eloquently put it: 'what were cracks before Covid are now chasms.' If we do not act now, we will undo decades of progress on gender equality and push millions more into poverty. The United Nations has estimated that 47 million women and girls will be pushed into extreme poverty by Covid-19, increasing the total number of women and girls living in extreme poverty to 435 million worldwide.

So what have we learned from how different nations have dealt with the crisis? How can we ensure that out of the crisis comes something powerful and good?

Wales and Scotland were both quick to act in some areas in terms of equalities, lifting barriers to ensure migrant women could access services such as refuges. In Wales, the Health Minister swiftly relaxed restrictions that would have made it almost impossible for women to access abortion in the pandemic. The rapid development of risk assessment tools to remove those at risk from the front line of the NHS was also positive, as was the establishment of a Wales Race Forum.

Throughout the UK, Covid-19 has impacted on women's access to justice and the ability to exercise their rights. Nowhere is this more apparent than for survivors of gender-based violence and abuse. Lockdown measures have made it easier for perpetrators to increase abuse, to isolate and gain power over their victims. Women and children living with abuse have faced greater isolation, a lack of refuge accommodation, a higher risk of experiencing economic abuse, an increase in online abuse, stalking and sexual harassment, new barriers to reporting, and reduced access to support services.

Delays in the civil and criminal justice processes have therefore had a devastating impact, creating a backlog of cases with a significant effect on the prosecution of sexual crimes. Rape Crisis Scotland has sought a legal opinion on the Scottish Government's response, and is calling on them to legislate for judge-led trials to be used in the short term.

One thing the Scottish and Welsh Governments have in common is their close working with stakeholders and the third sector and their increasing of funding to frontline services to support those most at risk. Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis was developed with reference to obligations within the Equality Act 2010 and the European Convention on Human Rights. This is commendable.

Governments in both Scotland and Wales have – in the main – ensured that policy development is informed by lived experience and therefore they have tried to root out and mitigate intersecting inequalities. According to our sister organisations in the third sector in England this has not been the case – they have not been consulted or involved in the response.

The biggest issue for the devolved nations to now deal with is the onslaught of poverty, but we do not have all the anti-poverty levers – many are for Westminster to pull. The UK Government must keep the increase of £20 per week in Universal Credit payment as a minimum, but we also need to see changes to Statutory Sick Pay as women are less likely to qualify for this. Extra holiday leave, as received by single mothers in Germany, would also be a welcome idea to keep women in the workplace whilst home-schooling and caring for their children. An easy way to get money into low-income families' pockets is to increase Child Benefit immediately.

## ONS figures show the shocking fact that disabled people accounted for 68% of all deaths involving Covid-19 between March and July 2020 here in Wales

Canada's response so far to the pandemic is the one that stands out and shows it is a country serious about tackling inequality and living up to a promise of being a feminist government. As well as an extra payment of $300 (£171) per child under six for families on low to medium incomes, up to a total of $1,200 (£685) (equating to a 20% increase in their child benefit), their focus has been on rebuilding the economy with care, inclusivity, and women at its heart.

As well as an Action Plan for Women in the Economy being a major plank of its recovery, Canada has committed $420m (£239m) in grants and bursaries to help train and retain qualified early-childhood educators and an extra $90m investment (£51m) over five years in the childcare sector. This is to ensure that women don't need to leave the workforce because of childcare gaps. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland thinks that spending the money makes 'sound business sense' – and it has the backing of many business leaders.

## The next Welsh Government has a big opportunity to shape our economy in a fairer way... and [should] invest in childcare provision in the way Canada has done

Canada's announcement of the first ever Black Entrepreneurship Program, backed up with an investment of up to $221 million (£126m) – including up to $93 million (£53m) from the Canadian Government over the next four years – is also to be welcomed and shows their commitment to intersectionality and building back the economy for all.

The next Welsh Government has a big opportunity to shape our economy in a fairer way post-Covid and invest in childcare provision in the way Canada has done. They should ensure that free childcare is available to all children from the age of six months, not just to working parents; re-energise the implementation of the Gender Equality Review; and start to implement both the Race Equality Action Plan and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan. One way to ensure that care gets the investment and attention it needs is to adopt the innovative idea from Oxfam Cymru of making 'A Caring Wales' a new well-being goal.

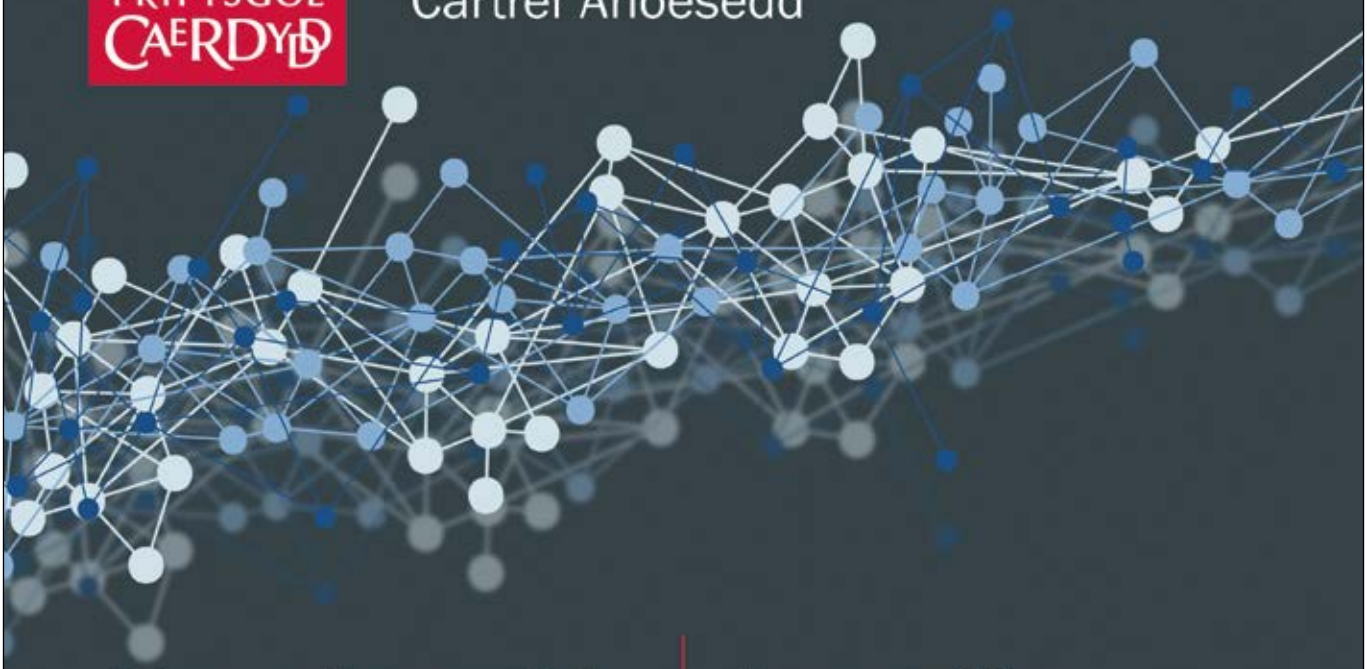
Rebuilding the economy and tackling poverty must be inclusive and we need a major focus on the role of childcare. There has been much talk of a Green Recovery – we must ensure that it is a Green and *Caring* Recovery or we will not be living up to our values of a more equal Wales. We will not be free of the economic impact of the virus until *all* of us are removed from poverty. Let us see Care, Care, Care, not Build, Build, Build as our mantra. ➤

**Catherine Fookes** is Director, WEN Wales
@CatherineFookes @WENWales

Catherine Fookes thanks Katy Mathieson, Coordinator at Scottish Women's Rights Centre @SWRC_ for her contribution to this article. To join the campaign to make Wales a country free from gender discrimination, join WEN Wales – wenwales.org.uk

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Home of Innovation
Cartref Arloesedd



# Mae arloesedd yn ein gwaed

Rydym wedi bod yn troi syniadau'n atebion i'r byd go iawn **ers 1883**.

Heddiw, rydym yn cynhyrchu **97%** o'r holl elw IP a gynhyrchir gan brifysgolion Cymru.

Ac rydym **ymhlith 10** Sefydliad Addysg Uwch gorau'r DU oherwydd ein nifer o raglenni trosglwyddo gwybodaeth.

**Ni yw Cartref Arloesedd**.

# Innovation is in our blood

We've been turning ideas into real-world answers **since 1883**.

Today, we generate **97%** of all IP profit generated by Welsh universities.

And we are a **top 10** UK HEI for our number of knowledge transfer programmes.

**We are the Home of Innovation**.

# Regeneration within tradition

**Steven Lovatt** *imagines Swansea's post-Covid future against a recent history of unimaginative civic planning*

During this year of lockdown Swansea's innate unpretentiousness has been able to reassert itself. I've lived in cities all my life – Birmingham, Edinburgh, Moscow, London – but Swansea has never really felt like one. Tractors are liable to rumble through Fforestfach and Cockett at any time of year, and in early summer the honest reek of manure, hitch-hiking in on a westerly, brings the fields right into town. Stand on College Street with your back to the Dragon Hotel, and the view across the river valley to St Thomas Church, dark steeple stark against the grey hills around Neath, is familiar from scores of Welsh market towns.

As elsewhere, Covid-19 is leaving Swansea with an incommensurably divided legacy of personal, material and economic misery alongside a sense that we've been allowed to glimpse a more human pace of living that's normally invisible beneath our busyness-as-usual. The distress caused by the pandemic deters most people from saying it aloud, but as one local café owner put it to me, 'I'm not making any money, but I do like the quiet. It'll be almost a shame when it goes back to how it was before.'

It's early March and I'm walking along the promenade, past the long and lovely Brutalist lines of the Civic Centre and onto Marine Walk, heading towards the docks. The tide is out, and a luminous mist hides the distant sea so that, as often happens, the beach stretching to the limits of sight resembles the surface of an entirely different planet. If it was previously possible to indulge this as a pleasant fancy, I nowadays more often experience it with a helpless foreboding that, pretty soon, the whole of Earth really will look like a different planet altogether. Does the sand shine with silica only, or is it already smirking with a billion microplastics? And at the other end of this path, are the men and vehicles working to repair the West Pier – wrecked this winter by Storm Dennis – doing more than making fresh sport for the fiercer, more frequent storms that we're told are now inevitable?

The scale and interconnectedness of the problems we face – a deranged climate, Brexit fallout, lockdown's personal and economic toll – are liable to overwhelm individuals, but by now it should also be obvious that radical change can't be expected from global institutions in thrall to a distorting fantasy of perpetual economic growth. I use this much-abused word 'radical' in its basic sense of 'rooted', and want to argue that our mess of crises can best be tackled at the civic level, by building on and reviving civic pride in particular places, in opposition to the everywhere/nowhere of globalised capital. So what kind of a city is Swansea, and what does it want to become?

A radical culture, that is, a *rooted* culture, is the indispensable foundation of civic pride. Culture has never been peripheral to Swansea. Walk around any part of town and you will see, propped up in the windows, framed glories of coloured glass, testament to the continuous presence, since 1935, of the internationally renowned School of Architectural Glass. And since appreciation of this art knows no boundaries of wealth and social class, you're just as likely to see it in a forlorn-

looking terrace in the shadow of the prison as you are in some villa of Ffynone.

The people of Swansea, like people everywhere, are hungry for culture that tells them proud stories about their city and its uniqueness. But crucially, if this pride is to be a lived thing, it needs to take material form in the institutions and infrastructure of the *polis*. This seems only flickeringly understood by the City Council. For all that you can't walk around Swansea without seeing the stencilled features of its most marketable poet on road-signs, feeder pillars and in skate parks, the Council still let the only bookshop in Uplands – which supported Welsh presses Parthian, Seren and Honno – close for want of an affordable lease. The ironies invited by replacing the bookshop with a bar called The Bookshop are shallow recompense for the further impoverishment of a local high street that, with its KFC and Subway, is well on the way to looking like any other.

I continue my walk, past dunes strewn with mermaids' purses and nitrous oxide bottles, to the harbour, where the remnant of Swansea's fishing fleet rusts at its moorings – *Shield*, *Heather*, little *Winnie*, dumpy as a finch. Just around the corner, the marina struggles to accommodate identikit powerboats. Sometimes it's difficult not to be cynical. Perhaps the rust on the side of the fishing boats could be masked with adverts for the yachts, in the sort of palimpsest of eyesores already well established in town, where the boarded-up shops are employed as hoardings for the coming Indoor Arena.

A great deal has been invested in this arena, and I'm not only talking about money. To criticise it seems churlish. Certainly, I can see the theoretical appeal of more international acts coming to Swansea, especially if Singleton Park were then spared the noise and other pollution that attends its use for summer concerts, but the real problem facing Swansea isn't that it 'struggles to attract' famous acts, but instead the dearth of scuzzy low-rent venues that would encourage the development of a distinctive local scene. The Council's struggle to see this, I'd suggest, is one facet of a wider schizophrenic mindset that, while dimly recognising the need for greater investment in bottom-up civic infrastructure, is still in thrall to the mythical thinking of the global market. In the latter conception, culture is something that can only be brought (and bought) into the city from

Long and lovely Brutalist lines: Swansea's Civic Centre


A palimpsest of eyesores: advertisements for the Indoor Arena


Swansea's 'iconic skyline': a retro 20th century myth
Images: Steven Lovatt

**The people of Swansea, like people everywhere, are hungry for culture that tells them proud stories about their city and its uniqueness**

**The vulnerability of individuals and of the health and care services could be greatly mitigated by... removing the stranglehold of three or four international fast-food chains on the city's advertising spaces**

outside, yet this is an attitude that posits globalised culture and finance as the remedy for the decay and anomie that the same forces have wreaked on the city.

The persistence of this mythical thinking is everywhere revealed by the emptiness of the language employed to promote it. The Council website announces a redevelopment scheme that will 'change the face of Swansea city centre through the creation of a world class leisure and shopping destination'. There never was, anywhere, such a thing as a world class leisure and shopping destination, but in Swansea there was and could be again pride in an inimitable character reflected in local culture.

The fantastic hopes carried by the Indoor Arena, and the misplaced status anxiety they betray, are nothing new to Swansea. When the Meridian Tower was built nearly fifteen years ago, it was defended against critics on the grounds that it would 'drag Swansea into the twenty-first century'. Swansea's utopian pursuit of a particular kind of status, intimately related to a particular myth of modernity, is also apparent in its iconography. The latest signs urging social distancing feature a skyline silhouette incorporating the castle, BT Tower, Meridian Tower, Sailbridge, Guildhall and... the Indoor Arena. Never mind that it isn't yet fully built, the arena has already been invested with symbolic significance as a key part of the Swansea brand. Yet the 'iconic skyline' itself is a retro, twentieth-century trope, whose exposure in this era of anonymous corporate skyscrapers would by now be evident even without its literal and symbolic destruction on 9/11.

A contradictory and self-negating attitude to Swansea's future flourishing is everywhere apparent. The Council's recent approval of a new drive-thru Greggs (with a drive-thru Burger King also on the table) is the action of people who, though they cannot be unaware of Swansea's horrendous health and littering problems, nevertheless wave through developments which can only exacerbate both. It never made sense that any town's civic pride could be enhanced by making it a favourable host for multinationals, but it's so evident now that the failure to grasp it can only be attributed to the power of magical thinking, a cargo cult mentality that if it had just one more skyscraper, one more arena, Swansea could be a global player. This is the same mentality that leads screen-addled kids, indifferent to their local history, to fantasise about becoming YouTube 'influencers'.

In Swansea as elsewhere, the Covid-19 pandemic has made existing vulnerabilities and dependencies more evident, and these should now be urgently addressed. The vulnerability of individuals and of the health and care services could be greatly mitigated by, for example, removing the stranglehold of three or four international fast-food chains on the city's advertising spaces. This has nothing to do with insularity, but everything to do with reducing the inequities that corrode civic pride. We are already globally connected, and this necessarily entails vulnerabilities, but the last year has made clear again how much more vulnerable some people are than others. Power will look after itself, as it always has. Empty student flats on Bay Campus won't sink it while it's still bankrolled by sheikhs (although a torpedo in the Gulf of Hormuz just might).

Meanwhile, global Swansea as a living culture, rather than a brand, carries on as before. At the Exotica supermarket I notice that the Perspex screen between cashiers and customers bears three cut-outs: Elvis Presley, Malcolm X and Peter Singh – Swansea's own 'Rocking Sikh'. The man at the till follows my eyes and comments simply, 'All legends!' The people of Swansea are proud, and they also have surprisingly long memories of globalisation: a toilet graffito in Oystermouth ended a tirade of complaints with the observation that 'Even the Romans had better services.' Presently, pride in Swansea's *civitas* is too often frustrated, and social virtues of civic-mindedness shrink to a private sphere of 'niceness'. Yet commitment to Swansea as a shared, public space remains visible, evident in the displays of stained glass, in the volunteers

**The people of Swansea are proud, and they also have surprisingly long memories of globalisation: a toilet graffito in Oystermouth ended a tirade of complaints with the observation that 'Even the Romans had better services'**

who litter-pick the parks each morning, in the work of Living Streets and other community organisations that see the connection between local green places and the global crisis of ecology.

It's this existing vernacular reality of material and cultural pride in Swansea that the Council should build on, and which will win it back the support of a sometimes sceptical population. For while there's reason enough for scepticism, a gulf of trust between Council and community serves the interests only of those who would exploit Swansea to turn a quick profit. Conversely, any genuine effort on the part of the Council to restore *civitas* would meet with a huge swell of support from below.

