agenda

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The IWA is a non-aligned independent think-tank and research institute, based in Cardiff with branches in north and west Wales, Gwent, Swansea Bay and London. Members (annual subscription £35) receive **agenda** three times a year, can purchase reports at half price, and receive invitations to IWA events.

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agenda
summer 2007

a time to listen – and deliver

What does Wales want and what can it expect from the new Assembly Government? By voting in larger numbers than in 2003, though still not as enthusiastically as the supporters of democracy had hoped, the people of Wales have at least indicated a growing interest in the Assembly and a realisation that it has the power to shape and influence their lives, particularly now that limited legislative powers are available to our 60 Assembly Members.

They have also demonstrated, no less significantly, that Wales has become less homogeneous and its views more divergent than we would perhaps like to think, even over the eight short years the Assembly has been in existence. Remarkably, nearly one in eight of votes cast on May 3rd were for parties other than the four main parties of Wales. The majority of these votes – twice the proportion in 1999 – went to parties well to the right of the Big Four.

All of this, taken together with the failure to secure a majority turnout, suggests many Welsh voters are in volatile or unresponsive mood, setting the new Governments a challenge they will need to plan carefully to meet over the next four years. The first two Assembly administrations – which included a brief Lab-Lib Dem coalition – have made significant progress in establishing just what are the issues facing Wales across a whole range of matters affecting Welsh people from poverty and social exclusion to health and the economy, but the transition from analysis to policy formation and implementation has been slow. No better example exists of this than the failure to raise Welsh levels of wealth relative to the rest of the United Kingdom, making it necessary to go back to Brussels for a second round of high level funding.

Given that the resources likely to be made available from the Treasury, even in the unlikely event of a review of the unfair Barnett formula, will be more restricted in the period ahead, there does now need to be much more thought given to how we can create wealth in Wales rather than merely distribute it. Here, in particular, the Assembly Government must listen to the ideas that were put to it by a range of organisations and individuals in the year ahead of the election. The IWA's own publication, *Time to Deliver,* which contained ideas across the whole policy field is well worth a re-visit by our newly elected and re-elected members.

There were also strong indications from the election that voters want to see clear evidence that an efficiently-run health service that can deliver care to the highest European standards is being put in place and one that remains responsive to local needs. Above all, Wales needs – and quickly – a stable health service that can be moved out of day-to-day political debate and control.

If these positive approaches can be adopted, the rewards will be considerable. Greater confidence in our Assembly and its members will lead to greater enthusiasm for and participation in civic issues. If there is drift, and worse, infighting within the parties as the realities bite of making concessions to opponents in order to make multi-party politics possible, the Welsh people may be tempted to make even less palatable choices next time or stay away in even larger numbers.

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Photos: Photolibrary Wales, Flickr, Science Made Simple, Elgar Museum

Cover Picture: Detail of work in progress on the Calon Lân sculpture in Blaengarw. Some of the community's inhabitants have been contributing to the sculpture's production. **Photo: Jane Jones**

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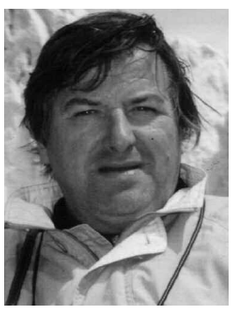

 ISSN 1464-7613

newsflash

coming up...

- **Welsh Science: Unsung Past, Uncertain Future**
  Thursday June 14th 6pm Debate 8pm Buffet. The contributions made by Swansea scientists and a look into the future. (Free)
- **The Manufacturing Economy**
  Friday June 15th 12pm for 12.30pm Lunch Parkhouse Club, Cardiff. Michael Leahy, general secretary of Community union on the prospects for the steel industry and manufacturing. £27.50 (IWA members) £30 (non-members)
- **Slate, North Wales and Cultural Tourism**
  Tuesday June 19th 6.30pm Slate Museum, Llanberis. Summer event at the slate museum with a ride on the Lake Railway and talk by Dafydd Roberts, museum keeper. £12.50
- **Agriculture and Energy**
  Tuesday June 26th Buffet 5.30pm Rhosygilwen, Cilgerran Opportunities for farmers to diversify into the energy sector and how to access European funding. £15
- **Academy Health Wales**
  Monday July 2nd. Conference 9am UWIC Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff. Discussion on the establishment of a health academy for dialogue and debate on health policy. £90 (IWA members) £120 (non-members)
- **Arthur Machen Remembered – Master of Holy Terrors**
  Thursday July 5th Buffet 6.30pm Debate 8pm. UW, Newport, Caerleon Campus, An evening chaired by Lionel Fanthorpe celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Caerleon horror author with award-winning fantasy writers and experts. £5 (£27.50 non members).

just published...

- **Myths, Memories and Futures**
  Edited by John Osmond, £20
- **Roaring Dragons: Entrepreneurial Tales from Wales**
  Edited by Rhys David, £15

more information:

www.iwa.org.uk

connecting with the consumer

rhys david

Wales has voted again in its own elections, and while it will take the pundits some time to work out the full significance of the results, we are, it would seem, becoming a more plural nation, as well as one that in relation to the rest of Britain is forging a more distinctive identity.

The turn-out may once again have been much less than hoped-for, but in all sorts of ways it is clear that since devolution a more distinctive Wales has begun to emerge, coupled with more distinctively pro-Welsh feelings. Policies have begun to diverge, and may do so at an increasing pace now that the Assembly is equipped with new legislative powers.

Yet, although on the one hand we have a number of signs of a strengthening national identity, there is something amiss – the weak Welsh presence in modern commercial fields, and particularly those closest to the consumer. Too much of Wales's image is still based on (usually-subsidised) artistic, cultural and heritage icons and on its industrial and sporting past. In a world where the brand you create for yourself is all-important, we have only half a brand – and one that says come and visit us and look at what we used to do, or come and see what a show we put on. We have too little to show that we are and can continue to be competitors in a modern commercial world.

Ask people in England, leave alone the rest of Europe, to name a product that instantly says Welsh and excellent and you are likely to get blank stares. With some prompting they might think of Welsh National Opera and during the annus mirabilis

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of 2005, the Welsh rugby team – both of them businesses of a sort but not in the conventional sense. They might also mention the Welsh countryside or coast, or the environment generally.

When it comes to outstanding Welsh businesses or commercial products they would be stumped. You would not expect people to be able to name industrial products but what about food, clothing, gadgets and gizmos and the other consumer products found in the shops, or indeed service sector businesses? What about financial institutions? Few of these companies exist and those that do are small. Only two Welsh companies have a sizeable market capitalisation – that is the value of those companies as measured by the stock market – and indeed only a handful are listed on any of the UK's exchanges.

Ask the same of Scotland. Most people can name a handful of Scotch whiskies, and, if they are Classic FM listeners, a brand of soup, not to mention biscuits, a bottled water, and a range of other Scottish food products. Scotland also has strong service sector companies based in Scotland and known well beyond its borders. Two of Britain's big four banks are effectively Anglo-Scottish – Royal Bank of Scotland, now the owners of National Westminster Bank, and Halifax Bank of Scotland, and they are present on every important High Street in Britain as well as in many centres overseas. Both of these have substantial Edinburgh operations, matched by a strong UK life assurance presence in Glasgow. Scotland is also strong in energy (Scottish and Southern and Scottish Power, where it has two of Britain's biggest suppliers, and in transport, (Stagecoach and First Group). Similarly, Scottish Media Group controls a range of media outlets not just in Scotland but also throughout the UK, as does Johnston Press.

For Ireland the same would be true. Guinness, though in reality a British-owned product, is inextricably associated with Ireland. The Irish have also managed to establish over recent years a successful new spirit-based drink – Baileys – and a new brand of cider, Magners, both of which help to project an image of Ireland around the world, as, too, do the many Irish bars to be found in cities on all five Continents. Major Irish food brands are also familiar in Britain and elsewhere, such as Kerrygold. In the financial world individuals such as John Magnier (property), Sir Michael Smurfit (paper) and Sir Tony O'Reilly (publishing) are well known. Ryanair may not be the world's favourite airline but it projects an image of a successful country with business operators able to compete in the toughest of markets with the biggest and best. Indeed, Ireland, a largely agrarian country only 50 years ago, now has three companies in the world's top 500 by market capitalisation.

It is puzzling to think that in Wales we have failed over the course of time to establish even a major dairy products based industry – despite our historically large milk output and proximity to the English market – when other milk producers such as the Irish, the Scots and the Danes have done so. When dairies and creameries come under threat in Wales they are invariably rescued (or not as the case may be) from beyond Wales's borders. Even where we have had some success in this area as with Rachel's Dairy, one of the first true organic brands in Britain, the business has been taken over and it has still failed to become a major, as opposed to a speciality product in Britain's supermarkets.

Wales still manages to have a reasonably large – by UK standards – manufacturing sector contributing to a range of products put together and sold around the world by big industrial groups based elsewhere. Ford makes several million engines every year in Bridgend and these go into Ford cars built in the Americas, Europe and Asia. Airbus aircraft could not fly without their Welsh wings made in Flintshire. Eads, the Franco-German aerospace group also has a strong defence presence in Wales. Wales also has its share of high technology companies and university spin-outs and a strong presence in some significant new business areas such as opto-electronics.

There are also, of course, Welsh headquartered businesses. Cardiff has seen a growth in its financial services sector over recent years, and amid the various UK owned companies providing largely back-office or call centre services from the city there is one substantial group, Admiral Insurance, which was started in the Welsh capital some ten years ago by an American Henry Engelhardt and is now very successful. Floated on the stock exchange only in 2004, it accounts for a substantial part of the capitalisation of Welsh companies though it is still small by UK standards.

There are also a number of prominent Welsh entrepreneurs operating internationally, such as Sir Terry Matthews in Canada in electronics, Sir Howard Stringer, the chief executive of Sony worldwide, Sir Chris Evans in biotechnology, and until he recently retired the chief executive of one of France's biggest companies, L'Oreal, was Welsh – Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones.

We have also developed some useful brands over recent years, mainly in the food sector. They are, however, highly niche and known only to those who make a special point of finding out about things Welsh – apart from the afore-mentioned Rachel's Dairy there is Penderyn Welsh whiskey, Halen Môn, Snowdonia Cheese, and a number of mineral waters, – Ty Nant, Radnor Hills, Decantae, Prince's Gate and Brecon are a few examples. Extensive promotion of Welsh lamb and beef, including the meat from Welsh black cattle, has also been successful in bringing these Welsh meats to the attention of chefs and other buyers in France and Italy.

Wales has, nevertheless, failed to develop a strong indigenous business sector, comparable in its size and significance with those of its somewhat larger but still relatively small Celtic neighbours, Scotland and Ireland. What are the reasons for this and in an age where globalisation is carrying all before it, does it matter? Can we expect a strong business sector to emerge as Wales grows in confidence in its nationhood?

The reasons are to be found deep in the history of industrial development in Wales and in inherited and deep-rooted attitudes towards business and towards making money. Other reasons lie deep within the Welsh psyche, including entrenched political and social attitudes towards business ownership, and perhaps historically the old British fault, writ large in the case of Wales, of regarding work in manufacturing or the service sector as not proper work like coalmining or steel making.

The Welsh Assembly Government argues quite rightly that unemployment in Wales is low and the rate of job creation over recent years has been strong, even if much of it has been in the public sector. Indeed, there are now 100,000 more people in work in Wales than in 1999 and more than ever before. Wales also remains home to a wide range of multinational corporations. Yet, valuable as it is to have big US, Japanese, Indian, Chinese or European companies in Wales making largely intermediate products, they only project an image of Wales or of Welsh quality at the margins. While each of these businesses creates significant employment in Wales, none of them has any aspect of Welshness at the core of its message and is, therefore, able to deliver branding benefits to Wales. Moreover, as has been found increasingly over recent years, their lack of local roots makes them much more likely to leave Wales to take advantage of lower labour costs or other incentives in other parts of the world.

Because they are not rooted in Wales and do not have Welshness at their core they will be less likely to require locally the full range of professional services they need to draw on to carry on their business, and will choose instead to use firms close to their headquarters wherever that might be. As such, they play a much smaller role than locally owned businesses would in developing these other sectors. This has stunted the growth of marketing and other professional services in Wales. Though Cardiff is home to a large number of public relations companies, a significant proportion of their output is for the public sector, and the skills needed for working in consumer fields have not developed to the same extent. We similarly have fewer firms than otherwise might be the case offering business advice, though, in mitigation, Cardiff is a strong legal centre, with firms based in the city offering advice to clients throughout England and Wales.

The absence of indigenous Welsh companies projecting their own brands also makes it much more difficult to adapt and survive in a world where globalisation is leading to the concentration of production in the lowest-cost centres. China and India, given the virtually unlimited pools of labour to which they will have access for generations to come, are going to dominate world manufacturing for the foreseeable future. You do not, however, have to make products any more but any economy with ambition does need to be involved in organising their design, manufacture, distribution and sale, if it is to share in the benefits of globalisation and not be its victim. These higher added-value areas are where the jobs are increasingly being created in advanced economies.

Headquarters companies, including branded goods companies have recognised this and moved some production overseas. Such companies, however, continue to base their headquarters functions in their country of origin while deriving all the benefits such as greater competitiveness in international markets – which access to really cheap labour offers. If you lack the locally owned company with its own brand in the first place, you are not in a position to outsource your production. Companies – such as Burberry which has moved manufacturing from Wales to China – move out and leave no trace behind because they have their headquarters elsewhere and will organise their production in overseas countries from that location. The higher added value jobs remain in the UK but not in Wales, because we never "owned" the brand in the first place.

Strong companies and strong brands also play another very important role in modern society as the equivalent of mediaeval patrons. Scotland's and Ireland's big companies (not to mention England's) support and enhance the image of their respective countries and their own business through support for the arts, sport, heritage and the charity sector. In Wales there are two organisations that are called on repeatedly to fulfil this role – Brains Brewery, and Principality Building Society, with UK national companies (with a few honourable exceptions, such as Coutts in the case of Welsh National Opera and BT and Coca Cola in sport) rarely seeing it as to their advantage or part of their marketing strategy to support essentially Welsh causes.

The absence of business and products that we can readily identify as Welsh also has another effect. Being a country that produces top quality products, for example Guinness (Ireland), Ikea, H&M, Ericsson (Sweden) Royal Bank of Scotland (Scotland), Novo Nodisk and Maersk (Denmark), Baugur, owners of Hamleys and House of Fraser (Iceland) or Nokia (Finland) feeds the self-esteem of the inhabitants of these basically small countries, even if only subconsciously, leaving them with the underlying feeling that they belong to a country which has something to offer the world that is better than anybody else's product in the same field, or at least competitive. This in itself can be helpful in persuading other businesses to invest there.

Our inability to offer this kind of iconography leaves us in Wales often living in the past and reflecting constantly on such now irrelevant facts as that Cardiff was once the biggest coal-exporting port in the world or saw the first ever £1m deal, or dangerously dependent on a narrow range of talented individuals (Sir Anthony Hopkins, Bryn Terfel, Katherine Jenkins, Ioan Gruffudd, Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey, Catherine Zeta Jones, Julien MacDonald and Ryan Giggs, not to mention Richard Burton and Dylan Thomas) as a source of our pride that we are special and distinctive. We also load excessive expectations on to any new star that emerges.

It also leaves us heavily reliant on our most visible area of sporting achievement (rugby) where we have consistently been in the world's top eight but where we believe our rightful place to be in the world's top three or higher. We also become heavily dependent on heritage images as a form of validation – castles and World Heritage Sites – such as Froncysyllte, Blaenafon, and Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge. And we have become particularly sensitive to criticism, with the result that we constantly find ourselves being teased by English newspaper columnists and other minor celebrities who know it is easy to get a rise out of us.

Somehow or other Wales must make the transition from externally owned business and small scale brands into creating an economy that more closely resembles its Celtic neighbours, where strong locally-owned companies help to project positive images to the world. Policy to date, however, has not sufficiently identified this weakness, and the current armoury of policies may not bring about the changes that are needed.

Many of the policies that have emerged from the Assembly over recent years, such as Wales a Vibrant Economy (Wave), have focused heavily – and in a way quite rightly – on improving skills and encouraging people to enter into business on their own account. These strategies are crucially important but even if they work they will only do so over the very long term and may merely add to the already very large number of micro businesses in Wales. The Wave document sees Government largely in terms of enabling, echoing to a large extent the prevailing view in Britain that this is the most Government can or should do. As such, it talks about minimising regulation, developing infrastructure, securing clean and renewable forms of energy regeneration. Much of what is proposed remains in the realm of exhortation, however, and there is little evidence that the Welsh Government has considered getting out there and seeking to shape the Welsh economy of the future, by helping to develop a Welsh presence in certain key areas of the modern consumer economy – and not necessarily those requiring large amounts of capital investment.

How could this be done? Firstly, there is a need to examine closely whether the new quasi-legislative powers conferred on the National Assembly by the Government of Wales Act 2006 can be usefully employed, or whether even within the powers the Assembly currently has there is scope for re-directing funding to achieve the objectives advocated here of a stronger Welsh business sector more closely aligned in character with those of comparable countries.

Wales currently has one of the most heavily supported economies in the Western world yet 30 years of Regional Selective Assistance to companies to help support innovation, research and development and high added value project opportunities has done little to narrow the gap in Wales's GDP/GVA gap with the rest of the UK. This economic development budget could, some commentators have suggested, be used instead for a general rebate on corporation tax. This could both stimulate the growth of indigenous profitable companies as well as attracting footloose businesses. Even more importantly it could perhaps help to crack the problem of persuading large UK or overseas companies to establish headquarters operations in Wales.

We also need a cleverer industrial policy in Wales. Trying to pick winning companies is now probably rightly regarded (except in France) as not a skill Government is likely to have. It might be appropriate, however, for the Welsh Assembly Government to pick instead sectors where Wales is weak and where Welsh companies could be encouraged to develop. Basic sectors, such as food and drink, public transport, transport and distribution, retailing (High Street and Internet), hospitality, property and construction, telecoms and energy supply, are key building blocks within economies. Within Wales there are a number of medium-sized companies in these sectors whose growth needs to be supported and their expansion in Wales and beyond facilitated.

There are also sectors where Wales is under-represented, such as the provision of financial services, fund management services, private client wealth services, and the media. The press sector in particular is weak in Wales yet the component parts that could lead to the creation of a Welsh media group are in existence. This is one of a number of areas where Welsh companies could be encouraged to co-operate or amalgamate to create stronger groups that could expand outside Wales, just as Tinopolis, the small independent television production company has done, rather than succumb as often happens to the aggregating ambitions of other UK companies. Ways have to be found of ensuring Welsh companies participate in new economic areas such as new forms of energy, environmental protection and climate change, and providing the goods and services needed to cater for Europe's ageing populations.

Wales also needs to make much more of the opportunities available to create and sell Welsh-branded products to visitors to Wales. Apart from holiday tourists, Wales is now attracting through the Wales Millennium Centre and the Millennium Stadium many more sports and music tourists. Few Welsh companies have grasped the possibilities of adding further to visitor experiences by providing goods branded Welsh – but not necessarily made in Wales – or by creating the service sector businesses that could serve these expanding areas. All too often the expertise has to be brought in from outside.

In the outdoors field there is one company that perhaps provides a model – Gelert, which uses a name from one of Wales's best-known folk tales on its country wear. This company is one of the very few that has managed to attach a Welsh brand to an activity – camping, walking, mountain biking or climbing – now intimately associated with the tourist areas of Wales. Another example is T-shirt producer Cowbois. It is perhaps a sign of Welsh diffidence in commercial areas, however, that many of the tourist shops trading in tourist areas of Wales and selling everything from clothing to gifts are actually owned by Edinburgh Woollen Mills.

Basic manufacturing is likely to become increasingly unviable in Europe but opportunities exist to organize the design, manufacture and distribution of such products from the new industrial economies. Government support in Wales needs to address how Welsh companies can become more closely involved in these operations, establishing Welsh companies as end-suppliers of consumer goods. We have a good brand in Wales – in many of our new activities and in the environment and heritage of the country itself. In many ways, too, it has been strengthened and renewed in recent years. The other countries that have managed to establish strong images around the world in recent years such as Ireland, the UAE, Australia and Spain – have all have been able, however, to point to indigenous business success as part of their story. This is where Wales needs to sharpen its performance.

Rhys David is Associate Director of the IWA. This article is a condensed version of a talk given to a conference, What Visibility for Wales? *at the University of Brest, January 26th 2007.*

active programme

It has again been a busy period for the IWA, with a number of interesting conferences and events across Wales and a number of new research projects launched. In March Cheryl Gillan, the Conservative Shadow Welsh Secretary (left), spoke at a Cardiff lunch, and provided an entertaining account of how Conservative thinking on Wales had evolved over the past ten years. Cardiff-born, she is now a regular visitor to Wales in her position as a member of Tory leader, David Cameron's shadow Cabinet. Other political events in the run-up to the recent Assembly election included a well-attended hustings in Cross Keys, at which members of the Gwent branch quizzed representatives of the main parties.

Our next speaker in Cardiff on Friday June 15th will be Michael Leahy, the Welsh-born general secretary of Community, the trade union representing workers in steel and other manufacturing industries. His views on the future of manufacturing will be of particular interest, given the recent take-over of Corus by Indian group, Tata, and the continuing debates over pension rights and the involvement of private equity in the UK and international economy.

The contrasting fortunes over recent years of Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy and plans for the future were examined at a North Wales branch conference also in March.

Speakers covered the development of enterprise and skills; science and technology as knowledge economy drivers; and language planning and economic development.

Other branch events coming up include a debate *Welsh Science: Unsung Past, Uncertain Future* in Swansea on June 14th, *on Slate, North Wales and Cultural Tourism in Llanberis* on June 19th and on *Agriculture and Energy* on June 26th at Cilgerran.

For a full list of forthcoming events please see panel on page three.

ISO9001

ISO 9001 CERTIFIED ORGANIZATION

The IWA has had its ISO9001 quality assurance certification renewed following an inspection by independent assessors.

Certification is an indication that an organisation provides services that meet the highest organisational and other standards and as such offer a degree of assurance to all those – including IWA members – who use those services. Procedures coming under scrutiny during the audit included the way the IWA handles its membership records, its conference and event organisation and its research processes. The auditor described the IWA's systems as wholly appropriate for the institute's size and activities and said they were maintained to an exemplary standard

arthur machen

Devotees of Arthur Machen, the Caerleon-born Welsh horror author who died 60 years ago in 1947, will be pleased to know that his anniversary is to be celebrated at a special event at the University of Wales, Newport, Caerleon campus not far from his fomer home (below) on Thursday, July 5th. The evening, starting at 6.30 pm, will be chaired by author, Lionel Fanthorpe, who will be joined by award-winning fantasy writers and experts, Simon Clark, Tim Lebbon, Catherine Fisher and Gwilym Games.

new publications

The IWA has continued to maintain its busy publishing programme. *Myths Memories and Futures, The National Library and National Museum in the Story of Wales,* brings together the series of lectures organised by the IWA over the past year to celebrate the two institutions' centenary. *Building the Nation: Creating Internal Political Solidarity,* is a discussion paper by IWA director, John Osmond, examining the impact of the 1979 and 1997 referendums on Welsh politics and the way in which they served to galvanise politics in Wales and in many ways changed the outlook of Welsh people.

The IWA's study *Between the Generations: Raising the Profile of Intergenerational Practice in Wales* was published in March. The project, undertaken in collaboration with the Cymru Centre for Inter-Generational Practice at the University of Glamorgan, reports on the efforts being made to bring old people and the younger generation together to the benefit of both.

As well as discussing policy issues the report contains case studies of three innovative projects - Theatr Fforwm in Ceredigion, The Music and Sound Experience in Conway, and the Write-On! Learning through Life project in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In April the edited papers from the IWA's autumn sports conference were published under the title, *Sport and Economic Regeneration: Measuring and Maximising the Benefits for Wales.* Contributors include Arthur Emyr, director Wales for the 2012 Games, John Jermine, chairman of Ryder Cup Wales, Dr. Huw Jones, chief executive of the Welsh Sports Council, and Dr. Calvin Jones of the Welsh Economy Research Unit at Cardiff Business School.

Copies are also still available of three books published at the end of 2006, *Gordon Brown, Bard of Britishness; Roaring Dragons, Entrepreneurial Tales from Wales;* and *Time to Deliver: The Third Term and Beyond.*

To purchase any of these publications at special discounted rates for members, please call or e-mail the IWA offices.

research

Research projects currently under way include Living *With Our Landscape.* This project, funded by the Countryside Council for Wales, will engage policy-makers in a debate about whether environmental management systems in Wales are fit for purpose. The project is being undertaken in three phases leading to the launch of the project report at a national conference in November 2007.

A second project, *The Stern Report and the Challenge for Wales,* will look at the impact of the Treasury-commissioned report on climate change. It entails a national conference later in the year, followed by publication of conference proceedings. The project is being undertaken in association with a number of environmental partners.

In education *Promotion of Welsh Language Teaching* is being developed in association with the Welsh Language Board and builds on the publication of *Saving Our Language* by Ken Hopkins in May 2006. The objective in this current project is to provide an overview of the complexities of Welsh language teaching and the take up of Welsh-medium education in the range of different provision within the schools of Wales - within both the Welsh medium and English-medium sectors.

A second education project, *Modern Language Teaching in Wales* is being developed in association with the UK Committee of the European Cultural Foundation, and builds on a study of the demand for and take up of modern language teaching in Welsh schools.

Another new IWA initiative, *Academy Health Wales* has grown out of the work of the Health Group involved in last year's Third Term Project, which culminated in publication of *Time to Deliver.* The objective over 2007-09 is to establish the Academy as a free-standing organisation linked to the IWA. An inaugural national conference will be held in July followed by a series of seminars with related publications in the autumn and winter of 2007-08.

Members interested in any of these research projects or who have ideas for other research the IWA might consider are welcome to contact the IWA offices on 029 2066 6606.

mixed messages

denis balsom looks beneath the surface of the Assembly's third term election

Wales went to the polls certain of only one thing – that Labour and Rhodri Morgan would not be returned with a majority. The hybrid method of election adopted for Assembly elections in Wales with regional and constituency votes had been deemed a system by which, on past performance and in the words of the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan "...Labour would win on three out of four occasions". At the third time of asking, victory eluded the Labour Party, which, while remaining the largest party, secured its lowest share of the popular vote since 1918 – before any experience of government and universal suffrage. Was 2007 a bad year for Labour or are more serious trends now emerging?

The early election poll published by ITV recorded an increase in Conservative support, but a later recall suggested a swing to Plaid Cymru, as did a Beaufort Research poll for the Western Mail. Seat projections based on such poll data are problematic, given the electoral system but for once the polls were proved largely correct. The third National Assembly comprises 26 Labour AMs, 15 Plaid Cymru, 12 Conservatives, 6 Liberal Democrats and 1 Independent member. Ostensibly, the modest losses of the Labour Party have been taken up by Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives but beneath this overall national result, a pattern of electoral competition can be discerned that denies such a simplistic analysis of the apparent political change since 2003.

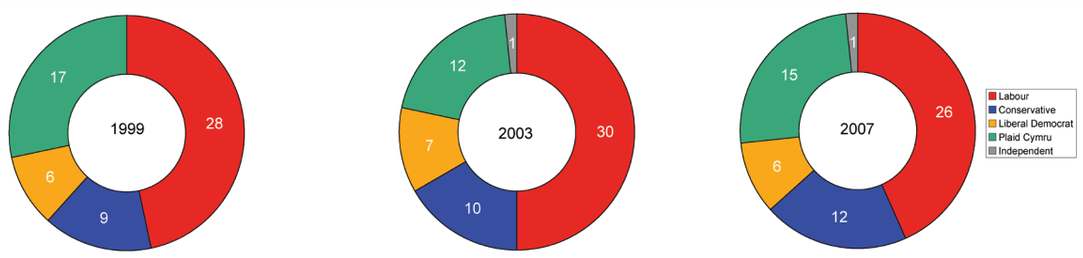
In North Wales extensive boundary changes in the former Gwynedd were bound to impact on the results. Labour's hold on Conwy looked tenuous with a majority of only 72 to defend. Once re-defined as Aberconwy, however, it became apparent that if this new seat had been in place in 2003 it would have been won by Plaid Cymru, as occurred this time. The new seat of Arfon combines Bangor and Caernarfon and is far more competitive than the former Caernarfon but Plaid Cymru still retained a comfortable majority. The remainder of the old Caernarfon seat, Dwyfor, is now attached to Meirionnydd and, under the tenure of Dafydd Elis-Thomas, is now the safest seat in Wales – probably the first time in almost a century that this accolade has not been enjoyed by the Labour Party.

Electoral patterns in North Wales remain split on a clear East-West axis. The Conservatives staged a considerable recovery in the East, winning Clwyd West and running Labour much closer than expected in both Vale of Clwyd and Delyn. Here politics seems essentially two-party, whereas in the West a pattern of three party competition, Labour, Plaid Cymru and Conservative, is more widespread. Labour's sole bright spot in North Wales was the re-capture of Wrexham from the erstwhile rebel – John Marek – the basis of whose rebellion is now probably lost on the Wrexham electorate.

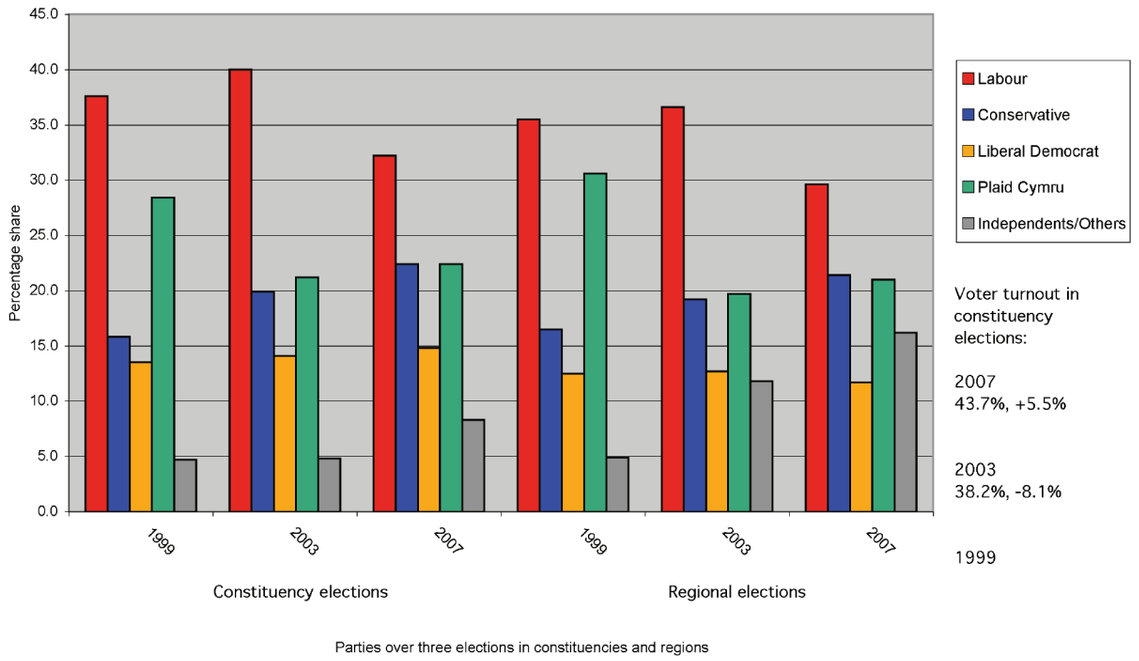
Plaid Cymru made a considerable effort to win support on the regional ballot, widely advertising the presence of Dafydd Wigley on its party list. The Conservatives would have had to do even more spectacularly well for Dafydd Wigley to be elected but it seems his presence on the list probably gained his party some small additional support. Throughout North Wales turn-out was generally up, countering the dreadful level of engagement in 2003 when several seats in North East Wales saw barely a quarter of their electors participating in the election.

2007 was the election when Mid & West Wales became a Labour-free zone. Plaid Cymru regained Llanelli, the Conservatives echoed their general election success and gained Preseli Pembrokeshire and went even further to win Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire. This had been a seat to which Plaid Cymru probably felt themselves to be the rightful heir. This vast regional constituency now encompasses most of the Marches and Welsh borders together with the sweep of Cardigan Bay from Bardsey to Skomer. Such a diverse area will never conform to one political stereotype and while Powys remains Liberal in the face of a strong Conservative challenge, elsewhere Plaid Cymru faces down both the Labour Party and the

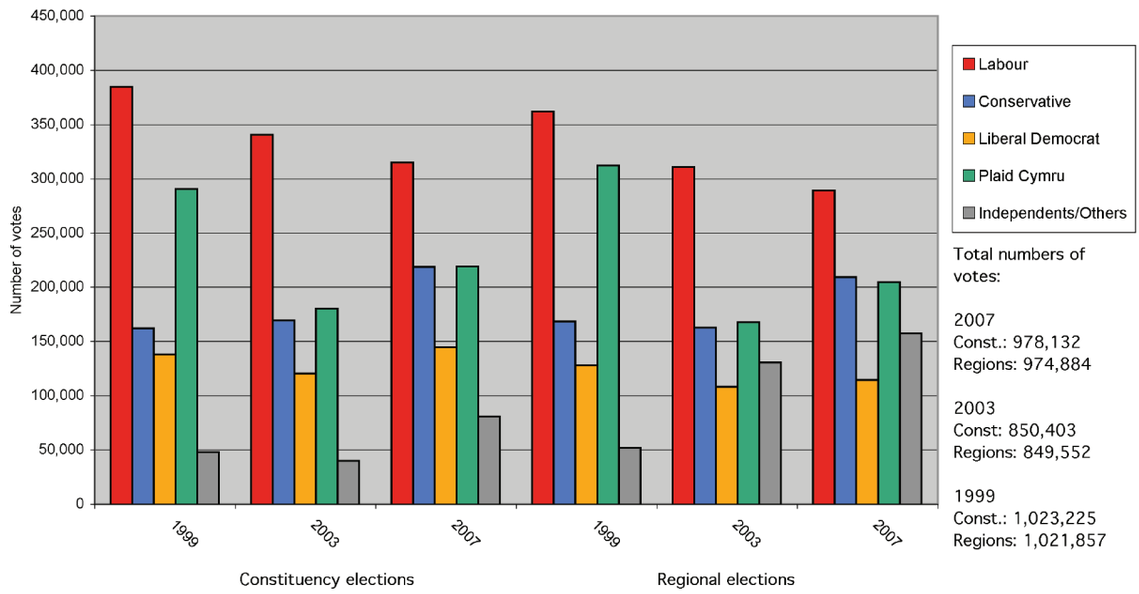
party seats: 1999, 2003 and 2007



share and number of votes in all Assembly elections



Parties over three elections in constituencies and regions



Parties over three elections in constituencies and regions

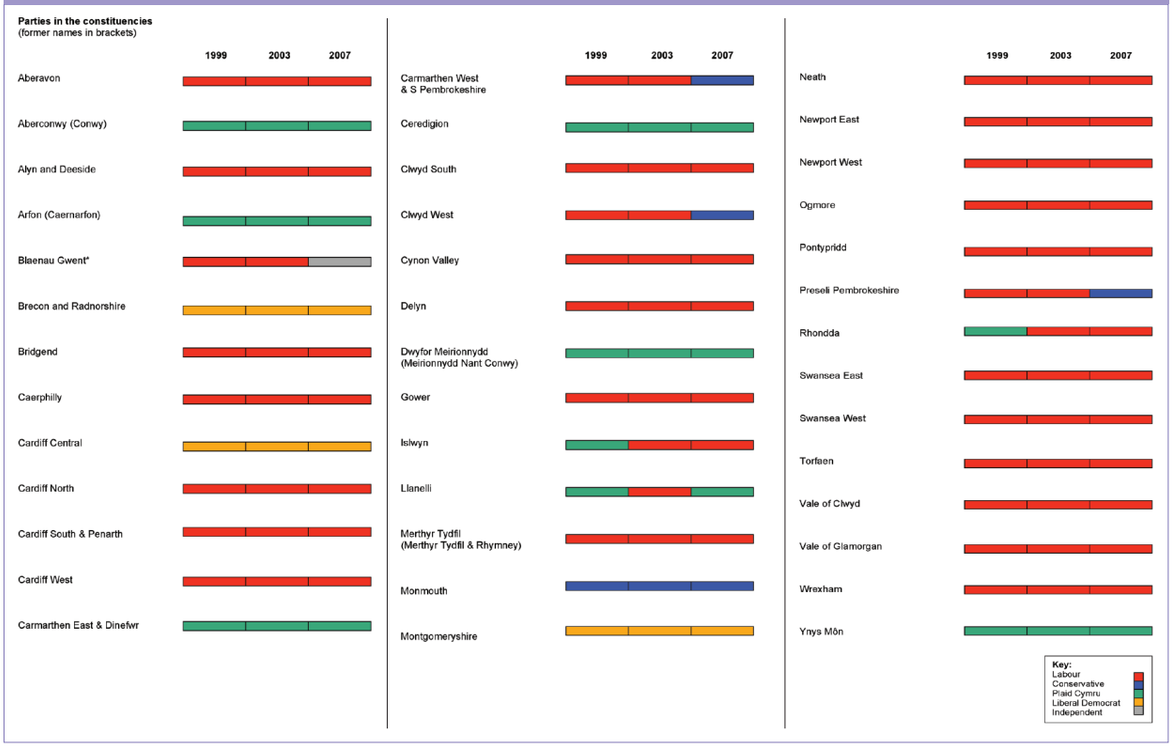
Conservatives. The Tory successes, however, deprived the Party of its three list seats – among the casualties, Glyn Davies, a popular AM, respected by all in the Senedd.

South Wales remains the Labour heartland but here the party did not escape the election unscathed. The repercussions of the Blaenau Gwent by-election continue to reverberate in South Wales East where Trish Law comfortably retained her husband's former seat. Close followers of her movement made sizeable inroads into Labour support in neighbouring seats, as did other Independents, usually disgruntled 'left' candidates.

The political renaissance of Ron Davies failed to materialise in Caerphilly but contributed to a major slump in Labour support across the region. Although largely retaining their seats, Labour still took a 'bloodied nose' if not a knock-out blow.

The political landscape of metropolitan Cardiff now resembles that of the housing market, with a prosperous Conservative North, a diverse, Liberal centre and with Labour retaining the estates and the South, notwithstanding the gentrification of Cardiff Bay. The pastoral, well-to-do Vale of Glamorgan almost fell to the Conservatives, with Jane Hutt's final majority of 83

party performance by constituency: 1999, 2003 and 2007



being surpassed many times over by the vote for UKIP that, in other circumstances, may well have been cast for the Conservatives. The Valleys hinterland to South Wales Central remains mainly Labour, but again vulnerable to opportunist candidatures from maverick Independents. Merthyr Tydfil saw three such candidates, collectively reducing Huw Lewis's majority by half – not that he does not still hold a safe seat!

In South Wales West Labour suffered a further loss of support and yet its overall hegemony remains intact. This area, which took a lead in the referendum on devolution in 1997, is now the least engaged with fewer than four in ten voters taking part in the election. The socio-economy of the area offers little prospect for extensive Conservative gains but the Liberal Democrats have some strength in Swansea and Plaid Cymru retains a presence, if not a challenge, in the former coalfield areas.

During the last session, the Welsh Assembly Government promoted Wales as 'The Learning Country'. Unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest that the electorate has learnt to use our unique electoral system to best effect. The third set of elections to the National Assembly may have provided the least clear outcome but this looks more of a random consequence that the product of sophisticated tactical voting. While there is considerable more 'churn' in voters' constituency and regional votes than the net aggregate figures suggest. For many electors their second ballot remains wasted.

The proliferation of smaller parties and special interest groups putting forward lists for the regional election, however, did produce some remarkable results. The BNP polled nearly 5 per cent of the total regional vote, having never shown any previous strength in Wales. The placing of the BNP at the head of the new 'portrait-style' ballot paper may have flattered their poll slightly, but the worries remain. More conventional smaller parties, such as the Greens and UKIP, polled well and the new Welsh Christian Party posted nearly 9,000 votes. The dual ballot election allows for such diversity of opinion, but the purpose of the regional ballot is to 'correct' the inbuilt bias of the 'first-past-the-post' constituency election. A more satisfactory, transparent, method of achieving greater proportionality, while not frustrating political diversity, is urgently needed.

The Labour Party undoubtedly had a poor election. The fact that Labour leaders claimed it was better than expected demonstrates how far Labour's ambitions had fallen. Will Labour ever re-assert itself in Wales? The imponderables include the make-up of the new Welsh Assembly Government and the impact of a Gordon Brown Government in London. From this election, the certainties would appear to be that new battle-lines are emerging in the various parts of Wales. The future will be multi-partisan, a coalition of minorities, representing the true diversity of modern Wales rather than the social and industrial uniformity of the past.

Denis Balsom is a Board member of the IWA and editor of The Wales Yearbook

damaging for devolution

a vigorous debate on Welsh issues is impossible when fewer than a third of the Welsh population read or tune into Welsh news, says lee waters

"Very sorry your piece hasn't gone up", the e-mail from the editor of the Guardian's blog said. "Got sidetracked by events in Scotland".

It is a familiar tale. In the closing stages of the election campaign outgoing Labour AM Sue Essex was driven to write to the New Statesman bewailing the fact that they had published a Scottish elections special but had no intention of doing the same for Wales.

It is a tiresome truism that the metropolitan media brackets Welsh politics alongside provincial English local Government. But Welsh politics does not just drift into their blind spot at election times. For the past eight years policy innovations and constitutional changes have hardly been remarked upon by London journalists. Our quota has instead been filled by tales of Cheeky Girls and badgers.

In a rare editorial dedicated to Wales in the middle of the campaign entitled The Forgotten Contest, The Guardian wrote, "Wales has not found a united political identity".

The maddening paradox aside, they have a point. Support for strengthening devolution is at an all-time high but more than half of the people of Wales did not take part in elections to their National Assembly. Though there was relief all round that turnout was up by over 5 per cent compared to 2003, 56 per cent of Welsh voters stayed away from the polls.

Here is the contradiction: the same number want the devolution process to be accelerated. A little noticed BBC poll published on election night found that 56 per cent of people think the Assembly Government should be the level of government that should have the most influence over Wales. A majority also now backs a Scottish style tax-raising Parliament. And yet, just 44 per cent felt there was any point electing an Assembly member.

It is hardly any wonder that so few people feel engaged with Welsh politics when so few know what is going on. After seven years in power 57 per cent of people had never heard of Rhodri Morgan, according to an opinion poll published in March. And just 6 per cent could identify the leaders of the opposition parties.

Given that most people living in Wales get their news from the UK media, the paucity of coverage for Welsh politics in the 'nationals' poses significant challenges to the viability of the devolution project. The existence of this 'information deficit' has been much discussed. Perhaps less well known, though, is the extent of the challenge we face in creating an informed Welsh electorate.

The total number of viewers for BBC's Wales Today, ITV's Wales Tonight and S4C's Newyddion combined amounts to fewer than 400,000. The circulation of the five highest selling Welsh based newspapers (South Wales Evening Post, South Wales Echo, Western Mail, Daily Post and the South Wales Argus – in that order) adds up to fewer than 250,000.

Even allowing for a generous margin of error, fewer than a third of the people living in Wales consume Welsh daily news and it is getting worse. In the last thirty years, the Western Mail and the South Wales Echo have each lost more than half their readership. The decline has been less marked at the Daily

average viewing figures

News	
Wales Today	276,000
Wales Tonight	100,000
Newyddion	15,800
Current affairs	
Wales this Week	157,000
Week in Week out	153,000
Politics	
Dragon's Eye	69,000
Politics Show	38,250
Waterfront	30,500
Manifesto	6,000

Source: BARB. Figures are an average based on a random sample from the final quarter of 2006

newspaper circulation

South Wales Evening Post	54,745
South Wales Echo	51,386
Western Mail	39,776
Daily Post	38,332
South Wales Argus	28,818

Source: ABC

Post but it has still lost more than a fifth of its circulation since 1997 according to research by Cardiff University.

It is not a problem unique to Wales. "Scottish papers, produced by Scots for Scotland, have seldom, if ever, had it so bad", according to the media analyst Peter Preston. Sales of The Scotsman are down (by 10 per cent to 54,875) as are the Herald's (down 7 per cent to 71,508). For the first time The Sun now outsells the Daily Record in Scotland (414,655 vs. 390,000).

It is hard to feel too sorry for the Scots though. Whereas most London based papers have Scottish editions, the Welsh edition of the Daily Mirror has long gone, and the News of the World and The Star's Welsh editions amount to little more than a red dragon on the masthead.

As competition increases, television audiences are declining too. In 2009 analogue signals in Wales will be switched off as digital television is rolled out across the UK. The availability of hundreds of television channels will pose huge challenges for the future of public service broadcasting.

Put simply, when there were just four channels on our televisions the licence to broadcast in Wales had considerable commercial value. In return for permission to sell advertising, HTV was required to broadcast a set number of hours of public service television. The regulator set a weekly minimum of children's television, religious programmes, news and current affairs and other shows of Welsh interest.

Now there are dozens of channels, and soon to be more, the share of advertising has been squeezed and in turn the value of the licence has decreased. ITV argue that the cost of producing 10 hours a week of Welsh programmes will simply not be worth its while once the switchover to digital takes place. The regulator Ofcom has already started to reduce the number of programmes it has to make in Wales.

Successful shows such as Nuts & Bolts, Fishlock's Wild Tracks and the Sharp End have already disappeared. The budgets of the remaining ITV Wales shows have been squeezed very tight, resulting in a drop in quality, and the slots reserved for them are on the fringes of the schedule. Though the viewing figures are unreliable, they suggest that only around 30,000 – 35,000 people on average stay up until 11.36 on a Thursday night to watch coverage of Welsh politics.

Industry insiders do not expect ITV Wales to survive in its current form after digital switchover. It is feared that popular programmes such as Wales this Week and The Ferret will be scrapped, as will the weekly political magazine, Waterfront. News could be reduced to a slimmed down 'regional' programme. It is almost certain, therefore, that at the next Assembly election in 2011, the BBC will be the only broadcaster offering full coverage of the campaign.

As well as reducing still further the coverage of Welsh affairs, the likely demise of ITV Wales will make life difficult for the BBC. If the BBC becomes the 'monopoly' provider of Welsh public service broadcasting, journalists in Broadcasting House will come under even more pressure from the Government and political parties.

Aside from the impact on the quality of reporting, a reduction in competition will also see the BBC as the main interpreters of our national identity. ITV has traditionally reached a different audience, and a different Wales. After digital switchover, there is a risk that the diversity of our culture will not be captured. There's no doubt that Owen Money and Boyd Clack capture a part of Welshness, but surely there is room for more?

Taken as a whole these trends pose serious threats to the viability of democratic devolution. Without a vibrant national debate it will be impossible to create an informed electorate.

For further analysis of the 2007 Welsh Assembly elections, please visit our website, www.iwa.org.uk

Lee Waters is the former Chief Political Correspondent for ITV Wales and is now National Director of Sustrans Cymru.

The Senedd: transparency in action

scrutiny under examination

aled eirug highlights the need for reform of the Assembly's committee system to ensure good scrutiny and effective use of members' time

The Government of Wales Act (2006), with its new legislative provisions, challenges the National Assembly to fundamentally re-consider its working practices, and, in particular, the way its committees work. For the first time, there will be a need for committees to scrutinise legislation as well as to examine Government itself, and this will impose significant additional burdens on the Assembly's 60 members.

Some of issues are foreshadowed in the recently published Standing Orders for the National Assembly, which provide for the legislative process by which the Assembly will consider proposed Measures and draft Orders in Council. Detailed consideration will normally be carried out by ad hoc committees established for each Measure or Order.

The Standing Orders leave it to the Business Committee to decide on the number and remit of the scrutiny committees that will examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government and associated public bodies.

The guiding principle for whatever system of scrutiny is established is, however, that it should be transparent. Sir Jeremy Beecham's report for the Welsh Assembly Government, *Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries*, has been important in mapping out the key principles for the work of the scrutiny committees.

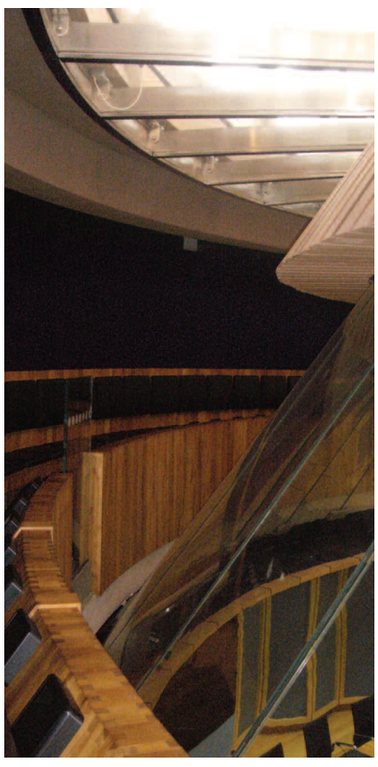
Sir Jeremy, a former chairman of the Local Government Association, encourages the National Assembly to "take the lead in encouraging greater citizen engagement, developing cross-cutting scrutiny and ensuring rigorous, evidence-based challenge so that Wales can become an exemplar of effective small country governance".

The report sets out three key principles the Assembly should adopt:

- to lead a mature, informed and constructive public debate about the policy and investment choices facing Wales in both the short and medium term;
- to set an example of citizen-centred scrutiny, geared to improvement, with no party whip and involving a wide range of stakeholders;
- to review procedures and committee structures to ensure a cross-cutting citizen focus, across all public services, including non-devolved services, critical to improving outcomes for people in Wales.

The 2006 Act provides for draft Orders in Council to be laid in Parliament, by the Secretary of State, to increase the Assembly's legislative competence. This parliamentary process will be preceded by consideration of draft legislative competence orders within the Assembly. It is this process, which does not exist within the other devolved administrations, that will be a huge challenge for the new Assembly.

Assembly Members may also have to sit with the House of Commons' Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and Committee in the House of Lords to consider drafts of Orders in Council. The capacity for meticulous examination of the legal text of the Measures will also be needed.



View from the gallery: citizen-centred scrutiny

The quality and effectiveness of such a body of law will depend on pre-legislative scrutiny of any proposals, together with a post-legislative check on implementation and outcomes, through measuring compliance and consequences. There is consensus in the Assembly that scrutiny of legislation should take place in separate legislation committees. The Scottish Parliament's committee system has overloaded scrutiny committees with consideration of legislation. As a result scrutiny of policy and administration has become less of a priority in a number of these committees. This has implications for the work of the Assembly's committees after May.

In the first year of the new Assembly between 12 and 18 separate pieces of legislation seem likely and these will come from three sources: Government Ministers; individual Assembly Members through a ballot system; and from the policy scrutiny committees. Given the amount of work that will probably result from legislation, it is likely that two or three legislation committees will be required to work at any particular time by autumn 2007. This is in addition to the ongoing policy scrutiny and other standing committees.

In the Assembly's second term there were 19 permanent regional, standing and subject committees. The new Assembly will have the right to create a regional committee, if a majority of constituency and list members wish to do so, subject to the agreement of two thirds of members. Many members now believe, however, that the regional committees have run their course. Though they offer members the opportunity to be visible in their areas, attendance has been poor and discussions have been desultory and without sufficient purpose.

At least six standing committees were in existence during the previous Assembly. Through its standing orders, the Assembly has agreed that after May there must be a minimum of seven standing committees. These are the committees for business, audits, subordinate legislation, standards of conduct, equality of opportunity, European and external affairs and scrutiny of the First Minister.

A number of these committees, such as the Committee for Scrutiny of the First Minister, may only need to meet periodically but most would wish to meet monthly. In addition, a Finance Committee will be established for the first time to scrutinise the budgets proposed by the Assembly Government and other public bodies. It will also be able to examine the financial consequences of proposed legislation.

The structure of scrutiny committees in the second Assembly, as required by the 1998 Act, has mirrored the Government's departmental structure, with eight separate scrutiny committees. Each one includes the relevant Government Ministers for health, the environment, education, economic development, culture and sport, social inclusion, local government and a further committee made up of the committees' chairs.

Unlike its 1998 predecessor, the most recent Act does not require the establishment of a scrutiny committee for each Minister and ministers do not have to be members of such committees. These committees will, therefore, be less inhibited in their enquiries and more rigorous. Reformers hope the party whip will not apply to chairs or members. There will also be a heavier workload on committees due to the Assembly's responsibility to give consideration to petitions submitted by the public, which may contain proposals for legislation.

All this detailed committee activity will fall on only 60 Assembly Members, and a drastic re-think of how policy scrutiny committees are organised is, therefore, required. It will be practically impossible for members to find the time to be appointed to the same number of committees as previously.

In spite of the recommendations made by the Richard Commission, the

Government of Wales Act (2006) retained the existing number of Assembly Members. None of the Government Ministers, the Presiding Officer nor the Deputy Presiding Officer may serve and the Opposition leaders will probably not serve on scrutiny committees. The Assembly will, therefore, have to seriously consider reducing its present number of committees to create capacity for legislative scrutiny committees and the smaller number of members (a maximum of 44 would be available).

If the present pattern of committees were retained and supplemented by new legislation committees (seven members for each committee), each backbench member would have to sit on between three or four committees. This would be impractical and unworkable.

In light of this, there are a number of options. The number of members on committees could be reduced. At present the average number of members on scrutiny subject committees is eight. It may be possible to reduce this to seven, although this might be difficult, if the majority party were to insist on a majority in each committee. Another possibility is to reduce the numbers of committees. The regional committees could be disbanded and the Assembly could ensure that the scrutiny committees would meet regularly outside Cardiff.

The general support across the parties for the philosophy of the Beecham Report gives the opportunity to re-consider how Government should be scrutinised and ensure that it is cross-cutting in representing the citizen and consumer. Beecham emphasises the case for stronger scrutiny as a 'lever' for improving delivery. He calls for scrutiny in the Assembly to be 'forward looking as well as reactive', that the whip should not apply and all public bodies should be required to participate. He calls on the Assembly to take a 'whole-system, citizen centred approach' focusing on service delivery across both devolved and non-devolved services. There will also be the new finance committee.

On the basis of the number of members available, four additional scrutiny committees could be created, with either seven or eight members scrutinising the impact of policy in four main areas that cover main Government spending but also fit in well with the emphasis on service delivery to the citizen rather than attention to the administrative structure.

The Assembly Government's 2007-2008 budget of £14bn primarily consists of health (£5.5bn), local government (£4.0bn) and education (£1.7bn). This spending merits the heaviest scrutiny. For scrutiny to meet the Beecham standard, however, each committee must not automatically scrutinise a Government department per se but rather policy, administration and spending across the whole of the Government.

The remit of the four committees:

- **Regeneration and Environment**
  Economic development; community inclusion and regeneration; transport; planning; environment and sustainable development; agriculture and rural development; countryside and conservation; and housing affordability.
- **Health and well-being**
  Health, children's and adults' social services; public health, mental health, physical and sensory disabilities and learning disabilities; health aspects of housing, for example homelessness; delivery of services for younger people and older people; treatment of the citizen across the organisational boundaries of local authorities, health boards, hospital trusts, the voluntary sector and private sector suppliers.
- **Lifelong learning**
  Lifelong learning, including pre-school, schools, further and higher education, training and skills; arts and culture; Welsh language policy (excluding regulation).
- **Public service delivery**
  Beecham-led new local structures; local government, NHS and health boards; housing funding; impact of non-devolved policy, for example, work and pensions and law and order); community safety; voluntary sector and the social economy; and police and fire services

This allocation of responsibilities between the four committees seeks to deal with the reality of a finite number of Assembly members and the need to prioritise the Assembly's work in scrutiny committees. No committee model is ideal and although much of the environmental and sustainable development agenda is here contained within the suggested regeneration and environment committee, it could be argued that as one of the key objective s of the Assembly and Assembly Government sustainability should be part of every committee's brief.

Many children's charities advocate the establishment of a children's committee but it may be more appropriate to establish a sub committee to scrutinize children's services across all areas of policy.

Much further debate will no doubt take place before the National Assembly decides on committee numbers, membership and briefs, and the views of all those with an interest in securing the most appropriate structures would be welcome. Please let me have your comments at aled.eirug@wales.gov.uk

For an examination of the significance of the Government of Wales Act (2006) to the Assembly's powers, see 'The Legislative Process' in *Parties Prepare for Battle: Monitoring The National Assembly, August – December 2006* (IWA and Grayling).

Aled Eirug is a constitutional consultant with the National Assembly for Wales.

Devolution has ended a 700 year link between the Welsh law courts and Chester

switching circuits

the breaking of the courts' link with Chester has created a Wales-only judiciary for the first time since 1831, says keith bush

Edward I's Statute of Wales 1284 placed the new county of Flintshire under the jurisdiction of the King's Justice of Chester. The administration of justice in Wales had been yoked to that of Cheshire. This has now ended. The Wales and Cheshire region of Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) disappeared at the beginning of April and was replaced by a Wales region. Cheshire became part of the north-west of England region.

Most will see this move as long overdue. The administration of justice in Wales should reflect the needs of Wales, something which linking the Welsh courts to those of Cheshire made impossible. Yet, defenders of the status quo have fought a tough rearguard action, claiming that it will make north Wales a legal backwater.

The modern court system in England and Wales is a product of the Courts Act 1971, which replaced the old pattern of Assizes and Quarter Sessions with a network of permanent full time Crown Courts, whose administration was placed in the hands of central government through the Lord Chancellor's Department. Legal tradition was appeased by basing that administration on the old Assize court judicial circuits. Wales's 700-year old link with Cheshire was preserved. At the same time Monmouthshire, attached to the Oxford Circuit by the Tudors, was re-united with the rest of the country. A Wales and Chester Circuit of the courts administration came into being. It was a unique unit of administration – the only one based on combining Wales with Cheshire.

HMCS provides the infrastructure which enables the judicial work of the courts to continue. The judges are judicial office-holders independent of the

18

administration. That infrastructure includes court buildings, staff to run them and the back office functions of the courts generally. Separation of the judicial functions of the courts from the administrative side of their work can never be total. Issues such as where courts are located, how many days of the year they sit to hear cases and whether there are enough staff to deal with the necessary paperwork are all administrative but have a huge impact on whether the public has genuine access to justice.

The way in which the courts are administered also affects the organisation of the legal profession, in particular the Bar. Ever since barristers followed Assize judges around the country on their circuits, the structures of the Bar have followed those of the courts. Barristers organised themselves into circuits, shadowing the judicial circuits, and since 1971 the circuits of the Bar have followed the regional structure of the courts' administration.

Until quite recently local barristers enjoyed a virtual monopoly of work on their circuit. That has changed dramatically as it is now much more common than even a few years ago for barristers from Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool or sometimes London to appear in courts in Wales and Cheshire. Factors contributing to this trend include improved communications, an increasing tendency towards specialisation in the law (to which lawyers in smaller legal centres are worst equipped to respond) and much more effective and widespread marketing by barristers' chambers located outside the immediate area. The traditional close personal working relationship between the courts and the community of lawyers (both barristers and solicitors) practising in the area has weakened.

This close relationship between the courts and the local legal profession can still, however, pay dividends for both. The organisation of the courts on a Wales and Cheshire basis ensured the position of Chester as legal centre for north Wales and Cheshire. Barristers' chambers which began to develop there in the 1950s flourished, producing many eminent advocates and judges fiercely loyal to the system which nurtured them and hostile to any change which threatened it.

An arrangement which united, in the same unit, administration of courts in places as geographically remote and culturally disparate as Haverfordwest and Warrington, Llangefni and Macclesfield was inevitably going to be examined critically in the long run. Twin catalysts for doing so were the Courts Act 2003 (which combined the administration of magistrates' courts with that of the crown and county courts) and the impact of devolution. The review took place against the background of UK government policy that the boundaries of the courts administration should match those of the standard regions on which government in England and Wales was increasingly based.

Speaking in the House of Commons on November 4 2003, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, Christopher Leslie, explained the policy in these terms:

> *"We believe that (this policy) will impact more and more on the work of the courts because they are a part of the wider public service community. The regional offices will increasingly be joined up with other Government services at a regional level. We do not want the courts to be left behind in that, and many of our justice partners – the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, the national probation service, the prison service and, informally, the Crown Prosecution Service – are already aligning with the Government office regions. The courts have been an anomaly, and that is one reason that the issue has evolved in this way."*

A major feature of the anomaly to which the minister was referring was the link between the courts in Cheshire and Wales. The Lord Chancellor's preferred option was to move Cheshire into the North-West of England region of the courts administration but this, together with a similar proposal to detach Hampshire from the Western Circuit, attracted fierce opposition from the legal profession and judiciary. In announcing that the proposal would be shelved for the time being, the minister made it clear that Government policy still favoured it in principle:

> *"Dealing first with Wales and Chester, there are practical issues concerning the way in which court work is administered in north Wales and Cheshire, so we have decided to keep the link between them for now. We would like, however, to review that position in the financial year 2006–07 as part of a general post-implementation review of the agency's working arrangements. We believe that at that point there may well be compelling reasons for moving Cheshire into line with the region covered by the Government office for the north-west and to align the courts in Wales with the National Assembly."*

Opponents of the change argued that it would fatally undermine the position of Chester as a centre of legal expertise, making it a relatively insignificant outpost of the north-west of England legal world, which revolved around Manchester and Liverpool. Chester would wither away as a base for the Bar and north Wales would be stripped of any 'local' legal centre and turned into a legal backwater.

The undermining of Chester as a centre for the Bar would even, it was argued, be detrimental to the interests of the Welsh language. A concentration of Welsh-speaking barristers would be lost. As a result, solicitors would find it difficult to engage the services of barristers able to communicate with Welsh-speaking clients in their own language or to respond to the increasing demand for the use of Welsh in court. This argument led Plaid Cymru's parliamentary leader, Elfyn Llwyd MP, himself a member of the Chester Bar, to throw his weight behind calls to preserve the link between the courts of Wales and Cheshire.

It should also lead to issues such as the location of courts generally being considered in a way which takes better account of the geography and demography of Wales

Now that such arguments have finally failed to sway the UK Government, attention turns to the practical problems of implementing the decision and to the opportunities which it opens up for future development of the courts in Wales generally.

The legacy of the former arrangement is that choices which made perfect sense when treating north Wales and Cheshire as a single unit now make no sense at all in relation to their separate needs. In 2001 a £5 million civil justice centre was opened in Chester. Intended to be the main centre for hearing civil cases for the whole of north Wales and Cheshire, a high proportion of its work is drawn from north Wales. Similarly, some north Wales criminal cases are heard in the Crown Court at Chester.

Relying on north Wales cases being able to be heard in Chester has meant that not enough has been spent on providing court facilities in north Wales. There are now insufficient courtrooms in north Wales to cope with demand, a deficiency which will take some years to rectify. In the meantime, a temporary arrangement has been agreed whereby one courtroom in the Civil Justice Centre at Chester, staffed and paid for by the Wales region of HMCS will continue to be available to hear cases from north Wales until enough extra court space is provided there.