In the last week of its opening, a newly redundant staff member at Debenhams spoke to me bitterly of the money being spent on 'statement' developments while the high street goes into a tailspin. More and more, the lifting hook dangling from the crane arm three hundred feet above the marina brings to mind the Sword of Damocles, and the uneasy costs of pursuing status. In its desire to do Swansea proud, the Council should begin by trusting in the riches it already possesses. ▸

**Steven Lovatt** lives in Swansea. He is the author of *Birdsong in a Time of Silence* (Particular) and numerous literary and critical articles

# Getting Started in...
# Travel and Hospitality

*In the first of a series of articles exploring the experiences of young Welsh people starting careers during the pandemic,* **Hannah Watkin** *speaks to individuals who have had the start of their careers in the travel and hospitality sector interrupted*

When the first lockdown came into force in the United Kingdom on 23 March 2020, individuals in the majority of Wales' career sectors were thrown into uncertainty. All of us faced unexpected challenges as a result of the pandemic, whether asked to continue to travel into work, to work from home, furloughed, or in the worst cases, made redundant.

Managing one's career alongside the pandemic became a struggle for the majority. Especially affected by these troubling circumstances were the youngest members of the job market. Making the first steps into your chosen career is frightening at the best of times. Having to make them during a pandemic has been hugely affecting for many.

One career sector which has been especially affected by the pandemic is Travel and Hospitality. I spoke to recent graduates from the International Travel and Tourism Management course at the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD) to get a sense of how young people starting careers in the Travel and Hospitality sector have managed during the pandemic.

## A turbulent time

Thomas McDermott is 24. Following his graduation from UWTSD in 2019, his career got off to a strong start. 'After graduating on the 17th of July 2019, I started my first industry job on the 20th. I took up the position of concierge at the Radisson Blu Manchester Airport, working 40 hours a week. By early December I was arranging some front office training with my manager in order to help me gain the necessary skills to enable me to work in the reception team, as my long-term goal is management.'

Tom was on holiday in January 2020 when the virus became of more serious concern in the UK, and when he returned to work in February it was already having a negative effect on the sector. 'Once I was back at work I was asked to take time off. Sometimes I worked three or even two days instead of five. Then in March I was told I would have to take six weeks unpaid leave. Three days later the furlough scheme came into place. I originally believed my position to be safe until the pandemic ended, but I had my redundancy meeting in September and was then made redundant in October due to the furlough scheme ending. Three days later the government announced they were extending it, but by then thousands of people had already lost their jobs.'

The IWA's Team Administrator Rhian Cook also graduated from the UWTSD in 2019. After taking time off to travel, Rhian began job searching in January 2020, and entered the travel and hospitality sector at what was about to become an incredibly turbulent time. 'After lots of searching I finally gained employment with the Youth Hostel Association as a seasonal employee on the 10th of February. But this did not last very long given that the tourism sector was worst hit by the pandemic. I

was furloughed and warned that I was going to be made redundant, so I left the industry pretty sharply to work in a factory. Prior to the pandemic I worked in a hotel, hostel and events company. Two of these collapsed due to Covid, and the other is barely hanging in there.'

Lauren Boyce, 22, graduated from UWTSD in 2020. On graduating, she suffered a similar experience of Covid putting a dampener on a promising opportunity she had in the sector. 'When I finished uni, I wanted to go into events. I had the opportunity to go back to Aspen, where I did my university placement, to work with The X Games (an annual extreme sports event) and major weddings. Covid put a stop to that. But I was open to opportunities, and I managed to get a job as Marketing Manager with West Wales Holiday Cottages which I'm really enjoying, so it has all worked out well for me in the end.'

Olivia Griffiths, 24, is another 2020 graduate who had to cope with Covid ending an exciting opportunity for her prematurely. 'I did leisure management. I had been working in a theme park, but moving forward I wanted to enter the airline industry. I applied for the Heathrow graduate scheme. I think there were six rounds, and I got through to the last round, but then it got pulled because of Covid. Once I graduated, I went back to working in a theme park not really knowing what I was going to end up doing.'

Thankfully, through UWTSD's links Olivia is now also working as Marketing Manager with West Wales Holiday Cottages. 'In terms of my career, it's taught me to not try and stick to one rigid plan, but to be flexible. When I was in uni, I don't think I'd ever really thought of doing marketing, but I really enjoy it now. And I've actually been offered an additional new job, which I start in around two weeks time. I'm going to be a content creator for Pear Communications on their new attractions platform.'

Following his redundancy, Tom McDermott also began searching for a way back into a career in Travel and Hospitality, but the effects of the pandemic on the sector made this difficult. 'I immediately began applying for jobs in the UK and overseas – wherever was hiring. But even as businesses began slowly opening, everywhere was operating at minimal occupancy. I had no luck.'

However, Tom remained in good spirits, largely as a result of the support he found available online from others in the industry. 'I took some time to think about my options, often in communication with my previous university lecturer who would post online about jobs and opportunities in the industry. Having friends and ex co-workers also in the industry made me feel like I always had a support bubble. People relate to what you're going through – when I told my friends I had just been made redundant three others posted in the group chat saying they had too and we just laughed it off. There wasn't much else we could do.'

Olivia Griffiths, Dee Lee Jones and Lauren Boyce

## Thrown into disarray

23-year-old 2020 graduate Dee Lee Jones also found the support network she had with others in the sector invaluable. 'Honestly, at the start [of the pandemic] I cried so much and broke down all the time. It was really, really hard. At times it felt like there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I was working full time during the day and it was a lot of stress to get my assignments done alongside that. You overthink everything like *how am I going to do this?* and *how am I going to do that?*

But if you're passionate, you make it work. And I had great support from my friends, we were messaging each other like *How are you getting on? How are you feeling today?*'

Olivia also spoke about how the pandemic contributed to unexpected stress during her degree. 'Being in a pandemic is hard enough on your mental health, just as is being in your third year at university. Having to go through the two of them together was just crazy! Dee and I were working together on a consultancy project with Qatar Airways. We'd had loads of meetings and we'd finished two assignments. But then due to Covid the airline stopped operating from Cardiff, and our plans were thrown into disarray.'

Despite having graduated in 2019, Rhian's academic work was also negatively affected by the pandemic. 'Parts of my research for my masters dissertation were potentially going to be published, but with the initial chaos of the pandemic I understandably never heard back from my supervisor and the research quickly became out of date. The opportunity disappeared.'

On the subject of her pandemic halted research, Olivia continued: 'The stress of that threw me completely. We'd planned this thing since November and suddenly it was all in the air. And obviously when the job losses started hitting the industry we were worried by that too. I remember emailing my tutor all the time like *I really can't work out what to do. I can't do this, I can't do that. All my plans are completely ruined.* But she was so supportive. She emailed me back loads of ideas. So it was hard, but we got through it.'

Thomas McDermott, Rhian Cook and class; and Jacqui Jones, tutor

## Support and adaptability

Jacqui Jones, tutor and manager of UWTSD's International Travel, Tourism, Events, Festivals and Leisure Resort Management programmes, spoke the effect the pandemic has had on her students, and how the university has ensured that they received support and the same opportunities as previous cohorts.

'We've done an awful lot to support them. Our programmes have always been strongly industry and management based but one of the things we did was bring in a Crisis Management module into the final year and a digital focus to meet the changing needs of future graduates. Placement is still on the programme, but we've adapted it to Placement and Enterprise Projects so that they can do remote placement, university projects, or have the opportunity to investigate setting up their own business. Some things we've had to put on hold temporarily such as international trips, but an awful lot more has gone digital opening up exciting new opportunities for industry engagement.'

Jacqui sees her students' adaptability as having been a huge strength for them during the pandemic. 'This is one big sector, and I think the placements, the overall courses we offer at UWTSD have helped to make [our students] very adaptable.'

Eventually finding a job as a Business Event Centre Porter with Sedexo has been an especially rewarding experience for Dee. 'When I was looking for a job, it was the biggest struggle ever. But now I am extremely happy. I feel like I'm on the right path in terms of progressing and developing my career, and to have been able to do that during a pandemic! That's something which makes me feel very proud.'

Her tutor Jacqui is certain the sector, powered by the adaptability of its youngest generation, will bounce back. 'Everyone wants what we've missed, and

# Buddsoddi ynddoch chi
# Invested in you

**At Blake Morgan, our expert lawyers work with a range of public sector organisations, businesses and individuals to help find relevant, realistic solutions to complex professional and personal legal issues.**

Recognised by the leading legal guides for our technical expertise, experience and commercialism, we take pride in helping our clients to manage risk and achieve their goals.

Our clients across Wales tell us it's our personalised approach coupled with our real-world commercial experience that sets us apart.

**Yn Blake Morgan, mae ein cyfreithwyr arbenigol yn gweithio ag ystod o sefydliadau, busnesau ac unigolion yn y sector cyhoeddus i helpu i ddod o hyd i ddatrysiadau perthnasol a realistig i faterion cyfreithiol proffesiynol a phersonol cymhleth.**

Yn cael ein cydnabod gan y canllawiau cyfreithiol blaenllaw am ein harbenigedd technegol, ein profiad a'n masnacheiddiwch, rydym yn ymfalchïo yn helpu ein cleientiaid i reoli risg a chyflawni eu nodau.

Mae ein cleientiaid ledled Cymru yn dweud wrthym mai ein hymagwedd bersonol, ynghyd â'n profiad masnachol yn y byd go iawn, sy'n ein gwneud yn wahanol.

For more information visit

Am ragor o wybodaeth, ewch i

@BlakeMorganLLP
Blake Morgan LLP
info@blakemorgan.co.uk
w blakemorgan.co.uk

BLAKE MORGAN

the demand for tourism, the demand for leisure, the demand for events – I think is going to go through the roof. If we can create a rush on toilet rolls at the start of the pandemic, there is no question that we can't do the same when this is all over for festivals, events and travel! The industry is going to rebuild, and there will be so many exciting opportunities. I think this recent cohort of students will go on to be successful figures in the industry, in the same way as the group of students who graduated into the industry after 9/11 went on to be the superstars of the industry now.'

## Making a change

However, for now, Tom and many others have had to move on to different sectors to continue making a living. 'Many of my friends have turned their back on the industry, and you can't blame them. The skills we were taught in university are very transferable to use in many other roles and industries. I've seen people go into the police, many in supermarkets, and I myself am moving into a different industry.'

Tom is moving to China to teach English to children in a language school, but remains focused on a future career back in the Travel and Hospitality sector. 'I am determined to make the change beneficial not only to me but also to the people I meet along the way, but I will also be using this to my advantage. My time in China will enable me to learn Mandarin, a language growing in terms of the number of people learning and speaking it. Hopefully this will help boost my employability in the future, and when [the tourism sector] returns to normal, I will be able to make the transition back to tourism. I'd like to make the transition back to working in hotels or on ships, and whilst in Asia I can look at the opportunities out in that part of the world.'

## Remaining resilient

Lauren, Olivia, Tom and Dee's experiences show that although the pandemic has undoubtedly hit the Travel and Hospitality sector hard, there is still plenty of optimism amongst many of the young people whose early careers have been affected. Rhian, however, shared more concern with me about what the effect of the pandemic stalling young peoples' careers in Travel and Hospitality might mean for their future in the sector.

'For a time during the pandemic, the overwhelming feeling was that we had all failed even though it was out of our control. Most of us had to take low paid and temporary jobs which didn't help with feelings of failure. With easing of restrictions being discussed things feel more optimistic, but it's clear that jobs in hospitality will continue to be unstable or limited for a while yet. Many of my friends and I feel like at this point in our lives we are missing opportunities to become established in the hospitality industry. A great deal of hospitality work is more suited to being young and not having commitments, being able to pack up and move around and being able to live off a minimum wage.'

'Career wise, by now I had hoped to have been working toward a management position in hospitality as would many graduates at my age, but that doesn't feel feasible with uncertainty still surrounding the industry. For those reasons I thought it was best I diversify and adapt to find new opportunities that align with the goals I have set myself approaching my late twenties. I have joined the team at the IWA and now also run a successful small business. That is the positive thing about hospitality work, you learn many transferable skills.'

Without a doubt, having one's first steps into forging a career trampled on by a global crisis completely out of your control has been a worst nightmare for young people across career sectors in Wales. Yet the experiences of these recent Welsh graduates go to show how young people have remained resilient in the face of trying times and remain largely hopeful for the future of the Travel and Hospitality sector.

As Olivia explained: 'It is quite scary to think that something like Coronavirus, something that we wouldn't have predicted a year and a half ago, shut the industry down for so long. But because we've all adapted now so well to do things virtually, I feel like if anything like this does ever happen again, we would be better able to cope. It gives me hope that the industry will always be able to come back bigger and better.'

**Hannah Watkin** is a 22-year-old aspiring journalist and a member of *the welsh agenda* editorial group

*'Getting Started in...'* will continue as an online series for *the welsh agenda*: iwa.wales

# PLAYING OUR PART


**While the Coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly brought the worst of times in recent memory for Wales and the wider UK, it has also shown the very best efforts of Cardiff Met, recently awarded the title of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* Welsh University of the Year 2021.**

Since the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic colleagues at Cardiff Met have worked harder, faster and longer hours than ever to use their skills and influence to help others.

Over the last year our values-driven decision-making has placed the physical, financial and mental health and wellbeing of our students, staff and wider community at the heart of our response: We retained all staff on full salaries throughout 2020; we were the first university in Wales to offer rent rebates to students in our university-operated accommodation in both the first and current waves of the pandemic; and we are currently working with our valued Students' Union to address a range of student issues, including financial hardship, digital poverty, mental health and wellbeing.

**It is these collaborative and compassionate efforts that will take us forward into post-Covid recovery for our education sector, our economy and our society.**

# CHWARAE EIN RHAN


**Mae cyfnod pandemig y Coronafeirws wedi bod yn hynod anodd i Gymru a'r DU; ond mae hefyd wedi tynnu sylw at rai o ymdrechion gorau Met Caerdydd, a gafodd ei henwi'n Brifysgol y Flwyddyn yng Nghymru ar gyfer 2021 gan *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* yn ddiweddar.**

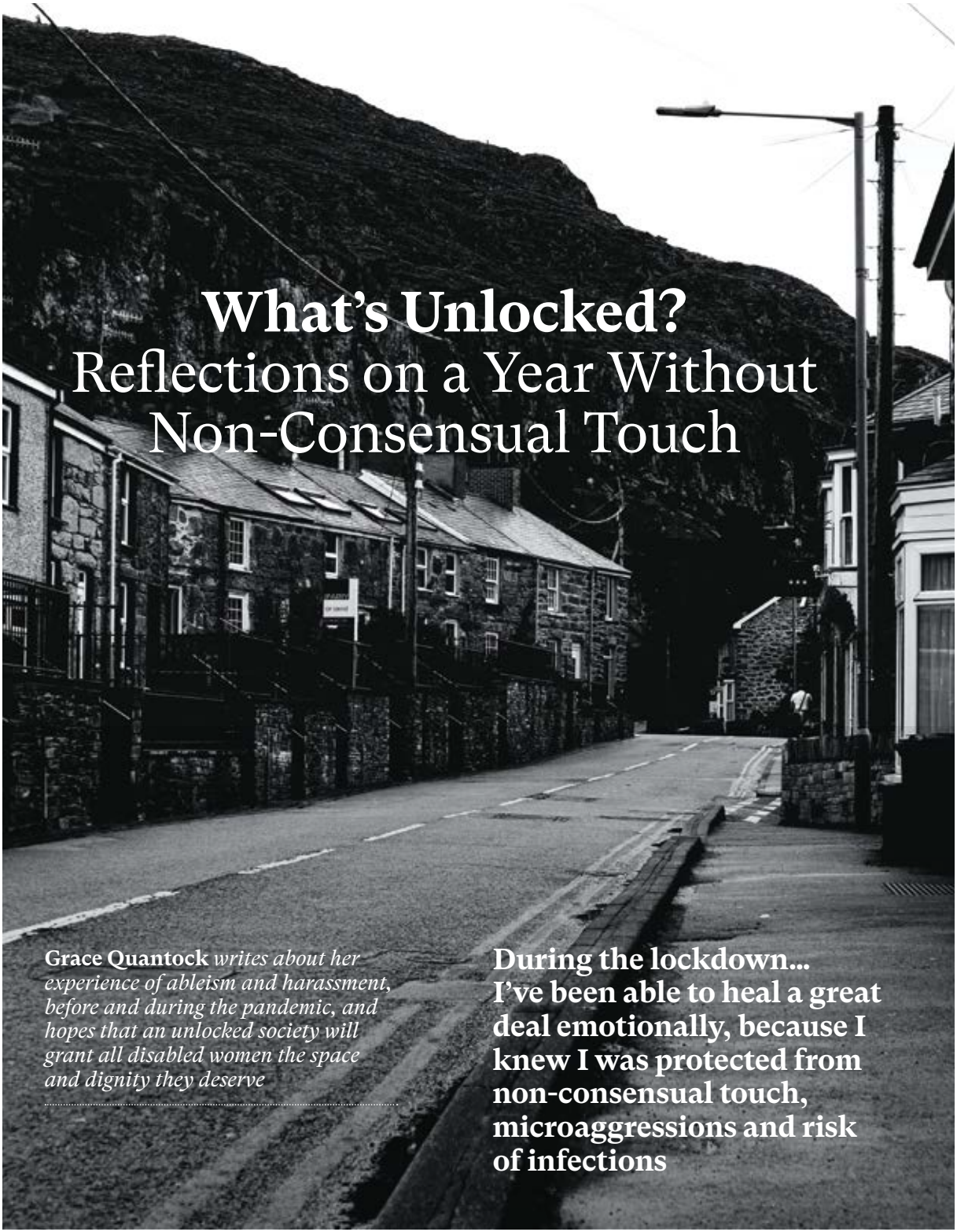
Ers dechrau pandemig y Coronafeirws, mae ein cydweithwyr ym Met Caerdydd wedi gweithio'n galetach, yn gyflymach ac am amser hirach nag erioed o'r blaen i ddefnyddio eu sgiliau a'u dylanwad i helpu eraill.