What about the legal profession and in particular the Bar? If the predictions of the Chester Bar about the impact on them of the re-organisation of the courts are correct, the logical outcome would be for barristers, at present based in Chester, to gravitate either towards Manchester or Liverpool or towards north Wales. One might expect to see new chambers in places such as Wrexham, Llandudno or Bangor. Only if a collapse of Chester as a legal centre were to be accompanied by a failure by lawyers to compensate by establishing one or more alternative centres in north Wales itself would the prophecy of north Wales becoming a legal backwater come true. Other professions have responded positively to changes triggered by devolution, re-organising themselves so as to respond to the patterns of government. There is no reason why the legal profession should be less able to do so.

What will be the benefits of administering the courts on a Wales-only basis? In north Wales it will, once the necessary extra courtrooms have been provided, mean that many cases will be heard closer to where those involved live. It should also lead to issues such as the location of courts generally being considered in a way which takes better account of the geography and demography of Wales.

The developing use of the Welsh language in the courts will be facilitated. The UK Government is currently considering responses to a consultation on a proposal to make it possible to select a bilingual jury able to hear evidence given in Welsh without the need for an interpreter. Significantly, a good deal of hostility to this proposal emanated from Chester-based judges. A by-product of the re-organisation is that Wales will, for the first time since the abolition of the Court of Great Session in 1831, effectively have a judiciary working exclusively in Wales. This will create better opportunities to strengthen links between the judges and the wider community in Wales, including the Assembly and the Assembly Government.

The UK Government has acknowledged that devolution has had a decisive role in triggering change in the pattern of administering the courts. Overall policy for the courts administration in Wales will, however, continue to be decided by the Department of Constitutional Affairs in London, as will HMCS's overall budget. The logic of seeking synergy between the running of the courts and other Government activities would seem to point in the direction of devolving courts administration to Wales.

The impact of devolution on the law applied in the courts in Wales will continue, for the foreseeable future, to be minimal. The day-to-day work of the courts is concerned with the application of the general criminal, civil and family law, subjects on which the Assembly would not, even if it were to acquire full primary legislative powers under Part 4 of the Government of Wales Act 2006, be able to legislate. Nevertheless, awareness of Welsh law and governance will be much easier to foster, both amongst the judiciary and amongst the legal profession, now that they are operating within a courts system which is organised on an all-Wales basis.

Your Views

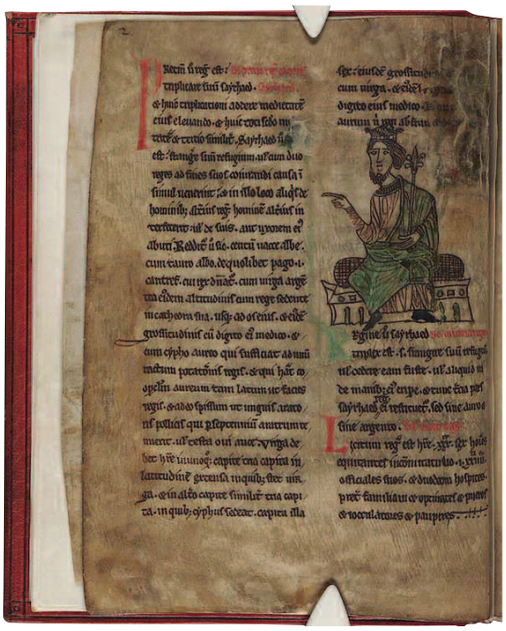
Do you have any comments on this or any other article in agenda, or any other issue affecting Wales?

If so, please e-mail the editor at wales@iwa.org.uk

Keith Bush is a barrister-at-law

llyfrau da

Wales should celebrate the return of law-making powers by putting the books of Hywel Dda on display at the Senedd, suggests john h. davies



Wales's historic law code is stored at the National Library in Aberystwyth

Now that Wales is poised to renew its legislative history through the Government of Wales Act 2006, there is a strong case for us to build on ancient foundations provided by Hywel Dda. For the first time since the establishment of localised Norman rule in the latter decades of the 11th century, we have the freedom to create and manage our own legal system and develop a unified body of Welsh law.

In this great effort we will not be starting entirely from scratch. Among the oldest enlightened bodies of legislation devised by man, the laws of Hywel Dda not only influenced the laws of Sweden but more recently have been a basis for modern European equality legislation.

The laws of Wales were first codified by the great king Hywel Dda (Hywel ap Cadell) around the year 945. As reported by the laws themselves, he summoned representatives from each cwmwd (community) throughout Wales to a great assembly at Hendy Gwyn ar Dâf, (Whitland), in Carmarthenshire, the first recorded national assembly. In the process he was doing no more than centralising the local laws which had been practised in those communities across the country for centuries. The ancient laws forming the framework of society had evolved from British and Roman practice and were standardised at Hendy Gwyn into a national corpus by the 950s.

However, between the 11th and 16th centuries Welsh legal history was the story of conflict between the jurisdiction of Welsh law and the locally modified Roman law of English governance in the Marcher Lordships.

The oldest law books still in use up to the time of Henry VIII are attributed to a professor of law by the name of Blegywryd ab Einon (fl. 955). He and his brother Rhydderch are mentioned in the Book of Llandâf and it seems likely that Blegywryd was a man of Gwent. He headed a commission of twelve other experts in law chosen by the representatives at Hendy Gwyn.

Two versions of the laws state that the Bishops of St David's, St Asaph and Bangor were in Hywel Dda's party on a pilgrimage to Rome to obtain the Pope's blessing on the laws.

There are as many as 80 versions of the laws of Hywel, which were divided into three groups by Aneurin Owen in 1841. These he named the Dimetian Code, the Gwentian Code and the Venedotian Code, which he concluded represented modifications made to suit the

law focus: hywel dda

The Hywel Dda centre in Whitland

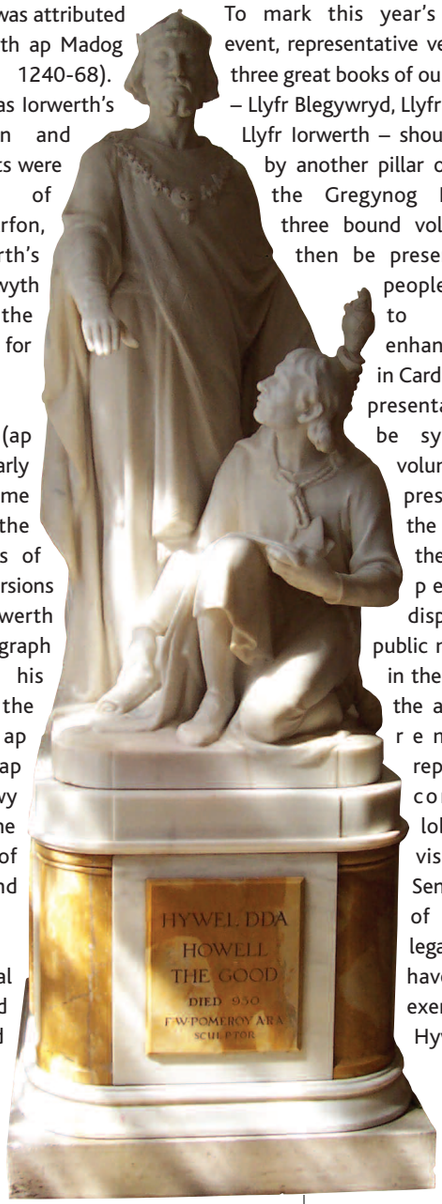
kingdoms of Deheubarth, Gwent and Gwynedd-Powys respectively. By 1909, however, it had been realised that these three Codes were not so regionally-based, and the three codes were renamed the Llyfr Blegywryd, Llyfr Cyfnerth and Llyfr Iorwerth.

The Venedotian Code had been modified in Powys under the influence of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, king of Powys (d. 1075), but the book of Iorwerth was attributed to the lawyer, Iorwerth ap Madog ap Rhahawd (fl. 1240-68). Cyfnerth (fl. 1210) was Iorwerth's grandfather's cousin and Iorwerth's descendants were famous lawyers of Glynllifon in Arfon, Gwynedd. Iorwerth's great uncle was Ystwyth (fl. 1204-1220), the secretary and envoy for Llywelyn Fawr.

Though Cyfnerth (ap Morgennau) was clearly also of Arfon, his name was attached to the south Wales versions of the laws. In several versions of the book of Iorwerth there is a paragraph acknowledging his compilation from the books of Cyfnerth ap Morgennau, Gweir ap Rhufawn and Goronwy ap Moryddig and the best books of Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth.

All this legal experience was carried away by the so-called 'Act of Union', Henry VIII's annexation of Wales to England between 1536 and 1542. The Hywel Dda corpus of law lay unused from that day until the present. Now, with the enactment of the new Government of Wales legislation, we are in a position to acknowledge and celebrate the greatness of our ancient laws, compiled and modified by the great legal minds of our ancestors – laws which served us for nearly 600 years from about 950 to 1536.

At last we are able again to determine for ourselves the working of our independent legal system in Wales. We can celebrate this newly gained independence of our legal system and the potential freedoms and responsibilities which that represents. At the same time, we can also build on and celebrate the deep roots of our legal system.



To mark this year's momentous event, representative versions of the three great books of our ancient laws – Llyfr Blegywryd, Llyfr Cyfnerth and Llyfr Iorwerth – should be printed by another pillar of our nation, the Gregynog Press. These three bound volumes should then be presented by the people of Wales to the newly enhanced Senedd in Cardiff Bay. Such a presentation would be symbolic. The volumes would be presented with the request that they be put on permanent display in the public meeting place in the Senedd, with the aim of always reminding representatives, constituents, lobbyists and visitors to the Senedd building of the great legal heritage we have in Wales, exemplified by Hywel Dda.

Each volume could perhaps contain the law texts in a script as close as possible to the originals and modern Welsh and English versions printed together in parallel texts, for comparison. It is possible, with up-to-date electronic equipment, for the public to scrutinise these law books in situ.The cost of the production of the three volumes should not be borne by the lottery or any other tax on the people but by a national voluntary subscription.

Maybe the campaign could be managed by the Society of Welsh Lawyers, and perhaps the Hywel Dda Society at Whitland, the National Eisteddfod, the Welsh History Forum and other such bodies would support and promote the campaign. Several members of these have expressed their support to date.

This would be a symbolic investment in the future good government of our country. The voluntary investment of the goodwill of the people of Wales which such a project represents, would be a constant reminder to our elected representatives in the Senedd of the reason for their presence there: that they are there as our servants to enhance the welfare of all the population of our country, as the laws of Hywel Dda sought to treat the people fairly and provide a just code for the governance of Wales.

Dr John H. Davies is regional geologist for the Countryside Council for Wales in Powys, Dinefwr, Morgannwg and Gwent. He is an amateur historian with particular interest in history up to the Tudor Period and the 18th century. John is Chairman of the Welsh Stone Forum and the Abbey Cwm Hir Trust and also an officer of the Welsh History Forum.

the impact of Objective 1 funding is difficult to measure, says eurfyl ap gwilym, who proposes a roadmap for further economic growth in Wales

growing pains

The latest data on gross value added (GVA), together with the claims made by the Assembly Government regarding the number of 'net new jobs' being created by the Objective 1 programme, indicate that those expecting a major and sustained boost to the economy of West Wales and the Valleys may be disappointed. Analysis indicates that the programme will have, at best, a very modest impact on relative GVA per capita and is failing to address the central economic challenge of rebalancing the pattern of employment to achieve higher levels of wealth creation.

The major growth in employment in West Wales and the Valleys has been in the public sector and many of the 'net new jobs' created by Objective 1 appear simply to have replaced other jobs lost in the private sector. This is particularly concerning, given the advent of the Convergence Fund programme.

In December 2006 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published latest data on GVA for the UK and its constituent countries and regions. Much of the detailed analysis was for the years up to 2004 but there were also some data for 2005, although these may be subject to later adjustment. In the case of Wales the most recent data continue to be disappointing.

Since the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999 there are three areas where the pattern of increased public spending has deviated markedly from that in the rest of the UK: economic development; health; and education. Spending on economic development has increased from £289m in 1999-00 to £851m in 2005-06; more than 70 per cent of this total is controlled by the National Assembly, 20 per cent by central government and 10 per cent by local authorities. Put another way, public spending per capita on economic development in Wales has increased from 133 per cent of the UK average in 1999 to 263 per cent in 2005-06.

Despite this massive increase in expenditure, GVA per capita in Wales relative to the UK as a whole has not improved. It has declined from 84 per cent in 1995 and since 2002 has stagnated at 78 per cent (see table below). Approximately a third of the monies for the increase in economic development expenditure have come from the EU as part of Objective 1, together with the public sector match funding contribution. With the exception of the EU funding element the increased public funding has been achieved by reducing the growth in public expenditure on health and education. In the case of health, spending per capita has fallen from 109 per cent of the UK level in 1999-2000 to 100 per cent last year. In the case of education it has fallen from 105 per cent to 100 per cent.

Has this switch in spending priorities been justified by outcomes in the case of economic development? Much attention has been focused on what is happening in the Objective 1 areas of West Wales and the Valleys and here the figures are not very encouraging. Relative GVA per capita has continued to run at 65 per cent of the UK average. At best it can be claimed that the sharp decline between 1995 and 1999 has been arrested.

The disappointment with these figures is understandable. After all, the Objective 1 programme came into effect in 2000. While it was clear that it would take some time for the programme to have an impact, it was expected that by 2005 broad measures of economic strength, such as GVA per capita, would start to indicate an improvement in the relative performance both of West Wales and the Valleys and of Wales as a whole (given that two thirds of the population resides in the two regions).

The Assembly Government, not unreasonably, argues that it will take time for the results of Objective 1 to feed through to the principal economic indicators. The key questions are:

- what impact on GVA per capita in West Wales and the Valleys can we expect if the programme has been a success; and
- how long will the effect of the spending take to feed through?

GVA per head indices (UK=100)

	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Wales	84	79	79	78	78	78	79
West Wales & Valleys	74	66	66	65	65	65	N/A
East Wales	102	100	101	100	100	100	N/A

Source: ONS, 2006.

employment in west Wales and the valleys

Date	Total employment*	Employees in employment	Self employment	Employment in administration public sector or defence
1999	741,000	647,000	84,000	218,000
2000	746,000	649,000	88,000	225,000
2001	745,000	647,000	89,000	233,000
2002	758,000	662,000	87,000	249,000
2003	784,000	672,000	103,000	250,000
2004	794,000	689,000	97,000	252,000
2005	796,000	687,000	101,000	255,000
Apr 2005-Mar 2006	796,000	686,000	103,000	259,000

Sources: Nomis – 1999-2003 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2004 onwards from the Annual Population Survey

* This includes employees, self-employed, people on Government-supported training and employment programmes and unpaid family workers.

Answering the question of timing is difficult but analysing the latest GVA data together with claims of the Assembly Government can at least help answer the first question. Of course, GVA per capita is increasing for all of Wales and the UK and is a moving target but, given the major expenditure on economic development in West Wales and the Valleys, one could reasonably expect to see a positive change in this measure. The existence of an effective Objective 1 programme should have given West Wales and the Valleys a competitive advantage compared to the situation before 2000.

The Assembly Government claims that by the end of the Objective 1 programme, 40,500 net new jobs will have been created and 85,000 unemployed or economically inactive people will have received help to reach employment or further training. What impact will the net additional jobs have on GVA per capita? In 2004 the total GVA of West Wales and the Valleys was £20,870 million and this was generated by the 786,000 people in employment. Thus the average GVA per capita of those in employment was £26,552. If the 40,500 new jobs generate the same average GVA then the relative GVA per capita in West Wales and the Valleys would increase from 65 per cent to 68 per cent. If the GVA per capita for the new jobs were at the same, higher level as for those in employment in the rest of Wales (£41,862 in 2004) then the relative GVA per capita would increase to just over 70 per cent.

These estimates rest on a number of assumptions but are valid as a broad assessment of the likely initial impact of the Objective 1 programme, if indeed 40,500 net new jobs are created. (Approximately 62 per cent of GVA is made up of wages and salaries of employees while 31 per cent is made up of profits and the remaining 7 per cent arises from the self employed). In the longer term the multiplier effect of additional jobs would provide an additional boost to economic performance.

While it is claimed that 40,500 net new jobs will have been created by the end of the Objective 1 programme, between 2000 and 2006 total employment in West Wales and the Valleys (employees in employment plus self-employed) has increased by 52,000 (see table above). However, we also know that in the same period the number of public sector jobs in West Wales and the Valleys had increased by almost 34,000. The implication is that there has been a net increase of 18,000 in the number of jobs in the private sector of which 15,000 were in the self-employed category. Thus, many of the jobs created by Objective 1 appear merely to have off-set job losses elsewhere in the private sector and there has been an increase of only 3,000 in employees in employment in the private sector.

This may help explain why the Objective 1 programme appears to have had no material impact on relative GVA per capita in West Wales and the Valleys. It is due to these off-set job losses and the fact that the increase in employment in West Wales and the Valleys has been principally in the public sector and is a result of increased public expenditure other than the Objective 1 programme. It is puzzling that the additional public sector jobs have not led to an increase in relative GVA per capita unless there has been a shift from full time to part time jobs. Another reason may be that high value added private sector jobs have been replaced by lower value added public sector employment at a time when the GVA yardstick has been increasing quite quickly.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. If the mid-term assessment regarding the creation of new jobs as a result of Objective 1 is correct, then the impact on relative GVA will be modest and, at best, the gap between West Wales and the Valleys and the rest of Wales will close from 35 per cent to 30 per cent. If Objective 1 was expected to deliver a significant increase in the relative prosperity of West Wales and the Valleys by creating net new jobs then it is not happening.

Low economic activity rates are commonly cited as one of the causes of low GVA in West Wales and the Valleys and, while this is a factor, its impact is relatively small. In 2004 the employment rate (the number in employment as a percentage of the population of working age) in West Wales and the Valleys was 69.6 per cent compared with 74.3 per cent in the rest of Wales. If West Wales and the Valleys were to enjoy the same employment rate as the rest of Wales, its relative GVA per capita would rise from 65 per cent to 69 per cent – an improvement, though not very dramatic.

Another factor that has been tending to depress relative GVA per capita in West Wales and the Valleys has been the change

in the mix of employment since 1999. There has been a loss of jobs in higher value added sectors of manufacturing (across all manufacturing there were 21,600 net losses between 1999 and 2005) and their replacement by jobs in lower value added services such as distribution, hotels and catering (a net gain of 26,625 across all services) and in the public sector (a net gain of almost 34,000). There has certainly been a modest but welcome increase in the number of jobs in higher value added services such as financial intermediation and business services but while this sector accounts for much of the higher value added in south east England, it is poorly represented in Wales as a whole and particularly in West Wales and the Valleys.

Job creation is important but the key to closing the gap between West Wales and the Valleys and the rest of Wales is to raise the value added of those already in employment. It is the low value added by the 788,000 people in employment that is the major contributor to the low level of economic prosperity in West Wales and the Valleys.

If this analysis is correct, the economic development priorities of the Assembly Government need to change. Given the slowdown in public expenditure growth, the focus needs to move from job creation, especially within the public sector, to helping employers move activities up the value chain as well as creating jobs in higher value added manufacturing and services. It is true that mass manufacturing of low technology products has a bleak future but it is a mistake to dismiss manufacturing as something to be done in developing countries.

High technology-based manufacturing, such as aerospace and semiconductors, continues to prosper and is a major employer in North America and in high cost countries in the EU. Similarly, in the field of services, care needs to be taken to differentiate between many of the low value added jobs being created in Wales and the much higher value added services found in more developed areas of the UK and elsewhere. The rapid growth of a cluster of law firms in Cardiff is an excellent example of higher value added services providing well paid employment in the services sector.

The twin challenges of high unemployment and low activity rates are no longer as important as they once were. What we now need to focus on is stimulating a private sector providing high value employment both in services and manufacturing. This is even more pertinent if relative GVA per capita is used as a yardstick of success. One of the most striking features of the UK economy over the last decade has been the explosive growth in wealth creation in the City of London which is the driving force of south east England and the UK as a whole (relative GVA per capita in Inner London is 248 per cent of the UK average). It is against this challenge that the Convergence Programme needs to be measured.

Eurfyl ap Gwilym sits on the boards of a number of public companies and is a member of Plaid Cymru's Economic Policy Commission.

formula for change

lord barnett proposes revision of the current formula which he devised and suggests that new definitions of need are neccesary

First, it needs to be said that it never began as a formula. As chief secretary to the Treasury from 1974 to 1979, I was responsible for the management of public expenditure and they were tough times. So, to make life a little easier, in 1978 I decided to temporarily cut out separate negotiations with Scotland and Wales, and I obtained cabinet agreement to allocate increases or decreases broadly based on population size. Thus, it would be 85 per cent for England, 10 per cent for Scotland and five per cent for Wales.

I assumed that the system would not last very long. Indeed in the book I published in 1982, *Inside the Treasury,* I never referred to what is now known as the 'Barnett Formula'. It became a 'for-mula' because Margaret Thatcher and John Major kept the system going for 18 years, for fear of upsetting the Scots and Welsh. Eventually, in the 1997 gen-eral election, they lost every single seat in Scotland and Wales. I would like to claim some credit for that happy result but I doubt it was the formula that did it.

Since 1978, changes in population have been taken into account in the annual allocation under the formula. There have also been modest changes in blocks of expenditure outside the formula. It should be emphasised that secretaries of state for

barnett unfair campaigners say there is a com

Tough times are forecast. The new Assembly, and the people of Wales, will have to come to terms with a tighter budget over the next term. It is not certain how this may impact on the Assembly spending commitments to key areas, such as health and education. The Treasury predicts, however, that the increase in the block grant to the Assembly will halve over the third term from the current rate of 3 per cent.

Against this background, leading figures from organisations representing important sections of the public services have together questioned the use of the Barnett formula. Before the election, one group of organisations – the British Medical Association Cymru Wales, National Association of Headteachers Cymru and Sustrans, a sustainable transport charity –proposed an inquiry, following the Richard Commission model. Immediately after the election leading education unions, such as the National Union of Teachers Cymru and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, added their support to the demands.

The formula, devised by Joel Barnett, now Lord Barnett, served as a mechanism to automatically adjust public expenditure in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Any changes in public expenditure are distributed in proportion to each region's population. Existing expenditure is not affected. Allocations are made in block form, allowing the devolved authorities limited financial independence. The formula has been followed by successive Governments, even despite devolution.

Campaigners argue there is a compelling case for an independent inquiry because no one can be sure of the real situation. "Too few people understand the way the Barnett formula works," claims Dr Tony Calland, Chair of BMA Cymru. "Could the Welsh NHS be missing out on millions because the formula is out of date? We need to know". Estimates of a possible shortfall vary. Ron Davies, former Welsh Secretary, asserts that Wales could be missing as much as £800m every year and Nuffield College in Oxford puts the figure at £620m.

Critics have focused on the Barnett formula's rigidity. It makes no allowance for economic and social needs. Additionally, it

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Scotland and Wales have discretion to distribute their allocation (other than social security, where the formula does not determine the overall size of the expenditure) between services in response to local needs and priorities.

Allocating expenditure under such a formula for nearly 30 years has, not surprisingly, been seen to be very unfair. The Treasury select committee has indeed agreed with Treasury officials. Its report concluded: "It is time to bring the needs assessment up to date."

On any assessment, published figures show that Scotland has done very well under the formula. On any realistic assessment, the north east of England, and parts of the north west in particular, on the basis of needs, are doing less well than Scotland.

Of course, there is no magical new formula that would produce a definition of need that would be precisely acceptable, or accurate. Even so, it must surely be possible to provide a formula that meets a needs priority better than the 'Barnett Formula', which takes no account of needs.

So what should be done? First, the 'Barnett Formula' as it works at present is, clearly, unfair and should be scrapped. If the name has become so 'loved' as to be politically impossible to scrap, then there should be a new mark 2 formula, based on need. I would personally have no objection, as I too have grown quite fond of the name.

Finally, it has to be said, there has never been a serious attempt to define 'need'. It is, therefore, essential that a committee should urgently be established to provide a definition. While inevitably not everyone may agree with it, the definition should achieve wide acceptance, and ensure that vital public expenditure throughout the UK – and I emphasise UK – is allocated on a much fairer basis than the present, clearly unfair 'Barnett Formula'.

Lord Barnett of Heywood and Royton is a Labour member of The House of Lords. He served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 1974-79. This article is reproduced with kind permission from the author and was featured originally in House Magazine.

is a compelling case for an inquiry

does not take into account the taxation raised in Wales nor does it provide an incentive to improve economic efficiency. Given the Welsh NHS has more pronounced requirements (mentioned in the Health and Social Policy section of agenda) this is a significant fault from a Welsh point of view.

The Treasury's 2006 statistics show spending planned per head on services for England (£6,623), Scotland (£8,096), Wales (£7,509) and Northern Ireland (£8,898). The lower spending per head on services in England has caused some resentment towards the formula and in particular the apparently over-generous support given to Scotland. It is a politically sensitive issue, not least because any potential reduction in Scotland's allowance could further endanger Labour's delicate position with the Scottish public.

There has been considerable reluctance within the previous Assembly Government to reconsider the Barnett formula. A spokesman said: "It is simple and understandable and as such provides a degree of stability in the consequential flow of resources to Wales." He added: "There is no guarantee that replacing Barnett would give Wales a better deal. We are yet to be convinced that a more complex – and in terms of output, probably more volatile – formula would deliver significant additional resources to Wales. It is conceivable any replacement mechanism could leave us worse off."

Lord Barnett has asserted many times that the formula that bears his name should be scrapped or significantly reformed. The campaign for an independent inquiry may grow as the block grant squeeze is felt most strongly by those on the frontline – healthcare staff, teachers and others in the public services. Any potential shortfall would impact on the public and, given the growing prominence of health service delivery issues in debates in Wales, the Assembly Government may have to face the issue very soon.

Nick Morris

promising futures

martin rhisiart identifies the benefits of futures studies and shows their many uses in Wales

Futures is concerned with improving the capacity of people individually and collectively within organisations to make decisions. Companies and governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) need to understand the implications of trends and the drivers of change. Shifts in personal and cultural values, climate change and economic globalisation, for example, have implications for all types of organisations.

Futures makes use of information that is available or that can be generated about our environment, society and economy. It is a process for making sense of complexity and ambiguity. It generates an imagination and possibility space.

Organisations use futures to address a range of objectives. A typical use is to assist the development of a new policy or strategy, enabling organisations both to understand the implications of emerging issues and trends and to test objectives and options against a range of possible futures. For the public sector, futures tools can help design and deliver new models of service. As the public sector moves away from command and control or rational planning models, there is a need to equip policy-makers with new skills. Futures can facilitate this human capital development in support of transforming public service delivery.

how futures approaches can be used

	Public	Private	NGO
New policy or strategy	✓	✓	✓
Entering new market, developing new product		✓	
Making an investment decision	✓	✓	✓
Facilitating social or economic change	✓		
Challenging mindsets – stimulate some fresh thinking	✓	✓	✓

futures in public organisations

The Observatory of Innovation (OI) at Cardiff Business School is currently leading a European consortium of organisations in applying futures tools within public organisations. The project, Futures for Regional Development (Futurreg), has been designed to strengthen the futures capacity of the partner regions. Futurreg is part-financed by the Interreg IIIC Programme and has partners in Finland, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, Greece and Malta.

A tool kit has been developed to assist organisations to implement futures. It is currently being implemented by OI and its partners in a range of exercises.

These cover several objectives and themes, including:

- strategy and policy development;
- innovation, research and technology;
- sectors and clusters;
- rural development and sustainability;
- futures clubs and networks;
- knowledge transfer from higher education and further education to companies.

In Wales, the project has been involved in two futures exercises. The first is being led by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), Which is using futures to help inform development of its corporate plan for 2008-12. The second, undertaken with the support of Menter a Busnes and the Welsh Language and Economy Discussion Group (sponsored by the Assembly Government), is using a scenario process to consider the possible economic value of language and culture in the future.

In February 2007, OI launched the Wales Futures Network at an international futures conference in Cardiff. The network provides a mechanism for exploring ideas and generating dialogue about a range of trends and drivers of change that might impact on society, the economy and the environment. It is open to all and is intended to be both conceptually challenging and relevant for practice.

A range of presentations was given, distilling futures experiences from different perspectives – geographic, business, public and NGOs. Two further events are planned for 2007: climate change in June and Welsh language, culture and economic development November. Discussions have started on the programme for 2008 and beyond.

Organisations need frameworks and tools to help them achieve core objectives and missions, whether financial profit in the case of business or excellent service delivery for Government. Futures approaches provide tools to assist organisations to understand the change-inducing drivers in their environment. Aside from realising tangible outputs, such as a new strategy, futures can be powerful tools in enhancing organisational human capital – improving people's insight and decision-making capacity. Investment is required by both the public and private sector in Wales to help foster creative and futures-focused organisations, capable of managing present challenges – and those on the horizon.

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what are futures?

There are multiple possible futures. By adopting a 'what if?' approach – using hard and soft information – futures (or futures studies) helps to increase understanding of the possible outcomes of the present. The studies use concepts and models derived from several fields, including economics, sociology, engineering and psychology. Combining a range of perspectives and methods allows us to gain a greater understanding of the way in which the present may shape tomorrow's reality.

The futures studies discipline deals with the possible, probable and preferable and, although it makes use of forecasts, the main business of futures is not to predict one future. The futures approach avoids treating causes in a non-linear way. Where there are complex socio-economic systems in which there is interaction between a range of actors and variables, it is extremely difficult to find simple and linear causal links between x and y, and to isolate and test causes and effects. The futures approach also treats causes in society in a non-deterministic way – in analysis equal consideration must be given to the social constraints on peoples' behaviour and choices, as well as their free will to make decisions. They are neither completely free nor is their behaviour determined entirely by outside factors. People can be irrational also. There are, therefore, severe constraints on what can be predicted.

There has also been the notion of dominant paradigms in science, the idea that different discourses struggle for supremacy within the sciences (following the work of Thomas Kuhn). Experts, even in the natural sciences, have varying interpretations and recommendations that are often seemingly in conflict. We live in uncertain times. While not advocating a relativistic position, where all interpretations are afforded equal weight, we should be mindful of the ambiguity and uncertainty that characterise contemporary western society. This presents challenges for individuals and for organisations.

More information:

- The Observatory of Innovation: www.observ.cf.ac.uk
- Wales Futures Network: www.futures.cf.ac.uk
- The Futurreg Project: www.futurreg.net

For companies, futures techniques can help in understanding the demand for products and services – by interrogating trends and absorbing signals from the market. In a business environment, where the vast majority of all new products fail, companies need more creative and interpretive tools in addition to traditional business management tools.

Use of futures exercises in policy-making has increased over the past decade. In the European Union every country has undertaken some form of futures exercise, with Finland among the leaders. Since the 1980s, and especially from the early 1990s, the Finns have invested extensively in their futures capacity, establishing several key bodies: the Finnish Future Society (1980), the Finland Futures Research Centre, Turku School of Economics (supported by the Ministry of Education and established in 1992), the Parliamentary Committee for the Future (1993) and the Finland Futures Academy (1998).

The Committee for the Future was a political and parliamentary innovation, emphasising the need to take account of the longer-term implications of the present day context and actions. Short-term political cycles are not usually congruent with longer-term concerns and consideration of the longer term provides support to more sustainable policy-making.

In Ireland, another relatively small EU country, there has been a wide application of futures over recent years both at national and local levels. At national level, current futures work is being funded by Forfás (the national policy and advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation) and the National Economic and Social Development Office. The Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly recently completed a futures exercise that brought together a wide range of people to generate visions for the region, taking into account important socio-economic and environmental drivers of change.