Dros y flwyddyn ddiwethaf, mae pob un o'n penderfyniadau wedi rhoi iechyd a lles corfforol, ariannol a meddyliol ein myfyrwyr, staff a'r gymuned ehangach wrth wraidd ein hymateb: gwnaethom gadw'r holl staff ar gyflogau llawn trwy gydol 2020; ni oedd y brifysgol gyntaf yng Nghymru i gynnig ad-daliadau rhent i fyfyrwyr yn ystod y don gyntaf a'r don bresennol o'r pandemig; ac rydym wrthi'n gweithio gyda'n Hundeb Myfyrwyr i fynd i'r afael ag ystod o faterion sy'n effeithio ar ein myfyrwyr, gan gynnwys caledi ariannol, tlodi digidol, iechyd meddwl a lles.

**Yr ymdrechion cydweithredol a thosturiol hyn a fydd yn symud ein sector addysg, ein heconomi a'n cymdeithas tuag at gyfnod o adfer llawn ac i fyd wedi'r pandemig.**

Cardiff Metropolitan University | Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd

**www.cardiffmet.ac.uk**



# What's Unlocked? Reflections on a Year Without Non-Consensual Touch

**Grace Quantock** *writes about her experience of ableism and harassment, before and during the pandemic, and hopes that an unlocked society will grant all disabled women the space and dignity they deserve*

**During the lockdown... I've been able to heal a great deal emotionally, because I knew I was protected from non-consensual touch, microaggressions and risk of infections**

Last week I reached the top of the hill next to my house and heard cheering. I turned around and saw a man standing on the balcony of a block of flats at the foot of the hill, clapping and cheering me. I felt uncertain – how long had this stranger been watching me? Was this the first time, or just the first time he felt moved to call out? I had felt proud of meeting my exercise goal but now my experience of what my body could do was impinged upon, my experience skewed by his gaze and appraisal.

I had been working on pushing myself further in my wheelchair for a few weeks. I've lost condition while shielding during the pandemic (there's not that much space to wheel inside my flat). But I know when I can travel again, I'll need to be able to wheel myself to the bus stop, while shopping, around the library and more, so I've been focusing on rebuilding my strength. I couldn't wheel myself up the hill next to my house before the pandemic, but now I can, and that's fantastic. Although I must tell you, it's not a hill so much as a slope – but it certainly feels like a hill halfway up.

The difficulty is, beyond my home, I'm always scared of being watched. As a disabled woman, I'm aware surveillance on benefits claimants in the UK is excessive and breaches dignity – claims made in a new report from Privacy International, a UK-based charity. The report describes excessive surveillance techniques including subjects being tailed and CCTV footage being gathered from supermarkets, gyms and banks. All the places I hope to be able to return to one day. Yet I am ambivalent as I know this will likely expose me to more unwanted gazes, unwanted touch and their unintended but very real consequences.

Reports on benefits 'fraudsters' often note them undertaking activities with 'no obvious signs of pain or discomfort'. I have been advised the DWP assessors look for signs of pain and to make sure to not mask my pain when in disability benefits assessments. As an adult, I don't generally cry out when something hurts, I've been socialised to minimise my pain and not to display it.

This surveillance, and its impacts, is something disabled people have highlighted often. There's a pressure many disabled people feel; that we must be performing either pain or inspiration in public. The author and award-winning mental health advocate Esmé Weijun Wang wrote a satirical essay from the perspective of an investigator surveilling her as a disability benefit claimant, 'Subject Was Seen Laughing' which concluded with the line, 'Finally, I was not inspired by anything she did, which is, I am given to understand, the whole point of disabled people'.

The sense of an assessing gaze is always present and there's the threat of poverty and prosecution behind its eyes. This is why I froze at the top of the hill when I realised I was being watched. Had I made my exercise look too easy? The man on his balcony couldn't see me sweating, of course. Would he call the Department of Work and Pensions fraudster tip line? He was celebrating, not accusing me, I tried to reassure myself. But still, it was an unknown man watching me exercise and that wasn't comfortable. A man on the next street would often watch me exercise too (don't these people have televisions? I can't be that interesting) and would comment on whether I was using my wheelchair or walking frame. One day he threatened to come to my house and 'massage' my legs, when my partner wasn't home. 'I know where you live,' he told me and laughed. It wasn't funny to me. I tried to make myself feel safer by getting an alarmed bolt for the doors, to use on the nights my partner was on shift. He watched me daily and made harassing comments, up until the pandemic and shielding began. 97% of young women reported being sexually harassed and 80% of women of all ages shared experience of sexual harassment in public spaces, according to a survey from UN Women UK.

This is what I fear from unlocking. Opening up into social interaction again is difficult for those of us for whom the world wasn't safe before, and isn't safe now. This has been a key risk for many Asian people through the pandemic, especially as many Asian people are currently grappling with increased racist attacks on younger people and elders.

Many people are craving social interaction and touch in lockdown but this desire isn't universal. If you are nostalgic for the times touch wasn't something you had to worry about, when you could clap someone on the shoulder and stand close in the bus stop queue, please consider those of us who always had to worry about it. Perhaps it wasn't a problem for you – rather than not a problem at all.

Before the pandemic, I'd had two serious bouts with influenza and I learned what it was like to struggle to breathe inside my own lungs. Of course, I can't know

where the infection came from, but I have suspicions both times. The first I was in my early 20s, at a conference in Cardiff. I was ushered into the 'wheelchair space' in the auditorium, a spot where seats had been removed from the row. Another woman came to sit next to me, guided by a young man holding her arm. She was bent over, flushed from coughing. She sat down and leaned into my shoulder, confiding that she felt awful, her chest infection was severe. She then proceeded to cough all over me. I got sick the week after. The second time I was in a co-working space in south Wales when an acquaintance arrived and rushed over to hug me. She explained she'd been off work due to illness and was still very ill with flu. I didn't understand why she'd have hugged me in that case. I was incredibly sick that time. I learned about sleeping sitting up, so I didn't choke on mucus, about spending hours in a steamy bathroom with the shower running, worrying about the cost and the wasted water, but desperate for some respite. I discovered that my voice changed after recovery and I needed vocal lessons to be able to speak for even a short time without my voice fading into hoarseness and then to nothingness – aphonia. Unfortunately since then, people often get too close to me, while telling me how softly spoken I am, citing this as the reason why they are in my personal space. If people had kept their distance to begin with, I might still have my voice. The level of hygiene and respect of others' space that's become public practice during the pandemic is the level I have always needed.

**The level of hygiene and respect of others' space that's become public practice during the pandemic is the level I have always needed**

It has been during the lockdown that I've been able to heal a great deal emotionally, because I knew I was protected from non-consensual touch, microaggressions and risk of infections. I am aware the lockdown exposed many others to these, locked in with abusers. But for me, the lockdown is the longest time in my adult working life that I've gone without experiencing some form of assault. Pre-pandemic it was a daily experience for many disabled women. Social distancing and shielding have spared me this.

Touch can be a vital part of physical and mental health but it can also be an issue for many people, including survivors of trauma, abuse, domestic violence, pain and people of different faiths, those with skin conditions and allergies. Pre-pandemic I would often find myself near tears when someone was chatting to me and interlacing their conversation with sympathetic dabs at my wrists, shoulders or knees (because I'm so pitiful, you see). These non-consensual touches were painful as they were directed at my most inflamed joints. Asking people to stop touching me is risky – often ignored or met with aggression.

While many are craving the social connections that are most familiar and easy for them, I fear returning to a place of countless moments of hurt. I've spoken to people who see themselves as 'good people' and crave the days where they could be 'easy' with others – you know, before #MeToo, DBS checks and health and safety assessments. I appreciate that it is uncomfortable to have to grapple with considering the impact of your behaviour rather than just focusing on your own intentions. But if the intentions are really as faultless and based in kindness as many suggest, then why are those who touch disabled people without consent putting their need to feel 'helpful' over the safety of someone like me? If contact were really 'for our benefit' then it would be offered consensually, wouldn't it? I'm tired of being other people's good deed. And as we unlock, I don't want to be locked into the old struggles again. ➤

**Grace Quantock** is a psychotherapeutic counsellor, writer and non-executive director. She is a member of *the welsh agenda* editorial group

# EGNI CO-OP

## SOLAR POWER ACROSS WALES
## YNNI'R HAUL LEDLED CYMRU

WWW.EGNI.COOP

JOIN US!
YMUNWCH Â NI!

- INVEST FROM £50
- GENERATE CLEAN ENERGY
- 4% RETURN
- TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

- BUDDSODDWCH O £50
- CYNHYRCHU YNNI GLÂN
- ADENILLION O 4%
- MYND I'R AFAEL Â NEWID HINSAWDD

# Barriers and Belonging: Supporting EU Citizens in Wales

**Lucy Luca** *gives an overview of the post-Brexit difficulties faced by EU citizens in Wales, and some of the work to support their residence and livelihoods*

The Brexit transition period is over. Things have changed for all of us, and will no doubt continue to change. There are around 80,000 EU nationals currently living in Wales, and we have certainly been feeling the effects of Brexit.

In 2019, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) was introduced: a way for EU nationals living in the UK before the end of the transition period to secure a new kind of immigration status, in order to retain their rights in the UK. Most EU nationals living here will have to apply to the scheme by 30 June 2021.

I work on the EU Citizens Rights Project (EUCR), an initiative funded by Welsh Government and delivered by EYST and Citizens Advice Cymru. The aim of the project is to support EU citizens to stay in Wales by ensuring they have access to information and support regarding their rights.

EU citizens have been feeling the effects of the hostile environment after the Brexit vote, and growing increasingly worried about their futures here. I know I have felt this personally, the uncertainty of a Brexit future: I've been told I'm 'not like the other [migrants]' because I'm bilingual, and unfairly denied opportunities.

Negative attitudes towards EU migrants have spiked in recent years and are still prevalent in Wales. People from EU backgrounds are often portrayed in a negative light and believed to be a burden to our society and economy. None of this is based in fact, as a report recently commissioned by Welsh Government and written by Alma Economics has summarised: EU migrants' contribution to Wales' economy is positive; we create jobs, contribute to the economy, and are not a 'burden' on the NHS. In fact, EU citizens are over-represented in key sectors: hospitality, construction, manufacturing, and health and social care.

It's not just the quantifiable contribution to our economy that matters, however. Wales is a diverse country, and diversity enriches our culture. Our nation prides itself in being a welcoming multicultural place. Migrants come here not only looking for work, but for a home, a community. We ought to celebrate that and show each other that Wales won't be divided by negative attitudes or xenophobia.

**Negative attitudes towards EU migrants have spiked in recent years and are still prevalent in Wales**

This is needed now more than ever, as EU nationals have been affected both by Brexit and the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. As part of our work on the EU Citizens Rights Project, we have seen a lot of people struggle and encounter barrier upon barrier, all exacerbated by the pandemic. People have lost their jobs, lost their homes, and struggled to find support due to language barriers, financial issues, service closures and, at times, a lack of awareness among service providers on what support is available.

In early 2020, embassies shut their doors due to the pandemic. This led to a lack of access to consular services, which were already in high demand pre-pandemic as many people had applied for passports because of uncertainty about travel post-Brexit. Even now, consulates are offering a reduced service and waiting times are high. For people without valid ID, this is an incredibly difficult situation, and is an issue for many who have effectively had their lives put on hold. Similarly, due to the HMRC offering a reduced service, EU citizens who arrived in the UK in 2020 were not able to obtain a National Insurance Number.

We often think of EU migrants as people who have arrived in the UK after 2004 when the UK's labour market was opened to people from EU countries. But they don't represent all EU citizens living in Wales: there are older citizens who moved here many years before.

In 2019, at an in-person event we organised as part of the EUCR project, I met some members of the Italian community in Llanelli, who told me they had lived here all their lives and identified as Welsh as well, even though their passports were Italian. They had Welsh accents, their children had learnt Welsh in school and they had always been a part of their local community, their national identity shaped not only by their origins but by the place where they had lived their


**It's not just the quantifiable contribution to our economy that matters, however. Wales is a diverse country, and diversity enriches our culture**

**The application for the EUSS is all online, and once someone is awarded settled or pre-settled status, the only way to prove their immigration status under the scheme is digitally**

whole lives. They were surprised that they had to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme, as they had assumed this was only for people who had come here more recently. But if they weren't British citizens and did not have Indefinite Leave to Remain, they would have to apply to the EUSS. They found out about this through attending our event.

But as a result of the pandemic, we had to put a stop to these in-person events. In the past year, everything has moved online. And while for many online services and events may be more accessible, the harsh reality is that for digitally excluded people this is a huge loss. The application for the EUSS is all online, and once someone is awarded settled or pre-settled status, the only way to prove their immigration status under the scheme is digitally, as people will not receive physical proof of their status. The intent was to make this application fast and straightforward, which it can be, for digitally literate people.

Unfortunately, many vulnerable people have been struggling with this barrier: older people who are not digitally literate, isolated people and those without reliable internet connection, disabled people who need in-person support and accessibility accommodations. According to a report by the Migration Observatory, these 'hard to reach' people are at risk of 'falling through the cracks', and not being able to secure their rights in time.

As part of the EUCR Project, we have been working hard to ensure we can reach and offer support to everyone, especially those who need it most. We have engaged with local communities and organisations, published information campaigns through social media and traditional media (including adverts on radio and in local publications), and organised art competitions for young people from EU backgrounds to take part in and celebrate their heritage.

We aren't the only service supporting EU citizens in Wales, however, and we have worked closely with other organisations to improve our outreach. We are currently hosting training sessions aimed at public facing frontline staff, to ensure they are aware of how to best support clients from an EU background.

As the deadline to apply for the EUSS draws ever closer, we call upon everyone who loves our multicultural Wales to stand with EU citizens and show them that they are welcome here. My vision as a young EU migrant has always been one of harmony and belonging. I will not give up this hope, even as I, like many others, have faced discrimination and negativity. I wholly believe that these negative attitudes towards EU citizens do not represent the views of most people in Wales. Let's make our voices heard: we are not outsiders, we are a part of Wales, we belong.

**Lucy Luca** is a 25 year old Romanian person living in Wales and working for EYST as EUCR Project Lead and Homework Club Coordinator. She is a human rights activist, advocating for equality from an intersectional perspective, and sharing her own lived experience as a multiply marginalised person

*Organisations in Wales that support EU nationals can be found at www.eusswales.com*

ColegauCymru
CollegesWales

# ETHOLIAD SENEDD 2021

# SENEDD ELECTION 2021

**Rydym yn gofyn i Lywodraeth nesaf Cymru sicrhau bod addysg ôl-16 a dysgu gydol oes yng Nghymru yn addas at y diben. Rydym am alluogi pob dysgwr i gyflawni ei botensial ac i allu cyfrannu'n werthfawr i'r economi a'n cymunedau.**

Mae ein ceisiadau yn cynnwys:

- Ehangu hawliau ac ymgysylltiad dinasyddion ag addysg
- System gydlynol a chysylltiedig sy'n cynnwys cymwysterau hyblyg a gwerthfawr
- Hawl dysgwyr a staff i lesiant
- Gwell ymgysylltiad sgiliau a busnes
- Gweithlu Addysg Bellach sy'n addas i'r dyfodol

**Darganfyddwch fwy:** colegau.cymru

**We're asking the next Welsh Government to ensure that post-16 education and lifelong learning in Wales is fit for purpose. We want to enable all learners to achieve their potential and to be able to provide a valuable contribution to the economy and our communities.**

Our asks include:

- Expanding citizens' entitlement and engagement with education
- A coherent and connected system that includes flexible and valued qualifications
- Entitlement to wellbeing for learners and staff
- Better skills and business engagement
- An FE workforce fit for the future

**Find out more:** colleges.wales

@colegaucymru

GWELL DROS **GOLEGAU**
GWELL DROS **GYMRU**

BETTER FOR **COLLEGES**
BETTER FOR **WALES**

# **Strength in love** A community movement for Wales

**Selwyn Williams**, *one of the brains behind Community Movement Cymru, speaks to* **Noreen Blanluet** *about community development, the foundational economy, and the importance of love*

I was born and brought up in the Conwy Valley. I had quite a varied career, as a farm and builders' labourer, I did biology degrees, an economics masters... I worked as a research scientist, as a school teacher, at the 'Normal College' which was a teacher training college, and then in the University in Bangor. I taught economics in the University, and a colleague and I managed to get some community development courses going, despite the cuts across the organisation; mainly because we came across students who had done degrees with us and who had ended up doing community development type jobs, and who were looking for the background and support. So we developed a number of courses.

For many years I've been talking about community development, and teaching about it, and researching it, and, especially since retiring, I've been also doing it hands on in my local area. I'm involved with several community development organisations and social enterprises. For example, in my own village of Llan Ffestiniog: the hotel was about to close so we got together as a community and bought Y Pengwern, and have been running that successfully for the last ten years. Since Covid-19 times things have been difficult of course, as it has for most people in the hospitality sector.

Y Pengwern is part of a network of local organisations though, and during Covid we diverted much of our work to directly help with the problems that were arising. We were able to adapt so very, very quickly

> The rough plan is, we want to change the world entirely. But when it comes to the detail, we will figure this out together as a movement

because we knew our community, and between us we had enough people on the ground: we could respond to all sorts of things like collecting prescriptions, making sure that people had the practical help that they needed, that they had someone around if they needed some extra help, all that sort of stuff.