In the UK central Government focus has shifted from industrial sectors and technologies – characteristic of the first Foresight programme of the early to mid 1990s – to tackling complex socio-economic and environmental challenges. These include ongoing projects on Mental Capital and Wellbeing and Tackling Obesities: Future Choices. The UK Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-14, recognised the need to identify emergent issues and trends. To help achieve this a Centre of Excellence in Horizon Scanning has been established at the Office of Science and Innovation. This is designed to input directly into cross-government priority-setting and strategy formation.

In Wales, there has been a gradual increase in the use of futures to inform policy work. In January 2007, the Assembly Government published a report, *Futures: some trends, implications and uncertainties,* with a thematic focus on transport, technology, society, international migration, health and lifestyles, governance, environment, energy, economics and demography. Other projects include scenarios work by the Wales Tourist Board and Gwynedd Council and the Future Technologies project carried out by the Welsh Development Agency. To reach some of the international benchmarks in futures practice (and to keep up with Finland especially) Wales needs, however, to invest more within the public and private sector and it is important, therefore, to build on these examples.

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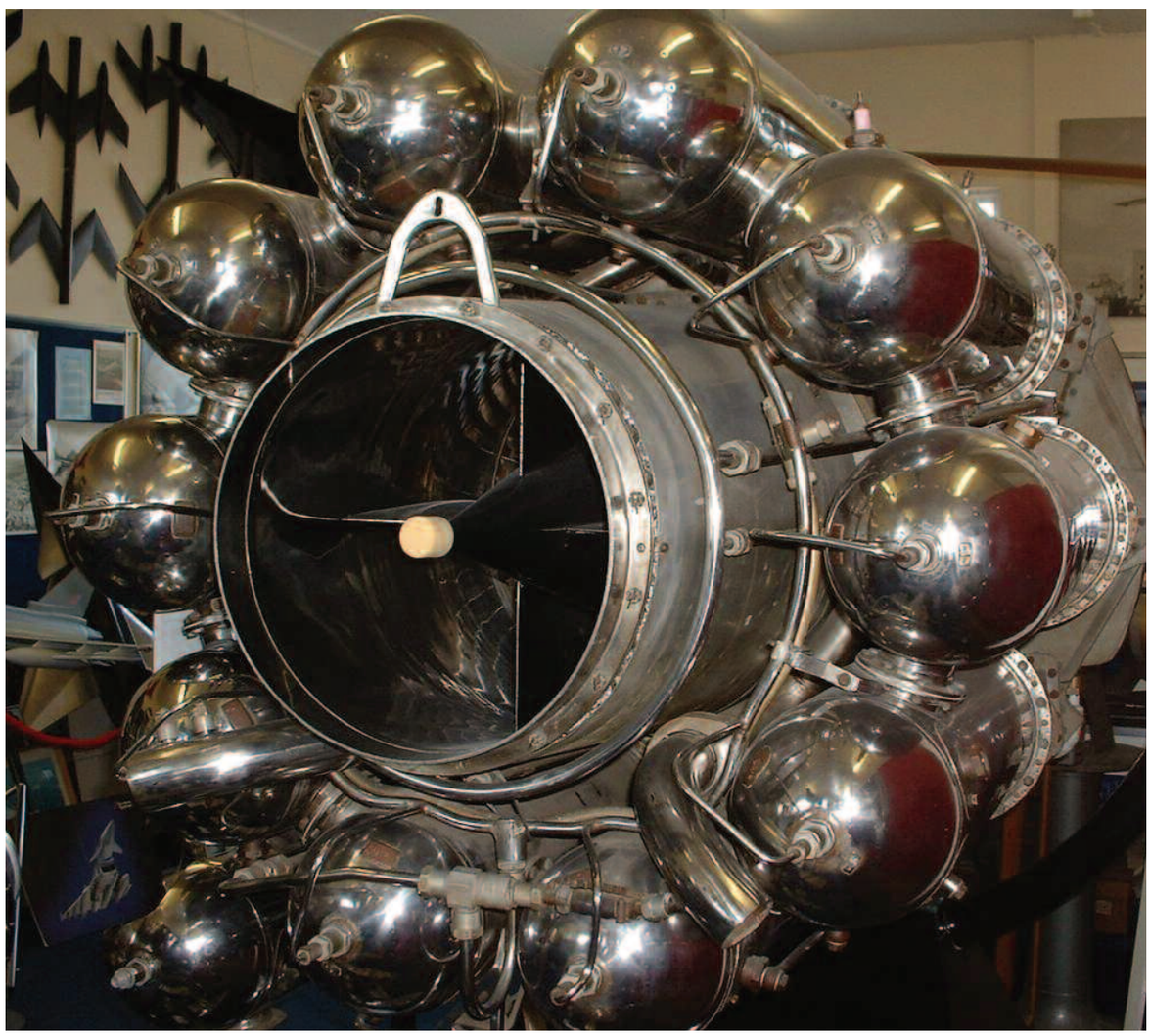
an innovative solution

jonathan kestenbaum challenges the lack of innovation in Wales and outlines a very modern solution

When JFK declared in 1962 that America would put a man on the moon within ten years, he was not just setting forth the US's intention to win the space race. He was initiating a galvanising national purpose around innovation. He liberated thousands of scientists and technicians to strive for the goal ultimately achieved by Neil Armstrong's 1969 mission. The US invested $10bn into putting a man on the moon but it was the multiplier effect this project had – encouraging a new generation of innovators – that proved so vital.

The UK does not have such a national purpose around innovation at present. It is complacent at a time when the speed of the diffusion of new technology leaves no room to be so. It took 50 years for the first 50 million people in the world to own a radio, but only three years for the same number to be connected to the internet. The rate of adoption of innovative products will only increase and the UK cannot be left behind.



The original jet engine: a fusion of science, technology and art

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As well as the US, the UK can look closer to home for examples of how innovation has turned around the economic fortunes of a country. The economies of both Finland and Estonia were turned around after their governments started to optimise for innovation rather than efficiency. Indeed, Sitra – the public body founded by former Finnish Prime Minister, Esko Aho, to foster innovation, is a model of what Nesta (the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) is trying to achieve.

The UK's record when it comes to entrepreneurship is mixed. A large part of this stems from our culture of risk aversion, with 33 per cent of adults citing a fear of failure as the main reason they would not set up their own business.

Similarly, this aversion to risk is found within companies. Studies show that employees are less likely to replicate the risk-taking strategies advocated by senior executives. This was illustrated in the research of Gary Hamel, who compared chief executive rhetoric regarding the importance of innovation to the actual recruiting practices of their firms' human resources personnel. All too frequently the former did not influence the latter.

Innovation takes place across disciplines and arises from collaboration between different organisations and groups of people. The Technium network throughout Wales and the University of Helsinki's longstanding and deep links with Nokia both illustrate that innovation cannot truly flourish in isolation.

Similarly, both the jet engine and the iPod were the result of science, technology and the arts coming together. Frank Whittle and Jonathan Ives both recognised that true innovation lay at the intersection of design and engineering. For Ives, this meant breaking down the wall that traditionally stood between design and engineering and bringing the two together from the outset to result in a product that seamlessly integrated both.

It is the supply of capital that drives demand and, at present in the UK, companies have to locate new sources of supply frequently. Private finance is limited because, too often, venture capitalists do not have a sufficient appetite for risk, particularly at the very early stages of a company's development. Venture capital wants to get in late, make a profit and get out quickly, rather than take the strain of the early risks. Often, too, for public finance it is the risk of bad publicity which can inhibit investment.

Ultimately, there must be greater recognition that companies require time to grow. The UK as a whole, therefore, must encourage more patient and intelligent sources of capital to help its fledgling businesses to develop.

The New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman, has advocated that, with the advance of the internet and global communication, the world is now 'flat' when it comes to innovation. Ideas originating in one place can be quickly applied in another, despite geographic boundaries. Although Friedman is correct that an idea thought up in London one day can be on the shelves in China by the next, we nonetheless still observe innovation occurring in clusters. Innovation is thus 'spiky' rather than 'flat'.

Technium at St. Asaph: helping to develop new Welsh ideas

This theory, advocated by Richard Florida, Hirst Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University, Washington, DC, in the US, claims that cities drive innovation because of how they bring together people and knowledge. Cities can create social capital in terms of the skilled, creative people they attract. Manchester is an excellent example of a city that through its artistic reputation, lively entertainment scene and diverse employers has attracted a huge number of highly-talented individuals who are able to interact in a network that supports innovation. Cities also facilitate the transfer of knowledge between businesses – the word-of-mouth knowhow that is so important for ideas to get off the ground.

Although the UK is strong at invention, it remains poor at innovation and dissemination. We have the ideas but are poor at exploiting them for commercial gain. Whether it is the lone inventor in the shed or a pair of scientists in a laboratory, it does not matter how brilliant the idea is if there is no way of exploiting it. For ideas to be commercialised, a balanced team is required: someone who knows the product or technology, someone who knows how to sell it to customers and someone who knows how to manage the finances. If a company lacks any one of these factors, it is likely to struggle.

At any level, innovation is a state of mind. It is not just about high-technology products and laboratories. It is about recognising core strengths and then deploying them for economic and social benefit. With an expanding skills base and a more focused innovation policy, Wales is getting there. If it is truly to face up to the economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century, however, it must recognise that the only way to succeed is through innovation.

Jonathan Kestenbaum is Chief Executive of Nesta, the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts which promotes innovation (www.nesta.org.uk). This article is based on a presentation he gave at the 2006 Innovation Wales Technology Exhibition in Cardiff.

time for communities

Not just coal but Calon Lân came from Blaengarw. A new sculpture in celebration is bringing the community together

communities across south Wales are re-casting social interactions and experiencing new and old ways in which to grow, says nick morris

Blaengarw's story is similar to that of many other Welsh mining areas. Located at the top of the Garw Valley, it was well-placed to exploit the coal resources there but the closure of the last pit in 1984 left the economy devastated. More than twenty years later the economy remains depressed with a handful of shops providing the only local paid employment.

Efforts to revive the local community have been gathering pace, however, most recently through time banks, an idea successfully used already in other parts of south Wales and outlined in an article in agenda in Autumn 2004.

The Creation Development Trust runs the time bank at Blaengarw from the Workmen's Hall and its chief executive, Dawn Davies, is a lifelong resident of the village. Working with other local people she established the trust to address the social, environmental and economic needs of the Garw Valley, some of the most deprived areas in the Bridgend County Borough. The trust now runs the Blaengarw Hall as a venue for arts and community events on behalf of Bridgend council.

The Blaengarw Time Centre is one of a number of projects run by the trust. Others include schemes aimed at helping reduce arson in the Garw Valley and a Rural Regeneration Programme which includes the running of the Creation Café in the centre of Blaengarw.

The time banking system is straightforward: members of the time centre give their time to the community through

activities in Blaengarw and use their credits in return – one hour equates to one time credit.

The credits can be used to buy tickets to events held locally, such as comedy, music and pantomimes, and for using the Workmen's Hall's facilities and resources. The idea is to establish not merely a club for exchanges but to engage people with their community. Time is thus converted into a community currency with a stable value – one hour given to the community results in one hour taken in the form of entertainment or the use of the hall's facilities.

Time banking was brought to Blaengarw after Dawn Davies met Geoff Thomas, Western Valleys co-ordinator for the Wales Institute of Community Currencies (WICC), during a Valleys Kids seminar.

The Blaengarw trust had already been active in the community before the bank was set up, giving tickets for events at the hall to local people who had contributed to the community centre. The time banking system has, however, given a more structured approach to the trust's activities in this area. Geoff Thomas stresses, though, that time banking is not about fitting people into an agenda but empowering them to follow their own.

The inspiration to bring time banking to Wales was provided by Edgar Cahn, author of *No More Throwaway People*, an American law professor and civil rights campaigner who first suggested that time could be a currency of so-called social capital. Since 2003, the WICC has supported around 25 time banks across South Wales, spread between the Western Valleys region, including Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Eastern Valleys region which includes Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly.

WICC's overall aims are to develop community currency systems like the time centre at Blaengarw, to research their effectiveness and to produce good practice guides for those involved in community currency projects. It is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund under Objective One.

Time banks also offer advantages over traditional community groups which are disparate, claims Geoff Thomas, who has years of experience of community work, as well as in the private sector. "These existing groups tend to operate in their own boxes – for example, a group of elderly people would rarely interact with younger people in the village, if ever," according to Geoff Thomas, "One advantage of the time bank is that it works between groups within the community."

Blaengarw has a widely-focused time bank project, with a potential to involve the whole community. Others across south Wales are smaller and more specific. At the end of 2005, for example, a youth club on the deprived Glyn Coch estate on the outskirts of Pontypridd asked the WICC to assist Communities First in developing a youth time bank out of the existing youth group. As a result of a 'time audit' of the Glyn Coch project by the WICC (which reveals the amount of time given by participants) the number of hours given by the area's young people has risen from 210 to 1,020.

Time credits have been acquired by helping to produce a mural for the local primary school, arranging concerts for the community and in running the club itself. With the credits, the young people have enjoyed outdoor pursuits, learned survival skills and visited the Wales Millennium Centre to see a production of the musical My Fair Lady. The young people have taken responsibility for many of the decisions at the youth club, including the budget.

The development trust at Blaengarw also has a budget to manage for the time bank and its other projects. The bulk of the trust's funds come from a £60,000 annual management fee from Bridgend Council to run the Workmen's Hall as an arts and community venue, and this pays the trust's core costs. Other funding is drawn from Assembly Government schemes and the Welsh Council of Voluntary Associations and the trust has charity status.

The trust is also Blaengarw's largest employer, with 19 workers at the hall, 17 of whom are from the village

The Workmen's Hall itself is an important resource for the community and features a computer room, which has ten computers with internet access, a dance studio and recording facilities. Also, it has a main hall, which hosts entertainment and a mothers and toddlers group. The trust also raises funds, through the Creation Café, for example, and uses its events budget to put on shows at the Blaengarw Workingmen's Club up the road from the hall. The facilities at the hall offer ample opportunities for Blaengarw's residents to earn and spend time credits.

The trust is also Blaengarw's largest employer, with 19 workers at the hall, 17 of whom are from the village, and another two at the café. In 2005-06, according to the trust's annual report, the Workmen's Hall featured 19,248 hours of entertainment, 5.582 hours of learning and 19,042 visits.

Geoff Thomas has memories of a strong community spirit from his childhood in the Valleys and believes the time bank can encourage its revival. He claims that the values implicit in the time bank system run against a number of prevailing trends in modern society. The commercialisation of community life and human interaction is one such.

> *"The current arrangement of public service delivery reinforces passivity and the idea of people as consumers of services, rather than participants. As a result, they feel weakly connected to their services and less willing to contribute to their communities. The time bank aims to give people the opportunity to do this, as 'co-producers' – similar to the old values of mutuality and trust among working communities which found their outward form in co-operative clubs and religious groups,"* he argues.

Geoff Thomas continues: "Old social networks were established on religious or political grounds which were socially exclusive. We are seeking to build communities tied by humanitarian values."

The principles behind time banking also enable 21st century problems such as youth alienation to be tackled more effectively. Increasingly, advocates of time banking claim, problems with the youth in communities are approached by engaging them in activities which remove groups from public view, rather than giving opportunities to re-focus activity to benefit the community. In fact, the time centre approach is to view people as potential assets, rather than problems. One of the central themes of Edgar Cahn's work was that people should be valued rather than approached as liabilities.

Time Bank headquarters: Workmen's Hall

The primary aim of time banking is to address social trends in areas which experience a 'social recession'. Where this has happened following economic collapse, the trend is for people to have less contact with others in the community resulting in falling mutual trust. Geoff Thomas cites the example of expenditure on safeguarding the home, such as burglar alarms, which show a reluctance of community members to rely on each other.

Despite the apparent success of time banking and its greater profile – First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, visited Blaengarw in March – the WICC is still learning. For example, early time banks encountered problems when suggestions were made to give time credits a monetary equivalent. The WICC has learnt, however, that the gold standard of one hour given equalling one received must be preserved. At Blaengarw, tickets can be bought with money or time. The time credit cost is equivalent to the length of the performance.

Just down the road from the time centre is the Blaengarw Sculpture Studio, which is soon to be enlarged to house a library. At present, artist Rebecca Buck is overseeing the production of a community sculpture, based on the hymn Calon Lân, by volunteers from Blaengarw. The song is significant to Blaengarw as the first draft of the words was written by Daniel James in a local pub. After a series of workshop consultations, the design for the Calon Lan sculpture was finalised and will depict the history of village. It is intended to improve the quality and relevance of public art and will be around 6 metres long and 2 metres high. All the volunteers, many of whom are unemployed and some of whom are fighting addictions, receive time credits for their contributions, which range from sculpting to manual tasks. Many use their credits to pay for art classes in the studio and credits can also be spent elsewhere.

Rebecca Buck says that people can do well with greater opportunities, saying: "One of the problems of getting people to be active is getting them to realise they are doing something of worth. People who come here tend to belittle themselves all the time." She is also clear about the aim of her work: "Our remit is to make good sculpture, not to deal with social or individual problems, although those are helped as a result."

Geoff Thomas avoids making grand claims about the future of time banking but will produce a good practice guide from his experiences at Blaengarw. Since it started in 2003, community co-operation in Blaengarw has, he believes, increased and membership now stands at around 300. As a result, the development trust has been able to increase the number of activities hosted in the community and the hall. Time banking in Blaengarw is innovative in many ways but it is rooted in the traditions of the village. The hall itself was originally opened in 1894 and the miners contributed two pence a week from their wage packets to build a centre of academic, creative and cultural growth. The mines may have closed but this spirit of community development lives on now in the Blaengarw Time Centre.

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gastro economy

research into 'gastro pubs' shows great satisfaction, good food and strong business potential, say jonathan deacon and jackie harris

The Foxhunter Restaurant in Nant y Deri

Visitors to the countryside villages that straddle the main routes in Wales, and in particular the M4 and A449 Usk Valley road in South Wales will have noticed over recent years a new trend, one which brings together the village pub, the local community and a potentially sustainable form of commerce.

The gastropub has reached Wales and in particular those locations that share the characteristics of typically short driving distances from the larger conurbations of Newport and Cardiff while being easily accessible to visitors using the motorway network.

With the shift in demographics towards an older aged population, health promotion focusing on the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption and drink driving legislation impacting upon the village 'local', many small and rural hostelries have for some time been facing either radical change or closure. Such a change can and has had a dramatic effect upon rural communities which were once partly reliant upon such places for social, information and commercial exchanges.

Representing as they do, however, an idealised image of tranquillity and village life, a growing number of premises are morphing into so-called gastropubs that focus upon food while offering a public house atmosphere. These new venues are visible throughout the Usk Valley, where a growing number of so called gastro pubs are also gaining a good reputation for the food and service they offer.

The social and economic impact that a change of direction – from village pub to gastropub – may have are well worth studying as a means of understanding how it could affect the future growth of this sector of the leisure and tourism industry – an industry that is vital to the economic well-being of Wales. From the research we undertook, involving information collection, through informal and formal conversation and observation, throughout Wales and the Usk Valley in particular, three distinct themes arose: the place, the food and the people.

The term gastro pub itself has a number of interpretations. Some respondents suggested that they were enterprises that were at heart a pub in the traditional sense but also offered quality but simple food. To others they were no more than relaxed restaurants. Importantly, a few acknowledged the links to the supply side of the industry and, therefore, the role of local produce in defining the pubs and their setting.

All respondents to the surveys we carried out were passionate about the food produced and the quality of the ingredients. Some told of serendipitous supply where people would visit with fresh seasonal or specialist food. On other occasions the venues had to chase supply and more than one commented on the lack of supply for (sea) fish and a local supplier of imported vegetables. Much of it seems to come from Covent Garden via London-based suppliers.

The immediacy of supplies, especially seasonal, was a recurring issue. The interdependence of supplier and venue appears only to be seen, however, from the venue's perspective. The suppliers of such produce, by definition, are most likely to be local and small scale but seem to overlook the opportunities afforded by closer working relationships. Many venues have, therefore, established their own sources of supply with cooks' gardens and farm supply (dairy, meat and vegetables). One has become so successful that they have been actively sought by a supermarket for supply.

Issues of quality and sustainability in employment do arise. While many of the front of house staff are local, these are typically young people who are 'filling in' and few have aspirations to make a career in the hospitality sector, unlike their counterparts in many other parts of the world. The picture in the kitchen is somewhat different – respondents made strong criticisms of the formal 'training' available for young chefs in Wales.

On the demand side the picture was a little different. Customers appeared to be a mix of locals (living within 30 or so miles) and outsiders. Respondents regularly referred to outsiders – regular customers who would make a special visit from the West Country, Cotswolds, west Midlands or London.

It was the expectations of the customer, however, that gastropub owners felt differentiated the two groups. The visitor from a distance was thought to appreciate the food before the surroundings. One respondent said: "They eat out more often and so a wobbly table is overlooked in preference to the quality of the food – whereas the local trade eat out as a treat and expect a tablecloth." The theme of 'educating the local audience' was strong and was nuanced in most conversations, although not in a patronising tone, as the goal was to share enthusiasm for food. This passion for food and the desire to integrate into the community was underlined in more than one inn by the prominent placing of a list of local suppliers and their produce.

Socially, while the character of the venue may have changed, in most cases a local hub for exchange and entertainment remains, though different in character from what has existed previously. The central thrust appears to be a passion for quality food at an accessible venue which is relaxed and not 'posh' and few would seem to want to risk alienating the local community in an attempt to attract visitors in their place.

The opportunities that exist for a closer relationship between local suppliers and venues is a recurring theme, however, as is the failure by suppliers to respond. Loyalty to the local agri-sector and a desire to establish chains of quality supply are, nevertheless, strong. These could, in time, act as a stimulus for further venues to develop and make it possible to offer quality produce and products to a wider geographical area, with a considerable multiplier effect on employment and tourism.

The totality of the 'gastro economy' in the Usk Valley suggests the constituent parts of a business cluster are in place. (More about clusters in Wales can be found in J. H. Deacon, 'Cluster opportunities in South East Wales – The Equine Industry'). This type of emerging cluster could be described as a 'ghost cluster' in that it exists but has yet to be fully identified. The view that a nice pub in a pleasant place can have little impact on the total economy appears to perpetuate a blinkered view of the sector.

The recognition that a cluster exists could enable the area, perhaps through targeted assistance and market development, to build on the framework that currently exists and many lessons could be learned from, for example, the Napa valley wine cluster in California. The supply side includes not only the ingredients for food preparation but also the development of people – chefs and front of house – for the service sector, crucial in Wales. Much of the development spend has been concentrated in the urban areas whereas gastro activities takes development to other areas of Wales equally in need of high quality employment.

The lack of structured links within and throughout the sector is astonishing, given the clear link between diversified agriculture, skills development and tourism. Local pubs have changed but this has brought an opportunity for a large part of the rural community to enable social, cultural and economic sustainability. Local and Assembly Government policy needs to recognise and reflect this.

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The enabler message has been taken to shows and other events throughout Wales

a home in the country

rural Wales must be allowed to benefit from an expanded network of enablers who can ensure housing is affordable, argues amanda oliver

Rural Wales has some of the least affordable housing in the UK. High house prices, Right-to-Buy, nimbyism (concern over the effect of developments on local communities), low wages, an overly long and complicated planning system and lack of housing development have together created a situation that has left many people priced out of the local housing market. They have in many cases been forced to relocate to other areas, often breaking local ties and this in turn has had a detrimental effect on the rural community and in some instances on the sustainability of the Welsh language.

Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) are independent brokers who, in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, national parks and local communities, develop affordable rural housing solutions for village communities. They significantly contribute to the supply of affordable housing and play a crucial role in fostering community cohesion and defusing tensions and sensitivities that can render development plans inoperable.

There is evidence, supporters claim, to show that they:

- significantly reduce the time-frame for development completion;
- are able to assist in early site identification;
- play a major role in housing need assessment;
- contribute to the development of innovative strategic and operational plans;
- support where practicable the delivery of other housing-related support services.

In addition, they are able to prioritise the needs of the community. RHEs have developed supportive relationships with communities based on mutual trust and respect. They also provide advice to housing and planning authorities and to other agencies to help develop more coherent strategies and policies. Enablers also inform the development of local housing strategies and community strategies. Their impact is widespread. RHEs help address the issues surrounding the sustainability of all rural services: transport, social care, health, education, childcare and jobs and support the use of rural exception sites. Innovative strategic and operational options, such as self-build, are explored by enablers who also contribute to rural areas research.

RHEs have been successfully tested in England and, following an evaluation of 16 RHEs across England in 2001, the Countryside Agency (now known as the Commission for Rural Communities) decided to part-fund up to 47 RHEs – at least one for each county. RHEs are recognised by the UK Government, the Housing Corporation and the Commission for Rural Communities as unique and vital in addressing rural affordability as well as supporting community regeneration and promoting social inclusion in rural areas. In a recent review, conducted by the Affordable Rural Housing Commission in England, a recommendation was made that the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs fund 100 RHEs across England.

Despite Wales having significant rural areas, it has only four RHE projects. These operate in Monmouthshire and Powys, Conwy and Denbighshire and in Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire. The RHEs in Wales have only been in post for a short time and cover a limited area of Wales but they are set to make a real impact. They have already made significant progress working with community councils, identifying sites and facilitating housing need surveys. To date few units have actually been built but this situation is changing and results are becoming evident.

One Welsh project that has, however, benefited from the scheme is at Castell Coch in the village of Dyffryn Ardudwy in Gwynedd. Local enabler, Arfon Hughes, has worked on the project since Autumn 2004 in partnership with various stakeholders. With the community council in the village, Tai

Eryri Housing Association, Gwynedd Council and the National Park Authority, Arfon Hughes has been able over the last three years to identify the need for affordable housing locally. He has also been facilitating delivery to meet demand. In Spring 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government allocated £800,000 through the Social Housing Grant which will be used to fund 10 houses, including a bungalow with specific facilities for people with disabilities.

The project will allocate the available housing as part of a special allocations policy that prioritises applications from local people with genuine need for housing. Gwynedd Council will sell the land to Tai Eryri, which will then develop the 10 houses at a cost of £1.3m.

The Castell Coch project highlights many of the issues surrounding rural affordability as well as unique cultural and linguistic aspects that require delicate and skilled handling. The RHEs have demonstrated that they fully understand these issues and have been able to successfully manage them to the benefit of all concerned.

Despite the successes achieved by the small number of enablers working in Wales there are concerns about the lack of continuity in funding and the future sustainability of these projects. A recent report, commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, the host organisations of the four RHE projects and Community Housing Cymru examined current arrangements and outlined options for the future of the service in Wales. The outcome of a research project undertaken by Hughes Isherwood Consultants in 2006, identified a number of weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

A strength highlighted is the role of the RHEs in developing collaborative partnerships with housing associations, planning authorities and the voluntary sector (while remaining independent from such associations and authorities). Additionally, the fact that the current RHEs were also lobbying effectively and raising rural housing issues was seen as a major success. In terms of linguistic challenges, the ability of RHE staff to speak Welsh helped greatly in Welsh-speaking areas. For local councils, the RHE network is saving much needed resources and making real progress on rural housing developments possible.

The major weakness is the scarcity of RHEs. The lack of a widespread network has meant that each RHE works in a fairly enclosed environment and has very limited scope for joint and cross-border working that would strengthen the RHE position within Wales. RHEs have also been seen in some cases as not independent due to their reliance on housing associations as providers and hosts. Short term contracts that the RHEs are obliged to work under also weaken continuity and project completion.

The main threat is funding. There is currently no continuity of funding and many providers are impatient due to the long-term nature of projects. Nimbyism may also threaten the work of RHEs. The issue of local and outside people being housed in the new affordable housing schemes has also raised local concerns. The principal opportunity arises from the possibility of developing a more permanent and flexible network across Wales. This would require increased funding from local authorities, housing associations and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The research project report, which was launched on February 9, 2007 at an event in North Wales by Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, Presiding Officer of the National Assembly and Nick Bennett, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru (see picture left), also suggests there is scope to work increasingly with the private sector to deliver the housing units required and to increase rural regeneration more generally. The opportunity to increase this type of joint work, in line with the recommendations of the Beecham Report, also exists between RHEs and local authorities, housing associations and National Park Authorities.

The report suggests having 12 or 13 RHEs, a central support unit, Chair, Champion and Board. Investment will be crucial in any expansion, with £1m a year necessary to facilitate the development of a larger network. Such investment and backing will also support those RHEs who have done vital work so far in bringing the complex issues of rural development together and achieved progress. The report argues, however, that without funding commitments the opportunity these projects offer to alleviate affordability issues will be lost.

Amanda Oliver is Housing Policy Research Officer for Community Housing Cymru, a membership body serving housing associations and associated support providers in Wales. The body was re-named from the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations in November 2006.

remaking Rhyl

the story of the resurgence of a popular seaside resort after years of decline is told by derek jones

Rhyl, in Denbighshire, boasts a wide promenade, harbour and marina, an interesting network of streets, many small shops and some fascinating, unsung architectural details. It has, though, during the past 25 years, acquired a formidably bad public image. It is not a matter of image alone. There is considerable dereliction and as a consequence real social problems. Until recently the town seemed set for permanent decline.

Rhyl's creation, in 1807, was on reclaimed marshes. It grew rapidly after the railway arrived in 1846. Rhyl was north Wales' first seaside resort, the annual destination of thousands from the industrial towns of north-west England and west central Scotland who helped build its reputation as a cheap respite from the smoke.

The visitors mostly stayed in boarding houses, of which there were 200 by 1947. They were of four storeys and arrayed along East and West Parades, providing familiar if sometimes rough and ready accommodation for many loyal visitors who enjoyed the usual range of amenities – pier, winter gardens, paddling pools, ballrooms, open air theatre, bingo and pinball machine emporia. Arthur Askey and Tommy Trinder topped the bill at summer shows and winter pantomimes. The Beatles' first Welsh gig was at the Ritz ballroom in July 1962. Rhyl's economy seemed to be assured.

What went wrong? The social pattern of British holidaymaking was already changing in the 1950s and 60s when caravans became available to increasing numbers of people. Massive sites emerged to the west of Rhyl. This was not initially a problem since caravanners came to town for meals and entertainment but then site owners began to provide facilities and enjoyment of the van became an end in itself. The decline of Rhyl was compounded in the late 1960s when Roy Jenkins, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, indirectly launched package holidays abroad – good weather guaranteed – by putting a cap on the amount of money Britons could take abroad, leading to travel companies offering pre-paid packages. Increasing car ownership and road improvements made possible day-trips to Rhyl and seaside landladies became an endangered species. Finally, even the day-trippers began to ignore the resort.

Of course Rhyl was not alone. Colwyn Bay and Llandudno – and their south Wales equivalents – were subject to the same forces. However Llandudno, and perhaps Tenby, managed to withstand them by catering for older, more middle class holidaymakers. At Rhyl, by contrast, the decline was viewed with a sense of helplessness, despair and then resignation. The authorities neglected the problem. The time to tackle the dereliction and personal melancholy was not yet ripe and superficial measures, in the form of the Rhyl Sun Centre

Future Rhyl: how the new Ocean Plaza will look at night

Rhyl in its railway heyday

Rundown West Parade will be refurbished

(bathing pools and tropical vegetation by 1980) and the Sky Tower (obtained, second hand, from the Glasgow Garden Festival during the 1990s), failed to stem the tide.

The physical results of Rhyl's decline were soon apparent and some can still be seen in parts of West Parade and neighbouring streets which are empty and almost literally crumbling. Some shops are boarded up; others are in decay from the second floor upward due to absentee landlords. There is also a sad-looking fun fair near the harbour, several gimcrack bingo parlours and the sub-Disneyland Children's Village which has so few friends that there are still vacant units after 10 years.

The social consequences are not difficult to imagine. Greedy or desperate landlords, the owners of empty boarding houses, turned them over to multiple occupation. Long term homeless and unemployed people and ex-prisoners, often fuelled by drugs, began to see the advantages of living by the sea. Drug pushers followed. Local people, residents and caring professions alike, already burdened with the normal run of family problems had at first neither the experience nor the resources to halt the process. Some streets became home to a transient population. In 2006, the town's unemployment rate stood at 5.9 per cent, way above the north Wales average of 3.1 per cent.

Areas of dereliction, although quite extensive, by no means cover the whole town. The many strong voluntary organisations

a national problem

Rhyl's situation is not unique. Many towns around Britain's 12,429 miles of coastline suffer from similar deprivation and isolation. Successive Governments in London have been reluctant to form an overall approach to the problems on the grounds that the towns are too diverse to warrant national initiatives. There is great inequality between towns, however, as some such as Brighton have been more successful in maintaining their economies.

In early March, the Department of Communities and Local Government Select Committee reported on the situation and recommended the need for the Government to do more to help coastal towns. The report said that complacency had left them to market pressures which, as in Rhyl's case, resulted in poverty when tourist income fell.

The report said that seaside towns in Britain had shared characteristics. Deprivation can be both a cause and result of these. Particularly important was the demographic trend of elderly immigration and outward migration of younger people, straining the local public sector and reducing economic activity in the towns. Housing markets tended to have high prices and a large, low-quality rent sector with many multiple occupancy dwellings, which suggests a significant transient element of the population. Tourism continues to be an important source of income, of course, especially in traditional seaside towns. The report highlighted the need for Government-led co-ordination to promote tourism and economic diversification to protect towns from market pressures.

Another issue facing seaside towns is environmental. Coastal erosion and flood defences mean more spending four local authorities. A month before the publication of the report the National Trust called for "urgent action" to prepare for erosion and flooding as over the next century three-quarters of the Welsh coastline could be badly affected.

and the well-established community development agency, while not minimising the extent and range of the problems, have discovered a new optimism about Rhyl's future and are playing a full part in its planning. Indeed, the interested parties – the Welsh Assembly Government, Denbighshire County Council, Rhyl Town Council, private developers, local businesses, voluntary organisations and all contributors to the Rhyl Going Forward Group – appear to have achieved a remarkable consensus on how to re-make the place they regard as home. Outer Rhyl, some two thirds of the town, already houses many who enjoyed the place as holidaymakers and decided to live there full-time and it stands comparison with much of suburbia elsewhere. The next stage is to transform central, west and south west Rhyl so that they, too, become desirable places to live and work. Unless that happens, no amount of new tourist amenities will bring back the holidaymakers.

Stylish apartments are planned for the front

The regeneration has already begun. Denbighshire council has already purchased some of the more derelict properties along the promenade and is demolishing some to make way for redevelopment and handing over others to private developers who are turning them into flats to buy or rent. The run-down Hotel Marina had provided shelter for many but also a base for all manner of anti-social behaviour. A fair approach to the homeless people who lived there and the people of Rhyl, who were often at the receiving end of crime, is a complicated moral issue.

Society's interest, let alone that of the young people concerned, is not served if the homeless are simply shunted elsewhere and, despite the adoption of progressive policies, there is no evidence that Rhyl has solved problems which are endemic elsewhere. Yet, it is hard not to be glad to see the old hotel refurbished (by Haigh Properties) as a block of decent-looking flats with a great view of the sea. Several other examples could be cited as developers' boards are beginning to appear. Soon, perhaps, Rhyl will begin to seem desirable again.

This is unspectacular, piecemeal regeneration, which will make a considerable difference over time. By contrast, Ocean Plaza, a Modus/Building Design Partnership development will impact in a bold and instantly visible fashion. The tired old funfair near the harbour will be removed. Contemporary apartment blocks, all curves, picture windows and balconies facing the sea are planned to house 300 families from 2009 onward. Architecturally about as different from old Rhyl as can be imagined, the plaza apartments (already dubbed 'ocean liners') will also incorporate small shops, bars, and restaurants as well as a superstore and hotel. The existing road along the promenade will be diverted through the development and open out into a wide new public space overlooking a greatly improved harbour.

West Cheshire, where property prices are high, is within easy commuting distance of Rhyl, which is now perhaps set to follow Brighton's lead by offering a seaside home to commuters. Young Cestrians can hardly fail to be attracted by the prospect of an elegant flat overlooking the harbour and open sea, even in a place with so poor a reputation. However, sceptics may argue that the arrival of Ocean Plaza, so obviously desirable and prestigious, may have unfortunate results for the social geography of the town.

Modus appear to understand the dangers. They say they are committed to Rhyl for the long term. They intend that the prices of the flats should be moderate, within reach of existing residents and are in any case bound by Denbighshire's policy that for every three new properties built or refurbished, one must be affordable. The plaza's shops and restaurants, likely to be trendy, ecological and led by design, are expected to complement those of the town centre rather than rival them. More traditional shoppers may need some persuading to use them but on the whole the situation looks good so far.

Rhyl's future well-being must surely lie to a great extent in the town centre. People observably enjoy its friendly atmosphere and there is much to be said for a place which is so liberally endowed with small shops, some of them – tackle and bait shops and a bookshop which appears to stock the entire works of Emyr Humphreys – usefully specialist. However, too much is tatty, needing at least a lick of paint and perhaps new signage. New names are required in some cases: Buttylicious and the Soled Out Bargain Footwear Centre, please note! Some like Queens Shopping Centre, ought swiftly to be demolished to make way, perhaps, for a department store. It would be good to see further edestrianisation and some cafe tables on the streets.

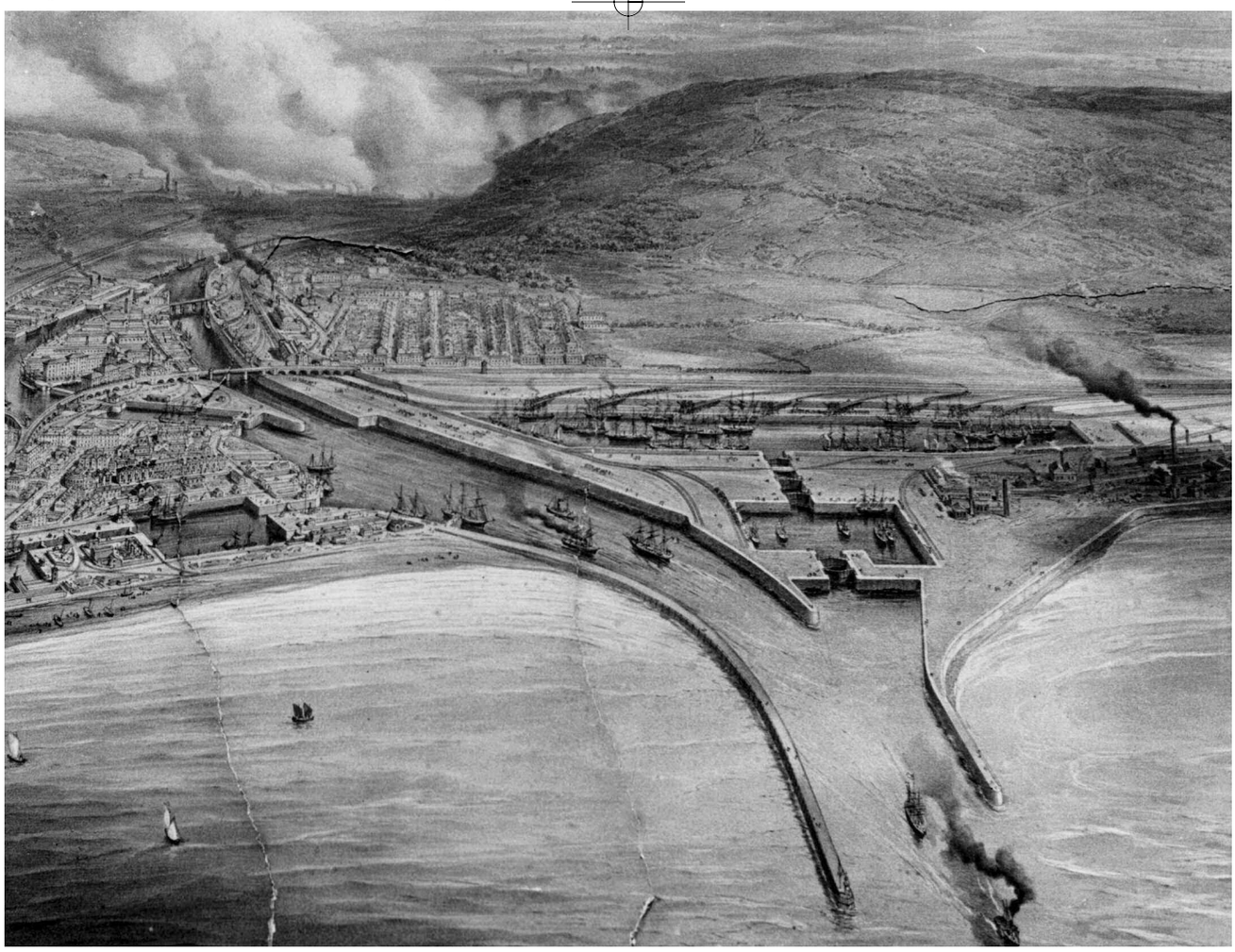
Denbighshire's Townscape Heritage Initiative has identified a number of interesting-looking 19th and 20th century buildings that have declined but are worth conserving. The curiously-named Bee and Station (1850s), a former commercial hotel, has some excellent external tiling in good condition and if refurbished it should immediately attract attention. Nearby, the gazebo on a former hotel at the corner of High Street and Brighton Road will be restored and will surely become a landmark.

A derelict building in Edward Henry Street, featured in an L.S. Lowry painting of 1935 will be put to rights (alas, the painting is in a private collection; it would be good to have it back in its place of origin). Several buildings that turn the corner at the intersections of streets present a handsome frontage and soften what otherwise might seem a rigid street plan.

All that will, undoubtedly, seem esoteric to some who will be better pleased with the new Drift Park on the sea front, this incorporates five themed gardens devoted to natural history (including a 'living roof' designed to attract butterflies), drama and music in the open air, play, paddling and crazy golf. Seating for the new theatre is arranged in shapes which reflect Ocean Plaza and its walls incorporate art installations celebrating moments in the town's history. Here perhaps is where Rhyl, old and new, locals and holidaymakers, will naturally meet.

Regeneration is in progress and it is potentially momentous in reversing decades of neglect. Behind it are not only the authorities and private developers but many Rhyl citizens who have responded positively to the stimulus. An international dimension has been achieved through partnership with Athy, south of Dublin, a town with similar problems. In Rhyl, as a result, a business group is now devoted to the repair of the town's image, including mounting an annual celebratory Rhyl Week, a French market (a challenge to class conscious stereotypes!) and a craft fair. The Community Development Agency is a reminder that not everybody will get equal value from the new Rhyl: their championship of the needs of those who could easily get left behind as the town goes forward must surely be allowed to continue for a good many years yet.

Derek Jones is Vice Chairman of Ruthin and District Civic Association. He is also a board member of the Civic Trust for Wales and chairs the editorial board of their magazine, About Wales.



blank slate

richard porch celebrates the opportunities offered by the Swansea development but argues that lessons can be learned from other projects

The metal refineries that dominated the Lower Swansea Valley in the early 19th century have long since gone

The chance to add significant acreage on to an existing city, free from a potentially inhibiting context, is very rare. Swansea has been handed just that opportunity with the 100-acre SA1 development launched in 2004 on the site of the old Prince of Wales Dock.

It was the last of the three great Victorian dock infrastructure projects that acted as important complements to the driving force of the Lower Swansea Valley, at the time the world's main non-ferrous metal centre. The north dock was the first to be built in 1845-52 followed by the south dock in 1852-59. These docks enabled bigger vessels to be handled and, consequently, larger copper ore shipments to be dispatched. Before this vessels were moored in the river and exposed to one of the biggest tidal ranges in the world. With wet docks, unloading could be done at nearly all times, except for a few hours either side of low tide.

By the late 1870s, however, even the capacity of these large docks had been exceeded and the search began for a bigger one. The Swansea Harbour Trust, which had been founded in 1791 and mandated to improve the town's port facilities, nominated land on the east side of Swansea. The trust identified Fabian's Bay, a natural harbour that had been used for centuries by anyone trading with the port of Swansea. It had already been partially filled with spoil from the digging of the New Cut – a channel to straighten out the winding course of the River Tawe that created the north dock in the process.

With minimum concern for the environment and far more attention to economic and commercial interests, the trust stepped up the infilling of Fabian's Bay to create the land needed for the new dock. On March 31 1880 the trustees, in a ceremony led by Henry Hussey Vivian (the owner of the town's hugely successful Hafod Copperworks), laid the foundation stone for the new 27-acre dock. On June 22, 1882 the new dock was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales (later to become King George V and Queen Alexandra) in front of 76,000 people, the entire population of the town.

Some 122 years later in 2004 another ceremony took place at the Prince of Wales Dock, this time to celebrate the launch of the SA1 Swansea Waterfront regeneration project undertaking with as much significance for what is now a city as was the original dock (see picture above and right). Planned originally by the Welsh Development Agency (now incorporated into the Assembly's Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks) and the Assembly Government, the aim of SA1 is to attract £200m of investment.

There was no royal presence this time, only a collection of local politicians and Assembly Members to attend the launch of what may also be Swansea's best opportunity to become a place in Wales where good architecture can flourish. The project had been mooted for a long time and in the 1990s had been known as Port Tawe. However, feedback indicated that some found the second word difficult and it was being mispronounced as "Taw". Rather than correcting people's pronunciation, the scheme's backers decided to rebrand it. Hence it became known as 'SA1', which was anyway perceived as somehow modern and is also the postcode for the Prince of Wales Dock area.

The project is set in the solidly working-class area of St Thomas, which was built in typical nineteenth century grid-iron pattern, following the lower slopes of Kilvey Hill closely and overlooking the main roadway from the east into Swansea. St Thomas mainly comprises short terraces of houses with street names that serve as a reminder of the mid-Victorian period in which they were built: Inkerman Street, Delhi Street and Balaclava Street. As a community it is separated from SA1 by Fabian Way (named after a Daniel Fabian who owned land in that area in the 1760s), a continuously busy stretch of dual carriageway. SA1 thus has an important frontage looking out on to the prime roadway into the city.

Unlike on the drive into many other conurbations, there are no bleak outskirts to be seen before encountering the city. With Swansea one sees the swooping, curving arrangement of Fabian Way, which presents on the right views of Kilvey Hill and on the left Swansea docks. It creates a real sense of arrival, which more attractive landscaping and some distinctive buildings can only underscore.

Having distinctive buildings should be the aim of the city and the lessons of the past need to be learnt. In the early 1990s an architectural competition was held to find a designer for the Ty Llen project, when Swansea was designated the 1993 UK City

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of Literature. Noted architects were invited to design a building in a competition that ended poorly when the local paper published the entries and asked the public to vote for its favourite.

Unfortunately, the public did not seem to care for any of the proposals and this signalled the end of the project. Thus, nothing new or adventurous was built and instead a classical building from the early Victorian period was refurbished. The result was that everyone was satisfied.

Apparently learning nothing from Swansea's misfortune, two years later Cardiff put itself through the same ordeal by public taste with the Cardiff Bay Opera House architectural competition. Fortunately, though, Jonathan Adams eventually emerged as the architect for the Millennium Centre and something far more decent than we expected was built. The lessons learnt were the need to hold strictly limited architectural competitions where designers liaise only with the prospective client and finalised schemes are not reliant on the ultimate approval of public taste. Architectural competitions are not beauty contests – they are vehicles (albeit flawed ones) for procuring good architecture.

Since the late 1990s a quiet but steady improvement in the architecture built in Swansea can be seen. Technium incubator units (two on the east side of the river and one on the

university's campus) have signalled that the city can live with buildings that contain odd shapes, are not made of stone nor are classically ordered. Swansea's Lord Mayor's Design Awards, the oldest of their kind in Wales, are a useful indication of the city's architectural ambitions. The last five years have featured a steady stream of improving work that shows architects from within and without the city are doing more than getting the job done quietly on time and to budget.

Projects built so far on SA1 include some riverside apartments, the Swansea Apostolic Church, a hotel, the Technium business incubator buildings, a low-rise office development and a 'signature bridge' by the architects of the adjacent National Waterfront Museum Swansea. All are of a standard that would be termed decent, but none (the Sail Bridge apart) are likely to make a significant impact in UK architectural spheres.

The same is true for Cardiff Bay and that has been building since the mid 1980s. Arguably the most significant building there – at least until the arrival of the Millennium Centre in 2005 and the Welsh Assembly Government headquarters in 2006 – was the Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre. Known affectionately as 'The Tube' it cost around £200,000 in 1991 and was only built with temporary planning permission. Intended to be merely an exhibition pavilion for a model of the Cardiff Bay project, it remained the most architecturally interesting building to be seen there until only two years ago.

It is proof that an iconic building need not cost a large amount. This is what SA1 will need at some point within the next two years, a really good building, or preferably two, that set an architectural standard, inspire press headlines for all the right reasons and positively identify the city with good architecture. Swansea has ambitions to be a European city of international standard: such cities are branded by the quality of the architecture they generate.

SA1 calls for the creation of:

- 2 million sq.ft. of business floor space
- 1500 quality homes
- The restoration of two Grade II Listed Buildings, the Ice House and J-Shed
- The attraction of £200m of private and public sector investment
- The creation of 2000 jobs
- 1000 new homes.

IWA Swansea branch
Free event
Thursday June 14th
6.00 Debate.
8.00 Buffet
Royal Institution of South Wales, Swansea Museum
Welsh Science: Unsung Past, Uncertain Future
with Dr Louise Miskell and Dr Neville Evans.
To book call 029 2066 6606 or e-mail wales@iwa.org.uk

Richard Porch is an architectural writer living in Swansea and a contributor to Planet magazine.

hydrogen future

dennis hawkes explores a new energy source where the potential for Wales is great

A project has begun recently that aims to establish a renewable hydrogen research and demonstration centre within Wales to show the world what Wales can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and produce a sustainable energy supply

Europe has embarked on a courageous path to fight climate change, agreeing that 20 per cent of the energy used will come from renewable sources by 2020. Leaders also agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 per cent from 1990 levels or up to 30 per cent if other countries join with the European Union in the drive to reduce emissions. However, figures from the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory show that while carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions fell in England (–6.7 per cent), and Scotland (-14.1 per cent) between 1990 and 2004, they rose in Wales (+2.3 per cent). This is despite Assembly Government targets to reduce climate damage.

Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change are not the only concerns for Wales. Fuel prices and our increasing dependence on remote sources of gas and oil from potentially difficult areas of the world are economic and political challenges that will affect all of us. One important response to these challenges has been a focus on research and development activities in hydrogen energy. For example, the European Commission has set up the European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform to accelerate the deployment of competitive, world-class European hydrogen and fuel cell

based technologies for applications in transport, stationary and portable power.

Why is hydrogen generating such interest? It is clean and efficient and can be produced almost anywhere in the world from a wide variety of locally-available sustainable energy sources. Since hydrogen can be stored it can also help us make better use of our intermittent renewable resources: tidal, wave, wind and photovoltaics (PV).

Hydrogen is in use now for transport in internal combustion engines with very low emissions. This is the system used in automobiles such as the fleet of BMW 750hL hydrogen powered vehicles. When hydrogen is used in a fuel cell the efficiency is higher and the electricity produced can be used to power electric motors as in the Clean Urban Transport for Europe hydrogen buses presently operating in London. Road transport accounts for one quarter of all UK carbon dioxide emissions and the introduction of hydrogen as a clean fuel would, therefore, have a major role to play in reducing pollution in our streets and meeting our climate change targets.

Hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe but has to be released from the compounds it forms, such as water and methane, using a primary energy source. Thus, we must think of hydrogen as an energy carrier, as electricity is. Most of the hydrogen currently produced in the UK is generated from natural gas and, since this is a fossil fuel and CO_2 is liberated during the process, this is unsustainable.

Hydrogen can also be produced from coal and, if safe economic ways of capturing the carbon dioxide could be found, this would be very attractive, as the reserves of coal in Wales and the rest of the UK are vast. Nuclear power could also be used for hydrogen production by using advanced reactors designed to operate in temperature ranges compatible with high-temperature thermo-chemical hydrogen production methods. However, there is still hot debate over whether this is sustainable or desirable. The true cost of nuclear power is very high.

Hydrogen can be produced from a variety of renewable sources, one reason that makes it so attractive. Water can be split into its constituent parts, hydrogen and oxygen, by electrolysis using so-called green electricity. Water can also be split using photo-electrochemical cells illuminated by sunlight, a process known as photolysis. Other light-dependent processes can produce hydrogen biologically. The problem here is to design cost-effective reactors where enough light can penetrate the cloudy microbial culture, a challenge that seems insurmountable.

Biomass, a collective term for all plant and animal material, can also be split to release the hydrogen it contains. The biomass can be either a waste product, such as that arising from the food industry, or fodder material, such as grass, maize or beet. The processes are CO_2 neutral since CO_2 was absorbed by the biomass and eventually is released back into the atmosphere as part of the carbon cycle. Pyrolysis or gasification of dry woody biomass can produce hydrogen through reforming synthesis gas. Fermentation of wet (green) biomass, with naturally occurring bacteria uses well-understood reactor technology, like that for biogas production by anaerobic digestion. Bacteria can, in the dark and in the absence of oxygen, break down a wide variety of carbohydrates and produce hydrogen.

Can we produce enough hydrogen in Wales to make a difference to our energy needs in the future? Since hydrogen, unlike bioethanol or biodiesel, can be produced from a wide variety of sources there is a large potential for the sustainable production of hydrogen, especially since we have an abundance of renewable energy. Wales already has an extensive hydrogen infrastructure mainly situated along the M4 corridor, although it is currently based on fossil fuel. Industry produces hydrogen in large quantities as a product or co-product. It means that there is wealth of knowledge about hydrogen and experience in handling hydrogen safely. Also we have world-class research in Wales in various aspects of hydrogen technology including dark fermentation of biomass.

Because of the abundance of renewable energy sources in Wales we are ideally placed to fully exploit the advantages that hydrogen can offer. The technologies we can develop could start a new industry in hydrogen technology. The renewable production of hydrogen, and its use especially in vehicles would fit well with the Assembly Government's sustainable development strategy. In the Welsh Assembly Government's document *Energy Wales: a route map to a clean, low-carbon and more competitive energy future for Wales,* a priority is a drive for innovation to create a stronger energy research and development base in Wales. The exploration of the medium and long term potential for hydrogen use in Wales is one of the actions. Andrew Davies, Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks, has stated: "The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to sustainable development and if Wales is to become a significant global player in the future development of a hydrogen economy we need to grasp the available opportunities."

With part funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), a renewable hydrogen research and demonstration centre is to be located at Baglan Energy Park in South Wales, by the University of Glamorgan's Hydrogen Research Unit. By 2008 it will demonstrate hydrogen production from a range of indigenous renewable energy sources and evaluate the benefits of using hydrogen as an energy storage medium for these intermittent renewables. Half of the building is designed to house equipment such as an electrolyzer, hydrogen compression and storage facilities. The other half will accommodate offices and a display, demonstration and educational area. This follows on from the successful H2Wales project also part-funded through ERDF Objective 1. This facility will help us realise the potential of Wales as a pioneer of a low-carbon economy.

For more information see www.serc-wales.org.uk and www.h2wales.org.uk

Professor Dennis Hawkes works in the Hydrogen Research Unit at the University of Glamorgan.

building a sustainable future

The 200-seat Wise lecture theatre

phil horton describes the construction and future operation of a building that shows climate change can be countered in many ways

We face a problem. If global greenhouse gas emissions exceed the planet's critical 'tipping point', runaway climate change will result in a series of global catastrophes, including massive agricultural losses, international water shortages, dangerous rises in sea levels, a slowdown of the Gulf Stream, widespread economic collapse and tens of millions of environmental refugees.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) is now rising at around 2 parts per million a year. The scientific consensus is that the tipping point will be reached in around 20 years. This allows 10 years to develop and implement technologies and lifestyle choices that could mitigate these problems. After this point, even large-scale changes to our way of life would have only minimal effect.

After several years of careful planning and fundraising, construction of the Wales Institute of Sustainable Education (WISE) at the Centre for Alternative Technology is finally under way. WISE is a response to climate change, the foremost contemporary environmental issue and the need to develop significantly lower carbon lifestyles.

Over the last 32 years, the Centre for Alternative Technologies (CAT) has developed and worked with low impact technologies on a site near Machynlleth in mid-Wales that hundreds of thousands of people have visited to learn about CAT's solutions-driven approach. We have been running courses at the centre since the 1980s but in recent years there has been a surge in demand, particularly in postgraduate studies and technical subjects. Our MSc course, Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies, run in association with the University of East London, now has around 300 registered students. This, in conjunction with demand for other courses, such as solar water heating for plumbers, solar electricity for electricians and wood fuel installations, has meant we have outgrown our current facilities. In 2001 we decided to develop a new education centre and WISE, a 2000m^2 development, is the result.

The development will feature:

- A 200 seat lecture theatre;
- Six other teaching spaces;
- A biology laboratory;
- Offices for 20 new staff;
- Accommodation for 48 in twin, en-suite rooms;
- A 50-60 seat extension to our existing restaurant;
- A large foyer (with bar) and other breakout spaces;
- Server room, plant room and other ancillary spaces.

In common with most of the buildings at the centre, WISE will further develop sustainable construction and feature innovative technologies prominently. The focus is on minimising the energy used during construction (the embodied energy) and the energy in use.

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The plan for the rooms is relatively shallow, arranged around a central courtyard, to maximise natural daylight and minimise electrical demand. Extensive glazing to the south, combined with movable screens, allows for passive solar energy gains and solar control. The main lecture theatre is a circular structure of rammed earth with 15m diameter. The walls are 7.2m high – the highest of their kind in the UK. The earth is a very low energy material and it acts as so-called thermal mass by insulating against temperature changes and making best use of solar energy.

The majority of the foundations are constructed using lime, which has a far lower embodied energy than cement, although more is required to obtain the required strength. Overall, there is around a 40 per cent reduction in energy use. Some parts of the site require the higher strength of cement. In these we substituted some cement with GGBS – a waste product from blast furnace slag – which again reduced the embodied energy.

The main structure of the building is a glue-laminated timber frame. Lamination produces high strength and stiffness beams while making use of small timber sections. All of the timber in the building has Forest Stewardship Council certification, the only fully independent guarantee of sustainable production. Unfortunately, the UK market for structural timber is not well developed so the frame is being supplied by a Danish company.

The external walls are a 500mm thick mixture of hemp and lime, with a small amount of cement. The aim of using this technology is to produce a breathable, highly insulating wall using a single material that is easy for a conventional contractor to handle. The walls will be rendered with a sand and lime mixture and all finishes will be environmentally friendly paints. Internal walls are a mixture of earth blocks, where additional thermal mass is needed, and timber studwork. We plan to use a material called glaster (a plaster made using recycled glass) as a finish. All of the building's exterior will be super-insulated to minimise heat losses. Glazing is of low emission type and is filled with argon. The majority of the heating system is underfloor, reducing energy demand still further. Water systems also minimise resource use. Low-flush toilets, a composting toilet, low water use showers and waterless urinals will be used. All our waste water will be treated by our existing reed bed systems.

WISE will dramatically increase the number of people at CAT – visitors, staff, course participants, students and visiting businesses. As we increase in size, our need for energy will increase accordingly. We are, therefore, preparing for the installation of a woodchip-fired combined heat and power (CHP) plant, to generate around 200kW of heat and 100kW of electricity. Our existing district heating system is being extended to link to more of the buildings around the site. The extension will include our straw-bale lecture theatre, on-site community cottages, existing courses accommodation and offices. Once installed, the CHP plant will make WISE the only place in Britain, if not the world, with solar, hydro-, wind and biomass electricity.

In addition to the CHP unit, Dulas Engineering, a spin-out CAT company, has already installed a 60m^2, 6.5kW peak output photovoltaic (PV) array. The PV panels comprise individual cells set in glass to allow some light through to the area below. There will also be a 65m^2 solar water heating system to provide hot water in the summer, when the main system will be switched off but demand for showers and from the restaurant will still be significant.

CAT has been connected to the electricity grid for many years, so we can sell our excess production and to prevent the need to invest in huge energy storage systems to supply at times of the year when there is low output. However, over the year, CAT is a net exporter of electricity. We plan to continue to expand generation as we grow, to retain the surplus.

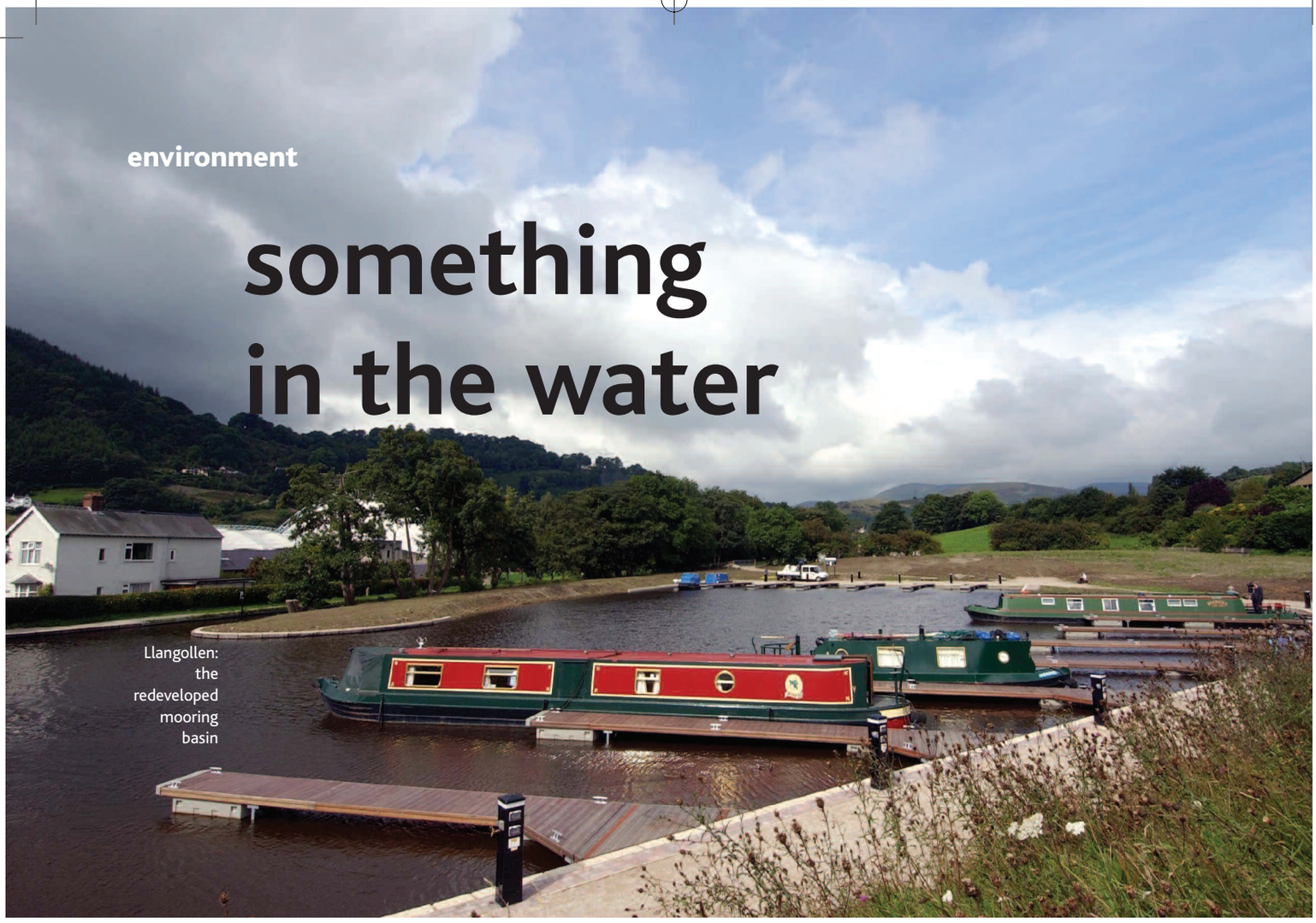
In order to measure the impact of the building, both in construction and use, a comprehensive monitoring programme is in place. Data Officer, Claire Rhydwen (see picture left), measures energy and water use on site, travel impacts of meetings and deliveries, and the embodied energy of the main building components. The aim is to produce a complete measure of the carbon footprint of the building. The hemp and lime walls are particularly interesting to researchers. Their insulation performance in use is better than anticipated by simple laboratory tests. A PhD student is researching the reasons for this. The building will have extensive monitoring systems built into the structure. This will enable ongoing research into the energy performance of the building and allow students to measure their impacts during their stay.