There are fifteen social enterprises in Bro Ffestiniog, which is meaningful for a relatively small area with a population of 8,000 people. We've succeeded in getting those social enterprises to work together; it took some time to persuade them to do that, but once we started there were huge advantages. For example we now share some of the accountancy work as a collective. Also, it's notoriously difficult to get good cooks and keep them in our hotels and restaurants. To be fair, it's hard work with unsociable hours, and you can't do it with one cook, you need two; but it's difficult enough to find enough money to hire one full time for them to stay! But as Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, the network of enterprises in the area, we have two hotels, four cafes, and two restaurants, which means between us we were able to hire a peripatetic cook.

We are also working with private sector anchor organisations: they're not social enterprises, but in many respects they share a lot of the same values because they are such a part of the local area. Sure, they are organisations that need to make a private profit, but they're much more than that because they have a connection to the community. So increasingly we're getting the smaller local private sector organisations to work together, along with the local social enterprises.

Three or four years ago, we ran an economic analysis of the collective effect of the social enterprises in the area. At the time, we were employing 160 people across all of them, which for our area is significant. And when you look at the income and outgoings of these organisations, a high percentage of our income came from trading, and a high percentage of this actually stayed and circulated within the local area; which is really important. So we're combining community development and foundational economy principles in practice, really, and that's part of the model.

There are many advantages to working together, including sharing resources, and the Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog network has been really effective in that respect; but it's a lot more than that. It's become a catalyst for change, for changing things which are important for the community. As part of that, we've established BROcast, which is a digital broadcasting service. That's really important because for most community development organisations, actually communicating with the community, getting them to participate in things can be difficult. But through this digital broadcasting, we are really carrying the community with us. I think we are slowly bringing about a sort of cultural change in the community, more and more towards 'we can do things for ourselves'. Or if we can't do things ourselves, the collective voice of the community can actually make other people do things that should be done *for* us, and *with* us.

> To be honest with you, I'm a bit scared of the whole thing, because... it's a good idea but who am I to try and facilitate such a thing?

One example: I still do some teaching, and we had an extramural class I used to go and teach in Trefnant in Denbighshire; we had to stop those classes because of Covid. The participants are all people who are retired or close to retirement age, but they got together and started Zooming, and so the class has gone online. But rather than the 25 people we had before now, they've invited others along and there are about 65 in the group now! So the lesson is we can do it ourselves; there's so much now that can be done independently of large institutions, and the whole bureaucracy that goes with it.

The more we work in this way, being catalysts and trying to facilitate more cooperation between people and between local organisations, the more stark the contrast appears with the way in which governments, local and central, actually work. Communities don't think in separate silos, whereas the public sector still very much does. I know there's a lot of goodwill and a lot of feeling within the Welsh Government that they want to get away from silo working, but it's extremely difficult to do that on a large scale, whereas on a community scale it is a natural way to operate.

Basically what we've got with Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog is a model that develops the community in a way which

integrates the environmental, economic, social, and cultural side of things – all of it. We started with one social enterprise, then a network of social enterprises within our area, and then we extended our work to some of the other ex-slate valleys in northwest Wales: the Ogwen Valley, the Nantlle Valley. Then some people from Anglesey came over to see what we're doing, and as a result of that they've adapted the model and set up Bro Môn, which is along similar lines.

Communities Trust (BCT). They have also been talking to people all over Wales and putting together a community manifesto to try and influence the political parties leading up to the elections. We'd published something on modern manifestos and movements as part of a contribution to a conference the Wales Co-operative Centre had run, so we'd also been thinking along these lines. It seemed to be a natural thing for BCT and us to work together.

## We've got to spread community, spread love, but not in some sort of wishy washy way, in a tangible way

So really, the natural succession of that is, well, can we do that on a Welsh level? That is what has spurred us on to this whole idea of establishing Community Movement Cymru. It is quite organic and very much from the ground up. Pre-Covid we spent quite a lot of time going all over Wales, meeting other communities, because we thought the model that we had was something that could be adapted elsewhere. The more we met and talked to people, the more we realised that there are plenty of other community organisations that are pretty isolated in many respects, because the way government works doesn't really help cooperation between them, and there isn't anything that does. These other communities have been saying similar things to us. And to be honest with you, we've been waiting for somebody else to take the initiative for quite some time... And nobody else seemed to be doing it. So in the end we thought, we'll have a go ourselves.

It's being led initially by Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, but we see our role as facilitating the setting up of the whole thing; once it's set up, we would like to be part of it, but certainly just a part of something which is greater than us, that will have its own momentum. The rough plan is, we want to change the world entirely. But when it comes to the detail, we will figure this out together as a movement.

To be honest with you, I'm a bit scared of the whole thing, because you know, it's a good idea but who am I to try and facilitate such a thing? But obviously, talking to other people, as I said there is support – we knew that. We've also got good links with Building

One conclusion we've come to, both in Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog and in BCT – is that it's all well and good having a manifesto on paper, but how do you get people to actually listen? Over the years I've known so many community development reports, and manifestos, and what have you... which have been really good, but that have sat on shelves subsequently. You need more than good ideas, you need power to actually get those ideas implemented and for change to occur.

So we thought, we need a community movement, that would have some sort of power to influence local and central government. That's not the only aim of Community Movement Cymru of course, but one of the significant things is to actually not have to go to meetings with local government and central government powerless, with nothing but a plea for charity and for common sense. We can go with a bit of collective strength, between all of us.

In the end my biggest criticism of a lot of Marxists is that they don't realise the power of love. That's the biggest weapon we've got, in a way; we've got to spread community, spread love, but not in some sort of wishy washy way, in a tangible way – you know what I mean. So with a bit of love, come and see us, yeah? ➤

**Selwyn Williams** is director of several community enterprises, including Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog.
**Noreen Blanluet** is Director of CoProduction Network Wales and a member of *the welsh agenda's* editorial group

# Aelodau Glas Cymru: Croeso i Ddosbarth 2021

Fel cwmni nid er elw, mae Dŵr Cymru yn unigryw yn y sector cyfleustodau, am fod pob gwerged yn cael ei ddefnyddio er budd cwsmeriaid. Sefydlwyd ein rhiant-gwmni, Glas Cymru, at ddibenion perchenogi, ariannu a rheoli Dŵr Cymru.

Nid oes unrhyw gyfranddeiliaid gennym. Rydyn ni'n dibynnu ar Aelodau annibynnol, sy'n cyflawni rôl llywodraethu allweddol wrth ddal Bwrdd y Cyfarwyddwyr i gyfrif mewn perthynas â stiwardiaeth ein hasedau a darparu gwasanaeth cyhoeddus hanfodol. Maent yn cyflawni rôl debyg i gyfranddalwyr mewn cwmnïau preifat eraill, ond nid oes ganddynt fudd ariannol.

Penodwyd ein haelodau newydd ar gyfer 2020 yn ddiweddar – gan ychwanegu at y cyfoeth o wybodaeth ac arbenigedd y gallwn fanteisio arno eisoes trwy ein Haelodau cyfredol. Byddant yn cyfarfod o leiaf ddwywaith y flwyddyn ac yn clywed gennym yn rheolaidd ynglŷn â'r gwaith rydym yn ei wneud, fel y gallant sicrhau bod Bwrdd y Cyfarwyddwyr yn rhedeg y cwmni fel y dylai.

Rydym bob amser yn awyddus i glywed gan bobl sydd am fod yn Aelodau – ac yn arbennig o awyddus i glywed gan bobl o bob cefndir a phrofiad, fel ein bod yn adlewyrchu'r cymunedau rydym yn eu gwasanaethu.

Rydyn ni'n agor mynegiannau o ddiddordeb ar gyfer carfan eleni yn gynt nag erioed – fel y gallwn gysylltu pan fyddwn ni'n dechrau recriwtio eto.

Os oes diddordeb gennych, anfonwch neges e-bost at Gwnsler Cyffredinol ac Ysgrifennydd y Cwmni, Nicola Williams, yn **company.secretary@dwrcymru.com** neu ewch i'n gwefan **dwrcymru.com/aelodaeth** i gael rhagor o fanylion.

# Glas Cymru Members: Welcome to the Class of 2021

Welsh Water is unique in the utilities sector as a not for profit company, where all surpluses are applied for the benefit of customers. Our parent company, Glas Cymru, is a company formed for the purpose of owning, financing and managing Welsh Water.

We have no shareholders. We rely on independent Members, who fulfil a key governance role in holding our Board of Directors to account for the stewardship of our assets and for providing an essential public service. They fulfil a similar role to shareholders in other private companies, but don't hold a financial interest.

We recently appointed our new Members for 2020 – adding to the wealth of knowledge and expertise we already benefit from with our existing Members. They will meet at least twice a year and hear from us regularly about the work we do, so they can make sure our Board of Directors are running the company as they should.

We are always looking to hear from people who want to serve as Members – and particularly keen to hear from people from all backgrounds and experiences, so we reflect all the communities we serve.

We are opening up expressions of interest for this year's intake earlier than ever – so we can get in touch when we start recruiting again.

If you are interested, drop an email to our General Counsel and Company Secretary, Nicola Williams, on **company.secretary@dwrcymru.com** or visit our website **dwrcymru.com/members** to find out more.

glas
Glas Cymru Holdings Cyf

# Decarbonising social housing

*One of the few opportunities for significant investment in the Welsh economy over the next few years is likely to be in the social housing sector. Preparations are being made to decarbonise homes to reduce carbon emissions and cut energy bills. It could involve billions of pounds of investment over the next decade. Emerging plans are already ambitious, and rightly so. But we could have an even greater impact for communities and local economies if we considered energy generation and local ownership models at the same time, argue* **Derek Walker** *and* **Professor Adrian Webb**

The scale of the social housing retrofit programme is likely to be significant. The umbrella body for Welsh housing associations, Community Housing Cymru, is calling for a ten-year, £4 billion stimulus package made up of a mix of public and private funding to retrofit social homes by 2030. There is political support for taking forward this programme, if not a clear idea yet about where the money might come from. Even if that level of budget cannot be found, there is a strong likelihood that a retrofit programme will happen at scale and begin early in the next Senedd term. It would be a huge investment in communities across Wales. If homeowners in the private sector were incentivised to retrofit their homes too, the investment could be much larger.

The benefits of taking forward this programme enjoy widespread support, for understandable reasons. Residential housing is responsible for 27% of all UK carbon emissions (if emissions from consumed electricity are included), and social homes contributes around 10% of the contribution from housing. Decarbonising social housing is therefore critical to cutting carbon emissions.

According to Community Housing Cymru[1], Wales has some of the oldest and least thermally efficient housing stock in the UK and Europe. 32% of the Welsh housing stock was built before 1919. 155,000 households still face fuel poverty in Wales. CHC believes that upgrading homes could lead to 39% fewer hospital admissions for circulation and lung conditions. They go on to estimate that refurbishing half of housing association homes in Wales, over the next term of government, would support over 12,000 jobs, 3,000 training opportunities and create £2.5 billion in economic output.

1 CHC's Manifesto for the Senedd Elections 2021, *'Home – Creating a Better Wales for All.'*

An important question is how to make this investment happen in a way that maximises the social return. This will be crucial at a time when there are likely to be few opportunities for large scale investment programmes due to the state of public finances in the post pandemic era.

Firstly, we need to make sure this programme creates jobs in Wales and that much of the work is delivered by Welsh based businesses. That way any profits stay in Wales and we develop a skilled workforce, who can hopefully go onto do similar work in the private sector or grow their businesses to operate outside Wales. Housing associations and local councils may be able to develop their capacity to do some of the work themselves, but they are almost certainly going to need to contract out a large part of the work. Work needs to be undertaken to understand the current capability of Welsh businesses and help given to prepare them for the opportunities. Otherwise, the contracts could be lost to large businesses that have no long-term commitment to Wales.

Secondly, we should consider how retrofitting might be delivered in a collaborative way. The Well-being of Future Generations Act encourages integration and collaboration. Already twenty-six Welsh housing associations are working together with academic and industry partners to create the tools required to roll out the large-scale decarbonisation of homes across Wales. This is a fantastic start. Housing associations do not just work in separate geographical areas. They often own properties in the same local area, so it makes sense they work together.

However, where local councils have retained their housing stock, there will be properties that need to be retrofitted too. If you add in other public bodies, their buildings and the willing private sector, you have the opportunity for retrofit initiatives that work together on a place basis, rather than an organisational basis. Working together could save money, support local supply chains and result in a programme that minimises disruption for local people.

Local energy generation (solar, wind, air and ground source – even from redundant coal mines in a few cases) could also be considered so that the energy supply is renewable and if possible, locally owned. Some housing associations are already looking at this.

One scheme will oversee the retrofitting of 650 homes in Swansea in partnership with a renewable energy tech and service supplier. As part of the project, solar panels fitted to most of the homes will be used to charge individual or communal batteries that will be installed in all homes. This means that renewable energy can be stored for subsequent use by the entire community and that those whose homes do not receive as much sunlight will not be disadvantaged. It is anticipated that the project will see the community generate as much as 60% of its electricity requirements, reducing bills as well as carbon emissions by as much as 350 tonnes per year.

Heat network projects could play a role in helping reduce carbon emissions and reduce bills if partnerships were developed with local businesses. Heat networks are already planned in Cardiff and Bridgend, where excess heat produced at industrial sites will be taken to public buildings in the area in the initial phase. Also known as district heating, the Cardiff heat network project will use underground pipes to transport waste heat from the Viridor Energy Recovery Facility to buildings in and around the Cardiff Bay area. In Bridgend, a new system of distribution pipes will take excess heat from a combined heat and power plant and thermal storage facility. Could similar schemes be developed that heated homes?

And finally, we need to consider how local people are involved. This retrofit programme is going to be disruptive for tenants so they need to be on board to understand why it is happening and how they might benefit. If residents are involved, they will be able to have a say about when the work takes place and how. This will make accessing properties easier. They can also be informed about how to use any new tech-smart thermostats and intelligent heating controls – to maximise energy savings. Residents could run the energy generation schemes as community co-operatives that operate on behalf of local people.

The retrofit programme perhaps provides an opportunity to go a small way in addressing the feelings of being left behind that were expressed during the Brexit referendum. Inequalities have exacerbated since then. In part the Brexit movement reflected the importance of agency and the lack of influence at the individual and community level. The retrofit programme is an opportunity to give 'power to the people', literally, and for residents to take back some control about what happens in their locality.

It would be a great step forward if all the parties committed in their 2021 Welsh elections manifestos to community ownership of local energy generation, storage and distribution systems and to promote citizens' jury discussions – to include tenants of social and private housing, local public bodies and the private sector – on the form that such community ownership systems could take and best be developed.

The retrofit programme could give a huge boost to the Welsh economy post Covid-19. If it were conceived as both a social and an economic programme of renewal, it could do so in ways that give economic opportunity as well as agency to local communities. ➤

---

**Derek Walker** is Chief Executive at the Wales Cooperative Centre. **Adrian Webb** is a former University Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Social Policy, currently Chair of the Big Lottery Fund, Wales and a Non-Executive Director of the UK Board

**Further reading:**

*Better Homes, Better Wales, Better World: Decarbonising existing homes in Wales* (July 2019)

*Community Energy State of the Sector Report 2019*

*Community energy – benefits and barriers: A comparative literature review of Community Energy in the UK, Germany and the USA, the benefits it provides for society and the barriers it faces,* Vasco Brummer (2018)

*Re-energising Wales*, IWA, 2019

Linc

"We are a Housing Association and Care provider. It's what we do, but is only the beginning of our story. We believe in creating the right environment for people to flourish." **Scott Sanders - CEO**

The homes we build and the natural environments that support them will contribute to improving people's quality of life, and as a care provider we will continue to work with Local Authorities and the NHS to address the needs of an ageing population and a health service under more pressure than ever before.

## Our Recent Completed Developments

Maesyffynnon – The extra care apartments in Rhondda Cynon Taf provide state-of-the-art apartments for older people. They were built using an innovative modular construction technique, where multiple high quality, energy efficient modules, were manufactured in a factory before being joined together on-site.

Passivhaus – The first large scale Passivhaus development in Wales, situated on the former site of Caerphilly Magistrate Court on Mountain Road. This development comprises 34 flats and 4 mid-terrace houses. The development is designed around improving the health of all occupants and reducing fuel poverty.

## Sunnyside Wellness Village - Bridgend

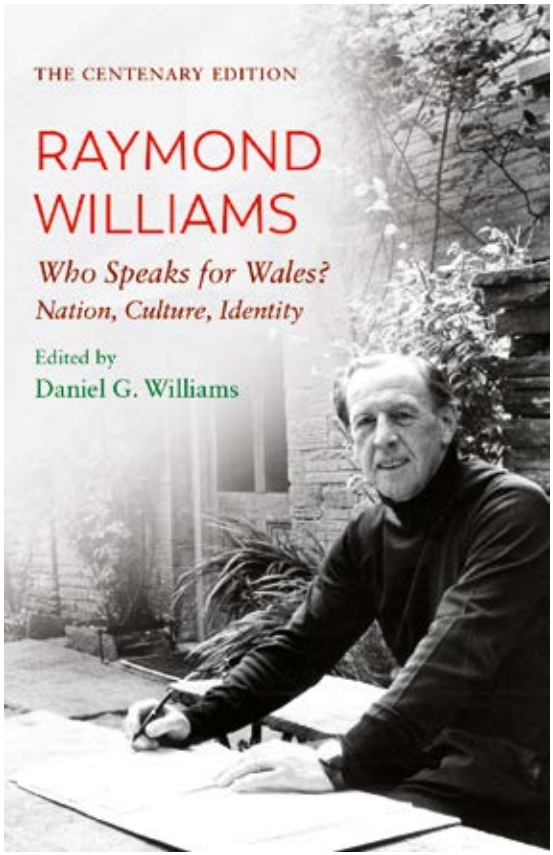
This unique mixed-use development combines housing and health, consisting of homes, a health-care centre, landscaping and infrastructure. The development is being designed to ensure innovative approaches are used to create a healthy and happy community.