Work started in June 2006. The majority of the groundworks have now been completed and the timber frame was delivered in mid-April. Once the frame is under way, the rammed earth walls will be the next stage in construction. The planned completion date is June 2008.

For further information, and to be updated on progress, please visit our website www.cat.org.uk/wise

Phil Horton is Special Projects Officer for the Centre for Alternative Technologies. He is currently overseeing the building of the Wales Institute of Sustainable Education.

something in the water



Llangollen: the redeveloped mooring basin

david baldacchino presents the case for improving the waterways of Wales, which can bring many benefits

In 2003 British Waterways published its strategy document, *Waterways for Wales*, which proposed a framework to enable development of our waterways, harnessing the potential offered by the canals of Wales. Four years on the potential is being realised. The document reported on the progress made by various partners, including Government agencies, local authorities, canal societies, community associations and other volunteers, as well as offering a re-assessment of the value and benefits of waterways.

Economic modelling by consultants for British Waterways shows that of the £3bn annual expenditure by visitors to Wales overall (VisitWales), an estimated £26m is currently spent on waterway visits, generating more than 900 full time jobs. Our vision is to double the number of visits made by 2012.

Llangollen Mooring Basin is one success story. The vicinity of the canal boasts several unique features: the International Eisteddfod, historic ruins and the longest aqueduct in the UK. Until 2003 it was also one of the UK's most congested sections of waterway. Mooring congestion was driving away holiday craft, depriving Llangollen of income from boating visitors and leaving customers dissatisfied.

The importance of developing Llangollen as a canal destination resulted in a partnership being formed between the former Welsh Development Agency, Wales Tourist Board, Welsh European Funding Office (Wefo) and Denbighshire County Council to back an ambitious British Waterways scheme to construct a basin.

Opened in March 2005, the basin transformed 1.5 acres and created 32 secure, high quality berths. An independent economic study shows an increase in boat movements from nearly 8,500 in 2004 to almost 12,000 the following year. The basin now attracts 28,000 more holiday visits and brings 122,000 additional day visits to the Llangollen area annually. The gain to the local economy is estimated at more than £450,000 in the first year.

Attracting visitors, however, is just half the story. The spectacular Pontcysyllte Aqueduct has admirers worldwide, yet does not bring sufficiently high financial returns for the surrounding area. Submission for World Heritage Site status in 2008 is viewed as key to securing further spending across north Wales. Studies for projects such as the Pontcysyllte heritage site bid and Montgomery Conservation Management Strategy have already established the international importance of these assets for heritage and biodiversity. Other benefits enjoyed by waterside communities and visitors from near and far are less easy to claim as financial returns. Waterways, though, offer enticing activities for all members of the community.

British Waterways is mapping the physical environment of Wales' canals, offering information and opportunities to improve recreational access for all as part of the Equal Shares for All project funded by the EU Equal programme. From this research demands for new facilities will emerge to better serve the growing market for all sectors of the community that wish to enjoy safe and inclusive access to the countryside – from long distance walks to canoeing.

Waterways for Wales and the many subsequent development proposals must, however, be set within the context of forecasted worsening conditions – not just climate change but dry spells in domestic and European funding, too. Because canals were built so long ago, time is an increasingly critical factor in waterways asset restoration.

Early in 2001 members of the Shropshire Union Canal Society (SUCS), who are also dedicated campaigners for the restoration of the nearby Montgomery Canal, began restoring Newhouse Lock, the Welsh canal's final frontier. After four years and spending of £250,000 the work was completed, bringing to fruition a 20 year strategy to restore all 21 locks along this ecologically sensitive waterway, which is 35 miles long.

SUCS secured funding from a variety of sources and, despite facing a number of problems (not least the need to re-build a section of the waterway), worked with British Waterways to complete the project. Volunteers have been integral to the Montgomery story and their continued involvement in waterways projects is crucial.

The case for investment to release the potential of waterways is growing. Quantifiable measures, such as footfall, visitor spending and destination enhancement, are established within British Waterways' corporate vision. They can now also be seen in assessments of the wider economic importance of waterway development for the surrounding economy.

The future may offer a route to the sea and the entire UK waterway network via a new marina and cut at Crindau in Newport

Beacon Park Boats is one of nine hire boat operations on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and exemplifies what can be achieved. Based at Llanfoist Wharf, near Abergavenny, one of the most picturesque sites on the canal, the company operates the canal's only 5-star holiday hire vessels. They combine strong product quality and excellent customer care, attracting the high end of the tourism market.

The situation in 2001 was very different. The existing fleet was dilapidated, and foot and mouth disease caused the closure of many of the canals and towpaths. This gave the owners time to renovate the boats and focus on increasing bookings. A brochure was placed on a website – a timely incursion into an expanding marketplace. The internet now generates 78 per cent of their business. Six years on, their rapid success benefits Abergavenny. They welcome more than 1,400 holidaymakers annually, employ four local people and utilise the historic wharf to house their business.

Current waterways have the potential to help deliver the sustainable development aspirations of Wales. Waterway geography demands flexible and progressive cross boundary operation between local authorities, agencies and the voluntary and private sectors. The enthusiasm to achieve lasting and beneficial changes can be seen in the unstinting attendance of representatives from communities, volunteer groups and entrepreneurs at the meetings of the Assembly All Party Group on Waterways (APGW). The APGW has been highly influential as a means of drawing interests together to share successes and emerging opportunities and to bring Assembly Members into the dialogue, demonstrating the strong support for waterways in Wales.

Recognition of the potential that waterways offer is seen in the upcoming Living Links Big Lottery bid from the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Regeneration Partnership for £25m to create stronger links between the waterway and the local community. Links are proposed with the World Heritage Site at Blaenavon and with Torfaen County Borough Council's plans for the development of Cwmbran town centre. The future may offer a route to the sea and the entire UK waterway network via a new marina and cut at Crindau in Newport. Also for the future, the Montgomery Canal, when transformation is completed, will focus on the conservation value of work and develop a valued section of wetland environment into a waterway that can be enjoyed by visitors and future generations.

Restoration is a long term aim. More immediately the Powys Canal Tourism Project will increase visitor numbers and

become a fellow

and support our work

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IWA Fellow, Labour Peer
Lord Gwilym Prys Davies

"The IWA fulfils a vital role in Welsh civic society. If it were not there it would have to be invented."
IWA Fellow, Rt. Hon. Dafydd Wigley
Honorary President, Plaid Cymru

"I am an admirer of the quality of the work produced by the IWA. Its research and publications are of inestimable value to Wales and its people."
IWA Fellow, Liberal Democrat Peer
Lord Livesey of Talgarth

"As someone who has been involved all my of my professional career in think-tanks, research bodies and policy units, I would like to pay tribute to the way in which the Institute of Welsh Affairs has clearly established itself as a leading forum for debate in Welsh political life."
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The Pontcysyllte viaduct has admirers worldwide

participation on the Montgomery Canal in Wales. The project contains familiar themes: accessible circular walks; canoeing and fishing; environmental enhancement; marketing; and linked signage to neighbouring community attractions. The funding partnership, including Wefo, the Assembly Government, Powys County Council, the Environment Agency and British Waterways will invest £582,000 by June 2008.

Steady rather than spectacular progress of diverse projects, delivered within timescales and limited budgets, has created and enhanced water based assets and delivered significant economic, social and environmental benefits lasting well into the future. The difficulty in making the case is that these a return on investment can take time to accrue. The prize, however, is an end to the neglect that once turned canals into eyesores and hazards.

David Baldacchino is Operations Manager for the British Waterways Wales and Border Counties region.

more needs to be done to ensure present and future generations can enjoy our natural heritage on the Welsh coasts, says beverley penney

access all areas

Ask almost anyone about their feelings for the coast – the beaches, cliffs, grassy heath and winding paths – and they will speak of their attachment to it. Yet, 40 per cent of the Welsh coast is largely inaccessible, according to the Local Government Data Unit in 2007

The 800 mile coastline of Wales is one of our finest natural attributes and it has helped define the Welsh past and will continue to be important. The right to enjoy the coast is also becoming a more prominent political issue. The coast, along with the Welsh language and the contours of the valleys and mountains, form the skeleton of Welsh identity. People feel a close affinity for the land and greater coastal access would strengthen this.

The Assembly Government has announced a programme to provide local networks of paths around coastal communities, offering better access for cyclists, horse riders and people with disabilities, and this plan includes a round-Wales coastal path. Crucially, however, statutory access is still under consideration.

Ramblers successfully lobbied Welsh Labour for a promise in the 2003 manifesto which said: "We will further extend open access to coastal areas..." and we secured a strong commitment in the Assembly's strategic plan *Wales: A Better Country* that promised to "further extend open access to coastal areas after the initial access to open country is established".

In September 2005 the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) began to prepare options for the Assembly. This involved consultation with the National Access Forum for Wales and then with invited stakeholders in three exploratory coastal areas in Wales. We thought this focused too much on a coast path rather than open access within a wide, and more beneficial, corridor, so Ramblers Cymru persuaded CCW to include an open access option in a paper to the CCW board in February 2006, which had originally only referred to paths.

Better access to a range of coastal sites, such as Carn Ingli, Pembrokeshire, (left) is the goal

Ramblers Cymru argue it is essential to have a clear vision, political will and sufficient new funds for high quality access. The early signs are encouraging but the greatest prize will be setting the all-Wales path and improved linear access within a corridor designated for access, wildlife and landscape benefits (including beaches, cliffs and adjacent land). We believe this is the best way, on behalf of the public, to deliver all the potential benefits to health, communities and the economy.

During campaigns for the responsible right to roam under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW), Ramblers Cymru argued for coastal access, too. We secured section 3 of the Act that empowers the Assembly to amend the definition of access land to include coastal land, defined as the foreshore and land adjacent to the foreshore – in particular any cliff, barrier, dune, beach or flat adjacent to the foreshore. We are also seeking agri-environment measures to improve both quality of the access and biodiversity. Wales should aim for the best coastal access in the world, better than that enjoyed in Scotland, Scandinavia, France, Denmark and Portugal.

In May 2006 an ICM opinion poll proved the importance of our campaigns, showing that 94 per cent of people across Wales and England wanted a legal right of access to coastal areas, including beaches, cliffs and foreshore.

At present people in Wales have secure access to just 60 per cent of the coast. The remainder has some access but it is not adequate, the CCW board heard. The next target should be securing the remaining 40 per cent and improving the quality of the coastal paths. For people to walk all round the coast, they need to be able to cross estuaries. Some bridges are far inland and, where appropriate, access to estuaries and mudflats should be granted.

ramblers cymru's coastal access vision

We are seeking a corridor of coastal land within which there will be a legal right to walk. Tracks and paths will offer continuous, permanent and erosion-proofed access around the coast of Wales. There must, however, also be a general right of public access on foot to beaches, cliffs, foreshore and adjacent land, with safeguards to protect wildlife, habitats and property. We want agri-environment measures to be targeted at improving the quality of coastal access and biodiversity. We would like to see greater rights for other non-motorised countryside users. All this should be subject to a strong code for responsible use, similar to the excellent Scottish Access Code.

In June 2006 First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, formally launched coastal access, while opening the path around Anglesey. This was a step forward but not far enough.

During an Assembly meeting in the same month, the key objectives of the coastal access programme were outlined:

- improve access to the coast for local communities and visitors through local path;
- improvements, including new circular routes at the coast;
- secure improved wheelchair and pram access to the coastal environment;
- cultivate new opportunities for cyclists and horse riders to enjoy the Welsh coast;
- deliver enhanced public access by maximising existing path infrastructure and improving links to areas of coastal land to which the public have rights of access (under the CRoW Act and to National Trust and publicly owned land at the coast);
- ensure a good quality all Wales coastal path in the long term (permanent and proofed against erosion), connecting existing coastal trails, such as the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path.

We were alarmed that the notes to the Assembly press release said: "Farming interests in Wales had opposed a general legal right for the public to access all land at the coast and the Assembly Government is not proposing this as part of this programme." After Ramblers had expressed their concern to the Assembly Government and officials, Carwyn Jones, the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside, clarified the position in July. He said: "There will be further consideration given to the issue of a statutory right of access to coastal areas" and he has subsequently confirmed that this remains his view.

For coastal access to work well the Assembly must offer a strategic vision, with detailed guidance and plans. Progress must be rigorously monitored and the approach adjusted if it is not delivering. So far £1.5m has been included for the year 2007-2008 but delivery rests with local authorities and it does not seem likely they will deliver high quality paths. There is variation, too, in the quality of approaches by local authorities. Given that public paths that are open and easy to use are in the minority, local authorities will need to create new public paths to fill gaps. Ramblers Association Cymru will continue to hold local authorities to account by identifying what could be done.

High quality coastal access can help with the health and physical activity agenda, too. *Climbing Higher,* the Assembly's strategy for sport and physical activity in 2005, aims for the proportion of those using the Welsh natural environment for outdoor activities to increase from 36 per cent in 2005 to 60 per cent by 2015. To help achieve this, Ramblers Cymru wants statutory coastal access to be in place to promote exercise participation and tourism, coinciding with the London Olympics in 2012.

In Scotland access rights to the coast under the Land Reform Act 2003 are excellent and both extensive and inclusive (for cycling, riding and canoeing as well as rambling). Natural England, formed from English Nature, the Countryside Agency and Rural Development Service, has recently advised the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the wider corridor approach is the way to go. Wales must not be the poor relation. If this project works well, the bond between the people and the Welsh coast will be deepened and strengthened. Importantly, the benefits for Wales will be widespread and sustainable.

If you are interested in playing your part locally with the Ramblers Cymru, please email cerddwyr@ramblers.org.uk .or phone 029 20644308.

IWA West Wales banch
Tuesday June 26th
6.30 Rhos-y-Gilwen, Cilgerran
Agriculture and Energy Alternatives
Opportunities for farmers to diversify and access EU finding
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Beverley Penney is Director of the Ramblers Association Cymru.

the future of science

careers in science can be inspired at an early age according to wendy sadler, who has taken science to thousands of young people

Close your eyes and picture a scientist. What comes to mind? In most cases it will be a slightly eccentric, wild-haired man who perhaps is not good at socialising or communicating. It is a deeply ingrained stereotype and one which is not helping address a big problem for the UK – the lack of future scientists.

At the Science and the Assembly event last year (organised by the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Institute of Physics), a range of distinguished speakers discussed the future of science, technology and innovation for Wales. The key issue of agreement was the need to develop the next generation of scientists and engineers for the knowledge economy of Wales.

science made simple was established in 2002 and became a limited company in 2004. Our mission is to inspire the scientists and engineers of the future and help to establish science and engineering as part of popular culture. Our location within Cardiff University (becoming a spin-out company of the university in 2005) provides great opportunities to act as a science 'translation' service between the research scientists, the media and the public. From a one-person freelance initiative we have now grown to a company of seven staff and within the next two months we expect to reach our 100,000th student.

The idea initially was to provide input from a physics specialist at secondary school level, where many pupils (around one in five) are taught physics by a non-specialist science teacher. Our range of secondary school presentations use topics that interest pupils and then introduce physics around them. This is an important approach as our anecdotal evidence suggests that young people are put off physics because they cannot see how it relates to their lives. Our most popular show is Music to your Ears which looks at the physics and technology of sound and music, from the basics of sound and vibrations to the techniques used in mp3 players and digital music. Other presentations look at the Science of Sport (how to bend a ball like Beckham!) and Weird Waves (how your remote control works and why your mobile phone interferes with your radio).

Because of the shows in secondary schools, we began to receive requests for primary school shows so we have now developed a range of presentations for Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds) and Key Stage 1 (5-7 year olds) students. Primary school students generally love science so the need to enthuse them is less essential but the provision of enthusiastic science role models is still vital. One particularly exciting primary schools project was developed in partnership with Women into Science, Engineering and Construction (WISE) in Wales, with funding from the Assembly Government.

Science and Engineering Superstars was an interactive science show that used short films of six young scientists and engineers as the framework for a show looking at real life superhero qualities and careers of scientists. Students were asked to name a superhero quality and then saw the real life equivalent scientist who was working in that area. For example, for X-ray vision we met Dr Haley Gomez, an astronomer using infra-red telescopes to see through dust in space and for someone saving the planet we met Katie Brown, an engineer from the Centre for Alternative Technology who is working on wind turbines.

In each example a short film of the scientists at work was shown followed by live experiments using volunteers from the audience to demonstrate how science in school links to their careers. The demand for this show has been huge. We had funding to develop the content and deliver 20 free shows. We wrote to every primary school in Wales and

The one revolves around the other. Wendy Sadler makes a point

Becky Read, science communicator: reaching out to schools

received 268 requests and we are now seeking funding to take the show to the 248 schools we were unable to visit. Teachers commented that it was very useful for the pupils to understand that science in school can be applied to some real jobs and for the pupils to see positive role models in science that help to beat the 'mad scientist' stereotype that still exists in much of the media. In addition, the show raises the aspirations of students, getting them to think about careers in areas they may not have previously considered.

Science outreach is important because it can show real people who are passionate about science and positive role models in schools and at festivals. The advantage of offering shows in schools is that teachers do not need to worry about the costs, coach hire for example, or other external trip requirements, such as consent forms. Although we must charge a fee to the school, by reaching more than 100 students at one time the cost per head is quite reasonable. In addition, the atmosphere of having more than 100 students in the hall for a performance is quite different from a science lesson of 30 students.

We are aware that we currently tend to reach the schools that have motivated science teachers, who look for activities to enrich the curriculum, and also usually the schools with access to funds for extra events. We want to work towards getting more sponsorship or grant funding to subsidise visits to schools that have fewer resources. A larger proportion of our bookings comes from outside Wales and teachers in Wales have said this is because they do not have ring-fenced funds for science.

In England we have been able to offer shows to schools for free, thanks to support from the Royal Institution regional schools programme. They book us regularly to do tours of the south west and north west areas. We have begun to work with Careers Wales to enable us to offer similar resources to schools in South and North Wales. We hope to expand this to enable work with more Welsh schools in the future.

Our placement at Cardiff University provides great opportunities to link with leading researchers. This year we are part of a new project called Engineering 4 Life which is a partnership with Professor Len Nokes and the Medical Engineering team at the School of Engineering. The project has been funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) as part of their Partnerships for Public Engagement programme and aims to show how engineering can be something that improves quality of life for everyone. The show, From Cradle to Grave examines the input from engineering at different stages of life from the new ultrasound scanners to the technology of replacement joints. As well as touring 20 secondary schools the show will be visiting local Women's Institute groups. By visiting groups other than schools it is hoped that parents and grandparents can also get a better awareness of the diversity of science and engineering careers available.

People often ask whether we are making a difference. We regularly evaluate the audiences' opinion and assess what has been learnt. There is a sense of motivation and excitement when you leave an audience and occasionally you see a moment of understanding in someone as a result of your explanation or demonstration. We have conducted a small-scale research project looking at the long term impact and have spoken to students after two and a half years have passed. We found that not only could they remember a large proportion of the presentation but they had also used the knowledge gained in other contexts.

Based on the results of the research and work we have done with the British Council overseas, we began to develop on a new approach – a science show with no words. With funding from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) and the Institute of Physics, we developed a pilot show using scaled up physical phenomena that were set to music and film. The idea was to encourage people to connect science phenomena and applications or examples of science in the everyday world. Also, we wanted to show the beauty of science and spark curiosity in those watching. As there is no verbal communication there are no age restrictions or cultural barriers. The show will be appearing at the Edinburgh Fringe in August in partnership with the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and will then tour nine countries in south east Europe at the end of the year. The combined art and science approach will appeal to a different audience and will, we hope, help our mission to plant science firmly in the cultural domain.

Over the next year we will be experimenting with many new projects, including expansion to other regions, the provision of Welsh language shows and the creation of a new engineering initiative. The shortfall of UK scientists is a growing concern for the Government and economists and further progress still has to be made but we hope that what we are doing is at least helping in some way. In March we won the EU Descartes prize for Science Communication – an award previously won by David Attenborough and Bill Bryson. We are hopeful that we can continue to grow so we can reach more students and inspire at least some of them with a passion for science.

Wendy Sadler is the director of Science Made Simple and works in the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy, in which she studied previously. She has worked in science communication for 13 years, including as Education Manager at Techniquest in Cardiff undertook a UK tour on behalf of the Institute of Physics, delivering its National Schools Lecture tour. She has written a number of books for children and presented programmes on BBC and ITV.

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marcus longley considers a novel application of jury service that could be used more widely to promote civic society debate

my health, whose responsibility?

Do we want to take medicines every day to remain healthy? What role should the NHS play in advising healthy people?

In a joint project with Cardiff University and the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, questions were put to a citizens' jury in October 2006. Its brief was to look at three inter-related questions: how can lay people balance the often complex risks and benefits of taking medicines? What help and support do people want if they try to do so and what role should the NHS play in this? Are these issues in which people want to be involved?

These are difficult and important questions. The sustainability of the NHS depends on our success in keeping an ageing population healthy; increasingly, the pharmaceutical industry will offer us new molecules designed specifically for the purpose of preventing ill health rather than curing it. They are not obviously questions for which doctors or other experts have a monopoly of the wisdom.

The Welsh jury worked from a specific case study and then went on to consider the generic issues. The study was a daily low dose of aspirin (75mg – a quarter of an ordinary aspirin tablet) for people over the age of 50 to reduce the risks of heart disease. Like all medicines, aspirin offers benefits but also carries risks. Low dose aspirin has a well-established effect of reducing the risk of heart attack and the most common form of stroke, especially in older people. However, it also carries risks for a much smaller number, including the possibility of severe bleeding from the gut requiring immediate hospitalisation and blood transfusion and – very rarely – even death. This is a classic risk-benefit calculation and potentially one that we could all do ourselves since low dose aspirin is available without prescription at negligible cost.

The work was overseen from its inception by a national group of experts. We commissioned the polling company ICM to recruit 16 ordinary, representative people from across south east Wales – ranging in age from 18 to 70, equal numbers of men and women, and from diverse backgrounds – to constitute the 'jury'.

A citizens' jury is based on the jury system used in courts of law across the country for more than 800 years. Decisions of life and death have been made by them and we have yet to invent a better method. The starting notion is that some questions are best decided by disinterested citizens, particularly where value judgements are needed on complex and often conflicting arguments.

The jurors spent a total four and a half days in Cardiff City Hall listening to nine expert witnesses on the main topics relevant to the question – the aetiology (causes) of the diseases and therapeutic options, psychological issues, the nature and scale of the possible risks and benefits and the public health implications. They also heard the evidence of six people with personal experiences, some of whom had experienced a stroke or heart attack or cared for someone who had, and people who had experienced adverse effects from aspirin. They spent more than 15 hours deliberating on the evidence to reach their verdict. Penny Roberts, Chief Correspondent of BBC Wales, facilitated the process.

Their verdict was presented in the form of ten recommendations (key points shown below). Having conducted this exercise, what have we learnt that we did not

the jury's key recommendations

- Governments have a duty to ensure that people are informed about the potential benefits and risks of medicines. They should allow people to make up their own minds on the available evidence, and not wait until there is unanimity amongst experts before disseminating the information;
- The results of research should be presented to the public by a trustworthy source, covering all sides of the argument
- Information on the risks and benefits of preventative medicines should always be set in the context of the risks and benefits of alternative ways of preserving health, such as lifestyle changes
- All healthy people should be invited to consult a healthcare professional at an appropriate age (perhaps 50) to discuss the options available to them to preserve their health. This would include the potential contribution which preventive medicines could make
- GPs should be encouraged to provide whatever they professionally believe to be best for their patients, regardless of remuneration and regardless of what the government has prioritised as targets

know already? This is an important question to test any research project. The results challenge conventional thinking in four key ways.

The jury was very clear that ordinary citizens were perfectly capable of making decisions about their own health for themselves and in fact were the only people who ultimately could make such decisions. Having had the opportunity to hear evidence from leading experts and thought it through in the context of their own lives, they probably knew as much about aspirin as most doctors. This realisation began to strip away some of the mystique which tends to surround medicines and doctors. The implication was clear – people should be let in on the debate without being patronised and Governments should stop being fearful of the consequences of having a mature debate with their citizens about their health.

This was not, however, an argument for individualism and isolation. The jurors recognised that most people would want some help in taking decisions – in accessing the relevant (and reliable) information, understanding it and considering the consequences. The NHS was the obvious source for this help but it seemed largely uninterested in providing intensive help and support for people who, because of their good health, were barely recognised as patients. The NHS must help people remain healthy but in reality it never seems to prioritise such work sufficiently. The jurors called for a new relationship, in which people would be expected to engage with the NHS at an appropriate age (50 for instance) to help them make decisions about their health before it was too late. This is a huge challenge for the NHS which seems to struggle with treating ill people, let alone taking on the healthy majority.

The jurors clearly valued key features of the NHS such as easy and universal access to GPs. But the evidence they heard over the four and a half days caused two anxieties about this treasured relationship and a paradox. On the one hand, they were concerned by the extent of Government control over events in the GP's consultation room. Disquiet was raised over the suggestion that Government targets and the new GP contract might induce GPs to do things which would not be priorities in a purely professional sense. On the other hand, they were concerned that the independence of GPs might mean that some of them were not sufficiently aware of the latest evidence on how to prevent or treat particular conditions. This appears to be a call for a fundamental re-adjustment to how GPs and other healthcare professionals are managed within the NHS – a move towards greater professional freedom to make decisions with individual patients but more robust measures to ensure that they are kept abreast of developments.

Finally, the jurors powerfully restated a core principle of the NHS – that no-one should be denied services on the basis that they might have contributed to their own illness. They unanimously rebutted the suggestion that people who did not take aspirin (or who smoked, over-ate or engaged in dangerous sports) should in any way receive less care. The NHS was not like any other insurance policy where the actions of the policy-holder might invalidate their claim.

This jury navigated through tricky scientific and statistical data and were ultimately confident that they could reach a verdict that was robust. They demonstrated once again that citizens in the 21st century are as capable as their predecessors of the past eight centuries of reaching verdicts on complex issues. Once the experts have decided what the evidence can and cannot support, the citizens can make the value judgements. As we know, popular interest in representative politics in Wales and throughout most of the western world is at a new low, with a majority of the electorate not even bothering to vote now in some elections. As Lady (Helena) Kennedy QC, Chair of the Joseph Rowntree-funded Power Inquiry wrote in late January in *The Independent:* "The public is tired of playing a role where the only meaningful right is to reject the Government every five years... From climate change to crime, people want a proper debate and want to contribute to decisions."

The National Assembly could decide to do things differently here. Perhaps they should commit to identifying a few key questions in public policy that require a value judgement and put them to citizens' juries or similar deliberative processes. They should not perhaps commit themselves to accepting the verdict but if they do not accept it they should at least explain to the people of Wales the reasons why not. As the approach gained currency, it might begin to re-dress some of the much vaunted democratic deficit and demonstrate that serious debate by ordinary citizens is possible and will be heeded. Who knows – we may even warm to the notion of 'Citizens' Jury duty', whereby every adult in Wales would be expected to deliberate on a major issue of public policy in Wales once or twice in their adult lives.

Finally, the jury, after hearing and deliberating on all the evidence, was divided: 11 decided that they would not personally take a daily low dose from age 50 and five that they would. This division makes it even more important that people are enabled to make up their own minds!

Copies of the full jury report are available from http://www.glam.ac.uk/wihsc and can be downloaded.

Marcus Longley is Professor of Applied Health Policy, University of Glamorgan and Associate Director, Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care.

jobs for life

greater attention to occupational health presents the opportunity to ensure healthy and long-lasting work habits in Wales, according to sue eynon

It is a familiar story. Wales has a greater proportion of people in receipt of out of work benefits than the other regions of Britain. One in five people here are claiming incapacity benefit, according to combined data from a Work and Pensions longitudinal study, the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Office for National Statistics.

Lack of employment can lead to impaired physical and mental health, and poorer social integration, as well as loss of self worth and self-confidence. This, in turn, can lead to more medical care and disillusion in families, passed from generation to generation. A recent publication asked the simple question, Is Work Good for Your Health?, a peer review of more than 400 studies by Waddell and Burton, and it concluded, as might be expected – yes, it is!

Equal opportunities measures exist to help people with disabilities but expertise and resources are needed to overcome the physical and ergonomic barriers that prevent access to work. At the same time, the population is ageing, and more employees are over 50 than ever before, all of whom need good health for an active life.

Occupational health professionals provide the link between health and work, so it is good that research and evidence have proved the value of OH and its contribution to the public health agenda. These findings were confirmed in a series of presentations made to the Wales Occupational Health Conference, Health and Wellbeing, the Occupational Health Contribution, in Swansea recently. As Dame Carol Black, the new National Director for Health and Work, said, there is no better time to develop and raise the profile of OH and we need to pursue this agenda actively in Wales.

The main challenges for OH today are three-fold:

- To assist people with sicknesses or disabilities back into employment by providing advice on rehabilitation and return to work programmes. OH advisers understand workplace health issues better than most;
- To ensure employers' needs are met. Sickness absence costs money and OH can help reduce costs by engaging employers in pro-active attendance management. OH can also support programmes and policies that aim to reduce or minimise the current causes of work related ill health and sickness absence – occupational stress, anxiety and depression and muscular-skeletal disorders, including back pain;
- To promote healthy lifestyles, keeping people in work fitter and for longer. This requires professional input into health policies such as healthy eating at work, exercise and stress awareness and many other measures. People spend a large amount of their time in work, so where better to influence healthy lifestyles?

Work-related stress needs to be tackled positively

Health and Safety Executive statistics for 2005/6 show that thousands of people die each year from work related diseases, mostly because of exposures many years in the past. Its current estimate is that there are 6,000 occupational cancer deaths per year (the true figure is likely to be between 3,000 and 12,000). In 2004 there were 100 deaths from asbestosis, a chronic, progressive condition of scar tissue build-up in the lungs resulting from the inhalation of asbestos, and around 200 for other types of pneumoconiosis, lung conditions due to inhalation of coal dust and silica.

The traditional illnesses associated with the mining industry are, thankfully, a thing of the past. "Deaths from mesothelioma are due to peak, [with] between 1,969 and 2,450 deaths, some time between the years 2011 and 2015. Deaths from mesothelioma in men aged under 55 have been falling since the mid 1990s, suggesting better control more recently," the HSE report says.