Continue to follow our story at www.linc-cymru.co.uk or via twitter @Linc_Cymru

CULTURE

# Minority nationalism, decolonisation and the relevance of Raymond Williams

*This year marks the centenary of the birth of Raymond Williams, the cultural critic and novelist who was one of Wales' foremost writers and thinkers.* **Daniel G. Williams** *has edited a new edition of his collection of Williams' essays* Who Speaks for Wales? *that first appeared in 2003. Here, he offers a preview of the new edition's 'Afterword' and makes the case for Williams' continuing relevance in the age of Black Lives Matter and the decolonisation of history, culture and the curriculum*




In the year 1985 Raymond Williams noted that the 'least known fact, by others, about contemporary Welsh culture and politics is that there are harsh and persistent quarrels within a dimension which is seen from outside as unusually singular'. Little had changed by 1995 when Fred Inglis, in the first biography to appear since Williams' death in 1988, lumped Dai Smith, Kim Howells, Dafydd Elis-Thomas and Gwyn A. Williams as being 'in Plaid Cymru' with its 'sometimes comic, always serious politics'.

Unfortunately, English commentators on Williams' writing remain unwilling to engage with Welsh culture in anything but the most superficial terms. According to Jim McGuigan, in the most recent volume-length study of Williams, the 'Welsh Williamsites' (he names Dai Smith, Hywel Dix and me) contribute to 'a Welsh network dedicated to revaluing Williams' fiction and, indeed, treating him as a latter-day Bard'. He warns us that 'even at its most self-consciously Welsh' Williams'

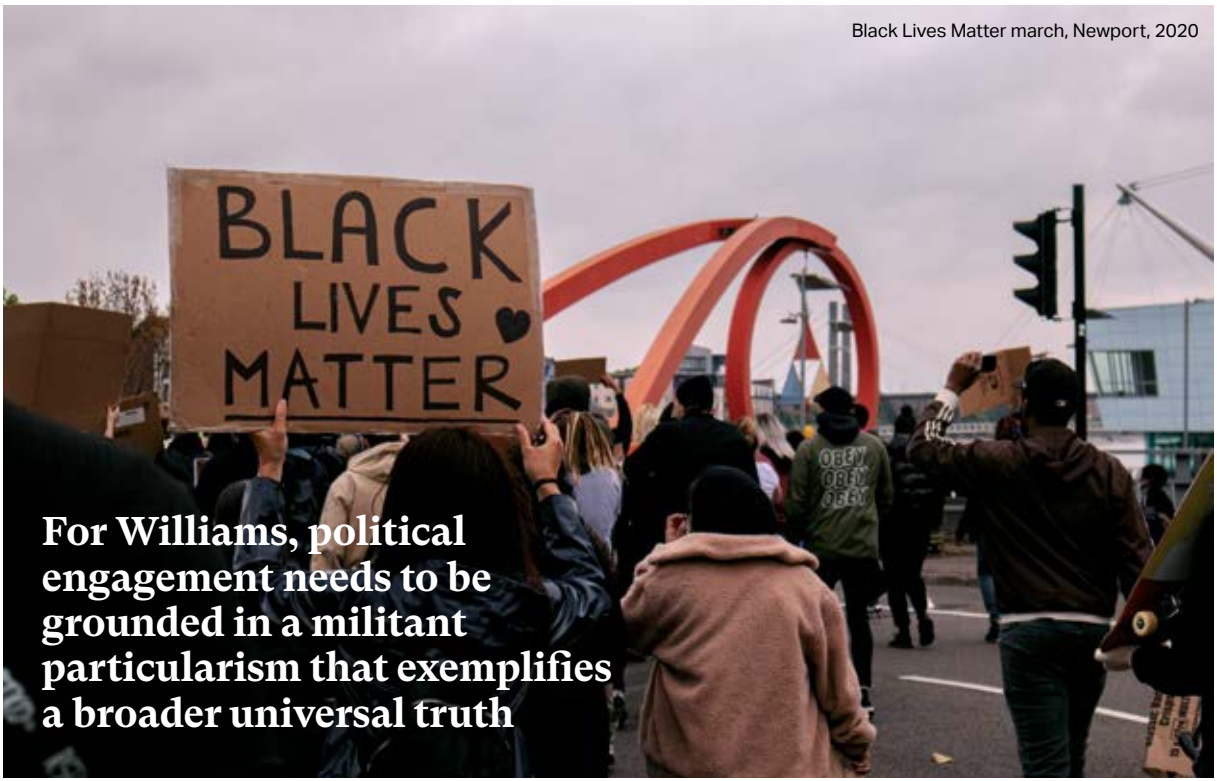
**English commentators on Williams' writing remain unwilling to engage with Welsh culture in anything but the most superficial terms**

position was 'never that of a Little Walesism'. I know of no one who has suggested that Williams was a 'Bard' (other than Englishman Anthony Barnett's reference to his 'radical Eisteddfodism' in 1976), and the phrase 'Little Walesism' is usually used only by those wholly blind to their own 'Little Englandism'.

Does this insufficient engagement with Wales matter? What significance, if any, should we give Raymond Williams' Welsh background? Is Williams' upbringing in the Welsh border country of any relevance to our reading of his writings beyond the novels? The new, expanded edition of *Who Speaks for Wales?* (published by the University of Wales Press in May), is informed by the belief that the occlusion of Williams' Welsh identity leads to fundamentally misleading accounts of his work. Inglis and McGuigan require no rebuttal for an informed readership, as they damn themselves with the homogenising superficiality of their analyses. More damaging and influential is the case made by Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and others that Williams experienced 'discomfort' when faced with 'those who were not settled, not truly English, not part of the nation', and embraced an essentialist view of the nation that was compatible with the overt racism of Enoch Powell.

Gilroy's influential and harsh critique in his seminal *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) derived from two aspects of Raymond Williams' analysis of national identity in his 1983 book *Towards 2000* (to which I return in greater detail in the new Afterword to *Who Speaks for Wales?* and on which I have previously written in *the welsh agenda* – see issue 60). The first was the fact that Williams based his discussion of race on a scenario in which (as described in *Towards 2000*) 'an English working man (English in the terms of sustained modern integration) protests at the arrival or presence of "foreigners" or "aliens" and now goes on to specify them as "blacks"'. On this evidence, Gilroy alleges that 'Williams does not appear to recognise black as anything other than a subordinate moment in an ideology of racial supremacy'. The second aspect of Williams' analysis that Gilroy found troubling was that though Williams recognised the danger of the 'jump from resentment of unfamiliar neighbours to the ideological specifications of "race" and "superiority"', his focus was not on the world view of 'the English working man' but on the 'ideology' of the 'standard liberal reply' to his protestations: 'they are as British as you are'. The British liberal's reply, for Williams, was 'to reduce social identity to formal legal definitions, at the level of the state', and was to ignore the power and legitimacy of people's 'communal identities'. For Gilroy, this focus on the 'reply' amounted to a 'refusal' on Williams' part 'to examine the concept of racism'. 'How long is long enough to become a genuine Brit?' he asked.

Gilroy's question only makes sense if Williams' self-defined 'Welsh-European' identity is ignored, if we pay no attention to his claim that he never considered himself 'British' (a 'term not used much except by people one distrusted') and that – within a 'Yookayan' context – Williams was a member of a minority himself. Even if we limit our analysis to *Towards 2000*, Williams is explicit in stating that 'a merely legal definition of what it is to be "British" [...] is necessary and important, correctly asserting the need for equality and protection within the laws'. Furthermore, Williams located the 'real grounds of hope' in the experience of the 'Welsh mining valleys, into which in the nineteenth century there was massive and diverse immigration, but in which, after two generations, there were some of the most remarkably solid and mutually loyal communities of which we have record'. Williams' emphasis is on the diversity of 'lived and formed identities either of a settled kind, if available, or of a possible kind, where dislocation and relocation require new formation' on the one hand, and the rejection of 'the alienated superficialities of "the nation"' on the other. Indeed, the advantage of a minority nationalist position for Williams is that it




Black Lives Matter march, Newport, 2020

**For Williams, political engagement needs to be grounded in a militant particularism that exemplifies a broader universal truth**

allows for an insight and emphasis on 'the artificialities of the settled "commonsense" nation-state', allowing the critic to shoot 'them to pieces from history and from social theory'. Williams is not endorsing Enoch Powell, but draws on Jean-Paul Sartre's point when 'writing about the Basques' that 'we're dealing with an entirely different' kind of nationalism 'when it is a case of the marginal or absorbed or oppressed nationality, the sense of difference from some particular dominant large nation-state or of course empire'.

What Williams' writings on Wales should help us to see is that the process of 'decolonising' Britishness means that we not only follow Edward Said, Gauri Viswanathan, Paul Gilroy and others in demystifying the myth of cultural homogeneity, cohesion and insularity (a discourse that equates 'Britishness' with the 'Englishness' of the 'home counties' as Williams noted) by making Empire and its legacies central to 'national' history. It also requires us to demystify forms of British universalism. Jed Esty usefully identifies the reasons for why this pincer manoeuvre is required:

> In colonial modernity, Englishness represented both an insular wellspring of distinctive values and an almost blank Arnoldian metacultural capacity to absorb and govern the cultures of its periphery. The English difference was, then, both a cultural essence and an essential culturelessness.

That is, decolonisation involves an insistence on the multicultural history and reality of the British against monocultural myths, *and* a critique of the ways in which Britishness poses as the realm of the universal. Esty sees this dual process exemplified in the work of Stuart Hall whose work combines multicultural and multi-ethnic studies of England that challenge monolithic myths of national identity, while also recognising the importance of addressing 'a conception of "Englishness" which because it is hegemonic does not really represent itself as an ethnicity at all'.

It is this latter project that Raymond Williams was contributing to in turning his attention to the 'standard liberal reply' that 'they are as British as you are'. On the surface, the phrase expresses a desire that the majority

should be tolerant enough to allow minorities to transcend their particularities in embracing a capacious Britishness. What this seemingly tolerant gesture forecloses is the possibility of a distinctive universalism rooted in the experiences of minorities; a 'Welsh' or 'black' universalism, say, that refuses to be obliterated by 'Britishness' but maintains its right to particularity. The liberal assimilationist reply rightly rejects racist intolerance, but hides a fear that minorities may not wish to part with their particularities, may not wish to assimilate into a pre-defined Britishness, but would rather forge a distinctive universalism of their own. This form of the universal would not require the erasure of its particularism by the black, or Jewish, or Welsh-language community. It would require an embrace of what the philosopher Slavoj Žižek had described as the 'determinate negation' which bears the mark of what it negates. Thus, while the 'standard liberal reply' to the particularism of a movement such as Black Lives Matter would be to emphasise that 'all lives matter' (a variant of 'they are as British as you are' in Williams' scenario), a more far-reaching response would acknowledge

> that while this principle is true, in today's concrete constellation, the violence to which blacks are exposed is not just a neutral case of social violence but its privileged, exemplary case – to reduce it to a particular case of violence means to ignore the true nature of violence in our society. This is the Hegelian 'concrete universality': we can formulate the universal dimension only if we focus on a particular case which exemplifies it.

This analysis by Žižek is very close to what Raymond Williams meant when he spoke of 'militant particularism' and 'real universalities'. In this crucial dimension of his thought, the logic of movements based on class, ethnicity and nation are structurally related. Writing in 1981 of the 'unique and extraordinary character of working-class self-organisation', Williams noted that

> It has tried to connect particular struggles to a general struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is at

> first sight the extraordinary claim that defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest.

The movement of this argument, from the particular to the general, is repeated in the attempt at seeking a response to the 'intolerable confusion' regarding nationhood and identity. Little, notes Williams, is to be gained from the 'familiar intellectual jump to this or that universality.' But this does not entail a rejection of the universal:

> The real 'universalities'– large forms which do succeed in prevailing over more local forms – are not to be found in intellectual systems but in actual and organised relationships which achieve, over the relevant areas, effective power. This is the way to look at the urgent modern problem of the 'nation'. It is ineffective and even trivial to come back from a demonstration of the universality of the human species and expect people, from that fact alone, to reorganise their lives by treating all their immediate and actual groupings and relationships as secondary. For the species meaning, and the valuation of human life which it carries, is in practice only realised, indeed perhaps in theory only realisable, through significant relationships in which other human beings are present. No abstraction on its own will carry this most specific of all senses. To extend it and to generalise it, in sufficiently practical ways, involves the making of new relationships which are in significant continuity – and not in contradiction – with the more limited relationships through which people do and must live.

For the solidarities forged in a particular struggle to become meaningfully practical requires their extension and generalisation into a new form of society. For Williams, political engagement needs to be grounded in a militant particularism that exemplifies a broader universal truth. The Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter movements in the United States draw on the specificity of the African American experience to articulate a programme of universal justice; the most far-seeing strains of the feminist and ecological movements project their particularisms forwards into wide-ranging reconstructions of society with the aim of benefitting all. This process – where the particular crises of a community 'under stress, under attack' becomes extended into a 'political movement' that addresses 'the total relations of a society' – is identified by Raymond Williams as also being 'a most significant part of the history of Wales'. To the envisaged 'federation' of movements mobilising particular energies for universal ends he adds the 'radical nationalist forces' of 'Irish or Scots or Welsh or Breton or Basque'.

Readers of *Who Speaks for Wales?* will notice that the essays in it typically follow a trajectory from the particular to the general. In concluding his thoughts on Welsh nationalism in the opening, titular, essay Williams notes that 'challenging, personally and publicly, and from wherever we are, the immense imperatives which are not only flattening but preventing the realities of identity and culture' is a cause 'better than national and more than international, for in its varying forms it is a very general human and social movement'. The 'Welsh essays' represent Williams' attempt at articulating a universalism that does not erase the particular.

The question that arises here – and is of particular relevance to the Wales that has emerged since Raymond Williams' death – is what happens if the nationalist project succeeds, and subordination comes to an end in the form of a political state? Is the minority doomed in such a scenario to adopt the 'discourses of sameness' characteristic of those coercive universalisms that deny particularistic differences? We will be best placed to address that question by standing on Williams' shoulders, and hope that we confront it as honestly as he did the challenges of his time.

**The 'Welsh essays' represent Williams' attempt at articulating a universalism that does not erase the particular**

**Daniel G. Williams** is Professor of English and Director of the Richard Burton Centre for the Study of Wales at Swansea University. He is the author of *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales* (2012) and *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority: from Arnold to Du Bois* (2006)

# Where are the Welsh novels on the new curriculum?

**Dylan Moore** *talks to publisher* **Richard Davies** *about Parthian Modern, a new series of contemporary classics, and finds him exercised about the lack of prescribed Welsh literature in the country's schools*

'It's ridiculous!' says Richard Davies, publisher at Parthian Books. 'We must be the only country in the world who use another culture as the mainstay of our national curriculum. Surely the time has come to move on from studying *Of Mice and Men*? It's a great little novel of 1930s Dustbowl America, but I think it's crucially important that something from the Welsh canon is on the syllabus. Otherwise we've got generations growing up with no idea that there is a Welsh literary culture in the English language!'

Richard – sometimes formerly known as Lewis (we'll come to that later) – is an easy going man with a soft Neath valley lilt, but this is an issue that clearly has him exercised. 'I'm going to write to Mr Drakeford,' he says. 'The WJEC have got to put something from Wales on, otherwise why are they calling themselves the Welsh Joint Education Committee?'

Clearly a raft of Welsh titles on any newly prescribed reading list linked to the new *Curriculum for Wales* might benefit Parthian, which over the last thirty years has established itself as perhaps the most prolific and successful publisher of contemporary Welsh literature. But Davies' 'big pitch' to the politicians and qualification designers – *The Long Dry* by Cynan Jones – has had its rights leased to Granta, so there would be no immediate gain. But that doesn't diminish Davies' enthusiasm for the book: 'It's short, it's manageable, but it has a lot to say to a 16-year-old audience.'

Cynan Jones is just one of many – often young – Welsh writers who have launched a successful career with Parthian, a company that came into being in 1993 in order to propel Richard Davies' own debut novel into the world. Now that novel, *Work, Sex and Rugby* – published under his erstwhile pseudonym Lewis – is one of a series of contemporary classics being reissued under a new 'Parthian Modern' brand.

'What we're doing is taking another look at the books that we've published over the past thirty years – and finding the ones we think are significant – and having another look at them ten or twenty years down the line, with a commissioned foreword by an academic, writer or critic [assessing] how they've stood up and what they've got to say now,' says Davies.

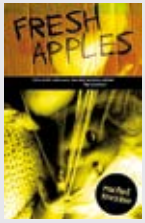
He cites Lloyd Robson's *Cardiff Cut* (2001) as an example of a significant title in the Parthian back catalogue that 'is definitely worth another look – it's not just what he was saying, but the way he did it, with dialect writing.' Again Davies refers to 'the curriculum' as the place where a younger generation of readers might have encountered Robson's writing. Instead, 'you'd have to really dig to find it now, maybe in a second hand shop.' Peter Finch, who hosted a launch for Robson's earlier work – under the Black Hat imprint – at the former Oriel bookshop in Cardiff, has written the foreword for *Cardiff Cut*, and Davies feels Finch's perspective as someone who was part of 'an even earlier scene, performance poetry in the 1970s and early 80s' is vital in bringing this new edition to fresh life.

Davies has clearly enjoyed being able to raid the company's now extensive backlist to create this new series, and in so doing the chance to look back at Parthian's history. There is the sense of a circle being squared with this year's relaunch of the Rhys Davies Short Story Competition, in association with Swansea University. The prize is entwined with Parthian's history. *Tilting at Windmills*, one of Parthian's earliest titles, collected the shortlisted stories in 1995.

'After that, the next significant development was *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*,' recalls Davies. That bumper collection of new short stories from Wales included

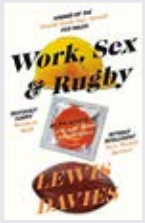
Surely the time has come to move on from studying *Of Mice and Men?*

## Parthian Modern titles




**Fresh Apples**
Rachel Trezise, foreword by Emma Schofield

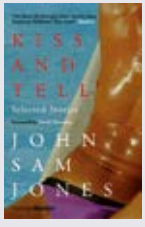

**Martha, Jac a Sianco**
Caryl Lewis, trans. Gwen Davies, foreword by Lisa Sheppard




**Work, Sex and Rugby**
Lewis Davies, foreword by Huw Lawrence


**Cardiff Cut**
Lloyd Robson, foreword by Peter Finch


**Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful**
Deborah Kay Davies, foreword by Becky Munford




**Kiss and Tell**
John Sam Jones, foreword by David Llywelyn

work from Rachel Trezise, Niall Griffiths, John Sam Jones and George Brinley Evans, all of whom went on to publish full-length works with Parthian and, often, bigger London-based publishing houses too.

'We framed ourselves as an outlet for first-time writers… you'd have a short story or something in an anthology, and we'd have a look to see if [writers] had more work in them.' He mentions Cynan Jones again, along with Deborah Kay Davies and Tristan Hughes as examples of successful contemporary Welsh writers who had their first break with Parthian. Davies admits he takes a lot of satisfaction from these stories of development and also 'other people, including editors who've developed with us and then gone away to work in London.'

Asked about the latest crop of new Welsh writers he has worked with, and who might go on to be the 'Parthian Modern' authors of the future, he mentions the 'ambitious' Richard Owain Roberts, whose *Hello Friend We Missed You* won the Not the Booker Prize 2020; Lloyd Markham, who 'has another couple of books in him'; and Sarah Younan, who will hopefully work on a full-length novel-memoir developing the piece she wrote for the publisher's recent *Just So You Know* anthology.

Given his enthusiasm for the work of so many others across so many years, it's perhaps surprising that Davies' own writing output has slowed. In addition to the early success he had with *Work, Sex and Rugby*, his travelogue *Freeways* won the John Morgan Award and his extensive work in the nineties and noughties comprises novels, essays and short fiction, as well as a good number of stage plays produced all over Britain. But he has a simple explanation: 'I had a lot more to say in my twenties and thirties. In my forties I was bringing up children.'

He now enjoys the producing and editing aspects of publishing work, but admits to always having a novel on the go. 'I'm always writing a novel, I think, but I never seem to have the concentration. In my mid twenties I was writing a book a year – because I could do it then!'

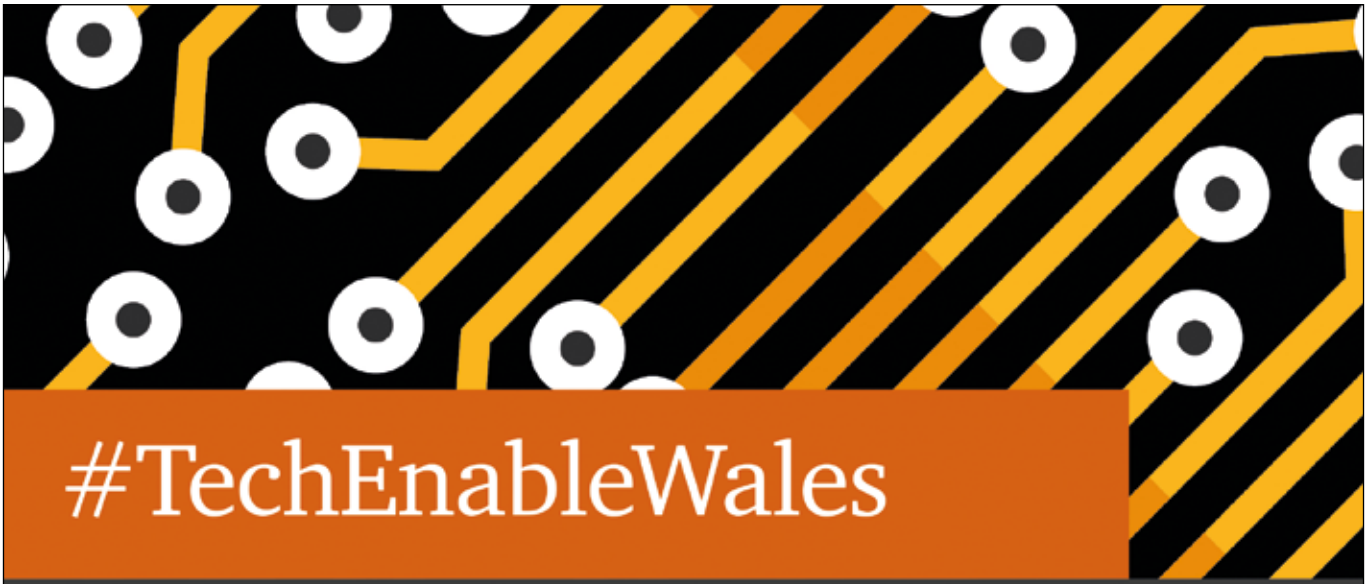
In those days there were people who knew Richard as Richard, and other people who knew him as Lewis. 'Lewis Davies was both the character in my debut novel and the nom-de-plume of the author. So that was an interesting kind of literary game, where different people genuinely knew me under different names.' Recalling the frequent work undertaken by Parthian Books in its early days in collaboration with the Rhys Davies Trust, Davies recalls: 'The Rhys Davies Trust was set up by the writer's brother, who was also called Lewis Davies! At one point people thought Rhys Davies was my great uncle, but that's not true!'

At one point people thought Rhys Davies was my great uncle, but that's not true!

What is true is that whatever Richard chooses to call himself, and however you might have known him (or not) over the years, his company – Parthian Books – has made an indelible mark on the English-language publishing scene in Wales. In fact, you would struggle to hold a conversation for long about contemporary Welsh writing without mentioning writers who were given their first publication by the company; many too, like Rachel Trezise, whose published work has developed a longstanding relationship with Parthian.

The trick now is getting some contemporary Welsh writing onto the school curriculum – but maybe Parthian Modern can help with that. ▸

**Dylan Moore** is Editor of *the welsh agenda*. His first book, *Driving Home Both Ways*, was published by Parthian. His latest, *Many Rivers to Cross* is published by Three Impostors



# #TechEnableWales

PwC in Wales is right at the heart of the firm's investment in digital. We're already doing lots of work in the tech space to help our clients, our people and our communities in Wales solve some of their most important problems.

Now, we're showcasing everything that we do under something we're calling #TechEnableWales. This demonstrates what we can deliver in our cyber team, our ethical hackers, right through to the work we do in fintech, data analytics, AI and beyond.

It's our aim to be the number-one professional services firm when it comes to digital and technology services in Wales, so that whatever you need – when it comes to tech – we should be the people you choose to work with. When you think of PwC we would like you to also now think 'technology', and how we're helping to #TechEnableWales.

---

For more information on #TechEnableWales visit pwc.co.uk/techenablewales or get in touch with a member of the team:


**Doris Davis**
doris.davis@pwc.com
+44 7841 561 549

**Rhodri Evans**
rhodri.evans@pwc.com
+44 7843 333 819


pwc



pwc.co.uk/techenablewales

# The Mystery of the Missing Banners

**Colin Thomas** *ponders a piece of Welsh history buried deep in the troubled Donbass region of Ukraine*

In 1969 two Welsh miners' banners were taken to Donetsk, the city in Ukraine that was previously Stalino and before that Hughesovka. What became of those banners is still a mystery, but the story provides an insight into recent Ukrainian history.

Welsh miners have had a long connection with the Donbass coalfield. S.O. Davies went there in 1922, representing the Dowlais district of the Red International of Labour Unions, and wrote of 'the supreme pleasure that is felt by these emancipated people as they jealously and proudly watch the growth of a new culture'. He described what he had seen to the *Colliery Workers Magazine* as 'that truly wonderful miracle – Russia in December 1922!' At the time many saw Russia and Ukraine as one, united in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The link with the miners of the Soviet Union was strengthened by the financial support they gave during the 1926 lockout and Dai Smith and Hywel Francis record that miners at Nine Mile Point, Cwmfelinfach, always referred to the grants that they received then as 'Russian money'. That sympathy for Russia and the Soviet Union continued during the 1930s. Few knew of, or believed in, reports of Stalin's forced collectivisation programme which led to millions starving to death in Ukraine, despite on-the-spot evidence provided by Welsh journalist Gareth Jones. De-Stalinisation under Khrushchev led to the main city of eastern Ukraine changing its name from Stalino to Donetsk in 1961.

The banners made for the Onllwyn and Yniscedwyn miners lodges in the early 1960s exemplified the best aspect of Communist ideology – a belief in international solidarity. The Yniscedwyn banner carried the words 'Socialism' and 'Internationalism' and the Onllwyn banner, quoting the poet Elfed, read:

> *Da yw caru Gwlad ein Hunian*
> *Gwell yw caru'r Ddaear gyfan*
> (It is good to love One's Nation
> Better to love the Whole Earth.)

Soon after the banners were carried proudly in the South Wales miners' annual gala in Cardiff, both pits were closed; Onllwyn in 1964 and Yniscedwyn in 1968. The sixties were a grim time for Welsh miners, with explosions at the Six Bells and Cambrian collieries, the Aberfan disaster in 1966 and what Hywel Francis and Dai Smith describe as a 'butchering of the industry.'

In 1969 a group of retired miners and their families, led by Dai Dan Evans who had been the General Secretary of the South Wales area of the National Union of Mineworkers from 1958 to 63, decided to take the two banners with them on a visit to the Donbass. There they were handed over to the Museum of International Connections in Donetsk, part of the Palace of Culture which served two mines and 7000 miners. Dai Dan and his fellow trade unionists saw placing the banners in the Museum as a way of ensuring that they had a permanent home in a place where they would be given the respect they deserved.

During the miners' strike of 1984/5 a Welsh choir from Coed Ely visited Ukraine and Mick Antoniw, the


Onllwyn banner replica by Angela Tilley

The banners made for the Onllwyn and Yniscedwyn miners lodges in the early 1960s exemplified... a belief in international solidarity

**On Hywel Francis**

*Colin Thomas remembers his friend and comrade*

Picking up books by Hywel after the sad news of his death came through, key words recur – class, collective, solidarity. I had first become aware of him as he fought – and all those key words apply – to save the great working-class libraries of Wales. They were threatened, in the words of the Times, by 'ignorance, accident and plunder.'

He won in the nick of time and brought into being the South Wales Miners Library, a springboard for adult education. Llafur, the Welsh People's History Society, was also in part his creation and he was to have helped celebrate its fiftieth anniversary last year. When I directed a programme for BBC Wales and S4C on Wales and Fascism, he was the first historian I went to and, in his interview, he provided evidence that in the 1930s some of Plaid Cymru's leaders were at the very least prepared to make excuses for Europe's Fascist leaders.

His brand of socialism made it a comfortable transition for him to move from his father's Communism to the left wing of the Welsh Labour Party and then to becoming a vigorous and effective MP. Although he strongly disapproved of a programme that I had made about the Welsh International Brigaders that criticised the role of the Communist Party, he remained as comradely as ever to me. Hywel, in my experience, could have sharp disagreements with those he worked with – The Fed refers to an 'often stormily dialectical' relationship with Dai Smith, his co-author – but he did not bear grudges or harbour enmity. Solidarity would prevail.

The final essay in Hywel's last book Stories of Solidarity refers movingly to his wife Mair and to their son Sam who was born with Down's Syndrome and died young. He then says: 'as we approach the end of our lives we are still living and we aspire to achieve full and dignified lives to the very end…' He achieved that in abundance and will be sorely missed.

**Colin Thomas**

the Museum of International Connections had gone and nobody seemed to know what had happened to its contents


Credit: South Wales Miners Library

Welsh MS of Ukrainian descent, recorded in *Planet* that Ukrainian miners made a contribution to Welsh miners' strike fund. When Hywel Francis, the founder of the South Wales Miners Library, went to Donetsk in 1984 the banners were still in the Museum of International Connections. He remembers them being near a glass case containing a copy of John Gorman's book *Banner Bright* on trade union banners. The book's introduction by Gwyn Alf Williams refers to the banners as 'still the visual memory of a movement. For movements as for men, memory, the organi[s]ed memory which is history, is the only human force which can conquer change and defeat death.'

By the time Gwyn Williams and I went to Donetsk in 1990 to make a documentary for the BBC, the Soviet Union was beginning to break up. We didn't film the banners – the focus of the films was on the way the history of the city told the bigger story of the change from Russia to the Soviet Union to Ukraine – but there is a photograph of Gwyn Williams standing in front of the Onllwyn banner which was probably taken in Donetsk at that time.

Gwyn and I did film an open-air Ukrainian nationalist meeting in Donetsk but it was thinly attended and, although the Donetsk area voted for Ukrainian independence in 1991, it was a substantially lower vote (77%) than in the rest of Ukraine (90%). By the time I went back to Donetsk in 1992 to make a television programme on Ukrainian nationalism for BBC Wales' series *Blood and Belonging*, there was significant opposition to the nationalist agenda. A burly Russian miner named Vladimir Kolpakov – King Kong to his mates – told us that instead of dealing with raging inflation 'the nationalists are spending their time in Parliament passing laws to change the signs from Russian to Ukrainian and altering the speaking clock on the telephone to Ukrainian.'

In 2008 I returned to Donetsk to make a radio programme for BBC Wales and, prompted by Hywel Francis, sought to track down the elusive banners. But I was told that the Museum of International Connections had gone and nobody seemed to know what had happened to its contents. At the main Donetsk museum, I picked up some resentment about the requirement to give only the Ukrainian nationalist version of history. Could it be that the internationalist perspective of the banners clashed with that version?

In 2014 the antagonism between those in the Donbass who saw themselves as Russians and those who saw themselves as Ukrainians turned to violence. This was followed by what Mick Antoniw accurately describes as 'the Russian invasion'. Tens of thousands have since been killed in the war that followed. A year after the invasion I was approached by Alexander Koroboko, a Russian producer based in London. He had read *Dreaming A City*, a book I had written on Donetsk for Y Lolfa, and suggested that I write an update of the story for a book that he intended publishing. I would enter the Donbass region from Russia; an armoured car would be waiting at the border, he told me, and I would see for myself what was happening there.

I would be paid a fee and, at first, I was tempted to go. But I then read *Putin*, a very favourable biography of the Russian leader which Alexander Korobko had co-authored, and decided that if I went I would be at risk of becoming part of what Peter Pomerantsev, an eyewitness of the war in Ukraine, in his book *This Is Not Propaganda*, has referred to as 'The Most Amazing Information Blitzkreig in History'.

So I turned the offer down. When I recently approached Mr Korobko about the missing banners, he offered to see if he could help to trace them, but made his perspective very clear, describing himself as: 'an eye-witness of what US-bred Ukrainian fascists were doing to my beloved Donbass.'

There is a Ukrainian faction – Pravy Sektor (The Right Sector) – which could be described as fascist, but it won only won two seats in the Ukrainian Parliament in 2014, and none in the 2019 election. When a Russian anti-aircraft gun shot down a Malaysian Airliner flying over Russian controlled territory in Ukraine in March 2014, killing 239 people on board, it became even more difficult for the Kremlin to reframe the present as Pomerantsev put it: 'an endless Second World War against eternally returning Fascists'.

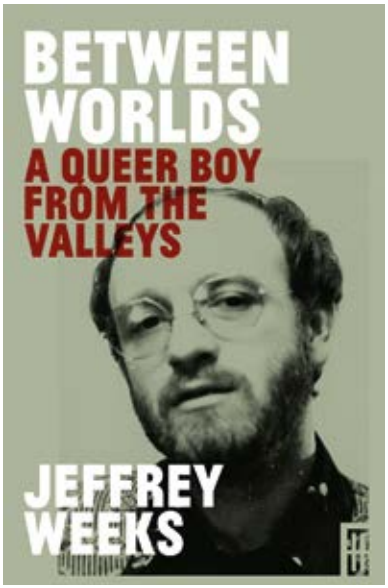
According to the latest *Lonely Planet* guide to Ukraine, 'the occupied areas of Donbass are now ruled by gangster-ridden governments of "people's republics"'. Without climbing into that armoured car and going to see for myself, it is difficult to tell how true that is, but whoever is in charge there does not seem much interested in tracking down missing Welsh banners.

They will not be forgotten at the South Wales Miners Library however and in 2023, the Library's 50th year, it will be launching a book on Welsh trade union banners. Hywel Francis, the Library's founder, refers to 'the importance of the received collective memory in sustaining a sense of solidarity, both locally and internationally'. A recently completed documentary – *Pride In Our Valley* – concludes with a full-scale copy of the Onllwyn banner being carried from the site of what was once the pit.