The executive's figures also show progress in reducing ill health incidence. The Revitalising Health and Safety target to reduce work related ill health is being achieved. Although the rates are gradually falling, however, stress, depression and anxiety are still the largest causes of self-reported work related illness for people in the past 12 months. Musculoskeletal disorders account for the next largest group. Successes, largely due to risk assessment and HSE control measures, must be complemented by OH services if we are to drive down occupational stress and musculoskeletal disease incidences even further.

Such services include OH advice and guidance to managers designed to help minimise risks. Health surveillance programmes could help prevent or at least give early warning of impending health problems. Early interaction between staff who feel ill, stressed or anxious at work can be invaluable and contribute to reducing sickness absence. Current research shows that an investment of £1.50 in occupational health can bring returns of £2.50. Other studies have demonstrated a return ratio on investment of nearly 4:1.

Occupational health also has positive benefits for organisations in terms of added value to the culture of the organisation – an employee perception of a business that cares for its staff – thus improving retention and minimising wasted training and recruitment costs.

Employers face heavy insurance premiums, if they are unable to demonstrate that they have good control of risks and hazards in place, as well as the risk of costly claims made by employees for work related illnesses. It is in the interest of a business that it has mechanisms in place to ensure staff remain at work and are fit and healthy. This is a situation in which all could benefit because employees feel valued and employers have a productive workforce that is happy and healthy.

Occupational health is receiving much more attention across the UK and Wales must not miss out. The strategy outlined in *Report and Recommendations: Improving Access to Occupational Health Service* is being implemented in England on many levels, with pilots in GP practices and several specialist occupational health centres established. Wales has yet to start on that journey.

One difficulty could be a lack of trained occupational health nurses. For the past 10 years, there have been no training courses in Wales, forcing those seeking to train out of Wales. The costs and time required mean many nurses do not take up this vital training. This has now been rectified with courses available at Cardiff School of Medicine and other universities throughout Wales.

There are, however, many committed and experienced OH nurses throughout Wales, many of whom have now joined the Royal College of Nursing's Occupational Health Forum – the acknowledged voice of OH nurses in Wales. Together we have vowed to work in partnership with our colleagues in the NHS and the public health sector to ensure the field of occupational health becomes the foundation stone for improving health at work in Wales.

Health Minister, Dr Brian Gibbons, in his opening address at the Swansea Conference, said: "Occupational health needs to be at the heart of the Welsh agenda." Many key issues are now being addressed by the Assembly Government including the launch of The Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Welsh 'Backs' Campaign.

A separate mapping exercise has been completed to review the location of OH professionals and the services they provide. The results are not good and many small businesses have little or no access to OH advice, although a pilot telephone help-line called Workplace Connect is available until the end of 2008.

In Wales we also have the Corporate Health Standard for Workplace Health. This covers a wide range of workplace health issues including health promotion and occupational health and allows organisations to measure their progress against others. Health Challenge Wales is another initiative aimed at improving health in society.

Now that OH is at last being taken much more seriously within Wales, all businesses and organisations could one day benefit from access to OH. This would help improve not only employee health but organisational health and the Welsh nation's health and well being.

For advice on occupational health matters in Wales employers or employees can visit the websites of the Wales Centre for Health (www.wch.wales.nhs.uk), the Health and Safety Executive (www.hse.gov.uk), the Department for Work and Pensions health site (www.health-and-work.gov.uk) or Workplace Health Connect (www.workplacehealthconnect.co.uk).

Sue Eynon is Senior OH Adviser for a Government organisation in Wales and is an active member of the South East Wales Occupational Health Group and Royal College of Nursing's Occupational Health Forum in Wales.

optimal benefits

Wales must have an Assembly-led strategy for health that measures medicines by patient outcomes as well as costs, says richard greville

In 2005, the Assembly Government published Designed for Life, which articulated a vision for "world class services in Wales by 2015". While a lot of attention has been focused recently on the controversy over the reconfiguration of secondary care services, *Designed for Life* offers a remodelled approach to healthcare provision, particularly for those with long term or chronic conditions. This new model will be based on the delivery of services by an extended primary care team and includes increased emphasis on early diagnosis, treatment and monitoring.

Designed for Life has been summarised by the Assembly's Designed to Deliver – Healthcare Quality Improvement Plan as "patients treated in the right place at the right time by the right people". The optimal use of medicines can play a key role in delivering this vision, and it is fundamental to meeting the aims of reducing hospital admissions and improving health outcomes for the population in Wales. It has, however, received relatively little attention to date.

The demands placed on health and social care services by patients increasingly challenge policy-makers, managers and clinicians across the UK and, indeed, the world. In Wales the challenge is particularly daunting because the nation faces a higher prevalence of limiting long term illness than any other area of the UK with the exception of parts of the north-east of England.

This poor health status is reflected in the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) statistics for 2004/5 collected under the new General Medical Services contract for GPs. This clearly shows that the prevalence of the majority of chronic conditions is higher in Wales than in England or Scotland (see table overleaf).

As the population ages and the proportion of over 65s is higher (as well as being forecasted to grow faster in Wales than elsewhere in the UK), the number of people with one or more chronic conditions will continue to increase. By 2014 there could be more than 400,000 people aged 65 or over in Wales with at least one chronic condition, the Assembly concluded in the National Public Health Service for Wales report in 2005.

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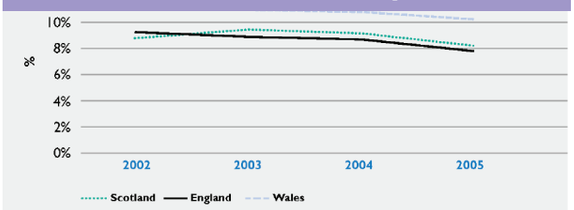
The optimal use of both new and established medicines is fundamental to meeting the aims of reducing hospital admissions and improving health outcomes. However, there is little reference in the documents to this critical role for

medicines. It is in the interests of patients to have access to new and improved medicines but at a time of significant budgetary pressure on the NHS this ambition is often compromised by attention to short-term costs rather than to value.

This approach, identified by the Institute of Welsh Affairs in *Time to Deliver,* its report last Autumn into policy options for the Assembly's Third Term, is characterised by the introduction of local and national policies which indiscriminately minimise expenditure on medicines or delay and place checks on the availability and use of modern alternatives. The yardstick for the value of medicines should be improved patient outcomes rather than short-term cost savings.

figure 1: prescribing in the community as a share of total health care expenditure



Sources: Department of Health,HM Treasury, Scottish Executive, Prescription Pricing Authority, Health Solutions Wales, ISD Scotland

There is a common perception that medicines are consuming more of the constrained resources of the NHS and that their use should be restricted. In fact, in recent years, spending by the NHS on medicines has risen more slowly than other areas of expenditure. As a share of total healthcare expenditure, prescribing in the community has been declining for several years (see Figure 1). Indeed, the average cost of individual medicines is more than 20 per cent cheaper in real terms than it was ten years ago, the Ministerial Industry Strategy Group of the Department of Health reported this year.

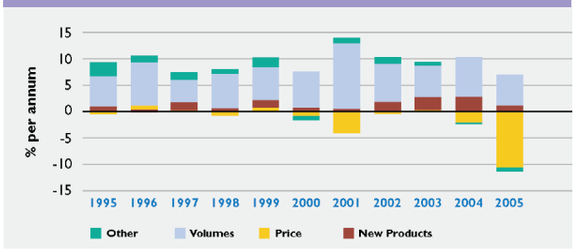
The total expenditure on medicines is dependent on a range of criteria such as:

- the availability, cost and usage of new medicines;
- older medicines coming off patent and becoming available to prescribe as cheaper generics;
- implementation of Government policies;
- patient health status and demand.

The growth in expenditure on medicines has been shown to be primarily dependent on the increased volume of medicines rather than the often cited financial impact of new medicines (Figure 2).

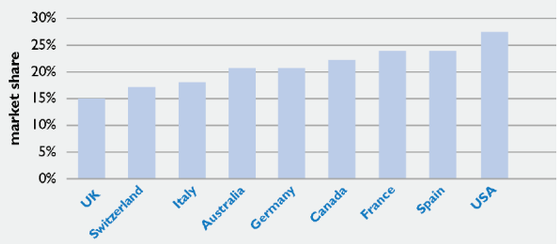
A recent Ministerial Industry Strategy Group report said that the uptake of new medicines in the UK remained persistently low, compared with other industrialised nations. For example, in 2005 only about 15 per cent of UK medicines expenditure was on products launched within the previous five years – lower than in the majority of other Western European and developed countries (Figure 3).

figure 2: analysis of growth in the UK medicines bill



Source: IMS

figure 3: international uptake of new medicines



Source: IMS

In Wales the current pattern of medicines usage reflects a high volume, low cost approach. The Assembly's statistics for GP prescriptions in 2005/6 reveal this trend. Considering the poor health status in Wales, it is perhaps no surprise that in 2005 a high number of prescriptions were dispensed per head of population – 19.2 in Wales compared to 16.4 in Northern Ireland, 15.1 in Scotland and 14.4 in England However, during this period Wales had the lowest net ingredient cost per prescription item – £9.89 compared to £11.02 in England and £12.36 in Scotland. This is a prescribing pattern which merits further analysis and understanding.

To fully appreciate the value of medicines, savings that could be achieved within the wider NHS budget and to patients, carers and employers should be considered. Budget impact models developed on coronary heart disease and diabetes in Wales by Nera Economic Consulting for the National Institute for Clinical Evidence demonstrate that the financial results of the use of cost effective medicines range from savings through to an increasing cost for the NHS. However, even these models exclude costs borne by patients/families/carers and the impact on society or patients' productivity in work.

table 1: disease prevalence in Wales

Disease area	Wales	England	Scotland
Hypertension	12.5%	11.3%	11.7%
Diabetes	3.8%	3.3%	3.3%
Cancer	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%
Mental Health	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease	1.9%	1.4%	1.8%
Asthma	6.5%	5.8%	5.3%

Wales should be applauded for taking a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach to the delivery of health and social care, particularly in the management of chronic diseases. The use of modern medicines provides a cost effective contribution alongside other approaches which address lifestyle changes and wider determinants of health. Diabetes and coronary heart disease (CHD) provide good examples of how improvements in disease control can lead to improved outcomes for patients and reduced costs for the NHS and society.

The potential of statins (lipid-lowering drugs) in tackling CHD again offers an example of the value of medicines. Statins offer significant benefits to patients and the NHS by reducing the consequences of CHD such as angioplasty and hospitalisation for stroke and heart bypass operations. Optimal use of these medicines could result in savings of around 112,000 bed days over five years. By far the biggest benefit of statins is their life-saving ability, which is estimated by Nera Economic Consulting to be almost 3,000 over five years in Wales. The economic benefit to Wales resulting from such large reductions in mortality is in excess of £3.5bn.

Over the coming decades the number of people with chronic and limiting life long illnesses will inevitably increase, along with individuals' demands and expectations of the NHS. Without appropriate planning this will exert ever increasing pressure on health care finances and resources. If a vision for delivering more services closer to the patient is to be achieved, consideration should be given by any future Assembly Government to developing a fully resourced medicines strategy and to not adopting a simplistic 'more and cheaper' approach to medicines. The measures for success should be long term improvement in patient outcomes, such as quality of life and life expectancy, not short term cost minimisation. As highlighted in the ABPI manifesto, a future when patients have access to the right medicines at the right times will not only help improve and save lives but will make sure that the most cost-effective use is made of the NHS Wales budget.

IWA Conference

Monday July 2nd
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Dr Richard Greville is Director of the Association for the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) Cymru.

IWA
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Institute of Welsh Affairs

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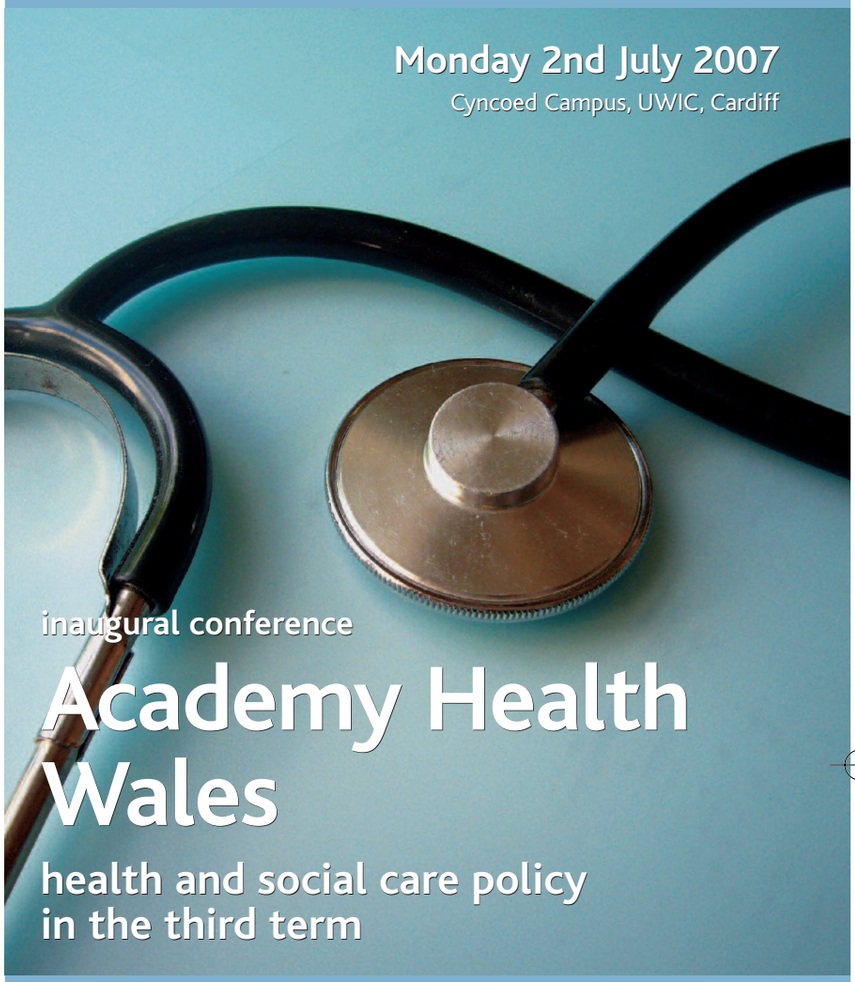
Cyncoed Campus, UWIC, Cardiff



inaugural conference

Academy Health Wales

health and social care policy in the third term

Health and social care comprise the largest segment of the Welsh public service, both in terms of expenditure and personnel, yet there is a widely shared view that there is insufficient dialogue within the sector. The creation of Academy Health Wales is aimed at improving communication between health and social care policy makers and practitioners.

Academy Health Wales has emerged from a group of health and social care academics, practitioners and administrators, brought together by the IWA as part of a wider project looking at the policy agenda for the National Assembly's third term. The full results of this work by nine policy groups, *Time To Deliver: The Third Term and Beyond: Policy Options for Wales* was published by the IWA in November 2006.

Academy Health Wales aims to provide a regular forum for dialogue and discussion on health policy and to develop a wide membership.

To attend contact the IWA on 029 2066 6606 for more details:

- £90 to IWA members
- £120 to non IWA members to include a year's free membership of the IWA

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The flu pandemic in 1918 killed an estimated 40m worldwide

facing flu

the feared influenza pandemic has not occurred but, as ian hosein explains, society must still ensure it remains well-prepared

flu, bird flu, pandemic flu – all of these terms have been in the media frequently over the last two years but are the issues clear?

Influenza (the flu) arises from infection with an influenza virus. There are three classes of these viruses designated by the letters A, B and C. The annual flu infections arise principally from the class A viruses and sometimes from B. The pandemic threat arises from class A viruses which have the ability to undergo minor genetic changes very frequently and it is this which requires different vaccines each year for so called seasonal flu.

Since the change is minor, the virus behaves in a similar pattern to the previous year and patterns of infection are comparable. Those at particular risk of severe infection, such as the elderly, are advised to get the vaccine to prevent infection but there is some degree of natural immunity in the population because of exposure to similar previous viruses.

The class A viruses are also unique in that they occasionally undergo a major genetic change, presenting an entirely different scenario. After major changes, the virus behaves as a new entity and hence there is no underlying immunity as new viruses differ greatly from the circulating seasonal ones.

This type of major genetic change has happened three times in the last century and each change has led to a worldwide outbreak (a pandemic) of severe influenza. The most catastrophic occurrence of pandemic flu was in 1918 when it is estimated that 40m people died.

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Mass vaccination with a bird flu vaccine at the onset of a pandemic is being considered by some governments as a means of priming the population

How does pandemic flu arise? The answer depends on how the major genetic change arises. The class A virus has many subclasses. Some of these are circulating in the human population right now and spread from person-to-person by coughing, sneezing and hand-to-face contact.

There are many more subclasses in the avian population across the world causing different types of avian flu disease (bird flu). Pigs are also susceptible to class A virus infection. One explanation for major genetic change and the emergence of a pandemic virus is a sharing of genetic information between an avian and a human virus. This could happen when both simultaneously infect a susceptible host, such as the pig, which could be co-infected with mammalian viruses and the H5N1 avian virus, leading to a combined new virus which can then infect and spread among humans.

Genetic information sharing can also occur in a person who has simultaneous infection with human and avian viruses. A major genetic change can also occur by mutation within an avian virus itself, which renders it more infectious for humans.

In the current situation:

- There are circulating human viruses – this is always the case;
- There are circulating avian viruses in the avian population – this is also common;
- There is a new avian virus which is causing widespread infection in the wild bird population and has also infected domestic birds in many countries, including the UK. This is caused by the H5N1 avian virus;
- A new influenza virus infection in humans has also occurred. This has happened since the H5N1 virus has been transmitted to humans and has caused infection. Person-to-person spread of this infection has not yet occurred.

It is important to note that that H5N1 infection in any species, even humans, is currently called bird flu. If the major genetic change occurs which permits widespread human transmission, this will then be pandemic influenza. What is, therefore, now a serious concern is simultaneous infection of a person with both the avian virus (H5N1) and a human virus and the possible result – generation of a hybrid (combined) virus. The hybrid virus may have the disease-causing potential of the avian virus and the transmissibility of a human virus. This is why we are preparing for a new pandemic. By definition, the problem will be global and much preparation must be at the level of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other United Nations agencies. The critical approaches and interventions are numerous.

The WHO has a continuous surveillance system for both animal and human influenza and tracks bird flu based on reports from affected countries. Surveillance may pick up the onset of a pandemic at an early stage, allowing WHO and the affected country to isolate areas with the virus and provide anti-viral agents to the infected or those who have had close contact with them. Whether this will have any impact on the emergent pandemic is doubtful. By the time a locality becomes aware of a problem, which is referred firstly to the national agency and then in turn to the WHO, the spread out of that country may have already occurred. This is a genuine concern in light of the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus which occurred across the globe within weeks of first appearance.

Considering the 1918 pandemic as a model, 25-30 per cent of the human population will be clinically infected so can we access sufficient drugs to treat this group? Many countries, including the UK, are working on a model with this 25 per cent clinical attack rate and are stockpiling enough of the drug oseltamivir (trade name 'Tamiflu') to treat this population. In fact, the UK has now had its order filled and stocks have been sent to the devolved regions. There are some worrying issues here as well, though, which include:

Large scale poultry processors need to be specially vigilant

- Will there be an efficient mechanism to get drugs to patients in the community setting, as patients will be encouraged to stay in their own homes?
- Could resistance to oseltamivir emerge with mass use which could render the drug ineffective?

The UK guidance is that oseltamivir should be used only to treat sick patients but this may miss the opportunity to give the drug to highly exposed people, such as families, to stop their being infected in the first place. The dose required may need to be adjusted in the event that data on pandemic infections indicates stockpiles will not be enough.

Vaccination is a consideration. By current methods, it takes 6-8 months to make a vaccine for a new influenza virus from the time of first isolation. Since we do not yet have a pandemic

at the Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust

At the Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust, the approach to date has been marked by four strategic elements. Firstly, we have been novel in our joint implementation of national guidance on influenza (top-down approach), we also listen to our staff about how best to implement guidance in our situation (bottom-up approach). We have followed these simultaneously because we believe that an emerging situation requires a flexible approach. The bottom-up approach builds staff confidence and may be critical for resilience when the pandemic peaks. With such a large organisation, getting all clinical directorates involved is a challenge and we are using our existing management structures and emergency response policies to help.

Secondly, we have given thought to the power we have, which is at three levels – none, partial and total. We have no power over the emergence of the pandemic so will not dwell on this. We can influence planning in Wales and make our views known through regional networks. We have total power to train our staff in proper face mask use and this is under way.

Thirdly, we have always invested in fostering a culture of prevention as regards infection and we were the first NHS trust in the UK to change the name 'Infection Control' to 'Infection Prevention & Control' and so were the first to create the now widespread position of Director of Infection Prevention & Control. We were also the first trust to introduce alcohol gel as the standard hand hygiene agent. We have had an in-house strategic approach to infection for many years and such prior investment will hopefully help if and when the pandemic comes.

Finally, there must be a constant awareness of time in planning. It is important to plan for the immediate, medium and long term threat: if the onset of the pandemic were declared today, in 1 year or in around 5 years, for example. Organisations such as the civil service, private sector, educational institutions and others could consider these elements of strategy:

- Combine top-down and bottom-up approaches (see panel)
- Use the none-partial–total power principle
- Integrate pandemic influenza planning into existing Quality Management
- Plan for the short, medium and long term to include the (business) recovery phase from a pandemic

strain, we cannot make a vaccine. Previous pandemics have struck in waves so planning assumptions may consider vaccine availability by the time of a second wave but not the first.

Mass vaccination with a bird flu vaccine at the onset of a pandemic is being considered by some governments as a means of priming the population. The advantages of this could include that it generates some population immunity to apandemic strain, though the match between the vaccine and pandemic viral strain will not be exact and, if a pandemic flu vaccine is eventually produced, we may need to use a lower dose to immunise people so that initial stocks of pandemic vaccine could go further and faster.

In the healthcare setting, we will be dealing with patients at close range. Performing procedures as part of care may generate small infectious particles from the respiratory tract (aerosols). There are face masks which can protect against inhalation but staff must be properly trained in their use and there must also be adequate supplies. With so many people expected to be ill, many of the basic requirements for everyday life and business output, such as transportation, supplies, fuel and food may be limited. Just-in-time logistics places us in a more vulnerable position as a society since there are now fewer stockpiles and a smaller stockpiling capacity. We need to consider that employees may also be off work to care for ill relatives or because schools and day care facilities are closed.

Consideration should underpin preparations for pandemic influenza. There are business development opportunities for improvement in vaccine development, anti-viral drug production and new drug development and the production of face masks.

Consultations with the business community in the Cayman Islands have allowed the trust in Cardiff to learn from their experience in coping with catastrophic hurricane damage. Many of the development strategies across the world are now striving for sustainable community development. In the face of pandemic influenza, what is required is community planning and networking for sustainable community resilience. Unlike a hurricane which strikes and then abates, the pandemic of influenza will strike in waves over many months. This means that all UK stakeholders need to work together at all levels for resilience in planning and during a pandemic – being good neighbours may yet save lives.

Detailed information on pandemic influenza can be accessed from the sources listed below.

- **UK Department of Health, http://www.dh.gov.uk**
- **National Public Health Service for Wales, http://www.wales.nhs.uk**
- **US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/**
- **World Health Organisation, http://www.who.int/en/**

Dr Ian K. Hosein is Director of Infection Prevention & Control at the Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust.

fair defence

mark richardson addresses critics of fair trade and shows that everyone can help reduce poverty

A sure sign that fair trade is starting to become more widely accepted is that it is now being challenged in the media as well as championed. This is a good thing as it can help to highlight areas where Fairtrade, the brand, can improve – even the most steadfast fair trade campaigners do not believe it is a perfect system! However, very few of the criticisms of fair trade are being challenged directly.

One criticism comes from a widely-held misperception that it is an inefficient way of getting money to poor people in developing countries. Many believe that it is simply a matter of getting a few extra pence to poor producers in developing countries and that it would be more efficient to give the money to charity. This misses the fundamental point of fair trade. It is not about aid.

Of course, it is more efficient to send £1 to a farmer in Ethiopia than to buy a jar of Fairtrade coffee if your only goal is to get an extra £1 in the farmer's pocket. Fairtrade, as the name indicates, however, is about trade. This means paying a fair price which reflects the costs of production and labour that have gone into making a product. It is about giving poor producers in developing countries access to Western markets in a way that does not exploit their weak position. Producers should be helped to trade out of poverty rather than making them dependent on western handouts.

Fair trade is also about a lot more than money. Consider the following examples:

- 43 per cent of the world's cocoa comes from the Ivory Coast. The price of cocoa has fallen so low that many farmers have resorted to buying children from traffickers and forcing them to work for no wages. Some of these children were the subject of a BBC documentary in 2002. The scars on their backs from the beatings were visible right down to the bone. Recent research for the US Agency for International Development estimates there are 300,000 children working on cocoa plantations in West Africa.
- In parts of India three cotton farmers a day are committing suicide. Their cotton revenue does not even pay for the original cost of the seed and fertiliser. In payment of the debt some

Give us your support: Government Minister Jane Davidson meets Fairtrade campaigners

traders are accepting children, some as young as 5 years old, into bonded labour. According to the World Health Organisation 200,000 people died last year as a result of pesticide poisoning in the cotton industry. A further 2.8m suffered chronic health problems.

- War on Want produced a report last year highlighting the true cost of cheap clothes on our high streets. Workers in factories in Bangladesh supplying Tesco and Asda are paying their workers 5p an hour and forcing them to work 80-hour weeks.

These facts are shocking but this is the reality for millions of producers around the world who supply the basic goods that we take for granted: food, drinks and clothes. Ordinarily we consumers have very little information about the origins of the products we buy. Fair trade provides an independent certification system that allows us to choose products that help rather than exploit people.

fair trade allows consumers to send a powerful message to retailers that they do care about more than the price of goods

The Fairtrade Mark guarantees:

- fair and stable prices to disadvantaged producers in developing countries;
- decent wages and minimum standards for working conditions;
- greater respect for the environment;
- long term trading relationships to allow planning for the future;
- a 'social premium' – extra money to pay for community projects such as schools and health care.

As well as helping more than 5 million people to trade their way out of poverty Fairtrade allows consumers to send a powerful message to retailers that we do care about more than just the price of goods. The message seems to be reaching the supermarkets – Sainsbury's now only stock Fairtrade bananas and Marks and Spencer are converting increasing numbers of clothing ranges to Fairtrade cotton.

Another argument against fair trade focuses on the guaranteed price to producers, that it drives down the price of commodities and so creates greater poverty. Low prices, so the argument goes, are a result of overproduction. Producers should switch to growing other crops where demand outstrips supply but the price guarantee of Fairtrade reduces the incentive to diversify and actually drives down the price of non-Fairtrade coffee making non-Fairtrade producers poorer.

Overproduction of some commodities such as coffee is a problem and it is the farmers who suffer from the low prices.

However, the cause is not the guaranteed Fairtrade price schemes. The World Bank, for example, has offered incentives to coffee producing nations to increase their production in order to service debts. In many commodities overproduction is stimulated by subsidies paid to western farmers, such as government subsidies to American cotton farmers or European sugar producers. If everyone were to start trading from an equal footing and competed fairly there would be no need for fair trade schemes. It would be a great mistake to attack Fairtrade for this until the subsidies to western farmers and unfair international trade rules are reformed.

Although it might seem a good economic argument to encourage poor farmers to diversify away from an overproduced crop, the reality is very different. The alternatives available to most farmers in developing countries are very limited. For example, the only real cash-crop alternative to coffee in Colombia is coca plants, used to make cocaine, and opium poppies, which make heroin. Such crops are profitable but illegal and can bring trouble from the authorities as well as the violence of drugs cartels. Of course, the cost to Western countries in terms of crime and social problems is enormous.

The other problem with this argument is that world prices for all commodities are volatile. By the time a crop with a good value actually reaches harvest (coffee takes 3-4 years, for example) its price may no longer cover the costs of production. Multi-national companies can choose to buy from anywhere, whereas the farmers only have the opportunity to sell to local traders.

Fair trade addresses all these issues not just by offering a guaranteed price but by offering a long term trading relationship and training in production methods, marketing and diversification. With the help of the Fairtrade Premium many farmers are able to begin growing a more diverse range of crops and reducing their reliance on a single market.

Some people see Fairtrade in conflict with the message to buy locally. In fact, the two campaigns are not mutually exclusive. They are both asking people to think carefully about the origins and production of food and are part of a call to use our shopping habits to promote environmental sustainability and social justice.

Many worry about the food miles attached to Fairtrade products. All Fairtrade products (with the exception of flowers) are shipped over to the UK which is the most efficient and least environmentally damaging form of food transportation. Also, although food miles measure the carbon footprint of our food, they do not tell the whole story. For example fruit, vegetables and flowers grown in hothouses in Europe use far more carbon in production than those grown in unheated greenhouses in Africa. That is why buying seasonal food is as important as buying locally-grown products.

Most Fairtrade products are not grown locally in the UK anyway, for example coffee, tea, cocoa and bananas. If you buy these products the best choice socially and environmentally is Fairtrade. These guarantee greater respect for the environment (for example, Fairtrade banana farmers in the Windward Islands are not allowed to use pesticides nor plant on steep slopes which can cause top soil to wash away) as well as helping producers in developing countries trade out of poverty.

Wales should be proud that it is taking a lead in promoting and developing fair trade on the world stage

A final argument against fair trade is that reducing global poverty is the job of Governments who enforce minimum standards of pay and conditions for workers, and as consumers we cannot make a difference.

There is an element of this argument with which one can sympathise. We do need to press our politicians to reform the unfair trade rules and abolish the third world debt that keeps so many more people trapped in a poverty cycle. Buying Fairtrade products is not something to do instead of voting or lobbying Government. It is something we should do as well. We can make a contribution both as voters and consumers.

Five million people have already been able to trade their way out of poverty as a result of Fairtrade – a significant contribution! Fair trade is an easy way for everyone in Wales to make a difference with almost no extra effort. We can vote with our shopping baskets. Multi-national companies have as much impact on world trade as governments and only by rewarding ethical companies with our custom, at the expense of unethical ones, can we influence their decisions.

Wales should be proud that it is taking a lead in promoting and developing fair trade on the world stage. The campaign to make Wales the world's first fair trade country is well under way and increasing numbers of people here understand why it is important. You can help make Wales a fair trade country in three simple ways:

- Buy at least one Fairtrade product every month or, even better, make sure that as much of your shopping as possible is trade!
- Register your support at www.fairtradewales.com
- Get your friends and family to do the same.

Mark Richardson works full time for the Wales Fairtrade Forum (Fforwm Masnach Deg Cymru), working towards making Wales the first Fairtrade country. In this capacity, he works with the Assembly Government, councils, public bodies, schools, churches and fair trade action groups.

the Welsh Baccalaureate is a valuable complement to existing qualifications and will aid the Assembly Government's education reforms, says steve marshall

a revolution in learning

Let's see if this works...

At an education conference in January 2007, Jane Davidson, Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (ELLS), said that Wales had begun a revolution in learning. This may sound extreme. However, the kind of reform needed to transform our education and training system into one that will rival the best in the world and, crucially, meet current and future economic demands, may be this dramatic. As Einstein said: "You can't solve a problem with the same level of thinking that created the problem in the first place". Serious challenges need new levels of thinking.

In early years education, the Assembly Government is taking forward the Flying Start programme for children aged 0 to 3 in disadvantaged communities and we are piloting the Foundation Phase for 3 to 7 year olds in 42 maintained and non-maintained settings across Wales. In 14 to 19 education, we are transforming provision through the Learning Pathways programme, providing young people with enhanced choice and flexibility, including vocational offers for all abilities and participation in a variety of experiences. Beyond compulsory education, we have commissioned an independent review of the mission and purpose of further education in Wales and are addressing economic inactivity through close joint working with the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus on initiatives such as Pathways to Work and the Want2Work project. We are developing the relationship between higher education and the other education spheres and training sector to secure closer alignment of schools, further and higher education, allowing a continuum of lifelong learning.