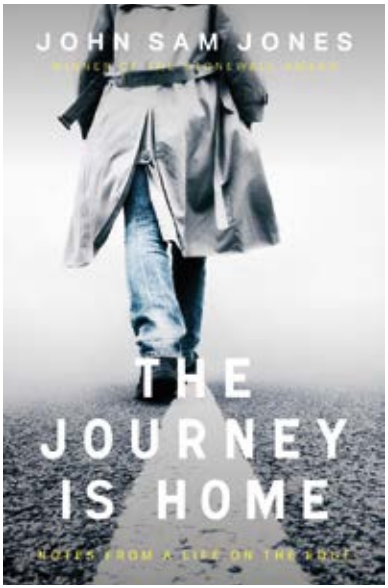
Whatever has happened to the original, the collective memory of it lives on. ➤

**Colin Thomas** is a director, three times winner of BAFTA Cymru's Best Documentary award and of Prix Europa

# Between Worlds: *a queer boy from the Valleys*




**Jeffrey Weeks**
Parthian, 2021




**John Sam Jones**
Parthian, 2021

# The Journey is Home: *Notes from a life on the edge*

*Hannah Watkin*

In today's comparatively accepting times, exploring the experiences of the individuals and groups whose campaigning in the late-twentieth century got us to where we are now is important. Both *Between Worlds* by Jeffrey Weeks and *The Journey is Home* by John Sam Jones offer fascinating insights into the lives of two of Wales' most influential gay voices.

In *Between Worlds*, Weeks explores both the geographical, psychological and ideological 'worlds' in which he has lived. Arranged chronologically but not completely linearly, each chapter organises Weeks' memories to focus on a particular aspect of his life such as his youth, his activism, and his writing.

From generations-old Rhondda street communities to international gay liberation groups, Weeks offers an informed insight into the inner workings of the many worlds in which he has lived. His writing succeeds to immerse us within the worlds he explores despite the book's focus on Weeks' experience of not quite fitting in.

Demonstrative of Weeks' career as an historian and sociologist, *Between Worlds* is as much a history of the many movements with which he was involved as of his personal life. Weeks carefully sets his personal history within its wider social context and effectively reviews his past self's views and actions

retrospectively from the present. Filled with witty comments as well as serious truths, this book is an incredibly honest assessment of his life and of all the groups, communities and individuals whom he has come to know whilst living it.

Jones' text is a far more personal one. *The Journey is Home* focuses on family, faith and love, and how Jones has come to understand his homosexuality within all of these settings. Rather than getting the history of a life from the perspective of an historian, here we get one from a writer.

This book takes the form of prose-like reminiscences which bring together a collection of memories to reveal a varied life. First, we join Jones as he moves from the UK to live on the outskirts of Germany with his husband in 2017. From here, we are then guided to various stories from his past which also posed their challenges.

From his public and political work to personal family matters, Jones explores every aspect of his life and doesn't hold back from describing all its difficulties and pain. At times, this makes *The Journey is Home* an upsetting read. The book is also very moving, especially when he writes about his family and his experience caring for his mother throughout her dementia.

But as well as sharing the hardest moments of his life, Jones also shares its highs by describing his journey to self-acceptance. The few lighter moments of love, celebration, and amusing anecdotes which are shared help make this journey an enjoyable read, just as the brutal honesty in which Jones details his worst experiences contributes to making it all the more affecting.

Jones' *The Journey is Home* adds context to Weeks' *Between Worlds* as it shows that despite the positive changes which were occurring as a result of the work of campaigners such as Weeks, the narrative that reached younger LGBT people such as Jones continued to cause shame as they grew up. Especially striking in this comparison is how whilst Weeks was in London seeing the first steps to legal changes in the rights of homosexuals being made, Jones was still able to enrol himself for electrical aversion therapy in Denbigh in 1975.

In his later chapters focusing on his work with different health boards during the AIDS crisis, Jones offers an unsettling look into how vital arguments and initiatives were dismissed by other professionals in the sector, especially in Wales. Through detailing experiences such as this, both authors' works remind us of just how far the movement for LGBT rights and liberation has come over the last sixty years.

Both books also remind us of the fragility of these new rights, and of the disappointing truth that no matter the gains seen in some areas of society regarding equal rights, there will still be individuals and institutions who will discriminate. Early in *The Journey is Home*, Jones explains the alienation he and his husband felt when they were told that they could not be registered as married in Germany as same-sex marriage

It remains a universal truth that LGBT+ individuals will experience the feeling of being 'other' at some point, or indeed throughout, their lives

was not legally recognised there at the time.

In *Between Worlds*, Weeks makes frequent references to times throughout his career when he felt others held him back from opportunities owing to his academic interest being in LGBT history and sociology. Indeed, it was saddening to read so many pages dedicated in both books to how often both authors still feel the need to justify their right to love themselves and their husbands today.

It remains a universal truth that LGBT+ individuals will experience the feeling of being 'other' at some point, or indeed throughout, their lives. Reflecting this, both Weeks and Jones have chosen a similar thematic way to explore their lives as gay men. For Weeks, the feeling of being othered throughout his life has left him feeling as if he has lived it 'between worlds', whilst Jones similarly sees himself as having lived 'a life on the edge'.

But despite this, both authors use these books to explore and celebrate their journeys to finding a place for themselves and their identities despite their often 'othered' status. In their final chapters, Weeks celebrates a time in which the individuals from the different worlds he felt caught

between came together at a boat party celebrating his sixtieth birthday in 2005, while Jones expresses the eventual happiness he has been able to find living with his husband literally on the edge – the border between Germany and the Netherlands.

Neither author's journey to self-acceptance is consistently smooth or positive. However, one can tell that they are both writing from a contemporary point of defiance against the othering they have felt subjected to in the past as gay sons, colleagues, and campaigners.

Additionally, although both books focus on the theme of feeling 'othered' as an LGBT individual, Weeks and Jones also make much of the individuals and communities which have supported them during

Neither author's journey to self-acceptance is consistently smooth or positive

their lives. Weeks dedicates many paragraphs of *Between Worlds* to discussing the stories of others who have positively influenced him throughout his life, whilst many of Jones' personal recollections of key moments in his journey home come from the influence of others, including the book's title and eventual thesis that 'the journey is home'.

As a younger member of the LGBT+ community, I have often worried that my generation romanticises the fight for rights that older generations of LGBT experienced without always appreciating the difficulties these out and proud queer communities faced. *Between Worlds* and *The Journey is Home* offer an incredibly important insight into the lives of individuals who had to inhabit the far less hospitable and more openly homophobic world of the recent past. I also feel these books offer a crucial insight for anyone who lived through these times to reflect or learn about what life was like for the LGBT+ individuals who are only now able to share their experiences so openly with a large audience.►

**Hannah Watkin** is a member of *the welsh agenda* editorial group

# Easy Meat

*'Remain' meant that everything would stay the same but 'Leave' meant something had to change. So what if everything went tits-up for a few months? No pain, no gain. No pressure, no diamonds. It was as if the world had frozen like an overloaded IT system, so many pages simultaneously open that nobody really knew what was going on... someone needed to knock it all off and back on again.*


**Rachel Trezise**
Parthian, 2021

*Polly Winn*

*Easy Meat* is a poignant and vivid depiction of life in the South Wales Valleys for Caleb, a typical Valleys boy whose life is spiralling out of control. An important addition to the growing genre of Brexit novels, it does not seek to hypothesise circumstances surrounding the EU referendum; instead, *Easy Meat* provides a valuable and moving snapshot in time from an area so often commented upon amidst the debate yet too often with an absence of local voices. Trezise aptly evokes the sense of 2016 in every detail, from Caleb and his brother Mason's 'celebrity death pool', to the Euros, the music and more.

We follow Caleb through Thursday 23 June 2016. He wakes pre-5am on his cronkey sofa bed to the stench of his brother's spliff, drives to work at the blood-soaked slaughterhouse where he struggles to appease his bad-breathed boss, then back home to drag his exhausted body for a training run around the streets of Rhosybol. While Caleb navigates a series of misfortunes throughout his day, he remains largely oblivious to the fact that the tectonic plates of the UK's political landscape are shifting.

The slaughterhouse provides the extended metaphor for the novel. It is a melting pot of immigrants from Poland, Portugal, Latvia as well as working-class blokes from the local valleys, a physical example of everything the referendum came to represent and threatened to change.

Caleb is an important central character in this sense, as class, nationality and identity are explored in a thoughtful and transitory way. He works quietly

'The sun was picking up strength, the landscape coming to life the way a polaroid develops: ferns and clusters of heather, yellow grass peppered with clods of brown reeds'

alongside his migrant colleagues with unspoken solidarity. In many ways he's jealous of the connections they have as they occupy themselves throughout the day with jokes that Caleb's not in on, in languages he can't understand: 'He felt a twinge of jealousy at this. They had something he didn't, they had each other.'

At the same time, he witnesses the way migrants are treated and perceived as he's pulled in different directions by the locals at the plant. The political tension is tangible – his slimy boss encourages him to vote Remain; 'no migrants, no meat industry' he says, while also complaining about strikes and unions. Another bloke from the nearby valley is voting Leave, grumbling about migrants, as he lauds the sacrifice and work ethic of his grandfather who arrived from Ireland into Newport docks.

The irony on both sides is not lost on Caleb, but ultimately he's just keeping his head down, constantly confronted by his own disposability: 'Do you think I won't sack you like that?', his manager threatens. 'I've got the agency on the phone begging me for an opening every five minutes.'

Trezise is known for her stark language, which makes descriptions of the slaughterhouse quite difficult to stomach at times: 'He kept his nostrils closed, postponing the advent of the putrid stench of death. But the moment he passed through the metal grille he could taste as well as smell the slaughterhouse, raw and elemental, buoyed at the back of his throat like a hot bubble of blood.' But she can seamlessly shift to calm, imposing and vivid descriptions of the South Wales Valleys: 'The sun was picking up strength, the landscape coming to life the way a polaroid develops: ferns and clusters of heather, yellow grass peppered with clods of brown reeds.'

Her prose really comes to life here, painting such a clear picture of the setting you can't help but feel the sense of belonging and hiraeth Wales is known for. *Easy Meat* is simultaneously a romantic and confrontingly cynical portrayal of life in the Valleys, the figure of speech itself seemingly representing how people of the Valleys have too often been exploited, taken advantage of and perhaps overlooked by mainstream culture.

But the most impressive thing about the novel is the way that it delicately and sympathetically highlights how the referendum came to represent so much more than a binary political choice. Instead, the Brexit vote holds a mirror up to society, playing upon themes that are central to who we are and the choices we make. Hope, aspiration, community, solidarity, combined with nostalgia, fear, isolation and hopelessness.

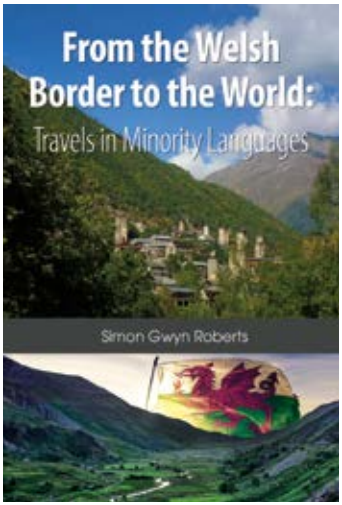
The strength of Caleb's character is that he could represent anyone worn down by their daily struggle. We never do discover which box saw Caleb's cross at the polling station. We can make our own guess, but it doesn't really matter. We can reflect instead on how loaded the vote became.

At just 125 pages, you could easily gulp this immersive novel down in a few sittings, but Trezise covers considerable ground, subtly brushing across a whole range of themes that are arguably even more pertinent now than they were in 2016.

Ultimately, *Easy Meat* is a sensitive portrayal of people as people – full, complex and multifaceted – whose every choice is shaped by the conflicting experiences and identities that inform who we are. ➤

**Polly Winn** works in PR, and is the founder of the Cardiff Feminist Book Club

# From the Welsh Border to the World: *Travels in Minority Languages*




**Simon Gwyn Roberts**
Chester University Press

*Nia Moseley-Roberts*

When Dr Simon Gwyn Roberts' book From the Welsh Border to the World: Travels in Minority Languages was first published in September 2020, Chester University Press advertised it as an antidote to the disappointed masses who had been forced to spend the summer at home. Given how events have played out since, the siren call of escapism is even more alluring. Escapism is what Roberts' book provides, and perhaps a little too successfully; whilst reading it is a wonderful, transportive experience, it has the equal effect of making you want to pack a suitcase and hotfoot it to Moldova. For someone who is young, and who very much hoped to be travelling the world herself, the aftertaste left by this book is one of wistfulness.

The underlying question of the book is encapsulated in the introduction: 'how can minority languages negotiate a global media culture facilitated by social media and dominated by ubiquitous languages of English and Spanish?'. It is a huge question which I am not sure is adequately addressed

The underlying question of the book is encapsulated in the introduction: 'how can minority languages negotiate a global media culture facilitated by social media and dominated by ubiquitous languages of English and Spanish?'

(Roberts himself admits that his book 'does not seek to provide a definitive answer'), but I also think this doesn't ultimately matter. If this is a book from which it is difficult to extract a general argument, this is because it revels in and celebrates the specific details of each of the cultures its author has visited. We perhaps don't hear as much as we could about languages because Roberts instead chooses to focus on the different things that he has seen and experienced first-hand whilst abroad. *Travels in Minority Languages* is written by a man with a nose for interesting detail, and a deep appreciation of the cultures he visits. This is the book written for and with a love that shines through.

A brilliant example is the way in which Roberts describes the local cuisine of the places he visits. You do not have to read for long before you realise that Roberts is very interested in food (and drink), and very good at writing about it; some of his descriptions will have you checking your store cupboards and planning a rather more adventurous meal than usual (the Badrijani nigvzit,

Georgian aubergine rolls stuffed with creamy walnut paste, sounded particularly delicious).

In the book's final chapter, he visits Vanuatu, a remote country made up of a cluster of tiny islands in the South Pacific, which Roberts (and UNESCO) identifies as the 'ne plus ultra of linguistic diversity'. Home to 138 separate languages, it is also believed to be the birthplace of a bitter tea with sedative, anaesthetic, and euphoriant properties consumed with gusto across the Pacific Islands: kava. As with most of the details – linguistic, geographical, political – that he chooses to focus upon over the course of his book, Roberts unpacks the significance of kava beautifully, using the drink to push out into a wider description of Vanuatu's 'kava culture'. We hear of the kava bars which pepper the nation's capital, Port Vila; of Roberts' own (very funny) experience with the drink; of its probable role in the elaborate burial of the sixteenth-century Roi Mata, a chief who was interred with over fifty of his retinue – whilst they were still alive.

This is excellent travel writing. Roberts' attention to detail ensures that you leave each chapter of the book feeling as if you have gained a broad and holistic view of the communities described. However, as indicated above, this comes at the expense of what purports to be the book's central theme. Roberts is a man who cares about minority languages but who also primarily sees them as meronyms for a broader societal identity; speaking native languages becomes part of a more generalised performance of cultural distinctiveness. In Roberts' own words: 'the power of such languages lies in their ability to frame a specific landscape, to provide a distinctive and irreplicable framework for the understanding of a particular environment'.

This detail-led, part-to-whole approach is perhaps not surprising given Roberts' journalistic past. But Roberts is also a journalist-turned-academic, something which becomes evident as soon as you open his book and read its introduction. It is here that you feel Roberts' academic credentials most strongly. This is not always a good thing. Roberts has a bad habit of name-dropping without also providing specific context; 'Robert Louis Stevenson' was fine, but it did take me a while to realise that 'Meek' was referring to James Meek, essayist and author of the brilliant *Dreams of Leaving and Remaining*, and was not simply describing German super-nationalists Alternative für Deutschland. As with Meek's collection, a fascinating (and highly enjoyable) set of essays almost gets undermined by the generalising argument being forcefully wrested upon it. For this reason, I would recommend that you skip the introduction of *Travels in Minority Languages*, or at least whet your appetite on some of Roberts' descriptive prose first – the joy of a print book being that you are under no pressure to read it in order.

The ability to be read out of order, to be picked up and put down again and at will, is another of this volume's great strengths. *Travels in Minority Languages* is in many ways the perfect bedside book. Its nine chapters, covering locations from Sri Lanka to Senegal, provide a great diversity of absorbing reading material; lovers of Eastern Europe will be pleased to hear that studies of ex-soviet states – the current focus of Roberts' professional research and from the contents of this book, an old favourite haunt of his – occupy a third of the volume. Roberts is by no means a shy traveller, often making a point of his desire to visit places off the beaten track and immerse himself in local customs. The fascinating information he subsequently presents is viewed through Welsh-tinted glasses, unfamiliar material framed by a more familiar viewpoint, making this an easy book for those familiar with Welsh culture to slip in and out of. ➤

The ability to be read out of order, to be picked up and put down again and at will, is another of this volume's great strengths. *Travels in Minority Languages* is in many ways the perfect bedside book

**Nia Moseley-Roberts**, from Cardiff, is a third-year English student at the University of Cambridge

# THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS, 23RD JUNE 2016.

It's another long day chopping beef carcasses up at the slaughterhouse for former reality TV star and Iron Man contender, Caleb Jenkins, who's untroubled world unravelled when his old man's carpet business went bust last year, another casualty of the global financial crisis. While he's busy trying to manage the well-being of his conspiracy-theorist brother, the mortgage keeping a roof over his bankrupt parents' heads, his own excruciating grief, internal rage and impossible credit score, politicians of all persuasions are promising the scared and voiceless people around him real change.

Desperate for acknowledgement and a transformation he can't quite bring about by his own means, **Caleb is on the edge**.