However, significant challenges remain globally. We cannot be complacent and must continue to build on successes and reform. Lord (Sandy) Leitch's recently published review of skills in the UK was a warning to all involved in education and training. The review said unequivocally that the UK's skills at present are not considered world-class and that there is no easy solution to this. If we continue on the present course, we will simply be heading for stagnation. The solution, therefore, has to be radical.

Wales is prepared for the challenge, particularly in attitude, and while building on improvements, the Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales reminds us that the steadily improving quality of learning is still not of a consistently high standard. Work-based learning continues to be a particular concern, with nearly half of providers inspected having unsatisfactory standards. The chief inspector's most recent annual report emphasised strongly the need for joint working to address the challenges faced but her findings highlighted a lack of vision, and will, to work in this way. Providers are still too strongly inclined to work alone but they simply cannot deliver high standards and a wide choice of learning opportunities to meet the needs of all learners in Wales alone.

The Learning Country: Vision into Action, published in October 2006, sets out the Assembly Government's plans for education and training. These are learner-focused, community-oriented and founded upon the collaborative principles which underpin the Assembly Government's broader approach to public service improvement. This approach has recently been emphasised in the Assembly Government's response to the Beecham review of public service delivery in Wales, *Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries*. This talks about collaboration being fundamental to achieving the citizen-centred model of public service delivery advocated in Beecham and recognises the need for the Assembly Government to lead by example. As Beecham says: "It calls for a transformation in the culture, capacity and processes of government". The ELLS department is embracing this change agenda through a major Organisational Development Project, which is building on a model of tri-level reform based on the premise that, if improvement is to occur, all levels of the system must be involved. Reform is needed at three broad levels:

- central government, encompassing the UK government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the ELLS Minister;
- local government, the business sector and the voluntary sector;
- schools, leaders and practitioners.

The project is attempting to align the ELLS department's operations with initiatives at the other two levels so that a shared commitment to improvement exists at all levels and with each level supporting the others.

Practically, we are already driving forward reform through key education, learning and skills initiatives in Wales. Basic skills is a good example, and one which Leitch emphasises as a key challenge across the UK. There is nothing more important in education and training than basic skills, which are fundamental to progress. Literacy is the foundation of democracy as it empowers people to participate in society and the political process in an informed way. The Assembly Government has a strategy Words Talk Numbers Count – and we are putting £40m into implementing this over the first three years on top of the mainstream funding already provided through local authorities, colleges and learning providers.

A novel solution called the Basic Skills Employer Pledge has been developed by the Assembly. This is a mechanism for employers to acknowledge the need to improve basic skills within their workforce and to take action by working with providers and it is an idea which Leitch has adopted in his report.

We are transforming the learning provided between the ages of 14 to 19, through our Learning Pathways programme, as featured in an article by John Osmond in the Autumn 2006 edition of this journal. We are also rolling out the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ) across Wales at Intermediate and Advanced levels in post-16 education from September 2007.

The roll-out announcement follows on from positive independent evaluation of the pilot of the WBQ. The evaluation was carried out by the Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning at the University of Nottingham which concluded that the WBQ was 'fit for purpose' and recommended a staged roll-out. The pilot followed from the commitment in October 2000 to "pilot a new qualification – a Welsh Baccalaureate, which will provide equal recognition to academic and vocational qualifications".

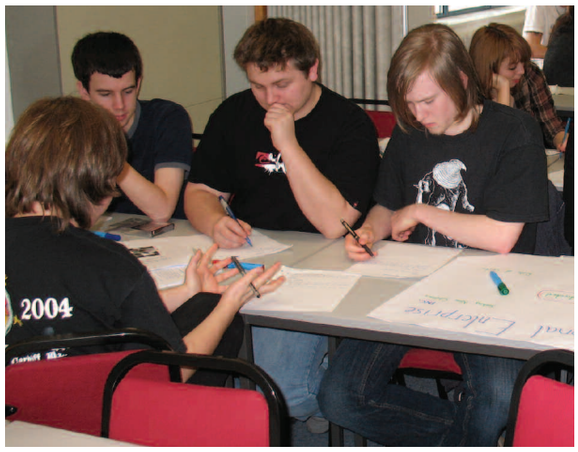
Literacy is democracy's foundation

Evaluation confirms that the WJEC's model fulfils all of these criteria and more. It also formally recognises activities such as Personal and Social Education and work-related education and, crucially, develops the skills and confidence that are needed in higher education and employment. Students and staff at pilot centres also confirm that the WBQ is challenging, rewarding and affords opportunities that would not otherwise be available. It is available through the mediums of both English and Welsh.

The WBQ is inclusive and will be offered at 3 Levels: Foundation (equivalent to GCSE grades D-G), Intermediate (equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C) and Advanced (equivalent to GCE A-Level) and so is suitable for a range of abilities, not just the brightest and best. The optional qualifications to complete the WBQ can be drawn from both academic and vocational routes. Qualifications such as BTecs and NVQs have the same weight as GCSEs or GCE A-Levels.

The Wales, Europe and the World component of the WBQ Core ensures that students learn about Wales and its place in

transforming our education and training system in Wales will require more than just tinkering around the edges. The problems we face are complex and so must be the solutions



Europe and the world and must produce an individual investigation that demonstrates research. Students' interests are also protected by using existing, widely-recognised qualifications such as A-Levels and NVQs as its essential building blocks. The WBQ is designed to sit alongside these qualifications, complementing rather than replacing them. The evidence from the pilot and evaluation have confirmed that the WBQ is suitable for roll-out.

The Welsh Baccalaureate, therefore, is a qualification that delivers many of the things employers and higher education providers consistently say that they want young people to have:

- it develops all six Key Skills that are important for employment and adult life;
- it requires good quality work-related education;
- it requires personal and social education, including an activity in the local community;
- it give students insight into the wider world through the language module and study of Wales, Europe and the world;
- it develops investigative skills and independent learning.

Completion of an individual investigation is part of the Welsh Baccalaureate Core.

These ensure that Welsh Baccalaureate students develop as more rounded individuals, equipped with the skills and knowledge they will need in a variety of situations in their adult, working lives. The core is also designed to complement existing qualifications such as A-Levels, NVQs and GCSEs, not replace them. To achieve the full WBQ, students must also achieve these optional qualifications (a minimum of 2 A-Levels or equivalent for the Advanced Diploma and a minimum of 4 GCSEs at grades A*-C for the Intermediate Diploma), and because the Welsh Baccalaureate gives equal weight to all approved qualifications, whether they are from the vocational route or the academic route, students can choose the qualifications to gain more specific knowledge that they will need in their future studies or employment.

The Minister has announced the first phase of the roll-out at Advanced and Intermediate levels in post-16 education. This phase puts us on course to achieve the target of at least 25 per cent of post-16 learners following Welsh Baccalaureate courses by 2010.

There will be announcements about further phases of the post-16 roll-out of the Welsh Baccalaureate in due course. In 2009 we expect to announce roll-out across the 14-19 phase, including a Foundation level (equivalent to GCSE grades D-G). The Foundation level is currently being piloted at 14-19 alongside the Intermediate model.

Transforming our education and training system in Wales will require more than just tinkering around the edges. The problems we face are complex and so must be the solutions. The Welsh Baccalaureate is a fundamental element of our solution to the social, demographic and economic challenges that we are seeking to address though our blueprint for education and training in *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*.

Wider learning, tailored to the needs of students, that the 14-19 agenda and the Welsh Baccalaureate offer, will bring huge benefits for Wales. Learners will develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge that will serve them well in further studies and in employment. This in turn will bring benefits for higher education, employers and Wales as a whole.

A revolution in learning? It certainly seems so.

For more information about the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification see www.wbq.org.uk

Steve Marshall is Head of the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in the Welsh Assembly Government.

basic improvements

peter mcgowan says 'barriers between academic and vocational education must be broken down'

Learning has to be a lifelong activity

The Leitch Report, published in December 2006, has articulated very strongly the need for the UK to improve its skill base if it is to continue as an economically prosperous country. Compared with the 30 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UK, on almost every measure, is currently in the lower half of the table. Other reports point out similar problems. Almost half of adults appear functionally innumerate and at least one in six does not have the literacy skills expected of an 11 year old. A report published by Unicef in February 2007 put the UK 21st out of 25 OECD countries for educational standards.

The UK's education system has undergone almost constant change for the past 12 or so years. Successive Governments, and the media, have put emphasis on the importance of academic qualifications as the passport for future success and prosperity. Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) were introduced as a way to help schools measure more objectively the progress of individual children. However, with the publication of those results, collective attainment in SATs became a way of measuring the success of the school rather than individuals.

This situation was exacerbated by the use of GCSE and A-Level league tables, which were used by the media as the way to identify good schools. Although Wales no longer has league tables, their influence endures. Hence in the public consciousness, a school with a 5 A-C GCSE pass rate of 55 per cent had to be better than one with a pass rate of 50 per cent. Head teachers, therefore, had to focus on SATs results and GCSE and A-Level pass rates, both to drive up objective (but narrow) attainment and to be seen to be improving the quality of educational provision. This has reached the point where people now make the simplistic link between educational qualifications and capability, believing that pupils obtaining good academic results must, de facto, have developed good skills.

The result of these developments has been to focus attention on the absolute importance of gaining GCSEs, A-Levels and a degree – anything less is considered failure. Even employers, many of whom are parents of school age children, adopt this thinking. They may voice concerns about the need for improved skills and may advocate a vocational route for others but are still likely to desire the academic route for their own offspring.

The well publicised year-on-year improvements in GCSE and A-Level pass rates mask some lesser known problems. After years of continued improvement, only 50+ per cent of pupils across Wales achieve 5 GCSEs at A-C and the number of youngsters leaving school with very poor or no qualifications remains persistently high. Equally worryingly, most pupils who

perform well at GCSE are not motivated by their activities. The current Key Stage 3 curriculum is still heavily academic, both in content and delivery and takes little regard for the accepted belief that people learn in different ways. The National Curriculum has such a strong academic thrust that most GCSE syllabuses are designed to provide a path to A-Level rather than providing pupils with the knowledge and skills to apply their learning in a meaningful way.

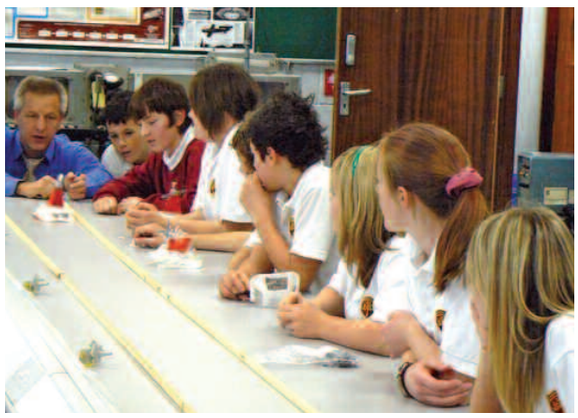
Beyond the classroom, however, the world has changed, not least in the types of role now available to employees and the skills they need. In the days of mass production in large factories and of strong coal and steel industries, jobs and working environments were stable. People tended to stay locally and mix with fellow workers and their families. A youngster leaving school would, therefore, enter employment with friends from the same school and start a job in which almost all of the time was spent with true peers – people who shared the same ideas, experiences and communication style. The individual's world was self-contained and introspective. The main skills needed were job-specific craft skills while, for a very small number seeking management positions, a good academic background was thought best.

The present situation is that there are hardly any jobs which fit this scenario. Employees at all levels work in far less homogeneous groups and most jobs require communication with people who do not come from the same localised environment nor, in many cases, share the same needs, attitudes and desires. The skills needed for virtually all jobs are generic: good communication and working with others, for example, on top of competencies specific to occupations.

However, the irony of the world becoming 'smaller' is that for many of our youngsters their world of experience has more literally become smaller. In December 2006 the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) published a report entitled *Freedom's Orphans*. The conclusion was revealing: "...British children spend more time in the company of peers, and less time with adults and parents, than young people in culturally similar countries."

This is made worse by the fact that pressure on schools and colleges to push pupils through prescribed schemes of work and qualifications means that it is perfectly possible for youngsters to experience an entire week at school or college without engaging in any form of true communication with an adult. It should, therefore, be no surprise that employers are concerned about the ability of new entrants to communicate with others, especially customers.

To achieve anywhere near the Leitch targets we will have to revolutionise our approach to learning. The targets for 2020 show that the UK will have to ensure that an additional 570,000 people obtain basic skills each year; an extra 220,000 must obtain Level 2; a further 290,000 will have to reach Level 3; and more than 275,000 obtain Level 4. That is an annual total of well over 1.5m people. Given that Wales is slightly behind the rest of the UK in skills terms, despite recent improvements, we must improve the skills levels of around 75,000 people every year just to stand still against the rest of the world.



Today's jobs require good communications skills

The Welsh Baccalaureate qualification (WBQ) and ages 14-19 Learning Pathways programme fit exactly into the Leitch recommendations and show that Wales is ahead of the game in policy terms, giving a great platform for development. It is doubtful, however, whether many people beyond the professionals know anything about Leitch or the situation within education generally. Not only do most employers still talk about O-Levels, but few people know about the WBQ and Learning Pathways. These matters appear in the press, of course, but few people absorb the information.

Despite the fanfare surrounding its publication in December last year, there is almost no public awareness of the Leitch report. We need to be more vocal in our discussion of what the report means for Wales and recognise that we will not reach its targets without adopting a radically different approach to education. The approach is inherent in the WBQ and Learning Pathways but is not made explicit.

Leitch demands a significant annual increase in the numbers of people improving their skill levels. To do little more than keep up with our international competitors, the UK will have to, each year, improve the skills of more than 1.36m, which is more than the current working population of Wales. As a very conservative measure, in Wales we will need to improve the skills of 75,000 people each year.

To succeed in this we have to develop a learning culture, in which learning is seen as a lifelong activity, not as a narrow pursuit of qualifications that ends at the ages of 16, 18 or 21. We have to communicate the message that learning does not stop at a given level but is a truly lifelong activity for everyone, not only an academic elite. We also have to destroy the perverse and artificial distinction between academic and vocational spheres. John F. Kennedy's said: "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education." This describes very well the challenges facing education in Wales.

Peter McGowan is Vocational Skills Champion in the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

foreign adventure

with considerable experience in bilingualism Wales should be leading the UK in encouraging the learning and use of other languages, says alwena lamping

Go Welsh is one of a series of television advertisements from CroesoCymru (VisitWales). Filmed against the spectacular backdrop of Llyn Cregennen and the Mawddach Estuary, it features the Welsh language prominently, ending with "...and for the not so adventurous, we've written some of the signs in English as well".

It conveys a country at ease with its identity, proud of its language and aware that it constitutes something special. This is a relatively recent phenomenon and Wales has every reason to be proud. Having battled to protect its linguistic heritage against the odds, Wales is now recognised as a leader in the field of bilingualism. It has taken vision, courage and tenacity to reach this point and Iaith Pawb, the national action plan for a bilingual Wales, should contribute significantly towards ensuring that the success story continues and that Welsh survives for future generations.

Very few would claim that Welsh alone is enough for Wales. Internationally, there is a need for other languages. Like most of the world's countries, we also speak the language of our next-door neighbour. This happens to be English, which is also the current global lingua franca. So we are lucky enough to be the guardians of one of Europe's oldest languages and also made bilingual with one of the major world languages. Is that sufficient? The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, a major exploration of language capability in the UK in 2000, concluded that it is not.

The inquiry highlighted an urgent need for improved linguistic capacity in the UK to ensure successful and reliable communication in complex international relationships. It said: "...exclusive reliance on English leaves the UK vulnerable, dependent on the linguistic competence and goodwill of others." The need is even more pressing today, as the threat posed by global terrorism and the repercussions of climate change demand greater cross-cultural negotiation and co-operation. In terms of economic success, too, cultural insight and linguistic ability are essential to keep up with the evolving global economy where competition for markets is becoming increasingly intense.

The inquiry's report and consequent media coverage stimulated debate, which resulted in national strategies for foreign language learning, first in Wales and then in England. The strategy for Wales is in a document entitled Ieithoedd sy'n Cyfrif (Languages Count), published in 2002. Aiming to position Wales firmly in an international context, it sought to increase recognition of the importance of learning foreign

languages and to encourage more people to learn. It has since become the blueprint for foreign language education policy in Wales and has led to the establishment of a solid infrastructure ready to support development in this field.

Speaking two other languages in addition to a mother tongue is the norm in many countries and is a central EU goal

We have two languages already in Wales. Can we cope with more? Speaking two other languages in addition to a mother tongue is the norm in many countries and is a central EU goal, according to the Lisbon Agenda. Young people in Wales have a flying start. Many grow up bilingual and all have experience of learning a second language from a young age. It is not confined only to Welsh and English; a study in 2006 revealed 98 languages in use, some spoken by one or two pupils, others by more than a thousand. It must be said, however, that unlike in some other bilingual countries, this has not yet led to widespread competence in foreign languages or even to acceptance of the need for competence. It will be interesting to see whether the newly established Bilingual Research Centre at the University of Wales Bangor will reveal the nature of the problem.

a dangerous lack of direction!

It is not an exaggeration to call it a problem. Last year only 31 per cent of schoolchildren in Wales chose to continue learning a foreign language after the age of 14, which means that a significant majority chose to stop. The reasons for this undoubtedly include the ubiquity of English and its global role; parallels can be seen in the rest of the UK and other Anglophone countries.

Leaving to one side the fact that an options system, where children of 13 make life-changing decisions, does not offer a broad and balanced education, we should be wary of accepting at face value that children are simply not interested in languages. For some, there is no real choice because the options process militates against languages in their schools. The process is open to influence by head teachers whose overriding concern may be the school's achievement profile. There are easier routes to an A* grade at GCSE than in a foreign language with the result sometimes that able linguists end up studying easier subjects to ensure a full hand of good grades. Research by the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre at Durham University in 2007 shows that languages are at least a grade harder than many other GCSEs. Perhaps now something can be done about this.

Monitoring the options system alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Is there a solution that is intrinsically Welsh? Wales already fosters a Welsh dimension in its curricula: schools have guidance in the form of Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and the Welsh Baccalaureate has Wales, Europe and the World as one of its four core components. In some schools it seems that motivation to learn a foreign language increases when the teaching is combined with familiar themes relating to aspects of pupils' Welsh identity and community, as advocated in Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig. The increased motivation is not confined to Welsh-medium schools, so perhaps more work could contribute towards overcoming the apathy shown equally by children in some English-medium schools towards Welsh and foreign languages.

Wales has an advantage in the accumulated experience of teaching Welsh to all age groups at all levels. Some of the techniques used produce outstanding results. Taken together with the established English-teaching experience of the UK and the high-quality advice and guidance available for foreign language teaching, this should put Wales ahead of the field. Yet, these strands generally operate quite independently of each other in schools and colleges. To tackle the problem, an action-based research project, Triple Literacy, is bringing together teachers of Welsh, English and foreign languages in a few pilot schools to consider common issues. It is managed by the National Centre for Languages, CILT Cymru, and the project is due to report in Autumn 2007.

Increasing the scale of Triple Literacy and introducing more joined-up thinking at macro level may be the answer for increasing foreign language take-up in Wales. Imagine the power of Iaith Pawb and Languages Count working in harmony alongside the prestige of the Welsh Language Board's international network, combined with Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig.

This might be something for the Assembly Government to consider as it gives thought to refreshing Languages Count in the near future, in line with commitments set out in *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*. Here is an opportunity to ensure that the young people of Wales grow up both proud of their linguistic heritage and adequately equipped for life in an international environment. Now what could be more adventurous than that?

More information about the National Centre for Languages can be found at http://www.cilt.org.uk

Alwena Lamping is a native Welsh speaker from North Wales and has held a variety of language posts in education. She has written and edited learning resources for the BBC in a range of media and languages and was a member of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry and later of the Languages National Steering Group in England that was set up by the Department for Education and Skills to develop a national strategy for languages.

fine air, mountains, streams and fish

rhian davies reveals the strong connections between a very English composer and Wales

In a recent Gramophone editorial, James Inverne questioned the "churlish and at worst stupefying decision" to remove the image of Edward Elgar from the £20 note. The Bank of England may have made a mistake in failing to continue to honour this archetype of Englishness during the 150th anniversary year of his birth but the 2007 Gŵyl Gregynog Festival, 15th-24th June, is attempting to rectify the situation with an afternoon of events to celebrate the composer's music. It will also highlight his little-known connections with Montgomeryshire. Elgar stayed at Gregynog Hall (above and overleaf), near Newtown, as a guest of the Misses Gwendoline and Margaret Davies in June 1924 and ongoing research is revealing more about the visit as well as his wider links with Wales.

Elgar was the second son of a Worcester piano tuner but among his closest friends was the Malvern architect Arthur Troyte Griffith whose father was from Carmarthen. Elgar and Griffith enjoyed bantering about the exploits of their supposed ancestors, the renegade Saxon Aelfgar ('fairy spear') and Gruffydd ap Llywelyn who sacked the city of Hereford together. Border influence may be traced in Elgar's compositions, too – the cantata Caractacus, written at the suggestion of his mother, and the Severn Suite for brass band, as well as his letters, reveal an interest in Wales and the Welsh language. The composer practised his Welsh in correspondence with Novello, his publishers, and he joked with another friend August Jaeger in 1901: "I have returned a week from Llangringoggywoggypygwyssill."

Elgar had stayed at Llangrannog where he bathed in a pair of old pyjamas and jotted down musical material which would appear later in his Introduction and Allegro for strings. In a programme note for the work's premiere by the London Symphony Orchestra, the composer recalled:

> *"Some three years ago, in Cardiganshire, I thought of writing a brilliant piece for string orchestra. On the cliff, between blue sea and blue sky, thinking out my theme, there came up to me the sound of singing. The songs were too far away to reach me distinctly, but one point common to all was impressed upon me, and led me to think, perhaps wrongly, that it was a real Welsh idiom – I mean the fall of a third … Fitting the need of the moment I made the tune which appears in the Introduction and in the coda of this work; and so my gaudery became touched with romance."*

Ceredigion was still in Elgar's mind during a visit to Cornwall five years later. A diary entry about Tintagel in 1910 records: "Coast fine but not as fine as Llangrannog."

Elgar often visited Wales for quiet work or complete rest. In 1903, he scored The Apostles at Minafon, Betws-y-Coed, the country home of the Liverpool cotton broker Alfred Rodewald. During a stay at New Radnor in 1906, he completed the introduction to Scene IV of The Kingdom. There were various restorative visits to Llandrindod Wells where he enjoyed the golf as well as the sulphur water. Elgar's description of his spa regime also dates from 1906: "We met like ghouls in the pump room at 7.30 am in the dark: mysterious and strange; hoodedand cloaked we quaffed smoking brine and sulphur and walked thro' dim-lit woods, sometimes in snow."

A 10-day holiday in Harlech with his wife Alice and daughter Carice in 1907 culminated in 'riotous games' on the way home: "E[dward] fell full length along the bottom of the train! A[lice] laughed so much sh[e] c[oul]d not even urge him to rise before someone came down the corridor."

In 1913, at a house called Tan-yr-Allt, near Penmaenmawr, Elgar worked on Falstaff, completing the score and proofs. The family visited Conwy and Caernarfon Castles and Menai Bridge and indulged in 'much paddling', although Alice "was not

altogether happy with Wales. One day she was 'furious with the uncourteous people'; on another, when the weather was misty, 'mountains and sea like phantoms and little ships like vague ghosts', she experienced her usual 'rage with Welsh official who w[oul]d not answer directly'."

Their departure left Alice "Sorry to leave the sea" but "delighted to leave the disagreeable Welsh". Elgar's attitude to Wales, however, was always more positive. Writing in 1916 to the organist Ivor Atkins, who was on holiday in Llantwit Major, he enthused:

> *"Wales always sounds of fine air and mountains – streams and, belike, fish … if I am better I shall surely come down – the Severn draws me and I want to walk by it from Worcester to Upton once more – will you join? Your acc[oun]t of the church sounds fascinating, and Baedeker is illuminating on it – I want to see it with you."*

Angling, by the way, was yet another enthusiasm of Elgar and one which he shared with the King. Investing the composer with his knighthood in 1904, Edward VII is reported to have remarked: "Very good to see you here, Sir Edward … Good sport to your fishing."

There were professional engagements in Wales as well as holidays. Elgar directed a 280-strong chorus in *The Kingdom* at Cardiff's Triennial Festival in 1907. He also conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* at Mountain Ash in 1913, although this performance was marred by massed voices of a rather different nature: "There was no applause when the work ended – in the enormous room half the people knew nothing about it – each person brought a baby! (which cried – all of which cried continuously)."

Performances of Falstaff with the London Symphony Orchestra took place in Cardiff and Swansea in 1920 when Elgar was a guest of Lord Aberdare at Duffryn Castle. Also, in 1924, having just been appointed Master of the King's Music, the composer undertook what proved to be a strenuous tour of mid Wales. At the fifth Aberystwyth Festival, he directed the Welsh Symphony Orchestra in his *Enigma Variations* and Arthur Williams as soloist in his Cello Concerto before proceeding to an engagement at the festival in Harlech Castle. Ian Parrott, Artistic Director of the Gregynog Festival during the 1950s, tells the story:

> *"It is said that as he was about to raise his baton for a performance of The Apostles, a little man jumped up and started making a speech. After several minutes of it, Elgar is supposed to have turned, said, 'Shut up, you fool,' and launched into the oratorio, sung by 16 choirs from remote mountain districts, lacking experience of modern music and paying their own expenses.*
>
> *"Small wonder that the 67 year old composer welcomed the opportunity of a retreat at Gregynog. He was taken to the Hall 'tired but happy', according to Henry Walford Davies, where he "melted into a good temper at last and enjoyed himself".*

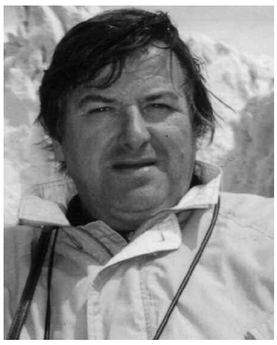
Unlike Ralph Vaughan Williams, who directed a performance of his Benedicite at Gregynog in 1932 and Gustav Holst who dedicated his choral setting of poetry by James Elroy Flecker, *O spiritual pilgrim,* 'For Gregynog', Elgar was never formally involved in music-making at the hall, although his compositions have always proved popular there. The Gregynog Choir performed *The Music-Makers* several times during the 1930s and 1950s, as well as excerpts from *Gerontius* and *The Apostles*. The second festival included *Nimrod* as a mark of respect for Elgar's death in February 1934.

Another link between the composer and the hall was the violist Raymond Jeremy who took part in the premieres of Elgar's String Quartet and Piano Quintet in 1919 and played frequently at the 1930s festivals. Performances of the Quartet, Quintet and Violin Sonata will be given during the 2007 festival's Elgar Day on June 24 by five rising stars, the Sacconi Quartet and pianist Gary Matthewman. A lecture by Elgar's biographer, Diana McVeagh and a presentation by Amanda Huntley of Huntley Film Archives, using rare footage of the composer, will also feature. These elements together will create a context and lead the way for further heritage programming when the festival celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2008.

Full details of Rhian Davies' first season at Gregynog, from www.gwylgregynogfestival.org or 01686 625007.

Music historian and broadcaster Dr Rhian Davies is Artistic Director of the annual Gregynog and triennial Peter Warlock Festivals in her native Montgomeryshire.

leaders galore



peter stead

At the very moment the polls closed on May 3rd I was sitting outside the Senedd looking across the water and feeling both nostalgic for an old Cardiff and proud of what the magnificent edifice behind me was in the process of becoming. Two couples came along and one of the men, who had a delightfully soft Grangetown accent, was obviously and proudly in the process of giving his visitors a conducted tour. 'This is our Parliament', he explained; 'it's a lovely building and under that mushroom you can look down at the chamber'. A tear came to my eye. Another, slightly younger, foursome approached; as they passed me the lead male turned to the Senedd, shook his fist and shouted ' I'd 'ang the bloody lot of them'!

I found it difficult to unwind after the all-night vigil that followed this moment of insight and, guessing that the party leaders were having the same trouble, on the Bank Holiday I invited them all, together with the PO, to my place for dinner. They were all in great form and obviously delighted to get away from their respective rank and files. There was much joshing about their television performances, all of them feeling that they had, as one of them put it, 'superceded themselves'. The consensus was that they had all looked 'presidential': in turn they each suggested that they would not have been out of place as candidates in the French Presidential Election. NB, in particular, thought that as the candidate of the French right, he would have obtained a lager share of the vote than Sarkozy, than whom he is both taller and more emollient.

All the leaders were proud of the fact that they had each stuck to their pre-election pact not to bring up any controversial matter during the actual campaign. They had all been determined to show that Wales was a homogeneous and mature nation with none of Scoland's bitterness. Clearly in Wales there was no room for the twisted tribalism of the Scottish Labour Party. IWJ was mildly chided for overdoing the hospital closures, but it was conceded that local pressures had forced him to and that 'reconfiguration' was not a catchy slogan. RM was rebuked for his outburst at the end of the ITV panel discussion in which he had accused IWJ of 'scraping the bottom of the barrel', but he explained that he had found himself in a position in which he urgently needed the programme to come to an end. I made the point that none of them had made much of what they were going to do with the Assembly's new powers. They all confessed that, under the pressure of the campaign, they had forgotten about those.

As far as assessment was concerned, MG was adjudged to have been the most presidential of the four (although 'a little posh' for the new Wales); IWJ was voted 'the most improved leader', one even hinting at new ideas; NB was thought to have been the most left-wing leader, winning the Bevan Prize for the number of pledges to the NHS, and all around there was sheer admiration for RM who had always been faced with the formidable task of having to remember and list all of Labour's many achievements.

As you will gather, self-congratulation was in the air. They were all as pleased as punch, although there was a sense that MG and his party had not done as well as they should have. But nobody was blaming MG personally: he had been let down by Tony Blair who had failed to start a new war. So pleased were our leaders that for several hours they played with the notion of the four of them personally constituting a cabinet and forming a government. They envisaged dividing the nation up into personal zones of responsibility. IWJ would be Minister for the West, MG Minister for the East, NB Minister for the Corners of Wales and RM Minister for the Valleys. Just as they were starting to talk in feudal terms of how they could make state visits to each other's territories, I interrupted to mention gender balance and local sensitivities. A consensus emerged that Trish Law could join them as Minister for the Heads of the Valleys.

They proceeded to delight in the notion that they could introduce pet reforms in their feifdoms: there could be PR in Brecon, a doctor-led health service in Pembrokeshire, free laptops for the children of Snowdonia, free food for everyone over fifty in the Valleys and a new steelworks for Ebbw Vale. No country in the world would offer as much choice as Wales. And as we talked of choice it was the PO who reminded our heroes that on the morrow they would have to stop playing games and be serious about who should rule. We all agreed that PR did not suit Wales. What was needed was a French presidential system that encouraged a high turnout and directly linked leaders and voters.

As the evening ended the six of us voted secretly on our dream cabinet, making full allowance for age, style, gender, the regions, the Western Mail's marks out of ten and even ability. My guests departed sheepishly but I retained the ballot papers. We had: First Minister, Elis-Thomas: Finance, Andrew Davies: Enterprise, Jane Davidson: Health, Jonathan Morgan: Social Services, Helen Mary Jones: Rural Affairs, Kirsty Williams: Education, Carwyn Jones: Culture, Rhodri Glyn Thomas and Business Manager, David Melding. The best is yet to come!