## *EASY MEAT* IS A GLIMPSE OF A YOUNG MAN AND A COUNTRY ON THE VERGE OF A MOMENTOUS DECISION.

# EASY MEAT

## RACHEL TREZISE

Free P&P when you use the code **'EASYMEAT'** at parthianbooks.com

## OUT 23RD JUNE 2021

PARTHIAN **£9**

# Miriam, Daniel and Me

**Euron Griffith**
Seren, 2020

*Eluned Gramich*

The world of *Miriam, Daniel and Me*, Griffith's fourth novel and his first in English, is rooted in Caernarfonshire, between two villages – Pantglyn and Bethel. We follow the lives of the eponymous characters as they navigate love, marriage, sickness, poetry, and football. Miriam has a relationship with two men and falls pregnant unexpectedly with the 'me' of the novel's title (whose name we never learn) resulting in her abandoning an unrequited love affair with an Irishman. The shadow of a possible life with him haunts her throughout her marriage to Daniel, her footballer turned Eisteddfodic poet husband. Although their marriage is the centre of the story, Griffith portrays the lives of their parent generation beautifully too – a more austere, religious world; a world of slate and quarrying, strictly defined by class. An entire complex family saga encompassing three generations is distilled in this short novel. Griffith leads us from one character to another, one decade to another, eschewing linear narrative in favour of story and event. Clues are interwoven in the narrative: references to the investiture of the Prince of Wales brings us to the 1960s, for example, and the memory of the Second World War looms dark over the community.


An entire complex family saga encompassing three generations is distilled in this short novel

The novel is filled with captivating scenes from north Wales' history. Daniel's (albeit brief) stint as a professional footballer in the post-war years offers a delightful glimpse of the origins of the game in Wales and England before it evolved into the slick, profit-driven version we're familiar with today. The resistance to the Prince of Wales investiture is channelled through the unstable character known as The Hangman, a revolutionary Welsh nationalist who is angry and bitter about the fact that his poems never get anywhere in the Eisteddfod. English hippies (with names like 'Wandering Elk' and 'Moonglow') arrive in Caernarfonshire with the aim of setting up utopian communes. There are darker elements too, including acts of animal cruelty that are simply told yet difficult to forget. The story is ambitious and compelling. The short chapters propel you along, and there is never a dull moment. Griffith's interest in female stories

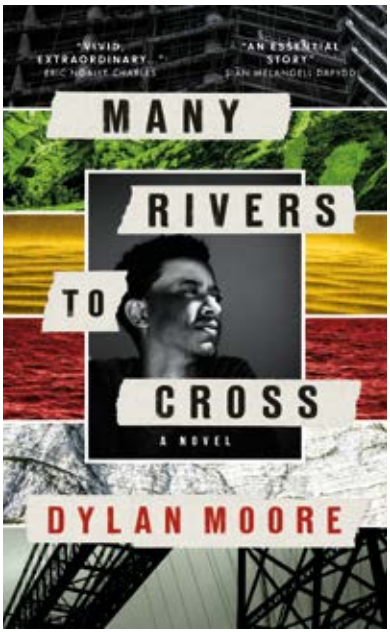
Daniel's (albeit brief) stint as a professional footballer in the post-war years offers a delightful glimpse of the origins of the game in Wales and England before it evolved into the slick, profit-driven version we're familiar with today

in particular – Miriam's pregnancy and the challenging years of early motherhood – is one of the strengths of the novel.

At times, the novel's concision and succinctness borders on exasperating. Griffith tends to summarise events rather than describe them in detail, so only the bare-bones of the action end up on the page. Chapters often end with a cliff-hanger sentence that both frustrates and intrigues: 'It was the last time Daniel ever saw him', for instance, or 'three months later they were married in Caernarvon's Salem chapel'. A part of me wanted more of everything – deeper exploration of the characters' emotions and motivations, their histories and desires, richer description of the different decades and the setting. Perhaps the novel could have been more expansive, more sumptuously written. But the fact that I wanted the book to be longer is, in many ways, a testament to Griffith's talent as a world-builder and storyteller. There's no doubt that *Miriam, Daniel and Me* is a compelling read, well-told, with a few very surprising twists along the way. ➤

**Eluned Gramich** is a German-Welsh writer and translator. She lived in Japan and Germany for several years before returning to Wales to pursue her Creative Writing PhD at Aberystwyth University. Her memoir about Hokkaido, *Woman Who Brings the Rain* (2015) was shortlisted for Wales Book of the Year

# Many Rivers to Cross




**Dylan Moore**
Three Impostors, 2021

*Angela Graham*

The cover of this book proclaims it as 'A NOVEL' but it is something more complex than that. This account of refugee experiences from the perspective of both the 'sending' and the 'receiving' countries – in this case Ethiopia and Wales – has had a fascinating gestation.

In an erudite essay on the writing process at the end of the work, Moore explains that,

> The work morphed into what I have come to claim as a 'composite novel', a cycle of stories which cohere to – I hope – bring greater nuance to refugee narratives through the employment of this polyphonic form.

I would have found my first reading of the book easier if I had known from the start that I was engaging with a composite novel. Some readers may be disorientated by the shifts in point of view from chapter to chapter and give up early. But that would be to lose a great read. The form works very well. It is fitting that the reader must make frequent adjustments of attention as a range of characters contribute their share of the story. Bewilderment and disorientation are among that story's main characteristics – for everyone concerned.

The opening (very short) section is told in the Second Person Singular, a clever choice because of its implication that the reader knows the person being

Bewilderment and disorientation are among [the] story's main characteristics – for everyone concerned

As David seeks answers to his question it becomes painfully clear that his Welsh readers are themselves experiencing an alienating loss of roots and of connection between themselves and their locales

addressed. Who we know, and who we regard as a stranger, is key to this narrative.

> 'Here,' you say again, palm against the map, disbelieving that this city, scratched out before you on a square of aluminium, is really where you are, where you have, despite everything and everyone, washed up.

The reader is part of the story from the start.

Moore uses David, a South Wales newspaper editor as his Everyman. This allows a skilfully handled scene-setting chapter which pulls the main characters into early focus. David struggles to find a headline to describe a photograph of a mismatched group mourning a riverbank tragedy involving a failed asylum seeker called Aman Berhane. Moore renders the individuals with a vivid economy so that we recognise each one when he or she reappears to pick up the story thread and take it a step further.

David can't make sense of the photograph.

> This was a story from a land so far away from the experience of his readers, of himself, it may as well be mythical. This tragedy did not belong here, and it was beyond expectation – beyond his remit, even – to think of a headline… This kind of shit was supposed to happen somewhere else.

Baffled but compelled, he headlines it with a single, capitalised word, 'WHY?'

As David seeks answers to his question it becomes painfully clear that his Welsh readers are themselves experiencing an alienating loss of roots and of connection between themselves and their locales. This disorientation is all the more sinister because their consumerist prosperity and the erosion of community-based ties weaken their capacity to react.

A pleasure of the book is the reader's growing perception of how apparently disparate people are connected within the frame of the mystery surrounding Aman Berhane. Only the reader hears everyone's account (spoken or thought) and is present at encounters in Wales and far away from it. This puts the reader in the challenging but engaging position of being almost better placed than the protagonists to interpret events, and particularly the twist at the story's end.

Dylan Moore has produced an intricately plotted narrative which takes the reader inside many lives with great delicacy and writerly control. This is also an important account of today's Wales, a country which has chosen to call itself a Nation of Sanctuary. The compassion evident in Moore's writing is, crucially, clear-eyed for all concerned: 'receivers' and 'senders'. He has distilled his own experience of working with refugees and his political and social nous (he is Editor of *the welsh agenda*) into true story. This is an impressive achievement. ➤

**Angela Graham** is a writer and broadcaster. Her latest short story collection is *A City Burning* (Seren)

# Q&A

Lloyd Warburton is a 17 year old from Aberystwyth, studying AS levels in biology, geography, physics, maths and the Welsh Baccalaureate. Over the last year, he has been posting daily updates on the Covid-19 situation on Twitter and Facebook, as well as maintaining the coronaviruscymru.wales website, which brings data from a range of sources together in one place. He is now also working on covering the Senedd election, with party profiles, election explanations and results lined up.

**What prompted your interest in statistics?**

I'm not sure really. It's something I've been interested in since I was quite young. I have some booklets lying around that I created for the 2017 and 2019 Westminster elections, as well as a PowerPoint about rugby from 2014. I've just always had a fascination with stats, graphs and maps, especially ones which tell a story. This has carried on, and as I have developed my skills, over into my current projects.

**Tell us what have you been doing, and what you think lies behind the interest you've generated?**

Since the 11th of March 2020, I've been posting slides on Twitter with the daily Covid-19 figures for Wales. A couple of weeks after starting that, I launched a website (coronaviruscymru.wales) which put as much of the data as possible in one place and made it as accessible as possible. I think this crisis has been a time where people have looked for clarity and simplicity and for content without strong opinions on the figures. That's why my posts have gained the attention that they have, in my opinion.

**What have been the saddest, most interesting and most surprising things you've learned in the course of the pandemic?**

I've learned an awful lot. I'd say the saddest is that around 1% of the Welsh population dies every year. It seems obvious, but it certainly had an effect on me when I realised the scale of that. The most interesting thing I've 'learned' is the lineage of the virus. I don't fully understand the websites that show the lineage lines and genomes of SARS-CoV-2, but it's really fascinating. I don't really think that anything has surprised me, though. I'm not easily surprised nowadays!

**How have you been covering the Senedd election, and what are your predictions for what might happen on May 6th?**

At the minute, I am working on a website which will show the results of the Senedd election on the night and am sharing party profiles on social media. As election day nears, I'm planning on sharing more information about the voting system and on the key issues at play. In terms of the election itself, I expect Labour will win, albeit with a reduced majority. I expect the Tories and Plaid Cymru to make moderate gains and Abolish to take in some of the UKIP vote from 2016. I can't see the LibDems making any gains, but I wouldn't be surprised to see the Greens winning a regional seat somewhere.

I've learned an awful lot. I'd say the saddest is that around 1% of the Welsh population dies every year. It seems obvious, but it certainly had an effect on me when I realised the scale of that

ARUP

# Gweledigaeth gynhwysol ar gyfer gwefru cerbydau trydan yng Nghymru.

Mae Arup yn cynorthwyo Llywodraeth Cymru i gyflawni ei Strategaeth Gwefru Cerbydau Trydan ar gyfer Cymru erbyn 2030.

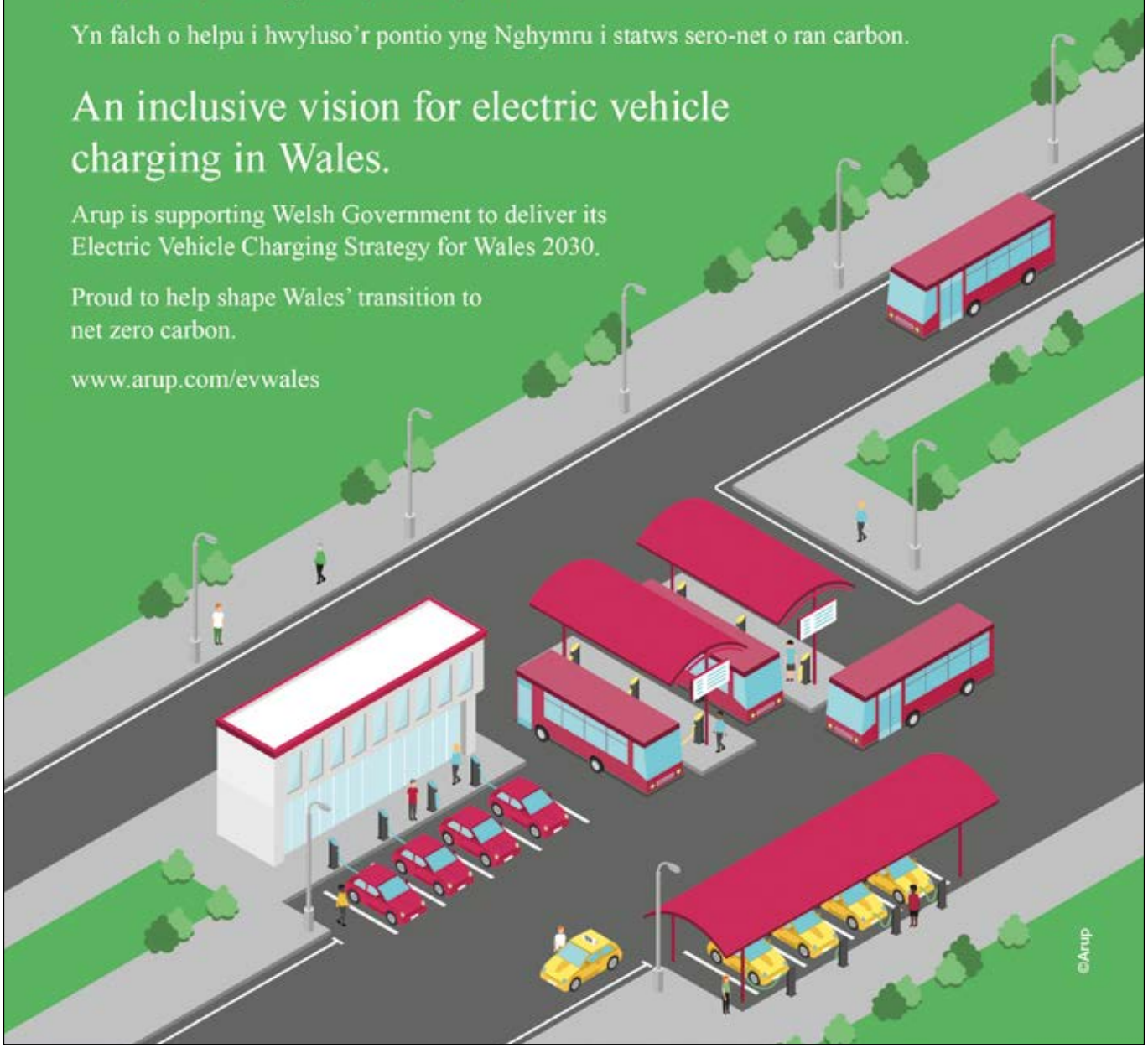
Yn falch o helpu i hwyluso'r pontio yng Nghymru i statws sero-net o ran carbon.

# An inclusive vision for electric vehicle charging in Wales.

Arup is supporting Welsh Government to deliver its Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy for Wales 2030.

Proud to help shape Wales' transition to net zero carbon.

www.arup.com/evwales



# Fellowship

The IWA Fellowship has been developed as a special category of membership as a mark of recognition for those who have made, or are making, a significant contribution to the life of Wales. To discuss becoming a fellow of the IWA please call Auriol Miller on 029 2048 4387.

Prof Jane Aaron
Nigel Annett
Ali Anwar
Tony Bagnall
Mary Barnett
Mark Barry
Simon Baynes
Prof Gary Beauchamp
Prof Deirdre Beddoe
Frances Beecher
Alex Bird
Sioned Bowen
Dafydd Bowen Lewis
Nigel Bowen-Morris
Cllr Frank Bradfield
John Bryant
Prof Antony Chapman
Prof Nickie Charles
Rocio Cifuentes
Prof Elan Closs Stephens
Dr Carl Iwan Clowes
David Clubb
Philip Cooper
George Crabb
Dr Daniel Cunliffe
Greg Dash
Rhys David
Carole-Anne Davies
Huw Davies
Lynda Davies
Paul Cornelius Davies
David Dixon
Ceri Doyle
Rev Aled Edwards
Huw Edwards
Richard Eley
Susan Elsmore
Henry Engelhardt
David M Evans
Felicity Evans
Jonathan Evans
Robin Evans
Sion Rhys Evans
Christine Eynon
Alan Francis
Kevin Gardiner
Lord Brian Griffiths of Fforestfach
Nigel Griffiths
Peter L Griffiths
Eurfyl ap Gwilym
Daran Hill
Gerald Holtham
Owen Gareth Hughes
Rob Humphreys
Prof Judy Hutchings
Gareth Ioan
Dyfrig James
Keith James
Milwyn Jarman
D Huw John
Granville John
Robert John
Clare Johnson
Prof Calvin Jones
Chris Jones
Dr Elin Jones
Dr Geraint Stanley Jones
Helen Jones
Hywel Ceri Jones
Prof Phillip John Jones
Ron Jones
Tom Jones
Prof Steven Kelly
Huw M Lewis
Roger Lewis
Dr Dai Lloyd
Sir Richard Lloyd Jones
Dr David Lloyd Owen
Prof David Marquand
Prof Judith Marquand
Prof Laura McAllister
David Melding
Helen Molyneux
Jonathan Morgan
Meirion Morgan
Steve O'Dea
Cynthia Ogbonna
John Osmond
Menai Owen-Jones
Alan Peterson
Jonathon Poyner
Dr Eurwen Price
Prof Richard Rawlings
Gruff Rhys
Menna Richards
Huw Roberts
Lord Rowe-Beddoe
Chris Rowlands
Owen Sheers
Paul Silk
Nicola Simons
Wiard Sterk
David Stevens
Geriant Talfan Davies
Andris Taurins
Rt Hon Lord John Thomas of Cwmgiedd
Ned Thomas
Prof Nigel Thomas
Roger Geraint Thomas
Dr Neil Thompson
Delith Thorpe
Martin Tinney
W Tudor John
Paul Twamley
Lee Waters
Rt Hon Lord Dafydd Wigley
Hywel Wiliam
Beti Williams
Eilian S Williams
Dr Ruth Williams
Prof Alison Wride